

ON NOT PAINTING

An honest lexicon  
of painters' excuses.



Quarantine

Most of these definitions I have used myself — at least two or three this month.

They keep coming back.

They come back smaller and smaller, now that I know their names.



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## TECHNIQUE

1. A wall artists build around their talent, then spend years mistaking for the talent itself.
2. The one thing you keep improving so you never have to find out what lies below.

## INSPIRATION

An excuse that arrives, with admirable punctuality, on the day you had already decided not to paint anyway.

## TALENT

A thing best not displayed —  
lest it appear once by accident,  
vanish forever, and expose you  
as ordinary.

## STYLE

1. Something that began as an experiment and ended as paperwork.
2. A debt older artists keep paying to their younger selves — for a freedom they can no longer afford.

## REFERENCE

1. What artists insistently look at, so they don't have to look at themselves.

2. What artists check, one more time, before admitting it isn't their turn yet.

## VOCATION

The permission artists grant  
themselves to feel guilty for the  
rest of their lives.

## IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

A guard you hired yourself, pay yourself, and have been unable to fire for years — on the off chance that they might be right.

## TIME

What artists insist they never had, until it becomes clear they gave it to everything else.

## ARTWORK

A visible symptom of the chronic infection known as art. The disease is incurable; the symptoms, fortunately, tend to improve with time.

## OWN VOICE

1. The signature you have been hunting for years, quietly suspecting that every mark you make already carries it.

2. Something you keep saying you do not have — to avoid realizing it was made by you, exactly as you are.

## VALIDATION

The authority artists hand to  
strangers, then spend years  
trying to take back.

## FEAR

A compass that points, with admirable precision, exactly where you should go — though you have learned to read it as a sign to stop.

## PERMISSION

A coin artists keep begging for,  
never noticing they are poor  
from giving it away to everyone  
else.

## QUARANTINE

A psychological field test held twice a year on a small island. For seven days, painters who have quietly stopped believing in themselves are kept apart from their excuses — long enough to discover the door was opening the other way.

## HUNTER'S MOON

Experiment #7, October 19–25,  
2026.

Control group: artists who  
finished this dictionary and  
returned, undisturbed, to their  
excuses.

✓ Experimental group: artists  
who apply.

APPLY