

Watching Paint Dry

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Abstract

Paint brings together rooms. Paint creates works of art. Paint does so much and so little at the same time. It just sits there really. What brings it to life is the person who uses it. Most of the time, that person only cares about the color, not what makes the color happen. Solvent, the most common being water, are bases that give paint its liquid texture. Pigments are powdery substances that give paint its color. Additives give paint beneficial attributes, such as smoother brushstrokes, mold resistance, and quick drying. Resin binds all these ingredients together. There isn't much to it, really, but then again, everyone has different definitions of nothing.

George's analog clock ticks away as he touches up the most recent coat of baby-blue paint on a bedroom wall in his newly purchased two-bedroom apartment. His hand refuses to let go of the paint brush that has started to feel like a permanent appendage, so he plops the bucket of paint next to his leather armchair with a gentle clank, positions his hand over the bucket for fabric protection measures, and settles into the cushions to enjoy the show.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Nothing has changed.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Still absolutely nothing.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Buzz. An intruder makes itself known, putting George on high alert.

In his peripheral, he sees the fly zip away, just out of reach, with a devilish

figure eight. *Focus on the wall. The wall is my friend. The fly wants me to lose my patience.* The fly passes through his line of sight, a silent taunt hidden in each flap of its wings. It crosses back and forth time and time again, edging closer and closer with every pass. *Do not engage, it is just an annoying fly.* As it gets closer, George notices that the fly's movements follow a consistent beat, consistent in fly terms at least. *Wait a minute, it's dancing.*

As if the fly can read George's mind, it flourishes its wings and soars up and over and this way and that, a reward for George's perception. Now he sees, it's been using dance to send him messages this whole time, the most recent being a gleaming smiley face to which George returns his own, with a newly polished twinkle in his eye. Using George's kind encouragement as fuel, the fly

performs for what seems like an eternity, every pass comes with a new dancing image, a baby bird flapping its wings for the first time, a raindrop finding purchase on a daisy, a couple looking into each other's eyes. A mirror staring into a mirror.

George closes his eyes and imagines him and his wife, his mirror. A mirror that looks with love. A mirror that peers into his soul and caresses all that it finds. The parts that lie buried under layers of lashing shame. The parts that... BUZZ.

The fly makes a sudden pass at George's ear, causing his paintbrush wielding hand, without input from his mind, to smack at it. George quickly positions the brush back over the paint bucket, but the damage is already done. Paint covers the entire left side of George's face, from his hair to his ear. It drips onto his shoulder and onto his lap, creating uncommissioned abstract patterns with every drop.

As the fly flies its final goodbye, George realizes it was just like another fly, here to distract and annoy. He was the one who turned its nuisance into art. He was the one who turned nothing into something, but that small taste only gave him a bigger appetite. *All I need to do is look from a new angle.* Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

George scratches at his face and a few flakes fall to the ground, the paint dried quicker than a chicken in a volcano. He tries to focus on the wall for some inspiration, but the paint's pesky itch keeps drawing his attention back to it. He scratches over and over again, causing a small pile of paint flakes to collect in his lap. He combs his hand through his hair, excitedly tugging on the strands caught in the thickest globs. Every time he scrapes through another glob, he feels like he successfully molted another layer of his old self.

George hesitantly scrapes off the last little bits, hoping that these few moments will bring about some sort of revelation. As

the last flakes fall, George gets his wish, one every genie would be ashamed to grant.

George drops the paintbrush into the bucket and shoots up into a standing position. He takes hold of the bucket and lifts it above his head. He squeezes his eyes shut, wishing he had a third hand to plug his nose, and dumps the bucket of paint all over himself. He stands as rigid as the wall, and the paint waterfalls over his face and clothes, turning him into a baby-blue statue.

He slowly opens his eyes and looks again at the wall in front of him with a fresh fondness. He feels what every wall must go through before it takes on its desired hue. The poignant prickling that tickles the surface, the rebellious little dribbles that refuse to dry, the comfort found in a fresh look.

The wall stares back at him, encouraging George to continue down his path of lunacy. It knows rules, that man was made to paint, and walls made to be painted. But the wall likes a rebel.

George has no idea the wall silently eggs him on, in fact, he thinks it looks at him in disgust. But George has always taken the opinions of others and given them even more reason to be had. *If you insist.* George raises his arms into a T position. Tick tock, tick tock. Paint drips from his arms onto the carpet. Tick tock, tick tock. George slowly begins to spin like a propeller trying to fly without any wings. Paint splatters against the chair and the carpet, all fears of cleanliness are gone. George picks up spin velocity, shooting paint splatters on the bed, the lamp, the dresser, at the ceiling, and out the open window onto his wife gardening below.

This is ridiculous. George suddenly stops spinning, causing the world to turn upside down. He sees baby blue stars closing in on him, and to avoid the collision, he drops to the carpet. On the carpet he feels safe. On the carpet he feels like a kid lying

in freshly fallen snow. And like any kid would, he enthusiastically paints the carpet with baby blue snow-angels. The opportunity is just too much for his grown heart to handle.

He rolls over something hard that snaps him out of his stupor. He lies flat on his back and reaches back for the object, to find the familiar handle of the paintbrush

that started this whole mess. He gingerly raises it above his face; he doesn't notice anything special about it. A couple hundred bristles. A splotchy stained handle. A shiny metal band holding the bristles in place. Then he looks closer and sees himself in the band, the fourth and most important part of the brush.

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