



JRB ART AT THE ELMS

Paseo Arts District

AGING WELL

By Joy Reed Belt

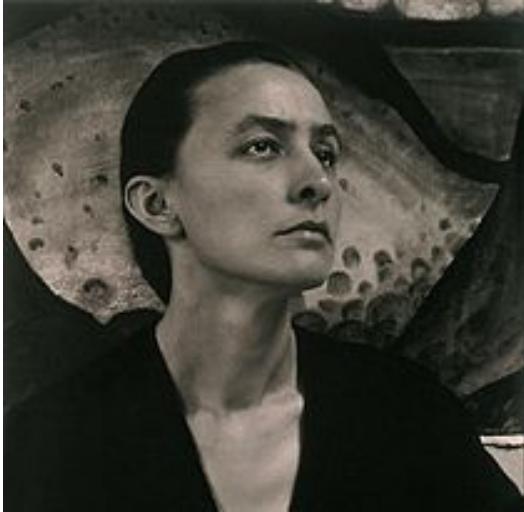


David Hockney, "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures), 1972, Acrylic on Canvas, 7' x 10'

September is my birthday month. As such, it has always been a wonderful celebratory time as well as a time of gratitude for a meaningful and interesting life that I share with my friends. Additionally, September has also been my designated time to have body parts removed and repaired. These physical tune ups started when I was a little girl and elected to have my tonsils removed during my birthday week. I made that decision because I was told I could eat ice cream for seven straight days following surgery and I wanted my birthday to last for seven days. Maybe my logic wasn't all that great, but I did receive lots of gifts as well as more ice cream than I could possibly eat. Several years later it was in September that I had an appendectomy. And so it's gone throughout my life, the most recent being a knee replacement in September of 2017.

Monday, I went to the doctor complaining of pain and discomfort and was told I needed to have foot surgery. Driving home I contemplated the timing of this news and smiled, realizing I was right on schedule. Birthdays provide convenient markers for our passage through life, including the measurement of our physical and mental capacity. What I enjoy most about my growing older is the gift of perspective. Have you noticed that growing older has enhanced the way you think about and understand things? How much wiser you feel?" Now instead of having one "ah ha" moment every month or so, I have several each day.

Recently I read an article in the Health and Medicine Section of "Harvard Gazette" that cited an 80 year longitudinal study that Harvard began in 1938, during the Great Depression. The researchers designed the study to reveal clues about how to lead healthy, long lives. They found that "embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier. The study findings stated that "Loneliness kills. It is as powerful as smoking or alcoholism." A recent Director of the study, Robert Waldinger, commented that "Good relationships don't just protect our bodies; they protect our brains." George Vaillant, a Psychiatrist who was on the research team states that the key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships." Their research also debunked the idea that people's personalities are formed beyond change by age 30.



Georgia O'Keeffe



Georgia O'Keeffe, "The White Calico Flower,"
1931, Oil on Canvas, 30 3/16" x 36 3/16"

Well, I certainly haven't conducted an 80-year scientific or academic study, but I believe there is another factor which contributes to successful aging and that is having a personal relationship with art. Experiencing the arts makes us more creative, expands our world and contributes to a more generative life. The arts contribute to better problem solving skills and facilitate other kinds of learning. The arts provide us the opportunity to find comfort, meaning and create relationships which would we not otherwise have. Some of my dearest companions are books and works of art.

We don't have to look very far to find artists who have inspired us as they continued to create as they aged. In 1992, the painter Agnes Martin moved to a retirement community at the foot of Taos Mountain where she painted every morning from 8:30 to 11:30. In 1995 she scaled down from her usual 60" square canvasses to meet her physical needs. Her final painting was a tiny drawing of a plant, barely more than three inches high.

Georgia O'Keeffe lead a very storied life as an independent woman and experienced great commercial success with her paintings of flowers, skyscrapers, animal skulls, and southeastern landscapes. In her older years, macular degeneration caused O'Keeffe to start losing her eyesight. But she refused to give up her work. She enlisted assistants to help her create her work. Her friend Juan Hamilton taught her how to work with clay. With his help, she created sculptures and watercolor paintings while producing charcoal, pastel, and pencil drawings on her own. At 90 years old, she said, "I can still see what I want to paint."



Anna Mary Robertson "Grandma" Moses,
"Thunderstorm," 1948, Oil on Pressed Wood, 20
1/2" x 24 1/2"



Anna Mary Robertson "Grandma" Moses

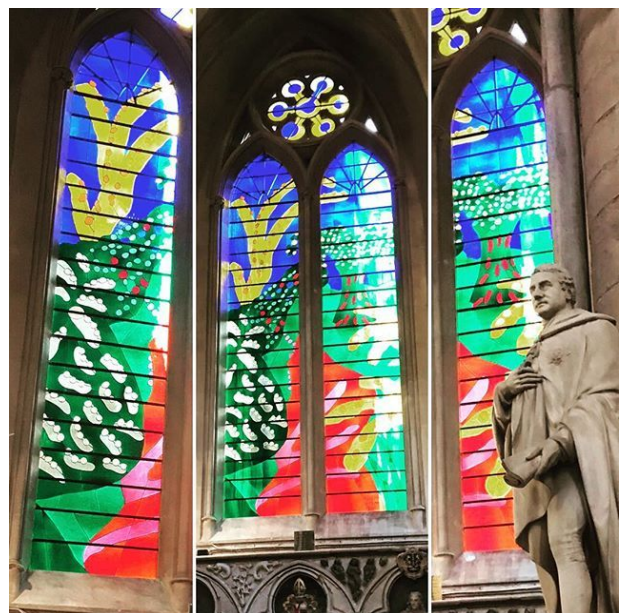
Grandma Moses spent most of her life running a farm with her husband and raising five children. When she was in her 70's she decided to start painting when arthritis forced her to give up embroidery. Entirely self taught, she became a prolific creator painting scenes from her life on Masonite panels. Moses continued to paint until she died at 101 years old. In her 30 year painting career she created more than 1,500 works of art, 25 of which were painted after her 100th birthday.

David Hockney (b.1937) is a British painter, designer, printmaker, stage designer and photographer. In 1972 one of his paintings sold for \$90 million which was then the most money ever paid for a work by a living artist. At age 72 Hockney mastered the Brushes software for iPhone and iPad. He used that software on his iPad to create a stained glass window for Westminster Abbey to celebrate the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. The window was installed in 2018. Hockney continues to paint every day.

Perhaps the reason art is important is because it is designed to make us feel. Perhaps relationships are important because they provide the conduit for processing our feelings.



David Hockney



David Hockney, "The Queen's Window," 2018,
Stained-Glass at Westminster Abbey

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