

THE NEXT ACT | LIFE STORIES

THE ARTIST

Sue Kreitzman, 73

Living art

ONE EVENING SHE SUDDENLY DECIDED TO GIVE UP HER CAREER AS AN ACCLAIMED CULINARY AUTHOR TO BECOME AN OUTSIDER ARTIST.

I'm living an art-saturated life. Life is art. Art is life.

That's what it's all about. But I only began living this life in 1999. Back then, I was professional food writer and cook. I made healthy food that was incredible sexy and delicious. For years, I cooked on daytime television for the BBC and ITV. And I never really got tired of it because there's always some kind of inspiration with food. I was always fiddling with things and trying new ways of cooking something so that it would taste fabulous but it wouldn't be all fatty and sugary. It was wonderful.

Then one evening I was sitting upstairs editing the proofs of my twenty-seventh cookbook. So I'm sitting there and my hand picked up a marker and drew a mermaid on a piece of scrap paper. And it was very kind of primitive, folk arty, very tribal. It was incredible. I looked at it. It looked at me. And it changed my life. I became a completely different person. All of my obsession with food was gone. My agent thought I had lost my mind.

This is an absolutely true story and I still don't understand it. I became obsessed with drawing - day and night. It could have been the menopause. It could have been



a psychotic break. Or the muse bit me in the bum. I don't know. From then on, I was drawing day and night with markers. And then one day I was walking through the market and I saw these beautiful nail varnish bottles for very little money. Then I was painting with nail varnish, using the little tiny brush and the little tiny bottle. I eventually started painted with acrylics, but I still use nail varnish to finish them off because I like the shine of it.

And then I started making memory jugs and assemblages. They represent different goddesses and creatures. These are mine. They are my own weird constructions.

Over the years, I always wore colourful clothes. But now, I design my own clothes and I make my own neckpieces. So I now curate myself. I'm a piece of assemblage art.

At school I was always told that I was very bad at art. My mother expected me to be good at everything. I tried to be good at everything, but at art I always failed. I couldn't draw what they wanted me to draw. I couldn't even doodle. I knew that I was hopeless even though I'd always loved colour, always loved other's art, always loved collecting bits and pieces.

I don't care if people think it's good or bad or mediocre or stupid. That's not the point. The point is: it's come out of somewhere in me. That's it. It comes not from the head. Not from the heart. It comes from the gut. And that's the beauty of it.

I'm not really an old lady, I'm just

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disguised as one. I do a lot public speaking with young people. And I tell them, we are you - if you are lucky to get to this point! What's the alternative?

When my mother was my age, she'd been dead for thirty five years. She died when I was in my twenties. And my father died the year after.

Getting old is a fantastic thing. I've done a lot in my life. I've seen a lot in my life. I can't complain about being old. When I leave I will have left a lot of memories, and things, and stuff.

Age doesn't matter. If your arthritis bites, you take a pill. You keep going. It's not a problem. It's a great privilege. It is the most wonderful adventure.

This is the last in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine and at www.nextact.ft.com.

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