



"CRAVING CREATIVITY"

By *Julie Potter*



Hi, I'm Julie, an artist from Sligo. I studied art at third level and attained a first-class honours at GMIT, Galway. I also got student of the year but still, I came out of my degree year feeling unsure about where to go or what to do.

I chose the safe option, to teach and studied at NCAD.

I 'felt the fear and did it anyway' and went on to get a job at an all-boys secondary school in Dublin. I am naturally quite introverted and quiet spoken so it was intimidating, to say the least. But I believed the more I did it the more natural it would become. However, it strangely never did. I became very good at managing my classes, but even after 11 years it still never came easily to me.

This is what led me to do a bit of soul-searching. After waking up early one Sunday with the Sunday blues I realized I had completely lost my own connection with creativity. I had gone from being an art student to an art teacher, taking on the responsibility of the curriculum, while pushing my creative self to one side. Even though it was a creative subject I was teaching, it was just not the same somehow.

I think it was in my 7th year of teaching that one day after work I began experimenting with bleaching an image on a t-shirt. I was thinking about giving it as a present to my sister. After deciding she probably wouldn't wear it, I figured I could put it into a frame so it would become a piece of art.

My relationship with bleach began that day.

I was smitten. I used every free class I had to lock my art room door and experiment with painting with bleach, dyes, different fabrics. I was creating and framing work with no plan for what I was going to do with them. I applied for an exhibition space and this led to my first solo show 'Calm in the Chaos' which was a huge success.

I continued having exhibitions while teaching full time. I found that it had invigorated me on a personal level which was obviously good for me as a teacher but also made me a little envious of people who got to do something they loved and that came naturally to them on a full-time basis.



While all this had been going on I had always been transforming my art room. I had inherited a room that was once an old dingy metal workroom, a huge space but not very inspiring. I began hanging students work, painting old desks, putting up displays all around the school.

A visitor from Dulux walked into the classroom on 'Open night' and asked would I be interested in some free cans of paint. I got so excited. I used any free class I had to either paint my bleach art or paint a wall in the school. I became hooked on the satisfaction I got from creating something tangible from an idea.

I started to think that if we could make the corridors more attractive and organized by using colour coding to indicate queuing areas etc we may be able to make an impact on the student's wellbeing and behavior.

I was off. I now had a chance to do what I loved with even more reason and intent behind it.

Students started to notice, they began to do work with me. It was such an exciting time, transforming our everyday environment. The more comments the students and staff made about it the more I thought:

'Imagine this was my job, imagine if I could transform other schools full time'

Of course, I didn't think it was possible. How could I tell my mother that I was leaving the safe, pensionable teaching job?

I eventually made the decision to take a career break to pursue all these avenues my heart craved, with no responsibility for anyone but myself.

This has led me to create 'Julie the Genie – Inspiring Environments' to replace my day job. I'm now over a year transforming school environments all over the country while also working in my gorgeous art studio on my bleach paintings and I can honestly say I've never been happier or busier.

Find Julie on
'Julie The Genie' –
<https://www.juliethegenie.com>
'Julie Potter Art'
<https://www.juliepotterart.com>