



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #069:

Creativity in Practice Series – Artist Greg Climer

May 11, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast, Episode 69. Thanks for joining me today. Today, I am doing something a little different on the podcast. Most of the last episodes have been focused on teaching you one certain element of creativity, leadership or team development. Each episode, I either interviewed or interview an expert in a certain area. For instance, [Episode 44](#) when I talked to Tanya Williams about increasing diversity in teams and how that can increase creativity. Or [Episode 40](#) where I talked with Tina Hallis about how positivity can increase creativity. Or [Episode 35](#) where I taught you the Leadership Styles Continuum and how that might change how you lead at different points of your team's development. Each of these episodes, the last 68 episodes, have been focused on a specific area of expertise that I wanted to share with you.

Today, I am hoping to start an occasional series where I am going to interview a practitioner. Someone who is focusing in and are actually being creative in their life, whether that is individually as an artist or a maker or as an inventor, or someone who is part of a team where that team is collectively working to be creative together. Let me know what you think of this. Do you like this new idea? I am still going to do the other thing, for sure, but I want to sprinkle in some of these other interviews with some practitioners.

Today, I am interviewing my brother, Greg Climer. I think you might be listening and you are like, "Wait a minute! You are starting with your brother? Isn't that cheating?" Well, perhaps, a little bit, but actually my brother is an amazing artist. He is also a fashion design professor at the [Parsons School of Design](#) in New York City. He has been working there since his 20s. I think at one point he might, actually, have been one of the youngest professors they hired. Do not quote me on that, but something around there.

A few years ago, I was visiting him and we were hanging out with some of his friends and one of his friends said to me, "You know, I don't know if you realize this, but your brother is like really

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amazing and well-known in his field.” It is like, “Oh, really?” Which I think is funny because sometimes when you think of family members you have known your entire life, you do not think of that about them. I remember when my brother learned to ride a bike so hearing that from his friend it was like, “Oh, this is really cool!” It was not completely out of nowhere, I knew already that he was doing amazing work and I would hear stories and stuff, but just hearing that from his friend made me kind of look at Greg a little bit differently. I am very excited to have Greg on the show. He is going to talk about his creative practice as an artist and what he does to be more creative on a daily basis. Here is Greg Climer.

Hi, Greg. Welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. Thanks for being on the show today.

Greg Climer: Thank you. Hi, Amy.

Amy Climer: Hi. We are going to dive into your artistic practice and talk about how you are creative as an artist, mostly. Can you start off and tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Greg Climer: I am Greg Climer. I am your brother, first of all.

Amy Climer: Yaay...

Greg Climer: But I am an artist and a design educator. I have a studio practice. Primarily, I work with textile. I am a former costume designer turned fashion designer and now I teach fashion design at the [Parsons School of Design](#) in New York.

Amy Climer: Can you talk a little bit about the art that you make now?

Greg Climer: Mostly, I make quilts. They are designed to be looked at both through a cell phone and in real life. The way that they have been made is using Photoshop and custom-making all the textiles to match pixels. That way when you see them in person, they are very abstract or they are somewhat abstract depending on the piece. But when you look at them on a small screen, they come into sharp focus. That is kind of the majority of my artwork, is working with quilts, but I have also done work with kind of playing with how textiles can be animated. I have been working on a piece and I have a prototype piece that is up online already of a film that every frame of an animated film was knitted and I have done another where every frame of the animation was quilted. A lot of just playing with technology and analogue and how they can talk to each other.



Amy Climer: The prototype you did of the knitted piece that was featured in is it [Fast Company Magazine?](#)

Greg Climer: Yes.

Amy Climer: We will put a link to that in the shownotes because I think that is pretty cool.

Greg Climer: Cool.

Amy Climer: Let's talk about just how you get ideas. I feel like, as your sister, I have been able to see you progress over the years and your ideas change and come from different sources. How do you develop the ideas to make the work that you make?

Greg Climer: The most important thing is I just do stuff, just constantly and physically doing things. All my work kind of starts from a place of craftsmanship and starting to do a craft. A quilting or knitting or playing with any sort of technology, just seeing what those tools can do. That tends to lead to questions that, for me, it is always "wouldn't it be fun if" or kind of finding the playfulness in the craft or in the possibility of that tool. Then what I end up doing a lot of is I would be working on these very technical craft skills and something will start to connect with something else that I have thought about. I will start realizing the squares of a quilt are no different than the pixels on a screen, which are no different than the stitches of a net. They are all an x-y axis. So I start to draw these connections and once I have come up with a connection, I will just start playing with it and seeing what it has in it.

Amy Climer: When you are saying that you start with just doing stuff, like making things, how much do you do that? How much time do you spend on that or how long do you find that you are just playing with something before an idea comes up?

Greg Climer: I do stuff every day. Literally, every day I will work on something. It could just be doodling, but I am doing something. Some ideas will percolate for years and some will just percolate for a week or two. There does not seem to be a consistency. In the knitting of a film, it was in the process of working on that that I started making the pixilated quilts and then it was over a course of about three to five years that I went from having the idea of knitting a film to actually being able to do it. And it was kind of by taking the tangent of quilting images that I was able to develop a lot of the skills I needed to make the knitting happen.



Amy Climer: That is interesting. You started with the idea for knitting the film, but then you got the idea for working on the quilts and so you started making the quilts, but then it was from making the quilts that allowed you to actually knit the film.

Greg Climer: Yeah.

Amy Climer: That is completely not linear.

Greg Climer: No, not linear at all.

Amy Climer: Which I think sometimes we think ideas are going to be linear, like I am going to get this idea and then I am going to work on it and then it is going to happen and it is not like that.

Greg Climer: Yeah.

Amy Climer: Do you find that you are working on more than one project at a time?

Greg Climer: Yeah. I always have multiple things happening where I am working on multiple projects and one will be on the foreground and one will be on the background and they will start to influence each other. One example of that is as I was working on the prototype for the knitted film, once it was completed, I realized I had this giant bulky, heavy film strip, basically. It is like a 60 pound film strip.

Amy Climer: Wow!

Greg Climer: That started making me think about what is the outcome? Is it the video on the screen, is it the animation or is it this giant city-block long film strip? At the same time, I was working on the quilts where I was able to see images come and go and kind of interrogate our relationship with imagery on a screen versus imagery in real life. That was starting to evolve into looking at people who we ignore in society, who are marginalized and diminished by the media, by people, by just how they are included in the dialogue that is life. I was working on that and I came back to the knitting and realized I actually have this incredible ability to manifest our baggage.

The film that I am working on is just recreating a scene of me in middle school when I got beaten up in class one day. Now, that film weighs 90 pounds and it fills up a large chunk of a room and it is this unwieldy object that is manifested in just a 20-second long incident on a screen. I find that dialogue between the object and the video to be really interesting. But it came out of having



worked on multiple projects at a time and listening to what the materials can do as a result of knitting, realizing that I am actually making these large unwieldy objects at the same time.

Amy Climer: I think about the metaphor there of, like you said, this 20-second experience that is this baggage, essentially, you have been carrying your whole life, decades, and now you have it in a physical form and you look at it like, “Wow! I have been carrying around 90 pounds that was just this 20-second thing.”

Greg Climer: Right. And that came out of just listening to the craft. I would never have sat down and said I am going to knit this incident from my childhood. It was only through kind of realizing wow, knitting can become this very big object that I started thinking about other invisible big objects.

Amy Climer: And just thinking of all the connections that are happening both metaphorically and more literally with the work is such a big part of creativity.

Greg Climer: Yeah. I always think about kind of the idea that when I am working, I have to bounce back and forth between the craft -- the making -- and then the thinking about the craft or the conceptual end of it. Which I consider both of them forms of thinking so I always call it oscillating between thinking with my hands and thinking with my head. And that you do not do one then the other, you bounce back and forth so it is a feedback loop.

Amy Climer: And if you only do one, if you are only, especially, thinking with your head and you are not using your hands, then that is not going to be so effective. You are going to just spin your wheels. It is a prototyping process, I think.

Greg Climer: Yeah, exactly.

Amy Climer: This makes me think about some of the things that Letitia Walker was talking about in the last episode about how creativity happens through your hands. I know you listened to that episode that is why I brought it up.

Greg Climer: Yes, I did listen to it.

Three Tips From Artist Greg Climer to Help You Be More Creative [13:18]

Amy Climer: Let’s say someone is listening and they want to be more creative, what advice do you have for them?



Greg Climer: Do things you do not normally do, experience things you do not normally experience. I just think you have to get as much input into the system in order for it to have new outputs. That could be really anything at all. Picking up a book you would not have normally picked up, going to a gallery and just seeing what is out there in the world. You are just constantly finding new input and not worrying about if it is useful, because one day it will be useful.

Amy Climer: What advice do you have to balance that idea of getting input and producing output? How do you know when you might need more input and when it is time to like, “Okay, let me just work on stuff?”

Greg Climer: You never have enough input. It is not a singular you do not have input day and output day, you are constantly doing both. You never stop absorbing things and being curious about the world around you. If you are, you are yourself very stuck. Then the output is to always constantly be doing stuff I think it is a daily habit that you have to develop. Yes, it is nice to be able to say, “I am going to take today off to just work on this project,” but I think even waking up in the morning and writing for 15 minutes every day, spending some time doing something that is output related, whether it is physical or writing, whatever it is, getting yourself busy.

Amy Climer: Yeah, I think that is huge. It is interesting how many artists say that and then how many people who do not want to be creative do not do that. You know what I mean?

Greg Climer: Yes.

Amy Climer: Because it is easier said than done, right?

Greg Climer: As a teacher, one of the things I will always tell my students -- because I am teaching fashion design -- is do not pick up Vogue Magazine, just do not pick it up between now and the time you graduate. Because you do not want to have a conversation with what is already being done, you want to have a conversation with -- pick up a science magazine, pick up a product design magazine. Pick up things that are outside of your field because then you are getting unexpected input and so your output is going to be different than everyone else's.

Amy Climer: Do you find your students listen to that advice?

Greg Climer: I do not know if any have completely shut themselves off from the fashion industry, but I can tell when they are not getting new inputs. If suddenly all their work is looking



very similar to what is happening on the runway right now, it is too much of that and not enough of their own interests or their own curiosities.

Amy Climer: I think that is a great point and also it makes me to get that idea of how sometimes it takes a while to find your own voice. You might even start out, initially, copying other people until you find that voice. Have you seen that either in your students or in yourself?

Greg Climer: Yeah. When I started making the quilts that were pixilated images, people were constantly saying to me, “Oh, it’s just like Chuck Close.” And that was a huge compliment because it is Chuck Close.

Amy Climer: Yeah, he is an amazing artist.

Greg Climer: But at the same time, I kind of had to find that ability to just say I am not going to change what I am doing because I do not think I am having the same conversation as Chuck Close. I think his work is exploring one territory and mine is exploring another. And yes, they overlap, but that is temporary. The more I worked and the more I refined what I was doing and started finding the conversation that was really my conversation, the less I was hearing that. If every time someone compared my work to somebody else’s, I stopped and went 180 degrees from where I was going, I would just constantly be running back and forth and never make it anywhere. So I was just listening to that critique as that is great, that is a compliment. He is someone that I admire and I look up to, it is fantastic to be compared to him. And not saying now I need to do everything I can to differentiate myself, but saying what am I doing? Not what am I doing in opposition to him, what am I doing to be like him, just what am I doing and eventually people will stop seeing the link.

Amy Climer: Like when you stop comparing yourself to him and you just focus on your own work it is going to emerge as your own work.

Greg Climer: Yes.

Amy Climer: Just in like visualizing almost like these roads or something where you have completely different paths, you come together and now you are parallel for a little bit and then you just start diverging again. And kind of being okay with that parallel and knowing it is okay, but I am going to diverge again just because I am being myself.

Greg Climer: Yeah. As part of my working on my craftsmanship and thinking with my hands, sometimes I will copy somebody else’s work if it is outside of my own skill set because you can



learn a lot by going through the same steps they have gone through and learning what they have done. I think that is a learning exercise. I am not doing that with the intention of putting it out into the world, I am doing that as a way of studying what they have done.

Amy Climer: It makes me think of like you go to a one-day workshop and you are all doing the same painting together or making the same wooden box just to learn the woodworking process, whatever it is, like a quilt. And it is not about we are going to teach you to be an artist in this class. It is we are going to teach you a technique so then you can take and make it your own.

Greg Climer: Right.

How You Can Bring Creativity into Your Work [19:53]

Amy Climer: We have been talking about your creative process in your art, yet you also use creativity in your work as a faculty member at [Parsons](#) and other work that you do. I am wondering what advice you have if someone who is listening, they want to be creative yet they are not really interested in being an artist. What advice would you have for them to bring creativity into their work?

Greg Climer: Be curious and explore other things. It sound very simple and I think that is all there is to it, really. If you are a manager trying to think how can I more creatively manage my team, do not go look at other managers, go look at things completely unrelated, other systems. If I am interested in managing my team at school, I am going to go look at how Toyota manages their assembly line. I am going to go look at just even natural systems. Go look at waterways, go look at any sort of system and you will learn things from them and you will start to connect the dots between them. I think that is all creativity is really, is taking in these other things and finding the connections between them.

Amy Climer: When you mentioned waterways, I was just thinking of going out on a hike along a river and being able to have an ah-ha moment about work or about a team that you are working on based on some inspiration on sights that you get from watching this river.

Greg Climer: I was thinking much more scientific than that. I was thinking kind of how water systems function in ecology, but I think those moments where you just go out and enjoy life and let things process are critical. You will never have those creative moments if you do not let it sit and reflect. Those connections cannot form if you are never just letting go. I think we often tend to think we have to be busy all the time, which I know there is a big tendency for us to avoid



boredom. We will turn on our phones and play a game or something when we have downtime just to avoid being bored waiting in line at the store. But I think those things where people talk about they had this flash of inspiration in the shower, it is because your mind is wandering and it is drawing all these connections. One really great way to be creative is to turn off your phone and be bored.

Amy Climer: I love that idea. I think it is so powerful to just think about just sit and just be on the subway by yourself watching people or like you said, in the line in the grocery store. It is okay to be a little bored.

Greg Climer: There is a podcast that has a challenge called the [Bored and Brilliant](#) project. I will send you a link to it. It is a series of daily challenges to help you become more bored and consequently become more brilliant. It is a really great series because each day they give you the science behind creativity and then a challenge for yourself. Some of them are really just so simple. You laugh and then you go to do it and you have anxiety. Like one of them was delete your favorite app.

Amy Climer: Nice. That is funny. That makes me think about the weekly challenge on this podcast. I always like to end every episode with a weekly challenge. Something that listeners can do this week to start implementing some of the ideas that you shared. What is a weekly challenge you would give people?

The Weekly Challenge [23:41]

Greg Climer: Go spend \$20 on magazines that you have never read. If you do not want to spend \$20, go subscribe to five blogs that you would not normally read -- whatever the \$20 equivalent of blogs is.

Amy Climer: Or even go to the library.

Greg Climer: Or go to the library. But I think just go find four or five totally unrelated topics that you are possibly curious about but you do not know much about and dive into them all at once.

Amy Climer: Awesome! I love it. Again, probably, super simple and might invoke a little anxiety in some people.



Greg Climer: Yes.

Amy Climer: Cool. Greg, if people want to learn more about you and your work, where can they go?

Greg Climer: You can go to www.gregclimer.com to see some of my work. On [Instagram](#), I am under Gregory Climer.

Amy Climer: Awesome! I will put those links in the shownotes. Greg, thank you so much for being on the show. It was really fun to have you.

Greg Climer: Yeah, it has been fun. Thank you.

Amy Climer: Thank you, Greg, for being on The Deliberate Creative podcast. It is so great to have you on the show. We have talked about this for a long time and so it is cool to finally make it happen. Greg shared three main points that I want to summarize.

1. First thing he said was do stuff every single day. Work on your output. Play with tools, different technology, different techniques, but everyday do something related to getting your creativity out there.
2. He also talked about inputs, so the opposite of that. Getting a variety of inputs, a diversity of input so it is not just like -- I loved his example of the fashion designers reading Vogue Magazine, but rather finding some sources of inspiration, whether that is different types of magazines or conversations with people you would not typically talk to or places you would not go, but getting diverse inputs is important.
3. The third thing was to ask yourself questions. And the question that Greg asks a lot is "wouldn't it be fun if" and I can tell you he does ask that question a lot. Sometimes it creates some funny moments. So output, input, ask questions.

I hope you will take Greg up on his creative challenge, his weekly challenge. You can ask Greg questions, you can share how the weekly challenge went on the shownotes page on my website and that address is www.climerconsulting.com/069. On that page, you will find some images of Greg's artwork. You will also find a link to his website and other resources that he mentioned so

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you can go check those out. If you do, leave comments, Greg or I will respond to them. We can have a dialogue about what you heard.

If you are new to the podcast, welcome! You can subscribe on [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#). Episodes come out every other week and those are alternated by blog posts that I write around creativity and innovation in teams. You can check those out at www.climerconsulting.com. If you enjoyed this episode, if you enjoyed the show, please leave a review on iTunes or Google Play and subscribe.

I hope to see you all next week. I will talk to you then. Have a wonderful creative week. Bye.