

Daydreaming: Revisited

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Abstract

Daydreams are moments in time when one become detached from their surroundings and escapes to a visionary fantasy, typically filled with pleasurable thoughts, hopes, and desires. Research proves that daydreams encompass a similar foundation of positivity, even though they vary from person to person. While daydreaming often carries a stigma of negativity, research reveals that there are many benefits to daydreaming. The act of daydreaming can release us from current stress, give us a rest stop for our minds and provide us with an infusion of creativity. The exhibition *Daydreaming: Revisited* shines a positive light on the subject through a better appreciation of these instances, which capture people in moments of daydreaming and depictions of various tasks and locations that are relatable to the viewer through drawing. The work explores the typical expressions of people in these moments and presents images of inanimate objects or settings that may trigger daydreams. These monotonous, routine tasks, so often performed, beckon minds to daydream. Influences for the work include personal experience and contemporary artists that reference realism, such as, Andrew Wyeth, Peggy Preheim, and Erin Wozniak. In addition to a personal desire to explore this subject, the goal of this body of work is to change people's perception of daydreaming and to encourage them to look deeper into the positive aspects of this pastime.

1. Introduction

Daydreaming is a temporary escape from reality. The mind wanders from the present and is momentarily filled with visionary fantasies of pleasant thoughts, hopes, desires, and aspirations. Daydreams take us from our current location to another within the blink of an eye. From sailing ships to flying planes, from slaying dragons to deep sea diving, daydreams place no limit on the imagination. "Oh the places you'll go."¹

Although most daydreams are positive, the perception of daydreaming is often not and is seen as a waste of time. If someone is daydreaming they are often perceived as lazy, slacker, spaced out, childish, even comical. This negative perspective of daydreaming is a misconception. In today's society, where time, urgency, success and productivity are stressed, our perspective on daydreaming is undoubtedly, and understandably, negative. Studies have proven that we spend as much as half our day daydreaming. "Estimates suggest that the tendency for the mind to stray from the here and now in favor of thoughts unrelated to current external events constitutes as much as 50% of our waking hours (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Klinger, 1999)."² Modern research digs deeper and reveals that there are many benefits to daydreaming, despite the negative misconceptions perceived by many. I am interested in the subtleties of daydreaming, from what causes people to daydream to bodily characteristics of people in moments of daydreaming. In a society today that struggles to slow down, I would like to highlight the importance of daydreaming and the benefits it brings. Through the use of subtle lines and relatable images I hope the viewer finds the ability to relate to the work on a personal level and views daydreaming in a more positive light.

1.1 Importance Of Daydreaming

Daydreaming has a multitude of benefits; it serves as a resting or idle mode for our minds as our thoughts wander off to another place or time. Although daydreaming may appear as unproductive, our brains are hard at work; unknowingly processing information and external stimuli. Irene Petrick, in the Research-Technology Management Publication, determined that we use between 80 to 95 percent of our brain power even though we are not concentrated on a focused topic.³ According to neurologist Marcus Raichle. His studies proved that while daydreaming several brain structures became “unusually metabolically active when the brain was thought to be idling.”⁴ Raichle’s findings prove that “daydreaming is the mind's default mode.”⁵

Daydreaming boosts our problem-solving skills, productivity, strengthens our working memory and serves as a de-stressor. It also allows and encourages creativity. “As daydreaming allows us to see the world from other perspectives, it pushes us beyond the confines of our expertise and into insight. Embracing this downtime can allow us to harness all of our brainpower for creative problem solving.”⁶

Daydreaming can be triggered by many things, including external stimuli. The smell, touch, feel or sight of something can cause us to slip away to another time and place. “Daydream thoughts may arise directly from memory, or they may be elicited by distracting physical stimuli or even by stimuli from that task at hand.”⁷ We may be focused on a task and the sudden touch of something, perhaps the touch of a dog's hair, can shift our minds adrift to the memory of a loyal friend from years past.

Research shows that when our minds are daydreaming, or are at rest, our brains are more apt to problem solve. Like a puzzle, our brains work at solving the problem by putting the pieces together. It is during these moments, when our brains are on idle, that we reach that “aha” moment. “By allowing your mind the freedom to roam, the chances that you’re going to have an insight are much higher. It’s likely that you are going to recombine pieces of information in a novel way.”⁸

In these moments, our creativity thrives and we are able to problem solve, tap into our creative insight, and discover new ideas. Daydreaming opens the gates to creativity. “First and foremost is Albert Einstein, who imagined himself running alongside a light wave, a fantasy that ultimately led to his theory of relativity. Kary Mullis, who discovered the polymerase chain—a now-indispensable method of replacing DNA—conceived the idea while daydreaming on a drive between San Francisco and his cabin in the Mendocino woods.”⁹

1.2 Understanding Psychology Behind Daydreaming

To better understand the benefits of daydreaming, it is best to have fundamental knowledge of the psychology behind daydreaming. There are two networks within the brain, the task positive network and the default mode network. The network that is responsible for daydreaming develops at a young age. “The daydreaming network first becomes active around age two, when children engage in make-believe play-the precursor of adult daydreaming”¹⁰

The task positive network is responsible for carrying out daily activities where our mind needs to be constantly engaged in what we are doing, such as, attention-demanding tasks, tasks-at-hand or solving a problem.

The default mode network is responsible for carrying out daydreaming. It consists of three parts of the brain that are responsible for mind wandering or daydreaming, essentially any thought created that is not correlated to the external environment. The three parts are, “autobiographical-memory-making hippocampus, the posterior cingulate (involved in emotion, memory, and in responding to sensory stimuli) and the medial prefrontal cortex, which evaluates info from our bodies and the world around us from a self-centered perspective.”¹¹ The default mode network becomes active when a person is not focused on the outside world. It is responsible for information regarding self, remembering the past, thinking about the future and thinking about others. Although both these networks perform different tasks, the brain is equally as active in both. Depending on what is being performed, whether it is carrying out daily activities or daydreaming.

1.3 There Is A Growing Interest In Daydreaming

There is a growing interest in the study of daydreaming and the benefits behind it. Malia Mason, a graduate student at Dartmouth College performed an experiment on brain activity in relationship to mind wandering. In her experiment, she placed 19 volunteers inside an MRI machine and examined their brain activity while they performed a monotonous task—one of which they practiced beforehand and performed another task that was novel.¹² Through the experiment Mason discovered that the default mode network became more active when the volunteers performed the practiced

task. "Those whose default networks were most active during the rehearsed task also daydreamed more in their daily lives. Mason's results suggest that our default network is like a car's idling engine, ready to rev up and ride off down a side road whenever the main drag seems a little dull."¹³

1.4 Negative Stigma Behind Daydreaming

Daydreaming is viewed negatively to some because people who are daydreaming may appear lazy and wasting their time. Daydreaming from an outsider's perspective may seem unproductive. Studies show that daydreaming, while it may appear as if the person is not doing anything, should be encouraged because of its potential benefits. With the busy, distraction-filled society we live in today, people are finding less and less time for daydreaming. However, daydreaming is something that should be encouraged for all people, both young and old. Daydreaming opens the door to imagination and creativity. As Edgar Allan Poe said, "Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night."¹⁴

In a study done by Jerome Singer, a developmental psychologist, and his wife Dorothy found that children who watched less television were more imaginative when compared to those who watched more. Children are spending more and more time with external stimuli and are not allowing themselves a mental break or allowing their minds to wander.

"The new-found importance of daydreaming suggests that—far from scolding children for gazing out the window in a daze—we may actually want to encourage children to spend more time doing it. It's unclear whether kids these days spend less time spacing out than kids used to, since no one has measured how much they daydreamed in the past. But there is reason for concern.

Recent surveys by Singer and his wife Dorothy, a developmental psychologist, show that children everywhere now spend up to 80 percent of their free time outside school watching television. And children who are heavy viewers of TV—watching at least three hours a day, and often programs with high levels of action-adventure or violence—are less imaginative than children who watch only one hour a day."¹⁵

2. Background

Daydreaming: Revisited is a series of drawings that are a representation of personal need to explore what daydreaming is and its benefits, as well the need to show a more positive light and importance on the subject. Daydreaming is something that we all encounter whether we are fully aware of it or not. I am intrigued by the moments in time when people slip away from reality and find themselves somewhere else.

This body of work has developed out of a personal goal to live a more minimalistic lifestyle filled with less distractions. I find myself on a journey to live a life with less complications. By doing this it allows me to spend more time doing the things I enjoy. Through my research, I am discovering the benefits of daydreaming in my own life and hope to inspire others to view daydreaming differently. I hope that through my work people can learn to minimize distractions, open their minds to freer thoughts, and become more aware and have a better appreciation for these moments.

I remember as a child escaping off into an imaginary world within my own daydreams. My imagination felt limitless when I was younger. As we grow older, our responsibilities in life and the demands from the outside world become greater. With the constant demand from the outside world for our attention and growing distractions like technology, cell phones, television, tablets and iPads—our minds are not able to take the mental break they need. We are not letting our minds daydream like we did, once upon a time, as a child. Our attention is constantly being pulled from one direction to another.

Through personal observation of my own life and others around me, I have noticed that we have become so busy and distracted that we do not allow our minds to wander or daydream. It is these distractions that deprive our minds of the mental and physical well-being that daydreaming brings. This inhibits our creativity and our overall happiness.

With this body of work, I make an effort to portray daydreaming in a more positive light. I capture people and sometimes their expressions in these moments of free thinking in different settings. These images are also intended to represent the circumstances and experiences that may have triggered the subject to daydream.

3. Methodology

Each of the drawings in my series was inspired by observation of close family and friends and others that I interact with on a regular basis. My work starts with taking photos of those times that I feel best represent moments of daydreaming. Some of my photos are candid shots while others are staged using my imagination. Works in this series include representations of what someone may be doing while daydreaming, what someone may be thinking while daydreaming, places people often daydream, as well as depictions of people in a daydreaming state of mind.



Fig 1. Brittany Lynch-Blosse, *Untitled*, 2016, graphite on paper, 15 x 22 inches

In this series, some of my drawing are of objects and places that appear to be older or have a sense of having been used. I have always felt a greater connection to an older object than something that was brand new. The history, and the story behind the object has always intrigued me. This is why most of the images in my work are not new.



Fig 2.,3.,4. Brittany Lynch-Blosse, *Untitled*, graphite on paper, 6 x 8 inches, 2017

We often daydream while we are relaxed. In these drawings, I have depicted different locations of where someone might daydream. I have drawn common places of daydreaming, from a kitchen chair to a fallen log in the woods. These locations are representative of places where we might find ourselves slipping away to a daydream. Many of my

drawings are of objects that have a sense of patina to them. The impression or appearance that someone has been there is still reminiscent. We often daydream while performing a monotonous task that requires little attention. Some examples may include cleaning, doing dishes, mowing the lawn, cooking, or perhaps even feeding the dogs. It is these daily activities that we do on a regular basis, or that require very little attention, from which we simply leave and let our minds slip away.

When we daydream, our imagination is endless. “Oh, the things you can think!”¹⁶ Some of my work includes drawing depictions of what someone might be thinking while they are daydreaming. With these drawings, I create images based off what I know about a particular person and things that they often think about, or I ask what they were thinking about during these moments. I then create my images based off of what I know about that person and my own interpretation of their thoughts. There is often a commonality in characteristics of people who are daydreaming. People appear as if they are staring off into the distance or seem to not be focused on a particular task at hand. In this series, I have created a group of portraits that depict people daydreaming.

My drawings are completed with graphite of various hardness. For example, for finer details and smaller drawings I use an HB pencil, it's a harder lead that allows for finer lines. I use hot pressed watercolor paper, allowing for a smooth surface to work on, which allows me to achieve fine details. The fading lines in my drawings reference daydreaming and that moment when people are slipping away into a daydream. The empty space around my drawings represent the quiet moments and the solitude we experience. The small scale of my drawings represents the intimacy of our thoughts within ourselves and are intended to draw the viewer in. This up-close interaction between the viewer and the work creates an intimate moment between the viewer and the piece. I am intrigued by this.



Fig 5. Brittany Lynch-Blosse, *Samuel*, 2016,
graphite on paper, 11x15 inches

I find that using simple line work that gradually fades away creates the feeling of someone becoming detached from their surroundings. By capturing people in everyday life, when they are engaged in some activity or doing nothing, I hope that the viewer can find themselves able to relate to these moments. My objective is that people will realize that daydreaming is something that we all experience, and perhaps need. In some cases, by drawing lighthearted depictions of what someone may be thinking about during these times, I would like people to become more open to daydreaming and the positive implications it may bring, as well as appreciate the humor that sometimes exists at the heart of these escapes.

Through my research and artwork, I hope to not only accomplish a better understanding of what daydreaming is and the positive implications that it may bring-for myself, but to others as well. My desire is that this work opens the

viewer's perceptions and allows them to revisit daydreaming with a more positive frame of mind.

4. Influences

Realist artist Andrew Wyeth's work has been a vital influence throughout the development of my creative process. Wyeth is known as one of the most important American artists of the 20th century and is known for his attention to detail and quality of realism. His favorite subjects were the people he knew and his hometown, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania and his summer home in Cushing, Maine. As an artist, I have always enjoyed drawing things around me and my home, from a chair sitting out in the yard being consumed by overgrown grass around it, to a pair of mud bound boots sitting by the back door. Wyeth often noted: "I paint my Life".¹⁷ Similarly, I draw anything and everything that seems to capture my eye and that is often representational of my life. Wyeth's work suggests a sense of isolation, rural quiet and a somberness. These are expressions and moods that I feel often come through in my work as well.



Fig 6. Andrew Wyeth, *Braids*, 1979, Tempura,
16 ½ x 20 ½ inches

<http://surfacefragments.blogspot.com/2013/01/artists-and-their-muses.html>



Fig 7. Brittany Lynch-Blosse, *In thought*, 2016,
graphite on paper, 11x15 inches

Through his composition, attention to detail, and imagery he creates a sense of mysteriousness that draws the viewer in. I become mesmerized by his composition and find myself trying to imagine the story behind the work. Wyeth is also known for his portraiture. Within his portraits, the people often seem withdrawn from what is going on around them. This is something that is also prevalent in my work as well. In many of Wyeth's works the figure does not make direct eye contact with the viewer. Rather, they are staring off into the distance as if they are in deep thought. In some of his works the figure's face cannot be seen, but based off of their body language they appear to be resting as if they were off in a daydream, perhaps reminiscing of another place or time. In Wyeth's Helga series, the figure rarely makes eye contact with the viewer, but appears to be deep in thought. In his painting titled *Braids*, the woman appears withdrawn from her surroundings, but appears to have a slight smile on her face as she stares off into the distance. The lack of eye contact and minimal information surrounding the figure leaves the viewer wondering what she might be thinking about. Wyeth also worked in a subdued color palette, this emphasizes a sense of calmness. Although I am drawn to his color palette, I believe that by simply using graphite, a similar feeling of peacefulness can be achieved.



Fig 8. Erin Wozniak, *Erosion*, graphite on paper,
7 x 9 inches

<http://erinwozniak.com/section/354655-People-Drawings.html>



Fig 9. Brittany Lynch-Blosse, *Morning*, 2016,
graphite on paper, 12 x 6 inches

Erin Wozniak is another artist that has influenced me. She is a painter who also works in graphite. One of her best-known works is a painting of her husband that captures his personality. “She says of the painting: ‘It began with preliminary sketches as he lay sleeping and continued to evolve and develop as I painted’ as she aimed to capture his quiet, gentle character.”¹⁸ In particular, her graphite drawings capture intimate and quiet moments of people in everyday mundane situations.¹⁹



Fig 10. Peggy Preheim, *Point Blank*, 2009, pencil on paper,
22 x 30 1/4 inches; 55.9 x 76.8 cm

<http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/artists/peggy-preheim/series-works-on-paper/24>

Peggy Preheim has been another great influence while developing this body of work, especially with regards to her small-scale drawings and highly rendered detail. I push myself to accomplish the same great amount of rendering that she successfully implements in her work with my own small scale drawings. Her small-scale work draws the viewer in for a closer look. I am intrigued by small scale and how it draws the viewer in for a more intimate experience. How something appears from a distance is totally different when it is experienced up close. Yet to find that when we look closer we discover something that we would have missed otherwise. In my work, intimacy that is created between the interaction of the work and the viewer intrigues me. This intimacy brings the viewer closer to daydreaming and the quietness and subtlety they may not have experienced before. I am attracted to the small scale of Preheim’s work because of the way it draws the viewer in for a closer observation. Because the scale of her drawings is so small, the viewer is automatically drawn in, curious for a closer look. I am also attracted to the process of the viewer walking up and getting close to the drawings. This moment between the viewer and art becomes very intimate and this dialogue is intriguing to me. This process of getting up close and personal to the image is comparable to how I feel people should approach their understanding of daydreaming. Daydreaming can be so personal, but it is often something we do not embrace. In my work, my small-scale drawings are of people daydreaming. By allowing the viewer to get close

to the images, an intimate, more personal connection with the work is created.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this experience, I have significantly broadened my knowledge and understanding of daydreaming. I appreciate how important it is for us to allow daydreams to become a part of our life. A better understanding of the psychology behind daydreaming is beneficial to all of us. I have also learned that, although we all daydream about different things, our daydreams are universally similar because of their association with positive thoughts. I believe daydreaming is something that we all need to embrace and spend more time doing. My methodology of capturing people in the daydreaming state has evolved as my research has continued. My artistic presentations hopefully will connect with the viewer so that they can appreciate their own moments of daydreaming.

6. Endnotes

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10. Ibid. 88-89
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15. Glausiusz, Devoted to Distractions, 91.
16. Dr. Seuss, *Oh, The Thinks You Can Think!* (Random House Children's Books, 1975), 1-24.
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