



Creativity

8 Leading Artists on How to Build Confidence

• Casey Lesser Dec 18, 2018 11:16 am

We talk a lot about what it takes to be an artist. We focus on the failure and rejection that artists need to overcome, the hustle they must maintain, and the financial duress that the vast majority of them endure. To stand by your practice, become a target of criticism, and continue to pursue a career as an artist—even when the prospect of selling and exhibiting your art appears bleak—requires confidence.

Artists encounter unique challenges. They are required to continually make new work that feels original and significant, but not too close to that of their peers and predecessors. They encounter public audiences that are quick to deem contemporary art esoteric or absurd. Unsurprisingly, the high stakes drive some to feel the debilitating anxiety of “impostor syndrome,” the psychological phenomenon whereby a person underestimates their accomplishments and fears they may be a talentless fraud. Even the most successful artists can, at times, feel this way.

The internationally renowned artist [Shirin Neshat](#) admits to questioning herself often—but, she asserts, having doubts is only human. She remembers a particularly resonant piece of advice she received early on in her career from the late legend, artist [Vito Acconci](#): “He told me rejections and disappointments hurt no matter what stage of your career, and so as a serious artist, you have to understand you will remain vulnerable,” she said. We recently reached out to Neshat and seven other leading contemporary artists to learn about their own experiences with doubt and impostor syndrome, and their strategies for building confidence.

Ursula von Rydingsvard

Follow your intuition



Portrait of Ursula von Rydingsvard by Alan Rokach. Courtesy of the artist.

“It’s okay to not know where you’re going as an artist. There will be possibilities for liberating things you thought you could never let go of. And for failure. I’ve experienced failure so deep that I ended up burning my sculpture; they burn for two days. You will rarely know what the right thing to do is as there are so few absolutely right things in life...instead, follow the quiet nudges of your intuition.”