

THE TIMES

ARTS

Could you create one new thing every day? Meet the artists who do

If you are making new year's resolutions, skip the usually doomed pledges to eat less and work out more and try a promise to make, says the Times art critic Laura Freeman



The artist Emma Carlow
CIRCE HAMILTON FOR THE TIMES

[Laura Freeman](#) | Wednesday January 03 2024, 5.00pm, The Times

On a grey December morning the tangerine-painted kitchen of the artist Emma Carlow is filled with birdsong. It isn't coming from the stepped garden outside, with the Lewes train steaming behind. It is coming from Emma as she blows into a succession of bird whistles. There are owls and cockerels, birds of paradise and all manner of fanciful fowl.

I came across Carlow's work for the first time at last year's Royal Academy summer show. It's hard to stand out among the thousand-odd works on display, but Carlow's cabinet of curiosities, her whistling *wunderkammer*, did: shelf upon shelf of tiny ceramic whistles in the shape of bears, lions, pigs, baboons, snails and a miniature aviary of birds. There were just fewer than a hundred creatures in Carlow's glass-fronted case. This turned out to be only a fraction of the total: 365

whistles, one for every day, one made every day for a year.

If you are making new year's resolutions this week, make a resolution to *make*. Not the usually doomed pledges to lose weight, eat less or work out more, but a promise to create one new thing every day.



Ceramic Whistles, made by Carlow
GRAHAM CARLOW

The whistle year started almost by chance. The very day Carlow formed her first clay whistle a friend made a joke about “a whistle a day” and it planted a seed. Carlow resolved to shape a whistle every morning after breakfast — at this table, in fact, where we’re having coffee, with Carlow’s cat, Squid, asleep on the chair beside us. “The beauty of doing something every day is that you don’t get attached to it,” Carlow says. “It’s not an end product. If it doesn’t work out — although they do all work — it doesn’t matter.” She chose whistles because “they’re such a worldwide thing”. She has done a lot of research into folk art and every culture has its whistles. The Italians have them, as do the Russians and the Mexicans. East Sussex now has an unparalleled collection. Keep up on Instagram as Carlow breathes life into each new creation: [@emmacarlow](https://www.instagram.com/emmacarlow).

Small is good. The whistles can sit in the palm of one hand with room to spare. They remind me of Japanese *netsuke*. When Carlow puts one of her whistles — a monkey-like creature with a

smaller companion in its pouch and another on its back — on the table, the packet of chocolate digestives looms over it like the Tower of Pisa. Each whistle is made by joining two pinch pots. “Like a little, hollow owl pellet.”

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The outsides might be wonderfully, wildly different but the notes they play are similar because the sound depends on the size of the hollow, and as they are moulded around Carlow’s fingers, the width and therefore the note stay much the same. Carlow’s entire “studio” fits on one little green-plastic tray. It had to be portable. She wanted something she could take to her in-laws’ house for Christmas. Smallness has other advantages: the cost of materials is modest and, although there aren’t many inches of wall space to spare in Carlow’s kitchen, which is bright with prints, paintings and ceramics, storage isn’t an issue.



JANICE McDONALD

The collage artist and graphic designer Janice McDonald would agree about size. She is based in Denver, Colorado, but I see her so often — daily, in fact — that she feels like a next-door neighbour. For Christmas 2018 she was given a small page-a-day diary. “April 1 arrived,” she tells me over email, “and I noticed the little book shoved to the back of my desk, still empty.”

There were always paper fragments left over from her larger collages, and she thought she might try making a smaller collage each day using a page of the diary as her canvas, so the book wouldn’t go to waste. She never set out to keep to a “streak”, but she found the diary format “surprisingly motivating”.



McDonald found the diary format "surprisingly motivating"

JANICE McDONALD

Carlow did her whistles with coffee in the morning as a warm-up exercise; McDonald did hers for 15-30 minutes as "a simple wrapping-up-the-day process". She became "quickly hooked" and started posting each day's page on Instagram ([@janicemcdonaldart](https://www.instagram.com/janicemcdonaldart)), which is where I came across her. Very occasionally she forgets to post a picture and "quite sweetly, people reach out to ask if I am OK". You might think that the compositions would become stuck and samey, but what delights me as a follower is that each acrobatic abstract seems to cartwheel on to the page with complete freedom and spontaneity. McDonald tells me that the "creative momentum" has carried over into other projects.

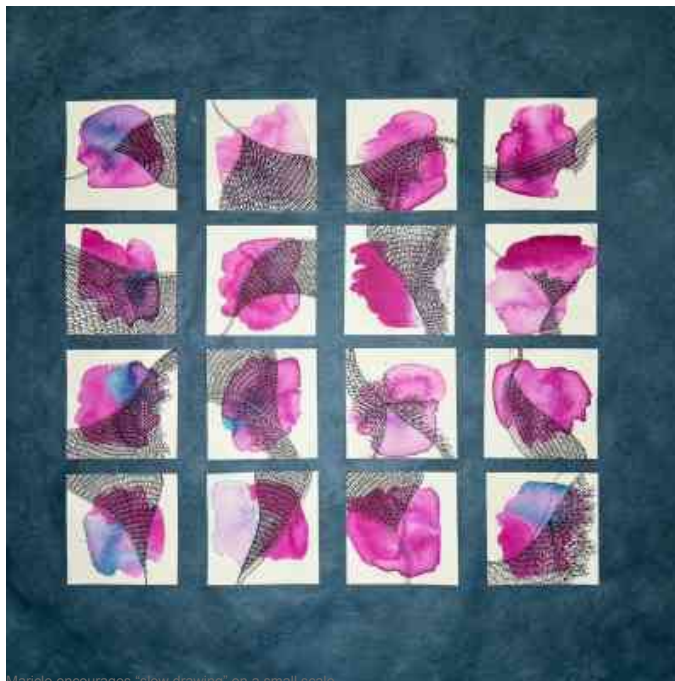
Next April will be her fifth anniversary. Has she ever missed a day? Only once, "after a huge tree fell onto our house in a storm, damaging the house and totalling my car. Seemed like a good excuse." She says there is no sense of duty or "drudgery" and that she always finds time. For years she had a quote by Julia Cameron, the author of *The Right to Write*, pinned on her wall: "The myth that we must have 'time' — more time — in order to create is a myth that keeps us from using the time we do have. If we are forever yearning for 'more' we are forever discounting what is offered."

When travelling she keeps the diary in a pouch along with a glue stick and a burnishing tool. She tears, rather than cuts, her papers so doesn't need scissors. She has done collages on an airline tray table at 35,000ft. At home she works at a table — "A little zone quite apart from my more chaotic studio space" — with a shelf above that carries a stack of magazines and a few trays of paper tearings. "It's very easy to start and clean up." She tells people who feel inspired to begin such a project not to beat themselves up if they miss a day. It's a pause, not a lapse.



Amy Maricle with her "inchies" — works of art on inch-square paper

Amy Maricle uses the phrase "flexible structure". She makes small works several times a week, not militantly every day. Maricle started by making "inchies" — works of art on inch-square paper — when she saw quilters working with tiny squares. She keeps a small journal, a pen and watercolour paper in her bag. "At moments where I might have pulled out my phone to scroll or check emails, instead I continue a small drawing I'm working on."



Maricle encourages "slow drawing" on a small scale

Inchies don't have to be quickies. Maricle encourages "slow drawing" on a small scale. "I walk

in the woods, on the beach and in my neighbourhood looking for patterns that light me up.” It might be lichen or moss or the lines the waves leave in the sand. Maricle is on Instagram too (@amymaricle). She tends to work on loose paper, not in a bound book, and it’s exciting to see the posts where several weeks of “play” come together and you see patterns begin to appear that weren’t obviously there from day to day.

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All three artists use the same two words: “love” and “fun”. Their daily making is not a burden or a chore. On the train back to London from Lewes, positively whistling with enthusiasm, I am full of resolve: a work of art a day for all of 2024. With the occasional forgivable pause? I will report back this time next year.

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