



ART IN THE FIRST PERSON

Renewal and Discovery

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF ART | BY ALICE NODINE



Alice Nodine

For many years, I stood on the periphery of art and art-making. Artists were an exotic breed—mysterious creatures to be admired from afar. While I yearned to join their ranks, I viewed such an aspiration as unrealistic. I had never taken art lessons as a child and figured it was too late to start once I was solidly entrenched in adulthood. One day I mentioned to a local artist that I would love to be able to paint. “Oh, I can teach anyone to paint,” she declared. Although I knew better—and told her so—I was struck by her conviction and began to wonder if my dreams of becoming an artist could be realized after all.

It took some time—years actually—but eventually

I registered for my first official art class and eagerly bought a sketchpad and a set of pencils. For six consecutive Tuesday nights, I was schooled in the fundamentals of drawing by an exceptional instructor whose gently delivered critiques were always spot-on. I was heartened by his promises that I would see progress if I worked hard on techniques. Outside of class, I assembled my first portfolio—a modest assortment of cross-hatched and stippled spheres, cylinders and cubes. I strengthened my skills as well as my resolve and immediately signed up for another class.

And so I launched my artistic journey, dabbling in



illustration, collage, mixed media painting and clay sculpture. With each successive class and workshop, my desire to create intensified, and I began to be more intentional about making time for art.

Even as I was discovering the joy of artistic play, I was entering a period of personal upheaval. Formal art instruction moved to the back burner as I confronted a parade of family crises. Occasionally, however, I managed to slip away with my sketchpad, grateful for a brief respite from the swirl.

Years later, I still recall the calming effect of those stolen moments. Each blissful hour of sketching transported me away from the calamity of the week and restored my bruised spirit. Losing myself in an intricate drawing, I felt my breathing slow and my muscles relax. Temporarily at least, I kept my worries at bay.

There came a time when the soap opera that was

my life moderated and I could refocus my energies on art and art classes. There were still plenty of dramas clamoring for my attention, but I was better equipped to deal with them when I took time out to draw or paint.

In addition to following my creative urges, I became more deliberate about spending time in nature. Immersing myself in the sanctuary of sky, forest and boulder fields cleared the mental cobwebs and left me refreshed and revitalized. Suddenly I had more bandwidth to act on my artistic impulses. As a bonus, the textures, patterns and colors I observed while hiking along wooded trails and across mossy streams began to influence my images.

All of these activities—making art, taking classes and finding inspiration in the natural world—fed my soul, and I was happy to continue this cycle. I was somewhat hindered, however, by the lack of a dedicated

Page 28: "Exultant," acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20"

Page 29: "Iris Frenzy," acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20"

Above: "Postage Due," acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16"

Opposite: "Safe Zone," acrylic and ink on paper, 30" x 22"



workspace. The art I made was messy and tended to take over whatever corner of the house I had claimed for my projects. Just when I found myself in a groove, it was time to pack up and stow my materials in a closet or a drawer and return the dining table to its intended purpose. What a gift it was when my husband helped me carve out a studio in our home. For the first time, I had a space set aside solely for creating art. Finally I could organize and arrange my tools and supplies in a logical way, which allowed me to access just the right brush or jar of medium when needed. I could work on a piece—or three—and create a happy mess without wreaking havoc in the rest of the house.

Having my own studio to work in for the past year and a half has dramatically jump-started my creativity and my productivity. The more I work, the more confident I become. Lately I've sought out opportunities to participate in juried shows and

competitions—something I never could have imagined even a few years ago—and I've experienced the thrill of exhibiting and selling my work in several shows.

I used to feel slightly guilty whenever I took time out from the busyness of life to pursue anything creative. But now I view art-making as a healing, transformative activity that is a vital part of my self-care. I look at the world with new eyes, finding inspiration in the most mundane objects. Ensnared in my little studio, I give myself permission to explore, to experiment, to learn from my mistakes. I break down complex processes into manageable tasks. I remember to breathe.

Peace Like a River, a solo exhibit of mixed media works by Alice Nodine, is on view November 17–December 16 at the Church of the Good Shepherd UMC in Vienna. See Calendar for details. é

Alice Nodine | www.alicenodineart.com

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