

ONE MEDITATION, TWO MOVIES

WATCHING THE BEATS

by k.d. self

At the Buskirk Chumley Theater, I sit in deep silence, listening to the sound of my own breath. Musician Rick Clayton's soothing strings also resonate, dance then settle into periods of quiet, encouraging what minister Mary Ann Macklin calls "being instead of doing." Clayton's guitar and harp replace (for today) Janiece Jaffe's beautiful singing bowls. For one hour, sitting in the BCT with other silent meditators, I am removed from national political betrayal; detached from digital devices; distanced from daily action. I just am.

In February 2017, five inspired women began this "Being Bloomington, Being Together" meditation project. These women are: Yoga/pilates instructor Laurel Reed Adams, spiritual musician Janiece Jaffe, life coach Nancy Kalina, Bridge Spiritual Center owner Karla Kamstra, and Unitarian Universalist Church minister Macklin. Once a month, at noon, these women create open, safe space for stillness. Their intention is to invite everyone—regardless of "race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, country of origin, or political ideology"—to "come together in self-reflection, prayer, or meditation." Upcoming times for this gathering at the BCT (noon to one) are July 26 and August 23. At the end of June's assembly, Clayton played the perfect song--John Lennon's *Imagine*. I left trying to imagine a world in which all people 'live life in peace.'

For characters in two recent movies about artists, peace was elusive. *Afterimage* (set in 1950s communist Poland) and *Cézanne et moi* (set in nineteenth century France) both told semi-biographical troubled tales reflecting artists' ethical, creative, and economic challenges.

Directed by Andrej Wajda, *Afterimage* focuses on painter and art theorist Wladyslaw Strzeminski. Strzeminski was forced to make extreme choices when confronted by Soviet-Polish authorities. Unwilling to paint propaganda-based socialist art, this modernist artist was eventually crushed by the authoritarian boot. The film's palette was largely tinted as grey as the complicit party-liners, especially compared to the passionate (and blue-eyed) Strzeminski. Although his choices affect his daughter, his students,

and those peers who try to support him, Strzeminski refuses to betray himself. He says an artist must paint "in harmony with one's self." Strzeminski's defiance ends disastrously. This film leaves haunting afterimages. Dogmatic practitioners of Polish party politics feel eerily similar to Republican/Trump partisans today. Are we only a lockstep away from such drama?

The theme of struggling artists facing moral dilemmas also played out in the *Cézanne et moi* film. In mid- to late-1800s, young artists felt intense pressure to be accepted by the bourgeois Parisian Salon. The impressionists (eventually) turned traditional art upside down, and Paul Cézanne (eventually) upended impressionism. Cézanne's childhood friend-- aspiring but initially impoverished author Émile Zola--found a measure of success writing social realism. However, Cézanne, while striving for artistic perfection, seemed always disturbed—with his (money-controlling) father; with his mistress/wife; with fellow artists—even with the impressionists whom he first admired. This film's narrative shifts time and space between the beautiful natural scenery of Aix-en-Provence (Cézanne's childhood home), Médan (Zola's middle-class suburban adult home), and squalid Parisian artists' quarters. The central conflict in the film (and in life): Zola wrote a book about painters (*L'Oeuvre/The Masterpiece*) in which the main (deeply distraught) character Claude Lantier bore striking resemblance to Cézanne. Feeling betrayed, Cézanne cut all communication with Zola. In the movie, Cézanne accuses Zola of selling out--of becoming the "bourgeois you hate," and Zola almost seems to realize that truth. Cézanne, conversely, chooses authenticity and follows his muse. The result? Over a

hundred years later, Paul Cézanne is widely regarded as a primary innovator of modern art (expressionism/cubism), earning the praise of masters such as Picasso, who called him the "father of us all."

Both *Afterimage* and *Cézanne et moi* raise vital questions about how to survive in unjust circumstances while making ethical individual choices. Can we resist social dogma or economic pressure and stay true to our own creative spirits? Can we live authentic lives, without harm to others or self? Can we imagine "a brotherhood of man," with "all the people sharing all the world"?

“Try to imagine a world in which all people 'live life in peace.'”



Three of the five inspired women who began "Being Bloomington, Being Together" (Nancy Kalina, Mary Ann Macklin, and Laurel Reed Adams; not pictured: Karla Kamstra and Janiece Jaffe).

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