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To Be An Artist: Musicians, Visual Artists, Writers, and Dancers Speak

Camille Colatosti

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To Be An Artist is a conversation with today s successful and prominent artists from a variety of disciplines musicians, visual artists, digital artists, poets, writers, activists and scholars. All of them discuss what it means to be an artist today, how they perceive their craft and their world, and the role of art in society. They agree that artists creativity and success come not only from the intense focus on their craft, but, also, from their development of a worldview from their wider vision and understanding of the world in which they live. In To Be an Artist, author Camille Colatosti, head of the Liberal Arts program at Berklee College of Music--a premier college of contemporary music and, with 4,000 undergraduate students, one of the largest arts colleges in the United States--shares her first hand experience with educating young artists. I In her more than 25 years of teaching at the college level and designing liberal arts programs for students planning specialized careers, she has seen how broad and general study helps young people develop and grow stronger in their chosen fields. At Berklee, she has watched aspiring artists, initially so focused on the study of the technical aspects of their craft, grow in their understanding of themselves and their world as they study philosophy, history, literature, mathematics, foreign languages and psychology. And, she has seen that aspiring artists, as a result of this growth, become more creative, more willing and able to use rules and technical aspects of art as a place of beginning, rather than a place of ending. She has seen aspiring artists gain the confidence they need to create something new. Featured artists include performance poet, dancer and yoga expert Caroline Harvey; singer-songwriters Janis Ian and Nona Hendryx; vocalist Bobby McFerrin; musician and composer Bill Banfield; painter Ellen Priest; painter and sculptor Greg Jaris; New York Times bestselling novelist Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez; New York Times bestselling nonfiction author Doug Stanton; dancer and choreographer Otis Sallid; performance poet Bruce George; bassist Victor Wooten; musical director Michael Bearden; photographer Henry Diltz; new media artist Lori Landay; and visual and sound artist China Blue. All of them emphasize a theme of performance poet Bruce George, co-founder of Def Poetry Jam on HBO: artists are the guides who take people from the individual to the social. Artists need to understand their world and this comes through study and lifelong learning. It is the constant desire to know, to learn, to inquire that facilitates and sustains an artist s career.

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