



“Are We There Yet?!”

Mary Pettis · May 9, 2016 · 11 Comments



I recently came across a familiar post saying “When I look at all this beautiful art, I just feel like throwing away my brushes!” I have heard this despair in workshops and on countless occasions from fellow accomplished artists. I would like to speak to this sentiment. We live in a digital age of instant answers. If it takes Siri more than 10 seconds to tell us the information we are searching for, we often become restless. Voices in our heads and partners looking

over the shoulder (and the checkbook) express concern if paintings seem to go backwards after a workshop. When will we get there?!

I am as guilty as the next of having “Why bother?” moments of misgivings. Okay. Actually, change the word “moments” to “decades”. After 40 years of painting for a living, I’d like to share a few insights on how to exorcise our doubt; this haunter of our artistic hearts.

1) First of all, trust in the rhythm and unfolding of your life. No one has lived your life. Time spent caring for parents or children or pushing the broom are the things that have made you who you are. You are shaped by your experiences; nothing is ever wasted. Make peace with this. The life you live gives you unique insights and authentic depth. It helps give you something to say beyond the outward appearance of things. In a positive way, you bring it all to the easel. It takes time. Be patient and gentle with yourself. Enjoy the present moment, and leave the rest to a kind universe. Angst only cripples.

2) Remember that all is relative. No matter where you are on this journey, there will always be artists who are better and artists who are worse than you are. Comparing yourself unfavorably with others is not only a downer- it is a distraction that robs you of your clarity. Why allow a beautiful painting to make you sad or insecure? Try to replace judgment and discouragement with inspiration. Be happy for those better artists who show the way. We are all one big family. In spite of this competitive current culture, do not have beating others as your goal. They are not taking your spot at the table. There is room for you, and... a chair with your name on it. Most of the ‘cover artists’ that I admire have this humility, awareness, and sense of perspective.



3) Know the reason WHY you are an artist. If you go beyond the simple answer of superficial fame and fortune, I bet you will find something that comes from a deeper place. Re-examine your artistic aims. Know what stirs and fascinates you. What we discover when we go inward is our poetic response to life. What abstract elements make your heart skip a beat? People want to know how YOU see the world.

Spend more time developing a feeling for your subject on the front end. The deeper you contemplate what is before you, the more you will bring to your viewer. One of my favorite quotes from Emerson is this: “The power in a work of art depends on the depth of the artist’s insight of that object he contemplates.”

4) Keep growing and love the journey.

The legendary cellist Pablo Casals was asked why he continued to practice at age 90. “Because I think I’m making progress,” he replied.

Happy Painting!

Snapshot Of The Author

Mary Pettis

In her work, Mary Pettis draws heavily upon her classical training and Russian influence. Mary has been juried into and won awards in national and international painting events and exhibitions from New York City to Scottsdale, Barcelona and Maui. Her art has taken her to the far corners of the world. She has exhibited widely, including the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, and collectors of her work reach across the globe. Mary is recognized as an eloquent and respected speaker, teacher and mentor. Mary divides her time equally between the studio and outdoors. Her decades of training and the experiences from hundreds of plein air paintings are a catalyst for a symbolic visual language of expression that celebrates the beauty, dignity and worth of this world and its inhabitants. Mary and her husband Randy live along the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway in Minnesota. Her work, along with information on galleries, exhibitions, and workshops can be found at www.marypettis.com.

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Marsha Savage says
May 10, 2016 at 6:49 am

I had one of those “moments” yesterday... several of them to be correct! Opening my computer and checking email first, seeing an OPA post, and reading it before going to others, it seemed as if you knew what I have been going through. I actually thought why not just give up the art because I have so much going on in my life. And my thought was “I’m such a fraud. I don’t have a clue what I am doing.” Of course I didn’t stop, I brushed out what I knew was wrong in the piece and started correcting. Honestly I am not comparing my work to others, but have been painting for over 40 years and have been very successful. I love the success and the work of others. I know enough to realize it is only growing pains. But right now, I don’t know who I am or what to even paint. I will continue to explore that thought. I haven’t given up before, and I won’t now. I will continue to practice. Thank you for a very timely post!

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Anne Blair Brown says
May 10, 2016 at 7:20 am

EXCELLENT blog, Mary!! Beautifully written, and I agree wholeheartedly. Thanks for putting these encouraging words out there.

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Rosemary Holusha says
May 10, 2016 at 8:57 am

Thanks for the comments. Sometimes artists think they must do what others are doing or they will be left out of the race.
R. Holusha

[Reply](#)

Debbie Bruce says
May 10, 2016 at 10:38 am

So glad I read your article! I, too, found it to be such an encouragement, and so real! Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us!

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Ellie Harold says
May 10, 2016 at 10:59 am

I love this! I read it as a sort of “Desiderata” for painters. I will take it to heart. Thank you.

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Carol Hopper says
May 10, 2016 at 3:57 pm



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