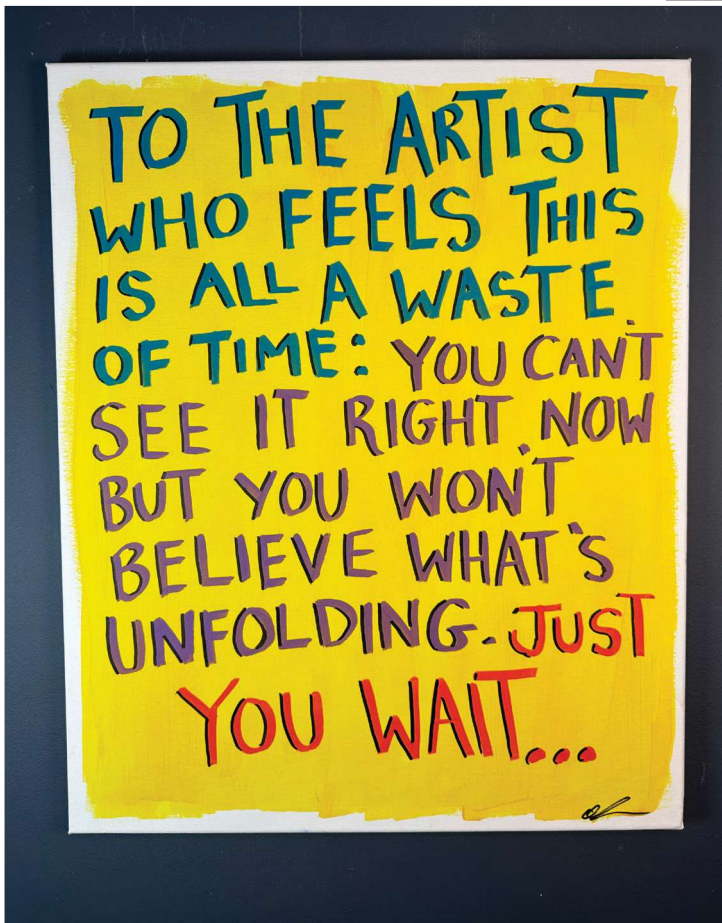


Meet the Artist:

# Amie McNee

Oxfordshire's Amie McNee is a novelist, a creative coach and the voice behind *Inspired to Write*, a manifesto on the vital, human importance of creating, with guidance for all artists in all endeavours, whether they're starting their journey or seeking a fresh perspective. **Esther Lafferty** met with her to learn more.



Amie uses the terms creative and artist interchangeably, and in addition to writing and speaking, she also paints large colourful 'love notes' on big canvases, a selection of which were on show at Oxfordshire Artweeks. They're energetic, dynamic and personal: "Essentially, these are positive messages to myself; like a word-based muse. They are the reminders that many artists need to navigate the creative journey."

She adds, "For example, I had huge amounts of shame for wanting to create, for wanting to take my writing seriously, and I felt embarrassed that I didn't want to have a 'normal' job. Nobody took my ambition seriously and I felt like a 'failed' adult with an inability to grow up and take responsibility. Navigating that negative energy was one of the biggest journeys of my life, and because we chronically undervalue artists in society, facing up to these attitudes is all part of a being a creative. Ironically, I now see how unstable the 'traditionally-safe' job

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## There's no such thing as a saturated market for creatives

market is now, and since I chose creativity, my career path has actually been much more stable,” she laughs.

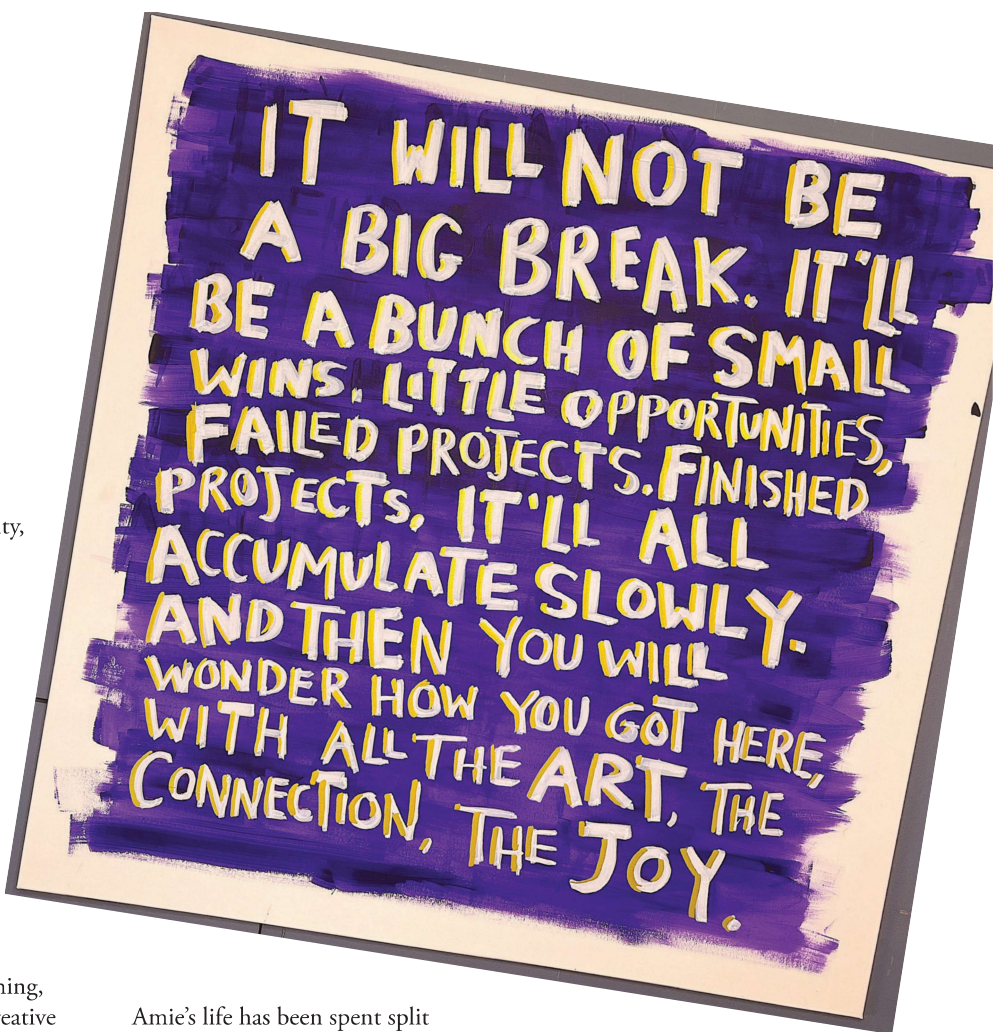
“My first craft is writing, fiction writing,” she explains, “but as I've gone on this journey and shared more about the creative process, I started putting words on canvases and made them visual, too. Initially, this was to help me share my thoughts online, but it has been beautiful seeing people collect the pieces and to have artists who are keen to hang my reminders in their studios.”

In her latest book, *We Need Your Art: Stop F\*cking Around and Make Something*, Amie calls on everyone to kick-start a creative habit, explaining how important this is for us as individuals and communities.

“There is a huge amount of research on why creativity is a crucial part of our mental health, our physical well-being and even our spirituality,” Amie explains. “You are instinctively creative, whether you have an education in the Fine Arts or not. It's natural for humans to want to play, explore and create. However, this human need is a missing pillar in society's understanding of self-development,” she continues.

“We think about exercising and getting enough sleep, but we forget that humans are designed to make things. It's a fundamental part of who we are as a species. Creativity shouldn't just be something to do as a kid and then consign to retirement. Sadly, 'responsible' adults often put creativity to the side, which robs them of so much joy.

When I talk to the public, often I'm not speaking to an audience of creatives, and I spend my time simply convincing people that they do have a creative side. Usually it was squashed by a teacher or a family member who criticised them so, when they were much younger, they stopped believing that their creativity was worthwhile.”



Amie's life has been spent split between the UK and Australia and she describes how Australia is often seen as a cultural void, a preconception that the artists in Sydney constantly fought against. “I struggled in Sydney and I felt very isolated,” says Amie. “That's a huge part of why I started speaking about creativity. Artists there deserve so much more support. I came back to England two years ago: Oxfordshire, and Watlington where I live, feels so much more alive creatively, and that's been amazing. We've grown up in a culture where there's a scarcity mindset in which we see one another as competition. People have negative feelings when someone else succeeds, as if they're stealing your opportunity.”

In her book Amie explains that artists are not in competition with one another: creatives are family – kindred spirits, who benefit from supporting one other. “It's important to recognise how when one creative does well, we all do well. There is space for all of us and we should celebrate everyone's success,” she states.

“There's no such thing as a saturated market for creatives, because humans have an insatiable appetite for art. I only really need one microwave in my life, she laughs, “but I don't have a cap on how much art I want in my life. And that's why Oxfordshire Artweeks and ▶

other big open studios events are such powerful events,” she goes on to explain. “Artists line up shoulder-to-shoulder and say, ‘Here we are. We are art. We aren’t in isolation but we’re all different! Look what we do.’ It’s a great way to highlight that art exists for everybody and we can all engage with it in one way or another.

They’re also an antidote to Instagram. It’s refreshing to have a real-life celebration of art and artists in a culture that’s so chronically online, where so much of an artist’s success depends on their social media strategy. Today, a large proportion of an artist’s energy is often directed at faceless viewers on the internet so to meet a human being who wants to know about and even buy your art is very special, especially for younger creatives who are craving that connection.

Art is good for the health of a community: active creativity has huge amounts of community benefits. When you bring the arts back to communities, you see them thrive. There are even sociologists and researchers who say instead of bringing back education or healthcare into disenfranchised communities, first bring back the arts as this gives a community a way to connect to themselves and to thrive.”

We Need Your Art: Stop F\*cking Around and Make Something, is therefore for anyone whether they’re on a creative journey or not on a creative journey when maybe they should be.

“Essentially the whole book is a call to action,” Amie concludes. “I sit the reader down and I tell them that creativity is something to take very seriously. I tell them why art is important and why the rest of us need their art. I say ‘You have something to give the world that is very important. I need you to start taking action.’ And very gently but firmly I ask the reader to stop F\*cking around and to make something.”

Amie’s other published works includes the historical novels *The Rules Upheld by No One* and *Regrettably, I am About to Cause Trouble*, a tale set in 16th century Oxfordshire, about being ostracised, and finding power and family in unusual places. Her first detective novel will be published later this year.



## Maria O'Meara

### Pink Lemonade

Do you ever get bored with food? I often do. I sometimes find myself staring in the fridge and food cupboards not impressed with the repertoire. However, the one thing – especially this time of the year – that I can never have enough of is pink lemonade.

We know that we humans pick our foods based on smell, taste and appearance. Pink lemonade for me ticks all the boxes, the perfect summer refreshment. In fact, I enjoy it that much that I could not help but researching into the history and origins of this wonderful beverage. A simple google search directed me to a Smithsonian Magazine article: *The Unusual Origins of Pink Lemonade* by Laura Kiniry (2016) in which the author provides two, quite colourful accounts, explaining the origins of pink lemonade.

*“Henry E Allott, a Chicago native who ran away to the circus in his early teens... believed to have ‘invented’ pink lemonade after accidentally dropping red-colored cinnamon candies in a vat of traditional lemonade. Adhering to the old circus adage ‘the show must go on,’ Allott simply sold the pink-hued beverage as is. A second, more stomach-churning theory comes in Harvey W Root’s 1921 book, *The Ways of the Circus: Being the Memories and Adventures of George Conklin Tamer of Lions*. Root’s main subject, George, claims his brother Pete Conklin came up with pink lemonade in 1857 while selling lemonade at the circus. Conklin ran out of water and... grabbed a tub of dirty water in which a performer had just finished wringing out her pink-colored tights... He marketed the drink as his new ‘strawberry lemonade,’ and a star was born.”*

How entertaining both stories are, turning this summer refreshment into a quirky phenomenon that prompts our imaginations to run wild, while at the same breath the soothing colour and playful taste gently caress our souls.

Indeed, pink is a colour associated with sweet love, compassion, calmness, peace, relaxation, hope and innocence. You cannot go wrong.

Which makes me think that different foods (and drinks on this occasion) and their properties – nutritious or otherwise – which can have such a profound effect, not just to the growth and healthy maintenance of our body but to our general wellbeing, our mind and soul.

Arranging the dinner table and plating our dishes in ways that enhance our dining experience means more than just a happy, full belly: a well-presented plate touches our spirit; it impacts our thoughts and emotions and like it or not contributes to a positive not just dining but life experience.... A life that is good and worth living.

The moral of the story..... Do ‘play’ with your food! And make it worthwhile.