The Beauty of Imperfection
Field Notes & Playbook

ThriveTrue.com

This guide was inspired by one of the sessions I did for the Year of Color summit hosted by Creative U. This was made to accompany that session. If you haven’t yet signed up for it, you can do so from: ThriveTrue.com/YearOfColor

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EXPLORING

• On and off the Page
• Outside the Studio
• Away from the Screens

Unplugging to Tune in and OUT!

Why outside? Movement and getting out of the studio is good for mind, body, and spirit! People sometimes tell me that my art is like a breath of fresh air. I wonder if it’s because I often go outside to collect inspiration or even add marks to the art (both big and small) while out doors. I find it is especially beneficial these days when many of us spend so much time in front of a screen.

I love online classes and communities! Still, I wish to have a good balance. It is a healthy part of my creative process to get exercise by going for a walk to get somewhere and pausing to appreciate the beauty along the way. It also feels good to be unplugged for a while! I even forgot to bring my phone the first day I planned to record for this. Taking a break from online input can help us tune in to our own joy, wisdom, and wonder while tuning out distractions and drama.

I've also noticed the shorter time frame spent sketching out in the field helps keep me from overthinking or overworking stuff. I like forest bathing, but you could adapt this to walking in town, a coffee shop, or a park.

2 Simple Supplies:
• 4x6 inch sketch book
• pencil or pen

Additional/Optional Supplies:
• pieces of paper with dry paint
• picnic blanket
• camera

I keep a very small purse on a hook by the door with the basic supplies inside so it's ready to go anytime. Keeping supplies simple for this also makes it accessible even if you may not have a big budget, desire, or room to have more art supplies. While I use lots of luscious supplies in the studio, this is a way to keep creativity flowing if we don’t have time, energy, or space for that. It can lead to fresh discoveries for later in the studio. I like the fine delicate lines and ease of pen or pencil. You could use paint markers for thicker, bolder lines.
WHY IMPERFECTION?

What does perfection make you think of? How does it make you feel? What does imperfection make you think of? How does that make you feel? I encourage you to take a minute and consider it from your own experience or intuition before reading my thoughts about it.

When I look closely at the natural world, I often notice that what may appear to be imperfections are truly signs of life, vitality, relationships, and evolution not artificial or stagnant and stuck. If the word perfect doesn't resonate with you, you could replace it with weird or ordinary.

After spending many days focusing on the imperfection theme, a spiritual book I was reading had a chapter about "Perfect Self-Expression." Divine humor? Maybe this is my perfectly imperfect version of that.

For this offering, I'm focusing on the following 3 aspects of imperfection:

- Appreciating the beauty of natural imperfections and allowing it to inspire new marks and patterns.
- Appreciating any imperfections in our own marks and movements as adding a human touch to the art.
- Allowing the energy we give to this to nourish us as we accept the beauty of our own imperfections.

Personally, I had physical symptoms like clenching my jaw or tension in my neck and shoulders. So, I wanted to loosen up! Below the title on the cover of my first book, it says, "lighten up, liven up, let your heart sing." Honoring beauty in imperfections can help us to do that.

I also thought that I wasn't talented or good enough at making art. I adapted the phrase "practice makes perfect" to say "play makes possible" instead. That mindset gave me the freedom to learn, grow and ENJOY the process. It helped the inner critic take a hike! Give your self permission to play. If you have an inner judge, remind them there is no perfect 4.0 goal here because there are no grades or awards. There are treasures to find and discoveries to make.

Play makes Possible
(and Presents!)
GATHERING INSPIRATION

I invite you to go on a treasure hunt to gather your own imperfect inspiration. You can take pictures, sketch or gather botanicals and other found objects. Be sure you know what to avoid touching, such as poison ivy. Please be aware of the impact you may have and gather in a sustainable way. It is best to take photos or sketches of any rare plants and collect only plants that are thriving abundantly. Still, we are a part of nature. There is plenty of inspiration to be found.

You can see and hear insights I’ve found in the following Field Notes video. You may need to adjust the volume since I did not take my tripod or microphone. I decided that’s okay given the theme. (Click to watch the video. It will go to my website for the video to play.)

Focusing on imperfections also feels like a way to rebel a bit for me when we are bombarded by ads saying our teeth should be whiter, hair thicker, bodies thinner, skin smoother, cars newer, on and on. Botanicals are my go-to for inspiration but we can also incorporate architecture, broken jewelry, clothing, or patterns found in parking lots. We could even honor our own wrinkles, lines, freckles, veins, or scars.

When my kids were younger, we would take observation journals outside as part of homeschool (that’s a page from mine above). It was a wonderful way to fit in art and gather inspiration at the time!

If you haven’t already, you can see how I took the inspiration gathered back in to the studio for additional explorations. I made various colorful backgrounds with paint and ink before adding marks and patterns during my more detailed and professional (yet playful) video tutorial session for the Year of Color offering.
ALL TRAILS LEAD HOME

What might that mean to you?

Have you experienced the magic, medicine, and messages that can be found in art? This is the kind of M.F.A. that interests me more than school degrees. Pause and listen during the process or come back later and see what fresh insights may emerge. Try looking at your art from different directions and distances (both time and space). Consider giving it a title even if it just feels like a doodle or study. Does the title have a story that goes along with it? You could use the title as a journal prompt to ponder.

The message "all trails lead home" came forth for me from the one pictured in the middle to the right. I notice quite a few nuances and potential interpretations from that title. It was great food for thought!

There is magic and medicine to be found in art.
Remember to pause and enjoy the view both during outdoor journeys and during the creative process. Focus on what you love! Learn from what you like and what you don't. Scan or photograph your art to easily crop or zoom in. You can even make digital color changes like I did in one below. I might scan multiple times during the process. It helps me feel free to make mistakes and learn from them! I find that I often like something I had doubts about after taking a long break.

For example, after scanning it, I made some big bold changes to one I created for the Year of Color session. I'm not sure how I feel about the visual now, but a sweet memory came forth during the process. An orchid shape reminded me of my wedding many years ago. I accidentally froze my bouquet in the hotel fridge trying to protect it. My dad replaced frozen blooms with orchids from my parents' garden. An aspect of the beauty of imperfection may be the opportunities some situations bring for more meaningful or memorable times.

Thinking of the past, enjoying the view can include looking back at old art to see how far we've come. I was cleaning the basement and going through piles of art recently. Wow, my art sure has evolved! Still, there was always power in the process no matter the skill level.

I also find faces or monsters in my art sometimes. Imagination is a powerful thing! Flipping fears upside down or focusing on what we love can help to address paranoia and enjoy the present.
PAINTING PICNICS

What's in the Bag (or Picnic Basket)

- Adding a fun 4 color pen or some paint pens is the easiest way I like to add color without many supplies.
- Increasing the size of the sketch book is an easy way to work bigger.
- For a more elaborate time, I bring a picnic basket with acrylic paints and inks (which dry faster if you do not use lots of water) along with paint brushes, paper towels, water containers and various canvases.

Keep in mind that more stuff means more weight to carry. So, I usually park closer to a table if I have a lot. When doing this with 2 younger kids, I took a backpack with 3 sketch books, pencils, and snacks. The bag below features some art created in the Year of Color session!

While the simple supplies are what I use most often to get outside or make art on the go, it can also be fun to make a longer outing of it occasionally. I suppose this is my take on plein air painting.

The easiest way to do this is right outside the studio door, but sometimes it’s nice to have a different view. It's also nice to get to know the moods of a place by visiting often.

It takes more effort to transport additional supplies and wet paintings afterwards (or to allocate enough time and space for them to dry while you have a picnic and relax).

I’ve even taken watercolor paint on a kayak! I brought an empty container with a lid to fill with lake water (and to avoid dipping dirty paint brushes into the lake). It was a sweet slow morning before going out again later with family from a lake house we rented.

Art can be an adventure in so many ways!
WAYS TO KEEP THE ENERGY & INSPIRATION AROUND YOU

Print on Everyday Products

- Redbubble
- Society 6
- Zazzle
- Pixels

The printers listed above are ones I’ve used. I use Redbubble more because it is easy to add designs to many products at once, you can make listings private (for personal use only), you can upload lots of designs, you can set the profit margins, and they haven’t been printing their brand name on everything. I’ve used the other printers for different product options or sales. You need high resolution files (I scan small art at 1200 ppi or medium art at 600). My favorite items (and more affordable) are tote bags and coffee mugs (which add a jolt of inspiration in the mornings!). All art featured on this page was created in the Year of Color session. It doesn’t need to be perfect to be a healthy and nourishing personal reminder.

Free or Inexpensive Options

- Add your sketches to an inspiration board or wall
- Use a photo copier to make your own cards or bookmarks
- Take pictures or scan sketches to use them as screensavers
- Make your own coloring pages
- Turn patterns into hidden picture games or cut them up for puzzles
EXAMPLES INCORPORATING THE IDEAS, INSPIRATION, AND DISCOVERIES INTO PIECES FOR GALLERIES OR OUR OWN SACRED SPACES

While going through my past Instagram posts for examples to share, there were way more than I could fit here. So, I invite you to go browse through them there for even more ideas.

The theme of imperfection appears to be a common thread through most of my art from the past several years. I noticed that embracing it was also a major turning point! That freedom and playful approach had a big impact that seemed to ignite the creative fire or open the floodgates to let love and life flow through the art. You can see more originals on my website.

In most cases, paintings on canvas have more lush layers and use more supplies. Still, some details are added in similar ways to those shared in the Field Notes and Year of Color videos, especially for smaller canvases or wood panels.

To go big, we might adjust the scale of our marks or use bigger paint pen tip sizes. Abstract and larger pieces may have small areas and marks inspired by sketch books or fun doodles with more paint and layers. High quality images of pieces on paper can also be used for larger prints or printed on canvas.
I live in the ancient Appalachians with twin boys, a guitar man, a feisty orange cat and many woodland creatures. I was raised in the wilds of WV and islands of the upper Florida Keys.

I love to see Souls Sparkle from the inside out! I always appreciated artists, poets, writers, and presenters. Yet, it took me years to see that my energy and creations are valuable in the same way. So are yours! It helps to surround ourselves with kind uplifting energy and voices that cheer us on.

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