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How My Days Are Spent

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For two years I planned my full-year sabbatical, something colleagues said would be a life-changing experience. My sabbatical days were filled with research and art-making. By spring, making art nudged research out of the picture. I was transitioning from an art hobbyist to an art professional. The thought of spending my days teaching made me physically ill, despite the fact that I had poured much of my time into continually improving my pedagogy. This change of attitude was not due to boredom, burnout, or frustration over university politics. I was an artist, full stop, so that's how I chose to live. Two years later, I took an early retirement package.

I have wanted to write a book about these developments, something I might title *Zen and the Artful Buddhist: Asperger's, Art, and Academia*. But I don't have the time, energy, or inclination to write a book. However, creating an illustrated version does appeal to me, and I'll say more about that in another post. I'm more realistic, and more selective about how I use my time now that I'm retired. A friend commented last week, "I'm not surprised that you have found new things to keep yourself busy."

My days are now spent in my art studio or at my part-time job at a local art gallery and framing shop. Down the hall is my former colleague, who, during a sabbatical, said to herself “I’m done with teaching.” She was my department chair for ten years, and she is my best (artist) friend. We regularly critique each other’s work and go for beer at 3:30 (aka “beer:30”) in the afternoon because we can. Plus, the pub is on the ground floor, two doors down. She moved out-of-state two weeks ago, and there’s now a feeling of loss each time I enter my studio.

I’ve started painting a lot of intricate, repetitive patterns lately, something I was doing regularly a few years ago. People often comment that my art and art-making processes must be spiritual and/or meditative. With my pattern-heavy art, I can see what they mean, but I still refuse to use the word “spiritual” in general or in reference to my artwork. Something about the repetition of patterns calls for deep concentration. It’s also very soothing, calming any Asperger Syndrome-related anxiety. I often tune out my surroundings by putting in my earbuds and listening to my “liked songs” playlist. My music is not soothing to most people, but repetitive sounds soothe many folks with Asperger’s.

My days are spent either working in a place that is part of the art community, or in my studio making art. As one of my art mentors used to say in figure drawing class — I took a few summer courses — “This is the hardest thing you are going to do today.” Art making is hard work. It calls for constant decisions, corrections, redirections, planning, and more. And then there are all the questions about why you made those choices. It never ends. And I’ve said nothing about all the other aspects of being an artist, like marketing your work, and so on. I suppose I will say more about living as a full-time artist in another post.

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