

The Art of Not Going Back

"I don't want to die not trying it."

Art was never the question for Leslie. Whether she could build a life around it was.

At 18, she wanted to go to art school. Her family wasn't convinced. The questions were practical: What are you going to do with that? How are you going to get a job?

The uncertainty around her didn't change what she knew she wanted. Leslie began figuring out how to make it happen herself.

She remembers filling out the financial aid paperwork, turning to her mother to ask, *"What's your income?"* before completing the applications and eventually leaving Los Angeles for San Francisco. The first year was hard. She was young, figuring out tuition and life away from home, in an art school that, as she remembers it, *"was not a brown space."* But she stayed.

"Going to art school in general, I feel, is a privilege," Leslie says. *"And I made it happen."* Even then, practicality shaped the choices she made. Leslie wanted to study illustration but chose graphic design because it seemed safer. She could still hear her father's question in her head: *How are you going to get a job after?*

And she did.

Graphic design became a career that eventually took Leslie into digital experiences, websites, online games, and virtual worlds. She worked with startups and later within Nickelodeon's virtual worlds group. The girl who had once been asked what she could possibly do with art had built a career from design.

But over time, the work changed. There were more business plans, PowerPoints, strategy, and meetings, and less of the hands-on making that had drawn Leslie to art in the first place.

"I really wanted to be hands-on, community and creative," she says.



So outside of work, Leslie began making things that were entirely her own. What started as a way to reconnect with that part of herself gradually showed her another possibility. Eventually, she made the decision to leave her corporate career and build a business around her own art.

Working as an artist brought a different kind of reality.

"I'm the creative and the marketing and the finance," she says. "It's everything."

There is freedom in making her own work, but there is also uncertainty. Leslie has been candid about questioning the decision, particularly when it comes to the financial stability she once had.

"I think people think I'm way more confident than I maybe am with the decisions with my business," she says.

That doubt is an important part of Leslie's story. Leaving a stable career did not make her certain she had chosen correctly. There are moments when she wonders about the life she left and whether the tradeoffs have been worth it.

What she knows is that never giving herself the chance would have been harder to live with.

"I don't want to die not trying it."

And trying has brought another question into focus: how much value does she give the work once she has chosen it?

Leslie has noticed how easily a day spent painting or making ceramics can become the work that gets interrupted.

"I feel like I create my own problems because I take things on because I'm like, I can get it done."

It is something she recognizes beyond herself. The more capable we become, the more we carry. And somewhere in that accumulation, our own time can become the easiest thing to move.

For Leslie, sometimes it is her art.

"It's placing the lesser value, I think, on my work," she says.

That realization feels especially significant when placed beside the 18 year old who once filled out her own financial aid forms. Leslie has spent years making room for art in her life. Now she is thinking about what it means to protect that room once it finally exists. Maybe that is why Leslie has given this stage of her life two names.

The first is her *"Señora era."*

The second is her Enlightenment Age.

She wants to return to the things she once promised herself she would get to later. Ceramics. Painting. French. Spanish. Textiles. The interests she placed on hold while building the responsible life she had been taught to build.

If Leslie could sit with her younger self today, her advice would be surprisingly simple:

"Just chill."

Take the nap. Stop feeling guilty about it. Take your time.

And perhaps, finally, give herself enough room to see where her art takes her.

Over the past three years, Leslie has also begun to recognize something in her work that took time to develop: a visual language that feels unmistakably hers. Her colors, illustrations, products, and collections now feel like they came from the same hand.

And she can imagine how much further that work could travel.

She wants partnerships. Licensing. Textiles. Fabric. Collections. She can picture her work at Anthropologie or Target. She talks about rolls of fabric covered in her designs and a Chicana collection that brings her perspective into spaces she once only imagined. The girl who once had to figure out how to get herself into art school is no longer asking whether art can have a place in her life.

She's asking how much room she's willing to give it.

When asked to finish one final sentence, Leslie doesn't overthink it.

"What comes next for me is opportunity, partnerships, community."

She may not know exactly where those opportunities will lead.

But maybe that is part of what she has learned.

She doesn't need to know exactly where the art will take her to know that she wants to keep following it.

What have you been waiting to give yourself a chance to try?

This is Leslie. This is SAR.