

Why blogging still matters

Heart and soul of artistry revealed in online journals

by Abby Glassenberg

A blog is an online journal that typically includes both pictures and text. Blogs have become such an entrenched part of the online community, you may be wondering if starting or continuing a blog holds relevance. The answer is a resounding yes.

For an artist, a blog can be a way to record your studio practice, share tips to help readers learn new skills, reflect on your creative journey, connect with a community, and market your work. Often your blog is the dynamic part of an otherwise static website because it's frequently updated. The new content allows visitors to see works in progress and

learn your thoughts on a wide variety of topics.

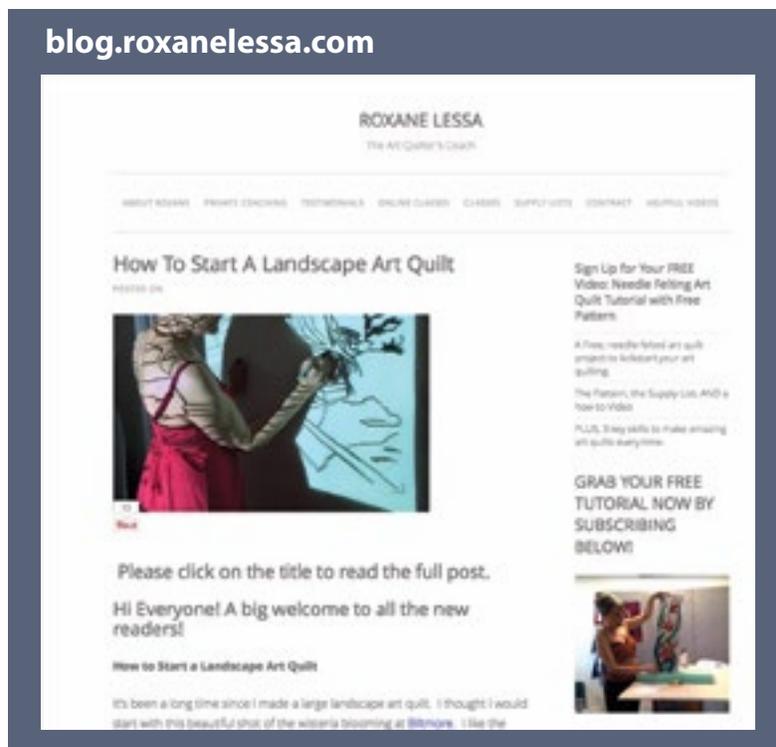
Getting started

Roxane Lessa set up her blog in June 2010 and has been posting at least once a week ever since. "I decided to start the blog to write about why and how I made my fiber art pieces," she says. "The whole point of my blog

is to inspire and teach quilters to be more adventurous and create works of their own that reflect their points of view." For Lessa, there have been no drawbacks to blogging. "I think it's very useful for me to put into words what my process is. It's helped me define my message and decide what's most important."

Blogs are created on a software platform that is specifically set up for online journaling, such as Blogger or WordPress. Learning to use the software can be a hurdle, but don't let that get in your way. Consider hiring someone for a few hours to get you started. Textile artist Ellen Lindner paid for assistance to get her started on a WordPress blog. "I got the help of a web designer to set it up because it was easy for her and it cost me very little," she says. Once it was ready, Lindner was able to easily create posts and update the blog on her own.

If you don't want to pay someone, consider asking a friend or family member to help you start a blog. Kathy Loomis worked with a friend to set up her Blogger blog. "She had a blog and sat with me for several hours





while I went through every step of the layout and design. It was great to have somebody sitting there to show me how the platform worked. It only took me a couple of days before I figured out how to add new things and improve the layout," she says.

No matter which blogging platform you choose, be sure to learn to upload images to illustrate your posts. Quilting is very visual so it's key that those images be large on the screen. Aim for 700-1,000 pixels wide.

Clara Nartey points out that starting a blog is actually the easy part. "Getting it set up was definitely not hard. What was hard, though, was showing up every week with a topic to write about."

Figuring out what to write

Once you become a blogger, you'll need an ongoing flow of content for blog posts. Many new bloggers find it helpful to brainstorm a list of potential post types that they can pull from. These might include tips or tutorials, reflections on your latest

finished work, works in progress, exhibit reviews, student work, trends and observations about the quilting world, interviews with other artists, research into art history, stories about your family or travel, and advice to other art quilters about lessons you have learned. A blog post can be very short with just an image and a few sentences, or it can be an in-depth article. This is your journal, so you get to determine the type and length of the posts.

Roxane writes about a variety of topics on her blog. "I generally write about exhibits I've seen, quilt shows I've been to, classes I've taught with examples of student work, and lots of colorful pictures to illustrate," she says. "Some posts are quick and take about 30 minutes, and some take a couple of hours." Roxane advises being generous in what you share. "The more you can share your knowledge, the more valuable you'll be to your readers. Share without fear of someone 'stealing' it. Stingy content is of no use to anyone."

For Clara, a blog is a place to explore the more emotional side of being an artist. "I write about the struggles, fears, exhilaration, rejection, and validation associated with creating," she says. "All are emotions creative people feel but sometimes don't have an avenue to express. Using my creative journey as an example, I try to make other creatives see how not uncommon their own creative journeys are."

Using Analytics to guide future content

Once you have a dozen or so posts published on your blog, you can begin to look at the data showing how many people visit and which posts are most popular. This information is available for free from Google Analytics, or, if you're using WordPress, from a plugin called Jetpack. If you have a particular tutorial that's getting more clicks than any other post, creating another tutorial on a related topic will grow your readership. By the same token, if a



blog disappear just because I'm on vacation," Kathleen says.

Many artists fear that blogging will be a time-consuming task that will take them away from their studio work. Clara once felt that way. "When I first considered blogging, I thought I could never find the time to do it. I couldn't find enough time to create art. How, then, was I going to blog?" She realized that the trick was to come up with a realistic schedule she could stick with. "It's better to set a schedule that's comfortable for you than one that you will not be able to keep. A schedule helps at the beginning because we're creatures of habit. After you've formed the habit of writing, you can relax your schedule as needed. It takes a while to figure out what you're comfortable writing about, so don't give up too soon."

particular post has gotten a lot of comments or Facebook shares, that's a good indication that you should create more content in a similar vein.

Once you get into the groove of blogging, you can determine how frequently you would like to post. Some bloggers publish new content three or four days a week while others might update their blogs three or four times a month.

Some bloggers decide on content spontaneously according to what they're working on or thinking about on a particular day, while others prefer a more structured schedule. Keeping a simple editorial calendar where you can jot down post ideas for the days and weeks to come is a great way to stay organized.

It's a good idea to publish on a regular schedule. Roxane says, "Consistency is key, because then your followers see you as reliable and trustworthy." Clara echoes this sentiment. "Although I know my readers will forgive me if I miss my schedule, I like to stick to it," she says. "It helps me be organized and keeps me accountable to my readers to have an

expectation of receiving an article at regular intervals."

If you're going to be traveling for a period of time, you can write posts in advance and schedule their publication. "If I'm planning a long trip away from home, I get my posts done in advance. I don't like to have the



The benefits of blogging

Although blogging does take time and effort, the rewards can be numerous. Many artists use their blogs as a tool to reflect on their work and solidify their thinking. Clara says, “Blogging has helped me articulate better what I do and why I do it. As much as you may think you know why you do something, you will be surprised how much you learn about yourself when you sit down to write about it. Blogging helps you sort out and synthesize your thoughts.”

Blogging can also be a way to connect with a community of people who share your interests, no matter where they might live in the world. Deborah Boschert started her blog in 2004 at a time when her family was relocating frequently due to her husband’s military service. “Building local relationships was difficult, but online there are no barriers,” she says. Over time Deborah has shared stories about her family, travel, and art making and has seen numerous benefits from connecting with her community in this way. “My audience isn’t just buying my artwork, they’re buying my ideas, teaching style, and experience,” she says. Kathleen has found similar benefits of connecting with an online community. “Through my blog I keep in touch with my art pals, and I make new art pals. I act as a mentor or guide to lots of people. Many people say they like my online personality and feel they know me even though we’ve never met.”

A blog can also serve as a living portfolio that can help you get new career opportunities as an artist. A popular blog can raise your visibility in the fiber art world, promote your

teaching career, and lead to paid work. Through relationships made on her blog, Deborah was invited to contribute to *12x12*, a book published by Lark Crafts in 2011. When quilts from the book were exhibited at International Quilt Festival Houston that year, hers was included.

Finding and keeping up with blogs

If you’re fairly new to blogging, it’s helpful to become a regular reader of other blogs in your niche. There is no holistic directory of blogs, so the best

*You will be surprised
how much you
learn about yourself
when you sit down
to write about it.*
—Clara Nartey

thing to do is to visit the websites of artists you like and look to see if they have a blog. If you find an artist on Facebook or Instagram, take a moment to click over to their website to investigate.

Keep up with new blog posts from the bloggers you follow with a feed reader such as Bloglovin’ or feedly. These readers are free services that create an ongoing digest of the latest posts of the blogs you follow so you can see them all in one place. Both Bloglovin’ and feedly have mobile

apps that allow you to read the latest posts from the blogs you follow on your smartphone as well. In the process of reading blogs, you’ll inevitably discover new post topics you would like to write about on your own blog.

Driving traffic to your blog

A blog is a public journal, and most bloggers would like to have readers visit to read and interact with their content, but readers don’t just flood in once you begin a blog. You will have to do some ongoing work to bring them to your posts.

Consider what people might be searching for when they do a Google search related to art quilting. Try to include those keywords in your post titles so that your blog post comes up in online searches. This is part of search engine optimization—the science of how websites are ranked in search results.

You also can drive traffic to your blog by linking to your posts from other social media channels. If you have a Facebook artist’s page, post an image and excerpt from your latest blog post and a link back to it. Pinterest is a strong traffic driver to blogs. Well-lit photos with a vertical orientation do best on Pinterest, so try to include at least one Pinterest-optimized image in each post. Even if you’re not active on Pinterest yourself, your readers will pin your posts to their own boards and that action will drive traffic back to your site.

Invest in blogging

When you first begin blogging, it can feel like you’re talking to an empty room. If you can find value in having

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