

Creative Capital

THE LAB

Lessons in Sustainability: Five Questions for Sharon Louden

Posted on [January 12, 2015](#) by [Hannah Fenlon](#)



Sharon Louden teaches at the Chautauqua Institution.

This winter, artist [Sharon Louden](#) hosts her first four-part webinar series: [How to Approach, Engage & Communicate with Galleries, Museums & the People You Want to Know](#). **This series is now sold out, but stay tuned for information about more webinars with Sharon in the spring and fall!** Interested in hearing about upcoming dates or joining the waitlist for this series? [Email us!](#)

Sharon is also the editor of the 2013 compilation, [Living and Sustaining a Creative Life: Essays by 40 Working Artists](#), which offers realistic insight into how artists juggle their creative lives with the everyday needs of making a living.

We had the opportunity to ask Sharon five questions about how she manages to sustain her own practice, and what she's learned along the way:

Hannah Fenlon: What are some of the things you've done to support your life as an artist? (from "hack jobs" to more interconnected work).

Sharon Louden: I have done many things to support myself over the years: pizza-maker for Domino's, shoe shiner at an airport, bartender, office manager, registrar in Non-Degree Programs at SAIC, temp-secretary in offices in Manhattan, professional organizer for small businesses, teaching, and private consulting to other artists, to name just a few. Currently, I am building a new body of work in my studio, while regularly sending out RFQs for public art projects; applying for grants; teaching, lecturing and critiquing at different colleges as a visiting artist; conducting my lecture series at the New York Academy of Art; consulting for the Joan Mitchell Foundation and other crazy odds and ends. Basically, I am constantly filling in the cracks of my life.

Hannah: Did you make any early career mistakes in approaching galleries or museums? Can you tell me about one of them?

Sharon: Absolutely. I remember one embarrassing thing I did, which was an outrageous and fantastic learning lesson for me! There was potential for a museum to acquire my work, and I was so excited by the prospect of that happening. I was extremely impatient, worried, thinking about it all the time, so I found the phone number of the curator and called her – at her home – ugh! A terrible thing to do. I was totally desperate. She happened to pick up the phone as she just came back from a foot surgery! Of course, I never heard from her again and I should never hear from her again – it was totally out of line on my part. I feel guilty about it to this day and if I ever see her, I will apologize to her in person. I learned a lot from that experience as it forced me to ask myself: Why was I so desperate? What was the hurry? Why didn't I think about the curator first? How would I feel if I were in her shoes? It was a great learning lesson for me that laid the groundwork for how I approach correspondence with everyone I encounter.

Hannah: What's the best advice you ever received from a mentor?

Sharon: There are so many points of advice I've received in the past that it's difficult to pin down one. In the preface of my book, I wrote that my professor in graduate school said to me that my "work will carry me." I understand that advice. The most important thing I have in my life is the truth of my work, and I would say that that is true for every artist. It is my most valuable asset and the core of my identity as an artist. But if I were to choose the one piece of advice that continually resonates with me on a daily basis, it would be: time carries you. No matter what happens in life, whether it is painful or glorious, time is going to just keep on clickin' on. I always keep time in mind: the management of it, allowing it to carry me from one difficult situation to the next, and how the lack of it in life serves as a motivator. It's more and more precious as I get older, so the decisions I make have much more weight.

Hannah: If you could only advise an artist to do three things today to help sustain his or her practice, what would they be?

Sharon:

1. Think of the other person first when corresponding with someone.

2. Express gratitude at every opportunity you have.
3. Make the absolute best work you can.

Hannah: And, because I can't resist: Tell me a little about your book event [part of the *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* book tour] at Art Basel in 2013.

Sharon: One of the early book events on the tour for *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* was held at the Art Basel Art Fair in Miami Beach, Florida, as a part of the Salon program. It was a packed house, with about 75-100 people in the audience. On stage was Shamim Momin (Director and Curator, Los Angeles Nomadic Division), Brian Tolle (Artist), Ellen Harvey (Artist) and myself as moderator of the program. One of the first questions that an audience member asked was regarding the relative success of Brian Tolle based on the large sum of money he had received for a public art project in the past. It was a wonderful opportunity to discuss perceived truths versus the reality of what really happens in the art world. Suffice to say, Brian pulled no punches in his answer. I think that we all get swooped up in the hoopla of an art world that may appear to be glittering and fantastical, but in reality it's very rarely so glamorous. You can see the video of this event (and Brian's answer) [here](#).



Sharon in an interview for the podcast, "Bad at Sports".

*Interested in learning more from Sharon? You can start by checking out the [recording of her interview](#) with "Bad at Sports" [pictured above], and **keeping your eyes on our calendar for more information about upcoming installments of her four-part webinar series: [How to Approach, Engage & Communicate with Galleries, Museums & the People You Want to Know](#).***



About Hannah Fenlon

Hannah is the Marketing Assistant for the Professional Development Program at Creative Capital, and is currently pursuing a Masters in Arts Administration from Columbia University. She has worked as a freelance producer and casting director in Chicago (where she co-founded Two Birds Casting, a casting facilitation service for theatre) and spent two years as an Assistant Director of Admissions at the University of Chicago. Hannah has worked with Goodman Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, the Ojai Playwrights Conference, A Red Orchid Theatre and, most recently, Theatre Communications Group, with whom she planned the 2014 National Theatre Conference in San Diego, CA and Tijuana, Mexico, and is now in the process of planning their 2015 Audience (R)Evolution Convening. Hannah has a BA in Drama from Kenyon College.

CREATIVE CAPITAL
15 Maiden Lane, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10038
creative-capital.org
blog.creative-capital.org

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