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Timeout for Art: The Bare Minimum

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Blackie Chan

One smart thing I've done in many areas of my life is establish a bare minimum. I always make the bed and do the dishes, even on days when I have no energy or inclination for housework. I fill one page in my journal each day, even if I have no desire to write. If I am too lazy to do an entire exercise program, I'll at least do the warm-up. I always walk the dogs.

I have spared myself many slothful days by maintaining minimal standards: clean one shelf; do one push-up; weed one flower bed. Sometimes, by the time I've finished the required minimum, I find I'm on a roll, and manage to surprise myself with how much more I can accomplish. Other days, I console myself with the idea that, "at least I got that small bit done."

In art, I have a series of "first steps" that are sometimes exactly what I need to nudge myself into a productive day. I'll convince myself to just *go into* the studio, just to have a look. Or, maybe, to just do a little organizing there. Or simply gathering materials for another day's work. Sometimes, even these small steps seem like too much to fit into a day. Daily drawing is my absolute bare minimum.

These certainly aren't "fine art." Small thumbnail drawings, they don't even fill an entire page of my sketch book. Some pages, in fact, have a dozen little drawings. None take more than a few minutes to complete. There are days when I feel like I've expanded my observation or rendering skills, or learned something new about how to depict shadow and light. Most of the time, it isn't that dramatic. The reward is simply in the discipline. On even the most uninspired days, I can accomplish the bare minimum.



