



Dear ,

When I was 23 years old, I was downsized from my first copywriting job. Since I didn't want to move back home with my folks, I signed on with a temp agency to pay the bills. That's how I ended up working as a part-time office manager for Carl Solway Gallery.

Carl Solway Gallery was an international contemporary art gallery specializing in Fluxus art. The Fluxus movement was started in the 1960s by an avant-garde collection of artists and composers. It included musician John Cage, dancer Merce Cunningham, video artist Nam June Paik, performance artist Yoko Ono, and so many more.

The Fluxus artists were anti-establishment rebels. They weren't interested in precious paintings hanging in museums or overly produced, over-hyped art. Instead, they made art from random everyday materials, things like tin cans, cardboard boxes, or junk store finds.

The Fluxus artists collaborated on cutting edge performances. Nothing was sacred. There was a lot of humor and play and chaos. They weren't bound by traditional rules of the art establishment. It was all so far beyond my midwestern idea of art and it felt incredibly freeing and risky to me. [Learn more about Fluxus art here.](#)

"Get yourself out of whatever cage you find yourself in." – John Cage

My job at the gallery was to keep track of it all. I did the accounting for all of the art projects which might include things like "pig fetus in glass jar," "WW II bomb with cello strings," or "antique wood TV cabinet." Occasionally, I would get to participate in live performances.

When I started working at the gallery, I knew absolutely nothing about contemporary art. I had no idea what it all meant. But Carl Solway taught me how to see.

Carl would tell me the story of each artist and each piece of artwork in the gallery.

He would explain the creative process and the meaning behind the work. He was so passionate and intellectually curious, and he inspired me to look deeper.



Today, Carl Solway is still teaching me how to see through the eyes of the artist. He is still challenging me and pushing me to see the world differently.

It was at the gallery that I first understood the power of art to inspire my own creativity.

I sat in that gallery day after day surrounded by cutting-edge artwork with dozens of artists coming and going. The artists would see me sitting at my desk paying the bills or typing letters for Carl on the ancient word processor, and they would stop and ask, "So what do you do?"

I would say, "I'm the office manager," like it should be obvious. They would look confused and ask again, "Right, but what do you DO?"

You see, they were artists, and they assumed that everyone made art. They wanted to know, "Do you paint? Dance? Draw? Compose?" What do you create?

Working in that gallery week after week, month after month, I began to be inspired. Until one day I answered the question, "What do you do?" with two simple words... "I write." That was the moment I declared myself as an artist for the very first time.

And that is why, when I lose my creative spark, I always return to the artworld, to artists, for my inspiration.

How Do You Find Your Inspiration When You've Lost It?

Every writer I know falls into a swamp of boredom now and again. Even if you love your work, your clients, and your writing practice, we all lose that spark at times, when nothing seems exciting and we struggle to put words on the page.

The WORST thing you can do when you lose your creativity is to try to force yourself to be creative. Staring at the blank page and telling yourself you MUST come up with something new and unique will drive you crazy.

Instead, you need to find a way to rekindle that spark. And one of the best ways to do this is to take yourself on an "artist date."

The term "artist date" comes from Julia Cameron and her beloved book, *The Artist's Way*. Now a lot of people read this classic book and they fall in love with the morning pages exercise. Every morning you complete three pages of long-hand journal writing to clear your mind.

It's a great exercise. But too many people forget that it's only half of the equation. The other half is a weekly "artist date." According to honorary Titanide, Julia Cameron, "An Artist Date is a weekly expedition to explore something that enchants or interests you." And it's equally important.

"My students understand 'working' on their Morning Pages – after all, this is America, and we have a powerful work ethic. But the very same students who studiously apply themselves to writing their three pages a day often find themselves balking at my assignment of an Artist Date. And yet, an Artist Date is what fills the well for them, triggering synchronicity and the flow of creativity in their pages and in their life." – Julia Cameron [The Magic of Artists Dates](#)

It turns out that Cameron is onto something. New research shows that art can heal us, inspire us and even alter our brain chemistry.

Artist Dates Trigger Your Pleasure Response

Professor Semir Zeki, Chair of Neuroaesthetics at University College London, conducted a little experiment. Professor Zeki showed a collection of 30 paintings by major artists, including landscapes, still lifes, abstracts, portraits, etc. to a group of men and women. Then Zeki took brain scans of the men and women while they studied the artwork. And he made an astonishing discovery.

When you look at a beautiful painting, the blood flow to your brain increases by as much as 10%. That is the same amount as gazing at someone you love. Both produce a powerful "pleasure" response.

But that's not all...

Brain images also show that when you look at a profound piece of art, your brain fires up the same neurons as the artist's brain did when he or she first created the piece. Just by studying the artwork, you're creating new neural pathways and stimulating a state of inspiration.

You literally feel the same inspiration the artist felt when creating the artwork. Scientists call this "embodied cognition".

Fellow Titanide Monica Day and I were talking about this on our recent retreat together. Monica is working on her graduate degree in peace and conflict resolution. So much of her previous work has been focused on the sensual life and engaging with all the senses to live a more vibrant, "alive" life.

Now she is researching the power of "embodied cognition" to help people in conflict use their senses to experience that same 'knowing' of each other. If you're curious, you can learn more about Monica and her work here: <https://www.monicaiday.com/>

Stimulate Your 5 Senses To Boost Creativity

While I was down in my rabbit hole researching the effects of art on your brain, I found another interesting article at FastCompany.com. It's by honorary Titanide Jane Porter. She reviewed all the research on how you can curate the 5 senses to jumpstart your creative process.

Did you know that while daylight makes you more alert, dim lighting boosts creative performance and encourages you to take risks? Or that listening to ambient noise stimulates your thinking? Or that changing the temperature in the room can affect performance? Or that a vanilla-scented candle boosts creativity while the smell of jasmine improves cognitive skills?

[Read the full article here.](#)

The best Artist Dates stimulate all your senses: taste, touch, sound, sight, smell.

In January, everything was cold and grey and I was suffering from cabin fever and a serious lack of good ideas. So my husband Tom and I booked a discounted hotel room at The Palmer House online, jumped in the car and headed for

Chicago. We spent the entire weekend on an extended Artist Date feeding all of our senses.

On Saturday we went to the Art Institute of Chicago to see an exhibit by Andy Warhol. I saw a large painting in the exhibit that looked like Basquiat, another artist that I like. I read the panel and it turns out that Basquiat and Warhol used to co-create paintings.

They would literally send the painting back and forth to each other, each one adding a layer until they felt like it was done. I found that fascinating, and I had never heard about that.

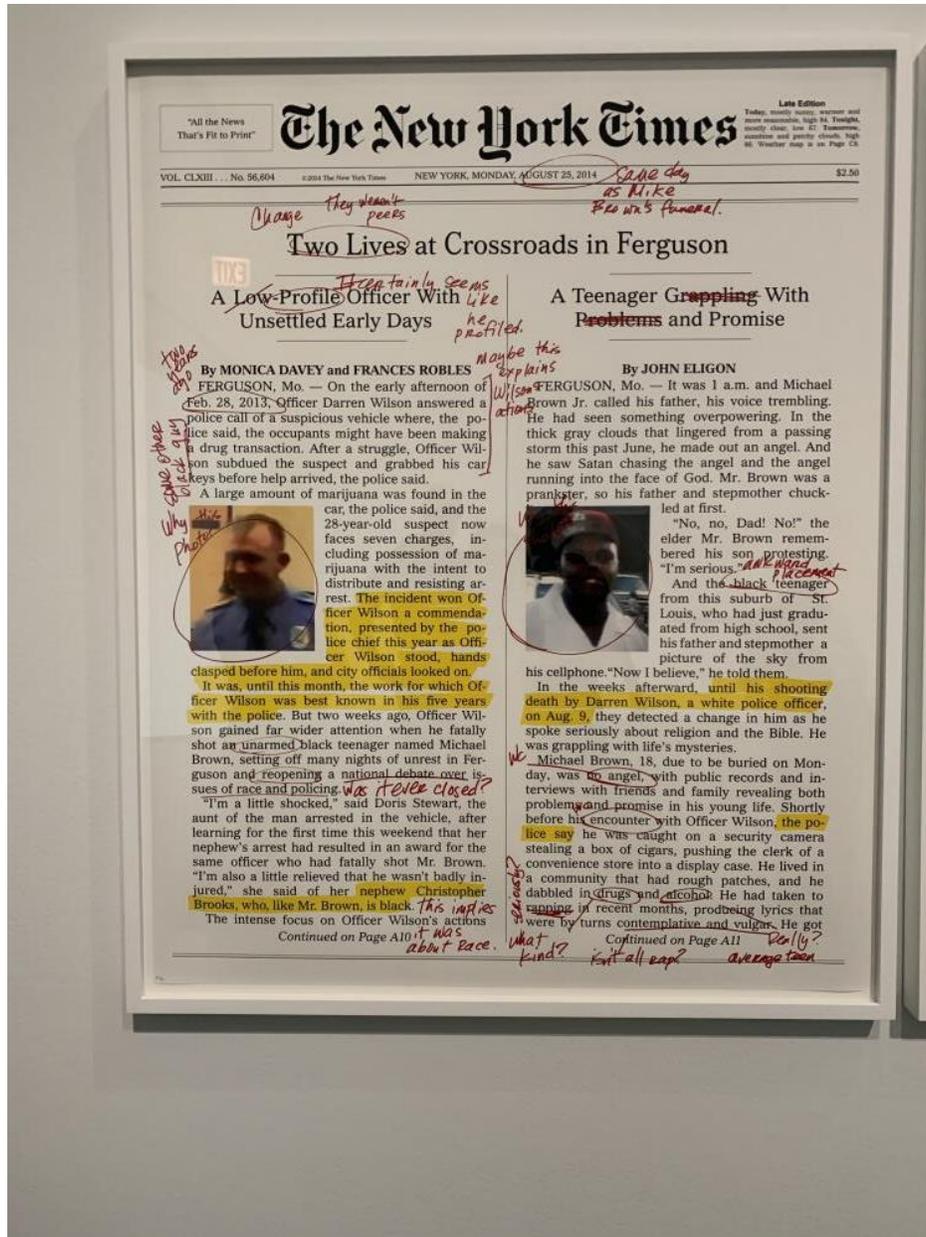


Then that night we went to see the Tedeschi Trucks Band in concert. It turned out that Susan Tedeschi was sick, and she was struggling to sing some of the songs. She invited a young woman, one of her backup singers, to sing *Bound for Glory*, one of their signature songs.

This young woman absolutely owned that song. She stepped up and belted it out like an opera star. The place went crazy. People were screaming and yelling and applauding her.

Then on Sunday, we went to the Museum of Contemporary Art to see a very interesting exhibition about the power of words. There was a young artist named Alexandra Bell, who took a *New York Times* story about the shooting of Michael Brown by a white police officer and examined the language.

She redacted parts, rewrote parts, highlighted different parts, and inserted editorial comments. Bell demonstrated how even so-called neutral reporting is biased by the facts that we choose to share, how we share those facts, how we open the story, and how we describe each of the protagonists.



Bell was looking at hidden racial bias in journalism, but it made me think about how we make those same choices in copy. And the choices we make influence the story and how the reader perceives it. It's a powerful responsibility.

Then Tom and I went back to the Art Institute of Chicago to see an avant-garde music performance by John Cale. The visuals behind it were amazing. The sound was like nothing I usually listen to, so it forced me to hear things in a different way.



Then we grabbed dinner at the Italian Village, where I used to eat with my father every Christmas holiday when I was growing up. We'd have calamari and manicotti and then go look at all the decorated windows on State Street.



So we have sight, we have sound, we have all the smells and colors of the city, and the taste of food. All of that stimulates you. If you missed my video post about the weekend, [you can find it here](#).

When Tom and I left Chicago at the end of that weekend, we were both spinning with ideas. Tom was excited to get back to his sketching, and I was filled with new ideas for my writing. Our Artist Date weekend got us out of our day-to-day routine and stimulated so many new ideas.

If you're journaling every day, that's great. If you're doing the morning pages like Julia Cameron suggests, that's fantastic. But don't forget about the Artist Date.

Once a week, mark the time on your calendar to get out and do something that sparks your inner creativity. You don't have to drive all the way to Chicago (although it is an amazing city).

You can do something as simple as go to a local yarn store and feel the yarn and look at all the colors. Go to an ethnic restaurant that you've never been to in a different neighborhood. Wander the aquarium, take a cooking class, finger paint, go to Nordstrom and smell the perfumes.

Take a walk in a part of the city that you've never been to. If art's your thing, go to a museum you've never been to before. You'll be amazed at how this sparks ideas for your project even when the two seem completely unrelated.

And... someday I want to have a Titanides conference in Cincinnati, and we'll spend an entire day doing an Artist Date together at my favorite spots! In the meantime, I'd love to hear about how you recharge your creativity with your own Artist Dates (or however you fill your well).

Love,
Marcella

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