

How to Doodle, or a Private View on an Artist's Everyday Life

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Sometimes I wish I had more time. Time for doing art, time for going around town to see exhibitions, time to hang out in coffee shops, more time to have dinner with friends, more time to sew a new dress, more time to finally restore the antique chair, more time to exercise, more time to watch a movie and more time to spend with my family or simply to sleep and recover from all those busy times. Sometimes I wish just to do nothing for as long as I don't get bored. Is that really possible? Isn't here immediately the problem that my inner fantasy starts drawing pictures of things that I miss doing at that specific moment? I am mentally doodling and end up thinking about everything that I really would like to do, too, while 'wasting' my time. Anyway, the list of more-time-wishes seems to be endless. But a week has only seven days and a day only 24 hours. Which leaves us all in the same condition to structure our lives.

Artist is an Artist is an Artist?

I am analysing my preoccupied life as an artist from a very personal perspective. Or I am trying to make a personal justification manual to survive as an artist with all those ventures to pursue and things you have to do. For this book project I am trying to contemplate what my preoccupations really are. What is it that I am doing all the time that is part of my work as an artist, and what is part of the other existence or multiple existences that I live? Is there a distinction at all between all those lives? Is being preoccupied that very specific problem artists suffer from? Do we artists have to live that way, or otherwise we wouldn't practise art or live the artist's lifestyle? The state of being permanently preoccupied seems a very typical

condition in an artist's life. The other issue is that as an artist it is difficult to distinguish between your private identity and your professional and therefore very public life. Your selfhood is often part of your work, your personality drives your spirit and your character is often reflected in your artwork's complexion.

Where I am concerned, basically anything can contribute to my artistic endeavours. Preoccupations, things that I do when I am not necessarily an artist, are actually preoccupying most of my time, I think. People always say that if you are an artist, you are it full-time, despite what you are actually doing. That is quite true. Doing art, being creative is my sustained interest – most of my activities are somehow incorporated into my creative process. Almost everything and anything I do engrosses my imaginative thoughts. Whether I want it or not, I am influenced by these activities; they define my life and structure my days. These preoccupations even parameterize my work.

I remember the times when I denied that it had been a sort of vocation to me to do art, even though that might sound a little lofty here. I always had the urge to lead a well-rounded life. I tried out many different things, had many hobbies, was engaged politically and went out into the world with open eyes. Actually, I claim I am still doing it.

But how has my life changed since? My life is filled with major preoccupations and career dilemmas – struggling with different full-time jobs at the same time: being a successful artist, earning money (as a graphic designer, a gallerist and curator or whatever comes along) and being a mother with a growing family. Most artists suffer from the same problem of juggling their livelihoods and finding simultaneously enough time to be productive in art.

In my case I often feel I need all this in my workload to be productive. The more things I do, the more I get done, the more ideas I have. It seems like a paradox that I somehow need all these activities for inspiration and motivation – to keep me going. The paradox of this love-hate relationship is that my preoccupations are distractions but also necessities.

I wake up early in the morning to the calls of my baby son; not getting up is not an option. He is right awake and wants Mummy alert and attentive. It's playtime. Then we have breakfast, but I am still sleepy; even the morning coffee doesn't wake me up anymore. While I sit on the ground running the train over the floor, I already start being preoccupied. I am enwrapped by thoughts of what I couldn't finish doing last night and what I have on my agenda: to be a good mum and have time for my kid, answer all those unanswered mails that have piled up in my mailbox, send out book printing quotation requests, get dressed, write my essay for this book, talk to clients, finish the graphic design job, write my curatorial statement for the next exhibition, cook lunch for the little one, extend the shopping list for what is missing in the house, listen to my son's needs, read quickly through the newspaper and think: this is a topic that triggers my interest, send out an invoice for outstanding payments – oh dear I am so tired – and in between I try to have a flash of wit for an art project that I have wanted to realise for a long time. I start to contemplate. In the evening I intend to go to an opening downtown, but don't make it because hardly any of all my tasks and errands is done. It is just a normal day.

My days are full with necessities, errands and wishing-to-do-dreams. And I ask myself, “Where is my space?” Where is the space (and time) that I need to be what I am? What defines that ‘space’? Are the preoccupations in the end that ‘space’?

I question myself whether this ‘space’ or these ‘activities’, or let’s call them preoccupations, are sometimes more a (self-)absorption? Or are they in reality the fundamentals of our lives? Or are preoccupations more passive daydreaming than active undertakings in the end? But ‘active’ can also mean: my mind actively wanders, but I am not active at all. I am vital and devoted to what I do. Anyway, to be preoccupied is our existence.

It seems as if preoccupations are actually 24/7 pursuits on the one hand. And on the other hand they can also put your mind off daily routines. Spinning like a hamster in the wheel can also help to detach yourself from your creative muddle. Preoccupations then can become a sort of mental doodle.

Doodles are absent-minded scrawls or scribbles, usually executed in some unexpected place, such as the margin of a book or a manuscript or even on a table we sit at when we are preoccupied with some other activity. But what if the doodling itself becomes our preoccupation – a positive distraction from our occupation?

Often I would say it is hard to distinguish for an artist between occupation and preoccupation. Is it a preoccupation when I love to collect stickers on fruit or is it actually part of my occupation? Is it a hobby to love to cook and to experiment with ingredients or is it an artistic process? When I am working simultaneously as a curator, artist and designer, where am I the most creative? That means I am back at the paradox where all these different tasks inspire me for whatever I do in my other existence. I need them, love them as well as hate them sometimes, if I don’t have time again for the other.

In the end I think the main thing is to stretch and to find your passion and see how that can be made to work for you (and your work).

