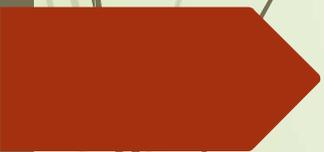


An Autistic Guide to Creativity



By Rhi Lloyd-Williams

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About me

- I am a writer, poet, playwright, essayist and blog at AutistRhi.com
- I was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2015
- I have worked with autistic teens in mainstream schools
- My play, "The Duck", about a late-diagnosed autistic woman is currently touring in the UK
- I am the Poet in Residence for *Neither Use Nor Ornament* (NUNO), which is an Arts Council England funded group of neurodivergent artists, using their art to express how they connect to the world
- My Essay collection, "The Wrong Kind of Happiness" – about finding happiness on the spectrum, was Longlisted for the New Welsh Review essay competition 2018
- I live in Wales with my husband and 5 children



What is Creativity

- Making something that would not have existed if you hadn't made it
- That's it
- Nothing more
- Nope
- Does not have to be worthy or beautiful or perfect
- Does not have to sell for hundreds of pounds
- Does not have to be Instagrammable
- Does not have to have a practical purpose
- Does not have to be 'For' anything
- Does not have to be traditionally 'artistic' could be coding or mathematical or scientific or cooking or gardening – creativity is not just about the arts

My Version of Creativity

- ▶ Marbling on paper
- ▶ Marbling cakes and fancy cake-making
- ▶ Built a grey water irrigation system during the drought
- ▶ Built a herb patch out of old cart wheels
- ▶ Smashed up an old, rotten piano to save the iron frame for growing beans up
- ▶ Wrote and produced a play
- ▶ Written hundreds - probably thousands - of poems
- ▶ Written several books that I have never tried to publish
- ▶ Built a kitchen
- ▶ Taught myself a bit of stone masonry to make some slate signs
- ▶ Crocheting hats, gloves, sloths
- ▶ Built an oak box
- ▶ Made three meter-wide roman blinds from scratch
- ▶ Rescued an old mangle to grow plants up
- ▶ Painting pictures in oils, acrylics, water-colours
- ▶ Tie-dye
- ▶ Sketching with charcoal and pencil
- ▶ Found an old bit of slate in the garden and sanded it down to use as a worktop
- ▶ Reclaimed my tadcu's boat and turned it into a flower bed
- ▶ Planted an orchard
- ▶ Planted a willow hedge
- ▶ Made a willow basket and stars and wreaths
- ▶ Learnt to felt
- ▶ Made felt headbands of animal ears
- ▶ Designed and made badges to fund my play
- ▶ Designed origami flyers for my play that can be folded into a duck
- ▶ Learnt to tile so I could tile the kitchen I built
- ▶ Went to a pottery class and made a teapot
- ▶ Wiring, plumbing, all sorts of DIY
- ▶ A master of face-painting
- ▶ Making Cushions
- ▶ Cooking fancy meals
- ▶ Used a bit of old rope to re-weave a broken chair
- ▶ Sanded down and waxed an old table
- ▶ Repainted old furniture
- ▶ Built veg patch out of old railway sleepers
- ▶ Photography - particularly of birds
- ▶ Costings spreadsheets with all the IF functions!
- ▶ Designed and built hanging shelves to maximize window growing space for seedlings
- ▶ Origami flowers
- ▶ Felt owls
- ▶ Learnt to play a ukulele (badly)
- ▶ Soap making
- ▶ Bees wax wrap-making
- ▶ Making sand-tunnels on the beach
- ▶ Making stone towers
- ▶ Drawing pictures in the sand
- ▶ Building a fire pit
- ▶ Building a dry stone barbecue
- ▶ Building an earth/pizza oven from clay and sand
- ▶ Building bookshelves out of left over worktop



Autistic Creativity may be Misunderstood

- ▶ 'Literal thinkers' doesn't mean uncreative
- ▶ 'Lack of social imagination' doesn't mean uncreative
- ▶ 'Dislike of change' doesn't mean uncreative
- ▶ 'Love of routine' doesn't mean uncreative
- ▶ 'Difficulties with social interaction' doesn't mean uncreative
- ▶ 'Sensory sensitivities' doesn't mean uncreative



Creativity isn't about overcoming Difficulties

- ▶ Creativity is internal – it doesn't require interactions
- ▶ Executive Function (EF) is often weak in autistic people – EF has been found to shut down completely whilst being creative – creativity is a break



Creative Outcomes

- What feelings might you get from being creative?
- What feelings might others get from experiencing the product of your creativity?



Autistic Creatives

- ▶ Anthony Hopkins – Actor
- ▶ Kate Fox – Poet and Comedian
- ▶ Dan Aykroyd – Actor and Musician
- ▶ Sonia Boué – Artist
- ▶ Dan Harmon – Screenwriter
- ▶ Susan Boyle - Singer
- ▶ Jon Adams – Artist
- ▶ Daryl Hannah – Actor
- ▶ Jerry Seinfeld – Comedian
- ▶ Beth Wilson – Artist
- ▶ Alan Gardner - Gardener
- ▶ Courtney Love – Singer



Autism as a Creative Advantage

- Problem-solving
- Hyper-focus
- Interest
- Pattern-thinking
- Sensory interaction
- Creating something for stimming or as a form of stimming
- Detail thinking
- Breaking unseen social rules and barriers
- Seeing the world from a different angle



Healthy Creativity

- ▶ A means to recognise and share emotions
- ▶ Self-soothing
- ▶ Focusing on one thing to reduce anxiety
- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Energising
- ▶ A form of stimming – visual, tactile, auditory etc.
- ▶ Taking focus away from verbal communication and putting it in to what suits the individual
- ▶ Doing it your way – go to a class, use youtube, go it alone – find what suits you, there are no rights or wrongs just what works for you



Crafty Creativity

I use crochet or origami in public spaces to:-

- ▶ Avoid eye-contact without it being misunderstood
- ▶ Move my hands and play with something tactile without standing out
- ▶ Have a focused topic of conversation based on my interests visible for people to use if they want to make small talk with me – a topic I know about and enjoy
- ▶ Focus on what I am doing instead of any sensory discomforts
- ▶ Focus on what I am doing instead of the variables all around me
- ▶ Focus on what I am doing instead of worrying about interacting



Advice from a Recovering Perfectionist

- ▶ If I need it to be perfect I will fear creating something
- ▶ If I focus on finished perfection I'm not focused on enjoying the process
- ▶ How to know when to stop
- ▶ There is no such thing as perfect
- ▶ There is perfection in imperfection
- ▶ If you are logical, logicise your perfectionism:-
 - ▶ Why does it need to be that way?
 - ▶ Does it already fulfill its purpose?
 - ▶ What are the odds I might make it worse at this point?
- ▶ Check the problem isn't change rather than perfectionism – if the finished product isn't what I imagined it would be, is that the issue, rather than the idea that it isn't perfect? Give it time; do I like it more for what it is once I have adjusted to the change from the initial plan?
- ▶ Being good at something isn't the aim – improving at something and enjoying it is the goal



An Open Question

- How do you overcome a blank piece of paper?
- What is your creative path?
- Some ideas:-
 - Free-writing (write whatever pops into your head no matter how daft)
 - Doodle shapes and patterns
 - Fold nice patterns
 - Draw a picture
 - Write a poem
 - Write your shopping list or create an idea for a recipe
 - Plan how you'll take over the world
 - Make a paper hat

Inference

by Rhi Lloyd-Williams

Nobody wants to see the real you. You are broken, deep inside,
It's wrong to think You may think
That you should be genuine. You can belong,
I can honestly say You can sing along,
No one will ever understand you - You can't.
Faulty thinking says that You're incorrect to think that
You can shine the brightest, You are wonderful.
It's wrong. I know You are nothing.
You will scare people. And no one thinks that
And that You are whole.
People will not connect. Keep that mask firmly in place.
You may believe that You're hurting yourself when you
You are a part of this world Try and be exactly who you are -
But you're not. Pretend to be someone else;

You should fold yourself up,
No one is interested in the idea
That you need to feel.
They don't understand
All that movement is weird,
They aren't getting it if they say
You're another shade of normal.
The truth is
There is only one way to be,
No one wants to hear that
Anyone can be different -
And everyone knows
Being the same is ideal.
It's wrong to think
You are perfect as you are.

- Now try that again, reading from the last line all the way back to the first