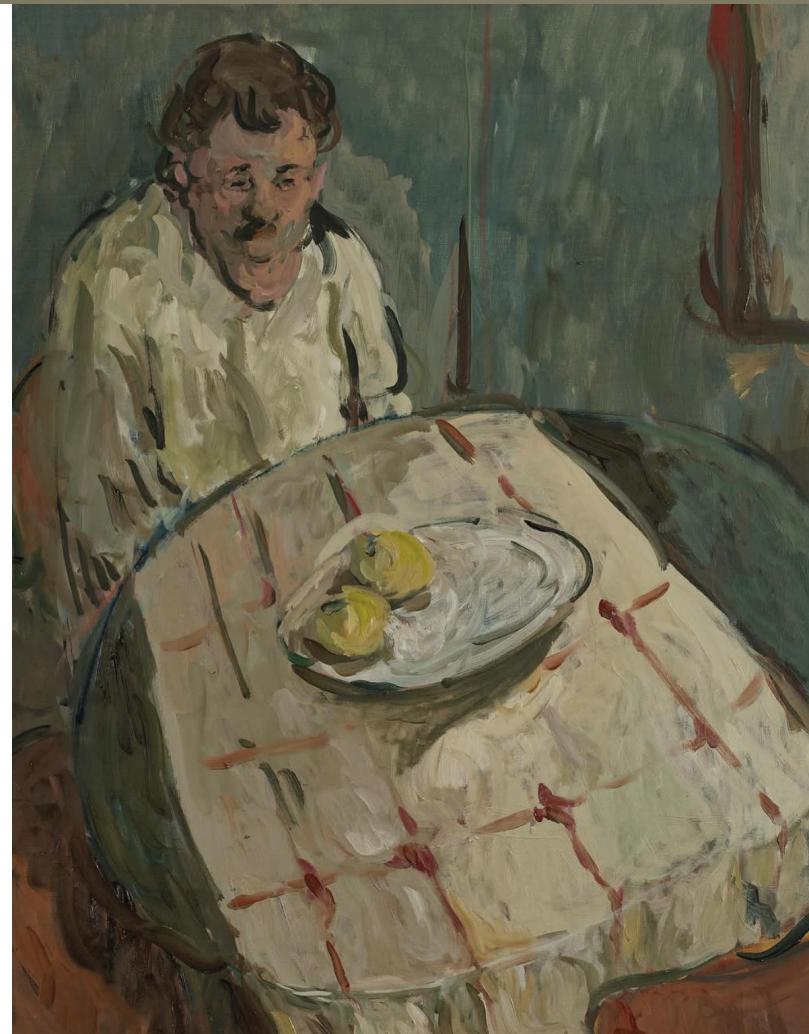




Ajea Zahid

Tricks and tips from Ajea Zahid,
a Bold Voice in Contemporary Pakistani Art



The artist's studio: is a separate space necessary for productive work? What are the absolute essentials in your working space? What advice would you give to emerging artists in terms of setting up a studio/working space?

A separate studio space isn't always necessary, but it can be incredibly valuable.

A dedicated space allows one to immerse in the work without distractions giving an artist the freedom to experiment and develop a rhythm.

However, it can also be necessary to learn to adapt, such as working in smaller, makeshift spaces when needed, and sometimes that limitation pushes you to find new creative solutions. My workplace, where I teach, gives me the freedom to bring my own work if I can manage, and I often tend to bring smaller-scale surfaces that help me with my own creative exploration rather than staying always in my studio.

For me, the absolute essentials in a working space are good lighting, enough room to move around freely – as I find it really hard to sit in one and the same place for long hours – and materials that allow for experimentation. Since my process involves layering, working quickly, and an intuitive approach to color, I also need wall space to step back and assess multiple works at once. Sketchbooks or small surfaces nearby for quick studies help me loosen up before committing to a canvas.

Earning a living from art: what steps are necessary to make a living selling artwork? Please share your experience of developing a website/social media pages, communication with wider audience and potential buyers, working with online and offline galleries, etc.

Earning from art requires a combination of artistic growth, visibility, and relationship-building. While talent and dedication to your craft are crucial, sustaining a career involves understanding the business side of the art world as well as presentation of work, understanding the market, connecting with audiences, and navigating the spaces where art is valued and sold.

In my case, I primarily sell through exhibitions rather than through online platforms, as exhibitions provide a space for engagement. Working with galleries has helped me connect with collectors and curators who invested in my work, and these relationships are important for building credibility.

I primarily use Instagram to document my process and share insights into my practice. It's not just about showcasing finished work but allowing people to see a bit behind the scenes, like what I'm exploring, struggling with, or experimenting on. This kind of transparency creates a deeper connection, making the work feel more personalised and accessible.

Staying inspired: please tell us what you do to keep being an inspired creative. Is it necessary to take breaks from your work? How can an artist maintain their creative curiosity? Does your inspiration come from within or outside?

For me, inspiration isn't something that strikes randomly; it's something I actively nurture through observation and engagement with my surroundings. I like to stay immersed in the world, constantly sketching, reading, and reflecting on moments that resonate with me. A lot of my inspiration comes from simple observation of my surroundings. I tend to sketch instinctively without the pressure of turning every drawing into a final piece of work. These sketches often become the initiation point for my paintings, carrying a raw, unfiltered quality that I later build upon.

The act of painting itself is also where I often find my inspiration. Sometimes, it's not about having a clear vision before starting, but about trusting the process. There have been many times where the unpredictability of paint leads the way.

At the same time, I also recognize that creative energy isn't infinite. There are moments when I step away from painting because I need space to let ideas settle. Breaks are necessary – they allow thoughts to breathe and transform.

Teaching has also kept me engaged in ways I didn't expect. Being in a space where conversations about art are constantly unfolding challenges me to think about my own work. It's interesting to see young artists approach their practice, what they're questioning, what excites them. In a way, these dialogues feed back into my own process by pushing me to consider different perspectives as well.

Ultimately, it is about remaining open, keeping looking, and letting the work evolve in its own time.



What are your How-To's and Tips for beginners on how to gain visibility, promote artwork, establish connections with galleries, and start monetizing their art?

Everything that I have learned from my experience is really all about being persistent, putting yourself in the right spaces, and not getting caught up in comparing yourself with other people.

Document everything – Capture your process, from sketches to finished pieces. People connect with the story behind the work, not just with the final product. Even if you don't share everything, documentation can still be incredibly valuable for you at some point.

Have an online presence – The world has gotten pretty digital. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook can be powerful for artists to engage with the world. Don't get caught up in the idea of not having a huge following. Treat your platforms as your digital diaries, more for yourself than for others. That will automatically bring a certain level of honesty which people will easily be able to see.

Take every opportunity you get – Research galleries that align with your style and email them with a well-curated portfolio. Keep in touch with pages like ArtConnect that regularly post open calls for exhibitions and residencies. Don't underestimate the power of group shows.

Focus on building relationships with collectors, curators, and gallery owners who can facilitate sales.

Base your pricing on factors like – the cost of materials, the current market value of similar works, the trajectory of your career, and exhibition history. Since relying solely on art sales can be unpredictable, especially when starting out, it's important to seek additional income streams that support, rather than overshadow, your practice. I emphasize support because your creative work should remain the core focus. To build a sustainable career, you need to consistently dedicate time to your art, ensuring that financial pressures don't pull you away from growth and exploration.

Be intentional about where you show your work – Exposure is great, but not all visibility leads to meaningful opportunities, and don't be afraid of rejection. I've applied to countless opportunities; many didn't work out, but the ones that did were transformative.

Stay authentic – Trends come and go, but your unique perspective is what will make people connect with your work in the long run.