

Mar10

## Timeout for Art: Stay on the Bus

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[Standard](#)



Yesterday morning after posting my blog, I was drinking my coffee and checking out various sites and pages on the internet, while waiting for the “like”s to start coming in (I’m a sucker for the feedback!). I ran across an article that announced, “this will change your creative life.” Well, I’m also a sucker for life-changing information, so I was drawn in.

The advice was simple: “Stay on the bus.”

It was based on the actual operation of Helsinki's bus line, and was first outlined in a 2004 graduation speech by [Finnish-American photographer Arno Minkkinen](#).

The theory claims, in short, that the secret to a creatively fulfilling career lies in understanding the operations of Helsinki's main bus station.

There are two dozen platforms, Minkkinen explains, from each of which several different bus lines depart. Thereafter, for a kilometre or more, all the lines leaving from any one platform take the same route out of the city, making identical stops. "Each bus stop represents one year in the life of a photographer," Minkkinen says. You pick a career direction – maybe you focus on making platinum prints of nudes – and set off. Three stops later, you've got a nascent body of work. "You take those three years of work on the nude to [a gallery], and the curator asks if you are familiar with [the nudes](#) of [Irving Penn](#)." Penn's bus, it turns out, was on the same route. Annoyed to have been following someone else's path, "you hop off the bus, grab a cab... and head straight back to the bus station, looking for another platform". Three years later, something similar happens. "This goes on all your creative life: always showing new work, always being compared to others." What's the answer? "It's simple. Stay on the bus. Stay on the f...ing bus."

A little way farther on, the way Minkkinen tells it, Helsinki's bus routes diverge, plunging off on idiosyncratic journeys to very different destinations. That's when the photographer finds a unique "vision", or – if you'd rather skip the mystificatory art talk – the satisfying sense that he or she is doing their own thing.

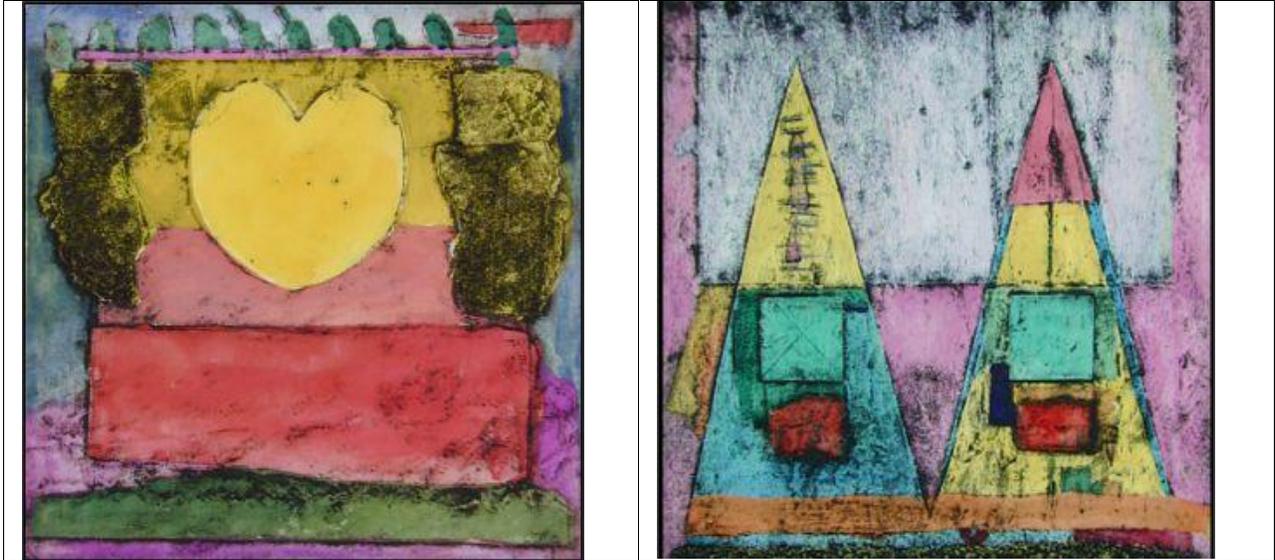
That's when the work becomes truly your own; that's when you have the opportunity to do something great, something never done before.





As I look back through my own creative experience, I see that I have never had the good sense to stay on the bus. I started with drawing; everyone does. I didn't think of drawing as anything more than one step on the way to something better, so I studied painting. When I changed colleges, the painting department was full, so I took a ceramics class...and then got hooked, and made that my concentration. Still enjoying two-dimensional art, I took drawing and painting classes when they were available. I learned serigraph, lithograph and intaglio printmaking techniques. I fell in love with collagraph printmaking. I toyed with papermaking, collage and the fiber arts. I played around with photography. I still do all of those things. I am still frustrated in my efforts. With fifty years of art-making behind me, imagine what I might have accomplished if I had simply *stayed on the bus*: chosen one course, and devoted all my creative energy to it.





Looking back on my life as a whole, I see the same tendencies. I jump from one thing to another. This year alone is a good example: I have a full-time job and a part-time job. In addition, I have an art career (that goes in a dozen directions), a news-magazine to publish bi-monthly, a blog to write daily, a radio broadcast, several on-going crochet projects, a garden to plant, a little dog to take care of, a house and yard to maintain, a sorely neglected diet and exercise regimen, friends and family that I don't see enough of, tasks that don't get done, commitments that fall by the wayside, books that go unread...days that go by unnoticed: sunrises and sunsets, the moon and the stars...

I have always wanted to lead a meaningful life. I pull more things in, in an effort to make it full. A full life is a grand life, right? What it provides in a steady hum of busy-ness that keeps me in a state of agitation that borders, sometimes, on panic.

In fact, the times that my life has felt most meaningful were the times when my attention was held by just a few things of great importance: cooking; creating art; family; motherhood; planting; reading; walking; writing. That's the bus I need to stay on.