

8 Pieces of Advice About the Creative Life From 2022 Commencement Speeches by Taylor Swift, Thelma Golden, and More

Here are some words of wisdom for the next generation of artists, writers, and curators.

Amah-Rose Abrams May 30, 2022

It's that time of year again. Students are graduating and commencement speeches have been written to inspire a new generation of artists, academics, curators and writers. At many schools, these are the first in-person commencement events to be held in at least two years, and guest speakers hope to congratulate and celebrate a graduating class that have risen to meet unparalleled challenges, including a global pandemic and fast-paced social change.

Perhaps the most notable commencement speaker this year was pop star Taylor Swift, who started her music career at the age of 15 and did not attend college, but was given an honorary doctorate in fine arts by New York University. In a speech that went viral, she encouraged the 2022 graduation class to embrace “cringe.”



Joan Semmel speaking at the New York Academy of Art commencement ceremonies. Photo: courtesy of the New York Academy of Art.

The writer Roxane Gay also received an honorary doctorate from the School of Visual Arts in New York, where she drew on an installation she saw at the Frieze New York art fair in her speech. She told students about *Trigger Planting*, which featured a garden wall of plants that can induce an abortion, placed on a map of the U.S. where the medical procedure is at risk. “And when you look, you realize just how many people in this country are on the verge of losing one of their most essential human rights,” Gay said. “These artists see what’s coming, they see what’s happening, and they are responding with power.”

And in an extremely generous gesture, Snapchat founder Evan Spiegel and his wife, model Miranda Kerr, [paid off the student debt \(https://news.artnet.com/art-world/evan-spiegel-miranda-kerr-otis-college-student-debt-2117044\)](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/evan-spiegel-miranda-kerr-otis-college-student-debt-2117044) of the graduating class at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, where he attended summer school when he was 15 years old. The total amount is thought to have exceeded \$10 million.

Here are eight pieces of life advice from the most memorable, creative commencement speeches of 2022:

Joan Semmel, at the New York Academy of Art

“I looked for an artist community with whom I could identify, art-worker coalition groups were open to all and met regularly so one could get a feel of the current art scene there. I met many artists, writers and many women artists. The women’s movement in the art world was just beginning and my time living in a dictatorship made me sensitive to the personal consequences of authoritarian systems and the restrictive position of women within that society... We would gather each week at different studios where we could see each other’s work. Very few women were able to get visibility in the gallery and museum world...”

—*Joan Semmel, artist*