

In 2015 I was accepted into the School of Art and Design of Saint-Etienne as a first year student and I couldn't have been happier about it. I had been living in France for the past two years, working temporarily as an English teacher and wondering what the next step would be. I had always been interested in visual arts and the creative field in general, so with some encouragement from my best friend who was an art student at the time, I sent in my portfolio and to my surprise, I got in! I was accepted in April, and spent my whole summer anticipating the school year and the start of my artistic career.

September finally came around, I started art school... and I hated it. I absolutely hated it. Nothing about the experience met my expectations and I felt frustrated and extremely isolated. I persevered and got through the first semester but by February of the second semester I was going to fewer and fewer classes, and had less and less hope of making it through what was supposed to be the first of five years. I finally quit, abandoning my study program and my hopes of becoming an artist.

Even though I chose to leave, it still felt like a huge failure. I had never given up on a project before, let alone one that was supposed to put me on a whole new career path. I spent the next year and a half working odd jobs and deeply regretting my choice. When my student visa finally ran out and I was forced to return to the U.S. I had really reached the lowest point. Dropping out of art school was one thing, but giving up my dream of living in France was a failure I just could not accept.

I had heard about a Master's program in cultural management at the University of Lyon, but with my undergraduate studies four years behind me, and the failure of my art studies still fresh in my mind, I wasn't sure that I was ready to go back to school just yet. But I had to prove to myself that one failure wasn't going to stop me, and that not succeeding as an artist didn't have to mean leaving the creative field entirely.

Applying for the Master's program became my catalyst. I reworked my CV and managed to get a job as a visitor services agent in an art museum in New York, and an internship at a French cultural institute. I applied and was accepted into the program. I moved back to France, and started school in October 2017.

The first semester wasn't easy. I was new to this field and was lacking in experience, vocabulary, and self confidence. But the studies were interesting and I really enjoyed being back in an academic setting. And most importantly, I was determined not to repeat my failure from two years earlier.

Today, I'm in my final year of the Master's program and I have no regrets about my choice. I've learned so much along the way, and have been put on a career path that really feels right for me. Not to mention I get to continue living and working in France, and will soon have a degree that will allow me to stay here permanently.

Doing this Master's program showed me another side of the cultural field, and all the work that goes on "behind the scenes". My failure as an art student became the driving force behind my success as a cultural management student. I'm glad to have turned what I considered to be a failure, into a new way of seeing things. It's an experience that taught me how to look for a compromise when things don't go as expected.

I still hold on to a few of the projects from my art school days : some drawings, a few written texts, a series of photograms. They no longer represent a painful memory for me, now they are reminders that sometimes you have to get lost for a while in order to end up on your true path.

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