

# CONTEMPLATING INSPIRATION

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A moment of sudden inspiration, a moment where every consideration and detail seem to fall into place behind a larger idea, thereby setting the real work into motion. It is the moment that at once brings relief and excitement, confidence and purpose to a project. Design requires inspiration.

But what is the source of this inspiration? Could it be simply an instant reaction, an intuitive genius, or nothing more than a stroke of good luck? The seeming instantaneity of inspiration might support these possibilities.

Yet could it only be through hours of careful research and thoughtful analysis, hours spent sketching and diagramming, hours spent constructing and reconstructing, hours spent in conversation, hours of questioning, that a truly inspired concept is achieved?

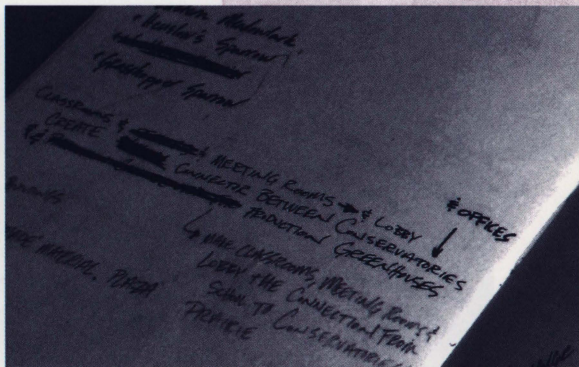
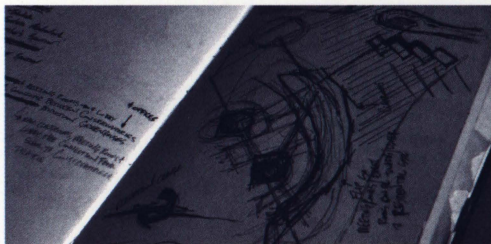
The moment one finds inspiration is often paralleled to the switch of a light or strike of lightning. Its fleeting nature makes one rush to capture its essence with urgency, before the moment is lost forever. Psychoanalyst and writer Adam Phillips argues, "...we still don't know where many of

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the best things about us come from, that many of them may not be teachable, and that we can't always recognize them – or rather, say what we recognize – when they turn up.”<sup>1</sup> The inability to predict the timing or definite origins of inspiration further increases the pressure to preserve its character in the moment. Therefore the intuition to recognize a potential idea is of greater necessity. Inspiration that goes unnoticed will have no influence on the work.

When one hesitates at the moment of inspiration, the instinctive response may be to immerse





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oneself in the work with the hope that it will trigger an epiphany. When in doubt, make, and it will come. Of course, there are times when it happens just like that. But it's also possible for one to get lost in the work, so much so that it distracts them from potential inspiration. In *The Grace of Great Things*, philosopher Robert Grudin cautions against "...a mechanical relation between mind and idea, one in which too much emphasis is put on conscious effort and too little on openness and receptivity."<sup>2</sup> Inspiration cannot be forced; the prior work may only create a circumstance in which this inspiration can transpire. As Phillips writes, "Without practice

no one can play a musical instrument, but practice at best creates the conditions in which inspiration can happen; no amount of practice creates or guarantees the inspiration."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is entirely possible a work could be forced to fruition without ever realizing a true inspiration.

There can be no broad formula for inspiration. The individual can only seek understanding within his or her own process, and in doing so aspire to create inspired works. Poet Randall Jarrell once said, "If a true poet is someone who is struck by lightning several times, then the only thing a poet can do is make sure he keeps going out."▲

<sup>1</sup>Phillips, Adam. "Waiting for inspiration." *The Observer*, March 12, 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2006/mar/12/1>.

<sup>2</sup>Grudin, Robert. "Introduction." In *The Grace of Great Things : Creativity and Innovation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. 3-9.