

The Clutter Fairy[®]

Gayle Goddard, Professional Organizer
In Houston, cell 713-816-9505
Or email me at clutterfairyhouston@gmail.com

Organize Your Art Space for a Creative Explosion!

Problem: Organizing and the Artist

How does a creative space get so out of control that valuable supplies are lost? What makes a space set aside for creative design become buried in creative backwash? How does an art studio become an indoor garage sale instead?

- 1) **Artists are handicapped when it comes to organizing – Creative people are visual** – you learn visually and retrieve memory from visual clues. A visual person ends up surrounded by piles because they have need to see everything they are “working on”. A creative type needs to see the materials to help in the design process, but if they have been collecting materials for more than a week, soon enough “having it out where I can see it” takes over a room. Usually, a visual person tries to use organizing strategies that are used for an office and it doesn’t work because those ideas do not take into account the creative design process – those strategies thwart being creative and the piles grow larger.
- 2) **The usual storage solutions don’t work well for creative spaces** – Storage is designed to put things away. The contents are hidden in opaque containers, closed, and stacked in furniture with the intent of, well, storing them. You need constant access and visibility to design. “Storing your art materials” is an oxymoron, because if they’re stored, you aren’t creating! Managing them and using them is a delicate balance requiring special storage choices.
- 3) **You collect large amounts of your art supplies** – Whatever your art medium is, you buy supplies for it in a fever. Having bought way more beads than I can use in a lifetime, I still buy more. For creative people, buying the tools of your creativity is a serious addiction. You exercise no limits in your gathering, and it takes over your space quickly. The best you can do here is get better at choosing as you get better at your art. Cheap materials you used to learn in the beginning are not what you want to use when you become more adept. This is an opportunity to clear out materials you won’t use anymore – so you can fill that space with the better materials you use now.
- 4) **You make excuses for keeping supplies that are no longer useful** –

- a. **“It Cost me a LOT of money”** – OK, so what? Are you using it? Do you like it? If it is just gathering dust because you don’t want to admit a buying mistake, you have a problem. Sell it on Facebook Marketplace or Etsy or Ebay, donate it to another artist or trade it at your group meetings. Costing a lot isn’t a good enough reason for it to take up valuable space in your studio. It needs to have a value to you *besides* the money, or it is a total waste of space.
- b. **I am going to fix that someday** – Doubt it! If you really meant to fix and use it, you would have already. Someone else can fix it – someone who has a clear and current need for it. Let another artist who sees an immediate use for it repair it and get it out of your space.
- c. **But it has such potential** – Of course it does and since you are an artist you can see that. All things have potential to become art in some way. Thing is – you can’t be the artist to develop all artistic potential in the world, or even all the potential you run across in your life. You are only going to realize your little portion of artistic potential, and you will have to leave some of the artistic potential to some other artist. Let another artist have it.
- d. **I can’t decide if I need that or not** – OK, so create an outbox in the corner of your room. Put the item that you can’t decide about in there and leave it for a week or a month. Chances are if you don’t need it and retrieve it within that time, you can give it away and let another artist play with it.
- e. **They don’t make those anymore!** - Yeah, and you still aren’t using it! Keeping a small collectible portion of your supplies is always fun, but you need to balance that storage problem against all the stuff you are using currently and want to store. This is the equivalent of keepsake clothing taking valuable space in the closet because you remember wearing it fondly. The less studio space you have, the less reason you have to keep a collection like this.

[Solution: Suggestions for the Studio](#)

- 1) **Every artist stores their main art supplies, their embellishment supplies, their tools and their reference materials.** Organize all the supplies in these four main groups and it will have a big impact on the space and your ability to create.
- 2) **Sort the main supplies based on how you use them and design with them.** If you design projects by choosing colors, sort by color; If by material, or material weight, sort that way.
- 3) **Assume you will never use 100% of your stuff,** not the least because you will keep buying more! Keep things that have a 50-50 chance of you using them. Let the rest pass on to another artist who will use them, and you play with what draws your attention.
- 4) **You always need a clear workspace on which to work.** You will need a space that is always clear for you to work on. You can't suddenly start creating when the mood strikes you if you have to clear a space to get started. Sometimes your inspiration is gone by the time the space is clear. It should be at a comfortable height with supportive seating, and as large as your art is and your space allows.
- 5) **The tools have to be within easy reach.** The tools you use most often should be within reach of your work surface without your needing to get up. The rest of the tools can go somewhere else in the room.
- 6) **The main supplies need to be easily reviewed and accessible for selecting project materials.** The most important thing about your main materials is being able to see them when you want to design. Use very clear containers – not milky white ones. Clear or wire mesh or anything through which any supply can be seen and recognized immediately. The goal here is to be able to access your entire color palette and all textures when you design. The color, the look, the weight – all these things impact design. Being able to see them all is part of inspiring your creativity.
- 7) **The embellishment supplies need to be portable so they can be out of the way when not required.** These supplies are by their nature your secondary supplies. They get used at a certain point in the creative process but are not usually used throughout the work. (Of course we are talking about creativity, so by definition there will be exceptions!) In terms of proximity to the workspace, these would get placed farther away than your main supplies.
- 8) **Reference Materials can be nearby.** – Magazines, books, class notes and sketches are good inspiration material when you need it, but you will probably only need one out at a time while you are working on a project. So, place these nearby, but not in the immediate work space.

Some Tips and Tricks:

- 1) Use a label maker - labels will make it easier to find things quickly.
- 2) Make the effort to find clear containers – so objects and colors can be discerned easily.
- 3) Color code your storage – main supplies have one color label, other supplies have another color label.
- 4) Use a binder and protective sleeves to capture project ideas, magazine cutouts, loose sketches, photos, etc.
- 5) Ziplock bags are your friend. They come in a million sizes, and are a great way to contain small loose pieces of things within the same storage container. If your space is limited, one storage box can hold lots of things and you can still find stuff easily if the various bits are in Ziplock bags.
- 6) A portable Pendaflex file box is a great way to store magazines – either the current ones that you are looking through, or as a central storage area that can be easily moved.
- 7) Project boxes are important. Designate some storage containers to hold unfinished or projects-in-progress – one per project. You won't lose any pieces and can pick the project up again when you are next creating without any trouble. Choose a project box size that works for one project and don't use that type of box for anything else in the studio. Then it becomes a visual cue to tell you where your UFOs are.
- 8) If you are energetic, you can develop an inventory of your supplies to carry with you so you won't buy things over and over again. Alternatively, maybe just a list of the items of which you already have a large quantity – it is a shorter list and the ones you don't want to buy again.
- 9) Store large amounts of fabric on the cardboard inserts used at the fabric stores. They throw them away, so you can ask for them and use them to store and stack large amounts of fabric.
- 10) Small amounts of fabric fit well in an old suitcase. Then you access the suitcase only if you need to go through all your small pieces.
- 11) Sawhorses make a great work surface that can be easily taken down. Buy plastic saw horses with extendable legs, so the top can be higher if you prefer. Then use a piece of lumber on top. When you break it down, the pieces can lean up against the wall.
- 12) Any shelving system will have various shelf widths – install different sizes to accommodate all your supplies and equipment.