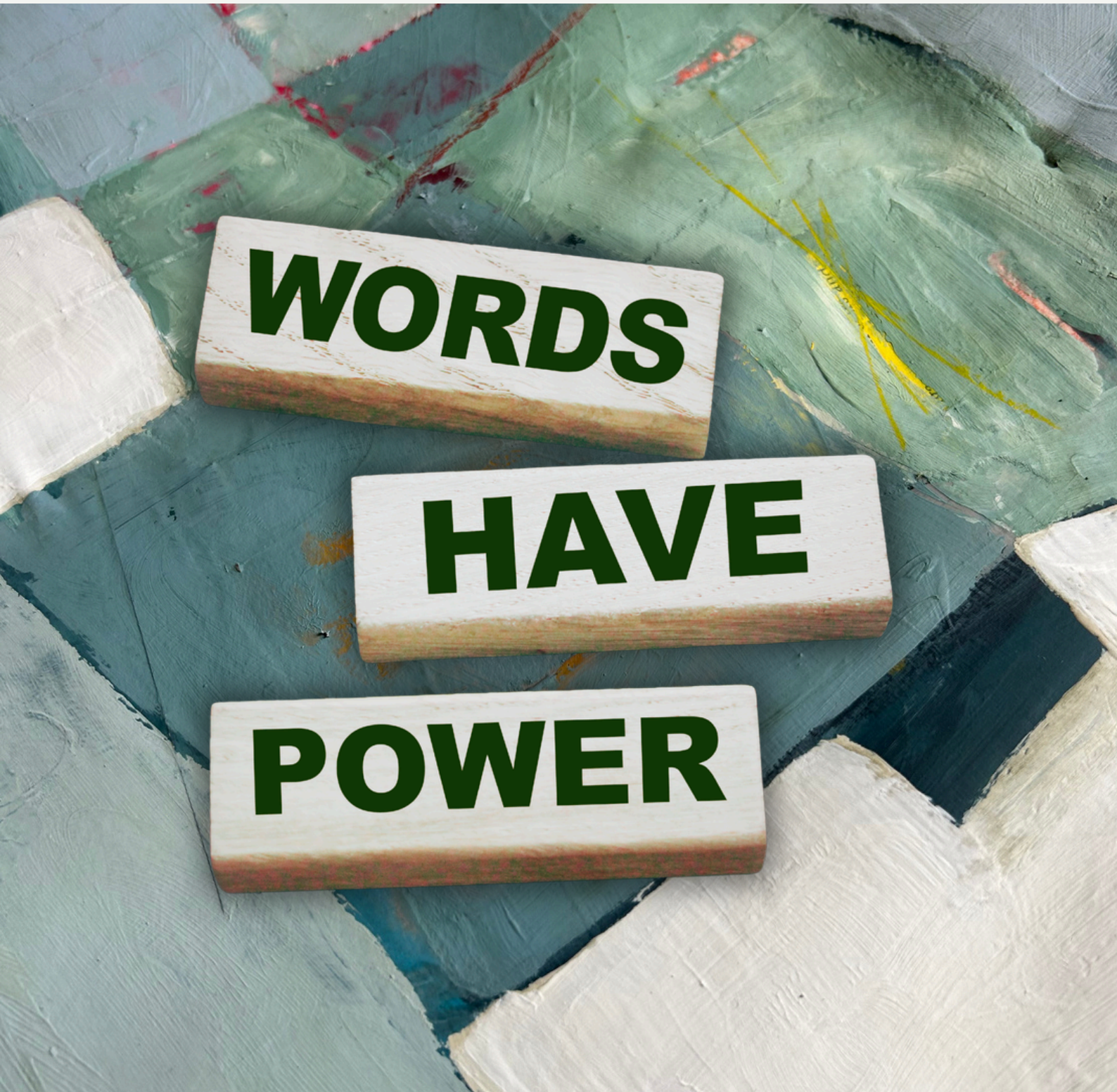
ARTIST GUIDE TO CHOOSING

YOUR WORD OF THE YEAR



Choosing a word for the year can be a useful way to give your creative practice some direction without turning it into another list of goals and targets.

As artists, we're constantly making choices about what to explore, what to pursue and what to let go. A word can give you something to return to when you're feeling overwhelmed, distracted or unsure which way to go.

This guide will help you look back at the year, think about what you need now, explore some possible words and find one that feels meaningful to you.

Why Choose a Word?

Your word doesn't have to be a goal. In fact, I think it works better when it isn't.

A goal might be to have a certain number of exhibitions, make a certain number of paintings or earn a certain amount of money.

Your word is more about how you want to approach the year.

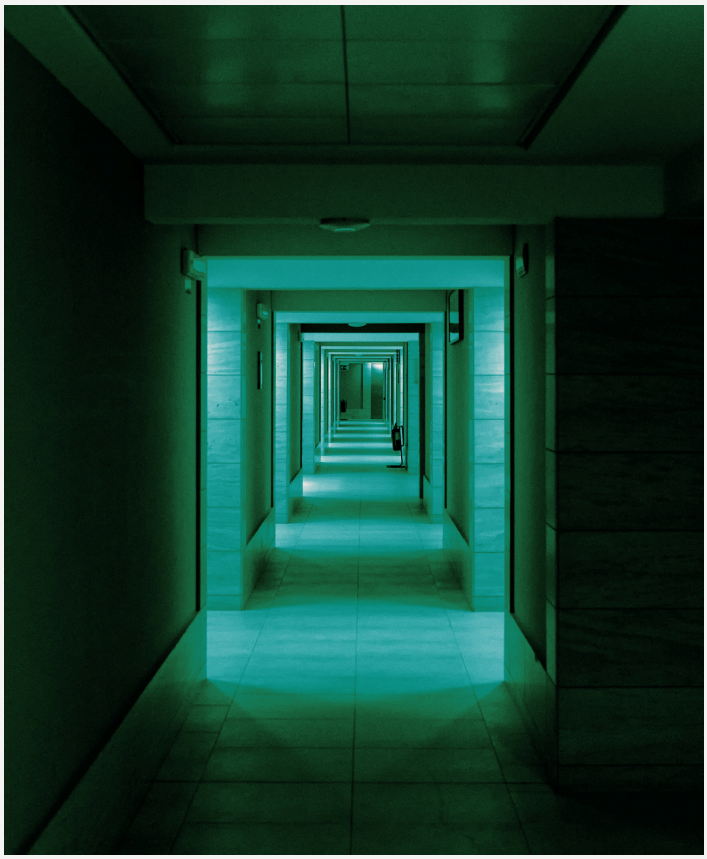
It might influence the projects you choose, the opportunities you say yes to, the things you decide to learn or even the way you respond when things don't go according to plan.

Think of it as a question you can keep returning to:

Does this feel like my year of...?

Sometimes that question is enough to help you decide.

Start by Looking Back



Before choosing your word, spend a little time thinking about the year that has just passed.

You don't need to do a detailed review, although I'd always recommend ending the year with an annual review. It helps you work out plans for the next 12 months. Instead, think about what you noticed.

What gives you energy?

What drains you?

When did you feel most creative?

What were you putting off?

What did you wish you had made more time for?

What surprised you?

What did you learn about yourself or your practice?

And perhaps most importantly:

What do you want more of?

Your answers might start to point towards the word you need.

Think About How You Want to Feel

It's easy to choose a word based on what you think you should be doing as an artist.

- Productive.
- Focused.
- Disciplined.
- Consistent.

But perhaps what you actually need is something quite different. Maybe you need play because your work has become too serious. Maybe space or spaciousness because you're filling every available moment with things to do. Or that is what you want your work to convey. Maybe courage because you've been playing it safe, and recognise that you need to take more risks. Maybe curiosity because you want to experiment again and feel like you have to give yourself permission. Maybe finish because you have a studio full of half-completed work. Maybe rest because you've forgotten that doing nothing can be part of a creative life too.

Your word doesn't have to describe the artist you think you ought to be. It can describe what you need or want right now.. Look beyond your art. Your word doesn't have to be exclusively about your art practice. In fact, some of the most useful words will probably have meaning outside the studio too.

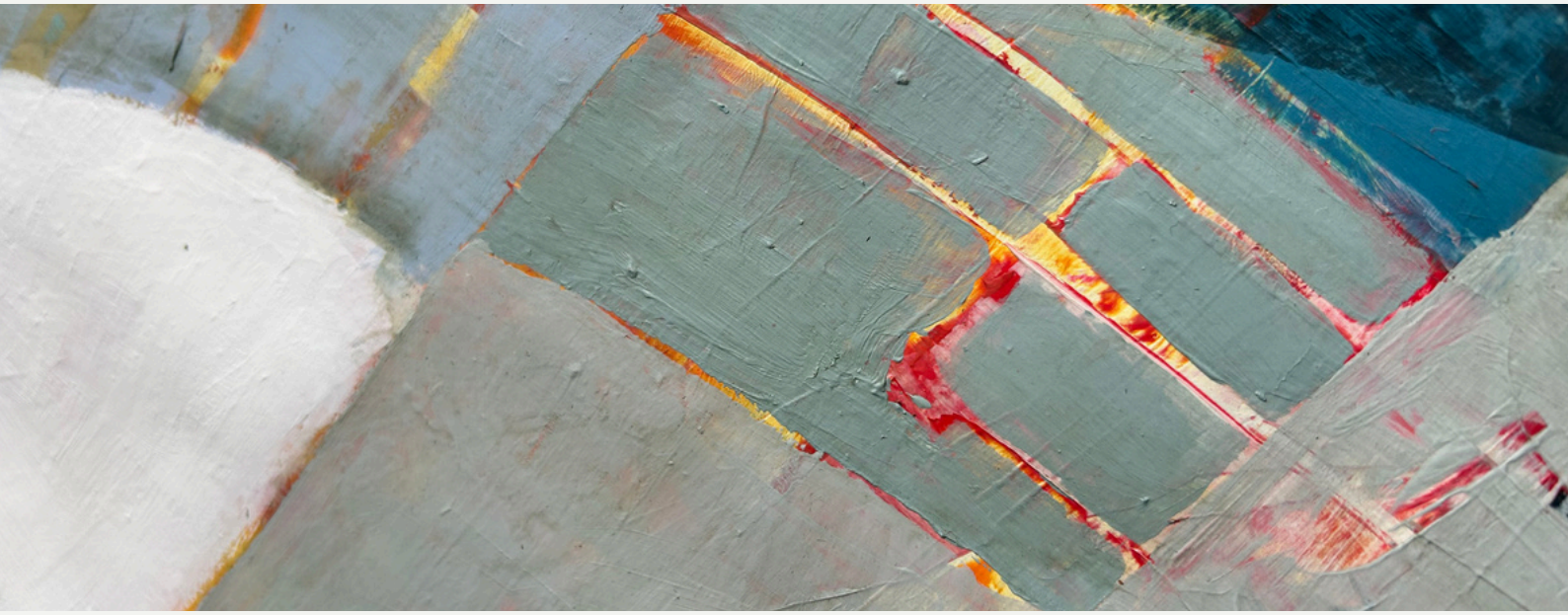
Think about your wider life. Do you want to be more present? More open to new experiences? More adventurous? Do you want to reconnect with people, places or things that make you feel like yourself? Do you need more space? More joy? More confidence? More balance?

Your creative life doesn't exist separately from the rest of your life. What happens outside the studio inevitably finds its way into your work.

Don’t Choose a Word Because it Sounds Good

There are plenty of words that look great written on a piece of paper but don’t actually mean much to you.

If a word makes you think, “That sounds like a good word for an artist,” pause.



Ask yourself:

- Why this word?
- What does it mean to you personally?
- What would change if you really lived by it?
- What would it encourage you to do?
- What might it stop you from doing?
- And perhaps most importantly:
- **Would I still want this word when the year gets difficult?**

Because that’s when your word needs to earn its place.

Look for a Word with Room in it

I like words that can mean different things at different times.

A word such as Open might mean being open to new ideas, new people, new opportunities or a different direction in your work.

Unfold might mean allowing a painting to develop without knowing exactly where it is going, but it could also apply to your life.

Beyond might suggest looking beyond what you already know, beyond old limitations or beyond the edges of your current practice.

Connection might start out as a desire to connect more with others but becomes a wonderful springboard for making connections with your inspiration or bringing together different ideas.

The best words can grow with you.

You may understand them differently in February or March than you do in December.



Don’t be Afraid of More Than One Word

You might find that one word doesn’t quite capture what you need.

Perhaps two words naturally belong together.

One might describe **where you want to look**, while the other describes **how you want to move towards it**.

For example my words for 2027 are



Beyond gives me a sense of direction.

Unfold gives me permission not to know exactly how I’ll get there.

The combination can be more useful than either word on its own.

Test Your Shortlist

Once you have a few possibilities, try living with them for a few days. Take some time to journal about them. Explore what they might mean in your art but also in your life in general.

- Put them on your studio wall.
- Say them out loud.
- Notice which one or two keep coming back to you.

You could even imagine yourself halfway through the year and ask: *I'm having a difficult week. Which of these words would actually help me?*

Or imagine a new opportunity arrives: *Would this word help me decide whether to say yes?*

And then imagine looking back at the end of the year: *Would I be glad I chose this?*

Usually, one word starts to feel different from the others.

Your word doesn't have to become another project

This is probably the most important bit.

You don't need to create a beautiful vision board, print it on postcards, make it your screensaver and develop a twelve-month strategy around it.

You don't need to do any of these things. But once you've landed on your word, a visual reminder can be useful. Put it on your studio wall, write it at the top of your sketchbook or keep it somewhere you'll see it regularly.

Or come back to it at the end of each month and ask yourself whether it still feels relevant.

There's no test.

You can't fail at your word of the year.

A Few Prompts to Help You Find Your Word

If you're struggling to choose, try completing these sentences:



- This year I want more…
- I want less…
- I would like to feel…
- I want to give myself permission to…
- I want to stop worrying so much about…
- I'd like to be braver about…
- I want to make more time for…
- I'm curious about…
- I would like my art practice to feel…
- The thing I most need right now is…
- What do I need more of in my creative life — and what do I need more of in my life outside the studio?
- What word keeps coming back to me, even when I try to dismiss it?

Then look back over your answers.
Are there any themes that keep appearing?
Those themes are often more useful than a list of possible words.

And Finally…

Your word of the year doesn't need to predict what will happen.

It doesn't need to tell you exactly where your art practice is going.

And it certainly doesn't need to become another measure of whether you've been productive enough.

Think of it as a way of deciding what you want to pay attention to.

The interesting thing about making art is that you rarely know exactly where a painting will end up when you start it. You make a mark, respond to it, make another decision and gradually something begins to emerge.

Perhaps choosing a word for the year can work in much the same way.

Choose a direction.

Stay curious.

Pay attention.

And leave enough room for the unexpected.

Remember, there's no need to get this "right". Your word can change as the year unfolds.

Use the next page to jot down your word and come back to this page whenever you need to reconnect with what matters to you.

My Word of the Year is...

Why I chose it: What made this word stand out from the others? What does it say about where you are right now?

What this word means to me: What does it mean beyond its dictionary definition? What does it represent for you personally?

How I might bring it into my art practice: What might this word encourage you to explore, change, make time for or let go of in your creative practice?

How I might bring it into the rest of my life: How could this word influence the way you spend your time, the experiences you choose or the things you make space for?

When the year gets difficult, I want this word to remind me: This is the one I'd definitely keep. It makes the exercise useful beyond January.

One small way I can put this word into practice: