

March 2023



Welcome to Contemplations!

This newsletter is new to your IEA inbox and will show up monthly to inspire, uplift, and maybe make you laugh just a little.

It is with delight I begin this space for you, and with anticipation I compose a few months entries then invite you, fellow IEA member, to compose thereafter! Do you have a story to tell, an encouragement to share, an insight to inspire? Then please submit to me [Patricia Baldwin Seggebruch](#) and let's begin to see what can come as we all reach out with the desire to help each other rise higher.

This edition is submitted by Josie Rodriguez! Thank you, Josie, for your heartfelt and insightful contribution.
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In the blink of an eye~



What I saw in the dark

My favorite quote from the artist Degas, *"It's not what you see, but what you help others see"* informed my art practice over the years as a visual artist.

Noticing, observing, being totally present was nothing unusual as these tools were an important part of my professional life for 20 years as a clinical hospital and hospice chaplain. And as an artist, encaustic teacher and mentor to others I continue to value these qualities.

Encouraging others to see their creativity during classes I have taught has been pure joy as I saw many of my past students blossom into dynamic artists. Dialoguing with others about generating ideas and the process of creating adds richness to my life. But my life as I knew it changed in an instant, joy turning to terror, when one early morning, in a deep sleep, I rolled over in bed, not knowing I was on the edge, fell over and hit my right eye on the sharp corner of the nightstand falling to the floor. What a way to wake up!

I knew at that moment it was a bad trauma, and in the blink of an eye imagined myself not ever seeing out of that eye again. Quick rush to the emergency room with a diagnosis of corneal abrasion and no iris. Emergency surgery followed by many months of recovery, needing help navigating my walking, unable to drive, depending on my husband to take me back and forth to appointments sometimes three times a week. For someone who values her independent spirit and a "can do" attitude, being dependent was devastating.

As helpful as my three grown boys were to me, they also kept me grounded and laughing. So, watch out for those sharp corners! They are everywhere.

My husband even began to file off some of the corners on tables in our house he thought could hurt me or someone else. Thinking of our little grandchildren that was an excellent idea. Visiting eye specialists over many months, in addition to all the support and prayer from friends and family, miraculously over time has given me, with the help of glasses, 20/20 vision, although, peripheral vision is still blurry, and bright light affects vision because there is no iris.

I knew things had gradually changed when to my shock and delight I began to see distant trees and buildings outside my studio window. One test the doctors always did was put their hand up in front of me and ask, "how many fingers do you see?" That sinking feeling when I said, "nothing, I see nothing." I'll never forget though when one morning several months later I could see my hand in front of me, and not one, but all my fingers! My vision was returning. I could walk down the steps with help, to my studio and surround myself with the energy I found there. Eventually, I could see to do my artwork, read, drive, walk, play and enjoy life around me. It was a gradual process much like writing an essay, draft after draft or creating a painting that needs to be tweaked a bit. I was determined to do some work in my studio. I had a commission I wanted to finish, and an idea for a series that came from an intense experience I had while waiting to be checked by my Ophthalmologist.

With the exam room door open, waiting to see my doctor and trying to stay calm, I found myself staring at the blank white wall in front of me. At that point I could only see out of my left eye. Looking straight ahead I saw images that were very strange, vivid, intriguing and amazingly calming.

I closed my eyes again. The images returned. These images became inspiration to create my series, In the Blink of an Eye.



In the blink of an eye

So, what did I see, observe, notice, experience? I saw moving black dots, curly and zig zag lines, swashes of red blob-like molecules, designs that looked like the iris of an eye and most intriguing a waterfall of flowers and greenery. It was as if I had a projector inside my eyelid. I didn't know what was happening, but my brain was telling me something.

Those images stayed in my mind's eye until I arrived home and wondered if my brain was trying to retrieve past memories, was I reliving my trauma, was it a message telling me that I would be ok, was it my imagination? I thought probably the damage inside my eye was causing these images to appear. I don't know. I only knew that my creative spirit wasn't gone, and I began sketching what I saw, with the goal of creating a piece of art to visually record my story.

This mental focus helped me see and produce art very differently and freer from what I had been doing before this trauma. Even though I could only see out of one eye clearly, I was finally excited and focused. Encaustic means to heat or burn. Heat used at every level. Layers of hot wax, paper, graphite, pigment, collage, ink on cradled wood panels were created over 7 months. Being creative overtook fear and anxiety and I knew that my world was healing.

This series was one way of showing strength, determination, resilience and healing. I felt myself moving forward even though shocked and baffled by such a bizarre accident. I had to adjust to this new reality. I strongly felt the surrounding embrace of artist friends, students, family, neighbors and people I didn't even know, sending messages of encouragement and prayer, my husband at my side every step of the way. I felt the concern and expert care of four different eye specialists who cared for me.

Gratitude was what I felt everyday not knowing what the future held. I felt a calmness within me and I knew that if I held on to the decision to be grateful, for the love and concern I felt every day, that I would be fine.



Peripheral Vision

The first in this encaustic series, *In the Blink of an Eye*, shows my world with eyes wide open, artistically and physically. The second, *What I saw in the Dark* was what I saw looking at the blank wall with all the swirls and dots, and the third, *Peripheral Vision* is my reality now, showing layers of tiny newsprint, alphabet letters from vision tests, words, ...all abstract interpretations of my experience, summed up with the words by Joanna Gaines, "Maybe you didn't ask for this chapter of your story, the one that feels like a winding road with no end in sight, yet, here you are, with fortitude showing up for every turn in the path, like a river curving and carving along the edges of the banks, you are a force to be reckoned with, here to become who you were always meant to be."

Josie~