

Why I Sketch

My Mom put me in a lot of classes as a child and taught me it's best to stay busy. She encouraged me to try new things—art, cursive, swimming, gymnastics, Quran study—and I went along with all of it. Yet, it never occurred to me that I could develop a deep passion for something, especially art.

For some of my childhood I grew up in India where I had no friends. I was introverted and too protective of my peace, so I spent a lot of my time alone. Whenever I was out by myself I observed everything. I was deeply curious and I wanted to absorb the world and understand how it works and the ways that people lived. I observed the way a child does. For instance, I once believed the moon followed me. I saw it everywhere I went at night, so it seemed obvious. When I told my cousin, he insisted it followed him, and we argued about it for a long time—until my aunt educated us both. I remember feeling kind of melancholy when she exposed our naivete. When I think about the prompt “Why do I sketch?” I think about this memory. Because art is a lot like the moon to me, I loved looking at other people’s art but I couldn’t believe art could be mine.

During the pandemic I was confined to my house with my sister while my dad would work late into the night and my mom was living in India. It was during this time that I got really into anime. I loved seeing all the artwork that came with it; the character designs, the fanart, the different art styles. What gave me the conviction to take art more seriously was that there was nobody around to judge me as I was still developing art skills. This increased my motivation to draw. For the first time I was proud of myself and my art. I started drawing my favorite characters, and even though I kept making mistakes, I wanted to keep going because I liked seeing the end result, even the bad ones. Still, I told myself that I wasn't an artist, just someone who enjoyed drawing and sketching and didn't take it as seriously as other people,. I worried people would expect me to be a talented artist who preferred realism.

Most of my artistic inspiration comes from other artists. I’m drawn to Studio Ghibli, especially the characters in Princess Mononoke, like San, whose designs feel fierce and hand-drawn. I wanted to learn how to make characters like that, so I watched youtube tutorials on how Hayao Miyazaki works and tried watercolor. I also love painterly styles like Reverse:1999 and Arcane, where a whole image comes from a few loose strokes. All of them remind me of my own sketches. I used to just redraw other peoples art online for practice to better my own skills but eventually I moved on to find my own style and process. I think that's what makes art more fun for me: I get to have my own personal style.

Over time, my passion for art sneak-attacked me in 8th grade when I suddenly realized I wanted to become a professional artist. I wanted to make webtoons (online comics). And like these comic authors, I wanted to make new and original characters. I started watching youtube tutorials and drawing more in my free time. I really love sketching because it lets me get my thoughts and emotions down without having to worry about cleaning it or finishing. In sketching, the draft is the final. Sketches can take anywhere from 20 seconds to many hours and I can spend

however much time I want on just one. If I don't like it, I can easily start over. Despite my newfound drive for art, I still had that lingering fear of being judged and I ended up telling people that drawing is just something I do in my free time but never that I really enjoy spending time on it. This irrational fear, combined with my poor middle school self-esteem, led me to hide my drawings. This really stressed me because art is like meditation for me. It's one of the only things that allows me to be "in the moment". I made sure to take art classes all 4 years of high school because I knew that I would not be able to survive if I was without it. In fact, when I persuaded myself into thinking I couldn't draw at school, I tended to drift off and worry excessively about superficial things. I'm afraid of a lot of things, especially the future. What if I can't start over? How do I fix my life when there's no eraser to start over with? What if the road I'm on leads me nowhere? Drawing keeps me grounded and when I do anything else it feels like I'm drifting further and further away from my true self. When I'm alone I don't have to appeal to anyone or worry about it being graded because I'm doing it for myself.

I want to have freedom of what I draw, who I draw for, and how I draw. While I've thought hard about whether to pursue art, it's only been in the back of my mind. I worry that I'm not as creative, passionate, or talented as others who want to pursue art. But if I didn't take art I worried that I would end up not being true to myself. Throughout my life It's the one thing that never changed, art is the only thing I don't feel forced to do. However, as the oldest daughter of my family I feel a responsibility to take care and support them. With the rise of AI, many jobs in the art field are being displaced. My parents are immigrants and only my dad works. It's especially hard in the Bay Area to even find an affordable place to stay. If I fail to secure a job, I wish I could go back to my family and rely on them but I feel like time is running out. My entire family, other than my parents and my younger sister, are in India.

My aunt was right. The moon doesn't follow anyone. It's there for anyone who sees it. Art is the same. I used to think it belonged to people who were more talented than me, so I hid my drawings and told myself I wasn't an artist, when in fact I was an artist. I wanted to keep sketching and I still do, I never want to stop sketching, it's a part of who I am. Sure, AI can make art and sketches in a few seconds, but you don't get to ask AI why they draw the way they do, why they placed that stroke there, what was going on when drawing it, or how things evolved to end up with an end result different from the rest of the sketches. Every time someone asks me "What do you want to pursue?" I never doubt myself when I say that I want to do art as a side job, because even if I don't do it as a side hustle, I know I won't ever stop. While I want a career in the medical field, art will remain my meditation, the thing that never changes, the thing that I don't need to force myself to do or think about doing, the thing that lets me see who I am, by what I'm doing, with my own eyes—it's what I need to live.