

How to Build a Container for Your Creative Experimentation



It feels like a contradiction. We're artists and we want to be free to experiment. Yet the market demands we present with a coherent creative voice.

The good news is that these two seemingly irreconcilable prerequisites are not as contradictory as they first appear.

It IS possible to build a unified [body of work](#) which also encompasses plenty of room for trying new ideas.

The secret is what I call 'building a container'.

The Container

The container is the part of your work that you commit to keeping consistent. Because you'll be doing a lot of it, it must be something that you find pretty easy and enjoyable - like your favourite armchair ;)

My 'container' is the cover of my [artists books](#). Each one is:

- Textured and tactile (medium)
- Metallic in colour (palette)
- Hints at the content but doesn't reveal it / allows for surprise (theme)
- Has a ribbon or other fastener (presentation)

I love making the covers of my books so much that I flirted with the idea of making only the covers without anything inside, but ultimately that proved to be unsatisfying.

The fact that I love making them, though, means I don't get bored and so can easily maintain their consistency.

In fact the consistency provides a relaxing starting point for the rest of the work. I don't have to reinvent the wheel. I have a reliable process to follow.

I can click into this process without a peep from the Demon of Resistance.

The Filling

The Filling is the part of your process that fills your creative well. The jam in your donut, the cherries in your pie. This is the part that simultaneously thrills and terrifies you. It's edgy and unpredictable.

The inside of my books are my Filling.

The element of surprise is very important in the experience I'm creating for the person opening the books, so I need a lot of licence to create different happenings here.

This is the part of the process where I have much more free rein to experiment without fear of losing my voice.

Even so, several factors remain common to the interior of all the books:

- they provide a surprise not evident when the book was closed (theme)
- there is a strong visual contrast between the inside and the cover - usually in terms of colour (palette)
- something 'unfolds' or is revealed - usually this requires the person to do something (presentation)

Once you work with your fillings for a while you might be surprised to find that they DO have a certain amount of consistency - albeit in a less obvious way.

Applying the Container and Filling principles to your creative work
Since I have worked with these two parts of the equation, I feel truly centred and fully represented in the work I create.

I have the comfort of familiarity, and the energy of experimentation, always playing off against each other. I can choose to focus on one or the other according to what I most need at the time.

If that sounds like something you need, then why not try applying the Container and Filling principles to your own work? Ask yourself:

What is your Container?

- What is the part you love to repeat? The easy part? The part where you slip into a pleasant groove? That comes together effortlessly?
- What are its elements? Colours / textures / materials and media / motifs / subject-matter / sensations / ideas / size / format?
- What are the influences for this part?
- How does this part 'contain' or provide a framework for the more difficult parts of your process?

What is the Filling or inside of your process?

- The part where you need free rein?
- The part that is more difficult? That challenges and stretches you? The part where you most often want to give up because it's so hard?
- The part without which you would feel your 'container' to be unsatisfyingly empty?

You may not have answers to these questions straight away.

Let them permeate in your subconscious.

Look at your work - completed, in progress and upcoming - with these juxtapositions in mind.

Relax into the idea that you CAN have it all - work which has a strong coherent creative voice yet which engages YOU as much as it does your fans.

Need help hearing your creative voice?

Let me help you build a strong and recognisable body of work that you LOVE to create, and that stands out in today's ultra-competitive marketplace.

(This package is also ideal if you want to develop a distinctive product line.)

[Find out more!](#)