

The edge of distraction and creativity

"The whole culture is telling you to hurry, while the art tells you to take your time. Always listen to the art." – Junot Diaz

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver died last month. I am grateful to her for the way she made me notice nature. But I am most grateful for her diamond-in-the-rough essay in *Upstream* in which this chronicler of nature deviates from her traditional path to talk about the elusive Nature of Time-and Interruption.

"It is a silver morning like any other. I am at my desk. Then the phone rings or someone raps at

the door. I am deep in the machinery of my wits. Reluctantly, I rise, I answer the phone or I open the door. And the thought which I had in hand, or almost in hand, is gone."

Such is the fleeting nature of the creative moment, at least for the artist working hard to make something of nothing. It is like chasing butterflies on a windy day. And in order to have a chance of catching anything, the artist needs solitude,



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that room in the mind, even if one has no separate physical room.

Oliver: "Creative work needs solitude. It needs concentration without interruptions. It needs the whole sky to fly in, and no eye watching until it comes to that certainty...A place apart-to pace, to chew pencils, to scribble and erase and scribble again."

But we cannot point the finger at the door or the neighbor or the

child. Often distraction comes from within. Oliver: "But just as often, if not more often, the interruption comes not from another but from the self itself, or some other self within the self that whistles and pounds upon the door panels and tosses itself, splashing into the pond of meditation. And what does it say? That you must phone the dentist, that you are out of mustard, that your uncle Stanley's birthday is two weeks hence. You react, of course. Then you return to your work, only to find that the imps of idea have fled back into the mist."