

# On finding balance in your creative practice



Artist Hana Ward discusses nurturing your artistic routine, achieving focus in the studio, connecting language and visual images, and taking long walks.

April 21, 2022 -

As told to Eva Recinos, 2038 words.

Tags: [Art](#), [Process](#), [Creative anxiety](#), [Focus](#), [Business](#).

**You're the owner and designer behind [Uno+Ichi](#), a ceramic ware brand, but have recently shifted to painting. How different is your process or thinking with that medium?**

Making ceramics was feeling really hard, like I was going against the grain to make things happen and work. It felt stressful. At the same time, things were happening really easily for painting—in a crazy, weird, magical way. It was just like, "Whoa, this was fun to make." And then this show sold out, and all these things [started] happening in a way that I was like, "I don't know what's going on, but clearly this is flowing, and this other thing, I'm having difficulty with." It'll always be a part of my life, but I don't need to force it right now. It's okay to put it down for a little while and take a break from it. That's what I decided to do.

**It sounds like there's a benefit to saying "it might not be the end, I can put this part of my creative practice away for a little."**

Yeah. And I'm curious to see how things will shift. It's difficult to always hold everything together. I think about artists throughout history that have taken way longer breaks than I do. They're like, "I put this down for five years" or something. You still know them for the work that they created—but they took long breaks. It feels weird, in the moment, making that decision. On Instagram, I used to get messages like, "When's your next ceramic drop?" And now I get messages like, "Hey, are you still making ceramics?" And I want to respond with, "I think so." I just want to give it some breathing room.

**In terms of focus, what are the things that you need, or that you avoid, when you're really honed in on your painting process?**

I'll have certain days [when] I have a few things on my to-do list that have to be at a certain place, at a certain time. If I have a few of those in a day, I will live my day thinking about the next thing that I have to do, making sure I'm ready...I can live the whole day not really present at all.

I've had days where I have several scheduled things and I also have to paint. And when I try to paint with that energy, I can't really get into it. I can't really focus, I'm not really relaxed. I'm not really there—I'm in the schedule. I've been trying to find ways to build into my routine that feeling of, "I've arrived, I'm here, and now I can do this." Going on walks really does that for me. It helps my body meet my mind.

**Do you normally start the day with a walk and then paint? Do you listen to anything while you walk?**

I really love listening to audio books, but sometimes if I'm really overwhelmed, I have to just not listen to

anything. Last month I was like, "I think I just need to sit in silence for hours. Everything's too loud. I just need silence."

I would love to have a schedule where I walk every day before painting, but it hasn't worked yet for me, to get a routine going. I walk at all different times now. I like to go, sometimes, right before sunset. If I can get a morning walk in, that's really rare and special. But usually I'll go in between. I'll work a little bit and then I'll go on a walk, and then come back and eat, and then have another session of working.

**Interiority and focus—and noise versus silence—are interesting to think about in relation to your work. I was looking at some of the titles of your pieces recently, and I liked an oil on canvas piece called "that drinking-wine-kind-of-thinking." I immediately thought, "Yes. I know that feeling." How does painting as a medium help you explore that interiority?**

It comes from a subconscious place. Sometimes I feel like my throat chakra gets blocked. I express myself through my artwork. I don't know if it's because [of how] I grew up. My family's very loud and talkative and I have always been the quiet one that just listens to all of the things happening. Sometimes the feelings don't come verbally at first for me—they come visually.

I'll draw something or paint something and then interpret what that was about, but it's not like I used my brain to think about what I was going to draw. It just came up like the way a feeling comes up, and then I can analyze that feeling a little bit. It comes from an interior place. But I'm also constantly reading things that have to do with spirit, soul, and mind connection. I've been trying to work on my own personal power, my own ability to choose what I want in a day or in my life—and focusing on the intentions and not living a reactive life.

**I like the word "reactive." Do you mean in terms of reacting to current events or social media?**

Anything that can happen in your day. Sometimes, especially if it's something that throws us off course, we can react to it and get caught up in reacting to the circumstances or the activities or actions that happened in the day. There's a lot of power in stating an intention and thinking about what you truly desire and what you want—and holding that in your mind. I've been reading a lot of things about this, but I think it's actually difficult to do. It's like using a muscle that's really weak. It's easy to forget or not do because it takes a certain amount of intention.

It's easier for us to be reactive and feel a certain way because of something that happens, rather than taking steps from a clear slate in your mind and thinking, "Okay, what do I want? What do I want to feel?" And moving from that space. I've been trying to incorporate this more, even before I paint. I've been trying to set an intention of, "What do I want to achieve in this space?" Right now I tell myself I paint with faith and joy and presence—because the whole reason that I'm painting is to have a fun experience and be in that flow state.

**Do you feel like you also have to strike a balance between that flow and being aware of the commercial side of art making?**

I've been really blessed. Things have been selling really well and been well received in a way that I haven't thought too much about it. I've been thinking about it like, "Okay, it's the gallery's job to sell the work, and it's my job to make a practice that's enjoyable and sustainable." That's how I've been seeing it, as who does what and whose job is what. I've just been focusing on my ability to not get hung up on doubt and stress, and those things that can mess up the flow and productivity.

I've been focused on feeling good and healthy and interested, and staying curious and invested in making work. I see that as my job, and hopefully the rest will work itself out...If I don't feel great about [my] work or something, it's not really so much how it was received, it's usually my opinion of it, because I'm like, "Oh, it didn't really hit what I was trying to hit." I have a lot of internal, personal goals. It stops me from thinking about what other people are going to think, because I'm still trying to attain the thing that I'm setting for myself.

**Is positive feedback also a part of that?**

Yeah, definitely. I used to get stuck when I lived with my mom and I'd paint in the outside area and she would come outside and be like, "I love this." It would be such an early stage and I would get upset at her because I'm like, "I need you to not love these things at their early stages." Because I started to feel like I didn't want to change it. I've found that if the painting's not finished, but there's something that I feel precious about—maybe I already painted the face, but [the painting] is not done, but I don't want to lose what I have by continuing to work on it—I sometimes have to consciously let go of that because that's when I'll get stuck on a painting. I try not to be precious about things in that way. I've had to actively notice, "Oh, this is keeping me stuck and I need to push this forward." It's going to transform and be something different—I need to accept that it's going to change.

**How do you decide when you see a painting and you think, "Okay, I'm done." Or does that not really happen?**

It's mostly a question of balance, especially towards the end. You can feel, as you add different things, the scales are getting more and more balanced. That's what it feels like. When I feel finished it's because it became balanced.

**I know that your mom is a writer and a poet. Did growing up around poetry and language inform your art?**

I have such a love for language, but I am not a creator of language. So I feel like I transform it. I'll hear something—like a song lyric or someone's words—or I'll read something that was written or [listen to] an audio book, and words and sentences stand out to me. I'll write them down. That's truly what I'm inspired by, but I can't turn that around and write words with it. That's the input; the output is images.

**I know that we've talked about introspection, but there are a lot of other themes in your work, like nature and history and Black identity. How do you hold onto these themes, especially when you might be experiencing creative block?**

Those themes are also what I'm curious about and learning about, so therefore what I'm reading about. Those things fuel me. They fuel my curiosity about the world, so it keeps me an active, engaged person in the world. I'm really, really curious about transformation and awakening. Thinking about that in all these different realms, like with regards to nature or Black identity, is really interesting to me. Like I said, I paint without really thinking about it initially, so sometimes I get confused...I'll think I want to make work about what I'm thinking about and reading about, but what's coming out doesn't look like that initially. Sometimes I feel that gap between them and I get a little like, "Oh, what do I make work about?" Or, "What am I doing?" And I think that's fine—it just can be what it is... I've always loved school, so I feel like I'm a student, always. I'm just creating my own curriculum now, and one thing leads to the next thing. I'm just curious to learn as much as I can.

**Yeah. I think we've talked before about how we both want to be a "forever student."**

Yes. Which is definitely part of a creative process in terms of curiosity—there's always something new, always something to be found out or explored in a way. I forgot where I heard this from, but it stuck out to me and I've been like saying it as my mantra: Stay curious about how things are unfolding. When something happens, instead of feeling like, "Oh no, this is bad or this is good," just like, staying curious about how it's unfolding. That keeps me feeling happy, to be honest. I can take things more lightly and be less quick to judge them, which often leads to a better outcome.

**Hana Ward Recommends:**

loquats

Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*

ctrl by SZA

gratitude

Unveiled Intuition and Tarot on Youtube

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Hana Ward

Vocation

painter and ceramicist

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Joonbug McIntosh