



The Process (September 2007)

The fall is difficult on me. I sense myself alive in ways I've never felt and I don't know what to do with the energy. I end my marriage because it became clear to me that I needed to do so as I walked across the desert at night. I often go out of town, continually drawn to friends' homes. I feel like each person I interact with has an insight for me, a clue for this fascinating game of my life. And they do. Most importantly, they help me live more in the moment.

I go for a walk with my friend who I had met in graduate school about a decade ago. Although she's old enough to be my mother, we're close friends. We wander her large property and she shares one question that helps her. "Where are you in the process?" I repeat that question over and over. Where am I in the process.

It is the fall, I am restless, I am working out the details of my divorce and I'm craving life. That's where I am in the process. I want someone to help me, but no one can.

The following morning, my friend's husband gives me a tour of his art studio. It is a large, sun-filled space next to their home, with numerous projects started in organized areas: charcoal drawings, watercolors, etching, wood engravings. He speaks of his most recent process that included moving into a new medium, a mostly abandoned medium.

He thoughtfully talks me through his process: how he began by first imitating the masters, building his skills until he could imitate their work, then letting his art get rougher and wilder and more abstract, then pulling it back again, playing with the original techniques and mixing in his abstraction – feeling a sense of extreme frustration at times, as the goal was not clearly set – and yet he continued. He flips through his black-bound and numbered sketch book, showing the clear process of his learning, until he reaches one drawing labeled as the "break-through." And it was – it had all the substance but with his



touch clearly evident.

As he talks me through his process, I assume that this is how he introduces everyone to his art studio. I asked him about it. “No, this is the first time I’ve articulated this process like this.” He opens a drawer with many drawings. Every Friday, he draws live models. The drawings were all beautiful, all beyond what most artists can aspire towards, yet he needed to move beyond that clear success. And here he is, an accomplished artist, a chairman of the art department at the university, the type of professor who attends students’ soccer games on Sunday afternoons, and yet that is not enough. He needed to venture into a new area, to push in ways he didn’t understand until he looked back. I stand there next to him in the warming studio and realize that is exactly where I am in my process. On the surface everything is what it needs to be, but I’m moving into new territory to see how else I can contribute to this globe.

We can only find our own voice, our own hand, our own body, our own path by allowing ourselves to fall into those spaces of wildness, chaos, disorder, perhaps even madness. If all we do is imitate those around us, daily, then how do we find ourselves?

I leave their beautiful home with a deep understanding of valuing the process and knowing that I have some wild times ahead.