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What I do: I make abstract collage-paintings. I also work in encaustics.

It is 4:30 in the afternoon, and I have to leave in half an hour to go teach a class. My workspace is covered with the detritus of art making, paint tubes and bottles everywhere, the garbage can full, piles of collage material... Do I spend that half hour putting things away, cleaning brushes, and tidying up? ARE YOU KIDDING? I spend every last second staring at the work in progress, adding a bit of collage, painting over it, staring at it some more. Then I remember that the chickens have to be fed before I leave – I have even less time - and so I throw my brushes into a cup of water, my laptop into my basket, and race out of the studio, feed said chickens, and arrive at my evening class with whole minutes to spare. In the morning I am greeted by yesterday's clutter – ARGH!!!! – but I soon get distracted by the work at hand. The clutter disappears from my mind until the end of the day, when, again, it seems way more important to keep working or staring than to tidy up.

Given that this is my tendency – and I admit, it does not “work” for me in the way it would for someone who really *likes* clutter or thrives on chaos – here is how I have coped:

Knowing that I have a hard time with organization, I originally set up my studio with some flexibility and accommodation in mind. First I built two main worktables (7'x30") that consist of shelving units as supports, and laminate tabletops (easy to clean, if you get around to it). I cover the top with sheets of white paper (even easier to clean), and change it when it gets really grungy (I save the paper if it looks interesting, to use in collage). The shelves are purposely shallow so I can't lose stuff in the back. I sit or stand between the tables so I can use one for working and the other for clutter. The idea is that I can contain my clutter away from the main work area, and this sometimes works.

I made bookshelves by building a series of cubes from plain pine. These can be stacked in various ways, and they are easy to move around. I do rearrange areas of my studio occasionally, depending on the demands of my work, and this modular system of bookshelves has proved extremely useful.

These two components of my studio have worked to a certain extent – places for storage, and plenty of work surface - but I did find my tables getting so cluttered with paper that I was spending too much time looking for tubes of paint, rulers, palette knives, and other supplies. A couple of years ago I built a half-wall up from the back edge of one of the worktables so I could hang tools on it and build shelves off of it. It is basically a 2x4 stud wall, 3' high, faced with ½" plywood, *bolted* to the back edge of the tabletop and stabilized with angle braces (more 2x4's). I had the plywood cut at the lumber yard (I don't have a table saw), cut the 2x4's on a chop saw (I do have one of those – it is indispensable!), nailed, drilled, bolted, voilà! This does not take real carpentry skills, just

a little patience and the ability to accept imperfection. I built little cubbies out of plywood (glued and nailed) and fastened them to the wall with short drywall screws. The advantage of plywood is that I can fasten anything directly to it rather than having to find the studs through the drywall. Now my supplies are right in front of me.

Another modification I made more recently was inspired by my desire to work larger. My limited vertical wall space (the studio is under a gable roof with knee walls on the longer sides, and windows on the two gable ends) was covered with bookcases, so this was a challenge. I needed to work on a wall, rather than a table, in order to get the appropriate perspective and distance for working large. I decided to expose the wall between two windows on the front gable end by moving the bookshelves to one end of a worktable. I mounted a piece of primed homasote to the wall, which gave me a 30" wide work area. (Homasote is very easy to impale with pushpins or small nails, so it's easy to hang work on.) In addition, I built a stud wall coming out from the gable wall about 5', faced also with homasote. This gives me an area to hang works in progress for viewing. I did have a carpenter help locate the wall and cut the studs to the correct angle and length, then I built it in place. So I now have my vertical workspace. I still needed a different system for keeping my paints, palettes, and tools close at hand for this area.

I created two moveable paint tables by putting boards over rolling file/bookcase carts. (You can buy rolling paint/storage carts with all kinds of drawers and shelves, even easels - I think they are called tabourets or art carts - but they are REALLY expensive.) I use one of these for paint, and one for my "clutter", or tools, pieces of paper, etc. I have a third mobile cart (yard sale item) on which I put my palettes and mediums, water, and brushes to the right of the work wall. For now this seems to work.

My organizational strategy is to:

- Designate homes for my materials and tools (even if I leave them out most of the time). Don't over-organize, but keep the categories loose (drawing materials go in *this* box, rather than pencils *here*, pens *there*, charcoal somewhere else).
- Keep the most frequently used items VERY convenient to the workspace.
- Let myself be messy on a day to day basis, but carve out time once a month or so to put everything away and tidy up the work areas.

My studio definitely reflects my personal sense of order, which is not entirely missing, but is certainly questionable or challenged. My organizational system, like my work, is in constant flux, a work in progress. As my work changes, I try to adapt my studio and housekeeping habits.