

Portrait of an ISFP:

Although all SPs (Sensuous Performers) are artisans in their nature, they usually do not pursue their artistry with the same devotion to grace and adornment as the ISFP. For whatever reason, the ISFP seems more inclined to the "fine arts" than the other SPs; so when an especially gifted composer, painter, or dancer shows up, he or she, more frequently than not, possesses the character of the ISFP. Beethoven, Toscanini, Rembrandt, and Nijinski, as shown by typohistorical research, were clear-cut ISFPs. But the ISFP temperament is very difficult to observe, even in the great artists, and so ISFP is probably the most misunderstood of all the types.

A major source of misunderstanding is the tendency of ISFPs not to express themselves directly, but through action. If they find a medium of expression, some art form, then the character is expressed in some degree via the medium. If not, it simply doesn't come out, and no one knows them, this social reticence making the character all but invisible. Of course, in those rare cases where remarkable skill is achieved, such as in the virtuoso, ISFPs become celebrities, but their nature is still far from visible. Harpo Marx, a brilliant comedic actor, may well be seen as prototype, in his simultaneous celebrity and mute invisibility.

On close observation, these relatively infrequent SPs (5 percent of the population is ISFP, as compared to 15 percent ESFP) are just as hedonic and impulsive as the other SPs. Here is no NF search for significance, nor for that matter any fascination with science (NT) or commerce (SJ). ISFPs live Epicurean lives in the here and now, and as gracefully as possible. They do not plan and prepare. Submergence in their artistry is not preparation for something later; rather they experience intensely, now. ISFPs do not wait, for to wait is to see their impulse wither and die; they want and value their impulses and see them as the center of their lives. Nor are ISFPs devoted or committed to artful play; rather they are caught, as by a magnet or a whirlwind. So then the long hours of "practice" the virtuoso "gives" to artistry is not practice at all and it is not given; it is doing and it is taken from the (willing) ISFP by the performance itself. The act is ISFP's master, not the reverse, so we must abandon any notion of ISFPs as careful and devoted planners and of dutiful preparation and rehearsal. They paint, or sing, or toot, or dance, or run, or skate, or pot, or whatever, simply because they must: the mountain is climbed because it is there.

Because the ISFP is always caught up, so to speak, in whatever actions are underway, rather than practicing toward some distant goal, there is no question of the ISFP noticing fatigue, pain, or danger. They are usually quite oblivious to these accompaniments of many of their favorite activities. It is not that ISFPs are inured to them as much as it is that, wholly engaged by an action, they simply do not notice them. In this ISFP is similar to other SPs and different from all other types.

ISFP, like other SPs, has a special kind of intelligence. Please recall that intelligence is defined in this book as doing things well under varying circumstances. This particular category of intelligence might be called "artisan concretization." Such talent differs radically from that possessed by NFs, NTs, and SJs (granting, of course, that they too have their own unique and inherent abilities). This artisan concretization somehow keeps the ISFP more closely in touch with the very real. While the ISTP is attuned to the tool, so to speak, the ISFP is attuned to color, line, texture, shading-touch, motion, seeing, and hearing in harmony. The senses of the ISFP seem more keenly tuned than those of others. Rembrandt could almost taste colors so great was his discrimination, Toscanini could hear a single false note in the most complex operatic-orchestral score, and Hemingway's words tasted and smelled and felt the waves. This extreme concreteness and specificity seems to come naturally to the ISFP and is embedded "in the warp and woof of the man's make,"

The social side of the ISFP character must not be eclipsed by the more spectacular performances some of this group are capable of. The ISFP has to be the kindest of all the types with no near competitors. The kindness is unconditional. Here is sympathy, of which we are all capable, carried to its most extreme form. The ISFP is especially sensitive to the pain and suffering of others and, like St. Francis of Assisi, with sympathetic impulsivity gives freely to the sufferer.

ISFP is usually not interested in developing facility in speaking, writing, or conversation. Speech, after all, is abstract, not concrete, ISFPs preferring to have their fingers on the pulse of life. That pulse must be felt-by touch, in the muscles, in the eyes, in the ears. This insistence on the senses being so closely attuned to reality can, in some ISFPs, occasion a breach with language, and language becomes a barrier to smooth interpersonal relations. So ISFPs are sometimes seen by others as reserved and private, tending to give up rather easily in their attempts to express themselves verbally. But this reluctant speech is not so much a lack of ability as it is disinterest.

The number of the great artisans who, upon investigation, were found clearly to have been ISFPs, is truly awesome. The other SPs seem to have contributed far fewer masters to the fine arts. Gauguin and Puccini, both ESTPs, were in this sense exceptional. Music and the dance seems almost the province of ISFP, and surely investigation will show many of the great athletes come from this group.

Of course, all ISFPs have not been and need not be artisans in the narrow sense of the word. Art, broadly conceived, is any action the next move of which is a free variable, and it is art thus conceived that is the forte of SPs in general and the ISFP in particular. Thus ISFPs have a lot of leeway in choice of occupation, especially if they don't drop out of school early (most SPs do, since the school offers little that is of interest to them or that challenges their special brand of intelligence). It is a sad day indeed when the ISFP chooses work wherein the operations are fixed by rule or necessity and not free. To be happy and productive the ISFP must choose variable actions and be rewarded for doing them.

Finally, in many ISFPs may be found an instinctive longing for the natural, the pastoral, the bucolic. They are quite at home in the wilds, and nature seems to welcome them. Some have a remarkable way with animals, even wild animals, almost as if there were a bond of mutual sympathy and trust. In some instances a similar bond may be seen between the ISFP and young children, instant and unstudied.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about ISFPs is that they are SPs, with much in common with ESFPs especially, often resembling ISTPs, and even sharing some traits with the seemingly very different ESTP. To summarize this communality with other SPs, ISFPs may be seen as optimistic and cheerful; egalitarian, fraternal, and insubordinate; tending to ward off obligation, duty, confinement, and fetters; a lover of freedom, easily bored, wanting excitement, risk, chance, and tests of luck; uncomplicated in motivation, trusting, receptive, generous, and in every sense of the word a spender rather than a saver.

ISFPs are misunderstood not only because they are retiring, reserved, and even self-effacing, but because the Jungians have cast them as "introverted feeling types," and therefore very much like the INFPS. Watch a few thoroughgoing ISFPs and you'll find they have very little in common with INFPS. Other types are reminded to guard against the natural tendency to project their own traits of character onto the silent ISFP.