

**Making Artists in an Entrepreneurial Age**  
***Keynote Address: Understanding the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Landscape***

**William Deresiewicz, Author**

I want to stipulate at the outset that I'm not an expert in art education. I *have* thought a lot about higher education in general, especially about the kinds of students we're getting and what we do with them once we get them. And I've been thinking a lot, more recently, about the arts, about the way that arts careers, specifically the economics of sustaining them, are changing now as the economy changes. Part of that research has involved reading and talking to people about art schools and how they might be changing, too. So all of that is what I bring to the discussion. First, I'm going to talk about who your students are when they get to you; then, about the world that they are graduating into; and finally, what I think you can do to help them during the time you have them.

I published a book a couple of years ago about the pitfalls of elite education in America, how the admissions process for selective colleges turns young people into what one of my students referred to as "excellent sheep": hoop-jumping achievement machines with no inner life. Today's ambitious students are "excellent" at being students, which means, at giving the grown-ups what the grown-ups want. But they are terrible at figuring out what *they* want, because they never get a chance to find out who they are or what they care about. So they become "sheep," meekly following the herd in one of a few approved directions.

It is a system, to put it in a nutshell, that forces students to choose between learning and success, because the rush to accumulate credentials, to amass gold stars, leaves no time for real learning. I've talked to teachers and counselors and principals at private high schools, and they all tell me the same thing. It drives them crazy, but they feel there's not much they can do about it. Real learning takes the kind of unstructured *time* that creates mental *space*. It takes the freedom to forget about grades and deadlines and lose yourself in a subject, lose yourself in the love of a subject and follow whatever meandering path your curiosity takes you in.

But the kinds of students I'm talking about don't have the time for that kind of love. A couple of years ago, a student at a public high school in an affluent New York suburb sent me a short documentary she made called "Losing Ourselves." It starts with a couple of first-graders. A perky little boy says that he wants to be a geologist when he grows up because he likes rocks. A bubbly little girl says that she wants to be a ballerina when she grows up because she loves to dance. Then we see five high school students in quick

succession, each one more depressive than the last. The filmmaker asks them, "What are you passionate about?" and the answer, in each case, is "um." They can't remember what they are passionate about. The question hasn't come up since junior high school.

The system forces students to choose between learning and success, but given what I've just been saying, it shouldn't surprise us to discover that it also forces them to choose between happiness and success. These are students who think that the world is going to fall apart if they don't do everything perfectly. And they haven't been able to develop the kind of robust sense of self, of love or purpose or faith or idealism, that could ballast them against that fear. The result, according to numerous studies and metrics, has been an epidemic of psychological distress among high-achieving students in recent years: anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, self-harm, suicide. They aren't just sheep; they are terrified sheep.

So that's what I wrote in the book. But the response I got told me what I really should've known already, which is that pretty much everything I talked about is true not only of high-achieving students who get to the most selective colleges, but pretty much all students who get to any college. The specific benchmarks may differ from community to community, but the basic pressures are the same. You must do what the grown-ups tell you to do, and you must do it perfectly, or you won't have a future. The level of resources may differ from school to school, but the way we educate students is the same. More and more testing, assessment, metrics, homework, regimentation, and routinization. Less and less time to stop and learn, to stop and reflect. More and more math and reading, the things we test on. Less and less music, art, and literature, let alone free time or downtime for exploration or intellectual and emotional consolidation.

Now I would've thought, before I started talking to people who work in art schools, that kids who go to art schools must be different. After all, they've chosen a different path. But what I am discovering is that maybe they aren't so different, and maybe it isn't such a different path, at least not in their minds, and maybe not at all. I'd like to know if you agree with me on this or not. I talked to someone who runs a company that provides career services to creative professionals and who has spoken at a number of art schools, and he told me that all the students he meets are terrified. Another person, the chairman of the art department at a public university, has told me how the ubiquitous talk of "disruption" in the economy terrifies them even further. It turns out, at least from what I can tell so far, that art students or not, by and large, the free-spirited bohemians, determined to defy society and pursue their muse wherever it may lead, that I would've taken them to be.

Far from it, in fact. Like students everywhere, it seems, taught that school means completing your assignments and providing the right answers, they have been trained to believe in perfectibility and to require perfection of themselves, both of which are antithetical to the making of art. They have difficulty dealing with situations that don't involve the binary alternatives of success or failure and a competitive stance with

respect to their fellow students. Like students everywhere, it seems, taught to believe that life unfolds in an orderly progression if you follow the correct procedure, they have an anxious need for predictability, feel that they need to have a plan, need to have their act together by the time they get to school. Like students everywhere, it seems, they have a weak sense, at best, of who they are and who they want to be.

I don't actually think that this is just about school. It is also about the Internet, social media, which we adults may use as a tool or distraction, but for young people today has become a major arena, perhaps *the* major arena, of socialization and identity formation. Sherry Turkle, the social psychologist, who specializes in the relationship between technology and self-development, has written that the loss of the capacity for solitude leads to a loss of the ability to develop a separate identity. So what does that do to the ability to create art, which depends on possessing, precisely, a strong inner self, a sense of separateness and even oppositionality, a point of view, and something to say from that point of view?

I spoke a few months ago to a faculty member at the art school of a major public university who is distressed about the changes she has seen among her students since arriving there about a dozen years ago. "Our students are becoming a lot less weird than they used to be," she told me. "Very rarely now is there a student who presents an unusual thought or an action that's surprising to me or that stuns me in an interesting way. It might even have been a few years since somebody did that."

She was teaching a course for sophomores that's designed as an opportunity to explore ideas in a free-ranging way, to begin to discover their artistic identity. When she had them introduce themselves the first day, all but two of them said that they wanted to be a designer of some kind—a product designer, an industrial designer, a graphic artist—that is, something very specific and practical. But when she invited them to talk about their passions and then asked them to imagine that they had three months to work on anything they wanted, none of them said they wanted to do anything related to design. One was interested in creating a graphic novel, another wanted to make wearable art, and so forth.

"I'm really curious about this," she told me. "Whatever pressures our students have, either from parental pressure or from the economy or student debt—I think it's bigger than that. I think it has something to do with their understanding of themselves as unique humans in the world and their capacity to say something very particular. I feel like they kind of have given up on that." I would only add, maybe they never had it in the first place.

So that's a sketch of where your students may be at when they arrive on campus. What about the world that you will be releasing them into 2-4 years later? The safest thing to say, I think, is that it's changing very fast. My hypothesis, in fact, is that the arts are undergoing the kind of fundamental shift that has occurred no more than a couple of times since the Renaissance. Artists were considered artisans, indistinguishable from

other craftsmen. Then, from about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>, they were seen as geniuses, solitary visionaries in communication with a higher realm. Then, from around the end of World War II or a little earlier, they effectively became professionals, climbing institutional structures as they accumulated credentials like degrees and awards. Now, it is increasingly clear, they are choosing or being forced to become entrepreneurs: single-person businesses responsible for every aspect of their work, from conception to promotion to delivery.

That account is undoubtedly too neat, but I do think it's useful as a heuristic. In any case, this shift is being driven by even more momentous changes in the economy as a whole: the rise of the Internet, the weakening of nonprofit and for-profit institutions, the move from full-time employment to the gig economy.

So what does this mean for the kinds of careers that your students can look forward to? What it seems to mean, at least right now, is that things are getting a lot harder. Less money, more work. The situation differs from medium to medium and may be less dire in the visual arts, which are less susceptible to digitization. In music, it's a disaster, since no one pays for music anymore. In the world of writing, it's challenging at the very least, since magazines and newspapers are under severe financial pressure from the erosion of their advertising model and commercial publishers are under comparable pressure from Amazon. Hollywood has become a creative wasteland stalked by digitized monsters and superannuated cartoons. Television, however, is experiencing a golden age, precisely because it has developed a business model that is both highly profitable and rewards artistic boldness.

About the visual arts it is harder to generalize, because they encompass so many different kinds of artists working in such a wide variety of contexts. But there are plenty of reasons to be concerned. Visual art is not vulnerable to the same kind of piracy that's afflicted music and movies--though the theft of work from independent artists by global brands like Zara is certainly a cause for concern. But visual art is uniquely dependent, for both its creation and exhibition, on one resource whose cost is rising rapidly today: space. And the visual arts are as susceptible as any other to what may be the most important factor behind our newly challenging creative economy: the oversupply of creative labor. The ease of production, marketing, and distribution enabled by digital technology has unleashed a flood of aspiration. Everybody wants to get in on the act, and now, everybody can. But we may be purchasing universal access at the price of universal impoverishment.

Of course, the other essential element of arts careers today is precisely the paradigm shift I alluded to before: the need to be entrepreneurial, because the professional model, which depended on the stability of institutions, is decreasingly viable. Universities were the main way this country supported the arts in the decades after the war, but tenure-track positions, such as many of you may have, are drying up in the arts, as they are throughout academia. Public funding for the arts has cratered since the

1980s as a share of the economy and now stands at less than \$800 million (about 0.004% of GDP). Arts institutions are under increasing financial threat. Even the kinds of for-profit businesses that employ designers and other visual artists are less and less stable, in the startup economy. The job you have today may be gone tomorrow, because the company may be gone tomorrow. You have to do it all yourself. You have to actively—and yes, creatively—manage your own career.

Here is some of what that means, according to what people at various stages of their careers have told me. When you're starting out, you need to do a lot of free work, because you need to build a reputation, a network, an audience: get your name out there, as they say. That doesn't mean working freelance, though, at least not right away; people straight out of school, I've been told, don't have enough contacts yet to make it as a freelance. But the general rule across the arts seems to be that you build a following—that is, without financial remuneration, by hustling to do work and then hustling some more to promote it—and then you monetize it.

I've also been told, by a young artist I met not long ago, that you need to be whomever the potential client or employer wants you to be. If you want to be an illustrator but they want you to be a graphic designer, then that's who you say you are. She handed me her card and pointed out that it doesn't say what she does, it just has her contact information. I said, but you have to be able to do the thing that you're saying you can do, no? She said, well, everybody wants to skip that step. Among other things, there is more and more pressure now to make it immediately, because people are following each other on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, where it doesn't say how old you are, so you're constantly comparing yourself to people of every age, instead of just to your contemporaries.

I also spoke recently to another young artist, this one somewhat further along in her career. She's an illustrator, 34, has an MFA from a prestigious art school, lives in Los Angeles, works freelance, and has done commissions for major publications and book publishers. I asked her what her "nut" was, the minimum amount she needed to make in a given year in order to support herself. She said she had no idea, because she's never been able to think about things that way. She's always just gotten by, though at least she's been able to do so mainly through her art. She knows a lot of creative people in Los Angeles, and almost all of them either drive for Lyft or Uber, teach yoga, or work as nannies. Things for her have gotten better recently, which means that she's been able to eat out a couple of times without feeling guilty. Meanwhile, as she put it, it's "hard to visualize the future." At this point, she feels, given that she wants to have a child, her career is either going to have to step up to the next level or she's going to have to think about a Plan B. And a lot of her creative friends are hitting the same kind of crisis point, now that they are reaching their mid-30s. As is often said, the new gig economy, with its absence of security and constant hustle, only works if you are young, healthy, and childless. I don't know if this is true of visual artists, but apparently the New York literary

world, or at least its younger echelons, could not survive without Adderall and other prescription (and nonprescription) stimulants.

Even if you succeed in establishing yourself, however, the lack of secure employment means that the need to be entrepreneurial, to actively manage your career, remains unrelenting. That means you need to cobble a living together from a wide variety of sources, and we can reflect in this connection on the fact that one of our era's characteristic phrases is "passion project," which acknowledges that most of your projects are things that you feel pretty indifferent about. You also need to continue to build and tend your audience, which in the visual arts means, above all, feeding the Instagram beast. I should say that you also need to tend your audience even if you do have a job, because you need to think about your next job, which will most likely come through your network, your audience within the field.

Amy Whitaker, a writer and educator who works at the intersection of art and business—she just published a great book called *Art Thinking*—says that the problem for midcareer creative professionals is not to make a living doing what they already know how to do and sell, but finding a way to carve out time to imagine and develop the next thing. It's also been said that creative careers differ from the career of a typical professional—a lawyer or a dentist—in which it is possible to decide that you've reached an acceptable level of income and don't want to put in the extra energy to rise to the next one. Creative work, because it is always project by project, is a perpetual roller coaster. You are always going back and starting from zero.

I listen to Mark Maron's podcast, which features interviews with artists and performers. Invariably, when he's talking to someone in midcareer, someone 40 or 50, someone with a newborn or a couple of kids in grade school, the fear they express, unless they're extremely successful, is that the work is going to dry up. They're doing well now, but they're not getting rich, which means, they're not putting much aside, so what's going to happen a few years down the road? And again, creative work is not like typical professional work. Dentistry and law are not subject to shifts in cultural fashion, and nobody cares how old you are, because the work is not about you, and it's not about your audience, either, because you don't have an audience. But artists need to be in tune and stay in tune.

Let me just say one thing more by way of concluding this sketch of the arc of creative careers today. When we speak of artists now as creative "entrepreneurs," we are really engaged in a bait-and-switch. They aren't really entrepreneurs, in the sense of someone who builds a business that they own and that gradually increases in value and employs more and more people. We are really just talking about people who are "self-employed," that sneaky oxymoron. You can't be employed if you don't have a boss. Creative entrepreneurs are simply workers, but workers who don't have jobs, which means that they have to do a lot of things that other people would've done for them if

they *did* have a job (like marketing and distribution), and that they have to do a lot of things for free that they would've gotten paid for.

Stepping back from the dynamics of individual careers, I think there are some broader trends that we can point to that grow out of the new conditions. The first involves the kind of creator sometimes referred to as a hyphenate or slashy. It seems that nearly everyone below a certain age—and I would say that age is more like 40 than 30—is doing several things at once, and I don't mean several different kinds of writing or music or visual art, but several things that cross those larger boundaries. They are a writer-painter-musician or a photographer/dancer/designer. In other words, they are diversifying, which is understandable at a time when opportunities must be chased wherever they are found, and when no single opportunity is going to pay you very much.

The second broader trend might be referred to as "relevance" or "engagement." Even art that doesn't understand itself in commercial terms understands itself in terms of some kind of social purpose: social practice, or community outreach, or political activism. This is as true for arts institutions and their relation to the broader society as it is for individual artists. Instead of art for art's sake, art for anything-but-art's sake. My first thought about this is, it's too bad that nobody cares anymore whether this art is actually any good, by which I mean, visually compelling on its own terms. My second thought is, this is what people increasingly *mean* today by "good," in art: whether it is relevant, which can mean commercially successful or socially engaged or whatever. As the paradigm shifts, the definition of value in the arts shifts, and ultimately maybe the definition of art itself.

The third broader trend has to do with the way the arts are being subsumed into the commercial economy. I don't just mean that art is bought and sold, or that artists earn money, and I should make it clear that I'm not against either of those things, nor do I think that there was ever a golden age when artists didn't have to make a living—though the way they made that living has changed, and art has changed with it, which is exactly the point of the four paradigms I laid out earlier. I mean something else, which is that increasingly the arts are being folded into larger commercial purposes.

For example, in this age of Richard Florida, Mr. Creative Class, the arts play a prominent role in redevelopment schemes. That might mean converting an old factory into an arts center as a way of drawing people back to a revitalizing downtown, or using sculptures or murals to enhance a new public park, or inviting musicians to busk in a business district. In other words, the patronage model, as in so many areas of society, is moving from public to private or to a mixture of public and private. There are good and bad ways to see this. On the one hand, the arts are being brought into the public sphere in a way that they haven't always been, especially in small and medium-sized cities that haven't been creative centers. On the other hand, the arts are being used as a leading edge of gentrification. It used to be that artists would colonize a low-rent district and then, once their presence had raised the area's cachet, developers would come in,

drive-up housing costs, and force the artists out. Now artists are being deliberately used, in a strategic and artificial way, as part of these kind of synthetic downtown-in-a-box schemes that seldom seem to work.

Related to this—and this is something Florida hints at—the way that people relate to the arts is changing. In the Floridian paradigm of the "vibrant" city or district, the kind that attracts high-income techies and other young professionals, art is something that people want to "experience" as part of the fabric of their daily lives, not in the context of monumental institutions that are set back from the urban fabric and that you have to buy a ticket for and go to at a certain time. They want to be able to drop in on a coffee shop that has some art on the walls, then duck into the local indie bookstore to check out a reading, then listen to some music at a bar.

And then they're going to go to the most creative kind of place of all in the contemporary city, namely, a restaurant. One of the most important facts about the arts today is that they are being subsumed into the larger category of "creativity." Hence the term "creatives," with its uncertain boundaries. Creatives or creators or creative professionals or creative entrepreneurs mean people working in the traditional arts, people we call artists, as well as people working in what would once have been referred to as the crafts, not just traditional ones like ceramics or textiles, but also, especially, food and drink. But even beyond that, it seems that everybody wants to be creative or already is a creative or insists on being thought of as an artist.

And it's not just individuals. Thanks to Richard Florida and Steve Jobs and many others, creativity is also the great buzzword, the great fetish, the great desideratum, in the business world. Every company wants to incorporate creativity, especially under the rubric of "design," into its processes and products. Every business wants to be "innovative," "disruptive," just like the ones in Silicon Valley. So one of the hot things now—especially, as I'm sure you know, in academia—is the forging of connections between business, the STEM fields, and the arts. The buzzword for this on campuses, of course, is STEAM.

Again, there are good and bad ways to regard this. The bad way is that creativity is being valued only in so far as it can be monetized. The arts are being used for someone else's purposes, purposes that may even be antithetical to the values of the arts themselves. "Innovation," it has been pointed out, is not the same as imagination or invention. Leonardo imagined; Edison invented; Steve Jobs merely innovated. As Amy Whitaker puts it, design thinking means getting from Point A to Point B; art thinking means inventing Point B, imagining a new place to get to. Business, she says, hits the target; art invents the world in which the target exists. And art, I would add, is a critical practice; it wants to change the world. "Creativity," as it is now understood, is a business practice; it only wants to optimize the world that we already have.

The good thing about this third trend, needless to say, is that it provides a lot of work for artists, especially visual artists. I don't have metrics on this, but it seems pretty clear



that there is more demand than ever for design. Not only are makers of consumer products more attentive to design, but so are retail establishments at every level. And now there is an entirely new realm that is actually constituted by its visual presentation, the Web. The universal dilettantism or hopeful amateurism that the Internet has unleashed is also probably a net positive. The dabbler is never really going to compete with the professional artist for work or sales, but he very well might want to take a class or workshop from her, or pay to hear her give a TED talk, or buy her book.

And of course it really is a great thing that it has become so much easier and cheaper to market and distribute directly to the audience or customer. But here again, I need to point out some downsides. The new environment may be encouraging artists, especially young artists, to think about the audience too early in the creative process. "There's a loss of the personal in the development of art," is how it was put to me by the head of an MFA program. "An initial concern for the artist now," he went on, "whether you're 20 or 50, but definitely if you're 20 or 30, is the external image, the website, the portfolio, not the particular question you're pursuing. Am I going to be noticed? Is someone going to blog about it? Does the work look interesting quickly on Instagram as opposed to an actual environment?"

The new conditions, what is more, insofar as they demand entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills as well as artistic ones, will reward people who are good at schmoozing and getting noticed, rather than at making art. Obviously you can be good at both, but it isn't a given that you're going to be. So the BS machine becomes louder than ever. I think it's telling in this connection that we talk now about building your "brand" rather than your "name" or "reputation." Aside from the fact that the word places us in the realm of the commercial rather than personal, it also already encapsulates the sense that there is something fishy or at least performative about the enterprise. You aren't really presenting your self; you're presenting a Madison Avenue version of your self.

And there's one more thing to say about the way the Internet has transformed the economics of making art, which is that in the most essential respect—and this is something that nobody who talks about this ever mentions—it has not transformed it at all and never can. For all the new efficiencies in publicity, marketing, and distribution (and in the case of digital media, reproduction), the most important cost has stayed the same or even grown. That is the cost of making art in the first place: not the cost of materials or even of space, but the cost in time, the cost in life. The cost of food, rent, gas, beer, and everything else you need to sustain yourself while you're making your work. And not only that, but the cost of becoming the person who can make the art in the first place. The cost of becoming an artist.

There's a story about Picasso charging a client a large amount of money for a sketch that took him five minutes to make. The client said, but it only took you five minutes. And Picasso said, yes, but it took me 50 years to get to the point where it could only take me

five minutes. Amy Whitaker points out that art invariably involves a great deal of startup risk. You have to invest a lot of resources in any given project before you see your first penny in return. And it's not like a business, where someone's going to give you a loan. Actually, it's exactly like a business, because today, Picasso's 50 years begins with a degree. Which means, it begins with a large tuition bill, and quite likely, a lot of student debt.

And that brings us, finally, to art school. I don't have specific curricular or policy recommendations for you. I don't know enough about how art school works, and even if I did, I'm not the kind of person who is good at making policy. But I think I can articulate some principles.

First of all, I don't think there any easy answers. It isn't a choice between art and commerce, imagination and practicality. As your students will themselves, you are being called upon to rise to the challenge of reconciling the two in a satisfactory way. I say the same thing all the time within a liberal arts context, which is something that I *do* know very well, and I say it to students and parents as well as to administrators. Life requires compromise, but compromise is not the same as capitulation. Compromise means that you figure out what you believe in, what you stand for, what you want your life or your school to be about, and you try to bring reality, with its material demands, as close as possible to that. It doesn't mean that you discard what you believe in, betray what you stand for, and alter what you want your life or school to be about.

I'm afraid to say that that is not what I see today, for the most part, in the liberal arts. I see a flight to practicality understood in the narrowest terms. I see nonmonetary values like critical thinking or cultural knowledge being justified in *monetary* terms. I see universities shrinking or eliminating core programs in the humanities in favor of an almost religious faith in STEM fields. I see priorities being radically reordered to satisfy the imagined preferences of the business community in general or of specific corporate patrons in particular, as if colleges were nothing more than training centers for the global workforce. I see shared governance—the idea that the direction of colleges and universities is properly the joint responsibility of administrators and faculty—giving way to the dominance of a newly separate stratum of highly compensated academic managers. I see faculty members being degraded to pedagogic proletarians as budget allocations get directed to everything but instruction. I see deans becoming academic careerists focused exclusively on their own advancement, and a proliferation of deanlets each with their own often pointless and poorly designed "initiatives." And I see students suffering from indifferent instruction, uninspiring curricula, unstable programs, and of course, ballooning student debt loads, even as colleges and universities believe themselves to be acting in their interests by treating them as customers and future workers.

So my first recommendation is, try not to act like everybody else in higher education. It isn't a good idea in any field, it's a bad idea in the liberal arts, and it's a terrible idea in the fine arts. Metrics, assessments, assignments, regimentation, control: this is not the way to produce creative people with robustly functioning imaginations. "Practicality," as

it is currently conceived, is not practical. It is impractical in the liberal arts, because the purpose of a college education is to teach students to think flexibly and to learn how to educate themselves, not to wed them to a certain body of knowledge or specific set of skills that will become obsolescent within 10 years. It is especially impractical in the fine arts given that we are preparing students for a world that prizes creativity. As the faculty member I quoted earlier said to me, "Employers want to be around people doing interesting things, not predictable ones."

Now how do you teach students to do interesting things: to be imaginers and inventors, to dare to be weird and surprising? I don't know, but I know who does. Your faculty. So that's my second recommendation: empower your faculty instead of your administrators, which may even mean, instead of yourselves. Give them power over the curriculum; give them each a free hand in the classroom; incentivize them to care about teaching; pay them well and treat them with respect. The more I think about education of all kinds and at all levels, the more it seems to me that the real purpose of any school is to enable students to encounter extraordinary teachers. All the rest is a distraction.

While I do believe that postgraduate employability is essential, it also seems clear to me that students have become too attuned to the pressures of the market. They are too worried, too soon, about what's going to happen afterwards, and it is distorting what is happening now, which ultimately serves them badly for what *does* come afterwards. The MFA director I mentioned earlier talked about creating a community within his school, within each class, that encourages imagination and risk-taking by shutting out the voice of the world. He also talked about the value of delaying the moment of critique even within the program in order to establish trust among the students in each other. So that is my third recommendation. When we talk about the arts, as when we talk about the liberal arts, we are ultimately talking about the survival and health of the human spirit in a commercialized world. We are talking about the possibility of creating space outside the market where we can value other things and value each other in different ways. An art program should stand outside the market, not surrender to it.

Instead of further terrifying students who already arrive at your school in a state of terror, or further regimenting students who are all too ready to jump through the next hoop, you need to give them the freedom, the permission, to let their hair down, to find their point of view, to not have a plan: to be good artists, not excellent sheep.