

‘Living and Sustaining a Creative Life’: Publication Review

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‘Living and Sustaining a Creative Life: Essays by 40 Working Artists’ is a collection of 40 compiled essays written in the artists’ own voice in the form of narratives, statements and interviews. The book was published in 2013 by Intellect Books. The author, Sharon Louden is known under many titles from a practicing and professional artist, educator, advocate for artists, to consultant, community builder and founder of the Institute of Sustained Creativity. She is from Philadelphia but is currently based in New York, NY. She has had many exhibitions across major US art museums such as Birmingham Museum of Art and Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. She uses a range of mediums from writing, figuration, and abstraction, to painting and drawing to create a physical environment that involve an inclusive advocacy.

The full essay book is compiled of 40 essays and is 226 pages long. The idea behind the book is to show how professional, contemporary artists make a living out of their trade and to change the common misconception that a living can only be made through gallery representation. This review will be closely focusing on a selection of 10 of the essays. These centre around different themes with each artist talking about their own journey. They discuss the creative process, the different roles education and personal development has had on their art, their own creative environments, and the act of balancing work with family and time. Others focused on how they make money, whether that’s through commissions, gallery exhibitions or jobs on the side, the importance of community and connection in the art world, and finally the sacrifices and risks each of them has made to be able to pursue their dreams of being artist.

I felt a personal connection to a few of the essays. The first that stuck with me was Annette Lawrence and her way of organizing her time. She talked about using journaling as a way to slow down and reflect, as well as making running to-do lists and a calendar. She emphasised these as the most important organizational tools in her work. Collaboration was a theme that seemed to be discussed among a few of the artists. Brian Tolle particularly emphasised the importance of working together with other artists to not only get help with production and exhibitions but to also push themselves as an artist. In his case he talked about how his connections turned into new opportunities and that network of people turned into a support system. The last topic I was personally connected to was artists' way of making money with their art and ways each of them establish financial security. Various artists wrote about having teaching positions at universities, which is their main income. It not only gives them financial stability but also helps them develop further as artists. Others explained how they make their living from doing private and public commission work or producing art for gallery exhibitions.

I believe that the essay book covered a breath of topics, which allows anyone, no matter what stage in their life they are at, to relate to the various artist and to learn something new. Reflecting on the themes covered in this review, for me the most valuable was learning about the aspect of collaboration in the art world. What stuck out to me was that it not only created new opportunities but also meant the artist had a support network around them. Looking ahead to my future as an artist, this publication was successful in collecting different people of different backgrounds with different stories. It was a reminder that everyone's path is different, and you shouldn't compare yourself with others.