

Living and Sustaining a Creative Life, Book Review
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Living and Sustaining a Creative Life is a collection of short stories authored by 40 working artists. This work was published in 2013 and edited by Sharon Loudon. The stories are non-fiction and autobiographical; they offer readers a glimpse into what it takes to be an artist. This is a rare opportunity to see under the hood of an artist's life and career. It reveals how they work to stay afloat and the different strategies these artists have employed over the years. This book is invaluable for aspiring artists and uncovers the way working artists are able to continue pursuing creative endeavors despite poor and unreliable wages.

The central idea throughout these stories is the practical application of strategies to survive as an artist. There are a few techniques that continue to reappear throughout multiple artist's lives. These important ideas are, relying on community and family, being smart and frugal with money and working a second reliable job. For example one of the most interesting strategies in my opinion comes from artist George Stoll. He is able to sustain himself by imposing a tight budget on his income. He splits his earnings into a 20-30-50 spending scheme where 20 percent goes to savings, 30 percent for taxes and the last 50 is for living expenses. This strategy allows him to always be wary about how much money he is spending versus saving. This helps him survive if he runs into leaner times. Community is mentioned a few times throughout the collection of stories as well, a lot of artists depend on their communities, partners or families to support them when things take a turn for the worse. This idea of external support is important, it demonstrates how artists or people who are struggling in general should reach out to their communities for help and support.

The writing style of this collection of stories was particularly interesting because of the large variety of styles that are found. Each artist has their own way of writing, this makes each section of the book unique and original and it doesn't get stale. On top of being a generally interesting read, the advice and information in this book is very useful. Getting all the perspectives from the different artists allows a large variety of readers to connect to the information being presented. I think that highlighting this struggle that artists go through is a good choice, it presents a side of the art world that is often overlooked. As a young artist, this is extremely important to know, if someone went into the field without expecting the struggle they would be dissuaded and give up early. Preparation is always important when pursuing something difficult, and this book prepares the reader for that reality.

I found this book both interesting and informative. I think that the candid honesty that you find in a lot of these stories is reassuring, even people who are known as professional artists still struggle to pay the bills sometimes. The advice and strategies that these artists employ are maybe not the most glamorous but nevertheless necessary to live a creative life. I think that this book will continue to get more prevalent as AI becomes more of a factor in everyday life. Many artists will have a harder time to support themselves financially and the idea of finding alternative ideas to maintain their work will be crucial. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the artistic field and especially any future artists.