Creative Block--What is it, and How Do I Get Past It? by Gail Carolyn Sirna

All creative people experience a time when they just cannot come up with any ideas for their next project, be it a painting, a movie, a song, or a book. And it seems almost self fulfilling: if one decides he has a creative block, he will almost certainly find it impossible to get past it. It's almost like identifying it makes it impossible to overcome.

But, my pretties, there are ways. First of all, try very hard not to obsess on the idea that you have run into a creative block, for this will just confirm to you that you have. Assure yourself that an idea will come along sometime soon, if you just relax and go about your business. Because it will. And you can help it along.

Since we are in the art field you want to be immersing yourself in visual cues, rather than auditory ones like music, although music might help, too. But please don't sit down at your drawing board with an array of sharpened pencils and a big sheet of paper and say: "Today I will design something." This is too sterile an environment. Go look at something.

If it's daytime go visit a museum or gallery and see what other artists have found fit to put on canvas. Maybe you'll be taken with a winter scene by Grandmas Moses, and be inspired to do your own winter scene. Not just like Grandmas Moses, but suggested by her. Or maybe a still life bowl of fruit by Renoir will catch your fancy, and you'll want to try one with needle and thread. Perfect! And don't be embarrassed to take your ideas from some other work of art. The great artists did this all the time. Today the museums will say "This painting is Cassatt's homage too Manet." or something to that effect, because they identify that the one artist was inspired by the other, and sometimes painted almost an identical scene, but in his or her own style.

If the galleries aren't open then avail yourself of art books or magazines. It's a good thing to have some of these on hand for ideas, and to se how other artists have handled design challenges. But sometime it's just good to let your mind wander through some beautiful paintings to get your own creative juices flowing.

I was in a class on design one time, a class with Barbara Smith, and she recommended as treatment for creative block, that we just stitch on anything. In fact, she thought that a kit, or someone else's design, with all the decisions made for you, might be the best thing. There is something about the repetitive nature of stitching that will free up the mind and allow it to wander about and seize upon ideas that might become future designs.

Late last year, right before Christmas, which is right before our proposals are due for the national seminars, my guild chapter had two guest teachers, Debbie Stiehler and then a little later, Tony Minieri. The last thing I need is more pieces to stitch on, but I like both these teachers and I wanted to be supportive of my chapter so I signed up for the classes. It was so enjoyable to just sit and stitch and not have to make any decisions about what thread to use or what stitch. I didn't have to worry about making choices that would fit into a two day time frame; I could just stitch.

And what a bonus!!!As I worked on these two projects the ideas just flooded in, so many that I couldn't even record them all. But enough that when it did come time to sit down and say to myself: "Today I must design"--I could. I had lots of ideas to send to the big seminars.

And now that I am in the madly stitching the projects phase, well that's easy, too, for I must have made many of the design decisions while I was doing that other stitching.

So do not despair, my friends, when the creative well seems pretty dry. go visit your local museum; stop on the way home and buy an art magazine, and then sit down and stitch on something. I'm betting you'll have some new ideas in no time.

Teachers for 2007 are: Shay Pendray, Pam Godderis, Michele Roberts, Ann Caswell, Jody Adams, Joyce Lukomski, Caela Conn Tyler, Debbie Stiehler, Joan Thomasson