

BEAT

BY
CERI HAND

THE

BLOCK





Beat the Block is a creative coaching email series. Every week I share artworld experience, artist insights and insider intel to help you create without limits.

I'm over 100 issues into this series, this document gives you a teaser of the insights that can land in your inbox every week.



BLOW YOUR OWN TRUMPET.



Owning Your Brilliance

I know that you might read that title and cringe.

It probably doesn't sit so comfortably with you, all that show-off, positive mantra stuff. Truth be told, nobody likes somebody who's over confident, right?

Especially if we don't know for a fact that what we've done is great. We all know the bore who blathers on about themselves and the thing they've just done, and on closer inspection it's blatant puffery because the actual thing they're boasting about is, well, a bit lame...

I know, there are examples of some people who are less interested in other people's brilliance and entirely focused on their own.

But we're not talking about becoming a colossal dick and not leaving any oxygen in the room for your colleagues, friends or peers. We're talking about practising soft power, owning your own efforts.

I'm going to use Ava DuVernay as an example. She's a filmmaker I admire greatly, because she's not just making films, she's creating and shaping culture, from her team to the wider world.

I saw her recent Instagram post about her new film Origin. Her caption read "My heart beats inside this film. I don't know much else to write here. Except that, ORIGIN is an offering from me to you. It is a cry. A shout. A fist. A deep breath. A hand to hold. I hope it reaches you somehow - in the ways that matter. Love A."

I like the sincerity of this, because when you hear Ava speak about her work you feel it. She means it. She has a mission. She speaks frankly about what she was trying to do, what she was aiming for, and who the people were that helped her make it great. I enjoy hearing her speaking powerfully, unapologetically, acknowledging all the hard work that's gone into something and hoping that it resonates with people. She sounds confident she did her best.

That makes me want to see it. She sounds respectful of all the people that played a part in helping the work come to fruition and she is backing them as much as she's backing herself.

This makes people want to support her, to be part of her team, to work with her, to invest in her vision. To do better themselves. Her owning her own capabilities makes other people step up their game and deliver quality, with grace.

Imagine if she stood there at the opening of her own movie and said "Oh crumbs, I dunno, I'm a bit embarrassed to be honest (stares at floor, shuffles feet). It's not the best thing I've ever made, in truth I can't even bring myself to watch the trailer let alone attend the screening. And don't even get me started on the people I worked with! Nightmare! Never again!"

Now, you may think I'm being a little extra, but I kid you not, the amount of times I've been at a preview and heard the artist either bad mouthing the gallerist / curator / commissioner or conversely not bothering to speak to anybody because nobody actually approached them, so they didn't think anybody was interested or they spend their time telling their mates how they would have hung it differently, or they wanted to include a different piece of work but it was vetoed and so they think the show looks shite...

"Confidence comes from taking action, and seeing yourself take action."



“Start recognising and articulating that what you do is great, you love it, you’re doing your best and edit out the rest.”

BLOW YOUR OWN TRUMPET

Rarely do I hear an artist say “I did this, I worked hard, it paid off, it was great and people did their best, they were kind and helpful. I’m really pleased with the result. It’s made me want to do this next and I can’t wait to get started.”

And you may well say, well Ceri the conditions for artists are crap and rarely do we get to feel good about what we do. Nobody makes it easy, it’s hard to feel positive when the odds are stacked etc, etc.

You might say Ava’s got a lot of money behind her and she has to say that stuff because of all the legal system etc. etc.

To which I’d say yes, and. She is also doing an incredibly challenging thing, making films as a black woman, getting them made, distributed, funded. Building and running a company where people want to work with you and champion you again and again.

We can always pick a reason why somebody else has every reason to be more confident than us. We can always look at the context and say it makes things challenging for us and we don’t feel especially confident. I know. I get it.

But my invitation is to you, right here, right now. To start recognising and articulating that what you do is great, you love it, you’re doing your best and edit out the rest.

So how would it be if we just practised backing ourselves. “I made a thing. Some people helped me. I tried my very best. I’m happy I made the effort. I can’t wait for you to see it. Tell me if it resonates with you. I’m going to make some more things, so I’d love to know what it made you think about?”

That doesn’t sound too dickish does it?

Confidence in your efforts. In your process. In your being willing to rock up and have a go. Seeing what lands or what flies. Having another go.

I’ll let you into a secret. I don’t think I’m the best at anything truth be told. But I am confident in my will, my efforts, my desire to help people. I work hard at having a go. I’m willing to change, to accept feedback, to adapt, give it another go. I hope that you can sense that.

And because of you and my team, my family, my friends, the people who have invested in me, I’m going to stand up and celebrate when we make something that represents our best shot, at this time. I’m happy and proud to have given it a go and that I have people in my corner, so I want to sing their praises too. I don’t want to let them down by diminishing their efforts or intimating that maybe they backed a dud in me.

Hell no, their faith in me wills me on to do better, be better and every time I show up I’m going to say we did our best. We learned and we’ll do better each time we try.

I know that confidence comes from taking action. And seeing yourself take action.

So my invitation is for you to hit reply and tell me what you did well, to the best of your ability, this week?



Tell me something great about your work.
Say it loud and proud.

I honestly enjoy hearing people loving talk about what they do. It’s infectious. It makes me feel inspired and happy that you’re backing yourself.

I want you to sing your own praises, sing your mate’s praises, tell everybody something great about what they do. Because we’re in this crazy art world together and frankly it’s not full of lone geniuses.

It’s full of people like us, doing our best and being excited when we see great work in the world.

So back yourself first and foremost and others will join you. They’ll start investing in you, supporting you, because everybody wants to know that you believe in yourself.

And it gets easier if you practise it.

So how about it?

TO MAKE
SOMETHING SPECIAL
YOU JUST
HAVE TO BELIEVE
IT'S SPECIAL

NO LONE WOLVES.



Why Collaboration is the The Key to Success in the Art World.

In the arts, we often romanticise the narrative of the lone creator, the individual who rises from obscurity to conquer the world with their talent. It's a story that captivates us, resonating deeply with the romantic notion of triumph against all odds. However, the reality is far from this solitary journey.

While the image of the solitary artist, secluded in their studio, may hold some truth, it's essential to recognise that true success in the art world is rarely achieved alone. Behind every celebrated artist stands a network of collaborators, mentors, and supporters who play a pivotal role in their journey.

Take, for example, John Akomfrah, representing Great Britain at this year's Venice Biennale. While his name may be in the spotlight, he stands alongside a team of long-time collaborators—Lina Gopaul, David Lawson, Trevor Mathison, among others. Their collective vision, expertise, and support have been instrumental in shaping Akomfrah's artistic journey and bringing his creations to life from as far back as 1982.

The Black Audio Film Collective, founded in 1982 and active until 1998, comprised seven Black British and diaspora multimedia artists and filmmakers including John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Reece Auguiste, Trevor Mathison, Edward George and Claire Joseph. Joseph left in 1985 and was replaced by David Lawson.

The Black Audio Film Collective defied conventional categorisation, seamlessly bridging the worlds of film, television, and art. My firsthand experience with their collaborative approach dates back to 2007 when I programmed the Collective's first exhibition at a prominent UK institution, which embarked on a tour from FACT (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology) in Liverpool to Arnolfini, Whitechapel Art Gallery, and Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts)

Eddie Berg, then Director of FACT, was a film expert and knew the significance of the show, as did his successor Gill Henderson. They trusted me to programme without question which was an empowering gift.

The exhibition, expertly curated by The Otolith Group, enlisted the architectural prowess of David Adjaye (now a controversial figure) to design its innovative layout. Spearheading the logistics, my exhibitions management team, under the leadership of Nick Lawrenson and Sara Smith, executed the ambitious installation across multiple galleries with precision and finesse.

Meanwhile, my colleague Michael Connor (now Director of Rhizome, NYC) curated an immersive media lounge, showcasing the Collective's extensive filmography in a ground breaking online format—a pioneering endeavour at the time. Inspired by their suggestions, we also integrated selected films into our cinema programming, further amplifying their impact.

To enhance the exhibition experience, we programmed an important panel discussion that expanded upon the Black Audio Film Collective's pioneering research process and contribution to culture. I enlisted Liverpool University Press to publish (and fund) the definitive catalogue, titled "The

“Behind every celebrated artist stands a network of collaborators, mentors, and supporters who play a pivotal role in their journey.”



“Art is far from a solitary pursuit.”



Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective.” This meticulously crafted resource served as a cornerstone for further exploration and scholarly discourse.

Its significance became even more apparent during my tenure as Director of Programmes at Somerset House, London. There, I collaborated with Zak Ové, son of the influential Horace Ové, who played a pivotal role in shaping both John Akomfrah and the Black Audio Film Collective. Together, we curated the exhibition “Get Up Stand Up Now,” which celebrated 50 years of Black creativity in Britain and beyond and included Black Audio Film Collective’s films and posters.

I share this story to emphasise the enduring journey that leads to what may seem like overnight success, underscoring the fact that art is far from a solitary pursuit.

Regardless of whether you operate within a collaborative partnership, the impact and quality of your work can be elevated by engaging individuals who excel in their respective fields.

So, here’s my questions for you: Who might you align yourself with to enrich your creative journey?

And whose journey could you enhance with your unique contributions?

GIVE ENVY THE SIDE EYE.



Why You Should Give The Old Green Eye The Side Eye.

I know we don't like to admit it, but we all morph into the Green Eyed Monster occasionally.

We witness a friend or a frenemy's success and we feel it like a sharp jab in the ribs, bending us double, winding us momentarily.

We use their achievement like a wrecking ball on our own career, smashing every brick we've built to date to smithereens.

We disintegrate into a puddle of self pity and loathing, clutching, frantically searching, trying to make sense of their wins by drowning out our own.

Why them? Why not us? What have they got that we haven't? Why even bother, it'll clearly never work out for us, we never get a lucky break...

We dine out on the crumbs of intel we've hoovered up, and hamfistedly start fleshing out the unknowns, spitting "Well, they make really accessible work" "My work is wayyyyy too challenging in comparison", "They have a rich family/spouse/trust fund/know a hip collector" "They're great at self promotion/marketing/networking and going to EVERYTHING", etc etc.

We can dress it up all we want but it ain't pretty inside or out.

Yet we know deep down that it won't have been easy for them, that there must have been some risks taken, compromises made, sacrifices along the way, hurdles to overcome, negotiations to be made, a loss of sleep, income, neglected relationships...

But when we look through the dirty lens of envy, the world shrinks for us.

We lose sight of just how far we've come and forget why we made the choices we did and how they served us once.

I'm teasing us all a little, but trust me, if you've been swallowed by the old Green Eye you'll know it's a rotten feeling to carry in your head, heart and body.

But honestly, you're not alone. Every creative person chokes on the success of others occasionally, particularly if we're in a fallow funnel or hibernation hollow.

So here's my invitation to you.

Practice backing the decisions and actions your past self took. You made the best moves you could at the time, with the information, resources, head space, skills, confidence and abilities you had at that time.

Now back the decisions your current self is making; you're doing the best you can right now.

Unless of course you know in the pit of your stomach that you want to make some changes. That you need to make some changes. In which case your jealousy is useful data.

So trust that your authentic self, minus the bullshit, is providing some useful signposting. Listen to those feelings rather than using it as a baton to beat yourself with.

“Their path is not yours.
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Yours will come.”



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Success is unique to all of us, so why try to inhabit others' stories, walk in their shoes, wear their clothes, eat their porridge?

We waste precious time wishing we had the lead in another person's movie.

You've got some great things going on and you've worked hard to get here.

So choose to be the star of your own creative life and eat your own porridge.

Take note of the Green Eyed Monster but don't let it swamp you, just acknowledge it with a sneaky side eye and ask it what it's got to offer.

And if it doesn't sound useful or ring true, then ask it to politely jog on.

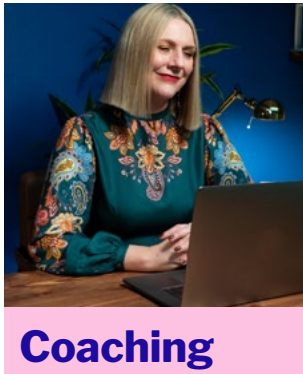
You be you be you be you.

Create Without Limits.

Ceri Hand coaches artists and arts professionals to unlock their full potential using her 5Cs Framework, a vital creative toolkit. With decades of experience, Ceri has empowered countless creatives to make a bigger impact and earn more doing what they love.

**BOOK YOUR
FREE 15 MINUTE
DISCOVERY CALL
WITH OUR TEAM
TO EXPLORE HOW
WE CAN BEST
SUPPORT YOU!**

I'M READY



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