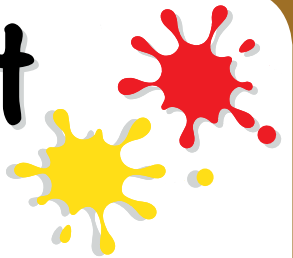




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Challenges and GRACE DAYS

by Gretchen Fleener

Challenge groups are popping up all over Facebook lately, which I personally find to be awesome! I have always loved personal challenges, and love entering contests just for the fact that they challenge me to create something I wouldn't have otherwise! There is one thing though that so many artists seem to be getting caught up on though...GRACE DAYS!

We all deserve a little grace!

Grace days are those days you basically take a day off from whatever your challenge is. So many artists are doing daily painting challenges feel a little sense of failure for the day if they take a grace day and don't paint that day, or decide not to participate in a particular challenge. Whatever your feelings are on grace days, I'm here to tell you, everyone deserves a little grace!

If you've been following my blog, you know that I have set up a personal challenge for myself to post a painting every day of 2017, related to whatever national or international day of celebration it is. Every day there is some reason to celebrate...and if you can't find one, I'll give you one every day, even if it's something as silly as a type of food! We are in the business of celebrations, so I found this to be a fitting subject to follow. But note that my challenge was to POST every day, not PAINT every day. And while I haven't missed posting a painting yet this year, I don't paint every single day and that was not my main goal.

Let's be realistic.

There's nothing wrong with being realistic... some days you really can't sit down and paint.

Sure, you can maybe bring a mini kit on your full day of airport travel, or stay up until 11:59 pm to squeeze in a painting for the day, but where's the fun or lesson in that?!

Get creative!

While I haven't forced myself to paint every day to consider my personal challenge a success, I've set other parameters to challenge myself in a more realistic and constructive way. For instance, I am not allowing myself to paint on anything other than skin. No practice heads, practice sheets or paper...just paint on skin. Part of the process of practicing is gaining more familiarity with the medium and substrate, and practicing on plastic just isn't the same as on skin. Sure, I may not have one of my kids around to paint on, but I can always use my own face or arm. Yes, it's a challenge to paint your own face! And would you look at that...I've accidentally found another way to challenge and improve myself by improving my ability to paint in a mirror!

The other challenge I've given myself within this daily challenge is to not post a painting I had previously done. This was hard at first, as I'd come across a theme of the day that fit perfectly with something I had already painted. By requiring myself to paint something NEW for each day's post, I have made myself re-visit how I might paint something in a different way, giving me opportunities for improvement on particular subject matters.

Passions should not be chores!

Every good relationship needs a little break now and then to stay healthy, and painting challenges are no exception. Painting moments before midnight to keep your streak going is not bad, but can turn into something unhealthy if you're not careful. If you're getting to the point where your challenge is just turning something you once loved into a chore, it's doing more


harm than good and it's time to take a step back. Creative challenges should energize you, not drain you!

Just as we all need a vacation now and then to spend time with our loved ones, relax and unplug from work, we need to do this from challenges as well to stay fresh and keep loving what we do. I have been gone out of town this summer a lot on family camping trips, where I did not bring along any paint! (or in some cases, have any internet access to post!) So, I painted ahead before my trip so my blog would still share my posts while I was away.

I don't consider this a failure of my challenge. Taking breaks from painting did not interrupt the whole point of my challenge, to stretch my creativity and paint every day possible...rather, the challenge to have a blog post scheduled every day kept me in a steady, healthy schedule of painting consistently all summer whether I had a gig or not. I have painted almost every day, usually for the next day's post or a future post as I schedule them to be published first thing in the morning.

Don't be paralyzed by fear!

The worst byproduct of daily challenges I've seen is that so many artists don't even attempt them, for fear of failing to paint one day. If the goal itself keeps you from even trying, you're missing out on so much growth! If you need a little more encouragement, check out my newsletter from January when I started my challenge, and talked about the fear of starting a challenge. Don't let fear of failure stop you from the growth you can gain from even a few days of participating in a challenge!

So get out there and accept a challenge for whatever good it can bring you. Make it your own, and make it work with your own life, not run it. You might be surprised with what you can accomplish! 



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