

ON THE COVER

Bend in the Road by Marissa Voytenko

Portions of this article are based on an interview with Marissa Voytenko on April 27, 2022, and information from the artist's website at www.marissavoytenko.com.

We are all on a series of journeys in life. The cover art for this issue of *American Psychologist* depicts, using encaustic painting techniques, a road with two bends. The artist, Marissa Voytenko, describes her own journeys to find herself as an artist. The painting was completed in 2021 and represents a journey of facing fears of limitations, of rounding corners to face the unknown, of shifting, twisting, and leaving behind constraints. It visualizes a journey to find oneself, to pursue optimism over despair, and to follow whims and callings, despite uncertainty, and irregardless of what others may think.

Voytenko, who now lives in the Chicago, Illinois area, has always been aware of her artistic interests and abilities, appreciating the encouragement of teachers to pursue creative endeavors during her childhood in an agricultural area in Northern California, north of Davis. During high school, she expanded her training and completed a formal educational art curriculum at the California State Summer School for the Arts, and then matriculated at Westmont College, a small liberal arts college in Santa Barbara, California. During college, she was able to travel internationally, to Mexico, India, Nepal, and Italy and also spent time in San Francisco, journeys that expanded upon her prior experiences and gave her confidence. This conviction led her to Boston University where she completed a Master of Fine Arts degree in studio teaching.

As a teacher, Voytenko taught middle school and high school students, although not only art but also an array of other subjects. Although she recognizes the critical role that teachers played in encouraging her to pursue art, she was also aware of a certain level of dissatisfaction with her teaching career. Was this what she really wanted to do to be happy? She had a persistent yearning to become an artist but felt that it was not an option for her during these years. She recalls

being challenged in particular by one friend who told her that she really needed to take the risk and follow her dream to be an artist.

Fourteen years ago, the time came for Voytenko to pursue art full time. Her husband, Vitaly Voytenko, PsyD, encouraged her to become an artist. Dr. Voytenko is a native of Ukraine and the couple lived in L'viv for 3 years. During this time, their son was born (they also have a daughter who was born after they returned to the United States). Voytenko experienced the challenges of raising an infant in another culture and dealt with feelings of isolation as she also was establishing herself in art communities in Ukraine. They remain very connected to Ukraine and committed to their family there, experiencing the painful uncertainty and helplessness associated with the current war. It is personal and intense for them as her in-laws are not able to leave Ukraine.

Bend in the Road highlights these journeys, particularly the "what ifs" of life, and facing possibilities while subduing fears of the unknown. The artistic media is interesting and a journey of its own in creating the final works. Encaustic painting uses molten wax, pigment, and resin. The artist works with it while the wax is hot. It moves as you work with it, and Voytenko notes that it is a messy process. The goal is to create a worn and weathered texture and to eschew a flat or pristine look. It is rough, abraded, and intended to demonstrate whimsy and playfulness.

Voytenko wants us to "lean into the bend and the fear" and find out what is around each bend. The painting might be thought to represent railroad tracks, but this is not what was intended. However, the journey does include inner roads of exploration and experience. The messages of *Bend in the Road* are ones that we can likely relate to, as we pursue our own journeys, facing fears and anticipating what the next turn in the road may reveal, both challenges and opportunities.

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Art Coeditor