



**HOW TO**

**BE AN**

**ARTIST**

**JERRY**

**SALTZ**



*Lynda Benglis, Fling, Dribble, and Drip, 1970*

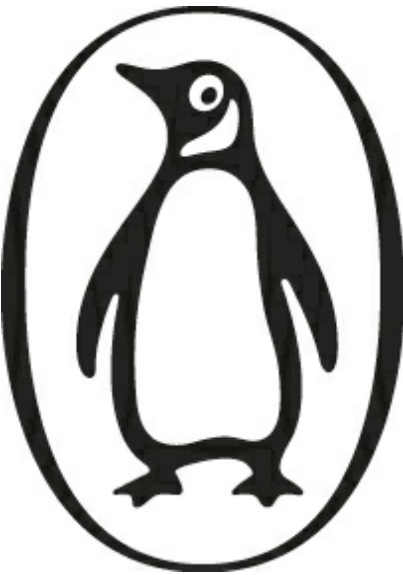
**HOW**  
*to*  
**BE**  
*an*  
**A****RTIST**

---

JERRY SALTZ

RIVERHEAD BOOKS • NEW YORK

2020



RIVERHEAD BOOKS

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

[penguinrandomhouse.com](http://penguinrandomhouse.com)

Copyright © 2020 by Jerry Saltz

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form

without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Portions of this book originally appeared, in slightly different form, in *New York* magazine.

[This page](#) constitutes an extension of this copyright page.

Riverhead and the R colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Saltz, Jerry, 1951– author.

Title: How to be an artist / Jerry Saltz.

Description: [First hardcover]. | New York : Riverhead Books, 2020.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019031361 (print) | ISBN 9780593086469 (hardcover) | ISBN

9780593086476 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Artists—Psychology. | Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.)

Classification: LCC N71 .S157 2020 | DDC 701/.15—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019031361>

Cover design: Grace Han

pid\_prh\_5.5.0\_c0\_r0

*To art, artists, and the art world, and to my wife, Roberta Smith, all of whom redeemed me*

## **CONTENTS**

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

*Dedication*

Introduction

Step One: You Are a Total Amateur: Things to Think About

Before You Even Get Started

1. Don't Be Embarrassed

2. "Imagination Is More Important Than Knowledge." —Albert Einstein

3. "Tell Your Own Story and You Will Be Interesting." — Louise Bourgeois

4. Recognize the *Otherness* of Art

5. Art Is Not About Understanding . . . Or Mastery: It's About Doing and Experience

6. Embrace Genre

7. Recognize Convention—and Resist Constraint

8. Cast Your Nets into the Waters

9. Develop Forms of Practice

10. Get Lost

11. Work, Work, Work

12. Start Now

## Step Two: How to Actually Begin: An Instruction Manual for the Studio

[13. Start Working When You Wake Up](#)

[14. Make Your Mark](#)

[15. Get Some Perspective](#)

[16. Imitate . . . Then Separate](#)

[17. Use Your Studio](#)

[18. Picasso and Matisse at the Border](#)

[19. Embed Thought in Material](#)

[20. Art Is a Flatworm](#)

[21. Listen to the Wildest Voices in Your Head](#)

[22. Find Your Own Voice: Then Exaggerate It](#)

[23. Clear the Studio](#)

[24. There Are No Wasted Days](#)

[25. Know What You Hate](#)

[26. Finish the Damn Thing!](#)

## Step Three: Learn to Think Like an Artist: This Is the Fun Part

[27. All Art Is Subjective](#)

[28. Look Hard. Look Openly.](#)

[29. Artists Are Cats. Art Is a Dog.](#)



30. See as Much as You Can

31. The Cézanne Rule

32. Art Is a Verb

33. Learn the Difference Between Subject Matter and Content

34. Be Inconsistent

35. Make Strength Out of Weakness

36. Own Your Guilty Pleasures

37. Make Art for Now, Not the Future

38. Chance Is the Lucky Bounce of the Imagination

Step Four: Enter the Art World: A Guide to the Snake Pit

39. Have Courage

40. Don't Define Yourself by a Single Medium

41. No, You Don't *Need* Graduate School

42. Be a Vampire; Form a Coven

43. Accept That You'll Likely Be Poor

44. Define Success

45. Art and Therapy.

46. It Takes Only a Few People to Make a Career

47. Learn to Write About Your Work

48. There's No Such Thing as "Fear of Success"

Step Five: Survive the Art World: Psychic Strategies for Dealing with the Ugliness (Inside and Out)

[49. You've Got to Want It](#)

[50. Make an Enemy of Envy](#)

[51. Deadlines from Heaven](#)

[52. Learn to Deal with Rejection](#)

[53. How to Recover from Critical Injuries](#)

[54. Overnight Is Overrated](#)

[55. Having a Family Is Fine](#)

Step Six: Attain Galactic Brain: Cosmic Epigrams from Better Heads and Mine

[56. "Art Is a Lie That Tells the Truth." —Pablo Picasso](#)

[57. "Artists Do Not Own the Meaning of Their Work." —  
Roberta Smith](#)

[58. Art Doesn't Progress](#)

[59. What You Don't Like Is as Important as What You Do Like](#)

[60. You Must Prize Radical Vulnerability](#)

[61. You Are Always Learning](#)

[62. Be Delusional](#)

[63. Oh, and Once a Year, Go Dancing](#)