

MARKING TIME

A Daily Practice Through the Pandemic
BY SHERRIE LOVLER

WHEN COVID-19 SHELTER-IN-PLACE began in California in March 2020, I saw it, as many artists did, as an artist-residency-in-place. I hunkered down with stocks of toilet tissue and art supplies. I wanted to “mark my time” and come out of it with something significant. I chose to begin a daily practice of abstract calligraphic paintings in a little book I made with a Greek binding, a variant of Coptic binding, inspired by Keith Smith’s *Exposed Spine Sewings*. My hand-bound book is four inches tall and three inches wide, with 18 signatures of five pages each—180 page spreads to fill—a six-month project if one is done every day.

I have been a student of daily practice for many years—a powerful tool for building discipline. Sometimes it is in the form of yoga, tai chi or qigong. I learned to play piano this way in my youth. For the past 12 years, writing poetry has become a practice. I have learned to value the process more than the result.

These book pages are done quickly, most without planning. I usually begin with sumi ink and watercolor and tools left over from previous work. Some incorporate gold leaf, making it a true illuminated manuscript. Sometimes a painting I have been working on inspires the new spread. Other times the smaller pages lead to a larger painting.

The book pages may include words or letters, and many have asemic writing, which affords freedom in mark-making without words.

There is a lack of perfection and preciousness in the book, perhaps because the pages are done spontaneously. The idea of the diptych is intriguing—the opposing pages never repeat each other, but harmonize with balance. Energized by the book, many of my larger paintings are now designed in pairs.

This daily practice has served me well and, as the pandemic continues, I look back on those days of shelter-in-place with a bit of nostalgia, knowing I used that time in a creative and productive way. 🐾

SHERRIE LOVLER will teach a workshop based on her pandemic book at the Write on the Edge conference. She is the author, illustrator, and designer of *On Solter Ground: Paintings, Poems and Calligraphy*, which won a medal for Most Outstanding Book Design from Independent Publishers Book Awards, 2016. See more at www.artandpoetry.com.

