

Tip #83

Online artist groups - community, sharing, questions and answers



As artists, we often work alone ... in our studios, at the easel or the kitchen table, painting plein air or sketching, more often than not we're by ourselves. For most of us, most of the time, that's delightful ... but we CAN get lonely, stale, or feel isolated. We miss the creative give-and-take of other minds, the stimulation of ideas not our own, the shared frustrations, the excitement over a new creative direction, even news of a new show, book, or product we might not hear about in our ivory tower.

But unless we live near an art school or university or active gallery scene, what are we to do about it?

Online artists' groups, communities and pools can fill a real need! You may think "I want REAL relationships," and so do we all - but never forget the person tapping away on that other keyboard *is* a real person.

* Forums like Wet Canvas, <http://www.wetcanvas.com/>, can be invaluable. That particular one is HUGE and may seem a bit daunting to navigate, but you don't need to be a computer geek to find your way around, just a bit of P&P - that's practice and patience. Their subtitle is "Cyber living for artists," and it really can be that. There are no end of "channels" or sub-groups represented there, and you can find real inspiration browsing according to your interest. Watercolor, airbrush art, colored pencils, computers, pastels, plein air, sketching, the business of art? You can find other artists willing to share their experience and offer advice, all for free.



Jump right in! You may ask any question you like (related to the subject line, anyway!) and soon you'll find yourself answering others and having conversations just as if you were actually talking to the person on the other end-because you ARE.

Wet Canvas is now owned by the same company that publishes my books, North Light Books, a subsidiary of F&W Publications, <http://www.fwpublications.com/>, and they're aiming for the same high quality and responsiveness to artists for the website.

* Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/>, pools and communities offer a chance to see other artists' work, make comments, and even write personal emails to someone whose work you like or have a question about. Many of these communities have a discussion forum where you can ask questions, answer them, or simply read and learn from other posters. I belong to a number of these pools, from sketching groups to hand-bound journal makers to nature drawing and transparent watercolor. It's always an inspiration!

In fact, I've even started four group pools on Flickr myself, two private groups for my students, and two for artists who enjoy the same things I do - painting plein air and working with ink and watercolor wash. (Both because I couldn't find a similar group to join, at the time!) You can find them at http://www.flickr.com/groups/plein_aire/ and <http://www.flickr.com/groups/ink-and-watercolor-wash/> - feel free to look around, and join us if you're interested!

* An individual painter's website can generate personal give and take as well - Robert Genn's twice weekly newsletter invites responses and can result in conversations both on and off-list. I know, I've had people contact me from my responses to Robert's intriguing posts at <http://painterskeys.com/>! (You can receive the newsletter directly in your inbox and respond from there if you prefer - just subscribe!) Poke around Robert's site for lots of information you won't want to miss!

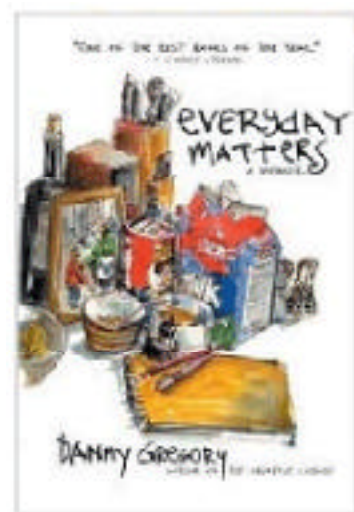
* I belong to several Yahoogroups for artists, including one I now moderate, begun by artist and communications guru Aisling d'Art, <http://aisling.net/>. The purpose of that group is helping artists make a living from their work - or at least supplement their income. You can find it - and join if you like! - at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AJmarketing/> and ask any marketing question you wish. Check the archives and links for lots of useful advice. Offer your own expertise, too, it's always welcome, and networking *works*!

* By far the biggest and most active of the Yahoogroups I belong to is Everyday Matters, begun by author and artist Danny Gregory after publication of Danny's inspiring *Everyday Matters* book. He's produced several more books since then, including *An Illustrated Life: Drawing Inspiration From The Private Sketchbooks Of Artists, Illustrators And Designers*, which will be out soon!

My own journal will be included in that one - and you can bet I'm excited about it! (And my being included in the book was a direct result of being part of the online community - how cool is that!)

Terrific cover, isn't it? It really gives you a taste of the inside of the book!

Check out the group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/everydaymatters/> - you can chat with other artists, create an album for your work, create a link to your blog or website, browse other artists' work. There are nearly 4000 members worldwide ... though not that many people are active posters, of course!



I've heard about new products there, as well as found solutions for problems in my studio or my work, learned about permanence of some art supplies, and gotten to see some wonderful blogs through conversations with other artists there.

And I've made some good friends online, too, including Danny!

* My own online classes offer an alumni discussion group for students - but we've grown into a group of friends who support and encourage one another, no matter what the subject. We have a monthly art theme and keep up with each other's blogs as well!

Google offers similar groups, as do other resources - check around to find a welcoming spot for you.

Still not the same as a "real" relationship you say? Well, my involvement in these groups have resulted in not only learning and inspiration and an opportunity to help others along the way, but some true, lasting friendships as well. Some of the artists I "met" online have become sketching buddies, and we meet once a month to go out drawing together. Doesn't get any realer than that!