



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #083: Creativity in Practice with Artist Hollis Chatelain December 14, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 83. Today's episode is the second episode in this series where I am interviewing artists or interviewing practitioners of creativity. Most of the episodes on this podcast, I am talking about a certain element of creativity to help you lead your teams be more creative. But today, I am interviewing artist Hollis Chatelain. She is an absolutely incredible artist who I feel so privileged to have gotten to know and to have on this podcast. I am going to introduce her in a moment, but first, I want to share with you a new review that came in on [iTunes](#). This review is from Hoff1991 and is titled "One of the Essentials for Me" five stars.

Hoff1991 says:

"I saw Amy at the Wisconsin Library Association Convention in 2017. It was easily the highlight of the conference for me. I signed up for her podcast before the program was over and have also found that very helpful. The notion that creativity flourishes with prompts or with appropriate structure while other structures simply crush it is obvious when stated so eloquently and clearly. Amy's podcast brings in other top pros in the field and is now a staple for me."

Wow! Thank you so much, Hoff1991. I really appreciate you taking the time to write the review and I am so glad you are listening to the podcast and very glad to find out that it is helpful for you. Awesome! That is what this is all about.

If you have not written a review yet on [iTunes](#), you can go over there, write a review for The Deliberate Creative. You can also leave a review on [Google Play](#). It means so much to me and it is a great way to kind of give back, if you will, and to let others know about the podcast.

1



www.climerconsulting.com



Let me tell you about Hollis. She is an amazing artist. I had the opportunity, gosh, over a decade ago, maybe 15 years ago, even. I took several classes with Hollis, three or four different art classes. At that time in my life in the early 2000s, I was doing a lot of art. I do not know that I have really shared this much on the podcast, but from 2007 to 2008, right around there, for about a year and a half I was actually working really hard to be a full time artist. It is super hard so anybody who is doing that I just have a lot of respect for because it was one of my failed experiments. I was able to do it for about a year and a half and that was it.

But Hollis is absolutely incredible. There have only been a couple of times in my life where I have seen a piece of artwork and felt like a physical reaction to it. One of those times was seeing a piece of Hollis' art in person. I just remember feeling like this welling of emotion and just tears filling up in my eyes just because it was just so beautiful and so incredible and just moving. If you ever get the chance to see her art in person, please do. She is so good. In the meantime, before you get to see it in person, you can go to her website. Her website is www.hollisart.com. You can go over there and just get a glimpse of it. It is very unique. It is all hand-painted fabric and then she does a lot of quilting over it. Heavily stitches it.

I have taken a few classes with her. Her approach as a teacher is a bit unusual, but incredibly effective. She is going to talk today about her experiences teaching art and making art and give us some tips and tools and techniques that we can use to be more creative. What she is going to talk about, even though she is coming from the lens of the artist, it is not about making art necessarily. It is really about being creative in any aspect of your life. I hope you enjoy this conversation with Hollis. Here is Hollis Chatelain.

Hollis, welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. Thanks for being on the show today.

Hollis Chatelain: Thank you so much for inviting me.

Amy Climer: Can you start off and tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Hollis Chatelain: My name is Hollis Chatelain and I am a professional artist. I work in textiles and the textiles that I work in it is fabric cotton that has been painted and then lots of threads are added onto it. It kind of looks like large tapestries. They are larger than life paintings and much of my art focuses on social and environmental issues, with an emphasis on women's issues.



I lived in Africa for 12 years, which was a huge influence on me in many ways. I often portray images of the people I lived and worked with in my art. I also travel quite a bit teaching and speaking. About a third of the year I am gone and I teach and speak about drawing and color and design and dye painting. I divide my time between working in the studio and being out on the road.

Amy Climer: Hollis, how did you get into being a professional artist? I know you have been doing art forever, but how did you start into this as a career?

Hollis Chatelain: When I was first in college, I went to a state college for early childhood education, wanted to change schools to be closer to a boyfriend -- I think some of us do that -- and ended up being transferred into the wrong program. I was transferred into interior design at Drexel University and I looked at the two curriculums and thought, "Wow! This looks really much more fun than the early childhood education."

Amy Climer: I love that!

Hollis Chatelain: I started in interior design and after taking a few courses, I took a photography course and I just fell in love with photography. Drexel University has a work-study program and so I ended up working for photographers and then continued on my own. They did not have a major in photography so I took my independent study classes and did photography through them taking classes with design teachers. After that, I just started working for photographers, working on my own.

Then I went to Togo, West Africa with the Peace Corps in 1980 and I met my Swiss husband there. He was also a volunteer. I loved Africa. I just fell in love with living in Africa, with the African people, with everything about it. I ended up spending 12 years in Africa, in four different countries in West Africa where we worked for humanitarian organizations, both my husband and I.

I started working in textiles while I was living in Burkina Faso because I fell in love with the fabrics. How can you not fall in love with them? They are so bright and beautiful and full of life. It was during that time that I discovered my love for teaching because I started teaching drawing, design and color.



We moved to the United States in 1996. My husband was willing to give up his career in humanitarian work so I could pursue my career in art. He eventually became my partner and he now handles the business end of our work, plus all the behind the scenes work.

Amy Climer: That is awesome! Not only are you an artist, but you are supporting your family through your business and your work.

Hollis Chatelain: Yes! We have been lucky enough to be able to support the family for the last 21 years.

Amy Climer: Wow! That is super cool. So inspiring.

Hollis Chatelain: Thank you.

Amy Climer: I say this because I was a student of yours and I know that in your classes not only are you teaching drawing and painting, but you are also really teaching people how to be more creative and that is an emphasis you have. How would you define creativity?

What Creativity Means [09:07]

Hollis Chatelain: Creativity, for me, can be defined in many ways. I think it is really how you live your life. You could even say how you are creative in your house. How you dress. How you handle your business, many, many other things. It is not only about art. Living creativity means not following the crowd. Maybe, thinking outside the box. Stepping out of your rut. It is being open to learning new things. It is about growing. About embracing your imagination. Creativity is all around us and part of everything and I think we just have to learn to follow our own creativity. To me, that is the important part.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. And I would say that is definitely something you teach in the classes that you do. Let's talk about how you teach creativity. How do you do that? How do you teach people to be more creative?

New Exercises to Help You Get New Ideas [10:07]

Hollis Chatelain: It seems that people are often afraid of creativity or they believe that they are not creative. But actually everybody is creative. I teach a master's art series where students



study with me once a year for a period of ten years. When the students start out, they often tell me that they are not creative and they cannot come up with ideas on their own and my response to them is draw. Go out and draw. We actually start the course with three years of drawing. Because drawing teaches you to slow down and observe the world around you. We often rush through our world so fast that we do not pay attention to what is going on around us. We tend to be focused on our devices.

In the first year of drawing, I ask the students to draw an object for one full hour without looking at the paper. They can only look at the object that they are drawing. The objective is to learn to observe things. The first 20 minutes are often the hardest because they cannot see what they are drawing and they are not allowed to look at the paper. In that situation, you are fighting the left hemisphere of your brain. The left hemisphere of the brain wants to see what we are drawing and then it often judges the drawing as being bad because if you cannot look at the paper, it does not really look like anything. And then it convinces us that we cannot draw and then we stop.

If you can get beyond that first 20 minutes, you start to see the parts of the object that you have never noticed before. If you are drawing leaves and flowers, you will start to see the different colors in the petals and you start to relax and that is when you move into the right hemisphere of your brain. That is the creative, the imaginative side of our brain. Once you learn to consciously move into that right hemisphere, creativity starts to happen.

When the students start the drawing classes, I always ask them to circle the part of their drawing that they liked best. They are not allowed to tell themselves that they are not doing a good job or their drawings are not good. I try to teach them to focus on the positive and let go of the other parts because our left brain is so powerful. Our world is set up for left-brained people and so we become more critical and being critical like that actually shuts down creativity. We shut down having our desire to learn to draw. We always need to trick ourselves into staying into the right hemisphere because our world is run by the left hemisphere.

All of this can be applied to your everyday life; noticing the beautiful things around you, learning to not be so critical, finding the good parts like going outside to watch a sunset or looking at the stars. Trying to spend more time in activities that feed you, open you up, clear your mind. This moves you into the right hemisphere of your brain and it opens up creativity. I am talking about all of this now because this is what I consistently say to my students year after year and I give

5



them exercises to think about these things. It is all about the more you take the time to slow down and observe more the world around you, the more you are able to move into the creative side of your brain.

Amy Climer: Wow! I love that exercise where a full hour -- I have done some drawing where I did not look at my paper but not for a full hour.

Hollis Chatelain: It is pretty painful for some people.

Amy Climer: Yeah. You mentioned that the first 20 minutes is the hardest. What happens in the last 40 minutes? How does that change people? You mentioned that, of course, it opens them up, but what is their reaction?

Hollis Chatelain: Let me start with the first 20 minutes. The first 20 minutes people draw in five minutes and then they say, "I'm done." And I will say, "No, keep going," and I see them start to get artsy and I am kind of wandering around the room and saying, "Don't look at your paper, don't look at your paper," that type of thing and so they keep going. If they are really not looking at their paper, their hand will often move off of the page and they start to draw on the table. They will say, "Help!" I will walk over and simply move their wrist back over on the paper and they start to realize that is not the place where it should be, but I have to let go with that. It is kind of reminding them of that again and again. And if people say, "I have drawn everything," I say, "Then draw it again. Draw your favorite parts. It doesn't matter what is on your paper."

They start to really pay attention to what they are drawing after 20 minutes. They start to really go back and look at all of the details. As they do that, little by little they forget about the time and they may physically become tired. Moving into the right side of your brain uses your brain in a very different way so they do become tired. And so I will say, "Close your eyes for just a second and then come back again." It is giving them the freedom to not have to produce something. This is a mental exercise, not a physical exercise and that is just the hard thing to learn to break into.

Amy Climer: Thanks for sharing that. Now I just want to go draw for an hour without looking at the paper. I am going to go try that.

Hollis Chatelain: You almost have to have a timer set and know that it is going to go off. Do not even think about it and really try to focus on the object. One of the things I will do is I will get a

6



branch that has leaves and flowers and I will cut it just before the class so it is not limp or wilted. The students really enjoy trying to see the differences after a while. At the end, I will always say to them, “What did you see that you never saw before?” And they are able to describe in detail parts of the plant that they had never ever seen before. And they find that very exciting.

Amy Climer: That is exciting. As I am thinking about it, I am just like, “This sounds fun, even though it is hard.” Although sometimes, I think, things that are hard and difficult are fun just because of that mental excitement.

Hollis Chatelain: I think that one of the very hardest things is when they are done they often laugh and say, “It doesn’t look like anything.” That is when I explain to them this is not about what you have produced as much as what you went through in your brain.

Amy Climer: Yeah. Although, I would imagine some of them they might not look like the branch or the leaf, by they look kind of cool in their own way.

Hollis Chatelain: They look very cool. They have a real emotional quality. What I do the most in this ten-year series is I teach people to use their emotion; to react emotionally to things. To not intellectualize everything because that is using the right side of the brain and that is working intuitively. Our intuition is very, very important in our creativity. It is believing in yourself. After about five or six years, I will give my students an evaluation sheet and ask them what have they learned the most in all of the classes. Their number one thing is they have become more confident.

Amy Climer: Oh, I am sure.

Hollis Chatelain: They feel much more confident in their ability because they are willing to take a risk and make a mistake. And that is how you learn.

Amy Climer: And that is a huge part of being creative. I do not know that you really could be creative without taking a risk because creativity is about something new and so there is a risk that is not going to work or that it is going to look bad. It is a risk.

Hollis Chatelain: The other thing is people will risk when they feel in a safe environment.

Amy Climer: Absolutely.



Hollis Chatelain: Creativity flourishes in a place of trust and dies if people do not feel safe.

Amy Climer: Yeah. And you know that intuitively and I can also add that the research has shown that same thing, which will not be a surprise to you.

Hollis Chatelain: Yes, I agree.

Challenges That People Have With Being Creative [19:04]

Amy Climer: In your classes -- you talked about this particular exercise -- what other challenges have you noticed that people have with being creative?

Hollis Chatelain: It is interesting because I feel like it is almost more challenging to awake creativity now than it was ten years ago. I will give you an example. I was teaching a class last week and it was one of my ten-year classes. After I gave the exercises to the students, I literally had to ban iPads right after I gave the exercise. This was because the students were scrolling through imagery on their iPads to be able to try to find art that they could either copy or they felt they had the ability to recreate. They were not using their imaginations. That never used to happen.

Sometimes the students were spending an hour searching and they only had one hour to finish the exercises. They were going through all of these things just scrolling through and going, "I can't do that. Oh, I could do that." But once the devices were removed, they were able to come up with ideas much faster and they finished the work in the allotted time. I was amazed. When students are struggling, I always suggest go outside. Empty your minds and most importantly, turn off your devices.

Amy Climer: There is a time and place for them. They can be an incredible tool, but they also can become this huge crutch.

Why and How to Embrace Boredom [20:45]

Hollis Chatelain: Right. I think that one of the biggest issues with our devices is we turn to them when we are bored. And we have even proven this in schools, students will say, "Oh, I use it because I am bored." But boredom is the beginning of imagination. Because when your brain is not full of other things, it is open to new ideas. We have a tendency so say, "Oh, we can't be



bored,” but I think about when I was a child if I would ever say I am bored, I would either be given work to do or be told to go outside and play. But now children are handed devices.

We need to be able to separate ourselves from this constant scrolling -- I guess that is the word -- because we are being hit with all kinds of information. Sometimes that is very good and other times it just hurts us. Especially, if we want to tap into the right side of the brain because devices are usually left brained.

Amy Climer: I am really glad you shared that example with people trying to go to their devices to look at images to copy or get inspiration. I have definitely found myself doing that and I would imagine many people have as well, who are listening.

Hollis Chatelain: Let me try to clarify that. I would say to the students come up with your idea first. Stop and think about it and if you have an idea and you are not sure how to carry it through, at that point, you may want to be able to use your device to give you information on how to carry it through. For instance, if you are doing a drawing and you are not quite sure how to draw a hand in a certain position, you can see it in your brain but you are not quite sure. Looking for a photograph to help you once you have the idea in your head then I do not think that there is anything wrong with that because you are using it as a reference. You are not using it only to find ideas.

Amy Climer: That is a great distinction, absolutely. Hollis, I am curious; what struggles do you have with being creative yourself, if any?

Hollis Chatelain: It may sound a little bit odd, but creativity really is not an issue for me. I always have too many ideas and not enough time to do them. I have kind of been like that since I was a little girl. If somebody says what would you do for this or gives me an idea, then lots of ideas come in my head right away.

I think I have always been intuitive and I think I am more right-brained than left-brained, and my dreams have also been a wonderful source of my art. Whenever I am stuck on a problem, and I am not necessarily talking about creativity, I will place the problem in my head before I go to bed and in the morning it is often figured out. But even as a child, I remember sitting and staring out the window just daydreaming for long periods of time. I could stare at a tree and not see it because my mind was wandering all the time and jumping from one thing to another to another



to another. If I am in a bus -- I really like to take public transportation -- and I am watching cars go by, I cannot help to look at the people and say, " I wonder where they are going," just because I like to just kind of free up my brain to wander.

Even in my teaching, I love to make up new lessons to challenge and teach the students. And my students will sometimes say to me, "Where do you get these ideas?" Because I want them to think outside of the box so I try to come up with lessons that are going to take them out of their comfort zone. Being able to come up with those lessons -- writing them is a little bit harder. Knowing how to put it together so they understand what I am trying to express is more of a struggle, but the ideas come to me quite easily and I find it actually relaxing.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. I can relate to that. I definitely am someone that generates a lot of ideas. It sounds like for you the challenge is not so much in coming up with ideas, but in implementing them.

Hollis Chatelain: That is right. It is a much harder thing for me to implement the idea than it is to come up with ideas, but we all do have our challenges.

Amy Climer: Right, absolutely. I totally get it. What are some ways that you overcome that challenge of implementing ideas?

How You Can Overcome the Challenge of Implementing Ideas [25:51]

Hollis Chatelain: Are you asking me in my artwork or are you asking me in other ways in my life?

Amy Climer: I would say in either. Just basically like if you have an idea, let's say a creative idea that you want to implement and you are just struggling to implement it, obviously, you have implemented a zillion times so some of those ideas have come to fruition. How do you overcome that struggle or that resistance to implement?

Hollis Chatelain: If I come up with an idea but I am not sure how to go about it, I usually will turn to another person as a source. Because I think that we can really learn from each other. I have had wonderful mentors in my life and I hope that I am able to mentor other people. I look for somebody or several people who have gone through it already and how did they implement it. And if that does not work, I will use the internet to try to figure out either taking classes or being able to find other people who have struggled with it and just having things that explain it. My

10



husband and I do a lot of brainstorming through this and I am very lucky in the sense that everybody in my family is self-employed.

Amy Climer: I can relate to that, yes.

Hollis Chatelain: And so we do a lot of brainstorming between us. My kids are all self-employed, my sister is self-employed so we kind of work together and talk to each other.

Amy Climer: That is super cool. I want to kind of switch to another topic that you and I have talked about offline. A while ago you were talking and you were sharing some thoughts about journaling. And I bring this up because it is something that is talked about a lot as a way to be more creative. Like you should journal every morning or you should do this or that around journaling. You have some unique perspectives on journaling and I am wondering if you would share some of those.

Why Journaling Might not be the Best Way to Foster Your Creativity [28:08]

Hollis Chatelain: Yes, I have been told to journal because that will help with your creativity. I think *The Artist's Way* is a wonderful book. They talk an awful lot about journaling and so I tried it and I just became resentful about having to do this. Because I think when it comes right down to it, I journal in other ways; I either draw or I create in other ways. I have to do a lot of writing for my work and writing is work for me. I do not find it relaxing. It is not intuitive for me. That is the left side of my brain, not the right side of my brain. And most importantly, and this sounds really odd, but it just does not interest me to go back and read what I have written in my journal so I feel like I am just filling up pages and it does not make sense to me.

I think that if I draw or simply put color down on paper or go out and work in the garden, or sit alone somewhere for a while, or go watch people, I get a whole lot more out of that than trying to journal. I think that when we are forced to do something like, "Okay, I am really going to follow this and I am going to do this every single day and I am going to write for 20 minutes a day or 40 minutes a day or whatever," that is something that maybe I am a non-conformist, but I tend to just push back and find other ways to do my own type of journaling. Walking is a great way to journal for me. I work it through my brain.

Amy Climer: Thank for sharing that. I wanted you to share that because I think it is a tool that can be helpful for some people and then I think some people will have the reaction that you had

11



like, “Why do I have to do this? This isn’t helping.” I guess I wanted you to share that to say like here is permission from this amazing expert artist that journaling may not be the answer. Thanks for sharing that.

Hollis Chatelain: A number of years ago I had several people say to me, “You need to write down your dreams.” Because I just had so many dreams and they said, “This way, you would help you remember them.” Which I started doing and I found I was writing over an hour every day. Finally, I just thought, “I don’t need to write all of this down because if I am meant to remember my dream, I will remember it or I will re-dream it. It will come back to me again and again.” I think that it was also during that that I realized that writing is not the solution for me. I think we all have to find what works best for us and that is just not the solution for me.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. Thanks for sharing that. One of the things I like to do on this podcast is to end it with a weekly challenge. Something that listeners can do based on what they just heard to start applying what they learned right away. I am wondering, what would be a challenge you can give folks, something small, something they can do this week?

Weekly Challenge [31:38]

Hollis Chatelain: Something that I would recommend is to go outside or go to another environment where you feel relaxed. Find a comfortable spot, turn off your phone or do not even bring it with you, and stay in that spot for at least 15 minutes. Stay quiet and allow yourself to observe and daydream. Give yourself permission to daydream. Do not think about the things you need to do. Try to be in the moment and see if you can see and hear and/or smell what is around you. Kind of tap into your senses and what is going on around you. This is not really meditation. I am not asking you to empty your brain. I am asking you to change what is going on in your brain. It is a way to relax your brain. You are kind of learning to space out and that can take you into the right side of your brain.

Another way, I think, that you can look at it is you are learning to embrace boredom. Boredom can actually be very positive. When you start to feel bored, you are actually at the point where you are ready to allow your imagination to take off. And if you can, try to do this every day for seven days and see if you can start to look forward to it. See if you can start to relax and have



new ideas coming into your head, not be stressed about taking that time because that is actually really positive time for you.

And you do not have to be in the country. You can sit on a bench in a mall. You can sit in a train station or an airport. You can sit somewhere where you are watching and paying attention to what is going on around you. And as you do that, you realize you are emptying your brain of your stress and what you feel you have to do. It is something that really, really helps me. I have been to my backyard and it overlooks a pond next door and I will just go there and just sit there. It really, really helps my stress.

Amy Climer: That is awesome! I love it. Thank you, Hollis.

Hollis Chatelain: You are welcome.

Amy Climer: How can listeners learn more about you and your work?

Hollis Chatelain: I am into social media, as are many other people, and so I have a website which is www.hollisart.com and I am on Facebook as [Hollis Chatelain Textile Artist](#). That is the public page. I am also on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and my handle is @hollischatelain. You can find me in all of those different places and I would love to have you go and check me out.

Amy Climer: Great! Hollis, any last comments you want to share before we end?

Hollis Chatelain: Well, I would like to thank you, Amy. I am glad that we reconnected after many years. It is very exciting that you are working in creativity and trying to get other people involved in creativity because it is a really wonderful aspect in my life. Something I cherish is my creativity and my creative moments and I hope that other people can learn to tap into that.

Amy Climer: Great. Thank you, Hollis. That is awesome. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Hollis Chatelain: Thank you, Amy.

Amy Climer: Thank you so much, Hollis. Wow! I hope you all enjoyed that conversation. Hollis has a lot to share. Go check out her website, if you have not already. Beautiful pieces of art there. She has a show coming out in a couple of weeks in January 2018 and you can find out more about that on her website or by following her on social media. You can kind of see by the

13



time this podcast comes out she will probably be in kind of the final stages of getting everything prepped for the show. But I know she is really good about posting online and sharing her work in progress, which is super cool to see.

Let us know if you end up trying Hollis' challenge of being able to sit still or just sit and be and observe for 15 minutes a day. You will notice a similarity with what Hollis talked about the importance of boredom and so did Greg Climer on [Episode 69](#). He was the first artist in the practitioner series that I interview. Both Greg and Hollis talked about the importance of being bored and letting yourself just let that boredom sink in and see what comes of it. Let me know what happens. You can learn comments in the show notes. You can find the show notes at www.climerconsulting.com/083. Head on over to www.climerconsulting.com and look up [Episode 083](#). You could find the links to [Hollis' website](#), her [Instagram](#), social media and leave a comment. Let us know what you thought of the episode.

Have a wonderful creative week. Have a happy, happy New Year and I will talk to you next time. Bye.