I spent 10 years making a sketch (in code) every day and here's what I learned…

👤 zach lieberman   (Follow)   12 min read · Jan 2, 2026
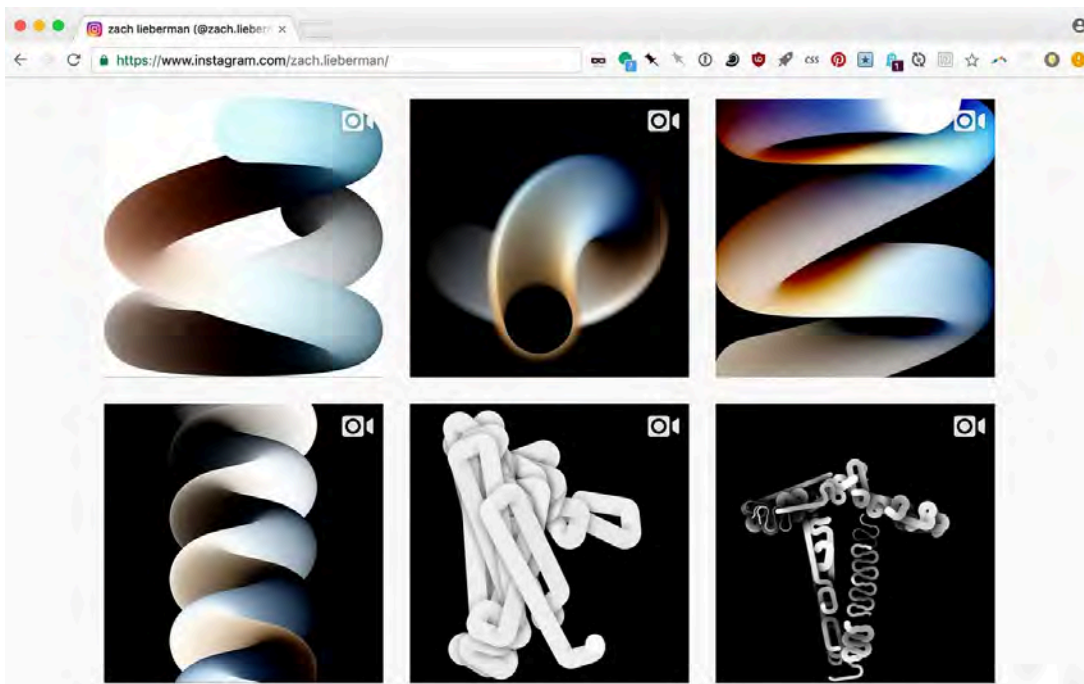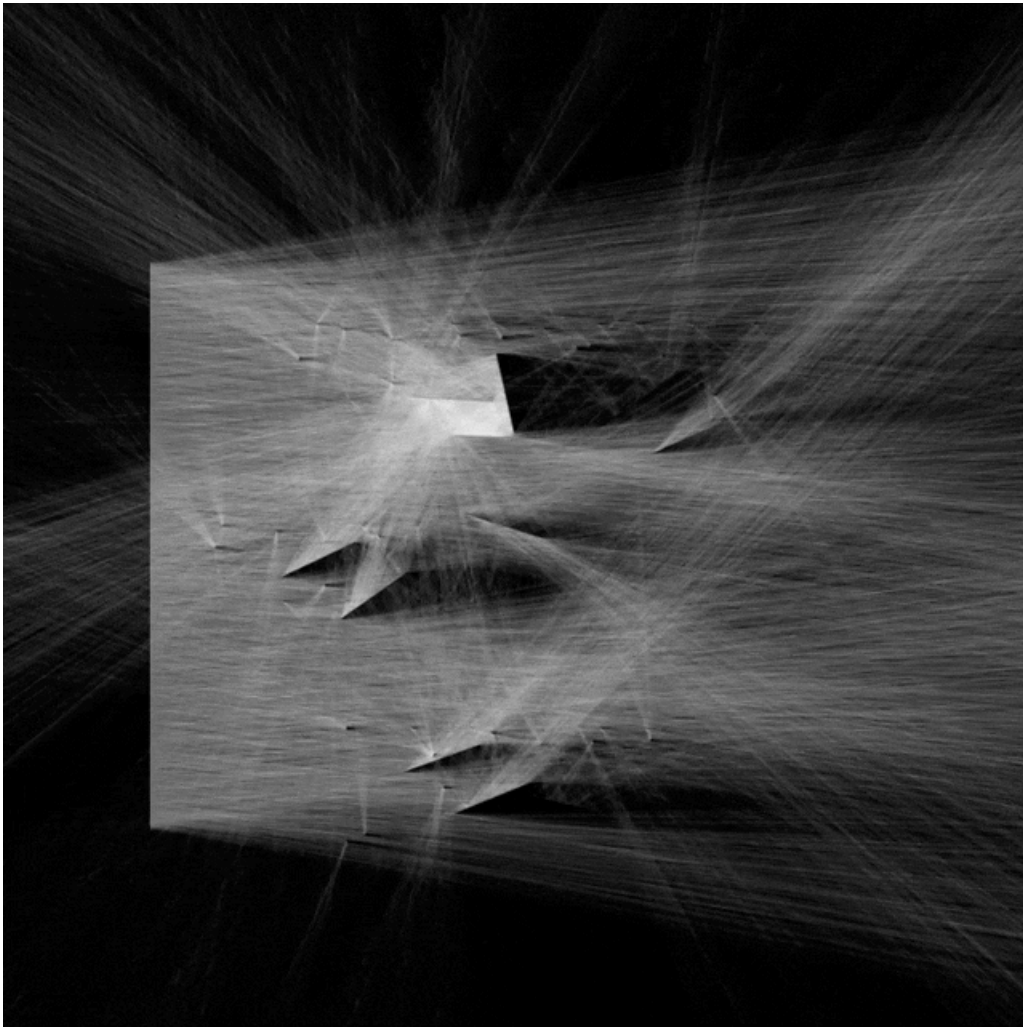
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(I just hit a milestone of posting a sketch every day for the last 10 years 😅. I've written about each year here: <u>2016</u>, <u>2017</u>, <u>2018</u>, <u>2019</u>, <u>2020</u>, <u>2021</u>, <u>2022</u>, <u>2023</u>, <u>2024</u>, <u>2025</u>)

Exactly 10 years ago, I posted a Happy New Years sketch, something I created with C++ code and recorded using screen capturing software, on Instagram.

My first sketch, Jan 1 2016

While it was the start of a new year in 2016, it was also the end of a very tough year for me. In spring 2015, my father passed away. I remember that I was not on Facebook or Instagram at the time. I was traveling back from France when I heard the news, and I created new accounts on these services, ones I had avoided until then, just so I could stay connected with friends and family.

I was thinking a lot about his life and creative practice, and my own life (I had recently become a stepfather), and reflecting on a kind of unhappiness I was have with work — a sort of mini midlife crisis. At that time I was working a bit like a musician: working 6–9 months in secret on a project the way a musician might work on an album, and then dropping it at a festival or event. I remember feeling intense disappointment when something wouldn't do well — like not getting press or follow up invitations for exhibitions. I knew intuitively that I wanted to work more open, stress-free way. When I was a student I just made things. I remember being jealous of the freedom

my students at the School for Poetic Computation had, and wondered if there was a way to work like that.

After the new year's animation I started posting every single day after that and never looked back.
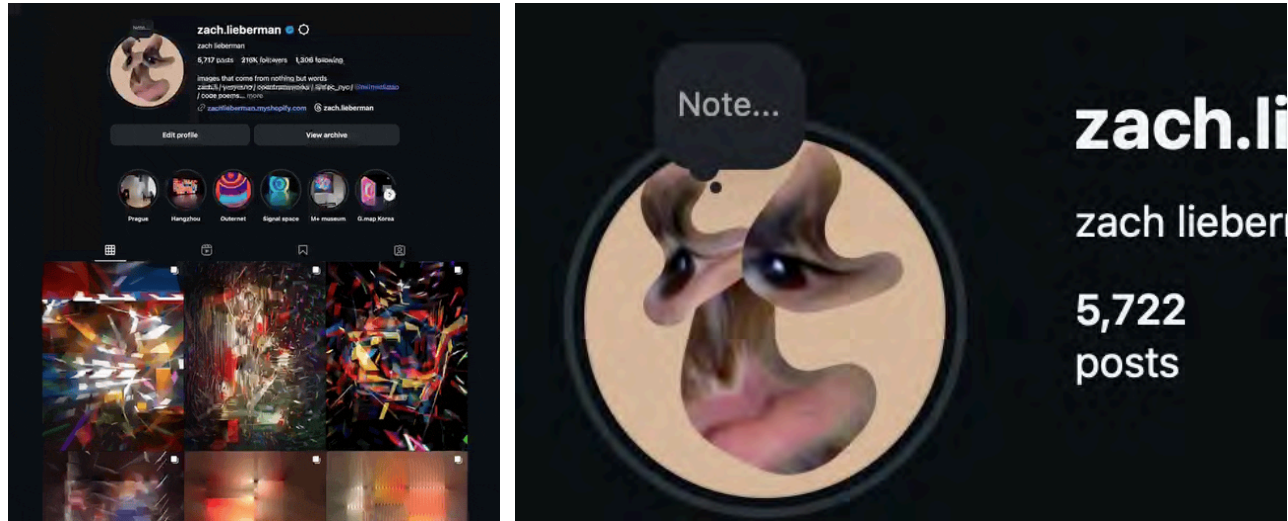
5722 posts! that's about 1.56 per day over 10 years.

Often the sketches were iterative in nature: I'd take something from the day before, and it became a game of changing it to make something new. I started to think of my days now not as AM and PM but more like BP (before posting) and AP (after positing). It became a rhythm and something I started to look forward to every day.

Fast forward to now, I've been doing it daily for 10 years, so I thought I'd try to document the 10 most important things I've learned. I apologize if these are repetitive to things I've said in talks or in write-ups, but I think they are important, so I'll repeat them.

(1) Always be iterating 🔁

I think the most important thing I've found in developing a daily (or regular) practice is taking the burden away from making something new or novel every day. The blank page can sometimes kill you — starting from nothing is great sometimes but usually, if you don't know where to start, you don't start.
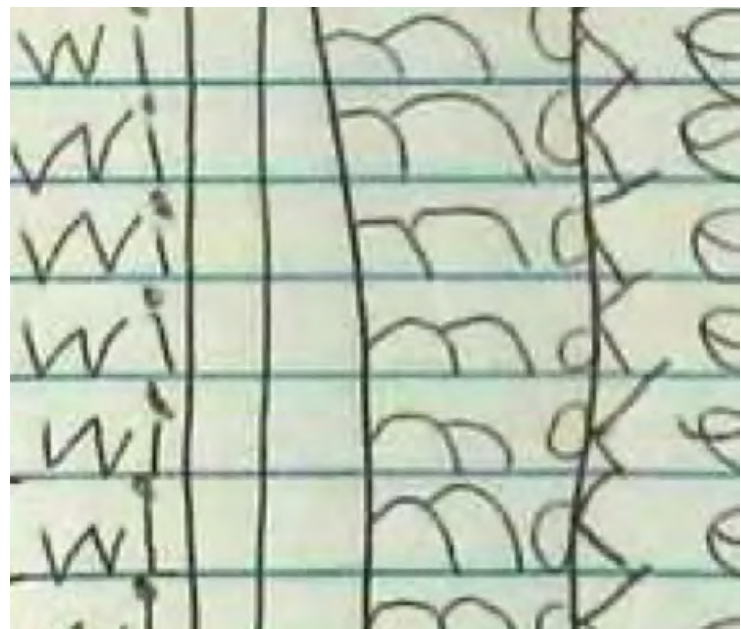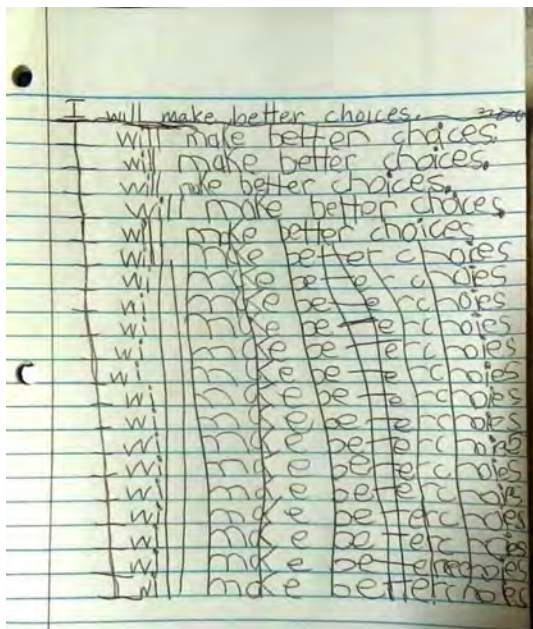
My solution is to focus on iteration. My motto is simple: Make something new out of something old. Every day I'm often taking code from the day before, and remixing it to see what it tells me.

When you do something repeatedly you have to take shortcuts. When I think about shortcuts, I always think about desire paths, the sort of paths that can be formed by people walking the shorter route. I think those shortcuts become your style and who you are as a creator.
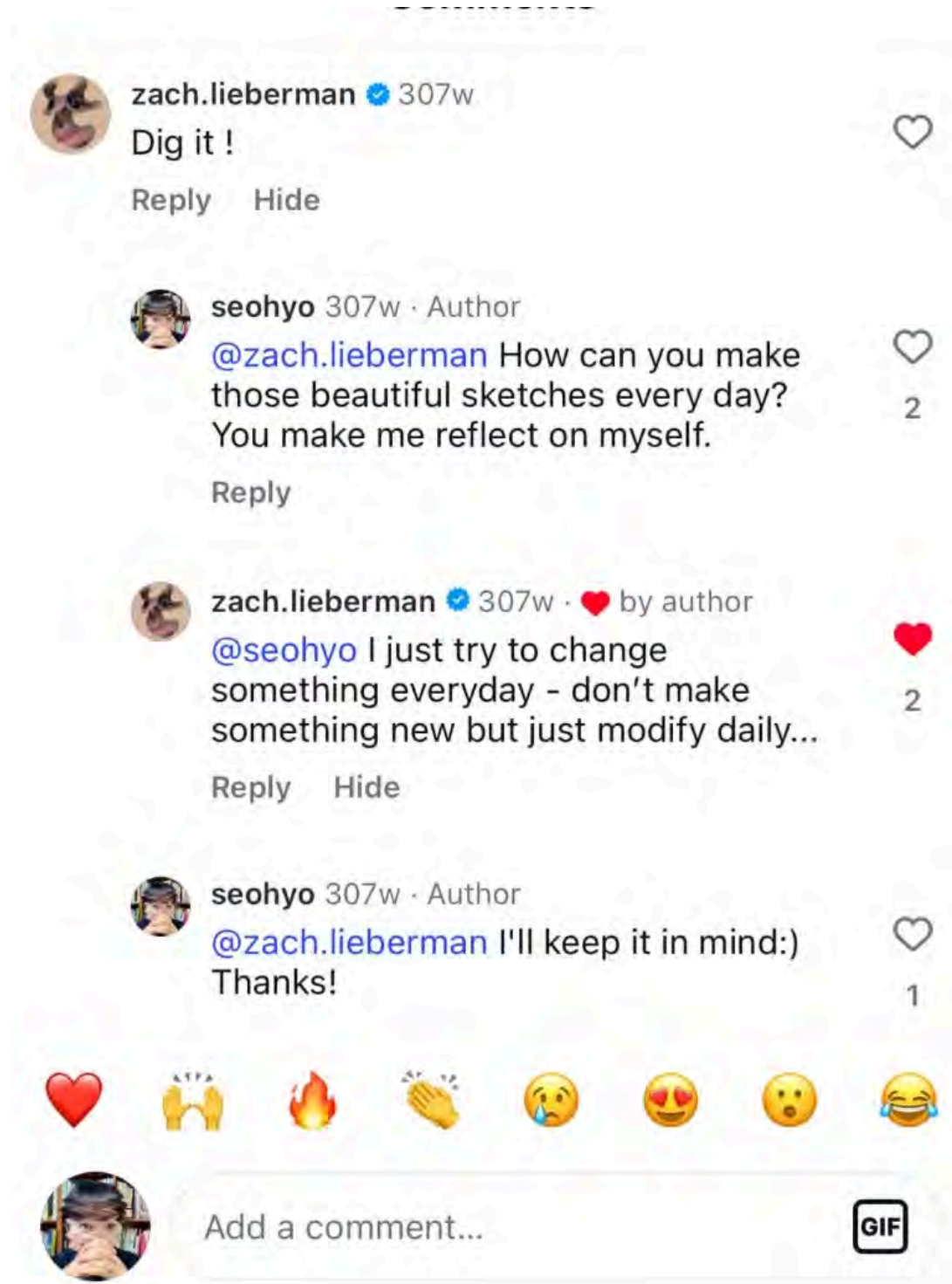

desire paths

Whenever I talk about shortcuts, I always show this image where a child had to write *I will make better choices* over and over again — and they optimize it so that all the l's are one line. It's the repetition that leads to shortcuts.

The "I" has been optimized to be a single line

2/3/26, 8:17 PM

I spent 10 years making a sketch (in code) every day and here's what I learned… | by zach lieberman | Jan, 2026 | Medium

This spring I was in Seoul meeting with a friend of mine, Seo Hyojung, who is an extremely talented creative coder, who also does daily sketches. At lunch she told me something quite touching — she actually started daily practice after something I said to her in a comment (which is essentially this point).

zach.lieberman ✔ 307w
Dig it !
Reply   Hide

seohyo 307w · Author
@zach.lieberman How can you make
those beautiful sketches every day?
You make me reflect on myself.
Reply

zach.lieberman ✔ 307w · ❤ by author
@seohyo I just try to change
something everyday - don't make
something new but just modify daily...
Reply   Hide

seohyo 307w · Author
@zach.lieberman I'll keep it in mind:)
Thanks!

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

Add a comment...   GIF

Since that interaction she's been daily posting for years, and I am amazed at how her work and process have evolved.

(2) Document everything 📷

Since I'm working every day, I'm generating thousands of images and videos. One thing I've found incredibly helpful is having a single folder called "everyday" where I put everything I make creatively. These files are like breadcrumbs: they document a creative evolution and are often useful for helping me find my way back to a certain place.
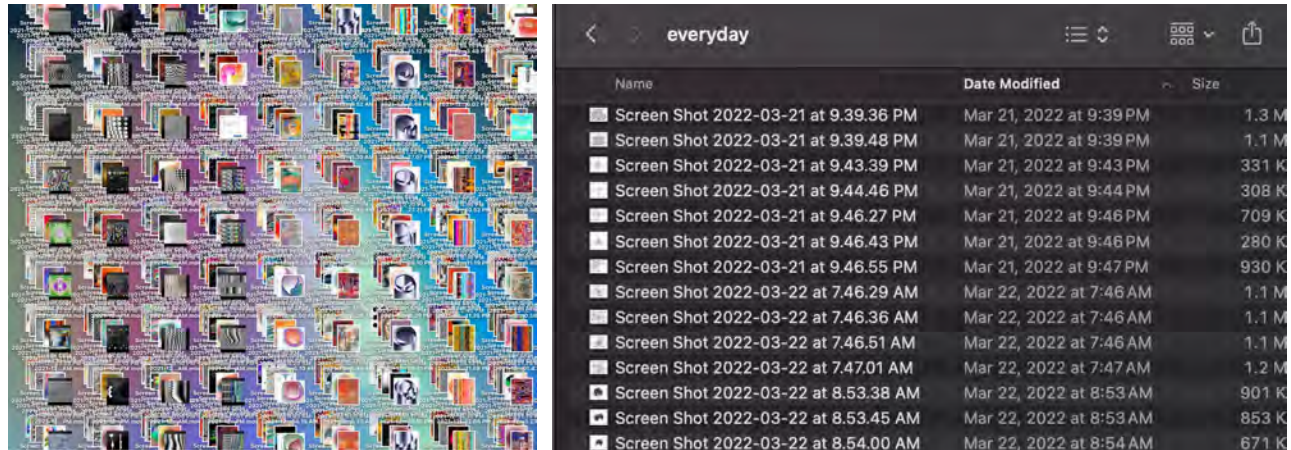
How my dekstop looks before I put things in "everyday"

Another tool that has helped me immensely was created by one of my MIT Media Lab students Lingdong Haung called SrcSnap.
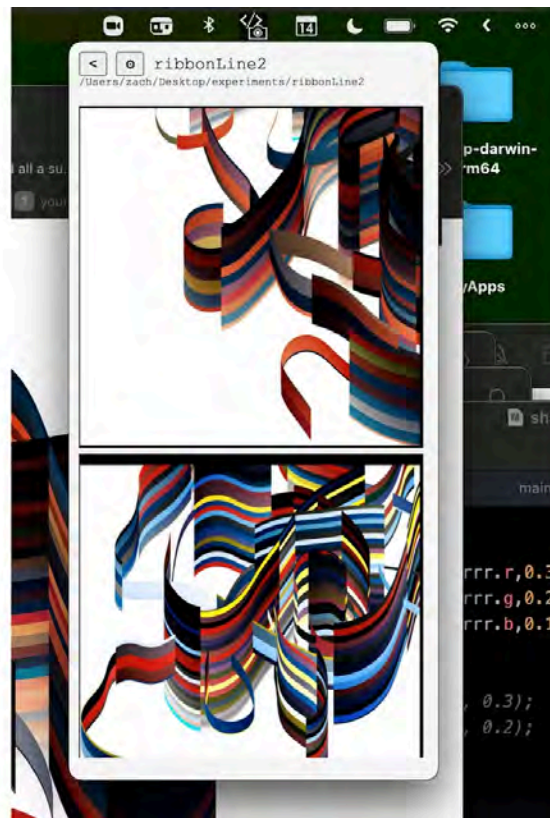
Srcnsap

It essentially ties the act of screenshotting to an automatic git commit. I found that, so often, I would change code, see something I liked, take a screenshot, and then continue changing the code, overwriting that previous moment. This app sits in the background, watches for screenshots, and when sees a new screenshot stores the internal state of a project in its own git repo tied to that image. If I ever need to find the code at a specific point, I can do so through the images.

(3) Reduce all friction to publish 👏

I remember one of my former students, Evan Roth, made an amazing project as part of Rhizome's 7x7 project, where artists were paired with technologists to make a unique artwork in 24 hours. Evan was paired with Wordpress founder Matt Mullenweg and they built a Wordpress plugin that plays an applause gif every time you publish a new post (video). It's such a simple idea, but I've always felt like I want to internalize that in some way — publishing should be celebrated, and if there's a way to make it fun, we should.

In my case, I made a concious decision to not overthink publishing. If I like something enough to take a screenshot, then it's likely someone else might like it too. Over time, I've started to have a better sense of when I want to share something, and I always strive to make the process as seamless as possible. Typically it's as simple as taking a screenshot or recording, AirDropping to my phone and publishing it. In the past when I've had more complicated steps — like using ffmpeg to adjust the bitrate of a video — I found it created too much friction.

(4) You are doing it for you 👉 👈

I really like these lyrics from the rapper JME: "Music is reason I make music. I am the person I make it for"
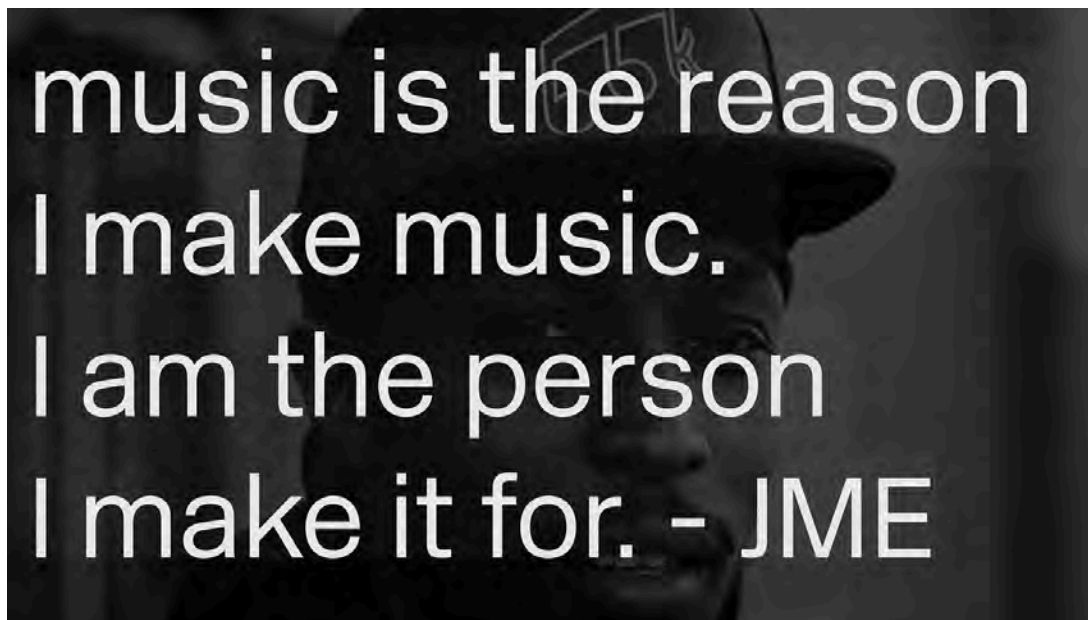
I think this motto is ideal, and something I always want to have in the back of my head. I'm sketching because I love sketching. I'm doing it for myself. I'm not doing it for attention, likes, or engagement. I'm not doing it to advance my career. Obviously those are worthwhile things, but I think the main motivation should be that I love this medium, that I want to see what I can do and how far my imagination and intuition can take me.

The other thing about this quote is that it reminds me of what daily sketching is for me: it's essentially a diary. I make things and share them, but at the end of the day these are diary entries. When I look at sketches now I can often remember where I was when I made them, what I was feeling and even what mood I was in.

Something that's interesting is when people like something I don't like, or I like things people don't like.

I like it and people don't like it (😊☹️)
I don't like it and people like it (☹️😊)
I like it and people like it (😊😊)
I don't like it and people don't like it (☹️☹️)

To me those are the most interesting moments because they teach me about how my ideas can be in and out of harmony with the world. To me those misalignments show me what ideas I want to fight for and explore further. If you only do things that you like and other people like it can be much harder to learn.

(5) Seeing with other peoples eyes 👀

This is sort of at odds with point (4), but I think one super power I always wish artists could have is to see the world through someone else's eyes. You can only see the work through your own eyes, and it's harder to know how other people experience it. For me the most revealing and insightful moments have come from people telling me what they see in the work.

I love it when someone mentions an artist I am reminding them of — to me it feels like a door opening to whole other world. I love it when people tell me what they see, what the work reminds them of or even how it makes them feel.

Sometimes I even reteweet things people have said with the tag #artisticgoal so that I can find them again. These kind of interactions are really meaningful to me and have made sketching a valuable exercise.
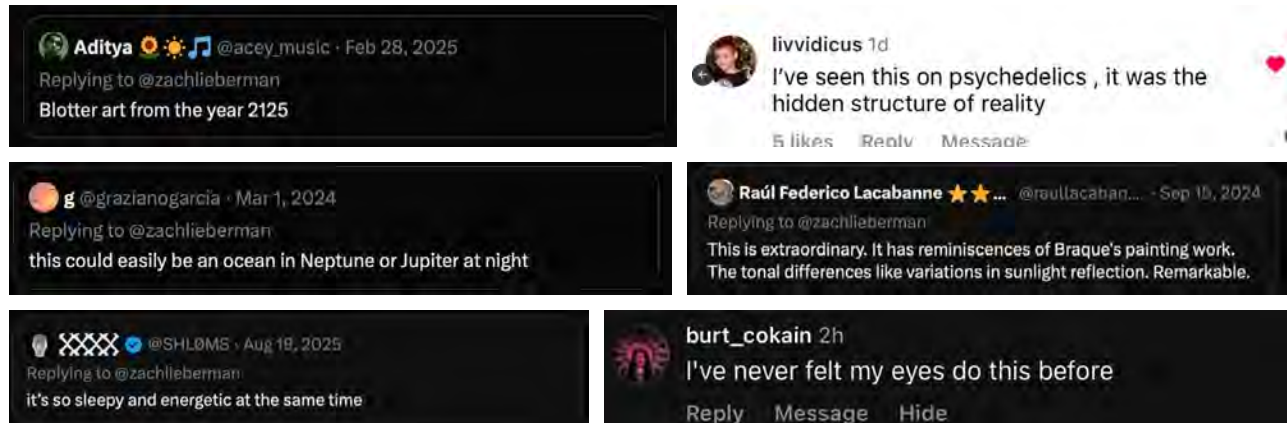
Sometimes the comments are so funny:
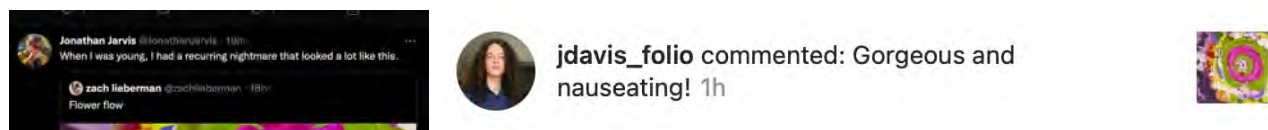
But my favorites are simple like this :

I had a bad day, I
saw your work, my day is good now.
Thank you

(6) You can repeat yourself ♻️

This is sort of similar to 1, but I think it's also important to stress how useful it is to do something again and again. I think artists should feel comfortable going deep on a topic, and revisit ityear after year. There are topics I return to over and over again — like blobs or ripples — because there is always something new for me to find there.

I've been looking at 10 years of work this week and one thing that's struck me is how valuable it's been to have consistent themes to return to again and again. Here's how I was describing it:

It's funny how you see the same things year after year but they are different because you are different, your eyes change ❤️

(7) It sometimes needs to be quick / It can suck 🕛

I remember I was interviwing Beeple, another everyday artist once and he said, "It has to be something you can do in 5 minutes, because there will be days, like the day my wife gave birth, where all you have is 5 minutes." That sentiment stuck with me. There are times where it feels like a fun game to try to do something as quick as possible (but feel meaningfully different).

One of the nice things about doing something daily is that the rythm gives you permission to make things that are not always great. I like the idea that there's always tomorrow. Giving yourself permission to post things that suck, or that you're not entirely sure about, is really ok.

I remember when I taught at Parsons School of Design, around the time that the iPhone had just come out, and I'd see students work for months / years on a game for the platform. I always felt that the longer they worked on it, the better it had to do, which adds so much pressure. Part of making work quickly is actually trying to remove that pressure.

(8) Boredom is important 💭

Above all else, it's important to allow yourself the freedom to be bored. We live in an era where it's almost impossible to be bored. Waiting in line? you can pull out your phone and scroll. It's an era of endless distraction.

As a creator I've found some of the best moments are the moments where I feel truly bored with my own work — and the rythm of making the same style of things daily can elicit a kind of boredom. I look at the code, whatever I'm making, and it can feel like drudgery to pull something beautiful out of it. In these moments — when I am truly aimless and bored, and sort of hating what I'm doing — I often find something unexpected, something really profound or different. When I look for it, I can't find it. It's almost like you have to get to the point where you are *not* looking for it. Those are the points where you find it.

(9) Silence all the voices 🤫

I'm pretty famous with my followers for not taking any advice about what to do. When people make suggestions, I often respond, "DJ does not take requests!". I am thankful that people care enough to make suggestions or say anything, really, but it's very important to me to try to silence all the voices except for one: the voice that belongs to me.
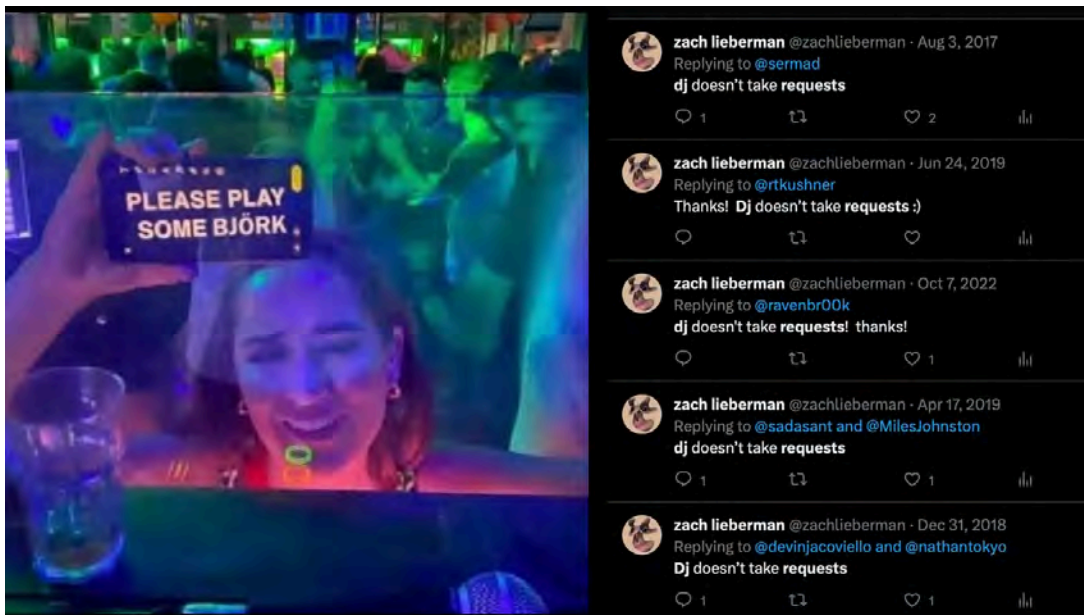
As a creator, there are always voices in the back of your head telling you, "It's not good enough" or "people will think it's silly" or "you're misjudging this." I feel my job as a creator is to silence these voices (as much as possible) to the point where my head is almost empty.

If you are reading this article for advice, I can't stress this enough, that single voice needs to be your guiding light. That voice might be your intuition, your curiosity, your love for the medium or the spirit that got you started. But whatever that is, that is something you need to protect dearly, like an exposed candle flame in the wind.

I love writing "DJ does not take requests!" If people are rude I enjoy blocking them. In general, I feel like my job is to try to make sure my mind is truly empty. I love not having any idea where I'm going or what I want to do — it's at these moments you can listen completely to your intuition and let it and luck, take the wheel.

(10) The Ultimate Goal is Freedom 🕺

If there's anything I want to stress about making something everyday, it's that this is ultimately an excercise in freedom. When sketching, I have no boss. I have no timeline. I have no milestones. No one's paycheck or career is in the

balance. There's nothing really at stake besides my time and my hard drive space.

There are those practical freedoms in sketching, but also a true creative freedom. Excited about typography? Want to focus on color? See an exhibit that inspired you and want to respond to it? You can.

To me those freedoms are ultimately what a creative practice needs: The freedom for something to suck. The freedom for it to be stupid. The freedom to repeat yourself. The freedom to get lost. The freedom to truly listen to yourself. The freedom to go deep or broad on something. The freedom to celebrate the medium for what it is. The freedom to make for the sake of making. The freedom to capture your feelings or whims. All of these freedoms are what make a daily practice rewarding. The only constraint is time and the dedication to keep making and sharing.

Sometimes when I would be working on a crazy hard project — pulling an all nighter or just in crunch mode — I'd take a pen and draw a the letters K.G. on my hand, like a tattoo. It stands for "Keep Going". I think that's the simplest way to describe a daily practice. I posted something once at the start of 2016 and I kept going.

I guess if there's one thing I'd say, after all this, for anyone interested in or curious about this practice it's simply this: K.G.

Creativity   Code Art   Generative Design

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