

However you frame yourself as an artist,  
the frame is too small.

## What We Tell Ourselves



We have stories about ourselves,  
and those are not who we are.  
We have stories about the work,  
and those are not what the work is.

All our efforts to make sense of ourselves and our art are a smoke screen,  
an obfuscation. They don't illuminate what is. They mislead us. We have no  
way of knowing what is insignificant and what is essential, or what our  
contributions mean.

We tell ourselves varying stories of who we are and how the work gets  
made. But none of them matter.

All that matters is the work itself. The art that actually gets made and how  
it's perceived.

You are you.

The work is the work.

Each person in the audience is themselves. Uniquely so.

None of it can truly be understood, let alone distilled to simple equations  
or common language.

Billions of data points are available at any given moment and we collect  
only a small number. With this glimpse through a keyhole, we assemble an  
interpretation and add another story to our collection.

With each story we tell ourselves, we negate possibility. Reality is  
diminished. Rooms of the self are walled off. Truth collapses to fit a fictional  
organizing principle we've adopted.

As artists, we're called to let go of these stories, again and again, and blindly put our faith in the curious energy drawing us down the path.

The artwork is the point where all the elements come together—the universe, the prism of self, the magic and discipline of transmuting idea to flesh. And if these lead you into contradiction—into territories that seem unbridgeable or unknowable—that doesn't mean they aren't harmonious.

Even in perceived chaos, there is order and pattern. A cosmic undercurrent running through all things, which no story is immense enough to contain.

| The universe  
never explains why.

## About the Author

**Rick Rubin** is a nine-time GRAMMY-winning producer, named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* and the most successful producer in any genre by *Rolling Stone*. He has collaborated with artists from Tom Petty to Adele, Johnny Cash to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beastie Boys to Slayer, Kanye West to the Strokes, and System of a Down to Jay-Z.



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