

Artist Career Training helps you make a better living making art
Contact: Aletta de Wal, Artist Career Training
(650) 917-1225 (Pacific Time) | aletta@artistcareertraining.com

“The Advantages of Working With Aletta de Wal, Artist Coach”

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Hello. This is Ellene Breedlove Davis, and today I'm talking with Aletta de Wal. We're going to be talking about the advantages of working with Aletta and her Artist Career Training. So good afternoon, Aletta.

Aletta De Wal: Good afternoon. It's terrific to be here with you.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Thank you. I've been following you for a while, and I'm excited to meet you via this wonderful tool called the Internet. So if you could, before we really get started, I wanted to ask you to share your very impressive story. I would like to ask you specifically about "Drawing a Life That Matters" and the circumstances leading up to this time in your life.

Aletta De Wal: Well, that is a story that a lot more people are interested in today. I'm pushing 60, and a lot of the things that I experienced are things that we're experiencing in the Baby Boomer Generation.

When I first had gotten into art, it was Grade 4. Like everybody else, I loved it. I drew a tree wrong, according to my teacher, and I stopped doing it. So I took my parents' sensible advice, which was to focus on school, and I love to read, as I was saying to you earlier. Got into school, got a good education, worked my way through a series of jobs in banking when that was still a good thing to do, and ended up with a really huge job – staff, a heavy travel schedule. And all of that was – basically, I was pretty worn out, and I was only, at that point, in my 30s.

One day I collapsed, and I had some strange sensations that were going on in my body, and I went to a number of doctors, and they kept telling me, "Oh, it's just stress, and it's all in your head." But I knew it was more, and over a series of different events, I actually found out that what I had was neurosystemic lupus. Lupus is an autoimmune disease that affects how your body responds to illness. And essentially, the difference is, in your body, if you have a healthy body, the T cells go out and fight a cold, for example, and then they go back to rest. In my system, they attack the weak areas.

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When they diagnosed me was when I was in my late 30s, and I was in pretty bad shape, and I had two strokes as a result of lupus. In my case, lupus attacked the connective tissue, which is what your blood vessels are made of. That was really scary for me because, until then, as I mentioned earlier, my whole life was built around what I could do with my head. Suddenly I couldn't walk; I couldn't talk; I couldn't read; I couldn't do any of the things that defined me. So it took about three years of intensive physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and some psychotherapy to deal with the fact that my whole life was turned inside out.

Along the way, one day when I was going to a doctor's appointment, I had a bunch of fabulous friends who really helped me out, and one was going to take me home from a doctor's appointment. She worked nearby, and I saw this announcement for an art class that said "art for absolute beginners." And I said, "Well, that would be neat right now." So I took the class, and, again, there were a lot of other details about the class. But essentially, what it helped me discover – rediscover was art, and art really became a significant part of my healing. I would say it was one of the most significant things that helped me get back to health.

When I decided to go back to work, I thought, "I'm going to use this as a way to help other people." So it actually started when I went back to work, by going back to the kind of work I was doing – I was doing executive coaching. I helped people learn how to run teams and to problem-solve using art, it was hysterical. There were some days where my classroom looked like a kindergarten room. I had art stuff all over the place. People were laughing and having a good time, and they were learning.

Lupus is chronic, I started to get sick again. I decided, you know, this is just not where I want to go, so I decided to make another shift and really decided what I really wanted to do was make art the core of my life.

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And that's how "Drawing a Life That Matters" came about <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/drawing-a-life-that-matters>
It's a course where I use art for people who, by the way, don't have to have any drawing skills at all – but they've produced wonderful, wonderful drawings anyway – to help figure out what they want to do with the rest of their life. It's a course that I've done in different places in the United States and Canada, and actually, a lot of Europeans have taken the course as well. It's just so much fun to do, so I'm hoping to be able to schedule one again coming up soon. In fact, I could come down to Georgia and do one sometime.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Well, that sure sounds interesting. We have a wonderful place here called the Quinlan Visual Arts Center in Gainesville, and it's the centerpiece, quote-unquote, of the North Georgia arts. It's a delightful place to show and a delightful place to take classes.

Aletta De Wal: Okay.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: And so, Aletta, you certainly do come from a place of understanding the artist's life, because all of us have our ups and downs and sicknesses and sadness and whatever we all deal with. So how did you decide to create your program "Artist Career Training"?

Aletta De Wal: Well, Artist Career Training has been around since 1996, so we've actually worked with over 4,000 artists in group classes, and I've personally worked with over 400 in one-on-ones. It started as individual coaching, and then it got too big for that. So we set up telephone classes and then also e-books and various resources that I have, of recordings of classes and so on, all different ways for artists to learn. I expanded to that, but I still find that a lot of people do get the most out of the one-to-one. And interestingly enough, that's been expanding again in the last few years. So we offer all different ways, depending on how people want to learn and what their budget is of time and money, because we don't all have the luxury of doing this full time, and many of us have other duties as assigned, like care-giving for people or another job to do.

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Ms. Breedlove Davis: Personally, I haven't worked with an artist coach, but I think that it would be a great thing to do. I know that there are many readers and students that are just beginning to want to market their art. So how do you work with artists at this stage of their career?

Aletta De Wal: Let me say a little bit first about what coaching is and what it is not, because I think there's a lot of confusion about that.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: All right.

Aletta De Wal: First of all, coaching is really about clarification. I mean, when I coach people, I believe fully that they're a whole person and they just need a little help in the area of their art business. So I help do some clarification about where they are now, where they want to be, and we define the gap between those two. And then what I really love to do is find pathways to fill that gap that are specific to that artist. I don't have a cookie-cutter approach to any of this.

I give them guidance and resources. I'm a good sounding-board for opportunities. I'm a partner for problem-solving. And I guess one of the things people say the most is I'm really organized. I think I have my mother to thank for that. But also that I give people a lot of inspiration and encouragement to keep going, because you have to be able to persevere when you're an artist, and also to remember to celebrate when you get through.

What coaching is not is, it's not therapy. It's not representation. I don't actually represent artists. I don't get leads for them; I show them how to find them. I'm not a replacement for action either. Some people think, "I'll just take one more course, and that'll work." So there's no magic bullet.

But the way that I help artists is, first of all, I ask them what their goals are. It's really important for you to ask yourself questions like, "What do I want from my career? Do I want to go past enjoying making a living, making art, and make it my main job? Do I have to make money from my art, or is it a nice bonus? And

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if I want to make money, how much do I need to make? Do I want to just cover my materials, support myself, or support others?"

Then I look at their skills inventory, because I believe everybody comes with a lot of skill, and sometimes you just really don't know what you already have. I really think that builds artists' confidence, so I start there and then help them figure out how to leverage them. So a question to ask yourself is, "What skills do I need to get where I want to go? And do I need any help identifying the gap?"

Then we look at investment. First of all, do you invest in your art? How much do you invest in your quality art materials, your tools, and any art workshops you take? You should be willing to invest at least that amount or more in developing your business and marketing skills. Developing your art talent is life long, and so is the business side.

The next thing we look at is, what career stage are you in now, because that's important to know where you're starting from. There are specific things to do in each stage, and if you go beyond that stage, you're going to probably waste some time and money. So it's important to say, "Where am I now? What are the key things I should be doing at this stage? Or do I need help in making a transition to the next stage?" Some artists get stuck somewhere. Those are areas that I really love to help artists. Again, this is about laying out a path that's doable.

Then support's important, and we don't all have great support. My birth family, for example, my family of origin thought it was great when I was a banker; still does not think it's so cool that I work in the art business. So my support comes from elsewhere. On the other hand, you may have read in my recent *ArtMatters!* newsletter that when there are art couples that work together, that's terrific. <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs015/1101178256859/archive/1104627985732.html>

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You have to figure out what support you already have, what results you're getting from that support, and then I help artists figure out "what else do you need that you're not getting?" That can be either strategy, which is what I mainly do. If you need tactics, and maybe even some hands-on support, which my assistant Robin Sagara does for me. I like to call her the wizard behind the scenes – She's on our team, and you can read more about what she does here: <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/support-services-robin-sagara>

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Yes.

Aletta De Wal: Then the other thing we look at is systems, because it's really important not to have to keep reinventing the wheel. There's a certain number of things that you have to do over and over again, and so I like to help artists have systems for organizing and running their art business. So the question to ask there in terms of what systems you need is, "What don't I like to do? What do I have trouble with?" I mean, personally, I don't like to handle the bookkeeping and all that, so I have an accountant and bookkeeper that does all that for me so that I can attend to my art, which is making my own art and helping other artists make a living.

So those are some of the areas. Now, I do that in a number of different ways. I have one-on-one programs. <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/coaching>, group programs <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/membership-programs> and <http://artistcareertraining.com/classes-by-phone>, books and recordings, <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com>

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Oh, that would be great.

Aletta De Wal: There's one more thing I think artists should look at, whether you're going to work with me or another artist advisor, it's really important that there's a fit. There's lots of people offering art advice out there now. When Artist Career Training started, we were one of a handful. Now there are lots of artists and gallery people helping artists as well.

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And so I think there are some questions people should ask. They can read about my answers to these questions on my website, <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/coaching-questions> and under How We Work <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/how-we-work> and FAQs <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/faqs> some of the questions are: What's your training? How did you get into coaching artists? Why are you different from other art marketing advisors out there? How much do you charge? What benefits will I get so that I know what my return is on my investment? What is your process; in other words, how do you work? How long will it take? And do you do things for me, or do you tell me what to do?

These are just a few of the questions that I suggest you ask. And before you even start contacting people, make a list of what you want to learn, decide if you want to learn alone or with others, and then go ahead and make the contact. Be really thoughtful about it, and contact several people so that you have some basis for comparison, because people that work with me work with me for years. They'll work with me for a while, go away and do some things, and then come back. So I know we have a fit.

On the other hand, in order to help people decide, I have a free 15 minute call for people so that we can talk about what it is they want and whether or not I can help them. <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/request-a-consultation> There are times when I turn people away and I refer them to other people who I think will be a better fit, because ultimately I want the artist to have a good experience.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Well, I definitely think that it's advantageous to work with someone that is a good fit. So what are some of the programs that you offer through Artist Career Training?

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Aletta De Wal:

If people are interested in working in a group program, that's often a good place for people, especially emerging artists – you mentioned emerging artists at the beginning. We have several programs that we have developed, again, over the years. A couple of them are Internet-run, and then there are others where I get involved.

So for emerging artists, we have a program called Start Your Art Business. <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/start-art-business> It really covers everything you need to know to go from being an amateur artist or someone who's making art for personal pleasure and now wants to build a business foundation. And it's really important to get a solid art-business foundation before you even start thinking about marketing and getting your work out there, because you'll save yourself a lot of time, trouble, and money if you get that down.

Then if you're a little bit further ahead and you've tried some things already and you maybe have a bit of a foundation, we have a program called Build Your Art Business, <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/start-art-business> that takes you to the next level. And both of those programs include e-books that are usually about 30 pages for each unit. Each program has 12 units. I suggest artists do it once a month, but you can go faster or slower depending on the rest of your life and what else you have to do. There are recordings of live classes, and there are discussion boards where you can talk with other artists about what's going on and ask questions. I also answer questions that way, since I really believe in artists learning from each other and then the community learning from all of these questions. It's really critical at this foundational stage.

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If you're a bit further along, I have something called Develop Your Art Business <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/develop-art-business> which is a mastermind group. Once a month we get together – actually, we do it by iChat now, so we do it online, so we can see each other. It's really exciting. That's a relatively new development. We develop our own agenda for the people that are in the group. Right now we're working on social media: how to use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. And we're actually going to the sites, and I'm taking people on a little journey through each site.

There are people who are a bit further than that and they really want more problem-solving or they want more about balancing – now that they've got a healthy art business, on how to still have a life. I have a program called Mastering Your Art Business, <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/master-art-business> where I work one-to-one with established artists.

I also have a special program that's not on the Internet. It's only for people who, well, read blogs like yours, for example. And it's called Jumpstart Your Art Business <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/coaching> . There are several different programs in that, but I do one where I have specific questions and answers for people on getting started. If they want to work one-to-one and they want to accelerate, a group program may not work for them. They might like to work more one on one with me. Jumpstart Your Art Business is a really thriving program. I'm working with about 12 artists, maximum, at a time, I have a bit of a waiting list right now, but I'm working as fast as I can to help people get out there.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Well, I certainly think that this is all very helpful information if an artist wants to further their career. So I noticed that you said that you have a team?

Aletta De Wal: Yes, I do. I have a terrific team.

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Ms. Breedlove Davis: And I heard you mentioned one member of your team.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: So tell us about your ACT team.

Aletta De Wal:

Yes, I have two kinds of people on my team.

<http://www.artistcareertraining.com/the-act-team>.

One is someone who is my dedicated right hand, and I think every artist should plan to have one. I have to tell you, I get first dibs on her time. But Robin does work for my clients. Robin Sagara is my Web marketing mentor, and she also does promotional work, so she does websites for people, starting from just a brochure website right up to very fancy ones. You can see examples on our website of the ones she's developed. She's in the L.A. area, so for artists who are there, she'll go and help them at their exhibits. She's working with one of my current clients to do a terrific exhibit this month, where she'll go and help with the hanging. She'll help with the registrations. She'll handle sales. She'll make sure people get on the mailing list, and take photos.

I also have affiliates I work with in specific areas. I really believe in having experience in the areas that we work on. So I have Jeanette Smith, who works as my art licensing mentor; Patrice Federspiel, who helps people with working on their blogs and marketing in person; Bruce Haley, who does work on people's photography, particularly fine art nature photography, how to develop that, how to build workshops and so on; Margaret Danielak, who's an artist's rep, and she'll help you understand how to get one; and then Pat Fiorello, who is my art business mentor who helps people on the money side. Not people's favorite side, but we have a terrific recording in e-book on how to track your money.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Well, that certainly sounds like a great team where anyone could get the kind of information that they need to further their career. So there's one more thing that I wanted to ask you about, and that is, I noticed on your website that you have a library?

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Aletta De Wal: I do.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Could you tell us about that?

Aletta De Wal: I have two. I have a personal library that's extensive, and I can't tell you how many books I've actually given away over the years. But I have a lot. I love to read. I've been a reader since I was a kid. I have a huge art marketing and art business library.

People kept saying to me, "Do you have any books I can read on this?" and I got tired of repeating the same information, so I thought I would share that with every artist. My art business library <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com> has two sections in it: one section where I have resources – for example, ones offered by my team <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com/art-marketing> and others that I developed through my classes that I've done, things like creating your professional portfolio, <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com/your-professional-portfolio> how to manage your giclées, all of those kinds of issues that are frequent ones that artists come up with.

Then I also have books that you can buy through Amazon <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com/books-art-marketing-sales>, and it's also a nice little way for me to give back a little. Any books that artists order through that link, I get a couple of pennies for each order, and all of that goes into a scholarship fund so I can help youth programs at schools. I'm very concerned about the art programs disappearing, so one of my pet projects is doing that.

So any ideas that you have and you think, "I wonder if there's a book on that," there probably is. *[Laughter]*

Ms. Breedlove Davis: There probably is.

Aletta De Wal: And I probably own it. *[Laughter]*

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Ms. Breedlove Davis: [Laughter] I noticed that you mentioned giclées.

Aletta De Wal: Yes

Ms. Breedlove Davis: How do you feel about artists making giclées?

Aletta De Wal: It has to be part of a strategy. You can't just say, "Well, you know, I think I'm going to pop out some giclées today and see how that works." First of all, you have to decide if you're only going to sell originals or if you will also sell multiples. And a giclée is one form of multiple. In other words, you keep the original, and you make multiples of it. Some artists also sell the original. So, again, you have to make a lot of choices.

If your art – if you have certain pieces of your work that are very, very popular and you want to offer it at a different price point, at a lower price point, then giclées are a good way to do that. But some people think that it devalues your original, so you really have to think that through. And that means: What is your ultimate goal? Do you want to be in museums and galleries? If you want to be in them, I would say hold off on the multiples and do more varying sizes and price points of originals. But if you want to be more well known and maybe eventually license your work, then giclées are a really good possibility.

Once you decide on giclées, I really do recommend you go to my article and product on giclées, which is *Tiny Dots on Paper* <http://www.artbusinesslibrary.com/giclees-tiny-dots-on-paper>. There are a lot of people out there marketing that they do giclées, but many of them are simply creating copies, and that's not the same thing. So in order to do this, you need to still pay attention to the quality.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Giclées also call for a different type of marketing than original work.

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Aletta De Wal: Yes, it does. It does. Absolutely, it does. And you would do a lot of that marketing yourself through your own website and through other retail online websites. Again, then it depends on what your art is about. One artist I have who does wildlife art is very successful marketing her giclées through retail stores, like art stores or Discovery stores, places like that. You have to think about where would the collector go who's interested in the kind of art I make, and that would determine where you would market them.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Yes, these are very valuable answers. And I heard through the grapevine that you are about to publish a new book.

Aletta De Wal: *[Laughter]* I really hope so.

If anyone thinks it's easy to write a book, I am here to say it's a labor to love, and it takes a while. I've been working on it for about 18 months, and part of my dilemma was how much do I put into it so that it doesn't overwhelm people, because there's so much that I could write about.

So I'm writing several books. My first one is called *My Real Job Is Being an Artist: What You Should Know Before You Quit Your Day Job (or Get One)*, it's for the emerging artist, primarily, so the person who's saying, "Can I do this? Should I do this? What does it take?" I'm in the rewrite stages, where I send it to my editor and she goes, "This part is good; this part, not so much." *[Laughter]* So that's probably going to take me another month and a half or so. I'll be promoting it through the *ArtMatters!* newsletter <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/artmatters-newsletter> and my blog <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/act-art-marketing-blog>. So anyone who's signed up for that is sure to hear about it, because I will be celebrating. You'll probably hear me without Internet. I'll be saying "Woo-hoo!"

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Ms. Breedlove Davis: Yes, I'm sure. So what was your inspiration to write this book?

Aletta De Wal: Well, again, I kept running into a lot of things that artists kept asking me about, and some of that is in my programs, but my programs are moved much more like being on the Internet or being on the telephone. And I thought, really, especially in this economy, a lot of people are being laid off or retiring. The Baby Boomer age is really a large group right now, and a lot of those people are going into art because they always wanted to do that, or going back to it. I've been noticing I'm getting a lot more clients in that area, so I thought it would be a good topic to write about to get that information into the hands of more artists and help them make that decision.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: I'm looking forward to getting it when it's released. So I really enjoyed speaking with you today and would like to tell other people how they can find you. So do you want to go into that?

Aletta De Wal: Yes. The first thing to do is to go to Artist Career Training. <http://www.artistcareertraining.com>. If you're a browser, just browse those areas. If you're not, go there and look for information on the programs under Online and In-Person Learning. If you are interested in speaking with me directly, then please contact me by sending an e-mail to aletta@artistcareertraining.com. I'll send you a few questions to answer, and we can have a free 15-minute phone call on how you can benefit from what we have on the website. There's a lot there. I realize that. So a personal tour sometimes really helps.

To get a sample of the kinds of things that I believe in and that I teach, go to, on the right-hand side, Get the Newsletter <http://www.artistcareertraining.com/artmatters-newsletter>. When you sign up to the newsletter, you'll get a free art marketing guide, "Eleven Tips for Success for Fine Artists." It's a digital recording and a 15-page PDF presentation that I've done.

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Ms. Breedlove Davis: That is really nice. I downloaded that.

Aletta De Wal: I know that people often say that it's just a good overview, and it really gives them a first step. It's like, "Oh, I never thought of that. This maybe is the part that I've been looking for." And then sometimes they can work on their own after that, and sometimes they need a little help. But whatever route they choose, my whole mission in life is to help artists make a better living making art any way that they can.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: Yes. art is certainly something that pulls us through rough times and makes us happy in good times.

Aletta De Wal: It does. It does, and we certainly can use that any time.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: As we get ready to wind down, could you give us your Facebook information, also how to contact you on Twitter?

Aletta De Wal: Well, the easiest way is to go directly to the website, and there on the right-hand side, it says "Follow & Friend Us," and there are three icons that will take you directly there so you don't have to worry about writing down any URLs or remembering them. And you can go directly to Facebook, where I have a fan page <http://www.facebook.com/artistcareertraining> where I post things once or twice a week. I also have a personal page, <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=509640416> but I use the fan page more. Twitter, two or three times a week, I post on Twitter. <http://www.Twitter.com/#!/artmktgmentor>. I'm in probably about a dozen groups on LinkedIn. <http://www.linkedin.com/in/alettadewal>. So check out my profile there, and you can find some groups for you to get more information from other artists as well.

Ms. Breedlove Davis: I have certainly enjoyed talking with you and getting to know you, and I wish you luck with your new book and with those coming after it. *[Laughter]*