

Fifty Days at Iliam Inspired Quarantine Project

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Intro to Iliam and Cy Twombly

Our man Cy Twombly (OmC) was born in Lexington, Virginia and studied at the famous Black Mountain College in North Carolina where he met future superstars, “Mr. Modal” John Cage, homeboy Robbie Rauschenberg (**sort of** now on view at the Museum of Outdoor Arts, Englewood, CO), and young Jasper Johns (YJJ). An outsider of the “art world” [Twombly fled to Rome in the 1960s](#)¹ where he would live and work for majority of his life. Never much of a commercial success Twombly’s work remained largely uncelebrated until a young [Basquiat](#) cited the [Virginian expat](#) as an influence in the [1980s](#).

While much of Twombly’s work is esoteric and dense with references to Greco-Roman mythology and history, there is a lot we can pull from here.

What Twombly does in his body of work [Fifty Days at Iliam](#)², is allow for his seemingly erratic movements and marks to guide the reader through Homer’s Iliad in complete abstraction. He references the work through words that are *not written but drawn*. His scribbles and puddles emancipate emotional events in the story, thus allowing the viewer complete freedom to surrender to the uncanniness of the work. By maintaining abstraction, OmC recuses himself from perspective, finger-wagging and the implications of responsibility, allowing those things to fall on Homer, while he sits and (presumably) collects royalty checks.

In this sense Twombly’s abstraction is a blameless navigator and inflectionless narrator³, [Rod Serling](#) with a paint brush.

What I propose is a mini-Iliam, from now on referred to as Miniliam, that will consist of a drawing in 10 parts.

It is highly recommended that everyone be reading a book or be in the depths of a television series (if you must) that is quotable and opens itself up to the exploration of its [pathos](#).⁴ If you do not have a current novel or television show that you are engrossed in, choose a classic you are familiar with.⁵

So, make that choice and live with it.

I’ll be using [The Planets by Sergio Chefjec](#) ;)

Material:

I recommend using either construction paper or something a bit stronger than printer paper, just so you can really do it up. The dimensions of the paper should be approx. 9x10in.

¹ [The original Vogue article from November 1966 titled Roman Classic Surprise is available here.](#)

² More on Twombly’s [Homer inspired work](#).

³ The *idyllic* modus-operandi of abstraction in this artist’s humble view at this time.

⁴ These works may be squarely rooted in our global historical canon and avoid addressing large pop-culture references directly. IE. Pride and Prejudice = “OK”; The Harry Potter series = “Not a great choice,”.

⁵ While mega-hit media franchises are cool, the hope is that your work (thematically based around this supposed novel, book, picture book, crossword puzzle from the Denver Post (MediaNews Group, Inc.) medical dictionary, Homeric *odyssea illiaden - whathaveyou* of your choosing) is able to represent as much of the artist (YOU!) as possible.

Black and white mark making tool (pencils, wax crayon, oil stick, India ink & brush-whatever- just make it black)

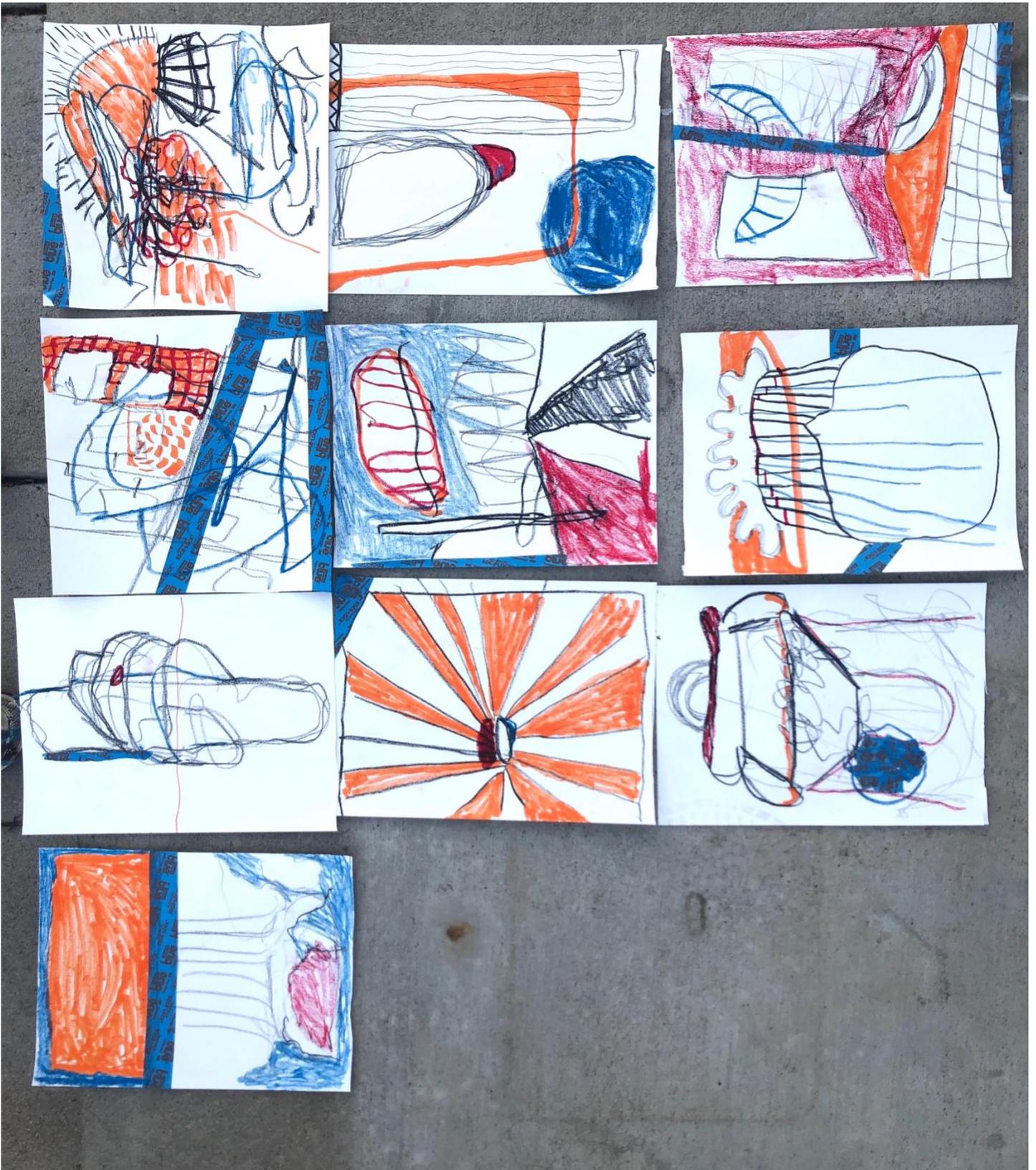
Two or three colors (again, any mark making tool, just limit these things to a few colors)

One “non-art” material (examples include White-Out, tape, adhesive stickers, food packaging, you get the idea)

Assignment Guidelines

1. Start your Minilium by creating a 10-part meditative drawing with a single element of your mark making materials IE. a pencil.
 - o It is best if the drawings are inspired by specific events in your aforementioned chosen book, better yet if they are part of pivotal plot points.
 - o These drawings should be “off the cuff” abstractions, conceptualized and executed *quickly*. Try to *minimize* erasure and corrective marks. If you are having trouble with making something abstract, look at a nearby object for inspiration (a chair, piece of fruit, gas tank etc.), draw it, and then strip away details until it appears unrecognizable. Make this drawing. Do this in one sitting.
2. Go make a cup of tea - do *something*⁶ that takes you away from the drawing for at least 90 minutes.
 - o You may find it helpful to set a timer, I like the egg timers.
3. Return to the drawing and add a layer to your abstraction with a different mark making material than before.
 - o An example of this would be, if you used your black pencil for the initial drawing, use a color
 - o Remember the motif or scene from your book you were referencing, reference it again on top of the first layer
 - o Don't be afraid to accidentally contradict yourself or undo some of the work you felt that you completed initially during the drawing- this is all part of the ebb and flow of abstraction and really try to maintain a non-judgmental outlook on your own work in this regard. Allow yourself the unfettered opportunity to make.
 - o Avoid illustration, neoromantic notions and explicit detailing. Embrace nuance, objectivity and detached romanticism
 - o Maintain speed when applying additional layers
4. Do this step two more times
 - o 90-minute intervals
 - o Allow for your total understanding of your chosen book to permeate this 10-part drawing
 - o Remember- this is a single drawing in 10 parts. So, embrace the idea of the singularity. While I understand this might seem like a dusty holdover from [Modernism](#), really consider the 10 part drawing to be the *sum of its parts*. Try to find something charmingly vintage in that notion, the same way you found something vintage charming during your last trip to Buffalo Exchange on South Broadway or 13th.
5. Wait an additional hour and let the drawing be during this time.
 - o Instead of finding something to distract yourself at this juncture, embrace the idea of waiting. Allow for anticipation and impatience to set in.
 - o Get the jitters at the idea of this project being a complete failure.
6. One hour later, return to the drawing
 - o Sequence the drawing's 10 components in a way that supports *not* the storyarc or narrative-based trajectory of your chosen book, but in a way that supports your *experience* of reading the book.
 - o Feel free to go back and edit (strictly based on the visual aspect of the work) where you feel compositions could be stronger, re-order over and over etc., it's not *that* big of a deal.

⁶ I found it incredibly helpful to spend the last 20 minutes of my 90-minute intervals with my eyes closed, free of visual stimuli. Using a common meditation technique of visualizing nothing and counting in increments of “1-10”, I was able to measure my breathing and freshen my sight in between layers (If you lose count or end up somehow at the number “12”, you know you are not focusing).



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⁷ Final Result: Demo images from my "Minilium" - turn to the left for correct orientation.

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