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Week 1 – The Innovator's Contradiction

We're in this course because we're interested in innovating. We all want confidence in the novelty and uniqueness of our ideas, and our ability to convert them into reality.

What does it take to be an innovator?

Innovators are risk-takers. They push the boundaries of the known world. They are willing to push themselves and their ideas beyond the safe and comfortable. They believe in their ideas and trust themselves to bring these ideas to execution. They are problem solvers and work relentlessly at making things happen.

In essence, being an innovator is not about being smarter and quicker but about being willing to take chances and, at the same time, trusting ourselves to realize them. Isn't there a contradiction at the heart of these two statements? Let me explain.

The innovator's contradiction

On one hand, the innovator is willing to take risks. This means s/he is willing to push a door open without knowing what's behind it, without knowing how big or small the “danger” is and whether they'll be able to handle it. They must be comfortable with or at least accept this uncertainty. On the other hand, the innovator must have the certainty that, once on the other side of the door, they will find in themselves the resources to bring their ideas to execution and produce work people will like. How can we be, at the same time, both certain and uncertain?

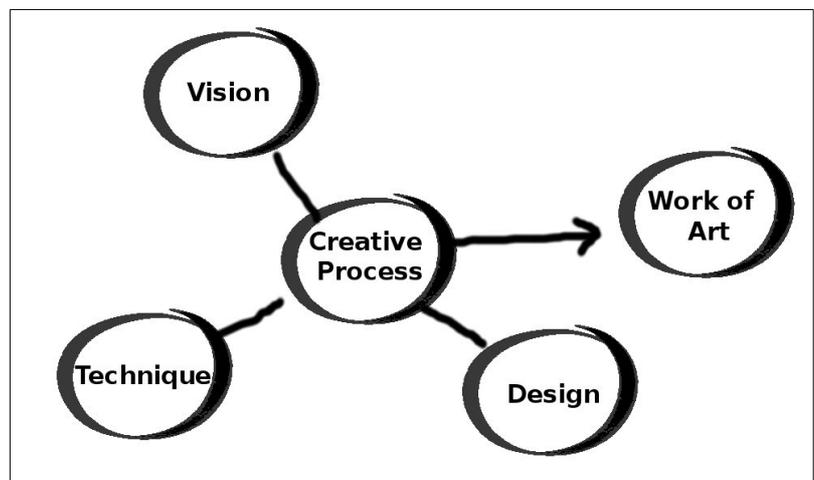
This isn't a rhetorical question; the risks are real. Let's push that door open for a minute and see what's possibly lurking behind: we'll find work people don't like; derivative work, or innovations that turns out to have already been invented and we get called copyists.

All these bad things can happen whether we open the door or not; but they are more likely to happen if we don't.

The Creative Process

Let's explore this contradiction in its impact on how we work as artists. The way we organise ourselves and how we use the resources we have to produce work is called the **Creative Process**. These resources include **Vision**, **Design** and **Technique**.

1) **Vision** has two components: i) inspiration (where we go for ideas) and ii) interpretation (what we make of these ideas).



Inspiration comes from many places:

- the external physical world, for example nature, science,
- our internal world, for example our imagination, mood, condition in life, biases, prejudices,
- a sense of aesthetics, for example abstraction, minimalism, tribal, impressionism.

Interpretation is the particular way we express our inspiration. It reflects who we are and the personal perspectives we have on things. Without interpretation the work we produce is derivative or even just a copy.

2) **Technique** refers to the methods we use to make something. It is where most of us start when we first explore creative materials, such as polymer clay, and is perhaps the best understood aspect of our creative process. It includes:

- the way we use clay and/or other materials, for example mokume gane, hollow forms, to glue or not,
- the way we use tools, for example extruder, texture sheets.

3) **Design** combines lines, shapes, forms and colours to materialise our vision. Design is the art of putting the right thing in the right place. Well designed pieces are expressive and considered artistic. Design concerns itself with:

- the appearance of the work,
- the relationship between the piece and the body, in the case of jewellery,
- the integration of its functional parts.

An Innovator's Creative Process

Let's explore how an innovator's creative process differs from a less innovative artist's.

The Less Innovative Artist	The Innovative Artist
Vision	
Looks for inspiration in obvious and comfortable places	Looks for inspiration widely, including in unfamiliar or uncomfortable places
Does not have a well developed ability to interpret and cannot move beyond the mundane	Has a well developed ability to interpret which can give an entirely new perspective on an otherwise mundane inspiration
Is sometimes unclear why they make certain artistic choices. ("I just like it")	Makes deliberate artistic choices beyond the "I just like it" and knows why
Design	
Struggles with the Principles of Design (Balance, Contrast, Unity, Movement, etc.) and tends to stick to proven and well rehearsed solutions designed by others	Understands the Principles of Design (Balance, Contrast, Unity, Movement, etc.) well and knows how to apply them
Prefers safe solutions with Shapes, Line, Colours and Forms and will not break Design rules	Not afraid to break Design rules and often sees breaking rules as necessary to their creative vision; are curious to see where that leads them in the expression of their vision
Technique	
Uses other people's techniques without personalisation	Develops their own techniques
Concerned with Technique to the exclusion of Vision and Design	Integrates Vision, Design and Technique

Innovators Examples

The Showcase on the website shows great examples of risk-taking pieces. And now is a good time to announce our mystery contributing artists. I am delighted to present our first mystery artist, **Donna Greenberg**. An innovator *par excellence*, she will be working with us for the duration of the course. **Reef Dancer** is the piece she associates most with risk taking and will be discussing it with you in the forum.

The other outstanding contributor is **Maggie Maggio**, who has kindly accepted to take your questions on colour. Because she will only be available during Weeks 14 and 15, I am introducing her work here in more detail.

Maggie makes a conscious decision to push that door open with her series, *In the Garden and Oceana* <http://maggiemaggio.com/gallery/inthegarden/>. As a result she created a significant body of work constituting a personal landmark that brought critical recognition.

She finds her inspiration in nature: *“I am currently exploring forms inspired by the structural skeletons of plants and animals”*. Her interpretation firmly places her in the innovator's camp: *“I am interested in exploring how the body inhabits jewelry pieces”*. Traditionally, jewellery must adapt to the body. Maggie takes the opposite view.

With regard to Technique, the decision to work *“with polymer alone”* adds to the risk of the project as there are no armatures in her pieces. However, her long research in the physical properties of polymer clay is her safety net. *“I am searching for ways to take advantage of the inherent strengths of polymer clay — its malleability, flexibility, lightness”*.

With regard to Design, *“I use Interconnecting elements. Overlapping colors. Playing with thick and thin. Dainty and bold. Tamed and wild and playing with pieces that wrap the neck and arms.”* Her strength as an architect and a colourist consolidates her safety net.

Baby Steps

Exploring how to bridge this contradiction between certainty and uncertainty, between knowing and not knowing is the objective of the course.

An innovator knows who they are. They exploit their strengths and find in their weaknesses opportunities for growth. This course invites you to become an innovator by helping you develop your strengths and turn your weaknesses into opportunities for growth. Innovators grow, steps by step.

The assignment invites you to assess your strengths and weaknesses by exploring your own creative process.

Week 1 – Assignment

This assignment is designed to assess your creative strengths and weaknesses in relation to how you use the three resources discussed above. Weaknesses identify opportunities for risk-taking; strengths identify areas of self-confidence.

Assessment Exercise

For each of the three tables below, read the text under each of the headings and locate the column that best reflects your current position – circle the corresponding number for each: NOTE there are three tables to complete. For each assessment, you are also asked to add additional information to provide context to your assessment (this is the text in italics) by documenting or explaining further your thinking.

Keep in mind, that you may not score the same in each of the three resource areas. What is really important is that you approach the assessment reflectively and with candour – don't try to fool yourself into thinking you're somewhere you aren't!

If you don't understand the assignment or require clarification, please ask before proceeding. Use your judgement in interpreting the words to refer to your own situation, as it is not intended that you reveal your scores. Two people may have identical scores, but for quite different reasons. It is the reasons which are important for you to identify and understand.

When you have completed the assessment exercise, please visit the **Forums** and

1. Discuss what you've learned from the assignment by posting a Topic on the Forum for this week: www.voila.eu.com/forums/Forum/innovator/ The value of the course is in the discussions and exchanges we'll have.
2. Also please introduce yourself by posting a Topic to: www.voila.eu.com/forums/Forum/introduction/

Assessing Vision				
1	2	3	4	5
<p>Everything inspires me. I don't know how to focus.</p> <p>I don't know what inspires me.</p> <p>I don't think Vision is important.</p>	<p>I know what inspires me.</p> <p>I am not very good at finding a personal interpretation .</p>	<p>I have a personal vision, but I don't know how to apply it consistently.</p> <p>I don't have the confidence to develop it.</p> <p>I sometimes get blocked, hit a blank wall, or get stuck.</p>	<p>I have a personal vision and I would like to develop it further.</p>	<p>My personal vision is a constant source of enlightenment.</p> <p>I never get stuck.</p>
<i>Expand on what you mean.</i>	<i>List a few of the things that inspire you.</i>	<i>Describe what blocks you.</i>	<i>Describe your personal vision</i>	<i>Expand on what your mean.</i>

Assessing Design				
1	2	3	4	5
<p>I don't know anything about Design.</p> <p>I don't think Design is important.</p>	<p>I have some informal knowledge of Design.</p> <p>I would like to know more.</p>	<p>I have basic knowledge of Design.</p> <p>I have difficulty applying Design in my work; I don't have Design confidence.</p>	<p>I have a good understanding of Design and Design Principles.</p> <p>I need help taking Design further.</p>	<p>I am very confident with Design and use it in all my work.</p> <p>Design is liberating for me.</p>
<i>Expand on what you mean.</i>	<i>List what you know about Design</i>	<i>List the Design Principles you use.</i> <i>Describe what blocks you.</i>	<i>List the Design Principles you are most attracted to.</i> <i>Describe what blocks you.</i>	<i>Expand on what you mean.</i>

Assessing Technique				
1	2	3	4	5
<p>I don't know anything about Technique</p> <p>I don't think Technique is important</p>	<p>I know what Technique is but have not developed any of my own.</p> <p>I usually work from tutorials written by others. I don't personalise the tutorial techniques.</p>	<p>I know what Technique is and have modified existing techniques.</p> <p>I would like to develop my own techniques, but am uncertain how to do this, or am not confident how to do this.</p>	<p>I know what Technique is and have developed novel techniques.</p> <p>I would like to develop more fluency in creating new techniques.</p>	<p>My creativity is strongly enhanced by the techniques I use or develop.</p>
<i>Expand on what you mean.</i>	<i>List your favourite techniques.</i>	<i>List techniques you have modified.</i>	<i>List the techniques you have developed.</i>	<i>Expand on what your mean.</i>