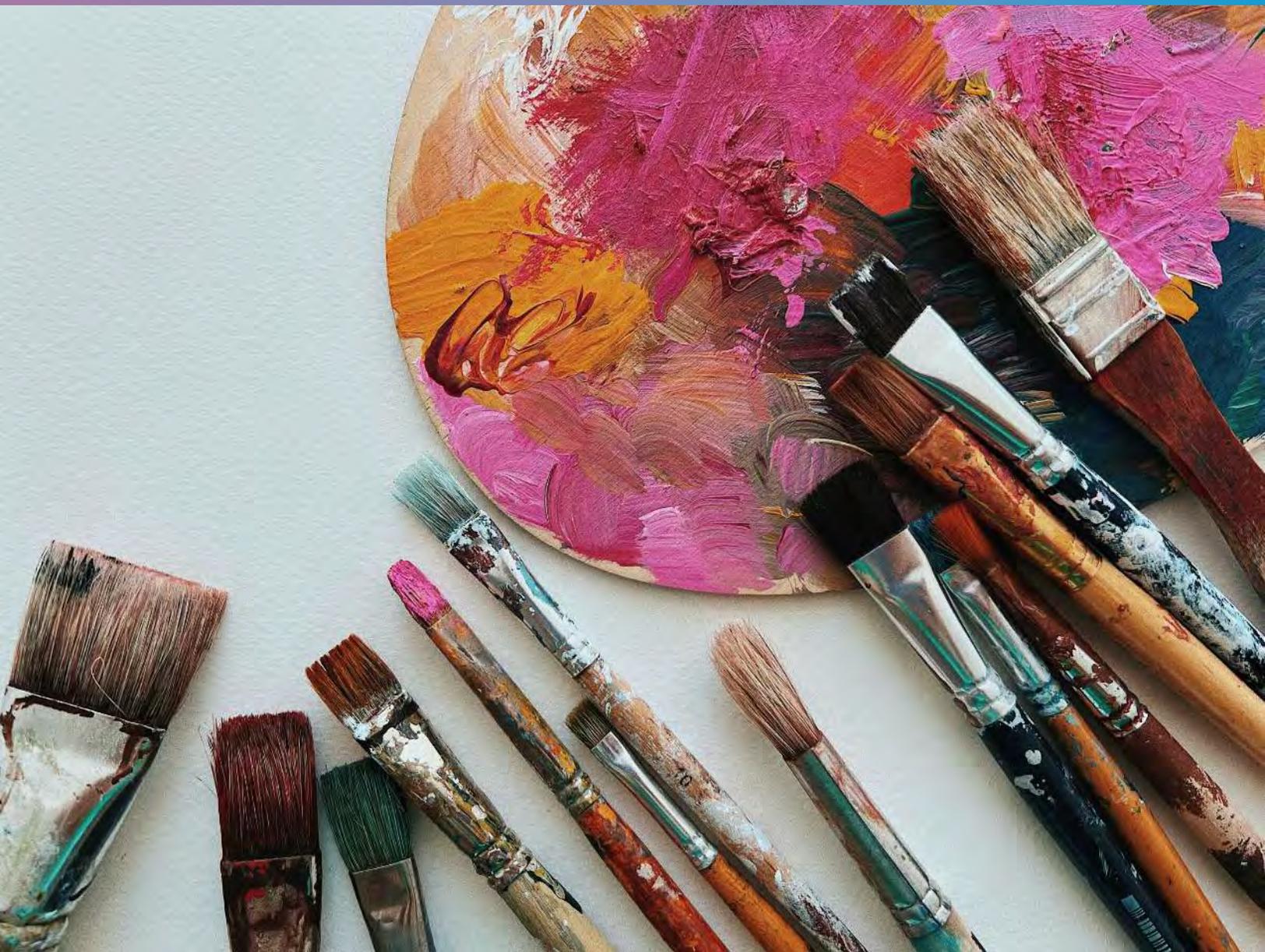


How to Art with ADHD

Working With Your Brain, Not Against It



ADHD Art Tools

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Chapter 1

The Lie You Learned About Being an Artist

Most of us learn what a “real artist” looks like long before we realize we’re learning it.

They’re consistent.

They finish what they start.

They show up every day and make steady progress.

This idea comes from everywhere—teachers, social media, productivity advice, even other artists who seem to move forward in a straight line.

And quietly, a rule forms:

If you were serious, you’d be consistent.

If you have ADHD, that rule turns into shame.

Not because you don’t care.

Not because you’re lazy.

But because your attention doesn’t move in straight lines. It moves in waves.

You might work intensely for a stretch, then stall. You might disappear from a piece and come back later with clarity. You might have bursts of momentum followed by long quiet gaps.

None of that fits the rule.

So instead of questioning the rule, you question yourself.

This book isn’t here to tell you to try harder.

It’s here to say this clearly:

You didn’t fail at being an artist.

You were following rules written for a different brain.

Key Takeaway

You didn’t fail at being an artist.

You were following rules written for a different brain.

Chapter 2

ADHD Is Quiet, Not Easy

When people picture ADHD, they usually picture chaos.

Interrupting.
Restlessness.
Missed deadlines.
Someone who can't sit still.

But ADHD doesn't always look like that.

Sometimes it looks like trying very hard in silence.

You might look calm on the outside while your brain is running constantly—tracking, looping, problem-solving, replaying conversations, imagining possibilities. You can sit still and still feel exhausted. You can care deeply and still feel stuck.

Because this type of ADHD—called inattentive type—is quiet, it often goes unnoticed. Other people assume you're fine. And eventually, you do too.

So when things feel harder for you than they seem to be for everyone else, you fill in the gap yourself. With self-blame. With guilt. With the idea that you must be doing something wrong.

But ADHD isn't a character flaw or a motivation problem. It's a difference in how attention, memory, and reward work.

Your brain doesn't offer energy on demand. It responds to interest, novelty, urgency, and meaning. When those fade—especially partway through a project—everything can slow down or stop without warning.

That's confusing if you don't have language for it.

One day you're absorbed. The next day, the same work feels flat and unreachable. You didn't stop caring. Your brain just shifted states.

Once you understand that, the question changes.

Instead of What's wrong with me?
You start asking, What does my brain need here?

That's where the rest of this book lives.

Key Takeaway

ADHD isn't a character flaw. Instead of "What's wrong with me?" ask, "What does my brain need here?"

Chapter 3

You're Wired for Art

The same brain that struggles with structure often excels at art.

That's not a coincidence.

ADHD brains are especially good at pattern recognition, emotional attunement, visual thinking, and making unexpected connections. You notice things other people miss. You think in images, stories, and symbols instead of steps.

What looks like distraction is often scanning.
What looks like inconsistency is often incubation.

Your mind moves in loops, not lines. And while that can clash with systems built around linear progress, it's incredibly useful for creative work.

Art doesn't require steady attention.
It requires curiosity, sensitivity, and the ability to see relationships between things.

Those are strengths you already have.

The problem isn't how you make art. It's trying to force it into a system that doesn't fit.

When you stop forcing linear habits onto a non-linear brain, something shifts. You stop fighting your instincts and start designing around them.

This book assumes something important:

You already have what you need to make art.
You don't need to fix your brain.
You need to support it.

Key Takeaway

**Your brain isn't broken.
It's doing exactly what creative brains do.
You don't need to fix your brain. You need to support it.**

Chapter 4

Why Traditional Productivity Advice Fails ADHD Artists

Most productivity advice sounds reasonable.

- Make a schedule.
- Use a planner.
- Do a little every day.
- Build habits.
- Be consistent.

That advice isn't evil. It just assumes a brain that works in a steady, predictable way.

If you have ADHD, motivation doesn't show up on command. It shows up when there's interest, novelty, urgency, or meaning. When those fade, "just do it anyway" becomes a fight you lose over and over.

So you try harder. You buy a new planner. You make a new system. You restart on Monday.

And when it still doesn't work, it feels personal. Like you're the problem.

But the mismatch is the problem.

Most systems are built to:

- reward steady effort
- punish gaps
- depend on memory and follow-through

ADHD brains tend to:

- work in waves
- forget steps when context disappears
- need stronger cues to start

So the traditional structure isn't neutral. It quietly turns a brain difference into shame.

This book isn't anti-structure.

It's pro structure that adapts.

Structure you can return to.

Structure that doesn't treat you like a machine.

Key Takeaway

**Traditional productivity advice isn't bad.
It's often just a bad fit for an ADHD brain.**

Chapter 5

The Messy Middle Is the Method

The beginning of a project is easy.

New idea. New energy. New possibility. Your brain lights up.

Then the middle shows up.

The piece gets awkward. The next step isn't obvious. The work feels slower. The fun fades. The doubts get louder.

For ADHD artists, this is the danger zone.

Not because you're weak.

Because the middle is where novelty dies.

And when novelty dies, motivation often goes with it.

Here's the part nobody tells you:

The messy middle isn't proof you're doing it wrong.
It's where art actually becomes art.

This is where you solve problems. Make choices. Change your mind. Try things that don't work. Sit with uncertainty. Let the piece tell you what it needs.

It's also where your brain wants to flee, because it feels like effort without reward.

So you pause. You drift. You switch projects. You "take a break" that lasts a month.

That pause can be normal.

ADHD brains process in the background. You might be incubating even when you aren't touching the piece. You notice solutions while driving, showering, scrolling, sleeping. You come back with new eyes.

The real threat isn't the pause.

The threat is the story you tell yourself about the pause.

"I'm flaky."

"I never finish."

"I'm not a real artist."

That shame turns a normal creative dip into a full shutdown.

So here's a better story:

Stopping can be part of the process.

Returning is part of the process.

The middle is allowed to be messy.

Your job isn't to force yourself through the messy middle with willpower.

Your job is to make it easier to return.

That's what the How chapters do next.

Key Takeaway

The messy middle is the part after the fun start, when the next step feels unclear. A pause can mean you're incubating—part of the process—not quitting. Shame is what turns a pause into quitting.

Chapter 6

I Have 100 Unfinished Pieces

If you're an ADHD artist, you probably have a pile.

Unfinished paintings.

Half-written pieces.

Projects shoved into a corner, a drawer, a folder, a closet.

And somewhere along the way, that pile started to feel like evidence.

Evidence that you lose interest.

Evidence that you don't follow through.

Evidence that something is wrong with how you work.

But unfinished doesn't mean abandoned.

It means layered.

ADHD brains don't work in straight lines. They work in passes. You add something, walk away, come back with new eyes, new skills, or new emotional distance.

The problem isn't unfinished work.

The problem is what we think unfinished work means.

Status, Not Shame

Instead of asking, "Why didn't I finish this?"

Try asking, "What status is this in?"

Some pieces are:

- Incubating—your brain is still processing
- Resting—you've taken what you can from them for now
- Waiting—on skill, clarity, or energy
- Ready—but intimidating

None of those are failures.

Giving work a status removes the emotional charge. It turns shame into information.

Choose a Home Base

Pick one piece to be your Home Base.

Not the best one.

Not the one with the most pressure.

Just the one that still has a pulse.

Home Base is the piece you touch first when you're back in the studio. Even for five minutes. Even if you do almost nothing.

You're allowed to rotate to other projects—but Home Base comes first.

This does two things:

1. It creates continuity.
2. It keeps you connected instead of scattered.

Rotate on Purpose

You're going to rotate. That's not the problem.

The problem is rotating without intention.

Instead of bouncing away because something feels hard or heavy, name the rotation.

"I'm setting this aside."

"I'm letting this rest."

"I'm switching, not quitting."

That single shift keeps the relationship intact.

The "Next Time Make It Easy" Rule

Never stop at the hardest part.

If you stop when things are unclear or difficult, re-entry becomes painful. Your brain has to rebuild the entire context again, and it will avoid that cost.

Before you stop:

- Write a note
- Leave a tool out
- Make one obvious next move stupidly easy

You're building an on-ramp for your future self.

When You Feel the Pull to Start Something New

New ideas will always show up. That's not the problem.

The problem is when starting something new becomes the only way you get relief.

Here's a rule that works for many ADHD artists—not as punishment, but as a gentle gate.

The Trade Rule (Ongoing)

When you want to start something new, make a trade:

Finish one piece from the pile first.

Not the hardest one.
Not the most important one.
The easiest win.

“Finish” doesn’t mean perfect. It means closing a loop:

- sign it
- varnish it
- photograph it
- frame it
- list it
- do the final 10%

Once you finish one, you’re free to start something new.

This rule does two helpful things:

- it keeps the unfinished pile from growing endlessly
- it turns finishing into the ticket to novelty

If the rule ever makes you freeze instead of act, loosen it. The goal is momentum, not compliance.

The Reset Rule (One-Time)

If you feel completely buried or stuck, use this once:

Finish one stalled piece—just one—to reset your momentum.

Then drop the rule.

Sometimes closing a single loop is enough to remind your brain that finishing is possible.

Why This Works

ADHD brains respond to:

- novelty
- urgency
- reward

The Trade Rule uses novelty as motivation instead of a distraction.
The Reset Rule gives you a fast dopamine hit without long-term pressure.

Neither rule is about discipline.
They’re about working with how your brain actually functions.

Unfinished Work Is Not a Character Flaw

Most artists don't actually finish more work than you do. They just hide the pile better.

Unfinished work isn't proof that you're unreliable.
It's proof that you generate ideas, start boldly, and work in layers.

That's not a flaw.
It's a creative pattern.

Key Takeaway

Unfinished work isn't a failure.

Finishing one piece—gently and on purpose—can unlock momentum without forcing consistency.

Chapter 7

The Process Is the Point (Even When It's Awful)

A lot of art advice skips straight to outcomes.

Finish the piece.

Make it good.

Make something you're proud of.

That sounds reasonable. But for ADHD artists, outcome—first thinking can quietly shut everything down.

When the goal is “make something good,” starting feels risky. Every mark matters. Every decision carries weight. If it goes wrong, you've wasted time, materials, or proof that you “still have it.”

So your brain does the safest thing.

It waits.

This is where perfectionism sneaks in. Not as vanity, but as protection. If you don't start, you can't fail. If you don't touch it, you can't ruin it.

The fix isn't lowering your standards.

It's changing the goal.

The goal isn't a good piece.

The goal is staying in relationship with the work.

That means showing up in ways that don't require courage every time.

Sometimes that looks like:

- sketching badly on purpose
- making a version you know won't be shown
- testing color on scrap
- doing ten minutes and stopping
- doodling just to feel the materials again

This kind of work still counts. It keeps the channel open.

Trying for awful can be surprisingly effective. When you remove the pressure to succeed, your brain relaxes enough to move. And once you're moving, better work often follows—but that's a side effect, not the goal.

Small, low-stakes actions create proof. Proof builds trust. Trust makes it easier to come back.

You don't make art to prove you're good.
You make art to stay connected.

Key Takeaway

**When starting feels risky, the goal is not "make something good."
The goal is staying in relationship with the work.
Low-stakes, even purposefully awful work keeps the door open.**

Chapter 8

What Actually Stops You From Starting

Most people think starting is a motivation problem. It's not.

For ADHD artists, starting is a friction problem.

Here's what usually creates that friction.

Hard Parts

You stopped at the part where things got unclear.
Now the next step isn't obvious.

Your brain hates ambiguity. Starting means figuring things out again from scratch, so it avoids the whole thing.

Decision Overload

There are too many possible next moves.

Which tool? Which version? Which direction?
Each choice costs energy. Enough choices can stall you completely.

Emotional Weight

This piece matters.

It represents something. It has history. It carries expectations. Starting feels heavy because the stakes feel high.

Re-entry Friction (The On-Ramp Problem)

You stopped. Time passed. Context is gone.

Coming back means rebuilding the entire mental state you were in before. That's expensive. Your brain chooses easier relief instead.

This isn't laziness.
It's energy conservation.

Fear of Doing It Wrong

Perfectionism often shows up right before you start or restart.

Not because you want it perfect—but because the idea of doing it wrong feels unsafe. Avoiding the work avoids the risk.

Lowering Friction Beats Raising Motivation

When starting feels impossible, don't look for more willpower.

Lower the friction.

That can look like:

- deciding on only the first tiny step
- setting up tools so you're ready, without using them yet
- working while listening to something familiar (audiobook, podcast, music)
- touching the piece without changing anything
- leaving yourself a clear note when you pause, so you know where to begin next time

Starting isn't one action.

It's a series of smaller gates.

Your job is to make those gates easier to walk through.

Key Takeaway

Starting or restarting isn't about motivation.

It's about friction.

Lowering the cost of re-entry makes starting possible again.

Chapter 9

Imposter Syndrome—and Why Marketing and Sales Feel So Bad (and What To Do About It)

Marketing and sales hit different when you have ADHD.

Not because you're lazy.

Not because you don't care.

Because this part asks for the exact combo your brain struggles to access on demand:

- consistency
- visibility
- delayed reward
- rejection tolerance

Art gives feedback fast. You see the mark. You feel the color click. Even when it's hard, it can still feel alive.

Marketing can feel like shouting into a void.

You post. Silence.

You email. Silence.

You list a piece. Silence.

For an ADHD brain, silence can feel like danger. Your brain reads it as “waste” or “rejection,” even when you did the right thing.

So you avoid it. Or you overthink it. Or you wait until you feel confident.

Here's the annoying truth:

Confidence usually shows up after action, not before.

So we build a system that works even when you feel weird.

Step 1: Rename the job

If the word “marketing” makes you freeze, stop using it.

Try:

- “making my work findable”
- “leaving breadcrumbs”
- “opening the door”
- “showing proof I exist”

Pick the least cringe option. Use that.

Your brain fights words. Use kinder words.

Step 2: Change what “selling” means

A lot of artists freeze because selling feels like this:

They lose money.

You win.

That map feels gross.

Swap the map.

Selling is not taking.

Selling is exchanging value.

They get something that can help them for years.

Calm. Joy. Meaning. A reminder. A feeling. A story. Identity. Home.

It’s not “just a picture.”

It can be a daily emotional tool.

When you remember that, selling feels less like begging and more like offering.

Step 3: Use the simple 3—step sales flow

Think of selling as three steps. Always in this order:

1) Attunement

Step into the buyer’s shoes. Learn why they want it.

2) Relationship

Make it feel safe. Add story, context, and human connection.

3) Transaction

Guide the decision. Clear price. Calm follow-up. Zero pressure.

If you skip attunement, price becomes the only thing left to talk about.
That’s when you get awkward.

This is the real reframe:

Your job is not to convince.

Your job is to guide.

You help people understand why they want it.

You help them picture it in their life.

You help them feel safe saying yes.

Step 4: Use buyer-led conversations

Most artists jump from “Thank you” to “It’s \$3,000.”

That whiplash makes you feel salesy.

Instead, stay buyer-led. Let them lead with emotion. You follow with clarity.

Boxed Mini-Tool: Buyer-Led Conversation Script (No Cringe)

Use this when someone says, “I love this.”

1) Ask one attunement question

- What about this piece speaks to you?
- What part keeps pulling you back?
- What does it remind you of?

2) Mirror it back

That makes sense. It sounds like this feels _____ for you.

3) Offer a gentle bridge

- Want me to send details?
- Want to see it mocked up on a wall?
- Want to talk through size options?

4) Invite a low-pressure decision

No rush. If you want, I can hold it for 24 hours while you think.

This isn’t persuasion. It’s guidance.

Step 5: Let listening do the heavy lifting

You do not need a “sales personality.”

Listening sells.

Introverts can be great at sales for one reason: they give people space.

Space makes people feel safe.

Safe people buy.

One good question can do more than ten paragraphs about your process.

Also, when someone talks longer in comments or DMs, it helps the algorithm.

So the conversation helps twice.

Step 6: Expect “no” and stop treating it like a verdict

Rejection is part of selling anything, including art.

Your brain wants to turn one “no” into a story:

“My work isn’t good.”

“I’m annoying.”

“I should stop.”

That’s not data. That’s pain talking.

A better mindset is buoyancy.

It means you float in a sea of “not right now.”

No is normal.

No is information.

No helps you find the right yes.

Step 7: Use a minimum rule you can return to

Don’t build a system that needs a perfect week.

Build a minimum you can do on tired days.

Examples:

- post 1 photo with 1 sentence
- reply to 1 comment
- add 1 listing detail
- send 1 short email

Small is how you stay in the game.

Boxed Mini-Tool: The 5-Minute Marketing Rescue

Use this when marketing feels heavy, awkward, or impossible.

Set a 5-minute timer.

Stop when it ends.

Pick one:

Option 1: Leave a breadcrumb

- post one photo
- write one sentence
- no polishing

Option 2: Make it easier for future you

- save a caption template
- rename a photo so you can find it
- drop your links into one notes file
- organize one image folder

Option 3: Touch, don't perform

- reply to one comment or message
- like and respond to someone who supports your work
- answer one "is this available?" question

You're not trying to "do marketing."
You're keeping the door unlocked.

Step 8: Don't measure success by feelings

Marketing can feel bad even when it works.

So measure simple things:

- did I post? yes or no
- did I link? yes or no
- did I invite? yes or no
- did I follow up once? yes or no

Feelings swing. Systems hold.

Step 9: Use the Re-Entry Ramp for business too

You will disappear sometimes. That's normal.

Don't restart from zero.

Leave yourself an on-ramp:

- a folder of ready photos
- 3 saved caption templates
- a draft email
- a note that says "post this next"

Then when you return, you don't have to think. You press play.

Key Takeaway

Marketing and sales feel hard because they require visibility, consistency, and delayed reward.

Use a kinder system: attunement, relationship, then transaction.

You don't need to convince. You guide. You listen. You return.

Chapter 10

Getting Started on the Business Stuff (Without Hating Your Life)

Let's be honest: "the business stuff" can feel like the enemy.

Not because you don't want your art to sell.
Because business asks you to be consistent in ways art doesn't.

So we're not going to build a system that depends on motivation.

We're going to lower friction and raise support.

1) Shrink the job until your brain says yes

Instead of "do marketing," pick one tiny action:

- choose one photo
- write one sentence
- reply to one comment
- add one listing detail
- draft a post and save it

Small counts. Small is how you start.

2) Do it after art, not before

If you do business first, you risk burning your best brain fuel on the least rewarding task.

Try this order:

1. touch your art first (even 5 minutes)
2. do a small business task second
3. stop while you still feel okay

You're training your brain that business doesn't steal art. It follows it.

3) Pair business with "brain company"

ADHD brains often work better with background input.

Try:

- a familiar show
- a podcast
- an audiobook
- music you've heard a hundred times

You're not distracting yourself. You're regulating.

4) Batch when you have energy, then let it coast

When you get a good wave, use it to make things easier later.

Batching can look like:

- taking 20 photos in one session
- writing 10 captions in a row
- making 5 posts and scheduling them
- listing 3 pieces back-to-back

Then you let the system run while you rest.

5) Define "selling" in a way your nervous system can handle

Selling doesn't have to mean convincing strangers.

For many artists, a kinder definition is:

Selling = making your work findable, and giving people an easy way to say yes.

That's a lot less scary than "be persuasive."

6) Use scripts so you don't reinvent language every time

Reinventing wording costs energy.

Have a few go—to lines you reuse:

- what it is
- why you made it
- what size it is
- how to buy it

Scripts reduce friction. Friction is the enemy.

Key Takeaway

Business gets easier when you lower friction.

Make the steps tiny, pair them with support, batch when you can, and let systems carry you when you can't.

Chapter 11

You're Allowed to Do This Your Way

At some point, every artist learns the “right” way to do things.

Work every day.

Finish what you start.

Be consistent.

Those rules work for some brains.

If you have ADHD, especially the inattentive type, your creative energy often comes in waves. You might work intensely for a stretch, then go quiet. You might leave a piece and come back later with better eyes.

That's not you being flaky.

That's you being non-linear.

A lot of shame comes from trying to force a creative brain into a structure that doesn't fit. You copy systems that look good on paper, then you feel like a failure when they collapse.

So let's make this simple:

You don't need to become a different person to make art.

You need a creative life that matches how you actually function.

That might mean:

- short bursts instead of daily sessions
- rotating between pieces on purpose
- letting work rest without calling it “quitting”
- building habits you can return to, not habits you must maintain perfectly

You're allowed to protect your energy.

You're allowed to change your process.

You're allowed to build something that works for your brain—not for a productivity quote on the internet.

You're still a real artist.

Key Takeaway

You don't need to work like other artists.

You need a way of working you can return to.

Chapter 12

What to Do When You Disappear (Again)

You will disappear again.

You'll stop mid—project.

You'll go quiet online.

You'll avoid the studio.

That's part of the pattern. Not a moral failure.

The trap is what happens next: you come back and try to fix everything at once. You look at the pile, the time gap, the mess, and your brain decides it's safer to avoid it again.

So we do one thing instead:

We lower re-entry friction.

The 3—step return plan

1) Make contact

Touch the work in the smallest way possible.

Open the sketchbook. Pull the piece out. Lay out one tool. Stop if you want.

2) Find the next tiny step

Don't solve the whole project. Decide the next 2—minute move.

Examples:

- mix one color
- pick one reference
- add one brushstroke
- write one note: Next time: _____

3) Leave a ramp for next time

Before you stop, make it easier to return:

- leave a note
- leave a tool out
- leave the piece where you'll see it

That's it.

You don't need a big comeback.
You need a gentle return.

Key Takeaway

**You don't come back by "getting it together."
You come back by lowering re—entry friction.**

A Note for When You're Stuck Again

Read this when you feel behind.

You're not broken.

You're not lazy.

You're not failing at art.

You're having a hard moment with an ADHD brain.

So here's the only rule right now:

Make it easier.

Not perfect. Not impressive. Easier.

Do the smallest thing that counts as contact.

Then stop on purpose.

That still counts.

That still builds trust.

You don't need to earn your way back into being an artist.

You already are one.

Quick Next Steps

- 1) Pick one page you can do today.
- 2) Do the smallest step. Stop while it still feels okay.
- 3) Come back tomorrow and do one more tiny step.

Want more help?

- Visit: ADHDArtist.net
- Support: info@ADHDArtist.net
- If you have the ADHD Artist Rescue Kit, start with the 5-minute reset.

Note: This book is for education only. It is not medical advice.

