

Every day I do *The New York Times* crossword puzzle. I would hate to admit how much time I spend on it and am embarrassed when I am caught with the dictionary open on my studio desk. I'll get just part of it on first pass. Then at the end of the day I'll finally realize that "Italian bread" isn't pane but lira and that "dig" doesn't mean pick (at) but rather like. It's a twist of the mind that I like. Being so sure that the word implies one thing and then realizing in a bolt flash that it means something very simple but contextually different. It's a brain fuck; the puzzle jogs me in ways that some art does. Layering of information with a flip.

The other idiosyncrasy involving my puzzle addiction is the tendency to bypass the news articles to get right to my fix. I do this when I am especially hurried or nervous. However strong my loyalty is to the *Times* (I grew up in New York City and have read it since high school) I often want to turn down its volume, to make a quieter, less verbal paper. That's why I made a piece called *News* by painting over a copy of the *Times* — page by page — with the color of the paper itself, thus leaving a mere pentimento of the text. All the giant ads for new movies and department store sales were hushed. Who cares really about all those things to buy and sales ads at which you can spend "and save" at the same time? And as much as the op. ed. page can have astute columns, it's a strain to wrap my brain around it all every day.

This morning I asked the cook at the diner if she'd mind turning down the radio. I was actually reading the *Times* over breakfast and found that the squeezey earplugs were not blocking out the boom boom of Tom Jones. Keep it down, would j'ya? Could ya turn the radio down? All this noise. My stomach knots.

That's what I want. A little air. A little quiet. Then I'm a better person and I can actually have a positive presence in the world. Not that I don't listen to bands like Helmet, Quicksand, and Nirvana, but all the reportage and political facts in the world won't help us unless we are in touch *in a tangible way* with what we are striving towards.

I realize that this may sound self-contradictory, but sayings like "hate racism" or "fight poverty" or "war on drugs" are like double negatives that do not mean a positive. Better to treat someone with respect, give something away, value sobriety. Same with art. Make something you like. Why add to the pile of what you're criticizing? What's the use?