



Art Advisor Maria Brito Wants to Help You Harness Your Creativity

She's helped celebrities curate their personal art collections, and worked to make art more accessible to all. Now, the author of *How Creativity Rules the World: The Art and Business of Turning Your Ideas into Gold* shares her journey from burned out lawyer to art world disruptor, along with the actions and attitudes necessary to take your ideas to the next level.

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- Alicia Menendez: How do you harness the power of your own creativity to change your work, your business, and your life? Maria Brito, art advisor, curator and consultant burst onto the art scene by questioning why the art world operated as it did. And in the process, she built an impressive roster of celebrity clients who wanted something that only she could offer. She's put her wisdom on creativity, which she argues is just a series of habits, actions, and attitudes that anyone can develop into her new book, *How Creativity Rules the World: The Art and Business of Turning Your Ideas into Gold*. Maria, thank you so much for doing this.
- Maria Brito: Thank you, Alicia. Actually, I'm a fan.
- Menendez: I love when fandom goes in both directions. One of the things I was struck by reading your new book is that it's all about creativity. And yet in an earlier part of your career, you had told a reporter that when you were growing up in Caracas with your mom, she's very big on this idea of a woman being self-sufficient, and she says to you, "only creative people starve."
- Brito: Yes.
- Menendez: And it seems to me given the trajectory of your own career, where you go to college in Venezuela, you go to Harvard for law school...that you bought into that idea.
- Brito: Absolutely. Of course, I believed her, a conservative Catholic family from Latin America from those times, and I think still though, you could only be three things, a doctor, an engineer, or a lawyer or something along those lines. And I basically had my own passions as a child and I was a very good performer and a really good singer and I was auditioning and I was getting absolutely everything. And my mom adamantly said, "No, you have to move out." She literally said that to me at the age of like 17, 18 or whatever, she's like, "You have to move out." And it's not like here, I cannot go and wait tables in Caracas. I mean, it's just like, there was no option for me. So I ended up believing what she said and that's how I became an attorney. And I thought I was doing the right thing until I was so miserable I just couldn't survive that anymore. I was just so sad and I had betrayed my real person and the things that I wanted to do that I ended up quitting and opening my business with all sorts of like warnings and people thinking I was crazy. And I took that leap of faith that has paid off handsomely. Here I am 13 years later and I wouldn't have it any other way. I have not looked back.

Menendez: I mean, you were collecting and curating your own art. 2009, you've done the lawyer thing in New York City. You delve into how crisis creates the opportunity for creativity. Would you call what you went through in 2009 a crisis?

Brito: A horrific crisis, because it was actually brewing inside of me. And it's not that I woke up one day and I said, I'm miserable and I'm not going to quit this job. No. That had been running around my mind and body and psyche for a long time. And it was just gaining momentum inside of me. And the catalyst was that I had a baby. It was my first child. And I had to go back to the law firm. Meanwhile, I'm thinking when I'm in maternity leave, I am going to show him that I sold out all my dreams because I'm going to be miserable for the rest of my life. I mean, when he asked why my mom is so miserable, I'm going to have to tell him because I hate my job. So it's now or never. And on top of that, it was the collapse of Lehman Brothers, it was the Bernie Madoff scandal, it was the whole subprime drama. Everything has come together to tell me I have no business in this law firm anymore. I don't want to be here and I'm not doing the best that I can because I'm not serving this clients with happiness and joy. And I hate this. So that was a huge crisis.

Menendez: You don't just look inward though, you look outward and you survey the art scene and you see gaps in what is being provided. What were the gaps that you saw?

Brito: So I saw a lot of people who had the job of an art advisor being very transactional. So they were like, "Oh, I work with this client, I want that. Let's just sell it and get the money and run away." I mean, there was nothing about education, there was no passion. They didn't want to share their expertise, let's say, through social media or blogging or utilizing the few tools that we had at that time, because remember this is 2009, we only had Facebook and Twitter, but there was nothing outside of the traditional magazines like Artforum and things like that, where nobody really understood what they were trying to say. And I was like, that is the spot, democratizing, demystifying, coming in with a fresh approach, showing the world that you can be a part of the art world, that you can't collect, that you can't understand the art without necessarily having to surround the whole thing with this protective halo of like just a handful of people can actually partake of this fabulousity. And I was seeing with Instagram, with the art fairs proliferating the musicians and hip-hop people partnering with artists for the cover of their albums and for their clothes. And I was seeing that before all that existed and saying that is a sweet spot. The sweet spot is giving access to those who do not have the access.

Menendez: Part of it is about democratizing art to let more people in. I think what is interesting to me as someone who is not of this world is that even celebrities felt that they didn't have access or a way in. And so one of the ways in which you explode on the scene is you have clients like Tracy Anderson, who then leads you to Gwyneth Paltrow. At some point you are doing consulting for Sean Combs, P Diddy. Depending on which era you're from, you know him by one of his many names. I imagine that working in this capacity with celebrity is very complicated. And I also imagine that it opens an entirely new world up to you.

Brito: Absolutely. I started working with Puff 11 years ago. Gwyneth gave me my first big break through Goop 11 or 12 years ago. So it was a different time where there was no TikTok and it wasn't all about reality TV. I mean it existed, but it is a different time where people actually are building their celebrity and businesses out of social media. And we have so many of those people with like 5 million followers on Instagram, 30 million followers on TikTok. So it was a different time. But the truth is that I needed them. And I didn't know I Latina to Latina: Art Advisor Maria Brito Wants to Help You Harness Your Creativity

needed them. The thing is these people came to me in a way where the universe was showing me that I was on the right path, by actually having the opportunity to serve them. But it also was a part of my passion and my desire to tell the importance of being connected to the here and now through contemporary art and how I presented this idea of everybody should collect, everybody should have access to art, everybody should have a dialogue with the artists that are of the here and now because they are so important as custodians of history. So my ideas and my pitch, which in my head I wasn't pitching, I was just so excited to tell this is what created so much momentum. And I pinch myself. It's like an incredible opportunity that I embraced and I run with it. It was absolutely crucial.

Menendez: I'm always obsessed when someone has a profession that is not clearly defined. It's not that someone is an attorney or a doctor or a teacher or a school administrator. You have gone through several iterations of how you describe to other people what it is you do. So about 10 years ago, you were still calling yourself a luxury lifestyle consultant. I noticed that you have dropped that as the descriptor. Talk me through how you got from luxury lifestyle consultant, which seems like the earliest iteration of this business, to where you find yourself today.

Brito: It's so funny you say that because that title actually came from a New York Times story that got published in the style section in 2013. And it was sort of like the hook why the woman who wrote about me wanted to write about me because I had incorporated company called Lifestyling by Maria Brito because I wanted to, and I look back and I cringe, but I wanted to create some sort of, like, styling people's lives with art. And I was also working with interior design at the time because I wanted to highlight the art and make the art the star of rooms. But I also wanted to, I was so dying to be creative. Seriously after all the dark ages of me being in the law firm that I needed to utilize all my might to put like, yes, I'm going to design your room, I'm going to design your house. And I did that for many years and the money was incredible. But at some point, I realized that my mission was not to place a rug in somebody's living room. That was, like, I'm a thought leader and I am super dynamic. And the business of art grew and grew and grew so much that it ended up eclipsing everything else. Then there was the consulting thing with companies, which I enjoyed very much. Then there was me actually packaging the same thing as I do through the companies but in an online class. Each step of the way, I tapped into what was my desire, but also what is the marketplace dictating? Like you said, I don't have a defined career because there's no such thing as that long 25 year career anymore, let's call it trajectory. But the truth is no matter what you do, even if you are in some sort of stable job, you will still have to shift and change and pivot many times if you want to thrive.

Menendez: In *How Creativity Rules the World*, you take a big swing at lots of the myths around creativity. What do you think is the biggest thing we get wrong or misunderstand about creativity?

Brito: I think it's two. One is that is just a thing that the artists do. Like when you close your eyes for a second and think about the word creative, you imagine people in a studio or you think about somebody who is designing a fashion collection or something like that. And that is wrong because creativity by and itself is the ability and the combination of skills that allow people no matter where they are, no matter what they do to come up with ideas of value that are relevant. Relevant because we need them for today. And the second myth is people who actually already know a little bit that creativity is not just for artists, but then Latina to Latina: Art Advisor Maria Brito Wants to Help You Harness Your Creativity

they say to themselves, I'm not creative, I'm the logical one, I am the left brain. That is not true first of all, because to be creative or to be extremely analytical, both parts of your brain have to work in tandem. And the creative spirit and the creativity of people is within us. But why we kill it is because we are conditioned by standardized test. We are measured in ways that do not appreciate that we make waves and that we express our minds and that we say things, we are also minimized by formal education. Everybody has this insane amount of ideas worth millions of dollars inside of them and they never get to see the light of day because they are consistently listening to the buzz outside of their heads instead of pressing and pushing through. Not every idea is going to be the hit that you were expecting, but many of them will be, and you don't pursue them because society and culture says that's not creative.

Menendez: You're offering, as I interpreted the book, two different approaches, which is: one, is you can bring this creativity, this approach to creativity to really anything you do, to anything you're doing early. You may love your job and you could still be better at your job, you could still bolster your business if you began thinking in a more dynamic way. It also provides a lot of tools for people who I think hit that inflection point, where they want to try something new, whether that means something new within the industry they're already in or something completely devastatingly new. Where do you start? If that all seems so overwhelming of all the tools and the tricks and the tips that you lay out, where do you begin?

Brito: I think you should always start with your vision and your authenticity, and that goes back to what I was talking about and it's overwhelming. But I think that each one of us has a dream. And that dream could be realized whether you are an employee in a company or if you just want to start something new or you're just graduating from college or from your MBA. And by writing down with pen and paper the things that we have dreamed about, the visions that we have for our careers and ourselves, we have a much more clear path. And that's without censoring, right? Because again, because of our surroundings and cultural limitations and societal impositions, we start diminishing ourselves even in front of a paper that nobody else is going to see is just for you. And a lot of this ideas that I write in the book about vision are very intertwined with the idea of ambition, because it's like, it's important to have something so big that you're like, I can't wait to materialize this. And it might be crazy big, but you have to start thinking backwards what are the steps that will get me there and how do I start with something. I mean, the worst thing that can happen is that you never take a step. And that is what I want to prevent is, ideas are a dime a dozen, but I want you to start somewhere and I want you to start having a tactile experience with a piece of paper and a pen.

Menendez: One part of How Creativity Rules the World that made my hands sweat was where you talk about how any great artist, any great creative also fails.

Brito: Yes.

Menendez: When has that been true for you?

Brito: Look, I fail all the time. The truth is, I mean, I gave an example on that book how one of my initial sales ended up in auction, which is one of the death sentences really in the art world is when you sell someone to a client and it shows up at auction, that gallery or that dealer will blacklist you forever. And it happened to me very early on in my career because I didn't do enough due diligence and I was eager to make the money and to please the Latina to Latina: Art Advisor Maria Brito Wants to Help You Harness Your Creativity

client. And I lost that relationship with that dealer. I couldn't save it. It's been a long time. I learned of the failure. It has not happened to me anymore. I have had certain instances where my gut feeling tells me something is wrong and I still move forward, man, and I pay that so bad. Intuition also has a whole chapter because it is so important to actually not only develop it, but listen to it for real. And it is an incredible part of being creative because it means that it's always guiding you towards the things that you can accomplish. And I think that since failure is something that is labeled by society too. Instead of failures, they should be called teachings or I don't know, lessons, I don't know what. Life has a funny way. I mean, you have to learn your lesson or else is going to keep showing up.

Menendez: I have one last question for you, which is to your point, the art world is built to keep people out. It's not built to have as many people in as possible. For a Latina who is listening, who wants to begin collecting, who wants to begin curating her own art collection, who doesn't have a celebrity budget. Where does one begin?

Brito: The world of art really has changed tremendously in the past 10 years. And the access right now is what I dreamt when I started. And it has only gotten better in the past five. There are, for example, a variety of young art fairs that not only have physical establishments, but also online. And so you don't even have to get out of your house. You can see it online and play it and put on the cart, pay and get your thing shipped to you. And those are excellent places to start looking because they show you a variety of artists and galleries and curators and things like that. And if you are in the cities where they go, which are usually New York and LA, then you can show up in person and see the thing. And there are also tons and tons of galleries in Miami, in Dallas. And everywhere, there are galleries that are supporting young talent because that is the hottest thing right now is like this covering the next big thing or going after this hot, fresh voice. And so to all Latina friends who are listening, do not be afraid of going to these galleries and asking for the prices and asking to be put on the mailing list and be engaged with the local community as well and ask questions, where is this artist going? Did he or she or them go to school? Are they being collected? Are they showing in little museums in the states? And things like that. So those are the questions to ask and you don't really need to have a celebrity budget. You can really start with nothing and build your way. Start with one thing, save money, have it aside, and then buy something else two, three months down the line, right? I mean, look, fashion is expensive and it really doesn't last forever, but the art does.

Menendez: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Brito: Thank you.

Menendez: Thank you as always for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Manuela Bedoya is our marketing lead. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer and mix this episode. We love hearing from you, it makes our day. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram, tweet us @latinatolatina. Check out our merchandise that is on our website latinatolatina.com/shop. And remember, please subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you are listening right now. Every time you share this podcast, every time you share an episode, every time you leave a review, it helps us to grow as a community.

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