

How successful creatives
got their start.
by Erin Loechner

dolan geiman



33-year-old Chicago-based artist Dolan Geiman's first official gig was re-branding his high school mascot—and he hasn't stopped creating since. To be fair, his contemporary mixed media, paintings and framed works are a far cry from his "Henry the Hornet" mascot days, but are no less inspirational.

Yet the artist that has gained stride in today's emerging art industry hasn't always been living the creative dream it seems. In fact, Dolan worked two part-time jobs shortly after college: at a bakery and bookstore. "I look back on it now and it still makes me cringe... I wanted to be making art all the time, but I didn't have the cash and I felt trapped. My routine was killing my mental and creative energy. Something had to give."

*** pro tip:** *Things don't always pan out as you think. The trick is to hang in there during the down times; you'll get through. Creativity always prevails.*

For Dolan, September 11th was a pivotal moment in his career. After a bout with depression and the grace of a friend who took him in, Dolan quit his jobs and began living the life of a creative nomad. "I moved into an abandoned warehouse in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, and it felt perfect. I woke up every morning at 6AM and drove thirty minutes to sell art to tourists in Charlottesville."

In Charlottesville, Dolan united with punk artists Leo and Amanda, who he now recognizes to be paramount to his career. "They introduced me to the Smiths and to shoplifting, and Leo taught me how to really paint and appreciate the way paint moves." The trio would sell art in the afternoon and make new pieces until the sun came up, and Dolan recalls bartering artwork for meals on certain occasions. "Some days we'd make \$50; others we'd make \$5."

Within four months, Dolan had saved enough money to move to Chicago.

*** pro tip:** *Choosing to live a fulfilled life of creativity is hard work. It's important to pre-*

pare for long hours, little pay and little stability. Yet it's always, always worth it.

Shortly after moving to Chicago, Dolan met his partner-in-crime, Ali Marie. "We both worked a few odd jobs, but I only took creative gigs, like painting walls or designing sets or working with interior designers. Eventually we both quit those jobs and turned our attention forward. We've never looked back."

Now the pair spend their days working together (in separate offices, of course!) where Ali manages business relations and Dolan creates art. "She can be like that football coach that makes you run in the 100 degree weather until you pass out—ha! Seriously, she's a great partner, and I am pretty lucky to have her."

*** pro tip:** *Collaborating with someone is a surefire way to gain external motivation, inspiration and drive. Consider partnering with a fellow entrepreneur who is passionate about building a creative lifestyle.*

Of course, the freelance life can be filled to the brim with responsibilities, tasks and deadlines. "I work on several pieces at one time: painting a little here, sanding a little there, so I can spread out the workload for myself. Sometimes if I work too long on one piece I start to mess it up, so I like to give myself some breathing room."

*** pro tip:** *Start small. Dolan writes, "Even if it's just a little sketch, do something. At the end of five or six days, you'll have a handful of things you have created, and a sense of accomplishment."*

Yet with Dolan's impressive database of satisfied clients including Fossil, Pendleton and an upcoming collaboration with Urban Outfitters, it's no wonder he's gained a sense of accomplishment.

Indeed, the "Henry the Hornet" mascot would be so proud. **U**

AT A GLANCE

Maple or hickory?
Maple, definitely.

Cereal or eggs?
Cereal and eggs.

Pendants or chandeliers?
Chandeliers.

Skim or 2%?
Whole milk all the way.

Magazine or book?
Books books books.

Confetti or streamers?
Streamers. Prom style.

Pen or pencil?
Pencil.