



**creative  
struggle  
is real**

STOP PROCRASTINATING  
AND START MAKING

HOLLY BLONDIN



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This book is dedicated to you, dear reader—  
to your growth as a creator, maker, and imaginator,  
and your remarkable creative courage.

Without you,  
these pages would never come to life.  
For an unopened book is as inert as an untapped imagination.

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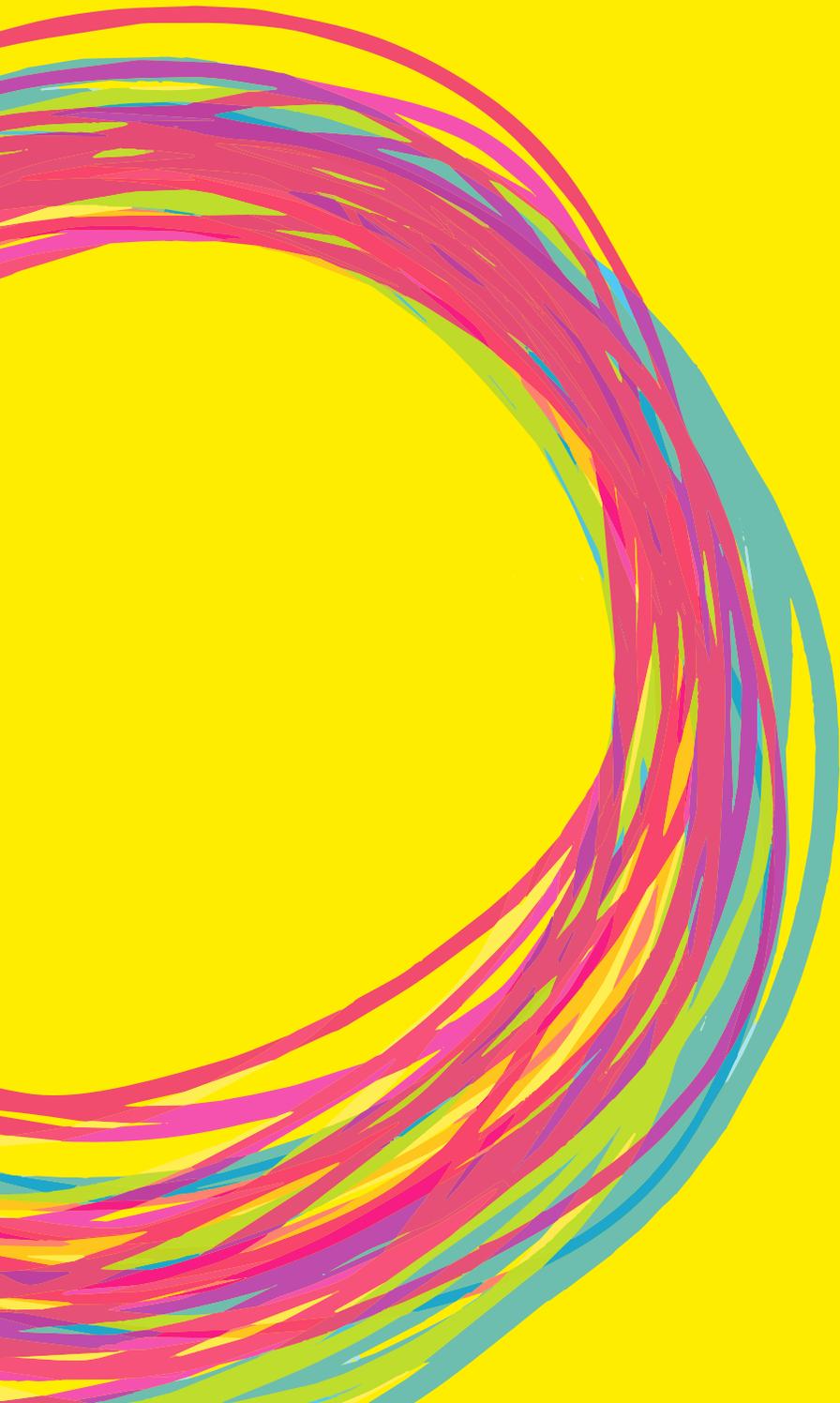
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# How to use this book

Dive in and start making. Write and draw on the pages. Get messy.

Use the creative challenges and activity spreads throughout the book to activate and strengthen your creative muscles. Follow them in order or choose one at random to explore.

You could also use the exercises with your creative team. Go straight to a challenge and invite everyone to take part and start making. Then share and discuss your creations.

For the deepest creative journey, start from the beginning and work your way through to the end. The three different sections of the book are **designed to build on one another to assist you in developing creative momentum that lasts, one stage at a time**. You'll begin with Part 1, *Defining your creative context*, before moving to Part 2, *Designing your creative practice*, and ending with Part 3, *Maintaining your creative momentum*.

Think of this interactive guidebook as a friendly creative companion, supporting you every step of the way as you embark on your next creative adventure and face the creative struggle.

# Introduction

For as long as I can remember, I have been making things. I grew up in a small town in the country with a big yard and a group of neighbourhood kids to play make-believe with. We spent our days making cakes out of mud and then selling them at the “bakery” we designed using lawn furniture and plastic buckets. Some of our best creations came out of the wood scraps my father, a carpenter, would leave behind in his woodshop. We were always looking for creative inspiration in our surroundings.

Like most children, I never questioned the act of making in those days. I just did it. If I had an idea, I would gather the resources closest to me and get creating. If I was moved to tell a story, I would write it down, recite from my favourite children’s books, or gather my friends to create a play or a dance we’d share with our parents. Making didn’t have barriers. Ideas weren’t abstract dreams, or things *other people* did. Making was a way of life. It infused our reality with imagination, and doing it together made us feel seen and accepted.

But even with this early education in making, my creative journey has been less than straightforward.

Let’s leave these memories of joyful childhood creation behind and fast-forward a few decades, to my professional life in marketing. What had once been a natural act of making had become a source of pressure. Making without

thinking now seemed like a luxury I couldn't afford. My approach to creativity started to be shaped by others people's expectations. I found myself following the rules set by the directors, managers, company visionaries, and brands I worked with. During those years, I became detached from my own artistic capacities and creative voice. I put off making, and exchanged it for waiting, procrastinating, and filling my time with other things. Something was missing, but I didn't know how I'd lost it. And I was struggling with where and how to find it.

I found myself asking the same questions that likely brought you to this book:

## *What happened to my impulse to create? And how can I get it back?*

Whether or not you consider yourself a creative person—and newsflash: the idea of the “non-creative” is a myth!—almost everyone remembers what it felt like to experiment, play, and make as a child. Each and every one of us is creative and capable.

But as we enter formal education and the workforce, many of us lose our ability to connect with our creative resources. We forget how to make.

Our culture values results over process. Rather than thinking about creativity as a practice, we're generally taught to focus on the end result. All too often, I see enormously talented professionals still asking for permission to use their creative capacities, more comfortable with copy-pasting the “right” answers into the frameworks they're familiar with. Even organisations that promote innovation often try to fast-track creativity by demanding immediate results, creating unrealistic expectations, and bypassing the creative process. Add that to our cultural tendency to divide people up into “creatives” and “non-creatives”, and it's no wonder that so many of us feel a creative disconnect.

So what can we do about it?

In my case, the path back to creativity came through an unexpected opportunity.

Throughout my MBA and my marketing career, I couldn't shake the sense I wasn't using all of my creative potential. The longing to connect to my personal creativity grew, but I couldn't seem to get back the imaginative rhythm I had once known.

Just when I felt most defeated, in 2014, I was invited to be an instructor at Parsons School of Design, where I would have the pleasure of guiding graduate students enrolled in the strategic design and management programme. It was an opportunity to develop and share new methods for creativity and innovation—and to find the tools that would bring back my own creative practice. This would turn out to be a journey so rich it would lead to one of my proudest acts of making to date: this book, which I now see I have been carrying with me since those early days in the sandbox.

This book didn't begin as a book. I didn't strategise or plan it; that came later. Initially, this book came out of making. I began designing a deck of cards with exercises to help others avoid the suffering that comes with creative struggle. These practices were a way to guide lost creatives and beginners alike to (re)discover their creativity.

By the time I started designing and making scrappy prototypes of my creative card deck, I had been an instructor at Parsons for several years, teaching graduate students and giving career guidance. I listened as brilliant professionals and innovators at every level spoke about their longing to create and make an impact and about the frustrations of the creative struggle.

They felt hopeless, demotivated, and confused about where to go next and how to use their creativity to do it. Disconnected from their personal creative motivations, they had fallen into the same trap that I had found myself in years before.

I notice one common theme among the hundreds of people I have taught and collaborated with. Simply put, they have stopped making. And *not* making is affecting their capacity to innovate, collaborate, and find joy in every area of their lives. The less they practice, the more they procrastinate, and the more difficult it becomes to begin... And the deeper the creative longing grows.

When I finally returned to my creative practice at long last, I was stronger, wiser, and more intentional in my making—and determined to never lose my creativity again. This book is an attempt to share the strength I have felt in my return to creativity, and the practices that got me there, with you.

I built this book using every creative lesson I have learned up to now. My creative learning has spanned many terrains, from professional dance, music, and theatre training and performing to designing and launching a greeting card line, to my later career in entrepreneurship, design, and education. I offer up the highs and lows of my personal creative struggle to let you know you are not alone. The practices in this book are a gift to support you in your making practice so that you may face the creative struggle with confidence and live with the creative freedom you long for.

- Holly

Part 1:

# Defining your creative context

Because your creativity is unique

Deciding to explore your creativity is a courageous move. It is a step into a world of uncertainty, where *you* define what's possible. Navigating the creative struggle is both exhilarating and terrifying. That's why it's important to start your journey knowing who you are, how you fit into the creative landscape, and how you can shape your environment to support your making. This will give you the solid base you need to build creative practices that work for you.

When it comes to your creativity, context matters.

In Part 1 of this book, you will explore your creative conditions and gain a better understanding of where your creativity is most needed and what's holding you back from living your best creative life. You'll identify what motivates you to create and define what creativity means to you. Finally, you'll discover your imaginator type, and learn how your unique imaginative strengths and vulnerabilities can help you to collaborate with your co-creators.

Once you've understood more about who you are and how your imaginative contributions fit into your surroundings, you'll be ready to face the creative struggle head-on and design a creative practice that fits your life (which we'll cover in Part 2). For now, let's start exploring your creative context!

## Chapter 1

# Creativity

## What is it anyway?

“

*Creativity is a combinatorial force: it's our ability to tap into our 'inner' pool of resources—knowledge, insight, information, inspiration and all the fragments populating our minds—that we've accumulated over the years just by being present and alive and awake to the world, and to combine them in extraordinary new ways.*

**Maria Popova**

Essayist, author, poet, and founder of *The Marginalian*

The twenty-first century has put creativity front and centre. The concept has been sensationalised, scrutinised, debated, and investigated, and in many professional environments, creativity has become *the* skill to cultivate. So what exactly is creativity anyway?

Creativity is primarily associated with the **arts or being an artist**. This definition also attaches importance to arts education and culture. At its essence, creativity in this context is understood as a deeply meaningful practice designed to be celebrated, revered, and shared. However, the artistic conception of creativity often emphasises individual talents or gifts, which in turn validates some as “creative” while rejecting others as “not creative”.

The **business environment**, on the other hand, gives us the message that creativity is all about technology and innovation. In corporate settings,