



# DAILY PAINTING

Paint Small and Often to Become a More  
Creative, Productive, and Successful Artist

CAROL MARINE



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Berkeley

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Published in the United States by Watson-Guptill Publications, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, New York.

[www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com)

[www.watsonguptill.com](http://www.watsonguptill.com)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Marine, Carol.

Daily painting : paint small and often to become a more creative, productive, and successful artist / Carol Marine.—

First Edition.

pages cm

1. Painting—Technique. I. Title.

ND1505.M36 2014

751.4—dc23

2014009131

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-0-7704-3533-2

eBook ISBN: 978-0-7704-3534-9

Design by Michelle Thompson | Fold & Gather Design

v3.1



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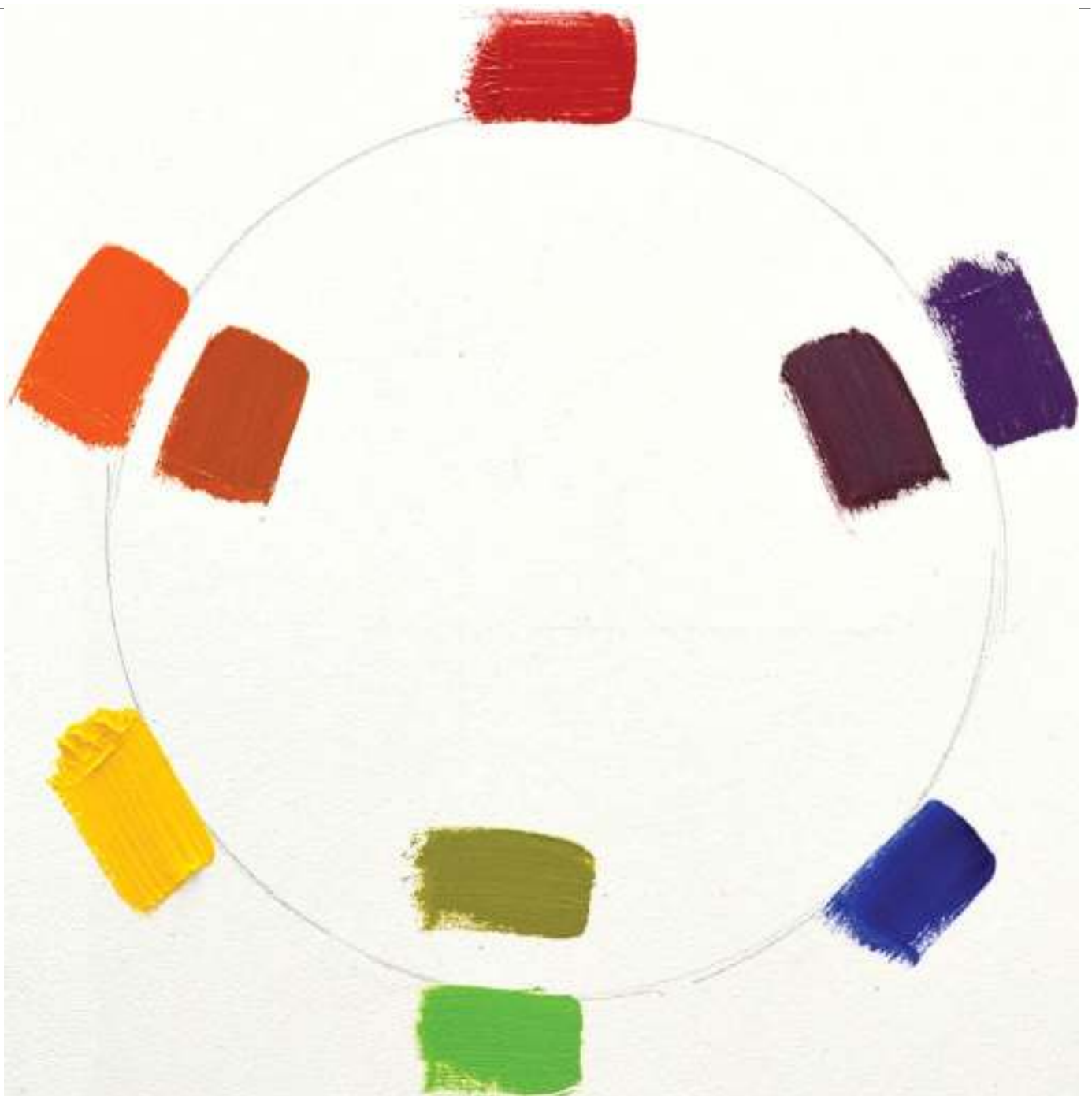
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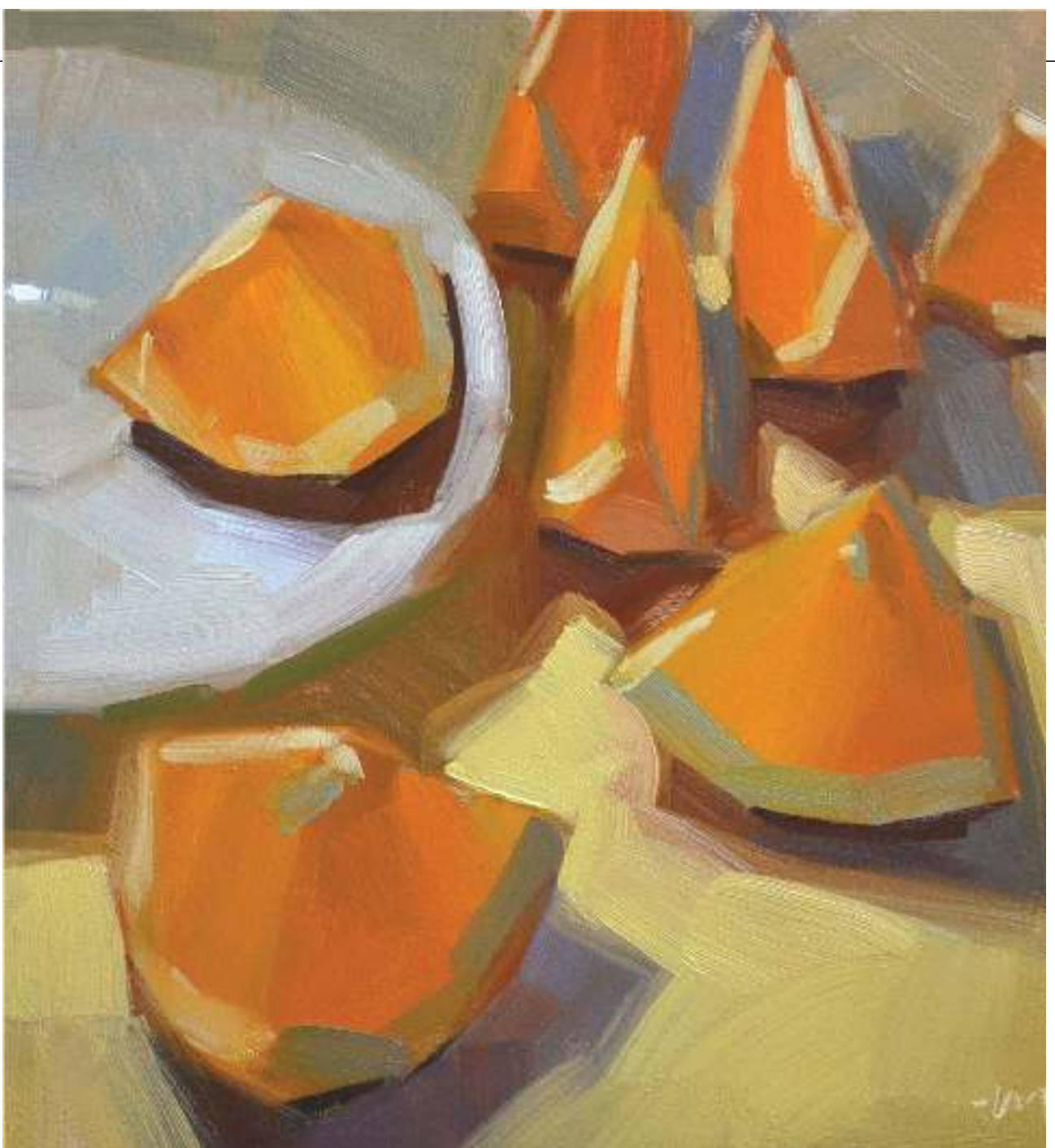


## Acknowledgments

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I couldn't have written this book without help from others. My family encouraged me to follow my dreams, and put up with me through the tough bits where I may have yelled a little bit (sorry). My students served as guinea pigs for all the lessons and exercises you'll find herein (don't listen when they say I threatened them with push-ups if they didn't cooperate!). My fans kept my spirits high with comments and emails. My friends helped me with kind words, warm shoulders, and plenty of wine. My generous collectors kept me housed and fed, and all the kind folks at Ten Speed took my ramblings and made them into a real book! In the end it was a group project, and I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Special thanks to all my contributing artists: Roger Åkesson (1.26), Christine Bayle (3.22), Carmen Beecher (3.29), Kara K. Bigda (3.04), Bruce Bingham (9.16, 9.17, 9.18), Brian Burt (7.07), Elizabeth Chapman (3.28), Randall Cogburn (3.09), Crystal Cook (9.13, 9.14, 9.15), Laurel Daniel (7.08), Lisa Daria (3.27), Belinda Del Pesco (3.16), Erin Dertner (3.24), Jelaine Faunce (1.20), Brenda Ferguson (9.07, 9.08, 9.09), Jacqueline Gnott (3.05), Claudia Hammer (11.10), Catherine Harley (3.14), Clinton Hobart (6.07), Diane Hoeptner (3.13), Qiang Huang (4.08), Barbara Jaenicke (3.07), Karin Jurick (1.24 and 7.06), Oriana Kacicek (4.09), Elena Katsyura (6.26), Duane Keiser (1.05), Rita Kirkman (3.12), David Lloyd (8.25), Raymond Logan (3.03), Jo MacKenzie (3.23), Nora MacPhail (11.08), Felicia Marshall (3.17), Michael Mikolon (3.17), Patti Mollica (8.26), David Morris (1.22), Michael Naples (3.19), Julie Ford Oliver (3.02), Cathleen Rehfeld (8.02, 9.10, 9.11, 9.12), Kimberley Santini (7.09), Sarah Sedwick (6.28), Dean Shelton (3.10), Nadi Spencer (3.11), Randall David Tipton (3.26), Dreama Tolle Perry (1.28 and 7.10), Victor Tristante (3.01), Donna Walker (11.03), Joyce Washor (9.19, 9.20, 9.21), Kathy Weber (3.15), Robin Weiss (3.08), Cietha Wilson (1.18), and Liz Wiltzen (9.04, 9.05, 9.06).





*Rose Glow*, 6 × 6 in., oil on board, 2012.

Early in my painting career, a professional artist I admired advised me to paint every day. He said it was the only way to get any better. I promptly ignored his advice and continued to coast as a starving artist for years.

But in 2006 all that changed. That was when I discovered daily painting—a movement that encourages artists to create one small painting nearly every day, and sell that work online. Before daily painting, I was in a frustrated rut. But after that epiphany in 2006, I not only improved my skills rapidly, I launched a successful art career and a website, [dailypaintworks.com](http://dailypaintworks.com), that is quite popular. And now I am proud to say I am no longer starving!

While the idea of painting *every day* may sound overwhelming, let me assure you, there are no specific rules or requirements. Really when I say you should paint “daily,” I mean you should paint “often”—but “Artists Who Paint *Often*” wasn’t catchy enough to jump-start a whole movement! Sure, the *ideal* might be that you paint every day, but not many of us can commit that much time to art, so we must settle for as often as we can. The daily-painting movement encompasses artists who paint daily, weekly, monthly, or intermittently. What ties these artists together, and qualifies them as “daily painters”? The simple fact that they strive to paint frequently, without getting bogged down by perfectionism, procrastination or any of the myriad things that keep us out of the studio.

The benefits of painting often are *huge*, as are the advantages of making small art (though not necessarily *only* small). We learn just as much about composition, color, paint application, value, and so on in one hour with a small painting as we do toiling for weeks on a larger one. And because it only takes an hour or so, we can fit it into our busy schedules and we aren’t heartbroken (and/or broke) if it doesn’t work out. We can then apply the knowledge—and, if our painting is a success, the confidence—we’ve gained to larger work.

“Small” art means different things to different artists. A lot of daily painters (including me) are in the habit of doing a lot of 6 by 6-inch paintings, but this is absolutely not a requirement. Some artists feel more comfortable turning out tiny paintings, some like larger surfaces, and still others do a wide variety of sizes, depending on the subject, day, and so on.

There are also no requirements in terms of media or subject matter. Daily “painters” use anything from oil to pastel to collage to charcoal and more. They paint a huge variety of subjects from still lifes to portraits to cityscapes to cats to completely abstract and beyond. The great thing about doing lots of little paintings is that you can try everything! You can do three little oil paintings of apples today, a portrait of your dog tomorrow in pastel, two versions of the tree in your front yard in watercolor the next day, and on and on. The fun never stops!

Most daily painters use a blog to document their progress and showcase their work. A blog

is easy to set up, free, and a cinch to update. Even if you blog just for yourself, with no intention to sell, the connections you can make with other artists are amazing! Too often, we artists work all day alone in the studio, with only our spouse, kids, or animals to give us feedback. And while they mean well, they don't always have the most encouraging things to say. My (least) favorite from my husband is, "Is it done?" But I get comments on my blog every day from people (mostly artists) who give me positive feedback that keeps my spirit high.

These connections have also brought about huge opportunities for my career. I got my first invitation to teach six months after I started blogging and now get so many, I have to turn most of them down.

In a time when galleries are closing all around us, the Internet offers a new, exciting venue for artists. Our potential market is the whole world, while galleries rely mostly on foot traffic. We are more in touch with our buyers, which gives us a better understanding of our market. Best of all, we skip the high gallery commissions and so do our buyers!

This book is a chance for me to share with you all the valuable lessons I've learned from painting daily: from materials to color mixing to ignoring your brain to photographing your art to marketing yourself online. I've also included lots of examples of other artists' daily paintings to inspire you as to what's possible in terms of medium and subject matter.

I have been happily painting daily since 2006 and don't intend to stop. If you are serious about improving your skills, increasing your sales, and expanding your network of artists, recommend you do the same!



# How Daily Painting Changed My Life (and Can Change Yours Too!)

## My Story

I grew up in a small Texas town in a geodesic dome house with chickens, goats, an outhouse, and a very creative family. Our parents encouraged us to follow our dreams. They said we might never be rich but we would always have enough to live on if we did what we loved. And we would be happy. Art was in my blood from the time I was tiny, so I set out from high school to the University of Texas in Austin to learn more about it.

Unfortunately, my education at the university was seriously lacking. My professors were more interested in discussing the politics behind the art than any kind of technical skills. I never once heard a lecture about value, composition, or color theory, much less how to *sell* art.



*Hannah*, 30 × 36 in., oil on canvas, 1999. My favorite painting from college, a portrait of my cousin Hannah.

One of the things I did learn in college is that you're not a "real" artist unless you paint large, make all your own stretchers by hand, and stretch and prime all your canvas. Needless to say, this takes a lot of time. So when I would finish a painting that took me two weeks, start to finish, and it was terrible (because I didn't learn anything about actual painting in college), I was heartbroken.

I found myself waking up every morning thinking, "What should I do today? Should I go into the studio and do another bad painting or ... clean the house?" And more often than not, I would clean the house or do *any* other task that would help me avoid the studio. The more I avoided the studio, the more riddled with guilt I became, and so I was doubly depressed. Here I was, following my dream, which was supposed to make me happy—but it wasn't.

The hours I actually spent painting came and went. I tried to focus on painting portraits and did some for friends and neighbors to build up a portfolio. One day on a whim I wrote to one of my favorite portrait artists, Michael Shane Neal, for some advice. A couple of weeks later I was shocked to receive a three-page handwritten letter, chock-full of great information. At the end of this letter, Michael wrote, "The best way to improve your skills is to do some kind of art every single day." I thought, "Yep, heard that before," and continued to ignore the best advice I'd ever receive.



*Pink Flower in Jar*, 34 × 40 in., oil on canvas, 2004. Another of my first gallery paintings—I did a lot of these big flowers in jars.





*Maddie*, 44 × 32 in., oil on canvas, 2002. A portrait of my stepdaughter, Maddie, when she was six years old.

What followed were years of struggle. I continued to paint whenever I felt guilty enough, but used every excuse to get out of the studio. I did crafts with my two young stepdaughters. I tried switching to web design for a couple of years. Unfortunately it was right *after* the dot-com bust (what was I thinking?!), and I never found a foothold. Over the years, I apparently ended up getting into the studio often enough to build my skills somewhat and teach myself some basics. My style was tight, I was still doing large paintings, and a fair number still didn't turn out well, but I was slowly getting better.

One day I decided to set a new goal. I gave myself six months to do ten (hopefully) fabulous paintings that I would take to my favorite gallery in town. If they didn't take me in, I would find another career. I was considering learning to cut hair.

So I did my ten paintings and took them to the gallery. The owner was very distracted and took her time looking over my work but in the end asked me to leave a few behind. She called me on my way home to say she had just sold one! So I started painting full-time, for the gallery. Unfortunately, I was hit by the same dilemma as before: maybe one out of every three paintings was salable, and the others were costing me a lot of time and money. I made enough to cover the cost of my supplies but nothing close to a living.



*Blue Monday*, 22 × 64 in., oil on canvas, 2004. One of my first gallery paintings, of a scene in downtown Austin—I did a lot of cityscapes then.

After a while, I found myself making excuses again. I had all the time in the world and yet was only getting into my studio a couple of days a week. At about the same time, my husband and I adopted our son, Jacob. This gave me the best excuse of all: *I can't paint—I have to take care of the baby!*

When our son was about a year and a half, a friend sent me an article about daily painting. The concept first gained prominence with artist Duane Keiser who was in a similar position to mine (minus the child). He was selling some work in galleries, but not enough to live on. Along the way, someone suggested he do small studies for his large paintings, and one day he decided to throw a party, invite everyone he knew, and sell his small paintings for \$100 each. This was a big hit, so he took it to the Web. He created a blog called *A Painting a Day* and listed each small painting on eBay, starting at \$100. Suddenly he was making a living, and other artists were catching on to the idea.

When I told my husband about it, he said, "You should do this!"—but I had my doubts. Surely I would fail at this as I had with everything else. But he kept poking and prodding me, saying, "C'mon, you've got nothing to lose." So I ordered some small panels, and one

day, when our son went down for a nap, I took out my paints, set up some onions, and painted them. It was in the same tight style I'd always worked in, took two full hours, and *hated* not only the result, but the process as well. I don't have a picture of it to share—I wiped it off immediately after.



Duane Keiser, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 7 × 6 in., oil on paper, 2013. Duane is considered the father of daily painting.

The next day, I decided *not* to repeat the experience. But once again, I had the expanse of nap time and all the panels, so I painted anyway, attempting a style I'd always wanted to try but didn't have the nerve to on one of my big, expensive, stretched canvases. What *did* I have to lose?! I set up a simple apple and after about twenty minutes, wiped that panel as well. After that I just played. At the end of nap time I had something I was pretty happy with. It wasn't a masterpiece, but it went in a direction I was excited about. Painting it had been fun, and hey—I had accomplished something worth sharing in little over an hour!

When my husband got home from work that day I was bubbling over with excitement. I said, "I get to do this again tomorrow! And the next day!" Suddenly my future was looking brighter.

Painting small and often gave me the freedom to experiment—every day I got to start on an entirely new project. No longer did I feel overwhelmed by the large number of things I

wanted to paint—I could do them *all*. And I could do each one fifty different ways (or more)! If one subject or one style didn't quite work out, well, I didn't sweat it. I had only invested part of a day's worth of work on it, after all.



*Apple*, 6 × 8 in., oil on panel, 2006. My first daily painting.

My fear of failing disappeared—well, *almost*. Probably a little fear is good for us. I *do* know I was no longer making excuses not to paint, and I woke up every morning genuinely excited and eager to get into the studio. My depression was gone.

In less than a year, I had done a staggering two hundred paintings—more than the total number I'd done in the previous five years combined. Because I was posting my paintings on a blog, in sequential order, I could easily look back to the beginning and see progress. I found in those two hundred paintings I had grown *more* than in the *five* previous years!



*Umbrella Flower*, 6 × 8 in., oil on panel, 2007. Daily painting #200.

Fortunately, because I was painting during my son's naps, I had a set time every day that I *had* to paint—or not at all. This lent structure to my routine. Because I was posting each painting on my blog, I had created a commitment for myself. If I missed a couple of days, I got emails from people saying, "What's wrong? You haven't been posting!" Okay, most of those were from my mother at first, but that still counts.

Previous to daily painting, after spending days or weeks on a large painting, I had a hard time being honest with myself about whether or not it was worthy of being sent to the gallery. If it wasn't, it was devastating, and after that much work, I did everything I could to convince myself it was good, even if I was deluding myself. With the small paintings, each panel costs about \$1 and takes one to three hours to paint. I find I can easily say to myself, "This one simply didn't work," wipe it off, and start over. Or I often do a series of one

subject, getting better each time. I am much less emotionally attached to each painting, even the larger ones, and can survive a scathing critique with much more grace than before ... most of the time, anyway (don't talk to my husband about this!).

Because less ego is involved with each piece, I can enjoy the process of painting more fully. I have more confidence in myself as an artist, which has carried over to other aspects of my life.



*Big Bottom*, 6 × 6 in., oil on panel, 2007. Daily painting #345.

After a few months of painting daily, I started to explore the marketing aspects of this new business. I joined an online gallery, listed my paintings on eBay, and traded links with other artists (more about this in [chapter 11](#)). Finally, I started to sell a few paintings from my blog. It was slow at first, very slow, but gradually I was selling more and more of my paintings, and some were even being bid up. I was making a (modest) living in a world where earning your way as an artist can be tantamount to climbing Mount Everest!

At this time a lot of other artists started jumping on the daily painting bandwagon. They were all creating blogs, using mostly the same free service—Blogger ([blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com)). It has a feature that allows others to comment on each blog post/painting. A huge community of daily painters has now formed (and is growing all the time), all commenting on each other's art. Whereas most artists find their work a solitary experience, we have found a new venue in which to share our art with each other (and the world). I can't tell you what a boost it is to post a painting and within hours get comments and feedback from other artists about what I've created!

After about six months, I got my first invitation to teach a workshop. After I posted about it on my blog, I very quickly got my second invitation. A guy from Sacramento called me and said, "I see you're teaching in Santa Fe. Do you think you could do the same thing for us here?" Before long I was getting invitations to teach more workshops than I could say yes to, all around the continent and the world! Because I had been painting every day and my

skills were growing rapidly, I felt confident this was something I could do. Before daily painting, I would have laughed at the idea.

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*Breakfast*, 6 × 6 in., oil on panel, 2009. Daily painting #705.

A year into daily painting, I was selling fairly well, but I wondered what I could do to market myself better and get to the next level. I thought about print advertising, but the prices were exorbitant. In 2008, with the help of my programmer husband, I decided to start an online gallery with other artists to pool our resources and advertise. Thus, [dailypaintworks.com](http://dailypaintworks.com) was born. At first we had just twelve members, and together we paid for a monthly, quarter-page ad in *American Art Collector*. We stayed that way for about four years.

In 2010, my husband lost his job, and we decided to focus on Daily Paintworks and make it into something great. We incorporated an auction feature into the site so our artists could manage without eBay's high fees and then opened the membership to *any* 2D artist—daily painters and not—wanting to sell original work.

We basically used everything I had learned about how to make daily painting successful and applied it to Daily Paintworks. Though the site isn't juried, we have an amazing community of artists, and each posts as frequently (or infrequently) as they want. Whatever they post on their blog is automatically pulled and shows up on the front page of Daily Paintworks for one day (and in the archives forever), with a buy link and a way for buyers to see it larger, and then is cataloged in their personal gallery. We've gradually added features like weekly challenges, a monthly contest, a place to exchange critiques, the ability to give and receive public comments, a grid to track sales and unsold paintings, and an online tutorial section called ArtBytes, and more.



*Royal Procession*, 6 × 6 in., oil on panel, 2010. Daily painting #997.

During the first few years of daily painting, I also sold larger work in galleries. The galleries worried that my auctions would undercut their sales, so I had to assure them that the two worlds were separate. To that end, I sold only paintings larger than 8 by 10 inches in galleries and only paintings smaller than that online. (In retrospect, I probably could have moved away from the gallery model entirely—but it was so ingrained in my mind as “the way” the art world works, I had trouble letting go of my existing gallery relationships!) Because of my website and my platform, I brought new customers to the gallery—and similarly, the visibility of being displayed in galleries meant that they brought new customers to my site.

Ultimately, I found that every year I brought in three to four times as much in online sales as from galleries. Of course, this varies from artist to artist—for some, gallery sales are a significant percentage of gross sales. But in my case, after having to hassle several galleries for payments, I decided to pull out of them completely and sell large *and* small work online. I end up charging less for each painting, but I sell every single one, and I (almost) never have to hassle anyone for payment.

Even though I have sold a number of larger paintings online, I find that smaller work sells better there, in general. People are less willing to spend large amounts of money on large paintings they can't see in person than they are to spend a small amount for a small painting that is easy to see well enough on a computer screen.

I've been daily painting now for more than six years, and it has completely transformed my career and my life. A friend of mine once implored me to spill my secrets as an artist and just tell her what to do, so she could instantly improve. But there aren't any secrets. It's like we've all got a painting muscle, and we've got to work it out, as often as possible, to get better and stay better—just like exercise. If that's a secret, then it's the only one I know!



*Surprise*, 6 × 6 in., oil on panel, 2012. Daily painting #1677.

## Benefits of Painting Small and Often

I've shared my own personal story—and I am living proof that daily painting can turn your life and career around. But if you're still not completely convinced, let me lay out the pros of switching to the daily painting model:

- It fits into your busy schedule. We have busy lives. We've got jobs and chores and family to spend time with, and it can be daunting (to the point of endless procrastination) to think of fitting art into all that. But if you can find a corner (and it can be a small one, since daily painting shouldn't take up a lot of space), have your stuff always set up, and get in the habit of producing one small painting each day that may take an hour to complete, the idea is far less daunting.
- You're more inspired to experiment. When you're only doing large works, you often feel a compulsion to get things "finished," especially if you are delivering them to a gallery or show. With this mentality, it can be difficult to do any kind of real experimenting. But with small paintings that take only an hour or so, you can try several new things every day.
- You're less emotionally involved. When you spend days or weeks (or more) on one painting, it can be a crushing blow if it doesn't work out. When you are painting every day and doing mostly small work, you quickly lose that sense of preciousness for each painting. It becomes much easier to say, "This just didn't work—but this next one might!"
- It facilitates quick growth. One day you paint and you have an idea for how it could have gone a little better. The next day you try out that idea, but you decide to make a little adjustment. So the next day you try that and so on. When you paint once a week or month, you often don't remember what worked and what didn't from the time



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