PLAY

PLAY is not a break from creating—it's one of the best ways humans unlock their creativity. Many artists treat PLAY as a 'serious' tool, not a distraction.

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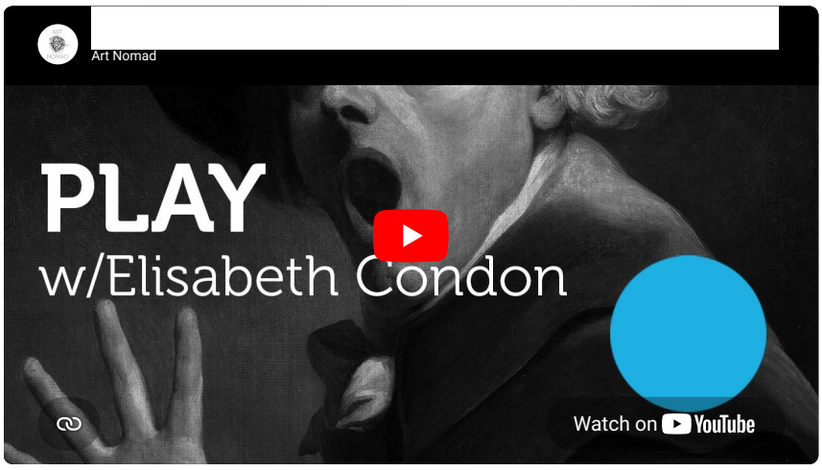
This week, we explore the world of art and creativity through the eyes of those who love to play. Our guest is Elisabeth Condon. She was smoking cigarettes before she could light a match, and while most of us begin speaking around age one, she didn't utter a word until she was four. Somewhere between that early silence and a strict Christian Science upbringing, a vivid imagination took root—fueling the playful curiosity that would later define her work.

Watch our PLAY podcast on YouTube:



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Artists & PLAY

The list of playful artists runs deep. And there is a reason for that.

Children play because they don't know any better.
Artists play because they know there's no better way.

Research shows that play helps people generate more original ideas by encouraging experimentation, curiosity, and flexible thinking. In other words, play makes it easier for the mind to wander, connect unlikely dots, and discover something new. (For more on the research, look up psychologist Alice Isen.)

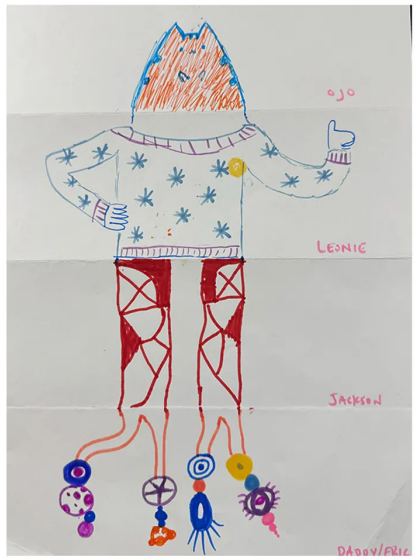
If you're looking for simple ways to play more often, introduce a little novelty into your day. Take a different route to work. Experiment with a new medium. Learn a simple magic trick. Doodle during a phone call. Spend fifteen minutes making something purely for the fun of it.

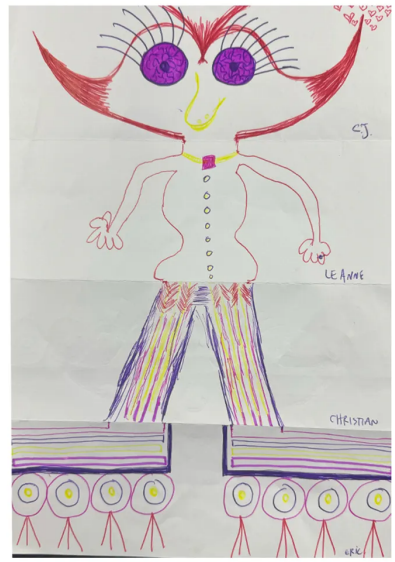
Play thrives when there is no pressure to perform. And fortunately, there is an endless list of ways to invite more of it into your life.

"Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father."
— Roger von Oech

Something for the kids

Kids don't get nearly as much exposure to the arts as they once did. So here's a little something to spark their imagination…The Exquisite Corpse drawing game:





This is something the entire family (and friends) can get in on. It strips away the pressure to perform and turns drawing into humorous, collaborative PLAY. Here is a link that shows you how to play the game.

If you know any parents who might like this, please share with them.

Playgrounds for everyone

If you come across a Carsten Höller exhibit, go. Whether it's slides, giant dice, upside-down glasses, or mushrooms, he has a knack for turning museums into playgrounds.

Höller argues that engaging with his art is about letting go—forcing all of us to abandon that "serious" museum behavior for immediate, physical PLAY.

Marcel Duchamp loved to PLAY

I'm putting a spotlight on Marcel Duchamp because MoMA currently has a fantastic retrospective of his work. If you're in New York, it's well worth a visit.

Duchamp loved to play. He famously bought a urinal from a plumbing supply store, signed it, and called it Fountain. He also took a cheap postcard reproduction of the Mona Lisa and added a mustache and goatee to it.

Duchamp called works like these Readymades, and they fundamentally changed the course of modern art. He shifted the focus from pure visual pleasure to intellectual engagement, placing concept over craft.

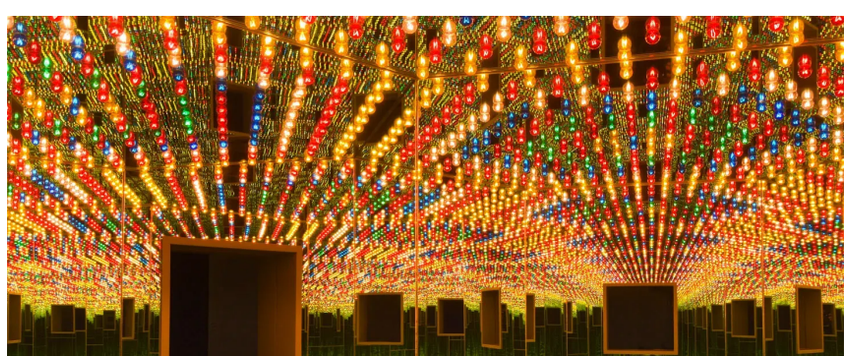
The Cubists, Dadaists, and Surrealists all tried to claim him, but Duchamp resisted being boxed in. Rather than turning himself into a predictable brand, he chose to keep exploring, experimenting, and playing. When asked what he was, he famously replied, “a breather.”

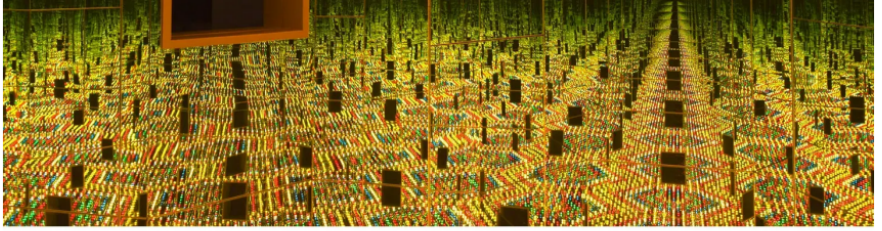
There was another dimension to Duchamp’s playfulness: chess. He loved the game so much that many people believed he had abandoned art altogether. He competed in international tournaments and argued that chess possessed a beauty comparable to art. Some art historians even suggest that the strategic, playful thinking required by chess influenced his revolutionary artistic ideas.

One final rabbit hole: if you have a few minutes, look up Duchamp’s match of musical chess with John Cage. It’s one of those wonderful moments where art, music, games, and experimentation all collide.

PLAY is good for business

Museums have increasingly embraced interactive experiences because visitors spend more time with exhibits when they’re encouraged to explore, experiment, and engage.

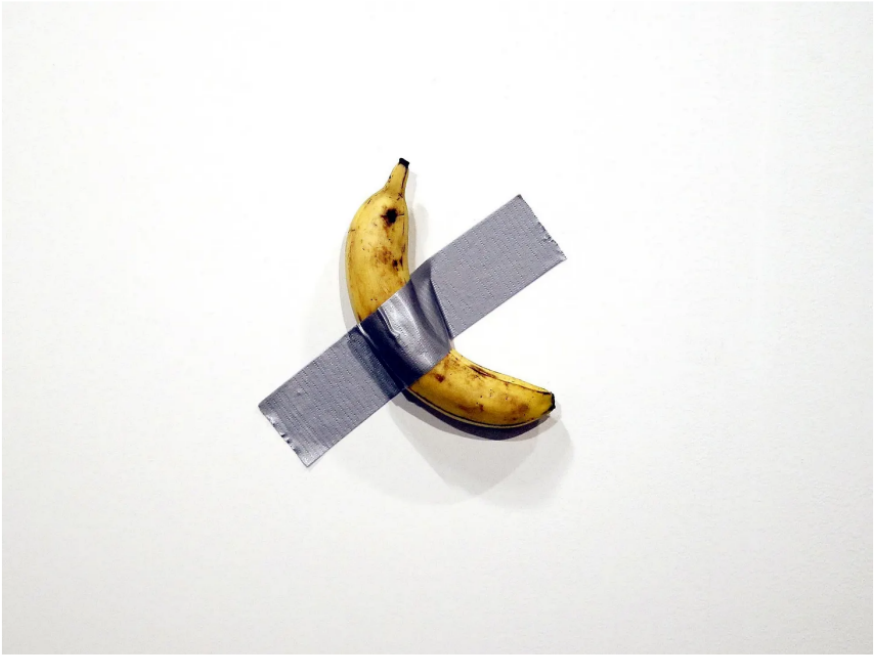




Infinity Mirror Room by: Yayoi Kusama

But the deeper story is that people are hungry for participation. We don't just want to observe the world—we want to interact with it. That's why so many artists and museums are inviting us to touch, move, listen, contribute, and PLAY.

$6.2 Million for this banana. Is that right?



This piece, Comedian, by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, sold for $6.2 million. Cattelan insists it's not a joke, but rather a commentary on value, scarcity, and the systems we create around objects. Is that really the case? I'll leave that up to you.

POLL

COMEDIAN (a banana taped to a wall) IS:

- Not art.
- Art, but not good for the art world
- Great for the art world.

Regardless of what you think about the duct-taped banana, it's no longer just a work of art. It's become a cultural reference point. The piece has escaped the gallery walls and entered the mainstream.

It appeared in a Super Bowl commercial last year alongside Kris Jenner, Chris Pratt, and Chris Hemsworth:

And now it's showing up in advertising for The Ordinary, which is selling bananas for considerably less than $6.2 million—but still a lot more than 30 cents:

The taped banana is everywhere: on social feeds, t-shirts, necklaces, magnets, coffee mugs—even Brooke Shields' forehead.

Pablo Picasso said, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child."

This is a young Picasso painting like Raphael:

This is an older Picasso painting like a child:

The beginning of the end

Yes, it's that time. Here are some quick hit links all about PLAY. Rapid fire…but nobody gets hurt:

PLAY JOKE
Q: Why did the artists bring a ladder to the playground?
A: Because they wanted to take their work to the next level.

(Not very good, but I had a really hard time finding something better)

PLAY GAME
See the Exquisite Corpse above.
Another one is artist Gabriel Orozco's ping pong table:

PLAY SONG
Dave Grohl created "PLAY," a 23-minute instrumental rock epic where he played all seven instruments. Beyond the musical feat, Grohl also created a documentary alongside the song that explored how PLAY and dedication shape creativity.

PLAY POEM
Playthings. By: Rabindranath Tagore
Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.
I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

The full poem is here.

PLAY BOOK
Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul
By Dr. Stuart Brown

PLAY QUOTE *(another one)*
"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."
— George Bernard Shaw

The end of the end

PLAY often leads somewhere unexpected. I was chatting with AI the other day and it told me to 'Turn on the secret honeypot that is invisible to humans'. I really had no idea what Claude was trying to say, but consider that invisible honeypot no longer invisible.

If you have any PLAY art links that I missed, please send my way…I'll make sure to get them into the next newsletter.

Thank you. If you like it…share it, stack it…make a racket!

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