

## Art Happens ~ With or Without a Job

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By Ruth Zamoyta / May 3, 2012 / Uncategorized / Leave a comment

October 21, 2011 ~

Frederick, a field mouse in the eponymous children's book by Leo Lionni, sits by while his friends scurry about, storing nuts and grains for the long winter months that await them. In their hovel, the mice begrudgingly share their food with Frederick, grumbling that he did not do any "work." But when the last crumb is eaten and the mice grow hungry, Frederick shares with them the "food" he had been collecting in his imagination: poetry. With poetry he feeds them the color, warmth, and beauty that they were missing as much as food. The mice then appreciate the imperishable contribution of their resident artist, Frederick.

Frederick showed his skeptical friends how art plays a powerful—almost magical—part in the sustenance of society. Yet when children declare they want to be artists, parents often worry that they won't find "work" and urge them to pursue a more practical career.

Last May a headline in the New York Times tried to put this fear to rest: "Survey Suggests Employment Prospects for Arts Graduates Are About the Same as for Others." The article showed the latest results of an ongoing survey by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), an initiative designed to improve arts education.

SNAAP triumphantly announced that 92% of art-school graduates who want to have a job currently have one. What's more, 65% of grads have worked as professional artists at some point in their careers.

However, a closer look at the survey results on SNAAP's Web site reveals that 30% of the 65% are teachers or administrators—teaching or administering art while others make art. After teaching, graphic design is the least unsuccessful discipline, with 16% of grads working in their field. Next come musicians at 15%, and the remaining arts occupations—architect, craft artist, film/video artist, dancer, fine artist, photographer, theater professional, creative writer—plummet into the single digits.

How about the poets, the Fredericks of our world? Only 6% of people who studied creative writing are employed as creative writers.

It is impossible to compare art to other professions, because it is not a job but an inner necessity. Art is a pursuit that must continue with or without a job—it is a compulsion as strong as a substance addiction. Indeed, the report says that 71% of grads who are not working as arts professionals continue to do art on their own.

Frederick and his furry fans would have found this last statistic the most encouraging in the report, and it should have been the one to make New York Times headlines. It reassures artists and art educators that regardless of employment, the work of art goes on—producing the color, warmth, and beauty that feed our hungry souls.

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