

BULLETIN

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ALTER EGO

Let's face it, it's almost impossible to be a Renaissance man - er, person - in the 20th century. It was probably pretty difficult to be a Renaissance person in the 16th century too, but it was certainly easier then than it is now. Now we're living in the age of specialization, not generalization, and if you've got to make a living you can't very well be dabbling in the assorted arts and sciences just for the satisfaction of being a well-rounded person. Today it seems quite demanding enough just to keep one's library functioning properly, not to mention keeping up with current events, friends, and laundry.

How, then, can one hope to achieve a life well-lived, rich in complexity, diversity, and wholeness? One solution, well-chronicled in this column, is akin to serial monogamy: when one occupation has worn thin, move on to the next. Another solution, somewhat more promiscuous, is found by padding the work-a-day life with a dizzying array of adult education courses, mini-adventures, cultural excursions, travel, and political actions. My solution, though, is more like bigamy. For the past sixteen years I have been married to two professions: art and librarianship. Not art librarianship, although I am a member of Art Libraries Association of North America, but art and librarianship.

Opposites attract, they say, and there must be some truth in that old adage, for there are a fair number of us artist/librarians out there. There are all types: poets, musicians, sculptors, publishers, photographers, and painters. The freedom of the creative moment, the power and autonomy of pure invention, and

just making whatever strikes you, regardless of client/patron, historical niche, or consequence - this is the freedom of art-making. The satisfaction of creating just for yourself is immense, and is both an exhilarating and soothing counterpoint to the world of librarianship, where everything has its place - even if you haven't put it there yet.

But don't be fooled. Only on the surface of things is art the more glamorous of the two professions. Let's take a look at the awful stereotypes behind the reality. There's the stern librarian with her hair pulled back into a chignon, telling patrons to be quiet or chiding them for returning books late. Compare that to the bohemian painter, living in a garret, penniless, but living with gusto and abandon. In this cartoon view, the librarian may be an old maid, but she is also a respected member of her community. The Gulley Jimson painter may be creative, but he is also disreputable, and perhaps even an outlaw!

I'm getting ahead of myself. How did I come to be both an artist and a librarian? From the start, I never wanted to support myself with my art. Way back then, my art was private. In order for the work to be true, it was best protected from the whims of the market. And since I had to work, I might as well contribute to the common weal, and do nothing that could harm the social fabric. After several years of experimenting with social work, sales, bookkeeping, cocktail waitressing, organizing Camp Fire Girls, census-taking, and other sundry occupations, it was finally librarianship that demanded the most of my top-notch

liberal arts education and my desire to do good in a world so complex that it was often impossible to know what was good from what was not.

A child of good parents and good manners, I had come of age sometime between the civil rights sit-ins, HUAC demonstrations, CORE, SNCC, the Free Speech Movement, and Vietnam protests. All of this in Berkeley! Coming from so much moral confusion, I must have savored the certainty of bibliographic verification in Interlibrary Loan and factual answers at the reference desk. Then, at home after dinner, my drawings could grapple with the unknowable. Sixteen years ago it struck me that this was the perfect combination: factual, organized, purposeful, non-profit and helpful by day, and elusive, creative, mysterious, uncertain and diffuse by night. Sixteen years later I haven't really changed my mind.

Of course, I know a lot more about libraries, librarians, and librarianship now, than I did then. And a whole lot more about art, art-making, and artists. And while I still believe that having two, opposite professions adds up to a well-rounded wholeness, I also know that it's not as simple as that, and that any one is rich enough in itself to satisfy.

I am also constantly aware of how each profession suffers at the hands of the other. One gets the hours but not the zeal, while the other gets the fervor but not the constancy.

We're not talking Sunday painter here, we're talking professional artist. A professional artist is one that the I.R.S. might recognize as genuinely, but desperately, trying to make a profit in art, against all the

odds. That means constant production, exhibitions, sales, reviews, reproductions, and write-ups. It means up-to-date mailing lists; accurate records about who bought what, when, and for how much; it means attention to archival matters in the use of glues, fixatives, mediums, grounds, and supports. It means the ability to articulate and the ability to make the pursuit of elusive moments and half-baked notions sound reasonable. It means coming home from the office to a-night-at-the-office more often than it means coming home from the office to a-night-at-the-studio.



(Maryly Snow is a visual resources librarian who heads the Slide and Photograph Library at the Department of Architecture, University of California at Berkeley. Her paintings and neon work may be seen at American Zephyr Gallery in San Francisco through October 17th (25 Van Ness at Market, in the Old Masonic Temple). Her work may then be seen at San Francisco Open Studios, Hunter's Point Shipyards, during the last two weekends in October from noon to five p.m.)

