

State of the *art*

In a world so focused on efficiency and productivity, it's time to slow down and appreciate the creative processes we engage in every day—and start some fun new projects, too.

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This past fall, I had the chance to take a linocut class at the Toronto Botanical Garden.

It was a gift from my aunt, after I'd mentioned I was craving some creativity in my life. At the class, our instructor asked us all to introduce ourselves and name the most recent piece of art we'd made. I hesitated—I said I was a “newbie” and was just excited to be there. But as I listened to the others share examples of their projects—journaling, graphic design, singing in a choir—I realized I'd boxed in my definition of what “art” and “creativity” actually were. My description was both limited, and limiting. And, as it turns out, I spend a lot more time being creative than I give myself credit for.

How had I ignored the fact that I've been a Scottish Highland dancer since I was a kid? That's art. Or that I'm always experimenting with recipes? That's also creative. I make my own soaps, lotions and candles a few times a year, and I recently helped my daughter build

a cardboard vase for her grade 3 STEM project. Plus, oh yeah, I happen to write for a living—didn't think about that, either! These activities simply didn't fit into my narrow idea of “art,” but they are all undeniably creative, from beginning to end. It made me realize that art isn't just about a final product. Although, yes, a finished canvas, beaded necklace or perfect roast beef brings us gratification, the real joy—and often the benefits—are usually found in the process itself.

Art makes you feel good

Did you know that crafting and engaging in creative arts can significantly enhance your life satisfaction? A recent study found that activities such as painting, photography, embroidery, crocheting, woodworking, jewellery-making and pottery, among others, can lift your mood, ease anxiety, reduce stress and boost wellbeing. The benefits extend beyond mental health, too—crafting has been found to enhance fine and gross motor skills, sharpen mental agility and even slow cognitive decline.

Why does crafting have such a positive impact? Partly it's the repetitive nature of certain crafts that creates a meditative space where focus on the task at hand provides a welcome distraction from daily stressors. And according to the Mayo Clinic, meditation fosters a sense of calm and balance, helping you manage negative thoughts, lower tension and regulate feelings of loneliness or sadness. The outcome is better sleep, a clearer mind and feeling better overall.

Mindful and sustainable

The act of creating isn't just good for mental and physical health—it's also a sustainable practice. Crafting often involves upcycling, using materials we already have, or choosing natural, sustainable options. Instead of buying mass-produced items, we can make something personalized and special. This approach reduces waste and contributes to a more mindful, eco-friendly lifestyle.

Even if you're not a crafter, you can surround yourself with art that speaks to you by purchasing handmade goods from local artisans, like the ones you can find on Etsy, an online marketplace that sells custom and handmade goods, as well as vintage items and craft supplies. I spoke with the brand's trend expert, Dayna Isom Johnson, who told me that one of Etsy's goals is to make it easy for buyers to shop with their values in mind. “When you purchase something from a seller on Etsy, you're not just getting a unique product, you're supporting local artists and independent creators who pour their heart into their craft. It's a way to invest in meaningful, one-of-a-kind pieces while uplifting small businesses either in your own community or from around the world,” she says.

The value of creativity

Whether you're helping your child with a school project, baking cookies, scrapbooking memories, knitting a scarf, singing a song, dancing around the living room or taking a drawing class, make no mistake—that's creative. And by recognizing the value in that, no matter what form it takes, your world may end up being just a little bit brighter, fuller and healthier.



Craft your heart out

Part of my renewed interest in crafting came after a trip to New York City, where I visited Etsy's headquarters to learn about upcoming trends. I met several Etsy sellers who had transformed their lifelong hobbies—like needlework, jewellery-making and pottery—into successful small businesses. One seller demonstrated simple needlework techniques, offering DIY kits for creating your own clothing patches. It struck me as the perfect blend: supporting a local artist while getting to experience the joy of creating something myself. If that inspires you, too, try one (or all!) of these DIY kits from Canadian Etsy sellers.



Choose from many beautiful designs and start creating your own string art from this Welland, Ont., Etsy store knotreallyart.

knotreallyart DIY Daisy **STRING ART KIT** with Wooden Hammer, \$28, etsy.com.



Create the prettiest cyanotype prints with this kit from Oshawa, Ont., seller SunprintCreations94.

SunprintCreations94 **CYANOTYPE KIT**, \$16.50, etsy.com.

Edmonton-based NabeelaRumi is the place to get started with paint by numbers or DIY embroidery kits.

NabeelaRumi Leopards **PAINT BY NUMBER KIT**, \$60, etsy.com.



Edmonton's StudioAkiyo offers DIY candle-making kits as well as many hand-crafted home decor items.

StudioAkiyo DIY Kit Classic Bubble **CANDLE-MAKING KIT**, \$45, etsy.com.



Hailing from Quebec, female founded Club Terracotta has the best girls' night pottery kit for two.

ClubTerracotta **DIY POTTERY KIT** for Two, \$207, etsy.com.

Embroidery and jewellery-making are combined in this DIY necklace kit from Skidegate, B.C.'s OhMyHeartEmbroidery. We love it!

OhMyHeartEmbroidery **DIY EMBROIDERY NECKLACE KIT** with Scissors, \$47, etsy.com.

