

Written by L A Bryson

Artist and Genius

Hours upon hours, ticking clocks, scribbles, notes—crumpled, illegible ramblings on the floor next to the bed, sleepless nights, driving without recollection of the journey, books read, TV watched, simple conversations, all without context, hampered by the incessant, often illusive, NAGGING *idea*...the dreaded walk to the space designated for spontaneous, intelligent, innovative...(?), pressure, insurmountable, ever-present, annoying, harping, defeating, deafening, unrelenting PRESSURE, self-loathing...now paint.

For a painter, working in the studio, genius does not suddenly occur; there is an invested, painful process involved in being a painter—artist. Devolving and evolving describes the body of my work but more importantly encapsulates the *act* of painting in the studio. The romantic notion of artist and genius is just that, romanticized drivel. Redefining or de-glamorizing the term *studio artist* may not be desired nor applicable to *all* (of course, no overarching generalities should be applied in any given circumstance), but, for me, the realities of artistic endeavors are not poetic, pretty or even appealing; they are merely personal, empirical, DEMANDING truths I consistently encounter. Read further if I have peaked your interest—push through and partake just for the hell of it.

Before any pencil, brush, or palette knife strikes paper or panel, the concept for the work first builds in the mind. There is this dark hole where my mind travels, where no audible sound can be heard, no voice recognized, not even the rumblings of a hungry stomach can dissuade this journey. This passage into darkness is equally met with a frenzied act of incessant scribbling down of incoherent words, one might call it mind mapping; I simply call it madness. The mind mapping morphs into nearly illegible

schematic drawings, similar to that of a five-year-old child—people with big heads, hands and feet, spindly arms and legs, void of any body. But in this mess, a single narrative is unearthed, permission is granted; I can now move into the studio space.

There, in the studio, sitting in front of a blank panel waiting for genius to spontaneously appear on it, evidence that I have mastered my craft, hours pass, I await genius, but that guy just doesn't show up, so I'm left with my hand, my idea, and me. Using the many photo references of myself, body wretched, face distorted, photos of screams, wild eyes in tandem with my schematic outlines, I begin to draw a rough sketch onto the foundation, panel or paper. This sometimes goes quickly, when luck falls into my lap, but most times, the preparatory drawing takes time, too much time. But mapping out the intricate movements of the form is extremely important to the execution of the piece.

Once the cartoon drawing has been initiated and confidence in its execution suffices, the paint is applied. Working wet-into-wet requires that I put six to ten hours into a single session. There is a moment when the oil paint reaches an almost clay-like state, malleable and perfect for slashing, scarring, and slicing one color into another, without losing the purity of either. For me this is ecstasy, the perfect moment when I become both painter and sculptor. DO NOT DISTURB! I cannot stress enough, DO NOT DISTURB! Oh but life does disturb, people walking through my studio space wanting to chat (seriously?), bathing, driving, even eating gets in the way. So I must put down my tools, clean my palette, cap the paint tubes; clean my face, hands, arms, hair, teeth, ears and various other parts of any paint residue and climb back into reality—life void of paint.

There are times when the painting process unfolds a relatively successful composition, never truly resolved but good enough, yet, all too often, there are unhappy fits, tools thrown, expletives fly, bad words, oh bad, bad words, and then the resounding echo of something heavy hitting the bottom of a trash can. Genius gave up and went home. Very few works survive and escape the dreaded plastic lined receptacle. But on the odd occasion when one does survive, the work is celebrated, a brief happy moment, where a little pride wells up, a chest puffs out...then a passerby, an uninvited observer asks, "Is it supposed to look like that?" A snort, a sniff of derision, followed by a glare and a concise "YES!" is replied.

The observer leaves but panic sets in, doubt swirls around in the head, the feeling of cold sweats come upon with such furry, fainting is sure to follow. Self-loathing, a well-known companion, visits and takes up residency in my studio space. He is not welcome. Oh but he doesn't care. He sits in my chair and laughs at me. He snickers at my work. So I leave. I walk away. I utter the words, "Never again."

Whose two little words, *never again*, fade, and I find myself sitting in the corner coffee shop, sipping mocha, discussing my next *idea* with that guy, genius. We banter, laugh, draw silly cartoons, write incessantly, scribble, rinse and repeat the whole process all over again. The drive and desire to create, invent, solve a problem...(paint) has taken hold, courage wells up. And as we part our ways, I pray genius will come visit me again in my studio. Genius and I team up against that other guy—self-loathing. The glamorous life of a painter—I think NOT.

Unorthodox—yes, unsettling—possibly, all true—yes, being an artist, with a capital "A" can be a burden, a blessing and a curse. It is oftentimes difficult to

establish where one ends and the other begins. The *gods* don't often deliver such a gift without also exacting a heavy toll. Now let's paint!

Written by L.A. Bryson
Copyright protected 2017