

The cycle of failure and self-worth in my artistic practice

Part A: the actual reasons I do this

Every day

I make something
Balance it with need to keep a roof over my head, food in my tum-tum, relationships alive
Curiosity, experimenting and hope
I own my work
Persistence, I keep having a go

Every week

Cautious optimism
I have fun with it, pleasure of making
Learning
Non-specific bad feelings

Every month

I express something really well
I learn how to do things better
I have a really brilliant and exciting idea! Woo-hoo!

Part B: Striving

Every six months

I express something really well and communicate it successfully to someone else
I get a bit of encouragement from others that goes a long way
I harbour fantasies of being celebrated and mega-rich, even though these aren't my values
Invites to participate in things for no money and a lot of effort
Make a little bit of money
Small failure, usually some form of shame and humiliation, ouch
Wrestle with admin, focus, planning, strategy
Fleeting sense of being ok

Every year

Demoralising attempts to get institutional funding and support, vow never again
Envy, inadequacy, comparing myself to others
Exploitation and burn-out, ugh, when will I ever learn?!
I express something really well and communicate it successfully to a few people
I try calling myself an artist but it doesn't sit right
Paid invites to talk about my work and participate in things
Second rate, B team, always the bridesmaid, etc

Part C: Making it!

Every five years

I express something really well and communicate it successfully to quite a few people

Medium failure, a period of recovery

People fan me and it feels vile and dehumanising, not what I actually want at all

People write about me and kind of get it sort of wrong

Ambivalence

A couple of times in my life so far

Big failure, deep and lasting shame

I express something really well, communicate it successfully to a lot of people and change things a bit

Solid sense of accomplishment and pride

I'm finally understood and appreciated!

Oh god, so rare...

Part D: Transcending

As I age, I hope

I learn to appreciate and care for my body of work

I am part of things, groups, people, community, connections, we get into the groove

I go deep into the weirdness, it feels totally amazing

Success and failure are completely irrelevant

I can do this, finally

After I'm dead

Immediately: people sad, maybe!

My executors archive everything

Longer term: total fluke that my work is recognised in some way

Secondary art market, prices skyrocket

Stuff I've made becomes an asset, loses artistic value

Becomes unloved, loses financial value

House clearance, charity shop and car boot of the future

Someone's mantelpiece

Someone's bin, landfill

All turns to dust

End of humans on earth

All become one with the atoms of the universe

And that is that