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By Mary Kay

Desire has always been my motivation for making paintings. From my very earliest experiences with paint; whether it was re-painting my tricycle every spring, spooning out tempera from tins, or seeing painting by adults that had an abundance of paint on the canvas: I always wanted the experience of the physicality, fluidity, and colour of paint. It seemed very obvious.

Eventually as a child it became essential to demand that my parents listen to this need. It was difficult to impress upon my family this kind of urgency; it was hard to articulate such a feeling, when nobody else seemed to know that need. So my first realization was that I might not be able to impress upon them strongly enough, that this was really all I wanted to do-paint. It was frightening to realize that no one really heard or saw this very clearly. I didn't care about ballet, horse riding or music - all those socially acceptable middle class activities for girls. I wanted this other thing, something different. I was, I suppose, coming up against the odd cultural devaluation of visual intelligence, and the kind of fear my parents had that, if I was going to be a painter I would immediately become part of some bohemian wildness, with an alternative lifestyle, accompanied by difficult baggage. It was all right if it was a social 'hobby' - painting nice pictures; but as a profession it was unacceptable, especially if taken too seriously, and definitely not for a woman.

This superficial understanding of art has been my biggest nemesis. It has been the condition that I have constantly worked in reaction to, even as a very young painter. Now some twenty years later I am still surprised to find myself somewhere where I have to continue to assert the validity of serious painting. I had all the illusions of a young painter that come from naivete and tremendous optimism informed by the long view of life ahead. I assumed I would be very good, and that I would make something extraordinary. Part of me has to continue that assumption in order to be brave enough to go on. But this attitude is tempered by the realizations of huge personal shortcomings and the harshness of reality; the excruciating race of time and the slow cumbersome realizations, backtracking, and limitations of the human mind and soul.

The most daunting of all, is the realization I certainly had by my mid-thirties, that the more deeply I investigated into this thing of painting the more difficult it became, and the further the ultimate understanding of making moves away. It is very different from my assumption of the wisdom of old age.

I relish the unraveling of complexities, the occasional thrill of possible comprehension that middle age offers. The temptations and richness of falling into places of unknowing are worth far more than the youthful dreams of success. Success takes on a very different meaning. It's more about struggling to make a painting speak in its own terms, than speaking in a voice or language that is fashionable. There is an intoxication that comes from the occasional epiphanies and revelations that painting offers.

I find myself to have less tolerance or patience for the insistence of other responsibilities. These are a constant interruption to the essential focus needed to make anything that's worth considering as expression.

Other activities have diminished importance for me in relation to the increasing complexity and confounding elusiveness of painting expression. Life vanishes with utmost speed. In order to begin to grasp the process of making, ruthless choices have to be made.

In a culture that thrives on pointless distractions, it is essential to put aside any worry of how others perceive or judge such a singular pursuit as painting. To worry how the rest of the world sees one is a route to failure; as it is, for example, in the subculture of academia, where the word is valued above all else.

My growing realization is that there are very few who truly understand the process of painting or for that matter care about it. That it has always been an isolated, lonely process and will continue to be so. I have few expectations save that I do intend, as fiercely as possible, to maintain the independence and focus needed to do it. I am not prepared after 43 years to give up any of the ground I have gained. And I intend to gain more.