

I started the documentary project by thinking of things I was passionate about, and only one thing came to mind. Art. From there it was a fairly easy process of choosing my documentary subject as I figured my art teacher of 10+ years would be the perfect subject. I originally thought of making my documentary a profile one but ultimately shifted to one that wasn't entirely focused on my subject's life, but rather a big topic: art and design in Silicon Valley. While interviewing my art teacher, something that I learned that surprised me was how environments, even ones all the way across the world can sometimes have very similar focuses and ways of life. Throughout the process of researching I definitely did learn some new information but a lot of what I researched matched with my previous thoughts about Silicon Valley. A lot of the research and papers I found about Silicon Valley, aside from the ones about tech companies and new innovation, were talking about the pressure of living in a place like Silicon Valley. This led me deeper into my research and writing about careers and pressures we have in Silicon Valley about less "stable" careers. The most challenging part of this process for me was actually writing out the book. I have never really been a strong writer and with such an ambitious and big project like this I faced some mental blocks when actually writing out my story. I had the ideas and the passion for it in my head but I had a hard time translating that into actual writing. I enjoyed the designing part of the book and felt like I got some good photos that visually complemented my design of the book. I used a lot of inspiration from previous books along with referencing the principles of design to keep a cohesive and interesting book design. I am most proud of the overall design of my book and grateful for the experiences of learning how to put a whole book together from the starting brainstorm to the end cover design. I would like everyone to take away from my book that you should never put your dreams or passion on hold because of pressure and doubts from other people, just keep believing in yourself.

Silicon Valley, a place known for startups, innovation, and creation. Home to many of the largest tech companies like Apple, Google, and Meta. But in a place so well known for opportunity there are often careers and jobs that get overshadowed by the boom of tech. Opportunities that many haven't even considered because of the stem pathways most people growing up here have been directed to. Art and design tends to get a bad reputation as not a serious and stable career, hence the phrase starving artist. But the truth is far from that. The world is surrounded by art and design. From the artwork you probably have hanging in your

home, to almost everything around you which has been designed and created. This world is filled with art, yet in Silicon Valley, a place of innovation and creation, art tends to fall into the back of most people's minds. This story is for all the people who have been too scared or pressured to choose a career they felt passionate about in life. It's for all the people who work 8 hour or more days doing something they never really wanted just because the money was good. For all the talent in the world that has been wasted because we live in a society that has directed us away from pursuing our true passion in life if they don't seem stable. But what if we could make a change in society and to all the younger people? What if we could show what a supported career in art looks like? What would it look like if we lived in a society where a career in art/design is viewed in the same way as a career in tech; so that every time someone asks what you want to do in college you don't get that awkward silence when you respond, "something related to art and design."

Creativity often begins without thought, it is the little drawings you do on the side of your math homework or the presentation in English class that you make look aesthetic. For Behnaz Lashgari her story begins in the same way, where as she recalls "I remember always drawing in my notebooks or what we now call doodling". There was no real thought behind it but rather just a way to express herself and have some fun. "I was always creating something", she says. The imagination and creativity level we have when we are young is almost universal. From the drawings we think look like they belong in museums to the cake we helped our parents decorate, we have this spark of creativity and innovation with us when we are young. Aspire, an early education and kindergarten, on their website states that "Creativity plays a vital role in early childhood education, helping children explore ideas, express themselves, and develop essential problem-solving skills". But where does this creative spark go when we get older? Well that depends on the environments that we are in.

Behnaz grew up in Tehran, Iran. Where she was raised and went to college before immigrating to Silicon Valley. In Iran it was her family who were her main supporters. "My parents saw my passion and encouraged me to go to art class, even just as a hobby", she states. With access to good art supplies being limited when her brother would go to Europe he would bring her back good, high quality art supplies. Over time as she got older her passion for art also got bigger. Her passion led her to study graphic design at Azad University Tehran. This passion

for art was supported by her parents a lot, but that doesn't mean that it was common or supported by the overall environment she was in. Most parents want their kids to be successful in life in order to live a good life, and in Tehran that usually meant becoming an engineer or a doctor. Which is why it was uncommon for people to pursue arts because most people followed the desired paths of their parents. As Behnaz says "art wasn't common as a career because you need money to live a good life, and many thought that as an artist they wouldn't make enough money to live a good life". While there is some truth to what people say about the correlation between artists and money, it is also a generalization. Many artists make a lot more than ordinary jobs and many don't, it's a wide range based on a variety of factors.

"It is the same as here [Silicon Valley]", was a response Behnaz gave when asked what type of jobs most people have and the environment in Tehran. But what actually is the environment we have in Silicon Valley towards art? Anyways when you think of Silicon Valley you really only think of the tech companies and the start-ups we have all heard of. Or then the high housing prices that no one can afford. From early education most schools engage in a creative and nurturing mindset, just letting kids still be kids. But as we get older and start to think more about our life after college comes the overall pressure of Silicon Valley. As an NBC article about teenage pressure in Silicon Valley said "Growing up in the shadows of tech companies, many Silicon Valley teens feel an intense and unhealthy amount of pressure to succeed academically". While we might not even realize it from the beginning of high school we have been almost trained in our minds to do more to take harder classes. Almost every single person at Mountain View high takes at least one AP class, which for living in a place like Silicon Valley might not seem like a lot but compared to the national percentage of only 37% of high school students taking one or more AP classes, it is significantly higher. Without knowing it we have been put on this path in Silicon Valley that usually directs us to jobs like engineering, coding, or generally tech related, while creativity and jobs in the creative field still are there they are overshadowed by the more "useful" or "stable" jobs.

As we get older our creativity doesn't just disappear—we just don't use it enough, so it gets forgotten in the midst of our busy lives. For many people they take up a hobby to calm themselves and use their creativity. This could be things such as gardening, baking, or painting. But where does the difference between hobby and career come in? Growing up we all might have

had a creativity hobby. But that's all it was. It was usually never seen like something you could actually pursue in life, more like something to do on the side. But what if we actually turned our hobbies into careers and followed them despite the nuance surrounded by going into a less chosen career. Behnaz decided to do this exact thing. Art started out as just a hobby she had from a young age but as she grew up she became more passionate about it. She realized that art brought her the most joy in life and wanted to continue that throughout her life taking hobby to an actual career. With the support of her parents and despite it not being a common thing for people to do at the time, Behnaz went to study art and design in college.

But how is this perceived by people from the outside? Choosing art as a career changes the way people around you view it. No one questions painting on the weekends or doing some fun little sketches. But when there is pressure and a life attached to it, the doubt from everyone hits. If when you think about art and design you only think of someone painting, you don't actually know the full scope of art and design and what you can do with it. Today there are so many various jobs in art and design that are making a big impact on our environment and everyday lives. From the buildings and places we live in that have been designed, the tables and chairs we sit on, the packaging for the products we buy, to even just the everyday artwork in our homes. Art and design has evolved so much over time that the perception of it being an unstable and doubtful career is outdated for the world we live in today.

This divide between career and hobby and the doubtfulness that comes with it is especially prevalent in a place like Silicon Valley. In Silicon Valley, success and happiness are often measured by one's job or amount of money they make. Everyone being surrounded with major tech companies creates this internal competition to be the best and make the most. Students growing up in this environment face the pressure of choosing a career that fits into the typical Silicon Valley environment. Furthermore, even the environment of schools in Silicon Valley is a big factor in impacting the future generations' career choices. As Behnaz says "One teacher can make a big difference in killing your creativity or building it up". It is so vital to have a good support system and a community that is open to new ideas and opportunities for this very reason. Often one doubtful person can make a big impact in a person's future career choices. If the new generations don't see examples of people turning their hobbies into stable careers they

will be less likely to do the same. For Behnaz she said that her art teachers growing up made a big difference in her journey with art. They always supported her and pushed her to do the most she could. But while Behnaz did have a positive experience with her teachers she as a teacher now understands the impact she has on her students, and the difference she can make in her students lives and perspective.

But why does art even matter? Art and design makes up our entire world, and as Gillian M. Morriss-Kay, a professor at Oxford University, says, “arts is practiced by all human cultures and has been around since the beginning of time”. From the cave drawings to the renaissance art, and now the modern art of today, art has played a vital role in the lives of people all across time. As a way to express themselves, storytell, show skill, and more. Even with art being something so important and something that has been around for so long in Silicon Valley art and design gets put to the side compared to tech and stem based jobs. This means that it’s not taken as seriously as other career choices, often gets less funding, and is overall under appreciated. But there is so much that art can do for the mind and the soul, it is a form of self healing and love.

Behnaz explains how many of her students now include adults as compared to previous years when it was mostly a younger audience coming to art classes. She describes how many of her adult students come to class as a way to destress from their demanding careers and as she says “it is healing for them”. She highlights the importance that these art classes play in her students' lives and mental health. Unlike most work environments art creates a space for opportunity to create without any expectations or pressure to do the best or be the best. Many places like the World Health Organization support this idea of how artistic activities can help people's mental health and reduce stress in people's lives. But Behnaz says it's not only the final outcome that is important but rather the whole process of creating that is important, and as she says “You need to enjoy the process”. In places like Silicon Valley and even Mountain View High we are taught to only value the outcome whether that be the outcome of a project, class, test, etc. Art challenges this mindset of only caring about the outcome as the process is the challenging memorable part of it.

Growing up in Silicon Valley has shown me both the opportunities and pressure that comes with living in a place driven by outcome and achievement. From a young age we are surrounded by stories of entrepreneurs, engineers, and innovation. While these careers are

important and do a lot for the world around us they aren't the only careers that matter. The artists, designers, musicians, and other creatives of our world are often disregarded and underappreciated for the work that they do. Through Behnaz's story I've learned that creativity does not simply disappear as we grow older. Instead, it is influenced by the environments we grow up in, the people who support us, and the opportunities we are given. For some people creativity remains a hobby, while for others it becomes a career. While neither is wrong, the problem occurs when people feel unable to pursue what they truly care about because they are afraid of judgment or because they do not see others around them doing the same.

One important thing about Behnaz's journey was the support she got. Throughout her life, from childhood when her parents supported her hobby, to as she got older she was supported by her teacher and family to further develop her skills. Even later in life now helping and supporting her own students to pursue a career in art and design we can see how support from the environment we are in can play a pivotal role in how we choose our future. As she said herself, "One teacher can make a big difference in killing your creativity or building it up." The same can be said for families, friends, and communities.

The purpose of this book is meant to highlight the challenges that careers in creative industries face from the start and why they shouldn't be valued any less than traditional careers. Art matters because it helps people communicate, connect, heal, and understand the world around them. Even for those who never pursue it professionally, creativity remains an important part of being human.

As Behnaz says, "Art helps us to slow down and be kind." In a world that often encourages us to move faster, achieve more, and constantly think about what comes next, art allows us to slow down and appreciate time more than ever. We should be able to live in a world where no one feels unsupported in thinking of turning their passion into a possible career. If future generations can grow up seeing creativity as something worth pursuing rather than something that must be left behind, then maybe the awkward silence that often follows "I want to study art" will one day disappear.

