

Hello!

I've always made a promise to the artists of The Sketchbook Project to figure out a way to keep this collection going beyond me, beyond a lease, beyond the limits of a small arts organization.

14 years ago when I was 20 years old, I set out to create a small community art space.

With over 50,000 sketchbooks from 30,000 different global creative people, we have grown over the past 14 years to be the largest collection of sketchbooks in the world. We have reignited art careers, inspired first time creatives and even helped a few marriage proposals. We have connected long lost friends, sparked creativity in young minds and created a space for art to live on, indefinitely.

We are more than just a project. We are a slice of global creativity. We are an inside look at what people are thinking. We are an archive, a library, a source for endless inspiration.

Since the first moment we thought up the idea for the library (which actually happened over dinner at an Italian restaurant in Chicago) we always wondered what the long term plan was. Would we have the resources to keep the books forever? Would the project sustain itself? Even if we did survive, at SOME point things would have to change, what would that mean? For me, the plan was always some sort of foundation or non-profit that would help secure the library for years to come.

For those of you who don't know, my name is Steven. I founded The Sketchbook Project in 2006 when I was just 20 years old and in college with my friend Shane. Since 2012, I've run the project with my wife and a rotating room of amazing employees and friends. Through out the years we have had amazing times, but also a lot of tough times. From the outside perspective, it may seem like constant growth, but it hasn't been. Running an arts organization is hard, stressful and sometimes burdensome. My wife, Sara, who has been around since day one, even helping to paint walls in exchange for free pizza, has been by my side. The Sketchbook Project, Brooklyn Art Library and all of our projects and community are a part of our family. I can not stress enough how true this is. The project, the collection and everything that goes into it has been intertwined with me for the whole of my adult life. I'm 34 now and my wife is 31. There has not been a day of our marriage that The Sketchbook Project was not there. It's like a 3rd member in our relationship.

I'm honored, grateful and astonished that we've been able to maintain this project as long as we have. I've been told by everyone, including family members (who all meant the best) that this would NOT last. Even after we passed 10 years in 2016, people would still tell me this. I'm not sure that I ever had a choice but to prove to the world that a library of sketchbooks can exist and benefit tens of thousands of creative people, while being able to pay fair wages for creative people, maintain my personal family and keep our lights on.

None of this is easy. For 14 years I've been fighting with people about the merits for paying for this project, explaining the benefits, helping people to understand that they are not just paying for a blank book. To see inside The Sketchbook Project, to really see it, is to see a one of a kind, unique archive. A glimpse into what people are thinking. What creative people have to say. A place like no other. A global institution.

We've always run at what we like to call an 'at-profit'. Basically a non-profit with none of the benefits. This was mostly because I didn't know any better when I started, and once we got going, it's what I knew. Why change? Besides the struggle of paying bills, somehow it always worked out. But as I said, I knew a time would come when I needed to view the project from the outside. I needed it to not be a 3rd in my marriage. As much as I will love it forever, I needed help. I needed to take a part of the weight off my shoulders and share it with others. The nature of our business model has always made it difficult. There was never a good time to invest in change. The project started and stopped, then tour came, the need for more projects came. A time would never feel right to make this change. Even if the time did come up, who would help me? Who would be my partners to make this happen?

No matter what, I felt that I had to start the process of becoming a non-profit years before it would happen. I had to take steps forward. Even though I may not have felt ready, I knew one day I would. I had to trust that the world would all come together and things would work out. 4 years ago I started the process. The next 3 years would be a whirlwind of ups and downs, both making it simultaneously harder to transition and sometimes easier. Around a year ago things started to fall into place. My wife and I started to plan for our future, friends and employees came into my life that would make the process easier, roles were filled that would help this seamlessly happen.

So here we are. It's happening. It's exciting, and scary. I'm so thankful to everyone who has supported me and the project for the past 14 years. You have no idea the amount of hard work, sweat, crying, organizing sketchbooks, and brainstorming that has gone into this. To keep this project going has never been easy, but it has been amazing and rewarding.

We are SO excited for the future. We are building out new educational programs to allow more people to participate, especially lower income participants and inner city schools. It's a relief to be able to say that Brooklyn Art Library can remain free and open to the public. That we have people in place to take care of it for many years to come. A lot of past employees and friends of the project have come back to be a part of our board. We have worked to create the BEST staff we could have. Whether you are new, or have been around since SBP Vol 1, we are sure you will be excited to see all the changes we are making. We are grateful for all the support over the years. We hope you will continue to do so as we grow out more programming, develop a better library system, build a better digital library and create a path forward so the project, the library and the collection will live on forever. This is day one of an entire new life for The Sketchbook Project.

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I'll be staying on and helping to steer the ship as Managing Director. Emma, who joined us a year ago, is taking part of the reins as our Executive Director. Autumn is here as our Associate Director and we have an amazing support staff of Alison, Ellie, Zach and Izzy. We can't wait to share more with you on how you can help support us. The thing that I've learned from all of this is it may have taken one spark of inspiration and a conversation over Italian food to start this, but it's going to take a family and our amazing community to keep it going forever. I hope you will help us along the way. Whether it's participating in our project, making future donations, or just volunteering your time. We are excited to have you along for this chapter.

Thanks for everything,  
Steven Peterman  
Founder and Managing Director