

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

Response: I was supposed to graduate in 2019 originally and I studied religion and philosophy. I got to take some great linguistics and comparative linguistics classes. I was really, really in my own feeling like I'm going to try to go down some kind of academia path with this, I'm going to try maybe to get a PhD, etc. I thought that I'd be able to continue down that path, following my own dream in that sense, because I told myself this is what I want to do. It wasn't that other people told me you should follow this path. I have a deep love for the humanities, I have a deep love for religious studies, I'm going to study this. Four years of doing that and near the end of my fourth year, I didn't even realize, because I was so stubborn that this is my dream, I lost so much motivation to do it. After I finished my senior thesis, (I finished that my first semester) then I said, *Oh, you know, I'm good, I'm done*. Because of that, I ended up staying another semester. Then another semester. I ended up spending an extra year at Emory because I was, in my opinion, too stubborn to admit to myself, *This isn't your dream anymore. You've done what you wanted to do in this sector, you have other things to learn*. And it was really starting to understand that that things started to change for me.

In January of this year, for the first time ever, I was just scrolling through social media and I saw an image of a 3d render. I learned how to use this program. I did it every single day starting in January. And I started to pick up and this was the first time I thought, *Oh, I'm doing art*. I've never done art before. This is really weird. *What can I do with this?* There's a voice in the back of my head going, *Hey, Karan, art is not practical, you're not going to be able to survive, you're not going to be able to make money, what are you doing wasting time?* But the majority of me was like, *Hey, I really like doing this, and I'm gonna do this. I'm just gonna do it*. I realized I wanted to be more involved in the side of the process of creating the art. I want to make my own tools. Like, there's a bunch of painters that make their own paints, stuff like that. I wanted to make my own textures and started learning how to do that. Then I decided I want to learn how to modify this program to make it do things that it may not be able to typically. I didn't learn how to code from Emory University. I didn't learn how to code using any classes or anything like that in terms of coding directly. But I did take logic classes and I did take linguistic classes. And those things helped me enjoy learning code. And it gave me ideas. I decided I really want to be able to draw and paint stuff too. And I decided I'm going to try to learn how to make some kind of a machine that can do my art for me.

Question 2: What does creativity and living a creative life mean to you?

Response: For me, creativity is the decision to not follow a particular path that you know works, and to take the risk to fall, and to not know where you're gonna go. To me creativity is cartography. Like you're charting territory. Even if it's something someone else has done before, if it's something that people are telling you isn't the way for you and you decide to go ahead and try it anyway. To me, that's creativity, for sure.

I'd compare my idea of creativity now to my idea of creativity when I was in school to be very different in the sense that my understanding of creativity in school was very extrusive. It was very much like, *Oh, I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to create what I want to create, I'm not going to look at*

what others are saying. I'm going to take their advice with a grain of salt, but I'm not going to let anyone else make my decisions. That was my understanding of creativity in school. The problem is that when you do that, you become very sure that your idea of what you want to do is always going to be your idea of what you want to do. When I left school, when I started to go down this path, in order to even go down this path and learn to code and learn to make this art, I had to decide for myself, *Hey, you don't even know for sure if you can tell yourself, 'This is always what I want to do.'* You're saying forget what other people are telling you about what your idea of success is. I ended up getting stuck believing, *Oh, my dream is my dream. This idea of success I have, this idea of creativity I have, this idea of who I want to be is static.* And that's just not the case. We're always changing, and accepting and embracing that change and even admitting to yourself, *I'm different now* - that's my creativity now.

Question 3: What advice do you have for your younger self?

Response: Once you think you know something and once you think you know who you are and what you are, it's time to start over, almost. It's time to put on a new face, it's time to pick up a new task. Instead of just sitting in the comfort of saying, *I am this person, I do this, this is my role, this is my life.* And I think that that's something that would have really catalyzed creativity for me and could catalyze creativity for a lot of Emory students. Because they come into school saying, *Oh, I'm a creative or oh, I'm a science kid, etc,* as if it's some kind of dichotomy. And then they're so overwhelmed with the amount of time being spent on the particular thing they've chosen to major in that they might not feel like they have time to do the mediums of creativity that they want to. Once you've picked up enough in this area and break down the idea that math isn't creative or can't be creative, you find that anything that you'd learn at school can be a channel to really, really empower any kind of creative medium or create new creative mediums, if that makes sense. And in my case, I never would have thought that I was going to take the work that I held in such high prestige to be intellectual, scholarly work. I never thought that I'd be able to use that as an applied philosophy that fuels my work today. I never thought that I'd be feeding old textbooks into a machine and seeing how it replies to those things or how it tries to mimic them. I think that you just can't close your eyes and your heart to possibilities and you have to trust, like, if I'm learning something, I'll be able to use it in an effective way and in a creative way in the future. And if I don't like it, I shouldn't be afraid to start something completely new and do something completely new. It's completely okay. And Emory does a great job accommodating people who decide that, especially through the IDS program.

To anybody currently at Emory, to anyone about to graduate, to anyone who has graduated who isn't sure what they want to do: Cherish your education, but don't think that it's your limit. Don't ever think that it's your limit. Be ready to pivot in a completely new direction. Be ready to take the things that you've learned and pull them out of the context you were taught them in. Get rid of the fluff and the prestige and the egoistic context behind some of your work that people have impressed onto it. Get rid of that stigma. And just use it as your paints, just use it as the things that you paint with. Just turn those things into tools for a totally blank canvas. Because when you're following what people tell you your field is about or what you've learned is about, the field is a canvas that a billion people have already painted on. And it's time for you to take that paint and put it on a new painting.