

## THE MOMS

April 17, 2014



### NELLIE KING SOLOMON

*Artist*

"Hi-ya" is a painting about the moment you're going to make it happen. You spend all this time in preparation for something and then the actual time spent on the moment itself is quite small and calm. Just like in life: it's chaotic and busy and most of your time is spent taking the steps to set yourself up. But the actual moment can feel anticlimactic, its built up for so long and the reality is the moment can be small. But it is in these small moments that Growth begins to churn, that your heart is open and your mind present, and you speak to the world. It is these small moments you disengage from the noise and center yourself. You are in touch with your soul, your community, your child. And this is where your Hi-ya manifests and gains power.

I asked artist Nellie King Solomon to describe her "Visions of Growth" and to take her rituals around painting and apply them to techniques and ideas that we all can carry with us to process our steps and prepare for "our moments". I knew she was the perfect person to engage in the conversation when she showed me her latest latest work of an airplane runway & an abstract ring blob painting, which is about the moment when you are on an airplane and the captain asks you to turn off your phone, all technology. Where are you then?

These questions I ask of myself all the time and have stimulated the current TMP topic of Growth. In the disconnect with lack of noise, where do you land? Are you at peace? Are you present?



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I am Nellie, Nellie King Solomon. I am a painter, a mom, and a native San Franciscan who returned after a decade of travel and living abroad.

I come from a family of designers, authors, tv writers, hat makers, pianists and shrinks. In short, generations of Californian creative professionals who made their livings off their wits and taste.

Nellie King Solomon, it's quite a name to carry. My mother definitely had this sense of humor.

I do well in bright open spaces. I live a double, or triple, life. And I am hell-bent on Growth.

That said I knew that just having a career was never going to be enough for me. Wanting a family was the most radical and fresh ground I could cut. It still is.

My inspiration comes from the hubris of the Gold Rush/ Tech Rush/ Start Ups...that flow in cycles thru our boom and bust culture of San Francisco. The raw expanse, the inherent uncertainty of our California land, and the current events both in my life and of our times.

Inspirational painters who are my contemporaries:

Gajin Fujita (LA Louver)

Tomory Dodge (ACME LA)

Lisa Sanditz (ACME LA)

Alexandra Grant (for her raw painting style and personal content)

Zio Zegler (for his prolific momentum and moxy)

Dana Harel (for her true to life scale and revealing delicacy)

Joshua Hagler (for his heroic and grotesque inquiry)

Monique Prieto

My life is a balancing act, our life in a Peter Rabbit cottage in Sausalito to my studio in Hunter's Point where I am surrounded by gunshots and razor wire. I have only a short span of time to make things happen and produce my art.

When I come to the studio to create, there is an act of quieting down the outside noise, uncluttering the head, and opening the heart. Making my meditation my occupation becomes a preoccupation.

The rituals of concentration I started in graduate school I still use to get into the right headspace. It is about making a deliberate space, creating two different worlds, and staying present in each space I have created.

#### The Ritual:

It is these steps that allow me to close off the world and noise around me, to get inside my mind and body, and to focus on the growth, goals and paint at hand.

1. Buy Azteca baby spicy chicken burrito on 3rd Street.
2. Arrive in studio-open fire escape to view train tracks, turn on lights, hang the work in progress for consideration.
3. Climb the ladder to assess all work in studio.
4. Change into my work clothes/my overalls (like Mr. Rogers).
5. Eat my burrito
6. Lay on the studio couch and use my burrito "coma" to contemplate my next moves. Maybe I sleep. I wait. I look, I plan. I have to be efficient about how to use my time/materials. Wet paint pays the rent.
7. I wait until I find my body running down the ladder into action. And I follow it.
8. Time becomes unmeasured. I work. I lose track of time. Many hours pass. And then, I *instagram* the best moments of the studio session.

My work is like reaching into a dark velvet bag and pulling out everything you're not suppose to talk about. This is what Growth is about, the breaking of barriers and facing the uncomfortable.

"I PAINT WHAT I KNOW IS THERE, BUT CAN- NOT SEE."

**My "Vision of Growth"**

Growth can be an uncomfortable subject.

Or hilarious, fun and disarming.

It has to do with joking away and diffusing fears.

"PPOOFF" and "HIYA"...

Growth is about cleaning out old hurts. Old stuff. Charades you are living. Charades you hold dear that are not working for you. Old patterns of behavior. Old roles you play with the people in your life. The hardest thing you can do in your life is change your role with another person, but growth might be held most strongly in seeing and doing just that.

I went about very deliberately this past year making space inside myself. I aligned myself solely with those who are not afraid of the ways the world is changing and those who have made space inside of themselves to receive it.

I think as women with big lives, aiming at a HIYA moment or coming back from a PPOOFF moment, we can be too much. I want to cultivate a pause, listen, and a safe space for myself, my child, and the men and women around me.

I'm not really buying much stuff these days, I'm more interested in selling off stuff from a bygone era that is not of use and weighs heavily on the living. I then use these funds to make clean and smooth the actual life at hand. My goal-"friction free living".

I'm not interested in the Liberal Conservatism that is so prevalent in SF both in us natives and in those who move here to orientalize the lore of our past and hold us to it. I went to Urban High School and every class of Urban is "The Last Real Class of Urban"...ha ha.

I'm interested in watching and navigating the changing tides of our worlds and regions as they unfold. The art world is changing and San Francisco is in another Boom cycle. It is always in flux. And it still is a Gold Rush town built on shifty fault lands; attracting speculators with hubris and a hunger for gold. I choose to enjoy it.

Gold brought my family here generations ago, but the door does not close after us. San Francisco reinvents itself. I don't fight it or resent it. I'm fascinated by it. The start up millennial generation is launching its visions now.. Each boom bust cycle... I paint about it...and I live in.

**"I TELL FIA TO BE A SELF-RESCUING PRINCESS"**

Kids: Califia (Fia) King Cone – age 6

I've learned from Fia about the stewardship of relationships. Being a single mom: I rely on myself, my family & community to support her development and growth.

Fia gets the best out of each of us. She is loved by quite a team of different personalities. My mom (a designer, writer, no frills, brilliant, say it like it is, woman in all black), my sister (a Waldorfian fairy-loving magical nurturer), her dad (a down-to-earth Mavericks big wave surfer), her step-mom Rhiana (a nurturing and strong occupational therapist), and my dad (a career focused architect who jumps around doing ballet with her in the kitchen).

It's a mixed bag of very different styles of love and gifts to give. She drinks it all in.

**Fia's Fave Five Things:**

1. Singing along with Anastasia's CD.
2. Dress up.
3. Making things from scratch.
4. Her H & M kitty shirt.
5. Her American Apparel puffy skirt.

Fia sometimes seems to channel *Cyndi Lauper*.

I still channel the most elegant woman I ever saw, a stranger in a European airport when I was 10 years old. Perhaps an ex-model in transit, she had pre-raphaelite hair which I have tried to cultivate and wore all khaki, no visible makeup and was radiantly beautiful and real.

I still dress in a monochromatic palate of one color at a time; beige, or whites or blacks, as I'd imagine she might have done.

*Nellie, it is incredible to see life moments through your eyes. How one can stay present and focused, even with the chaos, clutter, and noise around us and how we can take ourselves from the overrun life moments (infused with technology and light-speed pace) into a space of realization, presence and growth.*

*This is a question I constantly juggle with-but I too, am surrounding myself with people searching and practicing the rituals that make us pause, have a conversation, and create action and space.*

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

7:20AM

I wake in my 1920's Sausalito cottage with a golden sunrise over Angel Island and the docks. I take a hot shower.

7:30AM

I pack Fia's lunch.

7:40AM

I wake Fia and crawl back into bed with her as she insists on a "cuddle!" And then, I fill her "kiss tank".

8AM

We talk in imaginary characters together. Fia "becomes" an Irish girl, a coffee cup, a zebra or some under the radar costume she can pull off in school. Fia always lays out an outfit the night before.

8:30AM-8:40AM

I walk Fia into Horizon school and get her settled in a morning meditation circle once the music comes on.

8:40AM

As I leave, I imagine a series of rubber hands giving me Hi-fives all the way down the school hallway for getting Fia to school on time.

Whewww!

9AM-2PM

I work as hard as I can!

9:30AM

I email images and edit copy about my new work to Pauli Ochi of *Ochi Gallery*. Pauli and Peter Maloy are writing a feature on me for *ArtBlitzLA*.

10:30AM-11:30AM

I talk with *Jennifer Muskopf* about the historical and conceptual premise and formal painting qualities of our upcoming Alter Space Residency Collaboration. 84 past lives in 12 paintings.

12PM

For lunch, I make over-easy eggs and spinach with hot sauce to eat on my sunny porch couch. Ideal time for feet in sun and face in shade.

1PM

I struggle with some sort of frustrating tech issue...

1:40PM

I garden or clean to center myself and my home for a few minutes before launching out for pick up.

2:20PM

I pick up Fia.

2:20PM-3PM

We pull over to "cuddle" in the 4Runner in the same spot everyday, play acting rolls, talking, giggling and filling her "kiss tank" again.

3:30PM

*Tamalpie Pizza* in Mill Valley for a \$6 slice and lemonade for Fia and Kale Salad w fried chicken for me.

5PM

Sausalito playground or library.

6:30PM

Home for mac and cheese, movies, cuddles and baths.

8PM

I wrestle Fia down to for a teeth brushing ( her most ridiculous moment of resistance).

8:20PM

Fia lays out tomorrow's outfit on the chair. She is obsessive about this, as it makes her look forward to and know who she wants to be the next day.

8:30PM

I read three books out loud to her in bed.

8:40PM

Lights off and one last story in the dark with the animal of Fia's choice as my prompt.

8:50PM

We both pass out.

12:30PM

I select and forward images to Jumaane N’Namdi for a solo show coming up at N’Namdi Contemporary in Miami.



### 4 THOUGHTS ON “NELLIE KING SOLOMON”

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jess epstein

April 17, 2014 at 6:45 pm

When can I move in??! I want this studio, so much creativity and Ppooft! Love!

↩ Reply

Peter Clare

May 5, 2014 at 8:54 am

This article is nicely done. Fun to get a glimpse behind Nellie’s life curtain.

↩ Reply

Jessica Mullens Engelman

May 5, 2014 at 9:01 am

Exquisite portrait of the artist as a young woman.

↩ Reply

Eve

May 5, 2014 at 2:39 pm

What lovely words and pictures that highlight Nellie and her precious Fia! I am honored to call them my friends.

↩ Reply

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