



process, transitions and the

dawn chorus

September 1, 2020

September. Not totally hot or cool. Not entirely belonging to the closing of summer or the opening of fall. This month is change manifest, nature doing what nature does, changing. Here in the northeast, this month lets us experience the motion under the whole year, all the seasons. September is nature as process.

As hints of yellow and orange edge onto leaves, this is our first reminder that we have new fall activities coming. A reminder not on the calendar, but rather from the hues of the maple tree. This month, how many activities are about processes? The picnic blanket, gardening baskets, and other supplies — we will keep using those a little while longer. Not quite time to put them away, as we are tidying up for the cooler weather of the fall. Tomatoes, peppers, and other veggies are still coming in, yet slowing down. Beautiful orange and pink sunsets seem to come daily, waiting to be captured by a camera or in a painting. We are experimenting with new recipes because it is not quite time for traditional fall dishes and desserts yet, but it's a beautiful day with the kitchen windows open, so why not? Gardening, canning, and creative work for the sake of a goal is important, but so is work for the sake of process. There is something hopeful in it, something life-affirming, regardless of its end result.

Recently, I started working on a landscape in acrylics. In my mind's eye, there were birds in this landscape. While developing the painting, I came to a place of wanting to start again. I painted over the landscape with white gesso. The underlying image was still there but barely visible.

Then I started painting a convergence of lines—of what I wasn't entirely sure, but the idea of intersection felt right. Too harsh, too linear. I applied white gesso again, and now two earlier attempts whispered underneath.

I began a third painting: plants in my back yard, but after five minutes, I stopped. Another layer of white gesso. Three beginnings of partially visible spirit paintings.

Now, I am painting a sandbar on top of those. My process and underlying work affects what I do now, and I have found my rhythm. After four hours of working on this final version, none of the previous images are visible. But the layers are so thick, the sandbar has a texture. The choices I didn't take and the process I followed have placed me right where I want to be.

This work of process comforts me. Sometimes it is slow. Sometimes it is sudden. But it matters.

This morning, like most mornings, I listened to the chorus of bird song just before sunrise. Nature lovers call it the dawn chorus. As the eastern sky sees its first moments of color, the birds begin singing. One or two at first, but within minutes there are more singers than I can count. These little vocalists just before sunrise, all together. I don't know if they are singing for singing's sake, but it fills this between-time with hope and togetherness. This morning process transitions us, too. Transitions give us time to welcome something new, to acknowledge the opportunities that have passed and the opportunities to come.

Comfort. Hope. Solidarity. Communion. This is just a bit of what we experience in this interlude.