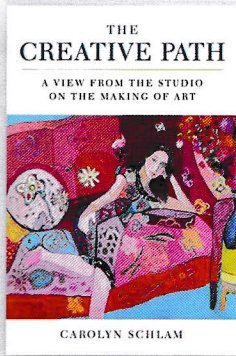




## Book Review

# The Creative Path

Linda Koffenberger, CPSA (NC)



### The Creative Path: A View From the Studio on the Making of Art

Carolyn Schlam, 2018

**N**ow in her seventies, author Carolyn Schlam, a visual artist and sculptor, was keen on recording the legacy of an artist and teacher who meant so much to the making of her art. Her recently published book, *The Creative Path*, shares the lessons she learned as a young artist in Norman Raeben's Carnegie Hall studio during the 1970s.

While there is plenty on aesthetic criteria and creativity, the book is mostly about how to sustain inspiration, intention, and commitment throughout a lifetime as a professional artist.

It is a bit reminiscent of *The Artist's Way*, the classic 1992 book by Julia Cameron, although Schlam's is written from the standpoint of building on your innate creative urge, while Cameron's is about breaking old habits and mindsets that block your creativity. Both books have suggested exercises to reinforce the lessons in each chapter.

There is a lot in *The Creative Path* I like, particularly the real joy Schlam—and Raeben before her—gets from making art:

- How finishing an art piece is not nearly as important as the process of creating it.
- How you shouldn't paint your likes or dislikes, as these are judgments and there is no room in the artistic process for judgment and criticism.
- How all visual art should start as abstract and how adding layers build to more and more representational detail—stay in the abstract as long as you want, just for the joy of it.
- How you should paint or draw shapes and textures, not objects.
- How you should paint or draw what your eye wants—rather than using imagination or intellect. You can read the book to find out what this means.

Basically, the simple message for sustaining a lifetime as a creative artist is keeping the joy alive.

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Avoid taking the big easy—be intent on learning. In other words, “giving yourself very challenging assignments is the best way to demand greatness from yourself.”

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There is more in the book on the mindset required to make art the path you want to follow, but keeping the fun in your studio is a big part of it. Then there is true grit. Avoid taking the big easy—be intent on learning. In other words, “giving yourself very challenging assignments is the best way to demand greatness from yourself.”

Bob Dylan was an art student in Raeben's studio in the mid-70s as well and credits him with regaining his ability to write songs—to getting his creativity back. I would love to have met Norman Raeben.

I have taught art classes for the past 12 years; and, while I've had plenty of grateful artists at the end of them, no one has even remotely considered writing as much as a journal page about the experience. Raeben must have been an extraordinarily gifted teacher.

If you are—or plan to be—in your studio every day, this would be a book you would want to read.

*Linda Koffenberger, CPSA, works in colored pencil, watercolor, and egg tempera. She is on the faculty of the 3-year Botanical Art & Illustration Certificate Program at the North Carolina Botanical Gardens, teaching colored pencil and mixed media courses, as well as workshops on art and nature. She is also an instructor at the Sertoma Art Center in Raleigh, North Carolina.*