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Success

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From a rejection letter received the other day —

I am both honored and deeply flattered that you have chosen “X” Gallery to review your work for exhibition. I am in awe at all the personal stories, emotional revelations and the infinite and diverse ways in which artists find to express themselves. I admire and respect each and every one of you for the extraordinary effort you make every day to share your gift. Again, we were happily overwhelmed with a huge number of excellent quality entries, and the competition for this show was very, very stiff. Only 50 pieces were selected from over 3,000 entries. Therefore, I also have the grim task of informing you that your work was not chosen. I hope you do not misinterpret this as a reflection on the quality of your work. It pains me that so much high quality work had to be omitted. In the end, there is really no way to predict how or why a juror picks specific pieces. Much of the selection process is based on an unconscious response to the work, which is often times based on a lifetime of cumulative visual experiences.

I sincerely hope this will not discourage you from continuing your quest to seek other appropriate venues to get your work exhibited. I understand the tremendous amount of courage it takes to enter juried competitions...it puts you in the vulnerable position of potential rejection. But, putting yourself out there is an obligation you have not only to yourself, but, to your work.

I get a lot of these letters, but by the end of reading this I was so moved by the author’s own pain (and her “grim task”) that my own passing disappointment seemed petty indeed. This hurt her more than it hurt me.

A spot on NPR reminded me not to take these outcomes personally —

<http://www.npr.org/2014/02/27/282939233/good-art-is-popular-because-its-good-right>. As a work of art (or an artist) becomes successful, “the process of social influence and cumulative advantage sort of magnified those small, random

initial differences...if you believe that there's a large role for chance in the outcomes that people have and the kinds of success that people have and also the kinds of failures that people have, it changes how you treat other people.

If success is capricious, then perhaps you shouldn't think you deserve either outcome. Apparently [successful people](#) don't believe this — *"a series of startling studies showing an apparent link between wealth and unseemly behavior."*

I don't think there's a better definition of success than continuing to make art. That in itself can give shape and meaning to your life. And you can always tell yourself your day will come, and this can't be disproved.

Creating the work is essential; "sharing your gift" (see letter above) with others is nice, too. Your work has to be seen to do that, and usually someone else has to agree to let that happen.

If your work is not being seen, take a lesson from the 19th century Italian sculptor, Medardo Rosso. Rosso would sneak his work into galleries and museums, take whatever sculpture was on display down from its pedestal, and replace it with his own work as if it belonged there. He wasn't trusting anyone else's judgment.



Medardo Rosso, via Wikimedia Commons

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