



Photographs by Justin Lane for The New York Times

For Artists, a Vacation Just Means a New Landscape

It May Mean Switching Materials and Working Smaller or Taking Mental Notes, but There Is No Real Break From Art

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

By and large, artists shed the Bohemian image long ago. They lead regular lives, which means that they take vacations like everybody else. But there's the conundrum: art is not a job, but a calling that's not easily switched off. Several Westchester artists were asked whether they can take a vacation from art, and if not, how they satisfy its demands when their art follows them out of the studio.

Donald Holden Painter, Irvington

At this moment my wife and I are packing for a trip to Paris and then on to London. No, I won't pack a paint box, but this is a painting trip.

The great Spanish painter Joaquin Sorolla said that he was always painting even when he wasn't painting. He was always looking at things as if he had a brush in his hand, storing images. Whistler would stand motionless and stare at a subject, memorizing the shape and the colors.

In Paris, I can sit at a sidewalk cafe for an hour. But an hour off duty is enough, and I dash to the Louvre to steal ideas from my favorite painters. I must figure out how El Greco painted those luminous blue skies on a red-brown canvas. And how did Rubens manage those fiery reflections and cool transitions in his shadows?

I shop till I drop for ideas. And when we hit London I drop into my favorite smoky pub, which

just happens to be across the way from the National Gallery. Like the Louvre, the National Gallery is filled with old friends whom I visit every time I'm in town, like Jacob Trip and his wife in Rembrandt's tender portraits of old age. I stand before this couple and ponder a question for which there is no answer: how can paint — just colored goo — convey such heart-breaking emotion and such profound compassion?

Susan Hoeltzel Painter, Yonkers

Vacations are a wonderful escape from the daily routine but definitely not from art. They are more downtime to incubate ideas and process new sights, smells and tastes. You are bombarded with ideas and imagery.

As it is with anytime you press for a solution to a problem, it is when you sit back and relax or soak in a hot tub that you are flooded with possibilities.

I've even tried lugging canvas and drawing materials to the beach. It's a wonderful place to work, but I really want the materials nearby in case anything happens.

Recently there was an imposed hiatus: I was without a studio while gutting and rebuilding an old house in Yonkers. Still there was no real break from art — you switch materials and work smaller. Maybe there's no such thing as an escape from art, or maybe I'm always on vacation.

Creighton Michael Painter and sculptor, Bedford

Working in my studio is like a vacation. My studio is a place apart, a sanctuary. When I do travel, I try to leave some work unfinished. This helps me regain the thought line broken by my absence. Two weeks is usually my limit for being away from studio activity. I start to have withdrawals.

I confess that traveling to destinations that are layered in history and culture is very stimulating. I make mental notes, not sketches or photographs of places, their patterns and movements. Later, sometimes much later, these ideas and images find their way into my work.

Serdar Arat Painter, Tuckahoe

In the world of work, family and friends, a vacation means a time of rest, and perhaps recuperation. In my world of surviving and hopefully succeeding as an artist while holding a job (as an art professor at Concordia College) and maintaining relations with family and friends, a vacation has a completely different meaning. It usually means all of the following at the very same time:

"Finally, I have a chunk of unbroken time to work in my studio, but I really need some rest if I plan to return to my teaching job.

"It is absolutely blissful to wake up and head

directly to my studio, but I hardly spend any time with my family.

"My wife wants me to join her on a trip to Bilbao. We can stay with our friends there and I can actually see the Guggenheim miracle in person. But, my artwork has just taken a new turn and even thinking about it makes my heart beat faster."

These conflicting feelings are almost always resolved in the same way: I head to my studio, gradually shedding the guilt and regrets, find boundless energy when I think I had none left, work an eight-hour day, and leave the studio in a state of high that comes from no other substance or experience, thirsty for more.

Dorothy Handelman Photographer, Sleepy Hollow

When I was growing up my father took only one vacation a year, at my mother's behest. He was consumed by his work and it never occurred to me that if your life's work was satisfying, any more vacation was necessary.

I discovered my life's work, photography, as a teenager and have been preoccupied with my fascination ever since.

When your passion is eminently portable, your work follows you everywhere like a charming, uninvited guest. It is inconceivable to me to take a vacation from art, and the demands of life are a rude interruption to what I really love to do.

Serdar Arat, above, a painter who has a studio in Port Chester, says vacation takes on a different meaning for him, since he is also an art professor. "Finally, I have a chunk of unbroken time to work in my studio." Susan Hoeltzel, center, a painter in Yonkers, says, "I've even tried lugging canvas and drawing materials to the beach." Creighton Michael, left, of Bedford, a painter and sculptor, says that working in his studio is just like a vacation.