

Miranda Writes

By Nick Cox



Photo by Stef Reynolds

Miranda Aisling has written every single night since March 22, 2008.

"My journals are up there, all 19 of them," says the local artist, author, educator, musician and overall creative-type person, pointing to a high shelf in the packed bookcase that spans one wall of her second-story home studio near Magoun Square. "I can't fall asleep unless I write... Even when I'm not home, when I don't have my journal on me, I'll text myself."

Seldom does Aisling pull one off the shelf and revisit it, though - that's not the point. The value of journaling, to her, lies foremost in the simple act of picking up a pen and putting words on paper every night, so much so that the question of *what* words almost ceases to matter.

Her new book, *Don't Make Art, Just Make Something*, names preoccupation with end results as one of the deadliest inhibitors of creativity. Recalling a middle school art class she once led, she writes that "I had an hour to get them to draw and three of them wouldn't even touch their pencils," because they

were so afraid of drawing something that wasn't "art." The key to creativity, she writes, is to forget all such notions and simply make *something*.

Aisling herself has never been one to let life's inhibiting factors stand in her way. In eighth grade she decided to apply to college. "I knew what I was interested in and I wanted to do it," she says. "I didn't want to spend four years going inch-deep over everything." As her peers got ready to start high school, Aisling was accepted to the early college program at Mary Baldwin College and began her freshman year three weeks after her 14th birthday.

"The first two years there were really tough," says Aisling. "I was eight hours away from my family. I only went home for Thanksgiving and Christmas." But now, at 19, she can hardly imagine her life going any other way. "As much as it blows everyone's mind how young I am," she says, "it blows my mind that I'm supposed to be [a sophomore in college], because this is my life."

The new book - which Aisling, with typical disregard for the

accepted way of doing things, self-published via Amazon at the beginning of June - is strikingly at odds with many common romantic notions about art. If you set out to make "art," she writes, you will be paralyzed from the start - it's only through many toilsome and unglamorous hours spent making *something*, making *anything*, that art eventually emerges.

Along with her books, Aisling also keeps what she calls "The Idea Blog" where she posts a new idea every day. In keeping with her emphasis on process over product, the blog began as a trash can in her studio - she says its main purpose is just to keep her fecund brain from cluttering. She also uses it as "backup," in case she wants to start a new project and ideas are not forthcoming. Mostly, though, she says, "it's just stuff that piles up."

In all her endeavors, Aisling's project is to "help reconnect art and learning to daily life." She hopes *Don't Make Art* will be "a spark" that will help stymied artists overcome their inhibitions. Her next non-fiction book, whose working title is *Bubble-Wrapped*, will further develop her idea that "we have bubble-wrapped art and education, because in art we are afraid of breaking things and in education we're afraid of failing."

She is also in the process of establishing "The Somerville Salon," a monthly gathering where Somerville's creatives can meet each other and exchange ideas. Her ultimate goal, to found an art space called "the Community Art Hotel" that would be "half art center, half hotel," is still a long way off - "five to 10 years," she says - but there's nothing wrong with that: Aisling has nothing if not time.



SOMERVILLE SQUARES

An arithmetical equation shows that the city's squares, from Ball down to Union, all add up to Somerville.

GO GET 'EM, TIGER!

Just your daily four-word pep-talk in Old-West-style black letters against a field of red and with an actual tiger standing in for the last word.

YOU ARE HERE

A simple design with tall red letters beneath a little black X - because, no matter where you are, it's nice to be reminded.

Don't Make Art, Just Make Something: The Process, Struggle and Vital Importance of Getting Started.

Through a pastiche of aphorisms, arguments, recollections, ruminations, quotations and the occasional poem, Miranda Aisling makes a compelling case for an approach to creativity best summarized by Michael Landon, whom she quotes: "Ready, Fire, Aim." The only way to reclaim one's creative spirit, she writes, is to put out of mind all thoughts of failure or success and just make something. In a world where standardized tests have come to dominate American public education, and school art programs are being cut left and right in favor of more test prep, the message of *Don't Make Art* is as urgent as it is inspiring.

**DON'T MAKE
ART,
JUST MAKE
SOMETHING**