

How To Turn Jealousy Into Creative Inspiration

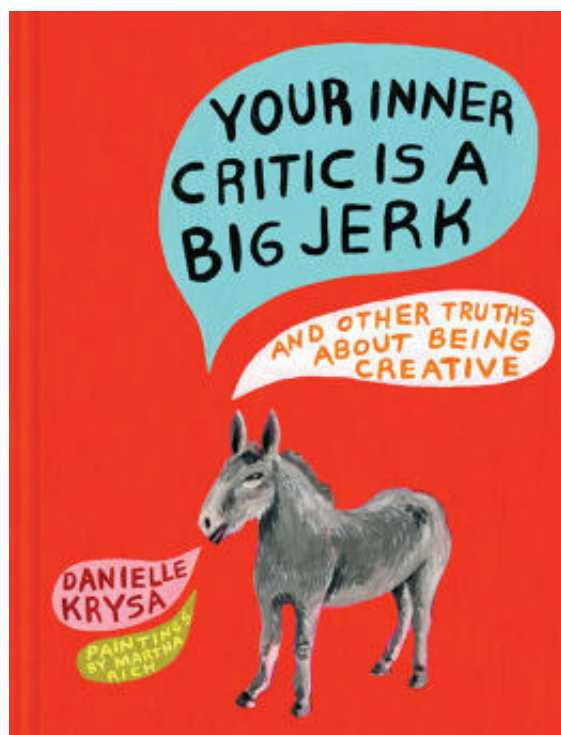
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Five tips for turning one of the most toxic (yet totally normal!) emotions into a professional asset.

Jealousy. This is a big topic—it's one of the seven deadly sins, for crying out loud. You may try to run away, but I've learned from experience that jealousy will chase you, breathing down your neck, hot on your heels. The only way to get rid of this toxic emotion is to face it head-on. Yes, stop running and turn around. Stare straight into those big green eyes, show no fear, and then make jealousy work for you.



It's totally normal to be jealous of people who are doing the things that you wish you were doing—believe me, I know. That, however, does not mean you should allow yourself to stew in jealousy for days, or weeks, or years. Take the time to figure out exactly why you're jealous,

and this will become your green light to go and get things done, turning this negative emotion into something positive. Once you're moving in the right direction, that green-eyed jealousy won't be able to keep up.

Before I started [The Jealous Curator](#), I was, well, jealous. I was trying to get back into making art after taking a self-imposed, decade-long hiatus, so naturally I jumped down the rabbit hole that is the internet. Did I find artists I liked? Yes, thousands of them. When I discovered work that I loved, I'd have an immediate 50/50 reaction. First, I would be so excited, heart racing, my cheeks flushed with inspiration; I couldn't wait to grab a fresh canvas and get to work. Then, only minutes later, I would feel totally defeated, my inner critic chiming in along the way: It's all been done in every color. Besides, you could never do it as well as [insert any name here]. Why bother? Let's take a nap instead.

I was bitterly jealous. It was breaking me, and completely stopped me from living the creative life that I so badly wanted to be living. After months of wallowing around in this poison, I'd had enough. It was time to take some control over the situation. I was jealous. But, instead of letting it eat me alive, I decided to stare it down, arm wrestle it, and then flip it on its head.

Within a month or two of writing posts as the Jealous Curator, I was feeling like a totally new person. It was like taking a deep, cleansing exhale. I slowly began to uncover the secrets that would turn my jealousy into admiration, and then I wrote them down.

SAY IT OUT LOUD

It is that simple. Say it out loud. Yes, just tell the person you're jealous of that you're jealous of her or him. Here's why:

- If nothing else, it will make the other person feel great, and that will make you feel good, too.
- Saying it out loud in a positive way, instead of keeping it bottled up inside, transforms jealousy into admiration.
- The person you're jealous of could very well be jealous of you, too! Seriously.

I started saying it out loud almost by accident, through the daily posts on my website. By writing about the artwork I loved, I was mastering the first two points without even trying—and it felt amazing. A few months after I launched The Jealous Curator, I decided that I wanted to try one of these "I'm jealous of you" conversations in person. Scary, but it had worked online. Why not add a little face-to-face and a fancy latte to the equation?

This experiment took place over coffee on a pretty outside patio. When I confessed my green-eyed jealousy to my coworker, Mary Jo, she was stunned. And then she burst out laughing. She explained she had been jealous of me all this time. It turned out we both had a lot of amazing things going on, that neither of us had fully recognized in ourselves. And, with that realization, my wishing days were over; I was ready to be a doer.

Who in your life are you jealous of? Draw these people in closer. Your admiration may convert these talented people from being objects of your envy into your close creative confidants. They may become the ally you reach out to when you're in a creative block or feeling insecure. People you admire are ideal brainstorm partners; wouldn't it be great to get some of their secret sauce in your work? None of this will happen unless you swallow your pride and admit your undying admiration.

WRITE IT DOWN

If you're feeling nervous or shy before your confession coffee date, this is a great trick to get your thoughts straight. In some cases, it might be your only option. For example, what if your jealousy alarm is set off by someone you don't know—a friend of a friend of a friend, a celebrity, an artist who died 100 years ago, or maybe an ex who you really don't want to have coffee with? Sometimes, saying it out loud won't work. No problem. Write a letter that you do not send. It's not quite as satisfying, but at least it allows you to articulate what's bothering you. Now, take a look at that letter and grab a fresh sheet of paper, for the next step.

MAKE AN ADMIRATION ACTION LIST

Your action list should be based on the things that make you jealous about a particular person. He or she goes for a run every morning before work. You hate running. Okay, then it's probably not the act of running that makes you jealous, perhaps it's the individual's balanced lifestyle that you want. Put something on your action list that works for you: morning meditation, yoga, a walk, the gym. Next: Does the other person make one thing every day? If that is something you'd like to be doing too, then pop it onto your list. Break it down, jealous item by jealous item; pin the list up in your studio or put it on your fridge. This is now your plan.

LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

The object of your jealousy has a big show opening in New York. What a lucky person. Really? Or did the object of your jealousy wake up every morning at 5 a.m. to work on the project before everyone else in the house got up? Did he or she just get handed this huge show or is it the result of hustling for years—showing paintings on any wall available, from coffee shops to tiny galleries? It's easy to be jealous of others' successes, and to assume that they miraculously arrived at the top of their field. Look behind the curtain, and take notes. What they have is the trigger for your jealousy, but what they do may become part of your plan to get on a similar path.

Sometimes the jealousy you feel toward these rock stars in your life comes from insecurity in your own work. But if you don't fear failing, you can play and experiment until you arrive in a place where you feel confident and proud of yourself. Slowly but surely, you'll begin to let go of that soul-crushing jealousy you feel when you see what other people are making. Sure, there may still be a pang of "damn, I wish I had thought of that." But now, instead of allowing it to stop you, you can use it to move yourself forward.



FIND INSPIRATION, AVOID IMITATION

When you find a painting, a book, or a song that truly speaks to you, sometimes the knee-jerk reaction is to copy it. "Oh, I love that. I'll make something just like it." Sound familiar? Well, you're not alone; I did this for years. I jumped around, changing my style every time I found work that I loved. I felt like a crazy person with no style or point of view of my own. Finally, about a year before I started The Jealous Curator, I had an idea—a brand-new idea that no one else in the world had ever thought of. I was officially an artistic genius! The idea flashed into my mind one day while playing with my son, who was two at the time. I was an stay-at-home mom. We spent a lot of time "being" dogs, and sheep, and any animal that he decided to be that day. I loved watching him, and so I did a whole series of collages that featured kids' bodies with animal heads. I was so proud of myself. Until I started the blog. Literally on the first day of looking for work to post, I found five artists doing exactly the same thing. Exactly. I was devastated, and frustrated, and strangely jealous of those other artists for thinking of my brilliant idea before I did. For once I hadn't "copied," but I might as well have. Damn. Back to the drawing board. In fact, getting shoved back to the drawing board was actually a creative blessing. This little animal-head fiasco challenged me to think about what I was trying to articulate. Was there another way I could visually represent that idea? Of course there was. I just needed to get into the studio and push myself past the first idea.

There I was, genuinely believing that I was the first person to put animal heads on kids, while I'm quite sure those other five artists thought that they were geniuses, too. The bizarre thing is, often there's just something collective going on in the universe. Geometrics are trendy, flowers have been a go-to subject matter for centuries, and there might just be more than one novel about vampires. As for collage work, it has a very unique issue all its own: A lot of collage artists use the same vintage images, not because they're "stealing" from each other, but because of copyright guidelines. The result is that these artists end up using images from the same time period (*National Geographic* 1950, anyone?), so their final pieces will look similar.

In any creative discipline, it's wonderful to be inspired by others. How sad would it be if you weren't? But then it's your job to alter, remix, combine, transform, and challenge yourself to make those found images, floral still-life paintings, and vampire stories into something unique. You'll find yourself creating work that is influenced by the world around you, but that is truly your own.

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