

FEAR AND COURAGE

by Christopher Schink

Fear and courage are the two emotions we seem to alternately suffer and enjoy as we paint.

The process of painting never seems to go easily and rarely is it fun. We start each painting with great optimism, the highest of hopes, even confidence; and then, more often than not, things seem to go wrong. We find dissatisfaction quickly setting in. We're discouraged. We fear we've done the wrong thing and made poor decisions. Or on those rare occasions when the painting is going well, we're fearful our next decision will be the wrong one. We'll ruin the good work we've done so far. Fear and courage are the two emotions we seem to alternately suffer and enjoy as we paint.

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Painting requires courage—not the kind of courage it takes to pull children from a burning house, but the kind of courage necessary to risk embarrassment. When we paint, we risk appearing inept, or lacking in taste, or emotionally vulnerable. We fear someone will decide we have no talent, silly ideas, and shallow feelings. If we think about it enough, we can find ourselves paralyzed with paintbrush in hand, our pigments slowly drying up on the palette.

However, if we're artists, we find the resolve to go on. We avoid playing it safe—doing what has worked before. We avoid being careful—simply making bad decisions neater. We try something different, bold, and new. We stop worrying about looking silly, shallow, or vulnerable. We simply muster our courage and paint.

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Many of the artists we admire most—Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse, Avery, and Rauschenburg—could be described as courageous. Despite constant derision and ridicule they remained firm in their creative goals. They seemed fearless. We all wish we could find a little of that kind of courage.

