



## Back to Reality. Step away from the whiteboard, turn off Twitter, and reengage with life.

ONE UPON A TIME, I wanted to be an “artist.” Or perhaps I was an artist and simply wasn’t aware of it. I spent years in art classes, learning to observe and to create. I spent hour upon hour drawing and painting the sensual curves and complex colors of everything and anything, from lower backs to Bartlett pears.

My last intense experience of seeing and sensing with a brush in my hand (and one between my teeth) seems like a dream. It was decades ago, and I distinctly remember being lost in a euphoric, creative state; totally immersed in an explosion of colors and textures. I’ll never forget that feeling, or my art teacher’s startling observation of my finished work:

“Well, you don’t need any more instruction. You’ll probably quit now.” (You can see a blurry close-up at <http://bit.ly/gkQcnH>).

I’m not sure how he knew, but from that point forward I stopped being an “artist.” I still went to art school and I still painted, but I had become much more interested in “art” than in experiencing reality. I shut my eyes to the brilliance of the real world, and indulged my mind in the artificial realm of fashion, concepts and popularity.

I’ve witnessed the world of business going through a similar passage. We used to be deeply involved in the precious, living world of our audiences; viscerally experiencing their unique hungers, fears, and dreams. Today, we fantasize. We sit in meetings and create abstract works like “perceptual maps” and persuasive content.

We used to listen with awareness and respond with highly relevant and desirable products, services and communication. Today, we get caught up in the competitive game, more and more estranged from the real world. We worry about media mentions and our reputations. We compulsively measure email open rates, and obsess over our Google rank and Facebook friends.

“It is a sign of decadence,” wrote Leonardo da Vinci, “to find one’s references in art instead of nature.” It’s a sign of detachment to find one’s business references in self-reflective concepts and content instead of the customer. It’s a delusion to believe that success is a few more tweets or one new management theory away.

Business isn’t an arms length, abstract creation. Business is reality, it’s life. We’re here to see, to feel, and to create with, and for, others. We must immerse ourselves in our audience’s world, so that we have access to real-world information and insights. We must look with fresh eyes and feel with childlike wonder and compassion.

Step away from the whiteboard, turn off Twitter, and reengage with life, with your curious senses and innocent heart. Rediscover your unbridled passion and idealistic hopes. Be daring and create new and preemptive benefits. Get back to reality and create brilliant and unique works of art.

As J. J. Van Der Leeuw might say today, The mystery of business is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced.