



## Art And The Practice Of Being Yourself, by Stanley Kunitz

There isn't only one kind of artist in the world, one way of becoming an artist. There is, above all, a need to articulate your own source of being so you will recognize the source and know who you are. How could you be an artist if you didn't explore your own inner life? There is something in the human being I would call, in the most general terms, a need to transcend the corporeal being and become a person identified by his or her individuating qualities!

As Blake put it, "We must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." You have to practice being yourself and not merely exist as a number in a world of billions of numbers!

The creative gift has very complex origins; you're accumulating and digesting experience, trying to discover its meanings, instead of stuffing it into a closet and moving on to whatever happens to you next. Every experience you have is a lesson in how to live for the next one and if you never learn anything from the experiences of the past, you never mature either as a person or as an artist.

My sense is that you're born with a more or less empty vault. Perhaps the first experiences are even before that, in the womb, and the vault begins to fill with jewels or painful memories. Each memory of a disastrous experience is there, not only as a wound but as a warning. You have to learn how to recognize the return of the same dilemma you've been through before. You have to look at the tag and the price.

Different kinds of memories enter into the making of the self, but among those, there are a few absolutely central memories. They may be traumatic, but they are the crystallization of the creative person's treasure house!

In a sense, all creativity is a process of giving meaning to what is on a universal scale meaningless. The plant and the poet and the gardener collect these disparate, disorganized raindrops, sun rays, passing birds and make something formal. Creativity gives form to what is in nature ambiguous, suggestive. Language wasn't there at the beginning. It was created after people had gone through all sorts of experiences and needed to become expressive in order to give meaning to life!

As an artist, you are a representative human being "you have to believe that in order to give your life over to that effort to create something of value. You're not doing it only to satisfy your own

impulses or needs; there is a social imperative. If you solve your problems and speak of them truly, you are of help to others, thatâ€™s all. And it becomes a moral obligation.

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