



## Perpetual Conflict: A Journey of Art and Redemption

**Victoria Wolf**

Wolf Design and Marketing

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*With attractive illustrations, the memoir Perpetual Conflict is about overcoming self-destructive behaviors and achieving self-knowledge through creativity.*

Victoria Wolf's illustrated memoir *Perpetual Conflict* is about achieving control over the canvas of one's life through creative expression.

The book's chapters begin with reproductions of canvases that were painted during a transformative time of Wolf's life. The processes of creating these works of art is then related to particular life events. Many are traumatic, including: maternal separation when Wolf was an infant, the loss of a valued business, and the dissolution of a long-term marriage. These events and creative processes are also tied to personal characteristics, like perfectionism. The connection between art and personal growth is presented as intimate and necessary; without art, Wolf says, "we have no outlet for human expression or an understanding of our own humanity."

Here, the creative process functions as an illustration and a metaphor for personal growth. The blank canvas is presented as an opportunity to redefine critical elements of the self, and the revision of a painting as an opportunity for a do-over. That the fear of failure can stifle creativity and self-expression is a recurrent point; in response, failure is "repainted" so that it becomes a step to success.

But the book's organization results in some narrative disruptions that impair its pacing. The repetition of events, like Wolf becoming part of the hair salon industry, slows the sequence when it comes to showing the relevance of the connection between art and personal growth. Further, the text tends to make abrupt statements about salient facts; these are often too embedded in unrelated sequences for the proper context to be apparent. The unnecessary capitalization of generic descriptors is also a point of distraction, while a tendency to bestow idiosyncratic nicknames on people limits their ultimate characterizations.

The book's tone varies, in part because of its patchy use of audience references. In some sections, readers are addressed in frank terms, and are encouraged to find solace from their own traumas; most of the book is more inward and specific to Wolf, however. Her detailed analysis of self-destructive behaviors, including self-blaming monologues, are resonant; they are amplified by discussions of how art can be a tool in personal battles against punitive internal voices. Still, few explicit connections are made between Wolf's journey and how its lessons might be applied to other people's situations.

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MICHELE SHARPE (May 24, 2021)

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