



## AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY READING LIST

©2010 Susan Kapuscinski Gaylord, [ingoodspirit.blogspot.com](http://ingoodspirit.blogspot.com)

### *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki

In 1982, I took a workshop with Jaki Svaren, author of *Written Letters*, at a calligraphy conference in Philadelphia. What I learned about letters paled in comparison to the effect of my first introduction to Zen. I bought the book immediately and it opened up my thinking about my art and my life greatly.

*"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."*

### *The Art Spirit*, Robert Henri

In a calligraphy workshop in New York with Welsh calligrapher Ieuan Rees in 1983, I was introduced to *The Art Spirit* by the early twentieth century painter and teacher Robert Henri. It has offered inspiration and nourishment ever since.

*"An artist's job is to surprise himself. Use all means possible."*

### *The Shape of Content*, Ben Shahn

I discovered *The Shape of Content* when I was teaching calligraphy at Rivier College and still feeling uncomfortable calling myself an artist. The book contains the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures that Shahn delivered at Harvard in 1956-57. I found the thoughtful analysis of what it takes to be an artist very helpful.

*"Art is one of the few media of expression that still remains unedited, unprocessed, and undictated. If its hazards are great, so are its potentialities magnificent."*

### *Art & Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, David Bayles, Ted Orland

I come back often to *Art & Fear*, sometimes for myself and sometimes for others, for just the right words of encouragement and perspective. They have a lot to say both about the work itself and the process of getting it out into the world.

*"Making art is a common and intimately human activity, filled with all the perils (and rewards) that accompany any worthwhile effort. The difficulties artmakers face are not remote and heroic, but universal and familiar."*

*Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Xaver Kappus

I first read *Letters to a Young Poet* when I was commissioned to do a quote from it in calligraphy many years ago. When I reread it several years ago, this quote about patience spoke to me and has been a source of strength ever since.

*“In this there is no measuring with time.  
A year doesn’t matter;  
ten years are nothing.  
To be an artist means not to compute or count...”*

*The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life*, Twyla Tharp

I found *The Creative Habit* when I had completed the Spirit Book Series and was feeling adrift. Twyla Tharp draws on her experience as a dancer, choreographer, and creativity workshop leader to present ways to bring the creative habit into the reader’s lives. She brings in stories from music, movies, books, and more. Each chapter also has exercises. *The Creative Habit* really helped me move on.

*“Everything feeds into my creativity. But without proper preparation, I cannot see it, retain it, and use it. Without the time and effort invested in getting ready to create, you can be hit by the thunderbolt and it’ll just leave you stunned.”*

*The Gift*, Lewis Hyde

*The Gift* is the most recent book of influence I have read. At this point, I am particularly interested in the intersection of my work and the larger world. Hyde draws distinctions between gift and commodity economies and addresses the difficult place of art, which is fundamentally a gift, in the world of commerce. He draws on fairy tales, anthropology, and literature in an enlightening but sometimes dense conversation.

*“The process is always a bit mysterious. You work at a task, you work and work and still it won’t come out right. Then, when you’re not even thinking about it, while spading the garden, or stepping into the bus, the whole thing pops into your head, the missing grace is bestowed.”*

*How to Survive and Prosper as an Artist: Selling Yourself Without Selling Your Soul*, Caroll Michels

I was so impressed by her previous edition that I hired Caroll to coach me to promote my Spirit Book exhibit in 2005. She is practical, knowledgeable, and has the artists’ interests at heart. The book is full of practical advice on presentation tools and packages, pricing work, public relations, dealing with dealers, grants, and more.

*“Being an artist means believing you are an artist; making a living as an artist requires mastering many of the skills and professional attitudes shared by successful self-employed persons engaged in other occupations. Equally important, it is necessary to overcome the career blocks that are particular and indigenous to the fine-arts field.”*

*Look for these books at your local library or book store. If you do purchase them through amazon, please consider doing it through my astore (<http://astore.amazon.com/makingbooksc0-20>) which gives me small portion of the purchase price to offset my various sharing endeavors.*