

## TIME MANAGEMENT

Do you commemorate a pandemic? Or do you just wait for it to go away?

It's hard to know if anything we are doing is important, in the face of mass sickness, death and injustice. I've been thinking it might be the job of a poet to memorialize this singular time. I'm not a poet, but I think I'm doing something to make this time make sense to myself.

As an artist, I'm finding it hard to separate what I am creating and what I am experiencing. Creating--in this moment--is what Zadie Smith refers to as "something to do," in her new book of essays *Intimations*. Likewise, I think keeping busy, while trying to not focus on fear, is the order of the day. In the very best of times, I am prolific, but the way I'm working now seems almost pathological. I think it's in lieu of something else, like clarity, perspective or structure. I've gone into hyperdrive; if I'm not eating, reading or sleeping, I'm creating something. All TV and movies are watched through cursory glances from the corner of my eye, as I work.

In early July, I noticed I was wearing a shirt and mask that had a similar pattern. Although I've never been a figure or portrait painter, I decided to paint myself. Maybe I missed looking carefully at real things. Maybe I wanted to look at myself. Maybe I wanted to see a face. After I painted myself--poorly--I reached out to a friend for a masked selfie. I'm not sure I thought I'd even end up doing the portrait, much less show it to the subject, but as I worked, I could see my friend starting to emerge. I braced myself as I sent the picture to her. But she loved it. She felt commemorated. Staying connected has always been a priority for me and, because I've been in touch with more friends than usual, it occurred to me to start asking for more masked selfies to paint. Ultimately, I painted more than 55 portraits.

While doing this project, I posted two portraits a day on Instagram and described how I met the subjects, why they were special to me, and where they were quarantining. I noticed as people commented on each other's images, friends shared memories and strangers connected through common experiences. As the number of paintings grew, I created an ever-growing grid of portraits. Seeing so many friends and family together, grouped randomly, was powerful. Oddly, it kind of looked like a Zoom call.

Late last year, I incorporated en plein air painting into my routine; I never would have predicted how important having an outside practice would be. Now, when I paint outside, I think to myself: I'm so glad I made this happen. Those paintings often become a souvenir in ways studio paintings do not. These paintings are reminders of a location, of how beautiful the day was, what I saw, how I felt. I think these masked portraits may offer the same kind of reminder to me: that when this is all said and done, I'll have proof that it happened.

This show displays how I've spent the past 6 months and how I will probably spend the foreseeable future. And in an effort to keep the days and hours separate, today I'll paint dog portraits and perhaps construct paper mache sneakers tomorrow. It's an exercise in keeping busy, feeling efficacious.. I think the inability for me to sit on my hands is resulting in a body of work that will serve as a personal time capsule. Of course, I hope there comes a day when masks are no longer necessary and the coast is relatively clear. But I think this time has provided an extraordinary opportunity to see how global unrest has affected me, and it's possible I'll have come that much closer to a fuller human experience.