



100 Reasons To Paint
by Julia Lu

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I dedicate this book to
My Mom and Dad -
My first and best teachers in Art
And in everything else in this life.



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Foreword

By Neil Slade

A few months ago, Julia asked me to edit her book *101 Reasons To Paint*. After some consideration, she made me remove one chapter. She said, “100 is a better number than 101.”

That should give you a good indication of how her mind works.

But even better indications can be found in her one-hundred reasons that follow in this tome.

Julia didn’t ask me to write an Introduction, but I’m doing it anyway. And since I am editing this book, and publishing it as well, it stays. I hope she likes it, because one thing I can’t stand is debating her. Even though over the years she’s learned that even she can’t win every argument with me, she will still try anyway. She’s a lawyer.

But actually, that statement is no longer accurate. 18 months ago I encouraged Julia to move to my town, discontinue her law practice and pursue what she really wanted to do - to become a full time painter.

She did that in less time than the time it has taken me to do this editing job.

She has accomplished that in such an overwhelming and astonishing manner that it amazes anyone who knows her and who has visited her in her studio. She has become a veritable painting force of nature, a tornado. No, a hurricane. A happy hurricane. The most delightfully cheerful splendidly happiest person I have ever known. For this reason alone, you should pay careful attention to this book.

Julia is a magician, and her main Wand of choice is palette knife.

There is a rare originality and quality in her work, a childlike spontaneity that is exceedingly rare among people who claim to be artists. She exemplifies the very definition and the true meaning of the word “artist”.

Add to this, she now wields a keyboard Wand of tremendous power, as exemplified by this informative and entertaining text.

However, she is all thumbs with a dictionary Wand and a thesaurus of correct English grammar. But that is fortunate. Otherwise, I would have been out of editing job.

Nonetheless, dismissing some her alien spelling which I have now hereby interpreted into more common vernacular, this book may appear to be deceptively simple. Don't be fooled even though some of the chapters are no more than a line or two.

You see, (literally), this book also has one-hundred original color pictures of one-hundred of her original paintings. And if one picture is worth a thousand words - well, you've got 100,000 words right here. Pay attention.

I would certainly caution against simply "glancing" at these paintings. Spend time with each, as you would a good friend. Pick one, and look deeply at it for a long while so that it reveals its secrets to you. See the depth, the lifetimes behind each image, and you will be rewarded far beyond what a mere cursory look only would afford.

There is priceless treasure that awaits you here- if you are simply willing to *see*.

Julia has a sense of purpose that I have rarely seen in any individual. But on top of that she has a sense of humor that equals or surpasses that.

The lessons she is providing you in this book will inspire you, make you laugh, and make you wonder about all kinds of things. Perhaps even your very existence. Certainly, your own sanity.

Importantly, this book is not just for artists and painters. It is a book that should be used by anybody doing anything. I encourage you to read through this book, enjoy and appreciate her creativity- and then work out how each of her "Reasons" applies to you own situation.

I am very grateful to be even a little part of this book, (and that's Reason #57), and I know you will be very happy having made *100 Reasons To Paint* a part of your life as well.

-Neil Slade, June 2010



Introduction

I was born into a medical family in China where every child was expected to go to medical school. But I was never crazy about pills or surgical knives. Fascinated with Chinese medicine, I studied natural herbs and acupuncture from a traditional Chinese herbalist in a far away village. My dream to become one, however, was soon over after a patient passed out under my needles and broke his nose. Following my parents' advice, "Do no harm," I studied physics instead. Mom and Dad were quite relieved that I would not kill anyone in my attempt to save them.

I came to the United States on a scholarship for graduate study. After completing my formal education with a doctoral degree in History and Philosophy of Science and later becoming a licensed attorney in Missouri, however, I found my true passion in art and fell in love with painting brushes and knives.

For several years I painted in the evenings and weekends while practicing law. Tired of traveling between courtroom and art studio, I decided to close my law office and become a full time painter. I moved to Denver, set up my own studio, bought 300 canvases, pounds of oil paints and a dozen palette knives, and began to paint like crazy.

I painted what I saw in the City Park, on the top of the hill, in the canyons of the Rocky Mountains, on streets, and in the urban alleys. I painted flowers that bloomed in the botanic gardens. I painted vases and wine glasses and bottles that stood on my kitchen table. I painted the sea, the beach, the ships and boats from my memory. I painted magical scenes from my dreams.

Painting has changed my life. The distinction between day and night, between weekday and weekend is blurred. Time has become the interval between two paintings. The first motion that starts my day is to grab my palette knife. The last action I take before going to bed is to sign my name on the last painting made on that day.

I paint while watching movies, listening to music, walking or dancing, with my hands, my head, and my soul. There are no boring days or sad days anymore, since most days are full of colorful joy and indescribable fun.

For me, painting has become life itself. Each time I hold my favorite palette knife or brush I feel most alive. Beautiful images and inspiring ideas pass through my mind, strong emotions run through my body, and enormous energy enters me from the water, the land, and the sky, shaking my soul. I have no choice but to paint - Paint with bursting energy, paint to express my emotions, paint to describe the impressions I receive from this world.

Painting makes me crazily happy. I am grateful for my talent and the gift given to me by God and my parents. I am grateful for the enormous encouragement and support received from my family and friends. I am content for being able to do what I truly love-to create, to seek truth and beauty, and to share with others.

A couple months ago, I cut my right hand badly and I could not hold my painting tools for a whole week. It felt like forever. Fortunately my fingers can still move. I decided to use the non-painting period to write down my thoughts about why I paint and why everyone should paint, hoping that whoever reads my book would pick up a brush or a knife to enjoy the ultimate fun of creation, which is far beyond whatever chocolate, ice cream, alcohol or drugs can give you.

These are my 100 reasons to paint.



Reason to Paint #1

To Express Emotions and Desires

Albert Einstein said, “True art is characterized by an irresistible urge in the creative artist.” Not every one was born a great artist and a few want to die painting as Paul Cezanne did, but we were all born with an irresistible urge to express ourselves through creative activities. We need to express feelings, emotions, and desires. Only when we act on that urge, can we be at peace with ourselves. Painting is one of simplest creative actions we can take, and one of the most rewarding.

Unlike acting in a film or TV movie, painting does not need a screenwriter, a director, co-stars, editors or producers. The painter is the all-in-one screenwriter, director, actor, editor and producer of the project.

Unlike performing music or dance, painting does not need a theater, a music hall, a coffee shop, a bar, or even an audience. You can paint at any place - on your study desk, dinner table, or even on your lap.

With a few simple things - a brush or knife, a sheet of paper, a small canvas or a piece of glass, and a few colors of paints, you can express all you subtle or not so subtle emotions and feelings - love, joy, sadness or anger.

No matter which subject you choose, you are painting your sensations provoked by the subject. Unlike a photo of roses, which may accurately record the appearance of roses, your paintings of roses can express your perception of the shape and color of the roses, your impression of the elegance and grace of the roses, and your appreciation of the natural beauty of the flowers. Your paintings not only tell the viewers about roses, but more importantly, about you, your feeling, your passion, your taste and your style.

What motivates you to pick up a brush or any other painting tool is your burning desire to say something about a subject, to express your emotions and feelings. It is your

inner sensation, the feeling of “Oh my god, I love these flowers!” or “This beach makes me so happy!” that inspires you to paint. You want to share with your friends, your family, and the whole world what you see and how you feel.

Living in this world, in a veritable emotional banquet under the sky and over the earth that embraces you from the moment you wake up until you collapse into bed at night, how could you not want to paint to express your emotions?



Reason to Paint #2

To Honor Inherited Talent

We were all born with artistic talent. The artistic talent is not learned from a teacher, a mentor, or your parents, nor is gained from years of formal training in art school. It is in our blood. It is in each of us now just as it was in the veins of that French caveman rubbing coal on the rock walls of his Lascaux living room.

No matter what your religious inclination or philosophic tendency is, you have no excuse to avoid painting, at least no excuses that I have discovered yet.

If you believe humans were created by a compassionate and loving supreme being, I cannot see any reason why such a master of the universe would favor Van Gogh, Monet, or Picasso over the rest of us. Those famous artists may have made more masterpieces in the end, but I've never heard of anyone being scolded by a heavenly voice for scribbling on a canvas or on a watercolor pad. We all have the God given talent, why not use it? Why not honor our creator by exhibiting the great talent he gave us? Last time I checked, "Thou Shall Not Paint" was not included in the Ten Commandments, nor in the Old or New Testament, The Koran, The Bhagavad-Gita, or the Buddha-Dharma.

If you believe in Buddhism, logic holds that after so many times of reincarnation our souls should be much closer to perfection than the people who lived 17000 years ago. If, as ancient men or women in past lives, we knew how to paint in dark caves lit only by smoldering bison bones, why not in this life as modern men and women under the glow of compact florescent illumination?

If you are a Darwinist, you will recognize that artistic talent is a result of millions of years of brain evolution. Since the cave men could paint, and there are plenty of stone-age paintings left, we probably cannot leave much worse illustrations for posterity

than our stone-age ancestors, even if modern man seems to use his frontal lobes to a lesser degree than his foraging ancestors did.

And there is plenty of news worthy evidence that some of our fuzzy mammalian cousins, such as elephants and donkeys, can express themselves with a painting brush held by a curling trunk or with their own tail. We, at the higher end of the evolution chain, definitely should be able to do at least what they can, at least in conjunction with an easel.

If you are a cat lover, you may have read that hilarious book, *Why Cats Paint: The Ethics of Feline Aesthetics*. Perhaps you have already set up a canvas for your cat to express her passion for art. Although I tend to believe that cats are in many ways superior to *Homo sapiens*, I do believe that our opposable thumb provides ample opportunity for us hairless apes to paint at least on par with our feline friends.

For those of us who believe that humans are actually on the lower end of the evolutionary and moral ladder than non-war making mammals, we should paint to speed up the process of intellectual and social evolution. We should paint to continue the journey of creation of beauty started by cave men and women and their many close and remote cousins in Darwin's evolutionary chain.

Make Louver not War.

There are endless sources of our talent, depending on what you believe. One thing is certain, however: Our talent is the gift we have had since the day we popped up on this planet. We have no reason not to honor it by using it to its full extent.

If you are still not convinced or you hear a voice within you saying "You cannot paint..." then you should definitely follow Van Gogh's advice: "By all means paint, and that voice will be silenced."



Reason to Paint #3

Follow Your Passion

Aristotle said, “All human actions have one or more of these seven causes: chance, nature, compulsions, habit, reason, passion, and desire.”

Passion is a major cause of successful focused human actions, especially creative actions. Without passion, there would be no creative energy, no creative activities, and therefore no art, at least no art worth looking at. Without passion, all art would be as dull as a cookie without sugar or as tepid as a cup of lukewarm coffee.

According to Rollo May, an American existential psychologist, creativity is a passion to live beyond one’s death. More than anything else, painting is a painter acting out her or his passion for life, love and creativity. Passion inspires and motivates painters. Passion creates masterpieces in art and makes a painting alive and magnificent.

One evening I watched a film, *The Power of Art*, with my boyfriend. He was moved to tears when Von Gogh’s sunflowers were on the screen. I always loved Von Gogh’s colorful paintings, but until then I did not realize that what made Von Gogh one of the greatest painters of all time. More than his genius observations, his brilliant techniques and anything else, it was his passion for truth, beauty and life that made his art immortal.

I always knew that I love sleep and chocolate, but only when painting made me forget about both, I recognized my passion for art.

Who knows, you may also have uncontrollable passion for art, or you may be another budding Von Gogh yourself. That’s why you should pick up your brush and paint. Otherwise, you might just be missing the boat, even if for you it’s just a personal and warm little rowboat.



Reason to Paint #4

Discover Your Talent

Yes, you were born with artistic talent. However, until you pick up a brush, a knife, or any other painting tool and begin to paint, you may never know that you have a talent. You may think that you cannot paint. That thought would make you hesitate to get started in creating any form of art and would prevent you from ever discovering your hidden talent.

Grandma Moses began painting in her seventies. After a collector discovered her paintings in a drugstore window, her work was exhibited in US, Europe, and Japan. People loved her and valued her paintings. New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller proclaimed her birthday "Grandma Moses Day" in 1960. Her painting *Sugaring Off* (1943) was sold for \$1.2 million in 2006.

You may also know the story of "Grandma Van Gogh," a 75 years old illiterate Chinese woman who became famous for her naive yet creative crayon paintings. She was from a small village in central China, had never been in school, had no training in painting whatsoever, and did not know who Van Gogh was. One day in 2003, she picked up her granddaughter's crayons and sketched a village to show her granddaughter what a particular kind of tree looked like. Since that day, she became more and more interested in painting with crayons. She has produced over 100 crayon paintings in recent years and held an exhibition of her own works in Hong Kong and other places.

By picking up crayons, this grandmother found her hidden talent in art. She did not learn painting from her grandchildren or anyone else. She knew how to paint before she knew that she could paint. She had a talent since she was born, but the talent was hidden until she discovered it by accidentally picking up crayons to make a sketch.

You have the talent, too. Why not discover it now? Why wait another decade, another year, another month, another day or even another hour? You should start now, here, right at this moment.

You may say that those grandma painters are exceptions, not the norm. How could you know? Most people have tried little during their life time, some not at all. Most people have not given themselves the chance to find out what form their artistic talent takes.

I know you've got it in you.



Reason to Paint #5

Paint To Declare Freedom!

Painting will set you free!

Perhaps the strongest desire of humans have is freedom. You may not always feel that you have the freedom to do what you want or to express your idea and opinion freely in real life. But when you pick up a brush, a knife or any other painting tool, you are entering a true, free world. There are no authorities, no restrictions, and no rules. You have the ultimate authority to make all the plans and decisions on that piece of paper or that canvas.

You decide what to paint. If you decide to paint a plant which grows red leaves and green flowers, who can force you to do otherwise? If you want to paint a river that is taller than a mountain, who can insist that such an image is impossible? If you decide to paint a pig having three heads, who can tell you that you can not do that?

Okay, somebody might try to tell you “No!”

You don't have to listen to them.

Haha!!

You decide what painting tool to use. If you decide to use a spoon to paint, who can tell you spoon is for dinner only? If you decide to use an electric toothbrush, who can tell you not to? Your dentist?

You decide which surface to paint. If you decide to paint on a mirror, the mirror will be your canvas. If you decide to paint on your bathroom wall, the wall becomes your big canvas.

You decide how to paint. In thin wash or thick impasto, smooth or heavily textured, pastel or brilliant, it's all up to you.

You don't have to follow any rules. You can do whatever you want with your painting tool, your paints, and your canvas. You have total freedom.

You may not be aware of a little known document discovered in 1957 in a chest found outside Thomas Jefferson's Monticello root cellar, next to the hose faucet. It begins this way:

"...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Gouache..."



Reason to Paint #6

Have Fun

Is there anything more enjoyable and fun than painting?

Not in my universe.

Pick up your brush, knife or whatever you choose to be your painting tool, and start to paint. Who cares if your hands get dirty? Who cares if you accidentally paint on your clothes? Who cares if you mix the wrong color? Enjoy the moment, enjoy the process of painting!

Heck, smear your shirt just for fun, right between the buttons.

When we were kids, we played all the time. After growing up, playing has been replaced by studying, working, and all kinds of duties and obligations. We miss the FUN of play. If you pick up brush to paint, you would find yourself going back to your childhood and enjoy that pure clean fun again!

Yes, painting is playing. You are that child again, without worry, without obligation, without objectives. You are having a pure fun. Messing with paints, getting your hands dirty, ruining your pretty sweater - who cares? Well, perhaps should not wear your favorite sweater.

You are living in the moment, the moment of creating and expressing, the moment of Traveling to Another Dimension. Your brush or knife becomes a magic wand that carries you to where you want to be.

If you start to paint, you may soon find out that painting is even more fun than eating chocolate or ice cream, watching movie, playing tennis, going shopping, or having a party.

It is above all the above.



Reason to Paint #7

Light Up Your Brain

Fifty years ago in his Colorado wilderness brain research laboratory, brain researcher T.D.A. Lingo first called our attention to those two little magic click switches in the middle of each and every human brain: The amygdala.

Other scientists have at last begun to catch on and catch up with Lingo. In the past decade scientific research regarding the amygdala has skyrocketed. Welcome to the Brain Party!

The amygdala is something like a master switch that controls the brain's most important activities at any moment, from basic fight or flight survival to advanced creativity. The amygdala is connected with all parts of the human brain. Importantly, the amygdala has a main highway straight to the prefrontal cortex, the area involved with our highest intellectual potential. The amygdala sends and receives input from this part of the brain all the time.

Ways to stimulate your amygdala into advanced mode includes smelling something pleasant, listening your favorite music, and seeing, recalling, or painting a beautiful scene.

To paint, in Lingoian sense, is to tickle your amygdala and make it click forward so that your brain will automatically be set in frontal lobes mode, in which the brain works with its highly intelligent parts. Painting is a true expression of how you are using your creative thoughts and action to light up your brain.



Reason to Paint #8

Wake Up Dormant Brain Cells

The potential of the human brain is infinite. We do not know, and may never know how much the human brain is capable of.

If the potential of your brain can not be calculated in its infinite potential, obviously, any portion that you may tap into is just a small slice of this Infinity Pie. It's like having the most deliciously tasty cream pie right in front of you, and no matter how many pieces you gobble up, the pie plate never runs out!

Wow! We study Einstein's Theory. We listen to Bach. We appreciate Van Gogh. We go to school or go to work every day. We communicate with our family, friends and strangers. We cook, clean house, go shopping, and decorate our house. We manage complicated relationships. We play tennis, go to gym, visit museum or gallery, and go to theater. Doing all of these, we don't even use 1% of our brain! How could we when the potential of our brain is unlimited? What is ANY percentage of infinity? An infinitely small portion!

What a magic brain we have!

Can you imagine how much we can achieve if we begin to use even 50% of our brain, if you could do such a thing? We would all be geniuses. We will be Einstein, creating an entirely new concept of time and space, founding a new physics, and playing violin beautifully, or Da Vinci, experimenting, inventing, writing, sculpturing, and painting, or Benjamin Franklin, conducting physical tests, carrying out diplomatic duty, drafting declaration of independence, writing books on various subjects, and making art.

What will YOU do with your Infinity Mind Motor?

Each one of us can use our brain to do what we want in this life. We can be scientist, inventor, writer, artist, mechanic, athlete, or perhaps several of these at the same

time. We can all create masterpieces, compose heavenly music, write novels, make movies, and play sports.

YOU decide what you will do with your Magic Mind Machine. The human brain is democratic in extreme.

How do we wake up our “dormant” brain cells and realize their unlimited potential?

Well, neurons just sit there stagnant because they are bored. Our daily routine activities do not involve that many brain cells. The connected functional structures of our brain have left big portions of our brain out of the picture, twiddling their axon and dendrite thumbs. It is not too much fun to watch other brain cells firing.

The dormant brain cells need to be involved in creative activities, including making paintings. They need to participate in the motion rather than standing by. They need to be in the playing field, rather than sitting on the bench. They need to be making a film rather than watching the finished movie.

What are you doing in your Brain Movie?

Are you just sitting there as an uninvolved spectator? Or are you in the middle of the story, as an excited and active character?

Once you begin to paint, you enlist a whole neural team into action. You can't lose because playing in the game is winning the brain game, no matter what the score is.

By painting, by going into action, you bring color, light and excitement directly into your brain, and you wake up sleeping dormant brain cells. Surprise! You never know what will happen next.

You have started Brain Magic!



Reason to Paint #9

Balance the Two Sides of Your Brain

My first roommate in graduate school studied education. Her thesis was on the different cognitive functions of the left hemisphere and right hemisphere of the brain. Influenced by her passion for the subject, I became interested in brain function and discovered, to my surprise, even though I had studied physics, mathematics, logic and philosophy, my thinking is dominated by my right brain. Therefore, art would be my natural field of study.

I decided to give my right brain a chance to show how much it can do. I took a correspondence course in fine art and picked up my painting brush. For years, I only painted occasionally. After graduate school, I got a job, but became bored quickly. I then went to law school after reading some articles talking about how much law studies would challenge my intelligence and my brain.

Although I love learning, I was never crazy about classes. I had trouble to concentrate for more than 15 minutes. In law classes, I began to draw pictures of the professors who were giving lectures, as well as drawing pictures of the students who sat in front of me. It was so much fun. It made boring lectures less unbearable. Drawing and painting helped me to go through law school without too much pain.

The more I painted, the easier the law study became. The right side and left side of my brain worked together and created a harmony that allowed me to understand and remember rules and codes without much effort. I joked with my friends that I have discovered the most efficient method for studying any subject with minimum effort to achieve maximum result. My method served me well. In the last semester, I even managed to get the best grade in one difficult class and got an award for it.

The day before the bar examination, when everyone else was studying hard, I was painting a series of canvases titled “Law School Fashion”. This totally relaxed me and made me happy.

Painting helped me pass the bar easily.



Reason to Paint #10

Nurture Your Creativity

Creativity is the greatest expression of our free will, a most precious gift of all. Creativity, a natural extension of human passion, gives color, value, and focal point to our life on earth.

True, you began this life as a creative being. As a baby you created laughter and wonder. As a child you dabbled making mud pies and messy finger paintings. As a teen, you made up wild dances and practical jokes on your friends.

Your creativity, however, will always need to be nurtured and protected as you get older. Your creativity can be repressed and even destroyed.

If you have ever lived under a repressing political regime, you would know that even a creative thought can send you to jail. When creative ideas or thoughts are criminal under a political system, it is impossible to express them via art. When artists are forced to make huge image of “the great leader” only, paintings and sculptures become propaganda tools, and artists lose their God given license to create.

During the modern Dark Age in China, almost all artists were branded as counter revolutionary or bourgeois liberals and were forbidden to create paintings, make music, write books, or make movies. For years, there were only eight plays allowed public performances. Eight! The only movies allowed to be shown in the theaters in the entire country were based on just these eight plays. For years, over a billion people watched just these same eight plays.

For decades, the only paintings allowed to be exhibited in the museum or on the street were the huge portraits of party leaders. The only music allowed to be played were “red songs” praising Mao and the communist party. Mao’s books were required to be studied. Other than his book, there were very few books that were published.

During that period, color almost disappeared in China. Pretty colors were connected with the bourgeois and with “moral corruption”. Creative fashion did not even exist. Skirt and dress were totally forbidden. Creativity was brutally repressed in any field.

Even if you live in a free society, you may still not be able to express your creativity all the time. Your job may require you following orders. Your teachers, parents, spouse or even your friends may not be so crazy about your creative thinking.

Painting offers you a space where your creativity can freely express itself. When you paint, you tell your knife or brush where to go and what to do, you choose what to paint, when to paint and how to paint. You do not have to follow anyone else’s order or care about anyone else’s opinion.

Creativity is like a wonderful flower which is in your custody and needs your care and love.

You must water your creative plant regularly, so that it blooms and gives you its beautiful colors and heavenly fragrance.

Don’t let your Creative Flower die.

Nurture it!



Reason to Paint #11

Develop Your Talent

Like a living tree, your talent may grow into the sky or may dry out and die. You have to discover your talent first by taking action - that is, pick up brush and begin to paint. After you find out that you can paint, you need keep painting to reach your true potential and fully develop your talent.

Grandma Moses did exactly that. She did not stop painting for 30 years after she picked up her brush in her 70s. If she put down her brush after a few years, she would never have reached her potential in her life time.

Your talent is like a photograph that develops onto the blank piece of photographic paper, sitting in the developing bath tray in the darkroom. If you take it out of the bath too soon, it will be under-exposed and remain blank.

Make sure you allow the color of your talent to develop fully. Keep your talent in the creative bath until you get a beautiful image.



Reason to Paint #12

Have Better Vision

Last summer when I visited my family and friends in China I bought a medical book written by one of the best traditional Chinese doctors and Tao masters, Zhong Li Ba Ren. It was the number one best seller on Chinese medicine in 2008.

Among all the books I have ever read, this book is one of the few books that I can read and enjoy over and over. It includes many simple holistic exercises which I practice regularly.

One of the exercises the author recommended is the movement of the eyes: Smoothly turn your eyes around in circular motion- first clockwise and then counter clockwise. Some eye doctors in US recommended a similar exercise for patients.

This particular eye exercise is effective, but inevitably boring, just like many exercise routines. Well, you may forget about the eye exercises all together. I have realized something better. Just pick up brush or knife and paint. You will exercise your eyes naturally when you paint, no matter making your masterpiece or doing simple study.

When making plein air (outdoor) painting at a scene, your eyes move between the distant objects and your canvas. When painting flowers in your studio, your eyes travel between your flowers and your canvas. The movement of your eyes is natural, free and continuous. It is much better exercise than any boring routine.

While having fun in creating your unique painting, you are exercising your eyes. One of unintended results of painting is a better vision, figuratively and literally.



Reason to Paint #13

Exercise Your Neck

A few years ago, I hurt my neck in a car accident. It was awful. I could not turn my head freely and had to see a physical therapist for several months. It was the first time I realized how important the neck is. To comfort me, my friends told me all sorts of stories about how much problems they had with their neck. I learned from those stories that some neck injury has nothing to do with accident, but is the result of years of working at a desk without adequate exercise and relaxation.

Knowing how inconvenient and painful it can be if my neck gets hurt, I began to pay attention to neck care. Most routine exercises do not work for me. They are mechanical and boring. More importantly, these exercises remind me that my neck was injured or I had a problem, which would inevitably evoke negative emotions.

My sister, a medical doctor, taught me a simple neck exercise method which she learned from a 95 years young lady who practiced Dao and enjoyed good mental and physical health in her Pentium age. The method is to write Chinese Character with your head, actually or imaginary. It is something I can do and enjoy.

Using my head as a pen, my focus is on writing and can forget about all the problems related to my neck. When writing, my head moves in all directions naturally and irregularly. It is much easier than following any boring exercise routine.

Inspired by this simple, fun and effective method, I added my own twist to it. I use my head as a brush to paint. I move the head to paint the water, boays, trees, or flowers in the air. With my head painting invention, I can design my next painting without waste canvas and my neck and head get great exercise they deserve. What a genius idea! If you have a problem with your neck, you may want to try it.

When painting with your head is not possible, you may imagine that you are doing so. Sport researchers already told us the startling effect of our imagination: Only by imaging that you are throwing a ball, the relevant muscles get the amount of exercise equivalent to 56% of the exercise these muscles would get if you actually throw the ball. By simply imagining head painting and nothing more, you would sufficiently exercise your neck without actually moving it.

I wonder if you would burn the same percentage of calories?



Enhance Your Brain's Neuroplasticity

My mom, a surgeon, teacher, creative artist, and singer, mastered everything she was interested in. She read in seven languages, made accurate medical drawings, and cooked dishes that one could only find in a four-star restaurant. She designed sweaters which became the envy of all my schoolmates and teachers. She was a true genius.

When I was a child, I spent a lot of time in my mom's classroom in medical school. I noticed that her hands almost never stopped moving. She drew various organs on the black board or made gestures when she spoke to the class. At home her hands were always busy, too. Mom knitted all of our sweaters and sometimes knitted for the neighbors' children, too.

By working with both hands, Mom was exercising her brain.

Scientists have presented evidence based on functional brain imaging to show that the neuroplasticity, the brain's natural ability to form new connections, can be enhanced by hand-eye coordinated exercises.

Some doctors have designed simple hand movements to exercise the human brain. But there are more natural hand movements which have already existed for thousands of years. Knitting and painting are two of those exercises that can produce beautiful art pieces you can wear or enjoy, and exercise your brain at the same time.

You paint with your hands and your eyes. When you make plein air painting outdoors, your eyes are on the object you intend to paint, and your hands are holding brush to paint your emotional reaction to the object. Without adequate hand-eye coordination, painting a picture which is similar to the scene you see is impossible.

Painting, in this sense, is a process of transforming a blank canvas into a painted surface through continuous hand-eye coordination.

If you try to paint with both of your hands, the result on your brain would be even better. When using one hand, you are stimulating the opposite side of the brain and activating the blood flow on that side. Since most of the time you are using your dominant hand, the opposite side of your brain gets lot more exercise than the other side. By using both hands, you are stimulating both sides of your brain and the blood flow would be more active in your entire brain.

When you use both hands at the same time, you are asking them to communicate or coordinate with each other. The coordination between two hands would stimulate the communication between the two hemispheres of your brain.

I used to paint with my right hand only. I am trying to use both hands now. It is awkward and uncomfortable, but it is also challenging and exciting. Actually my left hand paintings are more irregular, unexpected and interesting.

You should try sometimes, and you may like it.



Reason to Paint #15

Exercise Your Brain By Stimulating Nerve Endings

Scientific studies have shown that engaging the fingers can stimulate nerve endings directly connected to the brain and increase the blood circulation in the brain. The nerve endings on your fingertips correspond to more areas of the brain than any other body area, except perhaps the tongue and lips.

Well, you may eat or kiss to stimulate your brain, but if you eat too much you may damage your brain and your body and you could not kiss when you are alone. Exercising your fingertips, on the other hand, can be done anytime anywhere. The finger exercises include eating with chopsticks, netting or crocheting with needles, sewing, playing musical instruments, and painting.

The experiments conducted by National Institute of Mental Health showed that finger exercises enhanced brain capacity, increased connections between neurons, forged new neural pathways, and increased circulation to the brain areas. More circulation to the brain means more oxygen and nutrients for the brain cells and decreased waste products that clog up the brain. No doubt that finger exercises contributed significantly to brain plasticity, the ability of the brain to renew its self.

A month ago, when Erfie, my friend's dog smartly tied his lease around me and then ran away, I fell down on the icy ground and broke one finger. This incident made me realize how much I had depended on each and every one of my ten fingers. When I crochet, all my fingers are involved. All the fingers on my right hand holding the crochet needle, and all the fingers on my left hands form a channel leading the yarn to the needle. Without the participation of every one of them, it is difficult performing the task.

When I paint, I need all my fingers, too. All the fingers on my right hand work together holding the painting knife and move on canvas, in every direction and at every angle I can imagine. All the fingers on my left hands work together holding paper towel or rag, and cleaning the knife when it gets muddy.

More than ever I treasure each and every one of my fingers. They are not only the most efficient tools I can ever have, but the crucial parts of my body that directly connect to my brain.



Reason to Paint #16

Exercise Your Entire Body

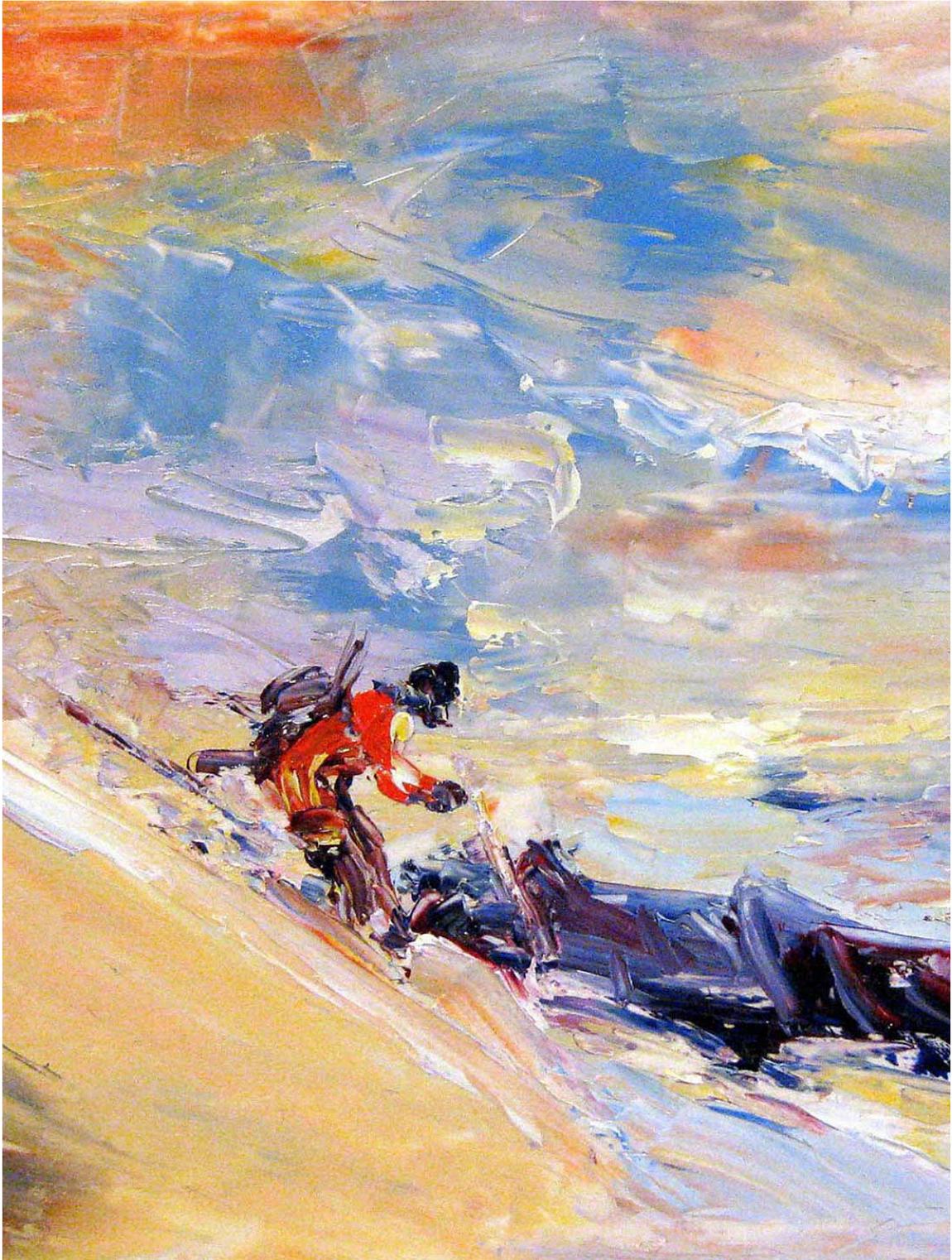
Painting is a physical act. When you make a big painting, you use not only your brain, your hands and fingers, but also your entire body. Your arm keeps moving around the canvas, your feet and legs change positions almost every minute, your torso is in continuous motion, and your waist twists now and then.

In fitness sense, the process of painting is a great natural work-out session. If you pay little attention to how you move while you are painting, you would notice that there is correlation between the rhythm of your physical movement and the rhythm and harmony of the color and value in your painting.

One day, I painted in front of a mirror. While focusing on my canvas, I was aware of the movement of my physical body --- the direction, the speed, the gesture, and the rhythm. When I turned my favorite music on, the movement became more interesting and graceful. True, painting can be a messy and muddy process, but can also be a graceful fitness workout dancing.

Some other artists were aware of the effect of painting motion on their body, too. Lou Shibai, a 91 years old Chinese artist noticed that the painting pose for Chinese ink painting not only guarantees the work's quality, but also exercises the painter's body. When making ink paintings, the painter's body is straight, with the wrist and elbow suspended and shoulders relaxed. The continuous movement of the wrist and arm in different directions creates an effect similar to that of shadowboxing.

Please do not punch holes on your canvas, though.



Reason to Paint #17

Increase the Flexibility of Your Body

Your flexibility is the ability of your joints to move freely through a full and normal range of motion. Stretching is a great way to increase flexibility and keep your body protected from injury.

There are two basic types of stretching: Static stretching and dynamic stretching. Static stretching is passive stretching where a stretch is held in a specific location for a certain time, like bending and holding the stretch. Dynamic stretching is dynamic muscular movements, such as a bouncing bend over hamstring stretch. In gym, you do static stretching after exercise when your body is warm, and do dynamic stretch before exercise, to warm up your body.

Of course, you don't have to go to gym to stretch your body, statically or dynamically. You can paint.

When you paint, you not only move your body around naturally, left, right, up and down, forward, backward, but also bend over, twist, or reach out a lot. When a knife fell down on the floor, you had to bend over to pick it up. When a brush jumped behind the desk, you have to crawl on the floor and stretch your arm to get it. To adjust the position of your easel, you may need to bend your knees or twist your arm. If the canvas is taller than you, you have to stretch your body or stand on the tip of your toe to reach the up edge of the canvas. All these movements are dynamic stretching.

When you finish painting, your body is pretty much warmed up. This is the best time to do static stretching. You may use your easel or desk as a ballet bar for stretching. Sorry guys, you might not be into "ballet" stretches. Perhaps you can place a tube of paint on the floor in front of you, and reach for it, pretending it's a cold can of beer.



Do Natural Strength Training

I read an interesting story from a magazine a few years ago. In early 70s, three 25-year-old men, who were in good health, participated in a strange experiment conducted by a medical doctor researching on exercise and health.

The doctor asked them to stay in bed for three weeks. They could watch TV or read, but were not allowed to get up or leave the bed for any reason. Meals were served by a nurse. All other needs were taken care of by nurses. After three weeks, the physical condition of three participants were measured and the doctor found that their heart and other major organs were aged similar to those of 50-year-old men.

Thirty years later the doctor found these three men. They gained weight and showed signs of aging in their body. The doctor offered them a 6 week strength training program including a healthy diet to improve their health. 6 weeks later, the doctor measured their physical condition again and found that the condition of their heart and other major organs are as young as those who were in their 30's.

These extreme experiments demonstrated the effectiveness of strength training in reversing the effect of aging and improving physical health. Strength training, also called resistance training, is the use of resistance to muscular contraction to build the strength, aerobic endurance, and size of skeletal muscles. The benefits of strength training including increased bone, muscle, tendon and ligament strength and toughness improved joint function, reduced potential for injury, increased bone density, and improved cardiac function.

Of course you may go to gym or attend fitness class to have strength training. If you don't like gym or not crazy about class, then you can always paint and have your own strength training naturally in your studio.

When you lift a box of canvas and move it from basement to your studio upstairs, or when you carry your easel from your car to the painting spot, you are having strength training with gravity. When you push the paint against canvas with brush, scrabbling or dabbing, you are doing resistance exercise naturally. If that's not enough, you may consider to wear a pair of weights on your wrists or ankles or both, before starting your next painting.

This may not be enough to qualify you for the Olympics, but it definitely beats sitting on the couch and moving your thumbs on your remote control.



Choreograph Your Own Dance Routine

If you pay close attention to your own movement, you will find its unique rhythm and pattern. You may record this pattern and use it as basic movement to develop your own fitness program or to choreograph your own dancing routine. By incorporating your movement pattern with yoga, Pilate, or ballet, you can create a unique painter's dance to characterize graceful motion and to address a painter's' particular need for relaxation and gaining flexibility and strength.

Of course you need select a perfect music for the dance that compliments your own personality. I use my friend's original piano music for my movement.

When you master dancing, you may apply it to your painting process. Your next painting will be done while you are dancing with music. You may be surprised to discover that your painter's dance has made your painting full of dynamic energy and more free and alive than ever.

You may, however, want to keep your shades down if you are shy.



Meditate While You Paint

Meditation, which used to be practiced only in Buddhist temple, has become part of many people's daily life. Meditation is taught in school, gym, yoga class, or fitness workshop. It is practiced by millions of people all over the world everyday. More than any form of religious ritual, meditation benefits your mind and body.

Traditional meditation emphasizes mindfulness, attentiveness to the movement of the body, and to the ever-changing states of the mind. The central concept in traditional meditation is detachment and concentration. Detachment requires to emotionally detach from the physical surroundings and concentration asks for focusing the mind on a single point.

To meditate, you don't have to sit still, thinking of nothing. You can paint!

Painting allows you to concentrate on a single point, the brush strokes on the canvas, and forget about all the trivial details of daily life. While you are painting, you temporarily detach from all the material objects surrounding you. You are only concerned with the beautiful reality you are creating. Therefore painting can put you in a perfect meditating state.

I used to spend hours meditating. Now I paint instead. Painting helps me to enter into the state of trance quickly and stay there as long as I want to. Painting connects me with the universe and allows me to fly into another dimension effortlessly and travel between worlds to enjoy the amazing views in each existence.

I Travel with my Brush Wand to wherever I choose to go, just like riding upon a magic broom.



Reason to Paint #21

Sleep Well

Dalai Lama said: “Sleep is the best meditation.”

I love sleep. Sleep not only allows my body to rest and properly regenerate itself, but also gives me one of the most beautiful experiences in life, dreaming. It seems to me that the priority in this life should be breathing, sleeping, eating, and then everything else because you must survive before you can do anything else. Sleep is the key to your survival and well being.

If you have trouble to sleep, you definitely should paint. You have trouble to sleep perhaps because you are under lot of stress, from your work or from your family life, or because you do not feel good about yourself, or because you have headache, back pain or other bodily discomfort. Painting can make you forget about all of the above and give you back your positive attitude and peaceful mind.

Painting, as a creative act, will offer you psychological satisfaction. As a constant physical movement, it will give you the perfect work out session you need. By the time you go to bed, you are content and your body is tired. How can you not sleep well?

When I paint the whole day, I sleep like a cat at night. When I wake up the next morning, I not only have the energy stored during my sound sleep, but also have the idea about what to paint derived from the dream I experienced while sleeping.



Reason to Paint #22

Be Healthy

Lao Tzu's said: "Health is the greatest possession. Contentment is the greatest treasure. Confidence is the greatest friend." His statement makes perfect sense to me. Good health, mental and physical, is the foundation of everything else in life. Without healthy mind and body, it would be difficult to be content and confident.

According to Lao Tzu, the secret to health is not to mourn for the past, nor to worry about the future, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.

When you paint, you are at your present moment of creation. No time to mourn for the last bad painting or worry about when you can make a masterpiece in the future. There is only you, your brush, and THIS canvas you are painting on.

Painting passionately is the key to a painter's health.



Reason to Paint #23

Lose Weight

Want to lose weigh or keep fit? Who does not? A simple and fun way to achieve fitness is to pick up your brush and paint.

When you paint, no matter how you use your fingers or other tools, your hand inevitably would get dirty. Getting hands dirty could be a good thing for losing weight because you cannot grab junk food that easily. To wash hands thoroughly in the middle of painting is not always practical, either.

Besides, there is so much stuff on your table. There is less room for Twinkies.

Paints are everywhere, brushes and knives are all around. How can you eat while painting? Even if you don't care about germs, you still need to consider the possibility of accidentally putting brush in your soup or confusing palette knife with butter knife. I did both several times. It was awful. It totally ruined my appetite for days. Oil paints may look great, but they taste horrible, worse than the worst food you have ever tried.

If you are like me, sometimes having so much fun in painting, you would totally forget about food. Among my friends, I am a well known chocoholic. If I indulge myself, I could finish two pounds of chocolate covered cherry or chocolate with almond in a blink. But when I am enjoying painting, one pound chocolate may last a whole week!

Thanks god I like painting so much.

According to weight control experts, a weight problem may have deep roots in human emotions. I agree. Sometimes I opened the refrigerator looking for food not because I was hungry, but because I was sad, mad or bored. Some of my friends seem to act the same way.

Well, if that's the case, painting is a perfect solution. When you are sad, you can paint blue to describe your blues. When you are mad, you can paint madder red to express your anger. Then you will not be blue or mad anymore. It will be on your canvas, and will make you happy to see how you have transformed your negative emotions into a creative expression.

When you are bored, painting will revitalize you and can keep you occupied for hours with colorful joy.



Reason to Paint #24

Be Happy

A variety of philosophical, religious, psychological and biological researchers have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.

One popular model considers happiness as consisting of positive emotions and positive activities. Another classifies three kinds of happiness: pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

If you believe either model, you should paint.

If you believe that happiness consists of positive emotions and positive activities, then you should paint to be happy because painting can provoke positive emotions and engage you into positive activities at the same time. When you are painting magnificent mountain, mystical lake, flowing river, splendid sea, brilliant sunrise, or stunning sunset, how can you not have joy, admiration, inspiring, and other kinds of positive emotions? You are creating an original, meaningful and inspiring painting, which can be shared with many others. How can anyone say you are not participating in a positive activity? Is there anything in the world that can be more positive than creation of beauty?

If you are convinced that there are three kinds of happiness: pleasure, engagement, and meaning, then painting can bring all three to you. To paint sea ships, river boats, spring garden, autumn trees, winter snow or any subject you desire definitely would bring you pleasure. Painting would engage your mind and almost all your body parts in continuous motion. Painting allows expression of your emotions and your perception of the meaning of life.

Happiness is not something made for you by someone else, but your contentment and satisfaction created by your own action. You live at the present moment of creating original art, how can you not be happy?



Reason to Paint #25

Live Longer

It is well known fact that many Chinese painters and calligraphy masters lived much longer than their contemporary fellow Chinese. As late as the beginning of 20th century, the average life span in China was under 35 years. Many painters and calligraphers, however, lived past 70. Among 100 famous painters and calligraphers who lived from the years 1800 to 2000, at least 20 lived more than 85 years, and the longest lived 109 years. Today, many painters and calligraphers are still working and exhibiting their works when they are more than 100 years old.

Painting keeps them physically fit and psychologically balanced. Painting makes them happy and excited. Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov once said that pleasure can make every pulse and impression in your life much easier to feel, which makes the body much stronger.

If you are happy and healthy, of course you will live longer in this world. Grandma Moses lived 101 years. Monet and Picasso also enjoyed their longevity. Painting was their fountain of youth. It is reasonable to assume that painting contributed to their longevity. To complete as many paintings as those painters did, they got to work out everyday in artistic expressive ways. Their paintings were exhibited all around the world and they were loved and admired by many. That would make them very happy and satisfied. They were doing what they loved and received awards for what they did. How could they not want to live longer? How could they not live longer?

Van Gogh? Okay, no theory is perfect.



Reason to Paint #26

Appreciate Nature More

Until I began to paint, I did not realize that no object is a single solid color under any light. Color changes in so many ways according to the quality of light. Shadow is not simply dark. As Paul Cezanne observed, shadow is a color as light is, and light and shadow is only the relationship of two tones.

I always loved the sky and liked to figure out what color the cloud was at any moment. Now, after painting for a few years, I see much more in the sky than I saw in all the previous years combined. I see many subtle tones in the seemingly white clouds, and in the stunning sunset, all its infinite hues of glory.

I always loved the trees, but now I can see much more shades of green in the summer trees and much more colors in the autumn woods. I always loved flowers. Now, more than ever, I appreciate their lovely colors, delicate shapes and stunning beauty.

Painting opened my eyes and brain in a way that nothing else has.

Summer used to be my only favorite season. I loved the early sunrise and late sunset, the beach and boats, the garden and flowers, and, of course, the heat. Now I favor all seasons. I enjoy painting the spring garden, the summer beach, the autumn woods and the winter snow. No matter in which season, hot or cold, shiny or cloudy, raining or snowing, every day is a beautiful day! No matter where I am, in my studio or on the street, at the bottom of the canyon or on the top of the mountain, on the beach or in the park, in shopping mall or coffee shop, I see beautiful colors, interesting textures, and wonderful shapes. I cannot wait to grab my painting knife.

In spite of war, violence, injustice, pollution and all other ugly things, this planet is still a beautiful place to live and to paint. Perhaps all politicians, generals, and CEOs

should start their basic training in art class so that they can appreciate the beauty of our planet and would work hard to protect it rather than damage it or destroy it for profit or power.



Reason to Paint #27

See the Beauty In Ordinary Things

Confucius believed that everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it. Painting makes me see beauty in ordinary things around me.

I see the magic sparkle on simple wine glass, subtle changes of colors on tiny panels of a wild flower, the curly shape of a golden leaf on the ground, the shadow of pine branches on the white curtain.

An artist should be the one who can see extraordinary beauty in ordinary things. One day, you may, like James Lowell, view each weed as a flower in disguise, or like Gerard De Nerval, begin to see each flower as a soul blossoming.



Reason to Paint #28

Appreciate Diversity

Painting helps me see each subject much more clearly and appreciate its uniqueness.

In this world no two objects are exactly the same. Each individual is unique. Each apple, each flower petal, each leaf, each branch, each rock, each tree, each hill, each river, each lake, each mountain, each street, each building, or each alley has its own personality.

The world is infinitely diverse in any direction. The variety of color, value, shape, texture, etc. on canvas is the reflection of the diversity in the real world.



Reason to Paint #29

Appreciate the Ever Changing Nature Of Objects and Events

Each object is changing with time in its unique way. Sunrise and sunset never cease to amaze me, no matter how many times I have seen them because no two sunrises or sunsets are the same. Each morning, I see *this* sunrise, which is a totally unique new thing to me. You cannot walk into the same river twice. You cannot see the same sunrise twice, either.

Each time you pick up your brush you are always facing a unique subject. That's why painting is so exciting. Monet's Cathédrale de Rouen series was painted from several angles and at different times of the day. Each painting captured the unique light, shade, and colors at a unique moment. Each time Monet was facing the same building-but each a different painting subject: The unique combination of light, color, and shape of the building at a specific time from a specific perspective.

Last fall I painted an alley series. The subject was the same alley near my house, which I walked through almost every day with my friends Neil, Erfie and Chloe. Each painting, however, is different --- different light, different colors, different angle and at a different time. It was fun. It made me more aware of the basic fact that every moment is unique. I have endless subjects to paint. I can stick in the ally for the rest of my life and still find new way to look at it every day.



Reason to Paint #30

Appreciate Different Perspectives

In art history, many themes have been painted hundreds or even thousands of times by different painters, at different times and from different perspectives. Not many people today still insist that he or she is the center of the universe and that his or her perspective is the only perspective which allows a person to see the truth.

As a human being, all you can see is finite objects at your time and from your perspective, which is definitely neither the only nor the only legitimate perspective. Picasso observed wisely that if there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme.

We all know the story about four blind people trying to describe an elephant after touching the elephant. Since they touched different parts of the elephant, each one had a different description about the same elephant. In a similar way, when facing the same object, 100 painters would make 100 different paintings. Each painter has his or her own perspective.

Painting from different perspectives helped me to realize the limits of my own perspective and appreciate the existence of different perspectives.



Tap Into Your Imagination

More than knowledge or skill, imagination makes creating an original painting possible. Imagination allows us to form mental images, sensations and concepts, which are not received through our five senses at that moment. Without these images, sensations and concepts created in our inner picture screen located inside our forehead, it is impossible for us to create original images on the canvas.

Most of the time, I make representational paintings. To me, to represent is not to imitate, but to recreate the object as I image it. To represent is to grasp the essence of the object, but not to copy its all indiscriminate details. It does not make too much sense to me to copy anything exactly, because that's what a camera for.

A good painting should be able to stimulate the imagination of its viewer. A literal imitation of any object leaves no room for imagination. Only a painting which is created via the painter's imagination can inspire the viewer to feel and imagine.

Of course, one viewer's imagination is different from another and may be entirely different from the painter's. So what? That's the beauty of human imagination. Only pre-programmed robots may see exactly the same images when they face the same painting.

Imagination allows you to see what your physical eyes cannot see. Imagination allows you to be somewhere your physical body cannot be. Imagination gives you wings which helps you fly as high as you want to. Without imagination, there would be no true art.

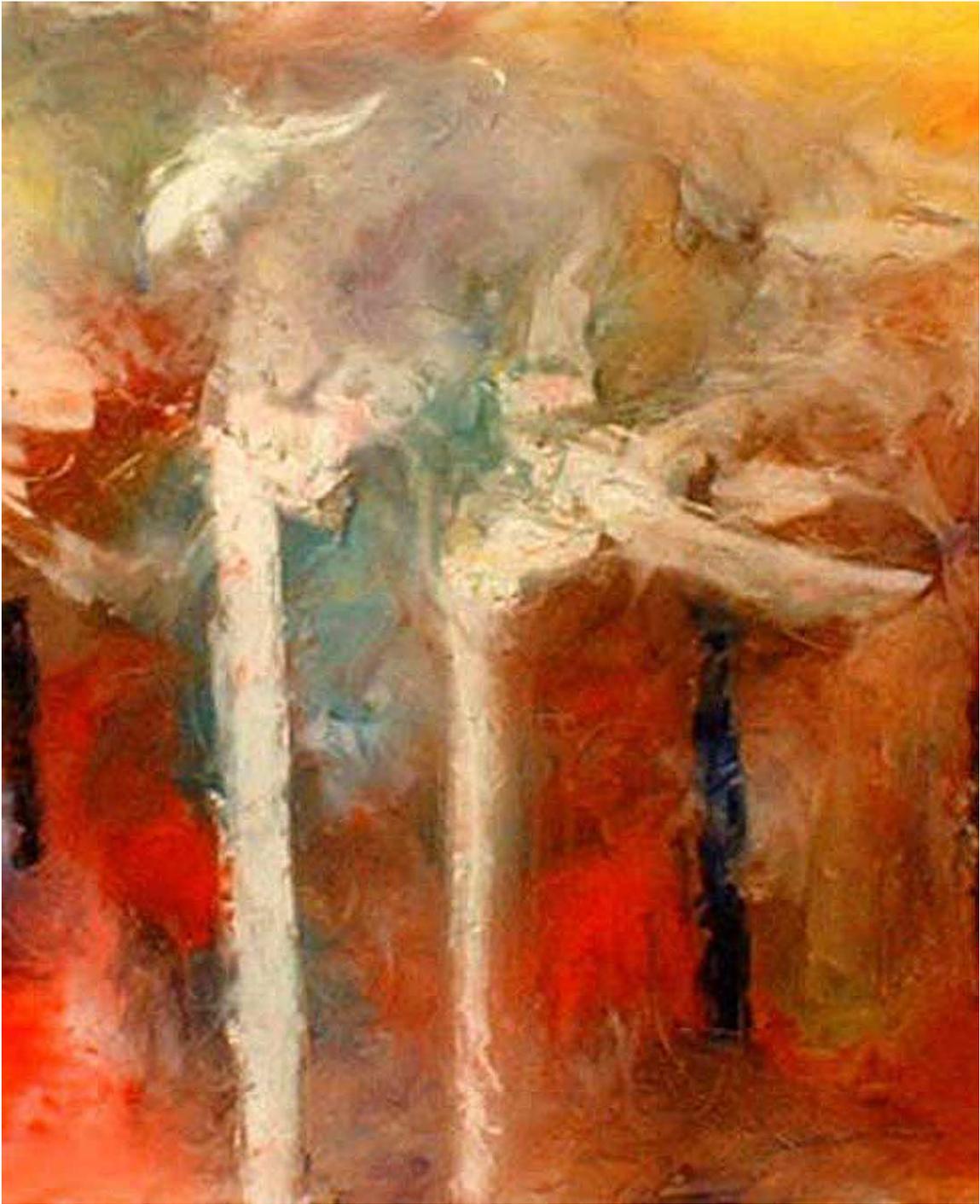
In your imagination you can travel anywhere instantaneously. I grew up in a seaside city where my parents' house was 25 minutes from the beach. My summer

memories are all related to sea, sunset, boats and beach. These are my favorite subjects of painting. Now, while seeing snow from October to April in Denver, my imagination carries me back to the sunny beach. When walking on the street and seeing cars and trucks passing through, I imagine they are sailing boats moving on the waving sea.

Imagination is not limited only to seeing images in your mind. You can also imagine sound, taste, smell, sensation or feeling. When you imagine a rose, you can see its delicate shape on your mental screen, smell its fragrance, sense its beauty and feel its movement in the wind. When you imagine a sunset beach, you can see many colors in the sky and water, the fishing boats near the horizon, and the children playing on the beach. You can hear the sound of the wave, the wind and the children. You can smell the sea.

People's imagination can be so different. Thousands of years ago, when a Chinese poet saw a round cake being cut at reunion festival, he imagined that it was the moon going through various phases, from full to crescent. He named the cake "moon cake". A few decades ago, an American song writer saw the moon, he imagined that it was like a piece of pie, and created that famous song which you can still hear on the radio today. From cake to moon, from an earthly object to a heavenly planet, the imagination is poetic and abstract. From moon to a piece of pie, the imagination is concrete and sensual.

Like anything else on earth, your imagination reflects your spirit, taste and style.



Reason to Paint #32

Learn From God

Picasso once said: “God is really only another artist. He invented the giraffe, the elephant and the cat. He has no real style. He just goes on trying other things.” His statement reminded me of a joke I heard from a famous mathematician, my logic professor in graduate school:

A surgeon, a civil engineer and a lawyer argued about what profession God was in. “God must be a surgeon,” the surgeon said, “because he made Eve with Adam’s rib.” “God was a civil engineer first,” the civil engineer argued, “because he created the world out of chaos.” The lawyer smiled: “Well, who do you think created chaos?”

Just imagine if God, as a great artist, only invented a few things and then mass produced them to save cost, how boring the world would be! Imagine if God stopped creating living beings before he made humans, then there would be no us, no debate among humans about whether there is God or not, or which profession God would prefer.

Thank God for being a true artist, who never stop experimenting and exploring.
We should do the same.



Reason to Paint #33

Understand $E=mc^2$

Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$ describes the transformation between energy and matter. Without this transformation, creation is impossible.

Newton considered that the universe is a huge machine which runs perpetually after God gave it his first push. Most modern physicists believe that it was the Big Bang that started our universe, which continues to expand. No matter if was from God's push or the explosion of the initial energy, the universe could not have been born without the transformation from energy to matter.

You need energy to create or change the structure and property of matter. Painting is creating, a process of transformation between energy and matter. When you paint you are creating a picture out of your imagination or memory. With paints and knife or brush, you transform a blank canvas into a painted surface full of colors and texture.

In a painter's hands, the simple tools become Magic Wands, which can change the order and structure of matter. It is your creative mind and vital energy that makes the magic possible.

The participation in creation and transformation is crucial for us to understand and appreciate God or Nature's power and greatness exhibited in his or her works, of which a human is one of the masterpieces.

Albert stated that Energy equals matter times the speed of light squared.

I believe that the quality of a painting equals creative energy squared times the condition of the light. ☺



Reason to Paint #34

Appreciate Simplicity

Einstein observed, "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction."

Painting makes me appreciate simplicity more. Getting a canvas muddy or making an over-worked dead painting is all too easy. But creating a beautiful painting with minimum brush strokes or knife marks that expresses your idea effectively and efficiently is a challenge of a different nature - easy, yet hard, but yet easy. It requires imagination, experimentation and creativity.

I am a minimalist in every direction. No matter what I do, I am constantly trying to find the simplest way to do it. I prefer palette knife mainly because it makes the painting process much simpler as well as more environmentally sound. No need for chemical cleaners, and no need for constantly changing brushes.

I used to paint on glass or mirrors. But it was difficult to hold the glass and I cut my fingers many times trying to frame the paintings. One day I found a photo of one of my old window paintings. Pahhhnnng! I had an instant revelation! Yes, there is a better and simpler way. I can use glass or mirror *with frame* and paint on glass or mirror without taking them out of frames. In this way, I get a framed painting in one step. What a genius idea!

Another benefit to paint on a pre-framed surface is that I can make the color and shade of the painting match the frame. It can save all the trouble in finding a suitable frame and framing the painting, which can be time consuming. I love to minimize the non-painting procedures or steps so that I can put all my vital energy on the painting itself.

How can you simplify things for yourself without sacrificing quality? How can you take the wasted energy of over-complexity, and funnel it into pure creative joy?

When you figure that out for yourself, then you too can write a book about it!



Reason to Paint #35

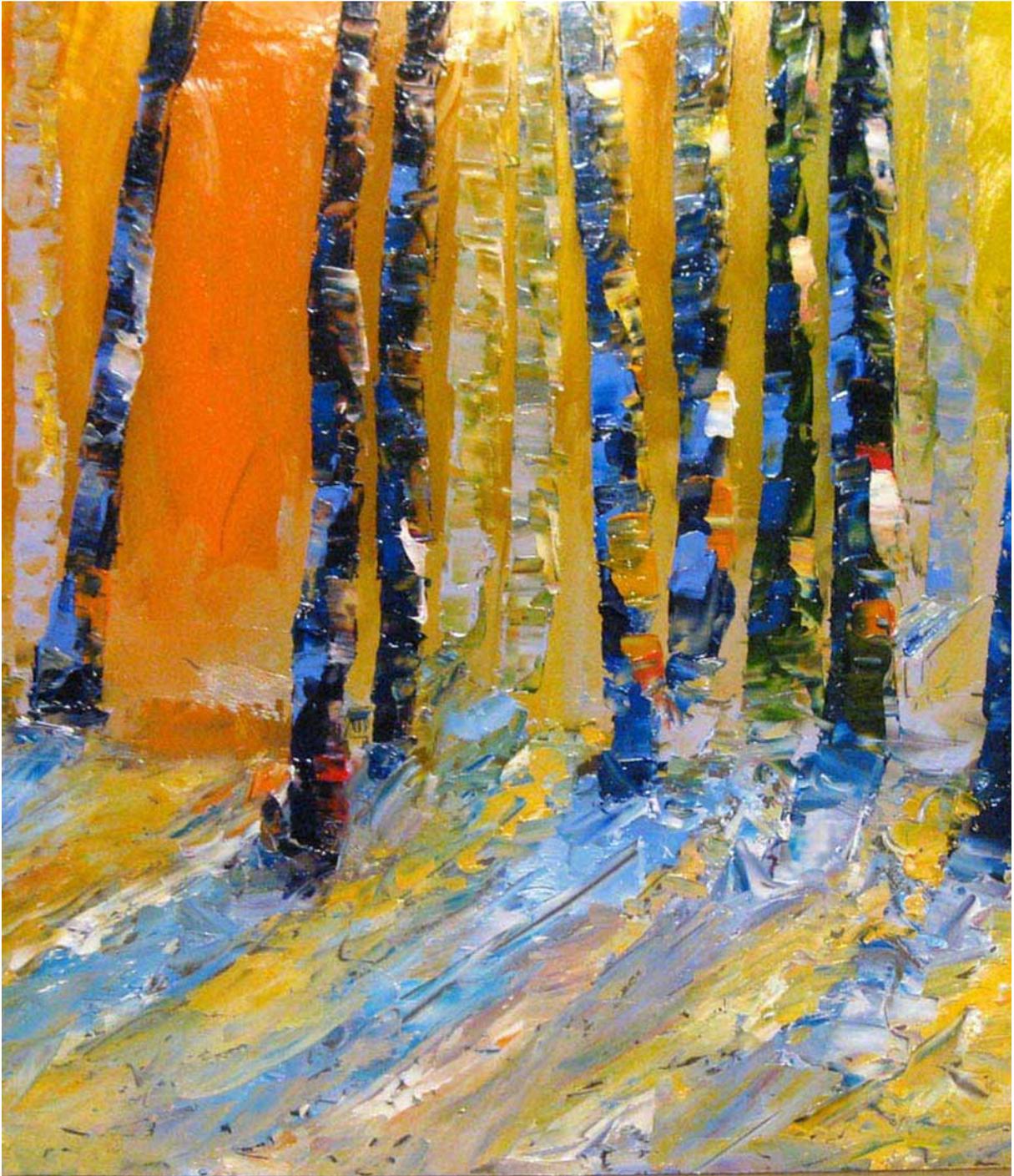
Communicate With the Universe

How do we communicate with the universe? According to brain research, we get most of our information about our surroundings through visual means. We perceive the universe largely via photons- Light. Light sends the information from the universe to our eyes and brain, allowing us to see the visible world

But real communication is a two way street. You must say something as well. You can always send a message with your painting brush or knife and respond to the universe with colors because colors are light waves of different wavelengths and frequencies. The unique color combination you use on your canvas creates unique light waves of yours. These waves carry your emotions, thoughts, and vision expressed in your painting. They are your code to talk to the universe and all living beings in it.

There are seven colors seen in the light spectrum -- red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Since the retinas in our eyes only have three types of color receptors, we can only detect three visible colors --- red, blue and green. These three colors are mixed in our brain to create all of the other colors we see. Since each of us has a unique brain, no two of us see or feel colors exactly the same way. Your unique vision is carried aloft through your expression with color.

It is perhaps a good thing that easels and canvases are not as common as cell phones. There would be far more car accidents if people would drive and paint at the same time as commonly as they talk and drive.



Reason to Paint #36

Understand The Color of Emotions

A study on colors' emotional aspect by a group of psychologists showed that blue, blue-green, green, red-purple, purple, and purple-blue are the most pleasant hues, whereas yellow and green are the least pleasant. Another study indicated that colors may have both positive and negative impressions. Red can have active, strong, passionate, and warm impression, but also can be aggressive, bloody, raging and intense. Green can have impression of refreshment, quietness, naturalness, but can also be associated with tiredness and guilt.

Painting makes one more aware of the effect of color on emotions. I love red, orange, blue and green because these colors remind me of sunrise and sunset, sea, river, lake, grass and trees. These colors instantaneously wake up my happy memories associated with beach, meadow and woods.

When I am happy, my paintings are full of cheerful colors that invoke positive emotions. Most of my paintings are made of true dynamic colors. My palette is simple and only consists of a few colors --- Ultramarine blue, Cadmium red, Cadmium yellow, orange and white.

One day I had headache, which was very rare for me. I thought that if I keep painting my headache would go away faster. It did, but my painting looked so muddy and depressing. The pretty colors were over mixed on canvas and became brownish mud and dirty grays. Perhaps these were the colors of my headache, and by painting, I exorcised the headache colors from my brain.

I learned a valuable lesson: Painting is like a mirror, reflecting the painter's state of mind and level of energy. You cannot hide from your painting.



Reason to Paint #37

Take A Chance

A couple years ago, a gallery owner in Kansas invited me to participate in an art exhibit with two other local artists. The gallery was in the same building as the wedding and wine shop owned by the same lady who had heard about my work from one of her customers. I hesitated. It was not a big gallery and I could only put twenty-five paintings in the exhibit. It was also a four-hour drive from my own home. It was winter. I was a C minus driver.

My friend Ginger encouraged me to take the chance. She said that it was not pure coincidence that a lady in another state invited me out of the blue. So, I accepted the invitation.

Because the gallery was associated with a wine shop, I decided to paint a series of paintings of wine bottles and glasses for the exhibition. I tried to do this on regular canvases, but I didn't get the results I wanted. I then tried painting this subject matter on glass, and then on a mirror. Voila! It worked! I discovered a new surface that is perfect for painting wine glasses and bottles, and a technique that I had never seen before. The series turned out very pretty, and all of the pieces that I prepared for the exhibit were sold.

I took a chance, and not only had a successful show, but discovered a new technique painting on reflective surfaces.

Perhaps I took a bigger gamble when I left law practice and moved to Denver to become a full time painter. Giving up security and a socially respected job for my passion is beyond many people's imagination. A friend and my former boss kept reminding me: "Julia, starving artist is one word." Starving or not, I could not make another choice. Perhaps it is my destiny.

By taking chances, going out of my comfort zone, I ventured into a new frontier and found magic in art and in my life.



Reason to Paint #38

Trust Your Intuition

Painting makes me more aware of my intuition regarding design, color, and value. I don't have to check the composition book or the rules on painting fundamentals every time I paint. I have learned to trust my intuition. When I feel right, the painting turns out good, when I feel something wrong, it turns out bad.

When my painting does not work, it is often because I am thinking too much or being too careful. Two years ago, when painting for a juried show, I wanted so much to make a perfect painting. I worked for the perfect design and then tried to paint exactly the way I had planned. After several muddy canvases I gave up the effort. After I decided not to participate in the show, I painted the same design again and got a much better painting without even trying.

Perhaps when I wanted a perfect painting so bad and tried so hard, I repressed my free spirit and restricted my creative energy. The result was an overworked and muddy canvas. When I did not focus on the result but rather lived at the moment of free creating, my passion for the subject and my spontaneous creative energy transformed the canvas into a painting that I love, with effortless effort.



Reason to Paint #39

Experiment

After having painted with oil for a while, I developed an allergic reaction to the paint thinner and cleaner, odorless or not. I decided to experiment with acrylic paints. Compared with oil, acrylic is more user-friendly. It allows me to use non-toxic paints and to clean up with soap and water. It can be applied to different surfaces, too. Perhaps the greatest advantage of acrylic paints has is that it dries very fast. This suits my style pretty well. I paint spontaneously and freely and like to see my painting dry fast so I don't have deal with many wet paintings.

I bought the best acrylic paints I could find and bought it in 16 oz jars. I began to experiment with different methods. When I studied physics in college, I did not get good grade in experiments because I did not like to follow instructions and always tried to do things differently than everyone else. Now I truly enjoy experimenting because I can design my own experiments and try them in my own way. I tried to make my acrylic paintings look like oils. After months of experimenting, when I sent two paintings to a gallery, the owner actually thought they were oil paintings. I also tried to make my acrylic paintings look like watercolor by thinning the paints with water and painted on watercolor paper or transparency.

After experimenting with several painting media I came back to oil when I began to use palette knife exclusively. The palette knife does not need chemical cleaner. In the last two years, I have continued experimenting with oil. I have tried different brands of paints and will continue to try more. The paints I am using now are made in Germany. I like these paints because the colors are brilliant, dry to touch in a few days, and do not become yellowish when they dry.

I get so much energy and excitement from painting and experimenting, I have started to wonder if I have discovered a new renewable source of energy. Maybe one day

people will run their cars on my paintings thrown in the back seat and heat their homes with my paintings on their walls.

Just a dream, but what a dream!



Reason to Paint #40

Explore

I like to explore all possible painting surface – canvas, silk, wood, steel, glass, plastics, paper, clear transparencies, etc. Why not? Most flat surfaces are paint-able.

I love glass. It is more forgiving than fabric. If I make a mistake, I can scratch the paint off, clean the glass, and restart. Also the transparency of glass makes reverse painting possible.

One evening I accidentally turned one of my glass paintings over and to my surprise the reverse side looked prettier than the painted side. Excited by the unexpected result, I tried deliberately for hours and made my first reverse painting of roses.

I knew immediately, I had made my signature painting. Reverse paintings were fashionable in Italy during the Renaissance and later spread to many other countries in Europe, Asia, America and Africa. It is rare now. More importantly, I haven't seen anyone else, in the past or present, painting on glass in my style.

All of my friends love my reverse paintings of roses and they were the best seller in several of my exhibitions, too.

Later, I extended my glassy canvas from clear glass to frosted glass and tinted glass, and then to Plexiglas and transparencies. I love all of them. Paintings on transparent and mirrored surfaces appear unique and mystical, and remain in a class of their own.

When experimenting and exploring all of the possibilities within painting, I feel like an astronaut seeking new planets and creatures. Hello!! Is there anybody new out there?! Hellooooooo.....



Discover With Different Tools

Although most people paint with brush, I like painting with a knife better. Not only because it makes oil painting possible without chemical cleaners, but also because for me it is more challenging and more fun.

I once watched a painting show on TV. The instructor told the viewers that a specially designed brush can do all the work for painting trees. All one need to do is to hold it and tap the paint onto the canvas. Of course, that *would* be easy, but not really a whole lot of creative fun, either. If painting were reduced to a simple mechanical procedure, it would take much of the creative joy as well as the painter's personal mark out of the process.

Perhaps I've reincarnated directly from the Stone Age. I prefer simple tools made of natural materials. Oops, well, okay, maybe the Iron Age or Bronze Age since my knives are made of metal.

I like tools that have some weight, feel solid and are made of stone, wood or metal. I like brushes and had fun painting with them, but I love palette knife. Since it is more difficult to paint details with a palette knife than with brush or painting knife, my palette knife paintings have certain abstract quality that I like. Since I use one knife for an entire painting, I don't have to worry about changing tools or cleaning it, I can concentrate on the painting process itself.

The palette knife I use has four different edges and it is very versatile. With it, I can put thin layers or heavy impasto. With it, I can create various unique and intrigue marks. Sometimes I apply lots of paint on the canvas and carve flowers. Other times I put several colors next to one another and push then back and forth to create reflections

of the boats in water. With my palette knife I can mix colors directly on canvas and create variations of all kinds of subtle shades.

The palette knife is the best painting tool for me so far. However, I am still exploring. Among many other things, I have tried dinner knives and spoons, chopsticks and twigs. My experiment with a vacuum cleaner hose was a dismal failure, so was painting with worn out shoelaces. You can't hit a home run every time I guess.

My failures do not frighten me. But the idea that one must paint in a certain way and with certain tools is the only thing that sends shivers up and down my spine. Fortunately, Congress hasn't passed a law about this yet.



Reason to Paint #42

Transform Trash Into Art

Once upon a time, a friend who was crazy about recycling brought me a truck load of old windows discarded by his parents when remodeling their house. He suggested that I use them to create some art work. I did. I made many framed paintings by painting landscape or flowers on the window glass and painting the window frame with layers of acrylic paint.

Painting on window glass made me know glass much better. I began to appreciate the optical qualities that glass has. It reflects, refracts, and defuses light in so many ways, making glass painting mystically beautiful.

The experience with those old windows also made me more conscious about recycling and reusing. After that, before I threw anything out I thought about the possibility to use the material in another way. I turned old vases into glass art by painting inside of the vases with abstract design. I made sculptures with old newspaper. I turned an old white T-shirt into a one of a kind of fashion by painting it with silk dyes.

I have a dream that one day I will have an exhibit in which every painting or sculpture is made of something that was thrown away as trash. Creating beauty and protecting the environment will be done simultaneously! I have started to create the objects for my future exhibition. I would like to have 100 items in all sizes and shapes and made of various materials.

I promise it will smell pretty.



Reason to Paint #43

Make Something Original

Originality has been considered as the principle mark of genius. What is originality? I like the definition by Thomas Carlyle : “The merit of originality is not novelty. It is sincerity.” Literary giant C. S. Lewis also stated: “In literature or art, if you simply try to tell the truth - without caring two pence how often it has been told before- you will, nine times out of ten become original without ever having noticed it.”

To be original is to be you, and to be true to yourself. Mr. Rogers told us: “No one else in this world is exactly just like you. You are special.” You may have a twin brother or sister, but there is definitely no another you on this planet at this time. Your perception, your impression and your vision are uniquely yours. If you express them through your art, you are creating original pieces.

When you put an apple on your table and paint your emotional reaction to THIS apple, you are creating something original. Yes, there have been millions of apples before this one, but no another apple is exactly just like the apple you are looking at. There have been thousands of painters who have painted apples before you, but no other painter is exactly just like you and no another painting was made at this time or under this light or from this perspective or with this vision. When you express your own impression of this apple on your painting, your painting is unique and original.

I like go to City Park because it has my favorite lake and boats, interesting trees in various shapes, colorful buildings, and lovely geese who are the permanent residents there. No matter how many times I have been there, each time it is new experience. The lake has different moods, the trees change from day to day and season to season, and the geese never dance exactly the same two days in a row. I painted many paintings of City

Park and each is the expression of my impression of a unique scene at a unique moment under unique light.

Sometimes I use the same elements for my flower arrangement, but each time I am facing a unique new relationship of the elements, at a unique space-time, and from a unique perspective. My subjective brain changes continually. So my universe changes perpetually, even if the objects outside my brain may stay the same objectively.

Being original does not mean you always have to paint something that no one has ever painted before, no matter how ugly it is. More often it means you are creating a piece of art that would NEVER exist otherwise. No one else has painted the same subject in same way as you do. You *are* special, and if you are true to yourself, every painting you paint is original and unique.



Reason to Paint #44

Bring Beauty to the World

The 19th century American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Love of beauty is taste, the creation of beauty is art, and a ray of beauty out-values all the utilities of the world.”

Unfortunately my utility company so far is not interested in trading my paintings for my monthly electrical bill.

Otherwise, as a painter, you can not only appreciate the beauty that already exists in the world but you can also bring beauty to the world that has not previously existed. When you paint a scene at location, you bring the beauty of nature to viewers who have not been to that place. When you paint a beautiful scene from memory, you bring the beauty that may no longer exist back into the world. When you paint from your imagination, you bring the beauty that has never existed to the world, like a new kind of flower that has just been created.

Our body is hungry for food, but our soul is hungry for truth and beauty. Beauty can move people and affect them in a positive way. When a friend of mine had knee surgery and had to stay in the hospital for a couple weeks, I brought a bright colored flower painting to her room. She told me that she could not stop looking at it, and that it helped her to forget about her pain.

I believe that every room in a hospital or a hotel should have beautiful paintings that can comfort the sick and make the traveler feel at home.

This is the power of beautiful paintings.



Reason to Paint #45

Paint Your Dreams

Dreaming is one of the most beautiful experiences in this life. Life without dreams, without those nocturnal fantasies and adventures, would be unbearably boring. As a painter, I am inevitably dreaming of painting and painting my dreams.

I always had vivid dreams. Since I began to paint regularly, my dreams have become more colorful and wild. For example, one night Monet, Van Gogh, and Matisse came to my dream beach while I was painting the sunset. It was so real. After I woke up I still could see the scene when I closed my eyes. Of course, I painted the dream.

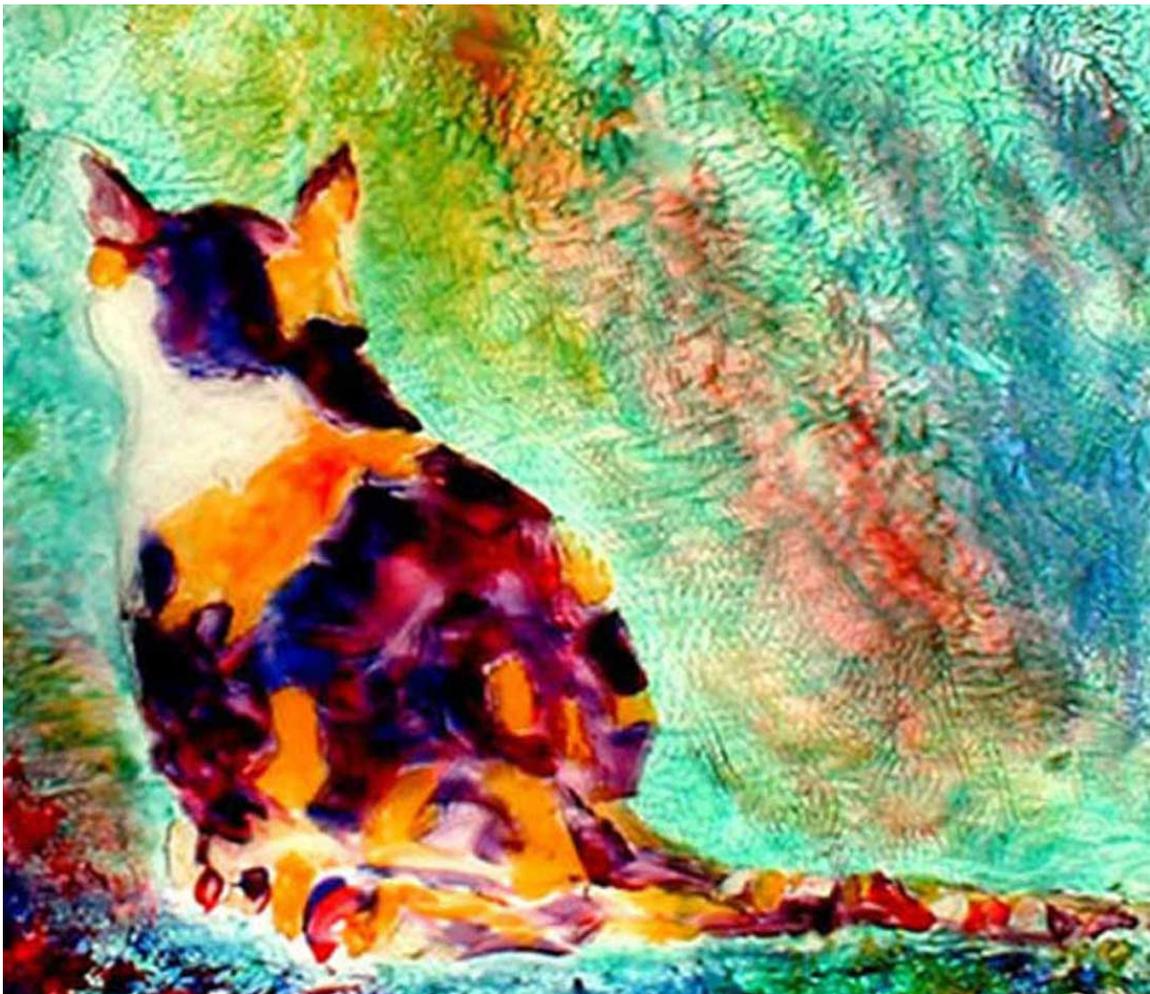
During the spring about two years ago I kept having a reoccurring dream every night for several weeks. There were translucent flowers that continuously changed shape and color. I tried everyday to capture the images in my dream. After making more than 50 flower paintings, I finally painted one that I really liked. But I must admit, even that one is not nearly as pretty as the flowers I saw in my dream!

In another dream I was walking on the beach of Sanyo, China, a place I had never been. I felt the warm breeze touching my face and saw the huge palm trees waving at me. I was amazed by the array of fishing boats on the sea, all dyed orange, red, purple and deep green by the sunset. I made a painting directly out of that dream.

My cat Tiger is my favorite model. She never complains, she barely twitches a whisker for hours at a time, and she does not ask for much – usually just a saucer of milk. I have painted several portraits for her, although so far she has not indicated whether she wants to keep them or not.

One night I dreamt of hundreds of cats gathering at the park to celebrate peace in Cat City. Tiger was giving a speech and she was wearing a purple and orange coat.

Tiger's natural coat has gray orange, black, white and gray pattern. Where did the purple come from? I didn't understand until I painted her that way. It's still Tiger, but more exciting!



Reason to Paint #46

Learn From Your Mistakes

I always want to be myself. If the choice is between creating not so great original art and imitating a great painter in art history, I would definitely choose the former. There have been and will continue to be, many mistakes made and many failed paintings. So what? Mistake is the best teacher in learning. I have learned a lot from my own mistakes.

Years ago, a professor told me a story about mistakes. An assistant to a big company CEO got fired because within a six-month period he did not make any mistakes in following the instruction of his superior. The CEO justified the decision with a stunning statement: “He has too little imagination to make any decent mistakes.”

When you start a painting from scratch, mistakes are inevitable. I learned to not throw away bad paintings or cover them up before I sufficiently analyzed them to figure out why they are not working. Sometimes I began to like my “bad” paintings after a while - once I recognized the genius of my mistakes.



Reason to Paint #47

Remain A Child

I like Einstein's theorem: "The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives." French novelist Victor Hugo made a similar statement more than 200 years ago: "A great artist is a great man in a great child."

All children are original artists because they haven't learned how to not be themselves yet. Once we grow up, we conform to rule, code, or conventions. We care about how others see us.

As adults, we tend to conform. We repress creative thoughts when they do not match popular beliefs. We question our actions when they do not follow the long familiar pattern of others.

By the time we pick up a paintbrush as a grownup to create something original, we have already forgotten how to be our true selves. Our creativity has been blocked by all the rules and methods and "don'ts" we learned in school and in life.

To be a true artist, we have to leave the grown up world and be a child again. It is not easy, as Picasso told us, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child."

Of course, to be a child, in Einstein or Picasso's sense, does not mean to be irresponsible or indulgent with ice cream or chocolate. That would be delicious, but it would also give us a stomach ache. To be a child, is to be curious about how things are and how the world is. It is to continuously learn, explore, and experiment. It is to discover and to invent each day. To be a child is to enjoy every moment of this life and live at the present, not in mourning of the past or in concern of the future.

To be a child is to be amazed by natural beauty. A child cannot wait to see the splendid sunrise each morning, to play on the sandy beach, or to climb the big rock in the park. To be a child is to live with unbounded potential and endless possibility.

To be a child is to be you in seeing the world and in pursuing truth and beauty.



Reason to Paint #48

Tell Stories

“Painting is just another way of keeping a diary.” – Pablo Picasso.

Instead of writing you may paint to tell where you have been and what you have seen. To tell a story, one picture is more than a thousand words. It may even equal a million!

Many famous paintings tell historical stories on a grand scale. Viewing these paintings can be more immediate and impressive for getting historical events in your head, even perhaps more than reading about such things in a book.

Before coming to the United States, I had never heard many biblical stories. One day in my history of science class, a professor made a reference to Noah’s Flood. I asked my classmate, “Which year the flood occurred?” He looked at me for a few seconds and then laughed uncontrollably.

To gain basic biblical knowledge, I took a bible class taught by the minister of a church near our campus. The book he used for the class was full of pictures, of which many are famous paintings, from *The Birth of Jesus* to *the Last Supper*. The stunning paintings guided me through a quick tour of the biblical garden.

You travel to a new place and are impressed by the spectacular scenery. You want to tell your family or friends about it. Write a long letter? Send a photo? Or send a painting? The choice is obvious. Actually what you wanted to tell you family or friends is not the scenery itself, but your impression of, and your emotional reaction to, the scenery. Your painting might tell them these impression or feelings much better than letter or photo.



Reason to Paint #49

Express Your World View

True artists do not simply copy reality but create their own version of reality. They do not simply accept what is now, but are searching for what could be or should be. Even when you make a landscape painting, you are not simply painting what is out there, but recording your impression of the scene, a personal glimpse into your unique view of reality.

Picasso did not just paint the distorted human faces or bodies for fun. During the war, it was how he expressed his anger and frustration about the current affairs. He said clearly, “The world today doesn't make sense, so why should I paint pictures that do?” The world had gone mad. Picasso wanted people to see this madness in his paintings.

Austria neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl stated, “Challenging the meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human. Through our art we question the meaning of our existence. “

Painting is like a mirror, reflecting the painter's values, concept and understanding of life. Painting expresses the painter's view of the world. When a painter paints a bombing raid as fireworks in the sky, the painter is glorifying war and celebrating the victory of the bomber. When a painter paints a terrified mother holding her wounded baby in a war zone, the painter is condemning war, the violence and the killing.

A painter's paintings represents reality as the painter sees it, and in a manner more pronounced than any statement, and more impressive than any words.



Reason to Paint #50

Purify Your Soul

Purification and movement go hand in hand. A clean stream is one that flows, refreshing itself from the movement of new running water.

Painting, i.e., engaging the movement of your creativity and imagination as well as the physical movement of your fingers, your arms, and your body, similarly cleanses and refreshes you.

The process of actively pursuing beauty and truth purifies the painter's soul. It washes off the stagnant old dust covering our inner being. As we paint, we are reborn.



Reason to Paint #51
Find Your Destiny

We all have our own destiny. If you are meant to be a painter, you should paint.

There are many jobs that are not particularly creative. If you don't do a particular kind of job, someone else will. Painting is different. If I don't create my paintings, no one else will, because no one else would have exactly the same impression, same perception, same idea and same vision as I do.

For me, painting has become the most important part of my life. I cannot imagine going through a day without touching my painting knife. Maybe if I had a bad cold - but that's it! If creating art is your destiny, then you must paint to have peace with yourself. Nothing else will make you happy.



Reason to Paint #52

Know Yourself

19th century writer Henry Ward Beecher observed, “Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.”

When you start to paint, you begin to truly know yourself.

Most of the time you paint alone. From selecting a canvas to designing the composition, from choosing colors to completing the painting, you make all the decisions and you carry out all the tasks. You think alone and work alone. You spend plenty of time with yourself. You have time to observe how you think and how you work with your hands and move your body. You get to know yourself when you are free from social restraints and totally by yourself.

Lao Tsu taught us, “Conquering others is strength, conquering oneself is true power. Knowing others is intelligence, knowing oneself is true wisdom.” Unfortunately, many people are so busy trying to conquer others, to control or to impress them, to win a title, an award, or a game that they do not have time to overcome the obstacle within themselves, to perfect their own mind and body. People can be so busy observing, analyzing, criticizing, and even admiring others that they do not have time to know themselves.

Knowing yourself also means to know who you can be and will be. You are not a fixed entity, but a growing and changing living being.

It is undoubtedly important to observe the external world and to learn from it. But it is equally important to look in the mirror and know the person inside that reflection. Take the time to be alone with your painting, and learn who that person is that holds and moves the brush.



Reason to Paint #53

Be Yourself

I did not hear the phrase “be yourself” until I came to the United States. When growing up in China, we were told that we should follow the great leader’s teaching and unify our will and action. In America, “Be yourself” is a common phrase. Typically, before taking an exam, getting ready to go to a party, or preparing for a job interview, if I asked my friends for advice they would invariably tell me, “You will be fine, just be yourself.”

To be yourself seems the easiest thing to do. You are yourself, who else can you be? In real life, however, sometimes it is not that easy. We were ourselves when we were children. But after growing up, many of us have learned to put on make-up or don a psychological mask every time we walk out of our bedroom. Often enough we have forgotten or fear being our own self. Painting can help us to discover ourselves again.

Being yourself does not mean to simply mean to indulge in your impulses. Being yourself means to honor your talent and potential and to be the best you can be.

Painting provides the opportunity to discover your talent as a creative human being who continues to grow and perfect as long as you live. Perhaps a better suggestion might be: “Be yourself, as you dream yourself to be.”



Reason to Paint #54

Simplify Your Life

Years ago a friend told me that we should simplify our life so that we can enrich our world. It made sense to me. Over the years, I have reduced my belongings to the minimum and my daily routine to the essentials. I have almost no furniture in my house, and this provides me with a surplus of space to paint or dance. I do not consider TV commercials every ten minutes an essential element in my life, so I do not even have a TV either.

Rather than missing things, I fill my space with painting, dancing, reading, and writing.

When I moved to Denver, my boyfriend joked that I turned from a rich lawyer to a starving artist overnight. Yes, I have less money and material things now, but I am much richer because I not only have a richer space full of joy in pursuing truth and beauty, but also have the true luxury in life -- time, which allows me to do whatever I love. That alone, is priceless.



Reason to Paint #55

Detach From Material Things

We all have our favorite things that we feel difficult to leave. Since all material things are ultimately temporary possessions, we will leave them sooner or later.

Among my favorite things were books. While in graduate school, I spent many Friday afternoons in the bookstores on campus to search for good books. Several professors in my department gave me many books, which I treasured. By the time I left campus, I had 50 boxes of books. I owned literally a TON of books.

It was great to have my favorite books around. When I had to move them it became a big task. Every time I moved - and this was frequent - I had to call all my friends to help me. One time we piled several mattresses on the ground and dropped all boxes filled with books from the third floor window. It was just too much for anyone to lug all these boxes up and down so many stairs.

I realized that when I had books which are necessary, they serve me. But when I had too many, I had to serve them. Nevertheless, it was difficult to leave them behind. As it turned out, before I was ready to say farewell to my books, they were all vaporized into ash from a fire while temporarily stored in a friend's basement.

Initially I was sad because those books had followed me for years. Before long, however, I felt relieved because I had no heavy moving of my personal library from place to place any more.

In time, most of my bookshelf space has been replaced by my painting supplies and my finished and unfinished canvasses. And even these don't stick around permanently as I sell paintings and give them away.

Now I feel perfectly fine, in fact *better* without the burden of so many books. I have a few favorite books in my house these days, but the flow of painting is a permanent and lasting pleasure that grows, unlike static materialism.

And, if I ever feel the need to read something that I don't have, I simply borrow my boyfriend's library card. It costs nothing, and he even pays the fines.



Reason to Paint #56

Know Your Friends Better

Without the enormous support I receive from my friends, it would not be possible for me to be a real painter.

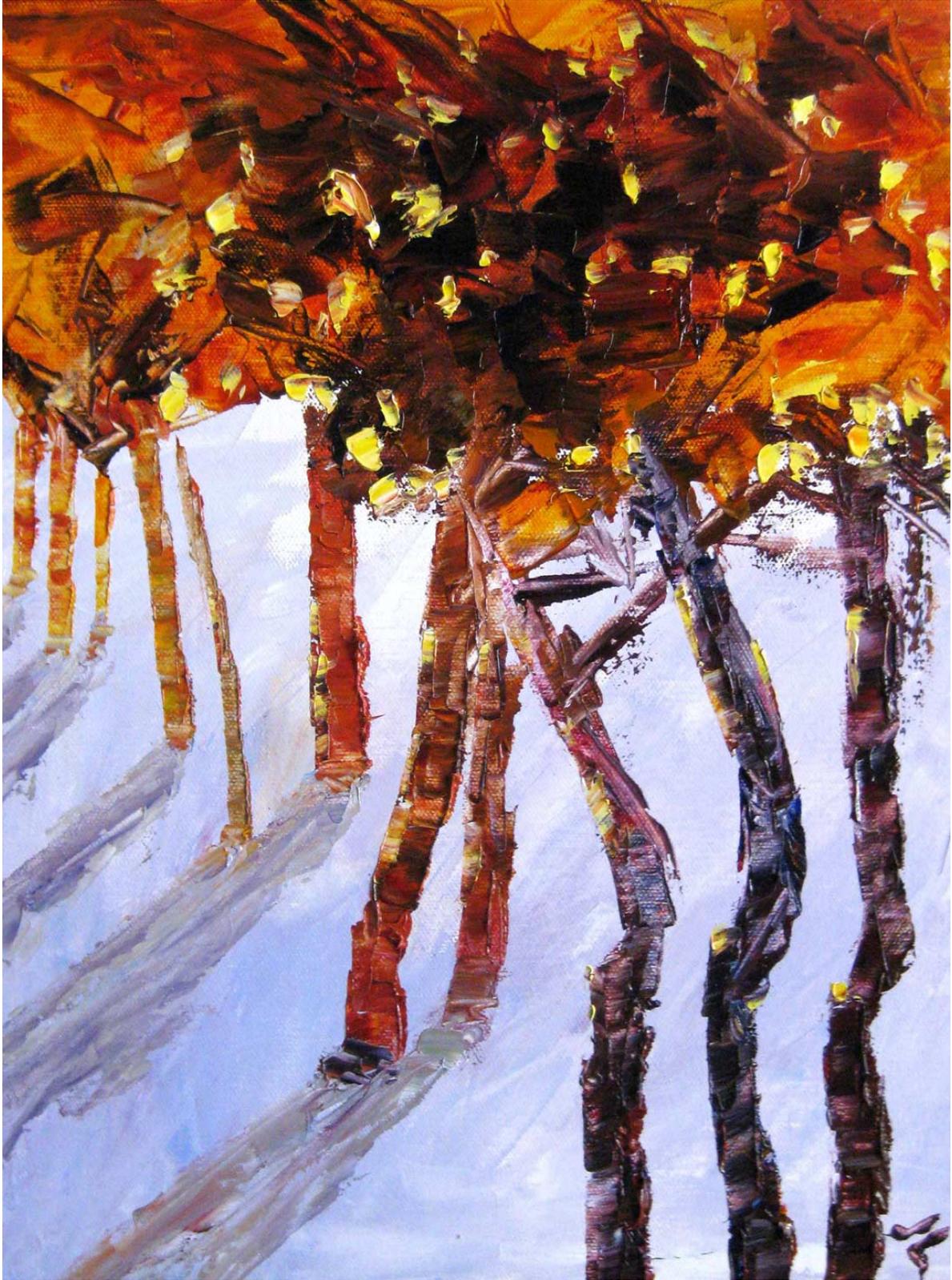
During the years when I was painting in Missouri, my friend Dan brought me all kinds of painting supplies that he found at garage sales and auctions: Canvases, mirrors, glass, paints, and framing tools. Whenever he found something that he thought I could use, he sent it to my house. When I decided to move to Denver, Dan and his girlfriend helped me to pack all of my belongings.

My friend Ginger always drove me to my various exhibitions, no matter how many hundreds of miles away or in another state. One winter evening when we came back from a gallery that was three hours away, the snow became very heavy and visibility dropped to near zero. I regretted the trip, but Ginger said to me that having shows here and there is part of being an artist, and that one day I would know that it was all worth the trouble.

It took me a while to decide to leave Missouri. I hesitated because I did not want to leave my friends and my legal clients. When I told my friend Cecilia that I wanted to move to Denver to paint, she encouraged me to follow my passion and assured me that she would take care of all my open law cases. I then knew that all my clients would be taken care of by a caring and experienced attorney who has passion for practicing law. This made my decision to move much easier.

In Denver, I have received same understanding, encouragement and help from my friends Neil, Sheila, Suzanna, Bobby, Karl, Larry and many others.

True friends love you as who you are and who you want to be. They support you, help you, and will always be there for you. True friends are priceless treasure.



Reason to Paint #57

Be Grateful

Painting has offered me a chance to see the creative gift I've received from the universe and from the graces of my parent's genes and their care and upbringing. I am grateful for this gift every day. I feel very lucky to be able to do what I love- to create, to seek truth and beauty, and to share with others.

Of course, not everyone might agree on my gift. But another gift I've been given is that I really don't care that much about the opinion that other's might have on my talent or lack of.

I'm grateful for that too.



Reason to Paint #58

Develop Your Own Style

Your style is the true expression of yourself. You would know that you have found your own style when you realize that you cannot paint in any other way.

To paint is not to copy another painter, no matter how great that painter is. Your role is not to follow a teacher's instruction religiously, or to treat those how-to books as a bible. To paint is to paint what you see and how you feel. To paint is to paint in your own way. Van Gogh was a genius, but if we all painted exactly like him, how boring the art world would be! The true value of a painting is not how much it is like another masterpiece, but how unique, original, expressive and inspiring a painting itself is.

Each of us is unique in our personality, vision, perception, as well as in the way we express our own emotion and artistic talent. By closely following another person, no matter how great that person is, you may miss the chance to discover and develop yourself.

To paint an original painting is to create. To copy a painting of another is to reproduce. Creation calls for originality, free spirit and spontaneity. Reproduction demands craftsmanship and accuracy, which has little to do with creativity.

We can always know our personal style and taste. If you do not think that you know, it is easy to find out. Walk into an art museum or gallery and look around. Browse an online art gallery or scan through an art magazine. You will know immediately which kind of painting you like, which you love, which you don't care about too much, and which you cannot stand.

I like French and Russian impressionists' paintings, but I have never had the urge to follow them exactly. I remember when I saw a Monet painting for the first time, my thought was "Wow, this is great!" But I also knew that if I were to paint, I would not use such uniform brush strokes. Mine would be more expressive and definitely irregular. Just like my brain.

I also share Picasso's distaste for over worked paintings. He once said "To finish a work? To finish a picture? What nonsense! To finish it means to be through with it, to kill it, to rid it of its soul, to give it its final blow the coup de grace for the painter as well as for the picture!" I like paintings that leave plenty room for viewers' imagination. The style I love is a spontaneous and free expression of my impressions.

What is your style and preference?



Reason to Paint #59

Appreciate Other Tastes

Painting makes you more aware of what you like, what you don't. And it also lets you know what other people gravitate towards.

When you put your paintings on the market you will soon find out that some people love your paintings, some people hate them, and most people do not care one way or another. Not everyone shares your taste for art. There are so many art styles and so many good works of art. And so many bad works of art.

Your own painting style is one in millions. Not anyone else would have exactly the same taste as you.

After I moved to Denver, my friend Sheila gave me a precious gift, the membership to the art museum. I love spending time there. A few weeks ago when I walked into a new exhibition I saw some strange objects hanging from the ceiling. I still don't know what they were, but they looked like huge black sausages made of plastic. In another room I saw huge white sheets of various shapes hanging on a long rope. Wow. My first reaction was: "What is this?!?" It reminded me of wet 17th century laundry dipped in polyurethane. Hey. Maybe that's what it was.

The big question I had that afternoon was, "Why did they turn this beautiful museum to a ugly sausage factory and a laundry room? How could these huge sausages or a white sheet possibly to inspire anyone?" Perhaps if you worked at a laundromat or in a meat factory it would have real meaning for you.

That day, I looked around and saw some people also passing by these works of creative ingenuity, but no one said anything. I thought, "Wait a minute, how could I forget that I am not the only visitor in the museum? Some people may not share my point of view, or they may see a different meaning in the art."

Those objects exist because artists made them. Those objects are exhibited because the curators of the museum like them. They are not my taste, but the taste of someone else. Museum exhibition is for everyone who visits the museum. I do not have to like everything I see there and I should not expect the museum to use my taste as standard to select exhibiting objects.

I like my own style, but imagine if all the museums and galleries only had my style of paintings or were restricted to any other form of art, how boring it would be. Perhaps even I could not stand it.

Bring on the plastic salami or buckets of wet clothes, as long as some people love them.



Reason to Paint #60

Keep Learning and Changing

Socrates believed that the only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing.

Cezanne must have been wise because he said “I could paint for a hundred years, a thousand years without stopping, and I would still feel as though I knew nothing.” Feeling one knows nothing, always wanting to learn more, to explore more and to create more; these are the signature characteristics of a true artist.

The goal of a true artist is not to establish a mechanical procedure that can be automatically apply to each painting, but to continue discovering and exploring new ways and better ways to express herself.

When you stop learning and experimenting, when you begin to copy yourself or work in a fixed formula, no matter how famous you are, you have already ceased to be a creative artist. You may have been a great painter once, but you are no longer one if you shrink into a safe zone of sterilization.

Life is continuum of learning, exploring, experiencing, creating and sharing. No matter how many paintings you have done, each time when you start with a new canvas you are facing new challenges with new learning and experimenting opportunities.



Reason to Paint #61

Appreciate Every Teacher You Meet

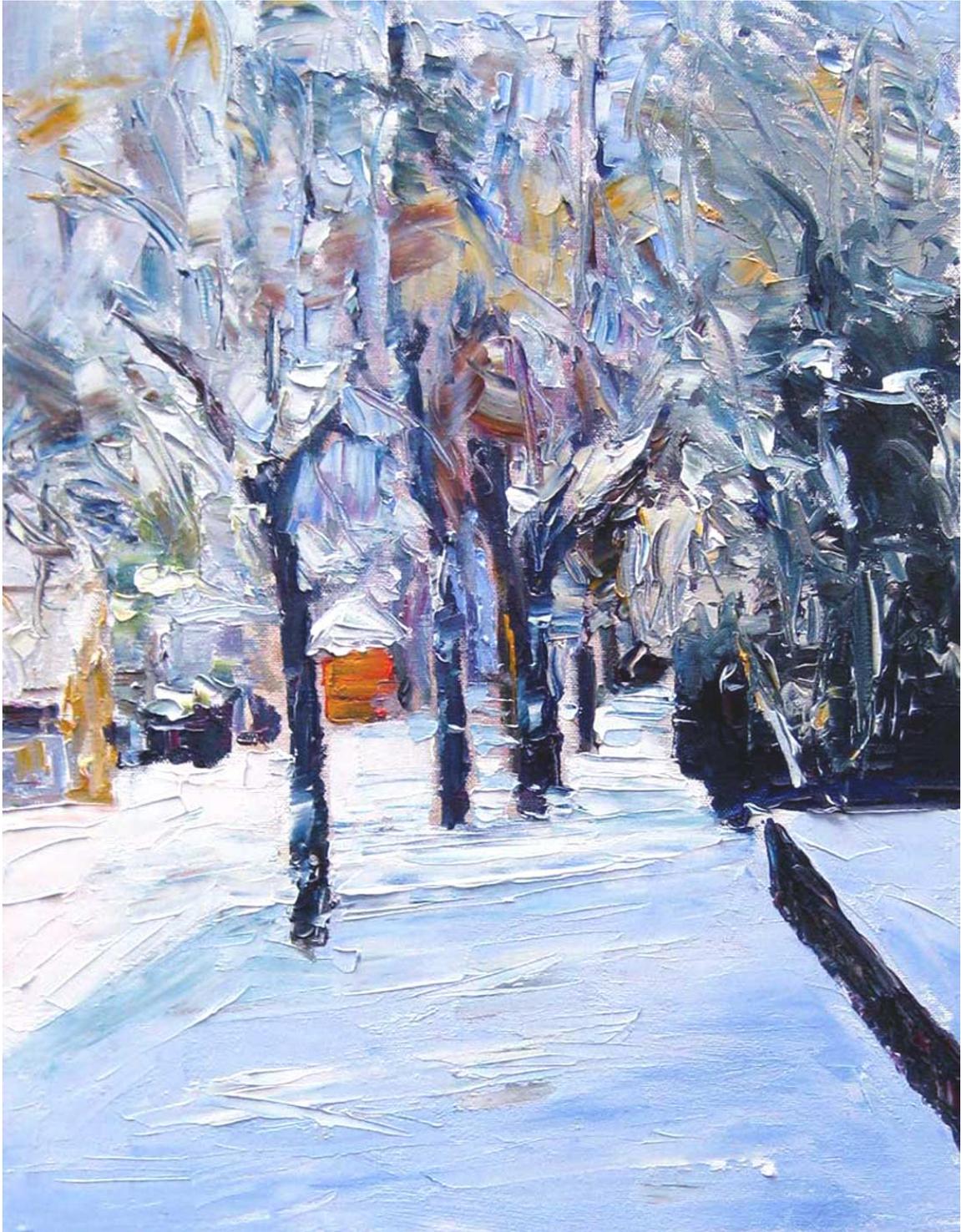
Since I've started to paint I began to appreciate art much more. I see more in paintings that hang in museums and galleries. Besides the subject matter of the painting, I see colors- *really* see them. I notice harmony, or lack of it. I see values, recognizing the value contrast in paintings. I see texture.

Whenever I look at a piece of original art, I try to figure out how the artist made it that way and I ask myself, "What would I do if I painted the same subject?" Visiting a museum or an art gallery becomes a true learning experience. All the paintings I see become new text books of art. All of the painters become my teachers.

Thousands of years ago a wise man said that when out of three people, at least one of them could teach you something. To me, *every* person I have the opportunity to meet is my teacher. Every person can teach me something about art, or life, or both. I have many teachers already, and I appreciate each opportunity to meet new ones.

When Oil Painters of America (OPA) began to offer to its members critique services, I sent ten photos of my paintings to the service. Soon, I received the detailed comments and suggestions from Mr. Watson, an experienced artist and a signature member of OPA. I am grateful for his encouragement and advice. He taught me valuable lessons and he has been my teacher ever since.

Now my studio is just a few blocks from the studio of a famous artist, master signature member of OPA, Ramon Kelly. Recently I was invited to visit Mr. Kelly's studio. He paints spontaneously in my favorite style. I had read his books before, but to stand near his easel and to see a master painter's motion in his working studio is much more impressive, thoroughly educational, as well as highly inspirational. I look forward to learning more from him.



Pay Attention to Other Forms of Art

As a painter, you have an intimate relationship with art every day. Art becomes part of your life, not just something you see as an uninvolved spectator. As a result, you become more sensitive to beauty and creativity exhibited in other forms of art. Here are my thoughts about a few of my favorites.

Sculpture is a natural extension of painting. Many painters are also sculptors. If you paint like me, using a knife to manipulate paints on canvas, you are not that far from sculpturing.

Crochet is a good exercise for your fingers. Since my fingers are used to moving, it is hard for them to lie still. When watching a movie at home or listening to music, I crochet so that my hands and fingers can get an interesting work out. Last winter, while watching movies at home I made 12 crochet hats in every color for all of my friends.

Silk painting is pretty and functional. I don't like most commercially printed fabrics. So, last spring I bought several bottles of silk dye, which can be used on any natural fabric. I began to paint on old T-shirts. By May, I had enough confidence to paint a few silk scarves for my friends. This summer, I am going to paint my dresses.

Fashion design is exciting and useful. With painted fabric, designing your own unique fashion is a piece of cake. A few years ago my sister sent me a box of silk scarves. They are big and beautiful. Although I don't wear scarves, I see the possibility to wear them as a dress, skirt, sash, or even as a jacket. After spending hours in front of a mirror, I invented dozens of ways to wear big scarves. A friend took some photos of these designs. I intend to put them in my next book!

As a painter, you naturally want have your own fashion style. Who wants to wear a uniform? But if you just do all your shopping in a store, in a mall, or online, you won't get a unique piece of clothing. If you truly want clothes that are made just for you and would fit you like your second skin, you may consider designing them yourself. It is fun and rewarding.



Reason to Paint #63

Understand Humans

When trying to paint human figures after painting cats, horses and fish, I began to realize the complexity of the human face and body. To my surprise, even although I might have gotten the proportions correct in a portrait, the paintings still did not look right. I did not capture the spirit of that person.

I began to ask the same questions which Picasso once asked: What are we painting? Is it what's on the face, what's inside the face, or what's behind the face? Which is more accurate portrait of a human face? The photo? The image in a mirror? The painting by a painter?

I thought that perhaps an experiment could help. I did several portraits for my friend Andrea and let her choose the one that she felt more represented herself than the others. She chose the one which is least detailed and the most abstract. I also made a few portraits for another friend, Dan, who is a self-taught philosopher and poet. Again, he liked the most abstract one, which is full of strong colors. He told me that all his friends immediately recognized him from that painting.

It seems that each person has his or her own preferred version of his or her own image. To get the correct shape of eyes, nose and lip and the relationship between them is important to paint a human face, but it is not enough, because a human face is much more than the combination of facial elements. To capture the spirit or essence of a person requires much more than mechanical painting skill.



Reason to Paint #64

Promote Love and Peace

Most people on this planet love peace. Buddha told us that peace cannot be kept by force, but can only be achieved by understanding. Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love. Art can help people of different cultures, regions or countries to understand one another and to share the love for fellow human beings, this planet, and the universe.

A beautiful flower painting can bring all flower lovers together, no matter whether they are from the Middle East, Asia, Europe or North America, because it can make them realize they have one important thing in common --- the love of natural beauty.



Reason to Paint #65

Gain Painting Related Skills

As a painter you want to learn to do many different things, such as framing pictures, how to hang paintings mechanically as well as esthetically, to design lighting, to photograph your paintings, and to design your website. To hire or assign anyone else to do these things can be expensive, inconvenient, and frustrating. Also, it is nice to have control over many aspects in creating and sharing art so that you feel your efforts are shown in the best way.

A couple years ago I needed to frame thirty paintings for an exhibition. With the help of a friend, I learned how to frame in the same way the frame shops do. I bought the best frame I could afford, and I framed all the paintings in three days. It was such a satisfactory experience that hammer, staple gun, and screwdriver have become my reliable friends ever since.

Framing is an art in itself. A good frame can flatter your art work, but a bad frame can make it look flat and unattractive. I love shopping for frames. It is so convenient to have extra frames around because you may not find the suitable one when you need them. For my glass or Plexiglas paintings frames are crucial since you cannot hang them up without a frame. Sometimes I get a frame first and then make a painting to match the frame. The results are pleasant because in such examples the frame and painting are in beautiful harmony.

Taking photos of your paintings is another skill you must have if you design and manage your own website or sell paintings on the Internet. At the beginning, I could not even get the focus right. The photos of my oil paintings all looked like blurred abstract watercolors! Many trial and errors later, I got the right camera for accurate color and light, and learned how the focus works. Now my pictures look like my paintings.



Reason to Paint #66

Appreciate Music Better

I cannot paint without music. Before I pick up my painting knife, I turn on music. I like listen to classical music when I am painting water and boats, and listen to lighter music when I paint flowers and garden, wine glasses and bottles.

Music gives the rhythm to my body movement and makes my knife marks more interesting. Each painting I make is coded with a particular musical composition. When I look at that painting again, I can hear the same music that I listened to while creating it. If I hear the music again, I can see the dazzling light of the beautiful colors I painted while listening that music. Music gives my painting rhythm and harmony. Painting has allowed me to see music in colors.

I love music, but I could not sing a simple song without changing the original notes. I guess musical dexterity is not in my genetic fingerprint. Nonetheless, I have always wanted to sing because I had so much to express through music. When I painted my hometown beach and fishing boats, I made up some songs that expressed my homesick emotion. I recorded those songs and sent the CD to my sister. She told me that several of my friends were moved into tears.

Even though I still cannot follow other's notes, now I can create my own.



Reason to Paint #67

See More In Movies

As a painter, I see more in movies than before. Besides the story and characters, I see a tremendous depth of color, light patterns across all parts of the screen, and all the interesting shapes of buildings, people, landscape, and even objects not being the focal point of the screen. I see the body movement and the relationship between characters in a scene.

I like movies that have beautiful scenes each of which can be framed like a well designed painting. My favorites are Fellini's films and some of the movies made by Japanese naturalist film makers.



Reason to Paint #68

Overcome Boredom

It is easy for me to get bored. I have trouble sitting still when reading or listening to anything for longer than fifteen minutes. My friends have told me that if I were attending school here as a child, I would be diagnosed ADD. I'm not sure if that would help anything because I really just like to be involved in something that actually interests me at a higher level. Perhaps that's the major problem many people have, too.

When I am painting, I don't feel bored at all. At any given moment, I have to make quick decisions about many things from overall design to what color this little boat should be, from the contrast between light and shadow to the best knife marks for that wave. Both my mind and my hands are busy. I have no time to be bored.



Reason to Paint #69

Overcome Sadness

Seven years ago my Mom was seriously injured by a hit and run motorcyclist and soon left this world. At that time my Dad was in hospital. Because we were concerned about his own health, we did not immediately tell him about Mom. Nevertheless, he saw Mom in a dream and knew what happened. 106 days later, Dad got pneumonia and left us, too.

Mom and Dad are the best parents imaginable, and the dream parents all my friends want to have. I love them, respect them and worship them. I did not use past tense because they are still with me now and will always be with me as long as I am here.

Initially, when they left this earthly realm, it was the most painful period of my entire life. Overwhelmed by loss and sadness, I could not eat or sleep for days. One sleepless night, I picked up a knife and began to put blue on a piece of acrylic sheet and move the color around. For a moment, I forgot my pain and my mind focused on that pretty blue.

I kept painting for hours until I was exhausted and passed out. Painting lessened my pain and gave me an unexpected dream, which confirmed my belief in the possibility to see my parents and talk to them again. They left this world, but their love still can touch us and will always be with us.

No matter where my parents are, I know they can see the vivid colors on my paintings. These colors can travel and reach far beyond this world. I know I can send my love to them.



Communicate With People Beyond This World

One Saturday night after a whole day of painting, I fell asleep and had a vivid dream. I was talking to my Dad who came to visit me. We had dumplings for dinner and chatted about all sorts of things. He seemed to know what was going on in my life. He told me that he loved my paintings.

When I kissed him goodbye, he said to me casually “Tell you sister that she needs to pay the electricity bill she gets.” Before I had chance to ask what he meant by that, Dad left. I woke up on Sunday morning with vivid memory of the dream. When I closed my eyes, I could still see Dad. I searched the whole kitchen, but I could not find a single dumpling. The dream did not seem to be related to a real event. More importantly, Dad’s words did not make sense to me because in my family, no one ever talked about money or bills.

That evening I called my sister and told her my dream. She said: “We don’t use bills here. I go to the electricity and gas companies at the beginning of each month to pay what they charge. If I was late in paying, they would call or come to collect money. We do not use check, everything is paid with cash. I just paid all the utility fees last week.”

It seemed only a dream, a vivid dream.

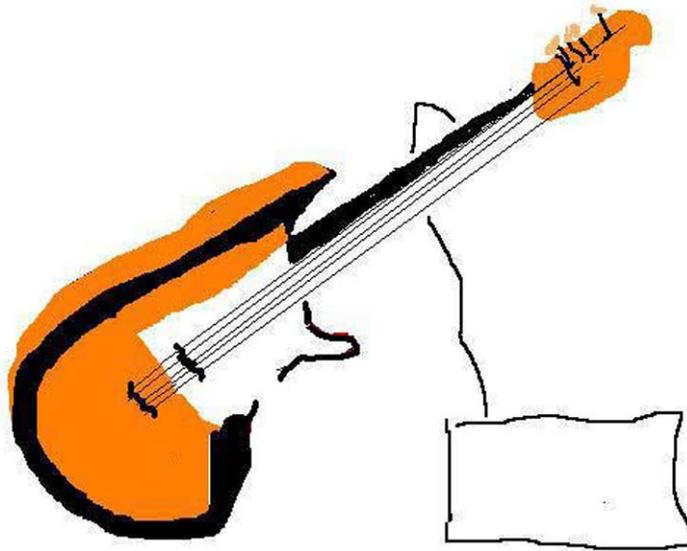
But, the next evening (it was morning in China), my sister called and told me that she just came back from the farmers’ market and saw a hand written note on her door when she returned. The note said that due to incorrect calculation of the electricity company, her payment was forty yuan short.

Oh, my God! I actually was talking to my Dad in my dream, and he was right! And he is still taking care of us!! I also thought perhaps Dad tried to tell my sister, too, but for some reason she did not hear. Thank God, I heard him and it was such wonderful feeling!

I grew up on the campus of a medical school in China. I played with skeletons and watched human body dissections in my mom's teaching lab since age seven. I never thought it was possible to talk to anyone who is no longer in this world. But I *did* talk to my Dad in my dream and he told me something that I could not know in any other way. Perhaps no one else on this world would have known either because it did not happen when he told me about it. It happened the next day!!

Nothing can change your belief more quickly than your personal experience, especially when the experience is so specific and can be verified by fact. Science has not answered our deepest question --- who are we and why we are here? What happens to our consciousness after our physical body dies?

I am still puzzled by what happened to me on that night. It seems that painting has made me more sensitive to everything. During that afternoon, painting put me in a mode of trance that lasted until that night when I closed my eyes to go to sleep. And while sleeping my mind was opened to perception of the world beyond.



Have Paranormal Experiences

One day while I was painting, I paused to take a nap at noon. Suddenly, I found myself in my hometown in China. I was at the railroad station square, a place that can hold twenty-thousand people. To my surprise, there were hardly any people on the street at all. I looked at the huge clock on the top of railroad station building and saw that it read exactly 2 o'clock. I thought, "Oh, it must be 2:00 A.M." It was noon in America where I was sleeping.

I looked around and everything seemed the way I remembered, except that there were two tall buildings that I had never seen before. These buildings were about twenty stories tall and totally dark. There were some stick-like objects on the top of one building, but no light at all. Somehow I did not look at the buildings from the ground. It seemed that my perspective was from the top of a tree. It was weird. "I must be dreaming," I thought.

Then I remembered that my grandma used to tell us that if you don't know if you are dreaming or not, you may bite your fingers to figure it out. If you feel the pain, then you are awake. But if you cannot feel anything, then you know you are dreaming. "I need to bite my finger, then," I said to myself.

However, to my utter astonishment, I could not find my fingers. Not only I did not find any finger, but I couldn't find any part of my body at all. I had no body.

Regardless, I felt like I was standing because I saw things the same way I normally did, except that I was much taller. My eyes seemed fine because they were working, but I could not touch them to confirm their existence, either. I felt naked without my body, although this didn't make much sense either.

Terrified, I wanted to go back to America.

As soon as I thought about going back, I felt as though I was on the top of a cloud, flying in the sky. The flight was so fast that the ocean passed by in a second. The

strangest thing about the flying was that there was no sound, and that it was completely in silence.

Before I even asked why, I was already waking up in my bed. It was 12:45 PM. My nap had lasted 45 minutes.

Even though it is impossible for me to have been in China, I knew I was there, and I saw what I saw, and felt the way I felt. I called my sister to ask her about the two buildings that I saw while I was on the top of the tree. She wondered how I could know.

Because I did not want to scare her, I told her that I had read about them somewhere. She said that they were built as hotels. But since there were not enough guests and the operation fee would be much higher than the rental revenue, the buildings were abandoned soon after the construction was completed.

Once again, painting earlier that day seemed to open up a doorway to an altogether impossible experience and alternative mode of perception. My brush was my key, my Wand. Perhaps this is what Niles Abercromby (*The Book of Wands*) would call “Traveling with an Unusual Tool”.

That day was a turning point in my life. One unexpected experience began to shake the foundation of my concept of mind and body and to change my view on brain and consciousness. I knew my body did not leave my bed, but I also knew I was there on the railroad station in my hometown. My body and my mind, or my brain and my consciousness were separated during that short period. How? I could not figure this out. I did not experience a vibration as some people described when they had an out-of-body experience, nor did I remember ever passing the window out or in. I did not float up to the ceiling or see my body on the bed, either. It could not be near death experience because I was very alive that day or after, and I did not see white light or pass through any dark channels. I did remember flying, but it was on the top of the clouds and in open sky.

I only told a few close friends about my experience because I could not understand how it happened or explain why it happened. I began to pay attention to other people’s stories and all sorts of hypotheses. So far, I haven’t heard any story exactly like mine or feel comfortable with any hypothesis. It is still a mystery to me, but I am glad that I had that experience. It further convinced me that anything is possible.



Reason to Paint #72

Visit Family and Friends- Instantly Around the World

Painting made me so happy that sometimes I felt like flying.

So, one Friday night I did.

One minute I was in my bed soundly sleeping and dreaming, and the next minute I was flying into my hometown and standing in the air near my sister's window on second floor of her house. I saw that she was knitting something with different colors. She sat on the bed facing the window. Four colored balls of wool yarn were randomly moving on the bed. I wanted to talk to her, but I had no voice. I tried to knock on the window, but I had no hands and no body.

Since I already had a similar experience once before, I was not as frightened as the first time, but still felt extremely uncomfortable and felt naked. I flew back home in America immediately.

The next day I called my sister and asked if she was knitting the day before. She said, "How did you know?" I told her that I saw it while sleeping last night. She told me that she was knitting a sweater and used wool yarns of four different colors.

On another visit, I saw that my sister's window was dark, but all other buildings in her neighborhood were full of light. When I talked to her the next day, she told me that the fuse in her building had gone out. She decided to go to sleep early and fix the fuse in the morning.

I feel lucky to be able to fly back to visit, but I still don't know what I can do to make it happen. It is free flight, but not on demand.



Reason to Paint #73

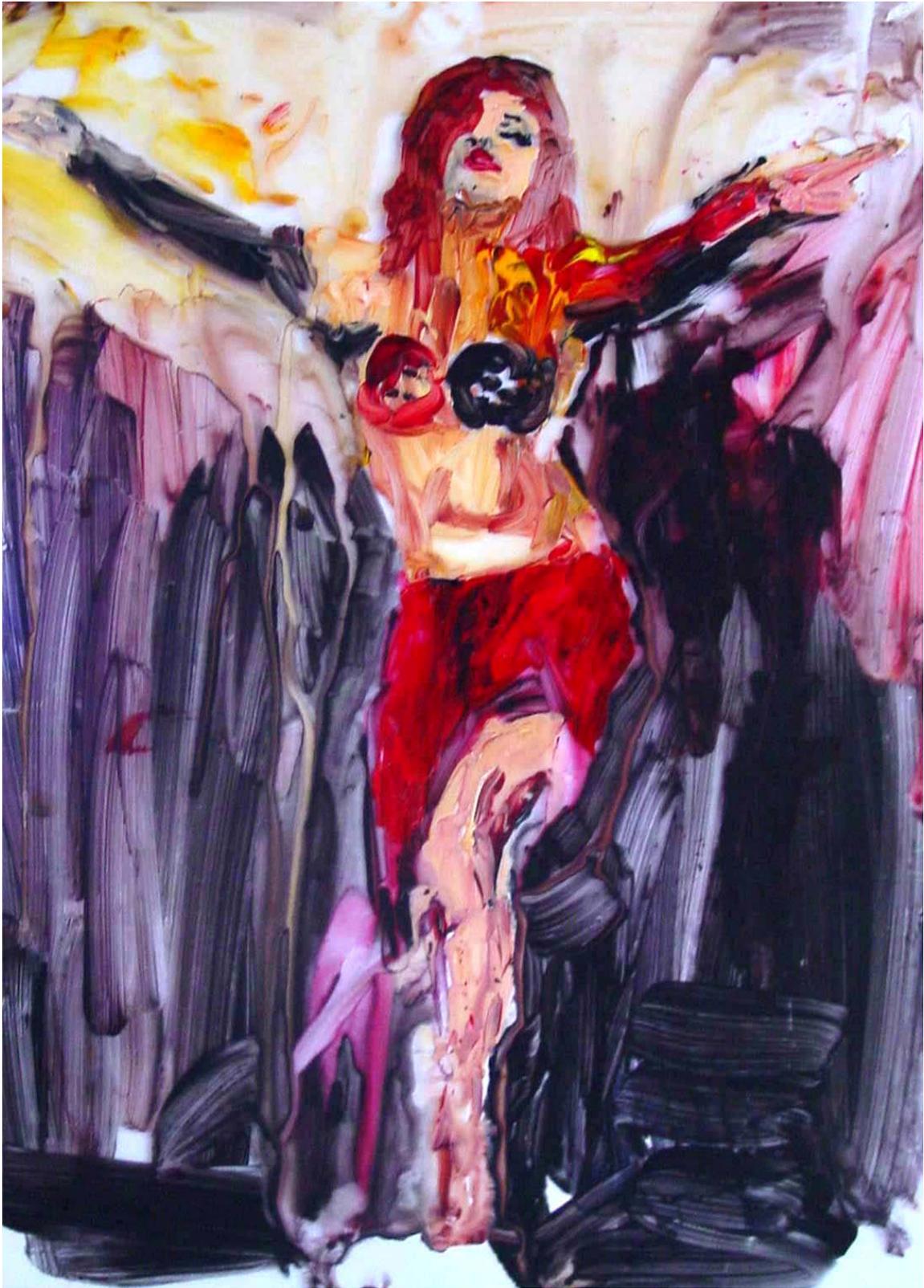
Make Portraits Of Your Friends

Matisse said that the portrait is one of the most curious art forms. It demands special qualities in the artist, and an almost total kinship with the model. Your friends could be the perfect models for you and your paintings could be a special gift to your friends. It hard to find a better subject to paint than someone you know well.

In this country, many people like to see their own portraits. More than 100 years ago, a Japanese diplomat wrote a book about Japan's tea culture, in which he described how weird he felt when he visited an American gentleman and saw a huge portrait of his host next to the host himself in the living room. If you are a portrait painter, America is the place to be.

My friends like the portraits I did for them. I once drew a sketch on note paper for an attorney friend. He liked it so much that he framed it and hung on the wall of his office.

I did a portrait for my friend Ginger. She gave it as gift to her brother. Another friend Dan treasured his portrait so much that he would not even let me borrow it for my exhibitions. Before I left Missouri, I asked if he wanted to have any of my paintings, he answered quickly: "Another portrait, please!"



Reason to Paint #74

Make Self-Portraits

To make a self-portrait is one of most satisfactory experiences an artist can indulge in. You may be the best model for yourself. You know yourself better than anyone else. You can be in the studio at any time and you can sit as long as you are needed. If you don't feel like you deserve a coffee break, you don't have to give yourself one. And you work for below minimum wage, too. You are the perfect model!

I've done several self portraits. Even in the most abstract version without any details, not only my friends but other people that did not know me well immediately recognized the subject of the painting as myself. One day a friend of my neighbors came to see my paintings. When she saw the painting of me on the beach, she commented: "I like this one, just wish that was me." Then she saw another self portrait and said: "You really like yourself." Why not? From the day I was born, I have been surrounded by love and encouragement from my family, all my teachers and friends. Besides, if you don't like yourself, how could you expect other people to like you?

Of course, no one likes everything she or he said or did. Then change it. Life is a continuum of self realization and perfection. As long as you are still here, you have plenty chance to become a better you.



Reason to Paint #75

Be Confident

Confidence is our best friend. As Picasso observed, “He can- who thinks he can. He can't- who thinks he can't.” Talent and intuition is important to a painter, but without confidence, you may fail to recognize your talent and ignore your intuition.

Confidence is the result of a combination of your genes, early childhood environment and education. This would include self-education and self-improvement.

One thing you can do to raise your level of confidence level is to take action. If you don't have confidence in painting, then paint! One good result could give you enough confidence to continue. More than anything else, picking up a brush to start a painting is the action that helped me to find my talent in art and gave me the confidence to create original workday after day.

Dive in, and get all your toes wet- right now!



Reason to Paint #76

Vanquish Fear

18th century philosopher Edmund Burke observed that, “No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as does fear.”

A few weeks ago, I saw a comedy in which a group of dead people were brought to Judgment City, where they were told that until they overcome the fear in life, they will be sent back to earth again and again. Essentially, the story portrays life on earth as the journey of the human soul to conquer fear.

In real life there are so many things we are afraid of. Fear of failure, fear of making a mistake, fear of ruining a perfect white canvas (of all sorts), fear of making a bad painting, fear of trying something new. Fear makes us hesitate to act. Positive action can help us to conquer fear.

I had once feared a white canvas because I was afraid that I would ruin it. I soon learned, however, the best way to conquer that fear is to start painting. Once I put some colors on the canvas, it is no longer pure white and I have no reason to fear it any more.



Reason to Paint #77

Be More Alive

Painting makes me more aware of my thoughts, feelings and movement.

Painting allows me to be more connected with the wind, the water, the land, other beings - the whole universe for that matter. Painting helps me become more passionate about my family, friends and this whole life on earth.

Painting makes me feel more alive!



Reason to Paint #78

Meet New Friends

As painter, you will have more chances to meet new people- other artists, gallery owners, art collectors or art lovers. Some of them will become your friends.

When you begin to show your work and sell your paintings, you will get to share your passion for art with many others whom you would not have known otherwise. Some of them will write to you or call you to tell you about their appreciation of your work. Their positive comments are among the best support and encouragement you will receive as a painter.

Could anyone have too many friends?



Reason to Paint #79

Share With Your Family

Last summer I spent three months in my sister's home in a seaside city in China. Between catching up with old friends, going to various parties, and traveling, I painted one-hundred eighty-three paintings. I found myself inspired by the sea and all of my rekindled friendships.

I gave all the paintings to my sister. My sister gave many painting to our friends and framed all of her favorite ones for her own walls. Overnight her house looked like The Julia Lu Art Gallery. I sent some paintings to my brother who lives in California, too. Both my sister and brother plan to open a local gallery to exhibit my work.



Reason to Paint #80

Share With Your Friends

My friends are very appreciative and supportive. Without them, I could not paint so confidently. Alma was the first among my friends to collect my work. She had my first oil painting. She asked for my paintings for her birthday and for Christmas. From the time I started to paint she has believed that someday I would be a great painter. She told me that she would like to pass those paintings on to her grandchildren.

Several years ago, I painted Ginger and her husband fishing on the lake. It was the first time I had painted human figures. The anatomical proportions were not quite right, but Ginger hanged the painting in her living room anyway.

I gave away all my earlier paintings to my friends. Whenever some one told me, "I really like that one," I would tell them, "It is yours, then." All of my good friends have some sort of collection of my work.

Sharing my paintings with my friends is something that continually brings me lots of joy.



Reason to Paint #81

Share With Your Neighbors

When I was in Missouri, I painted every night and put the new wet paintings outside my house to let them dry. Sometimes it took weeks for those paintings to dry. I had to use all of the space surrounding the house. Dozens of paintings were hanging in the front porch, in the back porch, and on tables against the outside walls. I knew my neighbors would see them, but I thought since they were all so busy and I hardly saw them at all, perhaps no one really paid attention to my artwork.

A few days before I moved to Denver, my next door neighbor came to me and told me, “Julia, you haven’t put out any new paintings the last couple of days.” I told her that I was leaving Missouri. To my surprise she told me that she had been looking at all of my paintings around my house, and that every day she looked forward to the new work. This neighbor was from Louisiana and particularly liked water and boat paintings. I gave her one of her favorite paintings as a gift.

A couple of months ago, my next door neighbor had a party. When I walked by their door, I met few guests of the party who were chatting on the porch. When they found out that I was a painter and had a studio next door, they wanted to see my paintings. They liked my work and bought three glass paintings. No wonder people often say that you should meet your neighbors.



Reason to Paint #82

Share With the World

Can you imagine how peaceful the world would be if every soldier held a brush instead of a gun? Can you imagine how beautiful the world would be if every woman, man, or child was creating beauty and sharing love? Perhaps it is just a dream. But isn't that how everything begins?

After painting for a while, you will have a collection of your own work. You might hang some your favorite ones on the wall and store the rest of them in the basement. A painting staying in basement, however, usually serves no function. You should let them out and share your creations with the world. You may publish your paintings in a book, put them in a virtual gallery, have an exhibit, or even give them away.

This way, you complete the Cosmic Circle of Energy - Energy that comes into your core brain, past your magic amygdala brain switch, out through your frontal lobes, and then out to Universe. Then the Universe gives you more energy back, and the circle starts all over again.

By sharing your paintings, you are sharing with the world your belief, your passion, your love and your vision. You are telling others, "This is how I see the world and this how I feel about this land, these woods, and this river and lake. This how I appreciate the boats, the bridges, and the buildings created by other artists."

If you let the energy flow through you, like a river that is constantly fed by clear snow high in the creative mountains, you will never run out of energy and joy.

Let's be happy that we have the opportunity to live on this planet. Let's take care of the earth so that the future generations can enjoy the beauty and harmony. Let's paint instead of fight, let's create with infinity of energy and appreciation.



Reason to Paint #83

Honor Your Parents

When my parents founded Benevolent Hospital after they each received their degree in western medicine, they decided that the hospital would accept all patients who needed medical care and come to the hospital, regardless the social or financial status of the patients. Patients would pay whatever they could afford, from as much as one-hundred percent to as little as nothing.

I remember when we were young, my sister and I asked Mom how the hospital could survive with such a policy since there were more poor people than rich people. My Mom told us that many people liked the idea and made donations to the hospital regularly. Some people made huge donations. Additionally, she told us that poor people often tolerate discomfort or sickness better than others, and did not come to hospital unless they were very sick.

During their lifetime my parents helped so many people. When I visited my hometown last summer, I heard many stories about them from their friends, colleagues, students, and patients. My sister is writing a book about Mom and Dad from the volumes of material she has collected.

I want to honor my parents in my way --- to carry out their spirit of giving.

Amy was the first gallery owner to buy my paintings. When she organized a fund raising event for Cancer Society three years ago, I donated five paintings. I also donated my paintings to the annual fund raising event for the University of Missouri. Even after I left Missouri, I still participate in that event and ship my paintings to the organizer every year.

Although I do not practice medicine and could not save life as my parents did, I have realized that doing what I love is one of the best ways to share with others and to honor my parents.



Reason to Paint #84

Have Gifts Ready At Any Time

Once upon a time, all gifts were things you made yourself. This was before the Age of Wal-Mart and all the giant chain stores.

As a painter, you still can carry out that wonderful tradition.

Among many other good things about painting is that I always have unique handmade gifts for any occasions and never have to worry about emergency shopping for gifts or having to buy mass produced stuff.

For my friends, “Made by Chinese” has an entirely different meaning.



Reason to Paint #85

Decorate Your House

There are very few things in the world that are better to decorate your house with than your own paintings.

You know what color and theme fit each room, and can choose the size suitable for the wall, especially when you have a hundred paintings to choose from. And you can change them whenever you want.



Reason to Paint #86

Live In An Art Gallery

I have put my favorite paintings on the walls of my house. I have turned my home into forest full of true colors and pleasant vibrations.

I live in a gallery and I am surrounded by beautiful art work. This is better than visiting the big art museum downtown. That's because here I can touch the paintings and eat my lunch in front of any of them without getting yelled at by the guard.

Heck.

I don't even need a guard.



Reason to Paint #87

Develop Self-Discipline

A healthy life requires keeping a balance between self-indulgence and self-discipline. Without chocolate or ice cream or whatever you enjoy most, life would be no fun. But too much fun can damage your health or even kill you. (Well, the wrong kind of fun anyway.)

Without discipline, no action, including creative actions, can be accomplished on a regular basis.

You can learn all about discipline if you had rigid parents or teachers, or joined the military, or attended a Catholic school. But too much discipline can certainly repress or kill your critical thinking and creativity.

Painting provides the possibility of a perfect balance between self-indulgence and self-discipline. When you paint, you are indulging yourself because you are doing what you want to do. But since there is no boss to tell you what to do, your self-discipline is the only fence between you and over-indulgence, which would lead to a total waste of your talent and sterilize your creativity.

To make a good painting you need self-discipline so that you can make all of the good decisions regarding picture design or technical issues you encounter in carrying out your idea. To develop your talent or improve your technique, you also need self-discipline to study and analyze continuously. Otherwise, your paintings may be no better than the ones we see painted by elephants in the zoo.



Reason to Paint #88

To Sell Paintings

After you begin to paint, people may want to buy your paintings. Sometimes it comes sooner than you ever imagined.

One day I showed my friend Elma one of my flower paintings, bright yellow roses in a blue vase. Elma could not keep her eyes from it. So I gave it to her. She put a beautiful frame on it. Two years later, I had already moved to another city and forgot about that painting. Out of the blue Elma called me to tell me that the painting was sold in a charity fun raising auction for \$500.00. I was happy because a stranger liked my painting enough to pay money for it. Besides, it was also for a good cause.

When my friend Ginger heard the story that I accidentally sold a painting, she told me that nothing is pure coincident. "Perhaps the universe is trying to tell you something!" she said.

"Well," I responded, "If that's the case, there would be more signs in the future."

Before long, one evening when I was walking back to my car outside a framing shop, I saw a woman looking through the window of my car. When I approached her she asked, "Are these your paintings?" She pointed to some small glass paintings on the passenger seat.

"Yes," I answered.

She continued: "Do you sell them? They are really beautiful."

It was a pleasant surprise to hear a perfect stranger say such a thing.. "I've never sold a painting before, except by accident," I said.

She bought seven of my glass paintings on that day. She told me that she owned an art gallery. Her gallery was the first one to exhibit my glass paintings.

It took me a while to feel comfortable selling some of my paintings rather than to simply to give them away. But now, I rather like the idea!



Reason to Paint #89

Exhibit In A Gallery

When I began to paint more regularly, I was invited to have a one person show in a fine art gallery in Mark Twain's home town, Hannibal, Missouri. The invitation was totally unexpected.

It all started with a stranger knocking at my door. She was a Russian lady with fiery red hair wearing a fancy dress. She was holding a painting I had thrown outside my door because I did not like it.

She told me that she was a friend of my neighbor. She asked me if she could have the painting and if I could sign it for her. I told her that she could have it, but I didn't want to sign it because it was a bad painting. But she insisted and said it would mean a lot to her. I signed reluctantly and forgot about the whole thing.

A few weeks later, I received a phone call from James, an art gallery owner in Hannibal. After introducing himself, he said that he would like to host an exhibition of my paintings in his gallery. He said that he saw one of my paintings at his friend's house and he really liked it. The friend, of course, was the Russian lady I had met outside my door, Lena.

Of course I was very excited for the opportunity to show my paintings.

A few days later, James came to select paintings for the exhibit and left with a truck load of my work. The exhibit was successful and was extended from three months to two years.



Reason to Paint #90

Avoid A Boring Job

How many times you heard “I hate my job” from your friends or even strangers?
If you can do what you love to do, then you do not have to keep a job that you hate.

It could be a MIRACLE! You might truly enjoy your work!

A job is boring perhaps because it requires you simply follow orders or instructions. It shuts off your feelings, your intellect - it shuts off your brain.

A job is boring perhaps because it is repetitive and mechanical, and does not involve critical thinking, or because it is too easy and does not stimulate your brain or evoke your creativity.

If your job was to be a painter - one that rewards continuous creation, experimentation and taking artistic chances - you might end up with the best job in the world.

And even if your have another full time job, you still can take everything that you learn about creativity, expression, and freedom from painting, and bring it to your regular job and make it that much more interesting and exciting.



Reason to Paint #91

Become A Better Artist

Two years ago, when I tried to fill out an entry form for an art show, I was puzzled by the definition of professional artist. The organizer of the show stated that, “A professional artist is an artist who has a formal education in fine art or has been selling art for living for 5 years”.

Gosh, Van Gogh would have been excluded because he neither had a formal education in fine art nor sold more than one painting in his life time. If the choice is to be a professional artist by definition or to be in the same category with Van Gogh, who would care about the official definition?

Regardless, professional artist or not, I want to be a great painter who paints with passion and who makes truly original paintings that are beautiful and inspiring. I don't need anyone's “official” designation to do that, and neither do you.



Reason to Paint #92

Have Another Reason To Travel

When you paint, you constantly look for exciting new scenes. For that reason alone, you must travel.

The ancient Chinese said that to become a wise person, you must read 10,000 books and walk 10,000 miles. If you wonder if walking to the corner store ten thousand times would qualify, sorry, definitely not.

Whether you travel around the globe or just visit a new place on the other side of state, travel allows you to see different landscapes, peoples and cultures. Travel opens your eyes and mind, and makes you a better person and a better painter.



Reason to Paint #93

Listen to Your Favorite Radio Shows

While painting, I've had plenty time to listen to radio shows.

One talk show I particularly enjoy is hosted by Laura Lee. The show covers many interesting topics, ranging from children's past life stories to party levitation, from brain mapping to energy healing. In their internet radio library, you can search any topic you like and listen on demand. Laura Lee's interviews with philosophers, scientists, and researchers are fascinating and inspiring because they are all related to the deep question about life --- who are we and why we are here?

You may find that you paint better if you have something to listen to while putting paint on your canvases. Perhaps this is a way to engage your whole brain, to keep both hemispheres occupied and productive simultaneously.

After all, two brain hemispheres are better than one.



Reason to Paint #94

Open An Online Gallery

The days are over when the only way to show your work was to put your paintings in a gallery and wait for few people to walk in the door. The Internet has opened a whole new way to exhibit and sell art work. Without leaving your house you can show your work to viewers in every corner of the globe at virtually no cost.

You can open up an online art gallery all by yourself and instantly share your work with millions of people, and nobody can stop you.

What an amazing opportunity! What an amazing new world of art!



Have An Excuse To Be Crazy

Once upon a time I had a boss who was extremely religious. He followed biblical ritual religiously. Before he started to drink water, coffee, or any liquid he had to put his hat on first. He always wore black pants and coat, and always carried a black umbrella. He only ate food processed exactly according to rules specified in the Old Testament.

I thought he would never act naturally or wildly. But I was wrong. One day, he came to take a look at the lake located on the property where I lived to check the possibility that he might be able to catch fish there.

I went back to my house to get something for us to eat and left him outside alone for a few minutes. From my kitchen window I could see him jumping, shouting with glee, and then tumbling down onto the ground. He began twirling and rolling around on the grass next to the lake for more than two minutes.

For a few secluded minutes my boss acted like crazy happy child. He totally forgot about all of his strict rules and codes and acted naturally because he was in the middle of nowhere, with no one else around. He was himself and didn't have to act "properly" at all.

I also witnessed a spontaneous and crazy moment of one of my law professors. This professor, a former federal court judge, always wore a suit and tie in the classroom and acted in a dignified manner. But one day, when he described a celebration of lawyers after winning a case, he shouted: "Wine, party, sex, everybody's happy!" and threw his hat into the air. The entire class was stunned.

We all have desire to be ourselves. We want to laugh when we are happy, to cry when we are sad, to jump, to run, or to dance whenever we feel like it. But most of us have to act in a certain way because we do not want people to think we are crazy.

As a painter, however, I can be myself all the time. I can do anything I want in the way I want, of course, provided that I do not violate any law or harm any one else. I can wear pink pants if I like that color, regardless what other people wear or what the fashion trend is. I can dance around in my living room, back yard, or at night on the street. Of course, I would listen to other's advice or suggestions regarding fashion or style, but only if they tell me directly. Guessing other's opinion or following the trend is not my style.

I can get up at five am to start a new painting or stay in bed until noon because I need to catch up my sleep. I can eat one pound of chocolate in one day and fast for the next.

There are many greater examples in art history of wild and odd painters, and I can not possibly surpass them, even if I try. Artists have license to be their creative selves or to act crazy.

I am a painter and therefore I am entitled to be eccentric. Somehow I am expected to be different. I like that.



Tolerate The Craziness of Others

19th century American poet Walt Whitman once said, “To the real artist in humanity, what are called bad manners are often the most picturesque and significant of all traits.”

To me, the most beautiful scene is the scene when people act naturally, no heavy make up, no pretentiousness, no acting at all. I like to see people express their emotions naturally.

Knowing how crazy I could be, I do not judge others when they act crazy as long as they do not harm others. Besides, what is called “crazy” really depends upon one’s own perspective. Norms in society are always changing. What is normal one year will appear insane another.

Since I dislike driving, whenever I needed to be at a court in another city one of my friends would drive me there. One day I went to a hearing with Gavin, a comedian. He had participated in the TV program “The Last Comic Standing” competition. Gavin is crazy by any normal standard. He has a degree in accounting, but chose to work in a pizza place. He does stand up comedy in a local club, dressing up as a woman.

During the hearing, after I finished my argument by citing the law and six separate cases, the judge said, “I don’t know much about this area of law.” The judge turned to the attorney who represented the company suing my client, and asked: “What do you think?” That attorney answered with four words: “I don’t buy it.” No counter argument at all. To my surprise, the judge did not say that he needs time to study more before deciding the case, but simply decided the case based on those four words.

Having listened to the entire conversation at the court, Gavin got excited because he found this to be interesting material for his comedy routine. On our way back home Kevin began to tell me the jokes he had derived from witnessing the hearing. One joke was like this:

A patient was lying on the operating table. The heart surgery was about to begin. The surgeon walked in and said: “Actually, I am not that familiar with the human heart.” Then he asked the nurse, “What do you think?” The nurse said: “I don’t know either.” The doctor put his surgical gloves on and picked up the scalpel, “Let’s start anyway.”

I could not stop laughing. Gavin said: “You think I am crazy? Compared to what I heard today, I am perfectly sane.”

Even if someone really is insane, music and painting can help him.

In psychiatric treatment facilities, one effective way to help patients achieve serenity without drugs is to let them paint pictures. My friend used to teach painting classes at hospitals and psychiatric wards all over Denver, and he can vouch for the effectiveness of this kind of art therapy.

Each of us has unique mode of craziness. To express it through art or music is infinitely better than express it any other way.



Reason to Paint #97

Appreciate The Creative Craziness of Others

When I first met my boy friend, I was shocked by his non-conformity, his so-called craziness. But after I begin to paint every day, his actions became normal to me. Now, I have become at least as crazy as he is. I think he would say, “Yep. More than me.”

He is an artist of all sorts - a musician, a writer, and has many other creative titles, including brain education guru and web master. He routinely ignores cultural expectations of opinion and behavior. He jumps when he is happy, and he cries and feels sad for someone else’s tragedy even if he’s just watching a movie.

He loves his friends and would do almost anything for them. I have seen him put his own work aside for hours to help a friend, fixing their computer or bicycle.

He totally ignores the common notion of time. In fact, I don’t think he pays any attention to time at all. He might walk around doing nothing at all on Monday and then will write nonstop on Saturday night when his creative juice is flowing. I appreciate his creative mind, loving soul, and craziness. Actually I cannot imagine him acting “normal”.

For me, to dare to be different and disregard the “norm” is sign of confidence and self-awareness. One winter night we went together to see the holiday light show at the Denver Botanic Gardens. The garden sold special glasses that turn ordinary lights into a magical and heavenly full spectrum of colors in all directions. We were so happy to slip into another dimension while walking among others who didn’t suspect a thing.

After the show, most people simply discarded those glasses. or throw them in the basement or garage. We kept ours. One night we walked for several hours with these glasses on in our neighborhood to enjoy the magic lights that appeared on every porch and every street corner lamp. All the houses and cars, and even our hands and bodies

became virtually transparent, with lights everywhere appearing as star studded rainbows. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple light were above and below, in front and behind, on the left and on the right at the same time. Everything disappeared, only we and the magic light existed.

My boyfriend put these Glasses From Another Dimension in his treasure box and we continue to use them regardless of the season.

Knowing we are both crazy, I've accepted my boyfriend's craziness and we are crazily happy together.

We are conscious about our health and fitness, but once in a while we may do whatever we want at the moment. We may have ice cream for lunch or chocolate for dinner, begin to clean house at midnight, wander in the park for hours, or watch movies until 4 am. So what?

We are artists.

Will you join us in our creative craziness?



Reason to Paint #98

Put Your Work Into A Museum

The first time I read Picasso's statement, "Give me a museum and I'll fill it", I thought it was an exaggeration. After I learned more about Picasso - the speed at which he turned out paintings and how many paintings he created in his life time - I knew it wasn't an idle boast. More than once, he did fill a museum with his work.

Now looking at hundreds of paintings in my own studio, I feel it would not take too long to fill any space with my work, either.

Not every painting has a chance to be in museum, though. My own local art museum is filled with many masterpieces. But it also has other works that are quite ugly. I suppose that if you can't create something stunningly beautiful, perhaps you can try to make something shockingly unattractive. This could be one's ticket onto the wall of an art museum. I would not recommend it, though.



Reason to Paint #99

Be Humble

Since I began to paint, I read much more about the history of art.

I would prescribe this to anyone, artist, painter or not.

Knowing all the great painters in history, how could you not feel humble?



Reason to Paint #100

Write A Book About Painting

Painting makes me so happy. I want to share my happiness with the whole world. Writing a book about painting has become inevitable to me.

Now you've read my book. You may have begun to paint already if you found that at least one of the reasons I listed made sense to you.

If you haven't yet, what are you waiting for?



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