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Fueling the hunger

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Creativity is a hunger that incessantly chews the brain. Wealth and fame go by the wayside when you are chasing that ray of imagination to create a new dimension in the world.

They say creative people are eccentric, ego-centric and unsocial, but such interpretations are totally misleading. In reality, artists have an inner struggle on how their idea can get a foothold. With passion, guts and belief in themselves, their only ambition is to establish that distinction, they barely care for anything else in life. Artists can never think about a directional career which 90% of non-arty people pursue. So from the perspective of people who cannot see beyond the boundary of everyday routine life, artists are often considered vagabonds.

Actually a true artist is extremely self-disciplined. There's no question that the dust of vagrancy can ever settle on their self urge. Take the example of my 75-year-old European artist friend you met in my last week's article. His 45-year-old wife and muse recounted to me how he fulfils his hunger for expression and how she luxuriates in his passion. Her artist husband suddenly wakes up at night, pulls her into his atelier, very roughly takes off her

clothes. At first she mistook this behavior as his wanting to make love. But he puts her on a pedestal, intensely strokes her through his eyes, mixes paints that he puts in her body, to find a matching body colour. She says she's always amazed at how, with sensuality and excitement, her body responds to his paint brush. He reveals no physical sexual urge, but his paint brush is filled with a sexuality that engrosses them both in a summit of ardor. Steeped in the artist's mind and brush colours, her body in his canvas, it's never ever occurred to her to question whether the paint could be harmful for her body.

Only after hearing her have I understood how a muse can entirely change an artist's canvas. Not everybody can be an artist's muse. She devotes herself to these sessions, sitting frozen nude hour after hour, allowing her artist husband to just watch her, not paint: "I am memorizing your flesh, your sensitive touch." He mesmerizes her saying he paints the intrinsic memoir that her eyes and body reveals, a sensation above any digital picture, and beyond her own consciousness.

One day I went with them to an artists' gathering in a sculptor friend's house in Brittany. Amidst the gossip an impromptu painting session started. When this artist started painting his wife's face, I was amazed to watch how deeply her feelings had penetrated his mind. Even with a thick brush, his strokes on her cheeks, neck, edges of the eye displayed sensitive nerves. I expressed

my appreciation to her, how his paintings, so modern in artistic form, have a universal sensual appeal with subterranean meaning. She spontaneously wanted to share my impressions and invited me to another artists' gathering in Paris. For 90 minutes people listened in rapt attention as I recounted my experience of that day; then a writer took it forward as memoirs of an artist's muse. I later came to know my artist friend had had many frustrating relationships, but only this muse could fuel the hungry passion of his inner self. He married her, they have a baby. This is my living experience of an artist's untold hunger mitigated when the right muse is found.

Another illustrious muse was Russian-born Gala, without whom Salvador Dali (1904-1989) was helpless. In March 2013, we had to queue for 2 hours to see the largest retrospective exhibition at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris of this prominent Spanish Surrealist painter, sculptor, and cultural icon of bizarre extravagance. But it was certainly worth waiting to see his several works that magnified Gala. Actually Gala was earlier an inspiration to many artists, including André Breton, Louis Aragon, Max Ernst and her first husband poet Paul Éluard. She could recognize creative genius when she saw it, and had relations with many artists and intellectuals. For 3 years she lived in a ménage à trois (threesome) with Ernst and Eluard. In 1929, she accompanied a group of artists visiting Dali in Spain. Love at first sight struck Dali and her, so she stayed back with Dali while her husband returned to Paris.

"It's mostly with your blood, Gala, that I paint my pictures," Dali had said as he started signing his paintings with his and her names. The couple married in 1934. Ten years older than him, Gala became Dali's agent and re-directed his focus from a liberal ideology to totalitarianism. She mixed with high society

to start a private Dali collectors club. Affluent investors would contribute every month; on Christmas Day they'd each get a Dali painting at a coveted, exclusive party in Dali's studio. Dali and Gala shared 53 productive years together, "Without Gala, divine Dali would be insane," he said. They spent the World War II years in America where he did many repetitive society portraits, window displays and promotions which brought disrepute to the Surrealist movement but made the couple very rich. Dali encouraged her penchant for young men as he practiced canaulism, exposing her in his paintings for other people's voyeuristic pleasure. Rock singer and televangelist Jeff Fenholt was allegedly among her last toy boys when she was over 80 years old. That she bequeathed him a million dollar home on Long Island, USA, was among the reasons that Dali and Gala's last years were very bitter. Yet after she died in 1982 he could barely function; convulsed with terror, he'd spend hours crying on her tomb.

Although the artist's model can shape the way the creative image emerges, it is the artist's hunger for expression that can never be curtailed. With curiosity, observation and action, artists always unearth society's trends through brush strokes on a white canvas.

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