



MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



Scratching my itch to be in the presence of art

I've been struggling not to give in to art lust. The galleries, project spaces and museums have reopened in New York and I've been making appointments in the late afternoon when I need a mental break from work. It has been so uplifting and much more exciting than I expected. Everything – works by familiar artists and new artists, in all types of media – seems to stimulate me in a heightened way. This, in turn, causes my itch of acquisition to swell. I can feel myself wanting to scratch that itch.

As I walk from one gallery to the next, the itch seems to spread, becomes more intense. I ask myself why do I have this urge and where does it come from? Is it a knee-jerk reaction to not having shopped for anything but food and wine during lockdown? I call friends who also collect art to talk

about this feeling. These chats quickly become like group therapy sessions for art addicts. All of us are eager to share what we've seen that we loved, what we think is really fresh, what disappointed us, and what we would acquire (we avoid the word 'buy') if we were adding to our collections.

Part of my lust comes from the need to feed my visual curiosity – to see and be challenged by interesting ideas and media. I deeply enjoy being transported by an artist's imagination. Not only does it give my mind a break from the quantitative thinking that is the foundation of my work in personal finance and investments, it puts me directly in touch with my emotional response and my intuition first.

Since 13 March, I have been looking at and digesting the same 29 works hanging on the walls of my apartment. Not only is this the longest continuous period I've ever spent in this place since I bought it, it's the longest period I've gone without rehangng all of the art. Occasionally, over the past few months, I have replaced two or three pieces with works that I stored under the bed, in a closet, and behind the couch – yes, I am that kind of collector. The new pieces added a little fresh interest, but it only lasted a short while. Soon I

could feel that nagging itch bubbling up again.

I looked online and was occasionally enticed, but did not yield to temptation. Looking at art online does not satisfy me, unless I'm already familiar with the artist. And even then, I have doubts. The images look and feel flat. I find it hard to get an accurate sense of the texture and scale of a work.

For months I haven't been able to be in the physical presence of new art in a gallery, or an old favorite in a museum. I have not been able to luxuriate in the wonder of its details, its magic, its achievement. I have missed this, more than I realised. It is one of my fundamental joys in life. Maybe my itch isn't about acquiring art at all; it is the itch to be in the presence of art. So just looking at art in person is scratching that itch. Now as I walk around the galleries and museums, I find myself humming the immortal, and very true words of songwriters Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson: *Ain't nothing like the real thing, baby!*

BRING ON DENZEL DAY

This week and last have been consumed with making sure all the details (script, interviews, musical cues) are correct for my podcast series, *Driving the Green Book*, which debuted on Tuesday. Of course, I'm not working on this alone; but I do review and agree to nearly all the additions, edits, revisions, reversions and further refinements that the team make to improve the podcast. It is quite exciting, but sometimes surprisingly tiring.

To amuse myself during this intense sprint to the debut date, I've started naming my days after characters in movies or television shows. When I'm alone in my study listening to the sound of my voice for hours on end, it's my Miss Norma Desmond Day (*Sunset Boulevard*). But am I Gloria Swanson or Elaine Paige playing Norma?

On days when I have to re-listen to the same episode again and again and again, it's Phil Connors Day (from *Groundhog Day*). Thankfully I don't have the ability to manipulate the real outcome. However, in my bemused, deluded fantasy I'm able to get every change I want.

On a day when, from the start everything seems to be a fight, it is Dominique Deveraux Day (from *Dynasty*), complete with glam shoulder pads and a slightly gentle my-way-or-the-highway attitude. Originally, this was my Joan Crawford Day (*Mommie Dearest*); but I found her word choice in boardroom meetings and her makeup application a bit heavy-handed. Ms Deveraux felt more, well, classy.

Perhaps my favourite is the Denzel Day – no last name necessary. No specific movie role is imagined. It's just Denzel's overall film persona, with a sly charm and a fine *près du corps* wardrobe that radiates a certain warmth and intimacy in my voice that makes the person at the other end of the phone or the Zoom call say yes to everything.

Most of the time the imagined persona only lasts a few hours. Frequently, around 1pm, I take a nap – to refresh my mind, to restore myself to plain ol' Alvin making avocado toast with spicy salsa for lunch.