



Detail shot of artwork by Emily Miller: Shallows II - encaustic, River to Sea series

Success as a Professional Full-time Artist (Interview with Emily Miller)

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*Emily Miller is a Pacific University graduate, Class of 2016, who built herself up as a full-time artist skilled in ceramics, glass sculpture, watercolor, graphic design, and many other mediums. Here's her **advice directed towards undergrads** also aiming to make a living as an artist. Please visit Emily Miller's website at: <http://www.ejmillerfineart.com/>. Beautiful, original artworks available for purchase!*

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Did you have any doubts concerning the question of stable income as a professional artist, and would you recommend a plan B just in case?

Yes and yes! I had huge doubts, but my income has actually been more stable than I expected. During my last semester at Pacific University, I made a simple business plan and a separate five-year plan to make sure I had specific financial goals and steps I could take to achieve them. That helped me feel more prepared and made it easier to see what I could do to boost income in slow months.

Most artists I know are doing lots of different things to contribute to their income, any of which could be a plan B, depending on the person: teaching, selling art objects, doing installations or lectures, working for other artists or art organizations, doing commissions and client-directed work. I mostly sell art objects, so I built up my sales outlets over time and I now have my artwork in 4 different online outlets and 10 retail locations, plus 6-8 short-term exhibits each year.



How did you make yourself known in the world outside Pacific as an artist?

Three of my classes at Pacific had an ongoing program of professional artists and alumni who came in to talk about how they succeeded in the art world. Their stories all sounded kind of magical: “I got this really boring data entry internship, but I met the art director there who later invited me to work on a big project, and he just happened to know this famous client...” I remember thinking, *That’s great, but not everyone’s boring, unrelated internship turns into a successful art career!* But now I think I have figured it out!

The connections we make when we represent ourselves as artists are never wasted. Say yes, even to small opportunities, and make sure to share your bigger goals. People will remember, especially if you keep on showing up and proving you are still interested!

I enter group shows and talk to other artists at the opening reception about their work and successes. Established artists are unbelievably generous with advice for newcomers! I approach local galleries with a body of work that I think would fit their collection. I volunteer for every art opportunity that fits my goals, and I treat each one like a paying job.



What did your transition from school to work look like?

I spent the rest of the year after I graduated trying out different ways of working. Every month I had a new project lined up that motivated me to keep making new work. I did exhibits, art fairs, installations, commissions, and a residency. I spent a lot of time thinking and writing about my goals and motivations. About half of the projects came from connections I had made at Pacific. I also questioned myself a lot more than I had expected. Starting a business involves endless decisions about how and where to spend your time and money. Everything took longer than I thought it would. Even with a plan, and a plan B, I still struggled with wondering if I was doing the right thing. But I never doubted for a moment that I was doing what I loved.



What would you describe as your personal values as an artist?

All my artwork is inspired by my love of exploring nature and the sea. Curiosity and delight are important to me, in my artwork and in my approach to life. I believe in giving back to support the communities that have supported me, and I believe in creating affordable and accessible work.



Are there any future goals that you have as an artist -- skills to master, career dr

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to achieve, or otherwise?

I love materials. Experimenting with different techniques will keep me busy for the rest of my life. Right now, on my list to try: gouache, handmade paper sculpture and fiber art, electroforming, crystallization, and more work with light and glow pigments.

In my dreams, I have a dedicated home studio with a kiln, big sturdy tables and shelves, lots of natural light, and a little loft area for office work. Two more of my dream goals are exhibiting at Portland Art Museum and being awarded an artist residency in an amazing location!



Do you have any advice for students looking to go down a similar path as you?

Make art, collaborate, be organized, and define your success.

1. Make art. Nobody will force you to do this – not even if you’re an art major. You need to dream up your own projects and set your own goals and stick to your own schedule. Believe in yourself, and believe that your work is worth making, in the best way that you possibly can.
2. Collaborate. Connect with other artists so you can bounce ideas off each other and even work on projects together.
3. Be organized. Being a professional artist is being a business owner. People will absolutely remember if you represent yourself as an organized, helpful professional. Follow up on connections any time you can. I carry business cards in my wallet and in the car, and I make sure my website is simple and easy to update so that I will actually keep it updated. I took an Arts Marketing course at Pacific that was incredibly helpful for planning my future as an artist. Ask about this course if you don’t see it listed, and make room for it in your schedule – it’s worth it!

4. Define your success. Think about what your life will look like as a successful artist. Get specific and write it down so you can read it over again, after a year of being in business. It's too easy to feel like you're not measuring up if you're using someone else's standards. Nobody can do everything all at once, so focus on what matters most to you!

And finally... go easy on yourself, and celebrate your successes. I didn't finish half of what I had planned during the year after I graduated. It was frustrating, but I learned to just keep on working. If this is what you love, it's worth it!



Remember to check out Emily Miller's website at: <http://www.ejmillerfineart.com/>.

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