

PROFESSIONAL **artist**

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Recorded Diffusion
by Alexandra Pacula

It's Never Too Late:

FOUR MATURE PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS

As more people continue to live productively into their 70s, 80s and 90s, past the usual age of retirement at 65, more people are also getting a second chance at developing a new career. This includes those who are looking to develop new art careers later in life.

For instance, when I started painting over 20 years ago, I took classes at my local museum school. I was 25 at the time and had just finished law school. All of the participants were much older than I was, and I was amazed at the exuberance

for life that the other participants exhibited. I thought to myself, this is the way to embrace the later years of your life. That thought stuck with me and inspired me when I pursued my art career professionally at age 43, after a career as a lawyer and then a stay-at-home mom to three kids.

Michael Chearney, Annie O'Brien Gonzales, Deborah Paris and Gabriele Evertz also chose to pursue their passion for art later in life. Here are their stories.



Sunburst, 2012, by Michael Chearney. Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48".
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MICHAEL CHEARNEY

BEFORE I BECAME AN ARTIST,

I was a creative director for major advertising agencies in New York and Los Angeles. I had no formal training to be an artist, but I was taught to paint at the age of 2 by my immigrant grandparents. To them, there were no lines or boundaries to art: You could paint people purple, the sky orange, and a brush could be anything within reach. Their love of creativity and freedom would re-emerge years later in my second career as a painter, and their early lessons are reflected in the work I do now.

My informal training was interrupted by my mother's love of paint-by-numbers works on velvet. I simply could not keep in the lines, and I naturally rebelled at pre-ordained color choices. When we moved out of my grandparents' house at the age of 3, my early teachers were unable to keep my abstract inclinations alive. Any additional training was limited to a few college art courses, and an art history minor, which proved to be invaluable training when I returned to painting.

I think most creative people in advertising are artists of one kind or another. They are drawn to advertising because it is a commercially lucrative way to express themselves. Unfortunately, it is making something by committee, with the intent to sell something other than art for art's

sake; however, it did train me to be clear and focused in my work. You only have 30 seconds to convey your message in a commercial, and in a similar way, a painting makes its impression in seconds.

Also, that world taught me that you need to touch something in a consumer, and also in a collector. Advertising requires you to be a good presenter, a salesman, to work with

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~ Michael Chearney

people, and to promote others and yourself. This is invaluable training for an artist. You need to know your product in advertising, and your target market. The same is true in art. You need to know what kind of painter you are, and who buys that kind of art and where. You have to develop a recognizable brand, image and style. For example, your artworks need to be identifiable in the similar way that an ad campaign is recognizable.

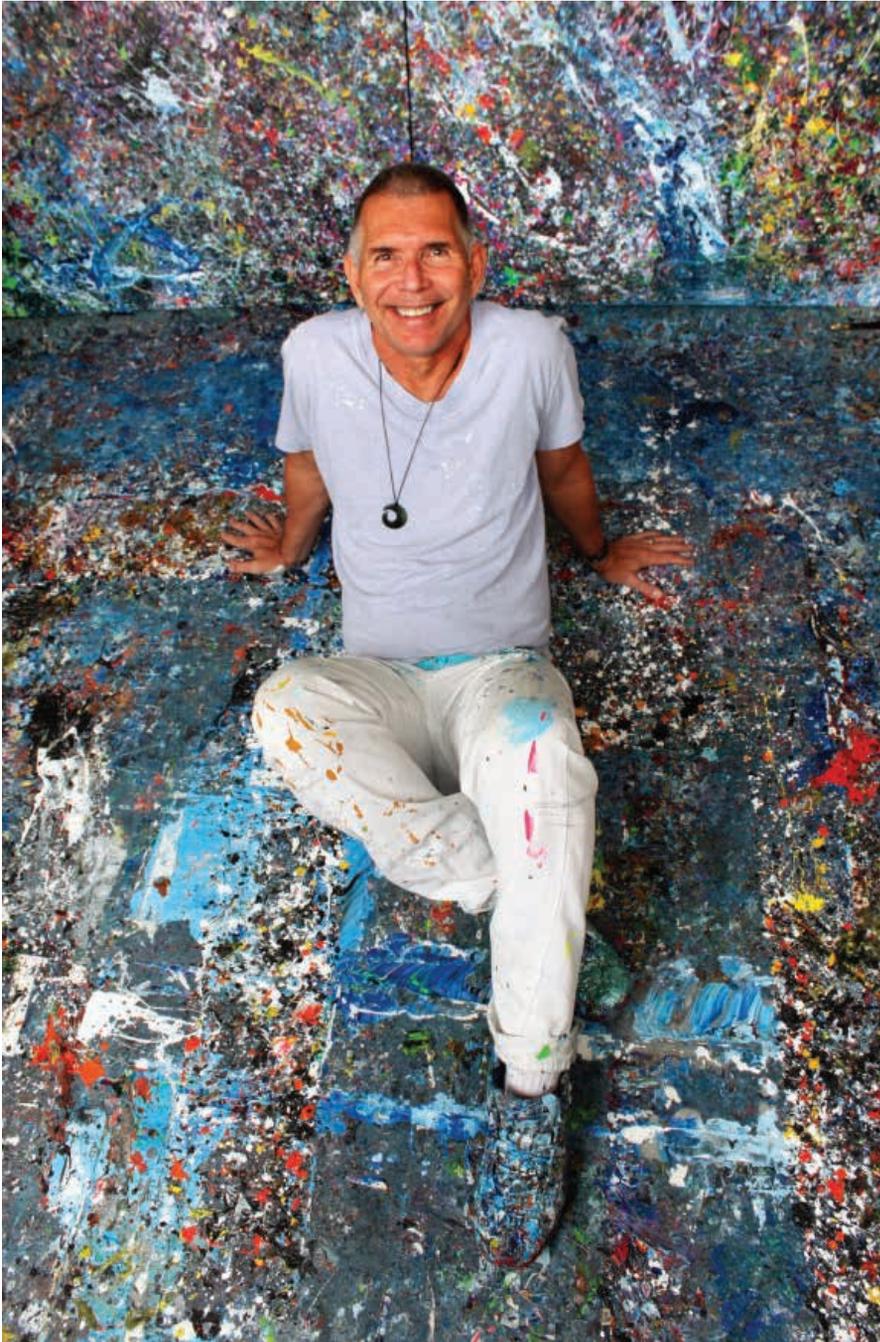
After years in the advertising world, I became frustrated. I found myself leaving an advertising client meeting one day in 1998 and going into an art store in Los Angeles to buy acrylic paint, brushes and canvas. Later that day, much to my partner's astonishment, I hung a sheet in our master bedroom and started throwing paint around. I had no idea I was starting my second career, but I knew I needed to do something of greater value.

I've been painting for 14 years now, seven of them professionally. I started out painting for personal enjoyment and gradually started showing my work in my home and office. With encouragement from friends and family, I took my work to an established art consultant in 2005 for review. I essentially asked him if I had a career. And he said yes. He suggested I open a studio/gallery as a first step, and discouraged me from pursuing established galleries until I had built my own client base of collectors and designers. I operated the Chearney Gallery in West Hollywood from 2005 to 2009. In 2009, I moved my studio to downtown Los Angeles and sought the company and inspiration of other artists.

What's funny is that if you told me I would be a professional artist 15 years ago, I would have laughed. But in 1998, it just felt like it was the right time for a career change.

I would tell others trying to make the leap to simply go for it. If it's the right time, you'll know it soon enough.

One thing I will point out is that there is a huge difference between



MICHAEL CHEARNEY
IN HIS STUDIO AT THE
INDUSTRIAL STREET LOFTS
IN THE DOWNTOWN
ARTS DISTRICT. PHOTO
COURTESY OF EDGAR HIRST.

creating art as a hobby and creating art as a second career. Robert Shapazian, former director of Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles, was teaching a seminar I attended early on in my second career. He said, “No one understands what it really takes to get a painting on a gallery wall.” I know this now.

Once you’ve made the choice to pursue art, get a studio set up in your home or elsewhere, and start working, experimenting and finding your style. I would suggest doing this while you still have income or support from a job or another source.

Here’s another tip: Assemble a body of at least 15 works you’ll want to

show a consultant. Spend the money on an hour or two with a good art consultant, and have them review your work. Listen to them. Learning how the art world looks at art is very important. You’ll need to find out where your art fits in. Also, attend as many gallery shows, fairs and events as possible. Become part of the art world. Dealers do not just see your art. They see you, too.

When you feel your work is consistent, and you have at least 30 paintings in your inventory, I would begin making a business plan. Set up a website, make cards and begin submitting work to juried shows. Finding a business partner, maybe your life partner or a friend, to help with your marketing is very important too. Making art as well as selling and promoting it is a big job for just one person.

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Additionally, I would avoid starting out by submitting work to galleries. I would sell directly to collectors, designers, in group shows, etc., and then, I would take my "credentials" and sales record as a calling card to galleries, along with a great portfolio and website. Meeting with an art consultant before showing the materials publicly is also a good idea.

Expect that there will be ups and downs, but keep the work flowing, and getting your work seen. Eventually your art will have a life of its own, and opportunities will find you. Whenever I have any doubts, I look at the television and see the commercials I spent so many years doing. And I smile.

» Michael Chearney (Chearney.com) is a native of Baltimore and is a self-taught painter. Selected exhibitions from this past year include Red Dot Miami, the Palm Springs Fine Art Show and INCOGNITO 2013 at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. In January

2014, Chearney will have his second solo show at the George Billis Gallery in Los Angeles. He has shown nationwide in group exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami. He paints at his studio in the downtown Los Angeles Arts District and lives in Hollywood.



Living Color, 2012, by Michael Chearney. Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 60".
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