

Safer PAINTING

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art + science

# Pick Your Poison | art and health



**Why are many plant-based chemicals  
toxic to humans?**

**There is a common misconception that all things derived from living plants must be good for you. This is expressed in the often overoptimistic use of terms such as 'natural', 'plant-based', or 'bio based' in products and chemicals we buy.**

It helps to consider that plants have survived for billions of years on the planet because they are in chemical conflict with their neighbors and enemies. They make their own protective insecticides, fungicides, herbicides (to keep other plants from growing too near), their own medicines, hormones, attractants and repellents, and more.

Not one of the above chemicals was made by the plant for our benefit. For instance, one of the first organic pesticides (a substance that kills pests), pyrethrum, was isolated from chrysanthemum flowers.

Our more ape-like ancestors knew what we have forgotten: Most plants are toxic, and some are outright poisonous. It took millions of years — and perhaps a lot of sick or dead apes — to learn which leaves to chew on, which fruits and blossoms are OK, etc.

Today we are disconnected from nature and most of us are unable to comprehend that often plants and nature are toxic and dangerous, and only sometimes benign and nourishing.

Monona Rossol, NY, 2024

## **Book Review: Pick your Poison**

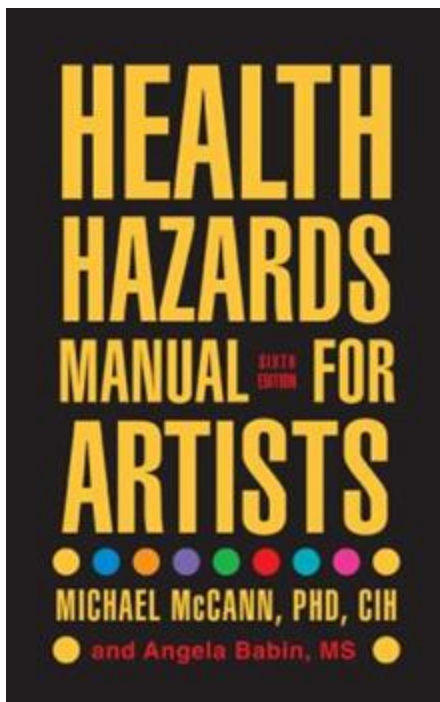
*by Monona Rossol*

**An essential read not just for regular consumers but especially for artists, students, art teachers, and anyone working with paints, solvents, pigments, glues, mediums, and other chemicals used in the arts and crafts.**

Following advice given in this book can literally ensure a long and happy career of painting or making art, without suffering the often terrible health consequences and early death experienced by old and modern masters alike.

If you work with toxic chemicals or poisons (like most of us do, often unknowingly) treat them with utmost respect or avoid them altogether, by building knowledge of the many alternatives and substitutes available today.

Reading this book can equip you with the basic chemical understanding, strategies of protection, and critical mindset, needed for the health and wellness for the creative practitioner, and those around them.



## **How the chemicals in everyday products are killing us—and what the government is *not* doing about it.**

Did you know that “nontoxic” usually means “never tested”? Or that many green cleaners are good for the environment but terrible for you? Chemist and activist Monona Rossol goes from under your sink to the halls of the powerful, tracing America’s love affair with chemicals that kill, explaining how much worse the problem has gotten in the last decade. Shocking and appalling and completely reckless—that’s how she describes the current prevalence of harmful chemicals in our everyday lives.

Scientists have started linking our increased rates of cancer, autism, obesity, and asthma (among others) to chemical exposure and Rossol points the finger directly at the companies and executives making millions of dollars by polluting our environment and introducing toxic chemicals into our bodies. She chronicles how everyday toxins get into our bodies and accumulate over time and provides us with inspiration to make changes at the checkout lines. She also explains that Americans are not nearly as well protected by our government as we might think we are.

Unlike the European Union, the United States allows chemical companies to produce toxins for use in U.S. consumer products with little to no oversight. While her tone is wry and entertaining, she’s also well informed, and her fact-filled treatise makes for absolutely terrifying reading.

Includes surprising explanations about the chemicals in furniture, detergents, paints, makeup, toys, spray cleaners, ionic air purifiers, art supplies, and more.

Reveals how many eco-friendly products are good for the environment but bad for your health.

Exposes the truth about government regulations, product testing, and labeling, including why terms such as “nontoxic” (which often means

““never tested””), ““hypoallergenic,”” and ““FDA-approved”” can be misleading.

Offers practical ways to reduce your exposure and protect yourself and your family.

If you're alarmed by the health risks of the many hazardous chemicals we encounter at home, work, and school, don't get frightened, get informed. Read *.Pick Your Poison* to learn the facts and find out what you can do about the daily onslaught of toxins that are making lab rats of us all.

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Pick Your Poison: How Our Mad Dash to Chemical Utopia is Making Lab Rats of Us All Hardcover – February 1, 2011

by [Monona Rossol](#) (Author)

The Artist's Complete Health and Safety Guide Paperback – November 1, 2001

by [Monona Rossol](#) (Author)

**With the information contained here artists can at last be free from fear and confusion to return to creativity in the safest, healthiest environment possible. “Vitaly important.”—*Library Journal***

If you are a painter, sculptor, printmaker, potter, welder, papermaker, photographer, or teacher in the arts, staying healthy and safe in your work place should not be a matter of circumstance.

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**Health Hazards Manual for Artists Paperback – Illustrated, July 17, 2008**

by [Michael McCann Ph.D.](#) (Author), [Angela Babin](#) (Author)

**This is the trusted resource for working artists and art students written by the leading authority on these health hazards.**

Whether you work in painting, photography, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, woodworking, textiles, computer, or children's art, this is the only reference book that covers all the dangers associated with metals, minerals, and chemicals. With illustrations throughout, this first aid book shows how to treat injuries and work with proper caution while still being creative. Updates include new ventilation, photo processing, and computer systems. Whether you are a beginner or professional, this is a must for every school, art studio, and home.

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