

DEALING WITH CRITICISM

*The words that enlighten the soul
are more precious than jewels.*

HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

It is important to be able to sort useful criticism from the other kind. Often we need to do the sorting out for ourselves, without the benefit of a public vindication. As artists, we are far more able to do this sorting than people might suspect. Pointed criticism, if accurate, often gives the artist an inner sense of relief: "Ah, hah! so that's what was wrong with it." Useful criticism ultimately leaves us with one more puzzle piece for our work.

Useless criticism, on the other hand, leaves us with a feeling of being bludgeoned. As a rule, it is withering and shaming in tone; ambiguous in content; personal, inaccurate, or blanket in its condemnations. There is nothing to be gleaned from irresponsible criticism.

You are dealing with an inner child. Artistic child abuse creates rebellion creates block. All that can be done with abusive criticism is to heal from it.

There are certain rules of the road useful in dealing with *any* form of criticism.

1. Receive the criticism all the way through and get it over with.
2. Jot down notes to yourself on what concepts or phrases bother you.
3. Jot down notes on what concepts or phrases seem useful.
4. Do something very nurturing for yourself—read an old good review or recall a compliment.
5. Remember that even if you have made a truly rotten piece of art, it may be a *necessary* stepping-stone to your next work. Art matures spasmodically and *requires* ugly-duckling growth stages.
6. Look at the criticism again. Does it remind you of any criticism from your past—particularly shaming childhood criticism? Acknowledge to yourself that

the current criticism is triggering grief over a long-standing wound.

7. Write a letter to the critic—not to be mailed, most probably. Defend your work *and* acknowledge what was helpful, if anything, in the criticism proffered.
8. Get back on the horse. Make an immediate commitment to do something creative.
9. Do it. Creativity is the only cure for criticism

Artists who seek perfection in everything are those who cannot attain it in anything.

EUGÈNE DELACROIX