7,000 Days of Art: What We Can Learn from the World Record Streak of catswilleatyou

A conversation about craft, attention, and making work when you feel empty.



GREG SWAN

FEB 13, 2026 • PAID

This issue of Social Signals was written to Radiohead's OK Computer.

Oh hello from Minnesota again. Earlier this week I talked about the dystopian feeling of cheering on sports and talking about our favorite Super Bowl ads while our communities here are hurting. You may also have heard ICE is leaving Minnesota, but I'm using Instagram to share a daily update from IceOut.org that tells a story beyond what may be suppressed in our social feeds. Let's just say, don't congratulate Minnesotans in your life. Not yet.

Meanwhile, this week I am using my newsletter to highlight a local Minnesota artist who has an amazing and inspirational story. I'm sharing my WCCO segment about the Super Bowl. And read to the end to watch Olympics-level TV camera-work of a dog running down a ski hill. -Greg

Your subscription to Social Signals is valuable to me, whether you're a free subscriber or a paid supporter. If you find this to be worth something, please share it! And consider upgrading your subscription for 2026 to support this work.

Subscribed

7,000 Days of Art: What We Can Learn from the World Record Streak of catswilleatyou



Self Portrait by Matt Semke

There are daily habits, and then there's what Matt Semke has done.

For nearly 20 years, Matt (aka *catswilleatyou*) has created and self-published a brand-new piece of art every single day. No missed days. No skipped posts. Just one man, his imagination, and a relentless creative ritual that has outlasted tech trends, art movements, pandemics, and even Beeple's streak.

On Sunday, he hits Day 7,000. That's a world record.

So what can marketers, creators, and curious humans learn from someone who has built a world of art one day at a time?

For starters: *You don't wait for inspiration. You earn it.*

Matt starts with nothing, shows up anyway, and lets the work lead him. From line drawings and VR paintings to animated characters and AI collage experiments, the art always finds him. Not because he waits for the perfect idea, but because he trusts the process.

"Start. Even if it sucks." - Matt Semke

His mantra? "Start. Even if it sucks." Because in the act of making, meaning emerges.

He has navigated big moments too. Surgeries, funerals, kidney stones, births, ER visits. Through it all, he never broke the streak.

I first met Matt through the now-defunct ESC: Experiential Sensory Collective series of digital-punk art events put on by REM5. I also won an NFT of his art in the early days of the metaverse. And I've become a huge fan over the years — completely in awe of his ability to produce creative ideas every single day.

In our conversation below, we talk about creative rituals, attention spans, the post-NFT landscape, why "ownership of digital assets is cool," and why Beeple is his arch nemesis.

More than a milestone, this is a masterclass in sustained creativity. Matt's work is a daily reminder that the most powerful art isn't always viral. But showing up and making work is success often starts.

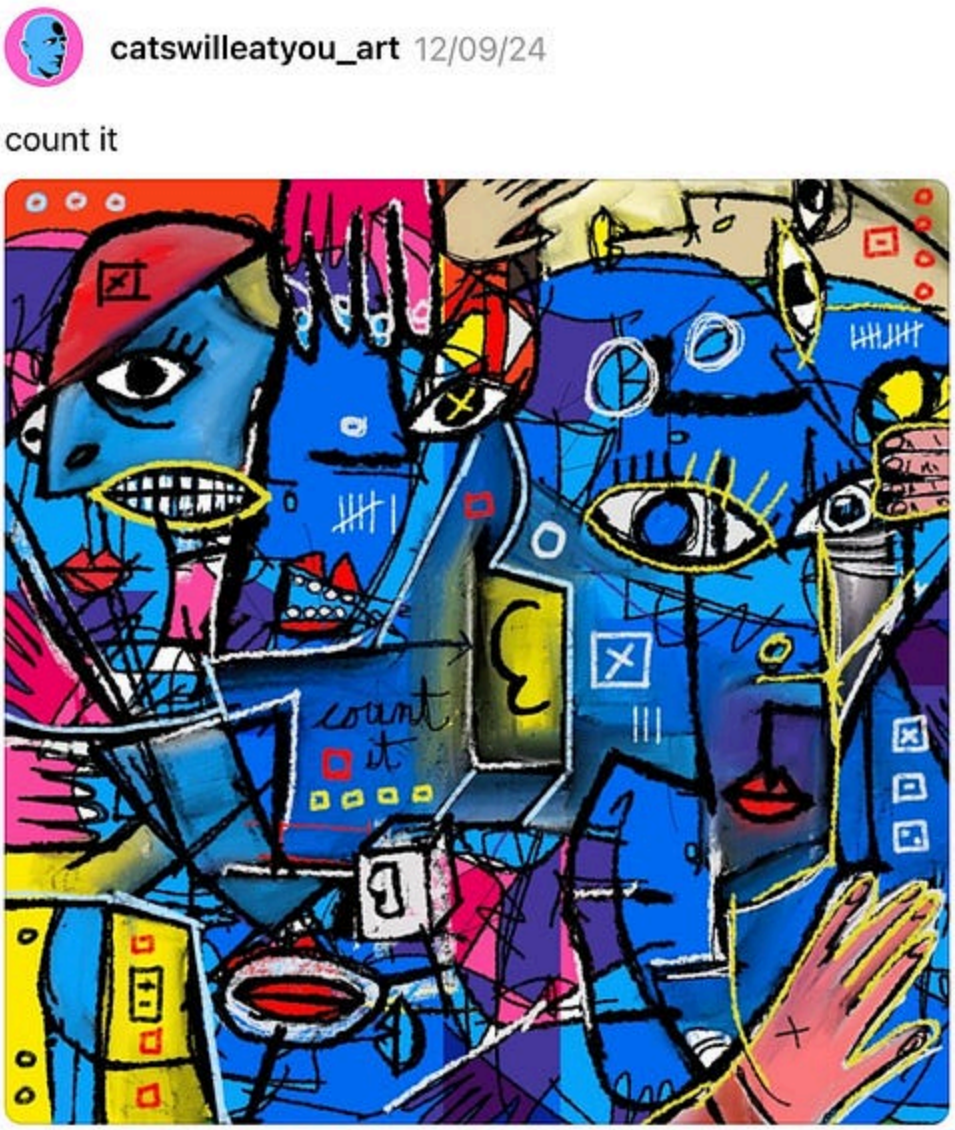
Let’s get into it! *-Greg*



Matt Semke holding “this this is how we do it” which you can buy here

GREG: You currently hold the world record for self-published daily work, publishing new art every single day since December of 2006, just hit your 19th year anniversary, and will hit 7,000 this weekend! Congrats! How did this all get started?

MATT: Thank you! I certainly didn't plan on going this long. After the first few months I saw such an improvement in my work that I felt extra motivation. Somewhere in the first couple years it actually got easier, it just became a built in part of my day. Maybe about 6 years in I discovered I had the longest streak of anyone I could find so that has also kept me going. Now it's absolutely crazy that it's gone on this long without missing a day.



What's your process for making new art every single day?

It's the last thing I do every day. My family is usually asleep. I just sit and work until an idea shows up. I have no plan. I don't even know what medium I'm going to pick. Starting is the hardest part.

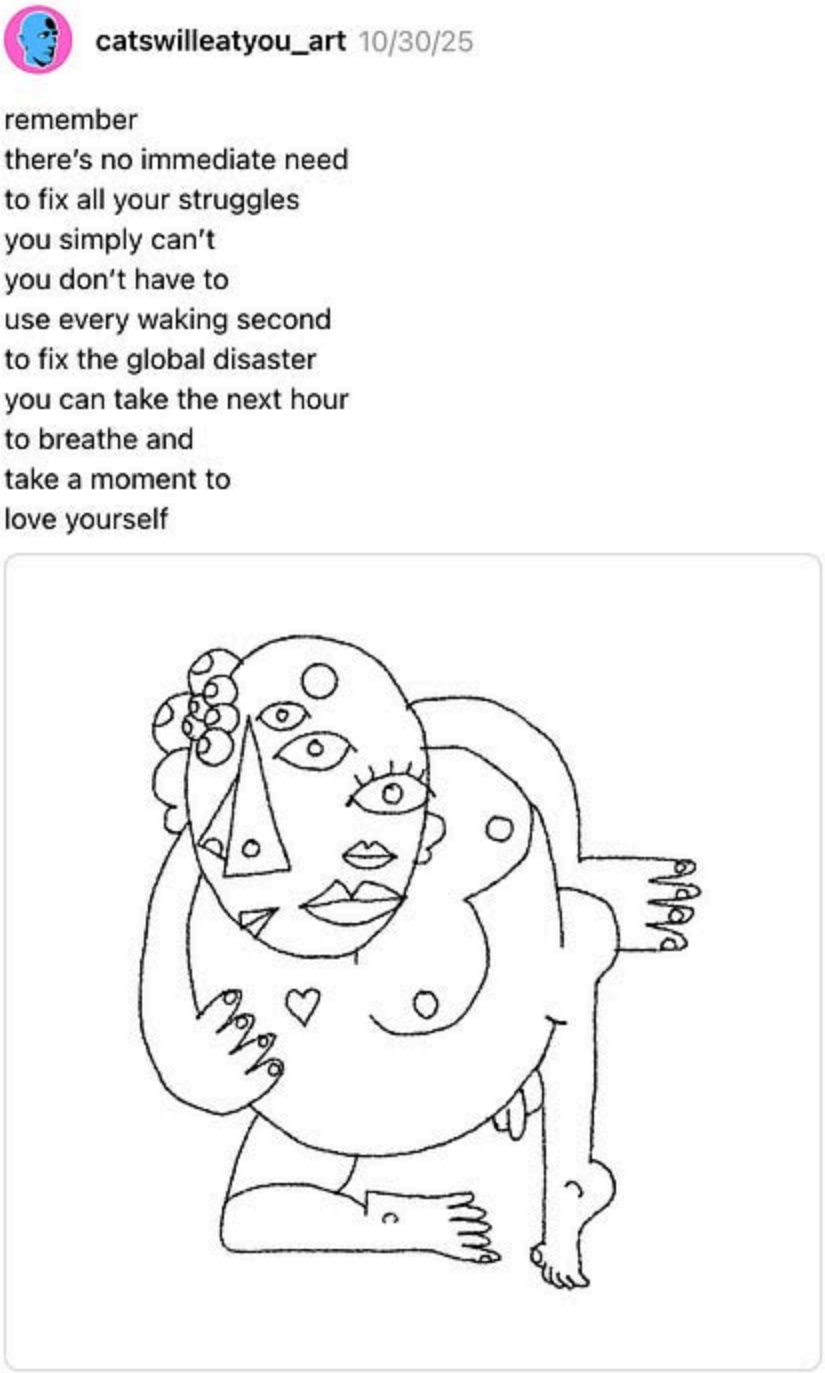
Fortunately the start does not have to be any good because no one will ever see it, and in the process of making something/anything the inspiration will inevitably show up to help finish the work.



Are there ever days you don’t feel like making art? How do you push through?

There’s usually only one or two days a year where this happens. I’ve still managed to deliver art on days where I’ve had ER visits, surgeries, kidney stones, weddings, funerals, babies being born, deaths in the family, and serious life events.

When you release daily you have to let go of perfection, so on these days I will just not overthink what I make. But most days I’m totally excited to be creating, and even on those very rare difficult days it can be a helpful way to process. Short answer is actually “no, I always feel like making art.”



You use a lot of different formats (physical, digital, VR, animations, line drawings, etc). What's your most familiar and go-to style for expressing ideas and which one(s) are you honing?

My most familiar medium is drawing. My painting style is all rooted in drawing too. Lots of my animation is simple line drawings. I'm still honing newer AI tools.

I don't like using AI for any sort of creative heavy lifting (like I can't stand my direct results of prompted images or prompted video) but I'm enjoying using it to create collage assets that I then cut out and modify. I also have just started "vibe coding" more dynamic works of art that change with time or can be interacted with.



Do you follow Jonathan Mann (the Song a Day musician) or any of the long-running webcomics or photo comics artists who have also found notoriety in posting content every single day?

Jonathan and I are friends! We've collected each other's work. In many of his videos you might even see my painting "six thousand sits" hanging on his wall (that was my milestone piece for my day 6000... almost 1000 days ago)

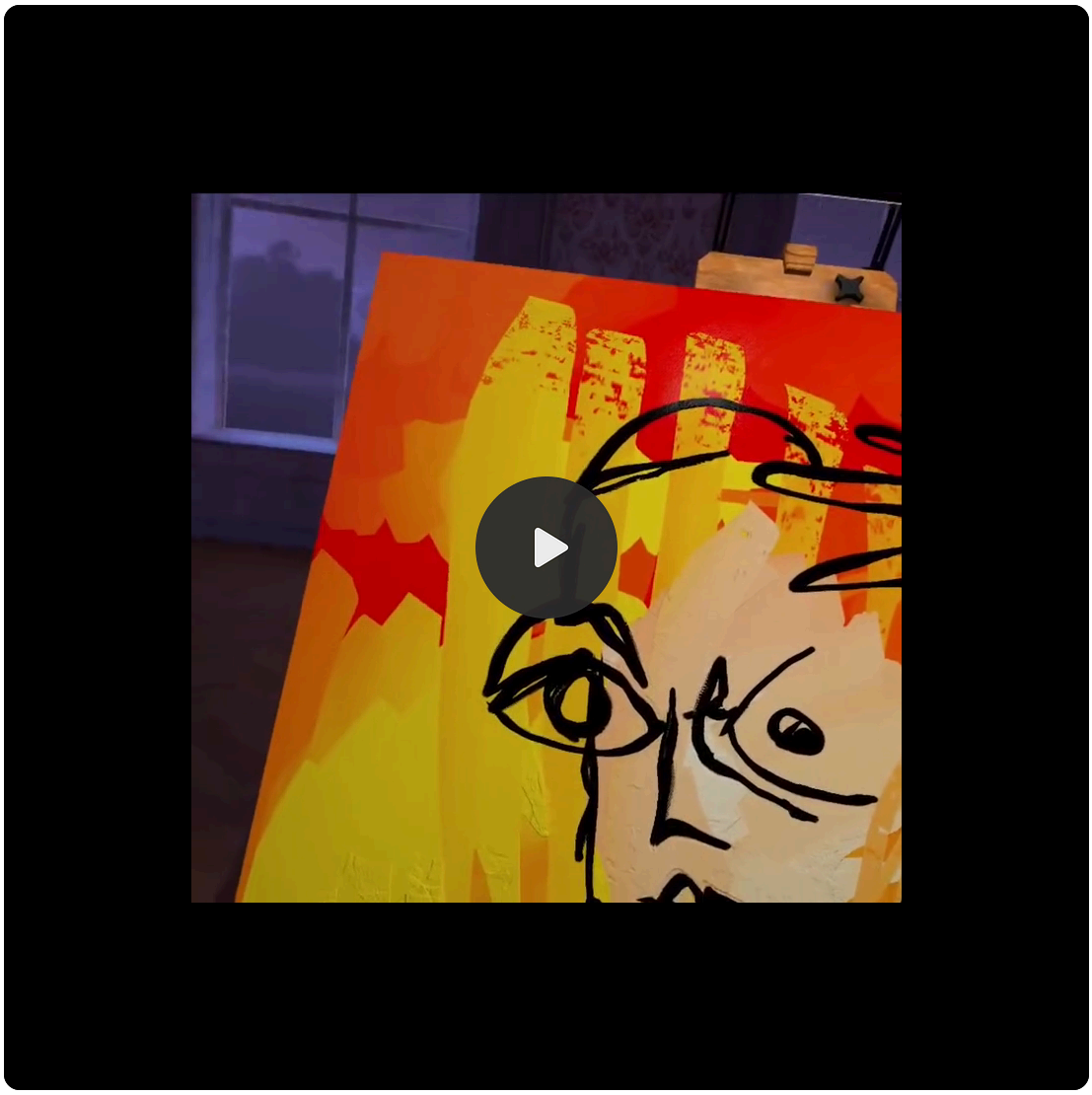
I think his talent and streak are so amazing. He's also been so kind and generous in amplifying my work. I love him so much. I'm also a big fan of another daily artist that goes under the name Bananakin. I think he's somewhere past the 2000 mark now, he's a great artist.

catswilleatyou_art 09/11/25

make room for love



Here's the video of the live creation of "make room for love"
⬇️



Many of your pieces have been “painted” in VR. And then you’ll share the process for how they’re created, which is fascinating! You’ve also sold artwork that includes a digital file that shows how the work itself was made. We’re kind of in a post-NFT buzz moment as the technology is maturing, but there’s still a ton of value in digital-rights management and provenance when it comes to art. How have you seen that technology come into your work, how have you embraced it, and what do you think the future of the tech + art is in this space?

To me blockchain tech currently makes the most sense for provenance and provable digital scarcity, and I still really love NFTs. There’s also

social-fi apps like farcaster and base where there's microtransactions around posting content and we have some noise around content-coins and creator coins.

I don't really know what will stick or what could take off in the mainstream. I'm still embracing NFTs while I'm playing with the new toys too. It makes up the majority of my art sales, and it makes a ton of sense for digital work.

However, the entire crypto space has a huge branding issue right now. We need to get past politicians larping as crypto experts and framing this tech as good or evil. Ownership of digital assets is cool. Creators getting paid for what they create is cool.



Beeple's The First Emoji

I have to ask about Beeple. He's been doing that "Everydays" project, that he started in May 2007 (6 months after you), and hit NFT superstartdom when "Everydays: The First 5000 Days" sold at Christie's for $69.3M in 2021 at the height of the NFT boom. Sometimes press frames him as an unrivaled

character when it comes to the new-work-every-day space, but you are clearly the leader in this space (plus he accidentally broke his streak in May 2022!). I've also seen his work evolve over the years, including becoming more political and leaning into more pop subjects that seem like click-bait versus perhaps working on his specific craft and style. How do you feel about Beeple and the visibility he's given to the everyday category, NFTs, and is there room in the art world for others like him?

His dailies have definitely evolved into taking the lowest hanging fruit and framing it in a way that gets as much fast attention as possible. That in itself is an art form, and he's clearly great at it. I'm not a huge of a fan of his everydays. No shade, I just think it's become predictable on most days and it doesn't give me a big emotional response that I got from his earlier work. BUT his larger works outside of dailies like "Regular Animals" are friggin incredible IMO. While it's still edge-lording and click-bait driven I think it's done to such an extreme that it made a great statement.

At the end of the day, we have such drastically different approaches to our daily art. I obviously find it annoying when the press speaks of his streak being unrivaled. BUT this will change. I continue to pick up attention from more and more credible people. I have moments where I enjoy pretending he is my arch nemesis but I am not at all interested in riding his coattails. That just diminishes my own accomplishments. Of course I would love to trade bank accounts with him, but I would never trade my art style for his. Day by day I am building my own streak, my own universe, my own way and finding my own fans. He's lazy and his streak will never catch mine lol.



purging by catswilleatyou

You have a bit of a tradition for celebrating your anniversary work each year. Can you explain that?

I like to shine the spotlight on myself around these milestones because it's an effective way to get people to zoom out and see the larger body of work. We consume content so quickly now. I've accumulated many millions of views, but in most cases those people have only seen one or two pieces. I try to make great work that can stand on its own, but it's so much more powerful as a body of work.

There's themes and characters and objects that continue to reappear in the work. I even like to do micro-milestone recaps every month. In a lot of cases that video might be someone's first exposure to catswilleatyou.

I publish this newsletter every week, even if I'm on vacation or really busy. I've found the nature of creating content isn't something I have to schedule or make time for — it's just what I do. Does that resonate with you?

Yes. 100 percent. The first year of this streak was the hardest, but since then it's become just a built in part of who I am and what I do.



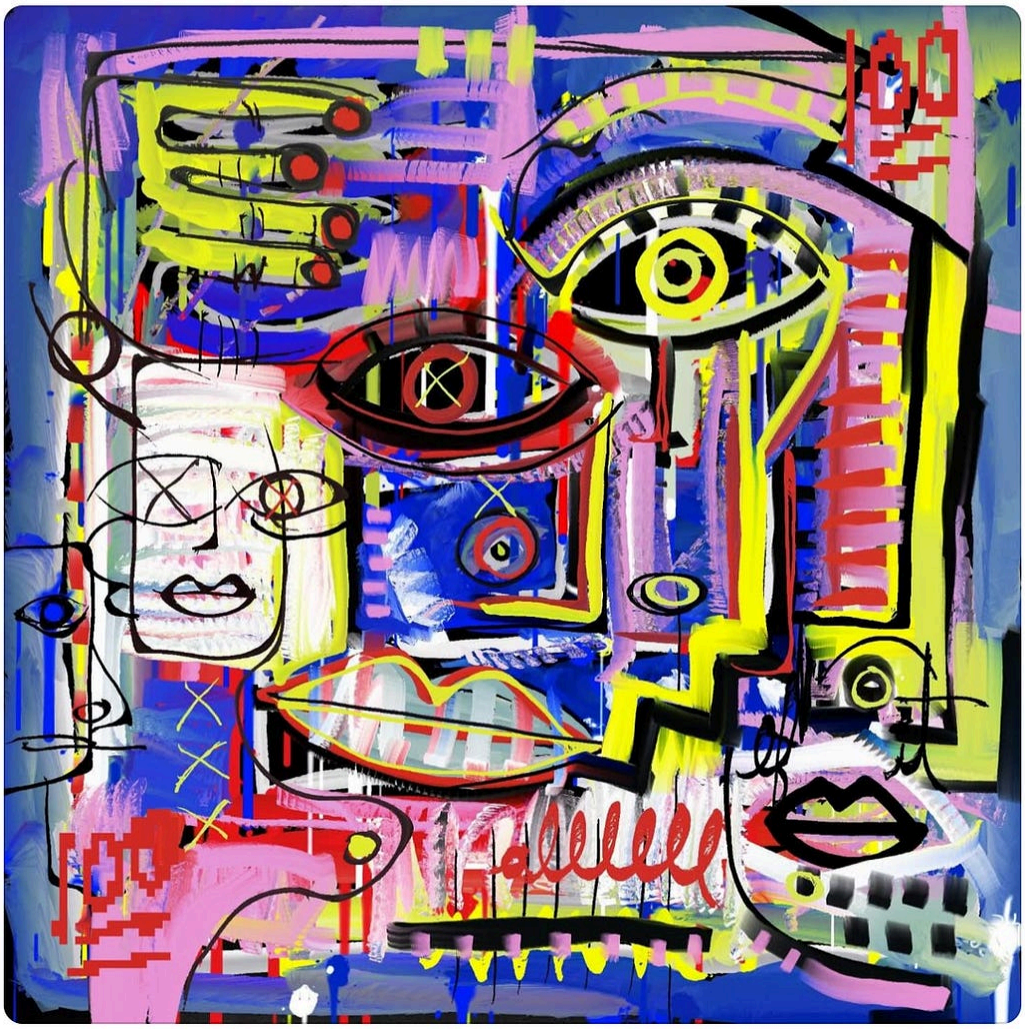
What have you learned from the discipline of creating work on a schedule that others could learn from when it comes to their own craft?

You will absolutely get better at anything you practice doing regularly. Publically committing is also helpful for motivation.



catswilleatyou_art 11/17/25

allllll of it

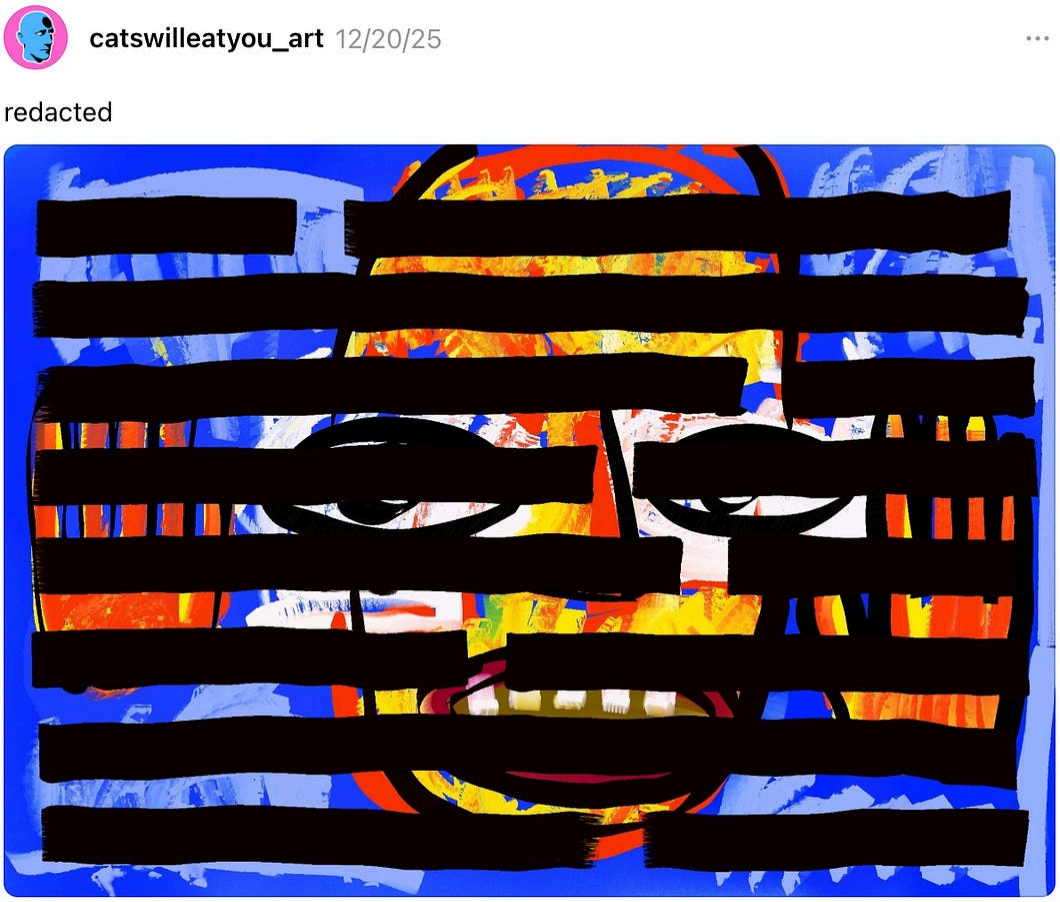


Have you found you've picked up any bad habits or has your work changed in a way you didn't anticipate?

I have a horrible habit with my phone. I'm always looking at all the reactions and comments on my work. It's really hard not to let this influence the current work.

Whenever I have a piece that really hits or resonates with people I will try to sort of recreate that work in a new way. I'm getting better at

recognizing this, and it's teaching me how to approach the work from a more pure space but it's hard not to let those thoughts seep in.



I obviously love your work, but one of your most recent pieces really spoke to me. It's "redacted" (above), and I loved how you walked through your process of making it and then putting in the blacked out lines — the same week as the Epstein report was finished. When you started that piece is that an idea you had in your head you were going to do, or did the canvas lead you there?

That piece was spontaneous, and obviously influenced by the news of the day... but right up until the moment where I started adding the black lines I had no idea that's where it was headed. Most of the time I don't

have any plan of what I'm going to make. I just figure it out during the process.



what does it look like by Matt Semke

In the last month a LOT has happened in your hometown area of the Twin Cities. How have you been using your art to speak to the vibes in our community right now?

What ICE is doing in Minnesota is objectively disgusting and it has filled me with so much anger and sadness. It is unusual for me to incorporate daily happenings into my work in such a literal fashion. I normally take

much broader approaches with my messaging. But this is such a fucked up nightmare it demands a little more from all of us. I feel compelled to react with my art that and free speech while I still have it.

I've probably made a dozen pieces as a direct response to the situation. Not only is it helping me cope, but hopefully it helps counter the lies that the administration continues to put out.



Ice Busters

You are coming up on Day 7,000 of posting in a row. CONGRATS! Will you do another 7,000? What's in store for Year 19 when it comes to catswilleatyou art?

Thank you! Yes of course I'll do another 7,000. This lifelong project has been so amazing for me, I can't imagine ever stopping.

Some of them will be amazing. There will be a couple creative breakthroughs, and some new mediums.



Where can folks find you, buy your work, and learn more?

I'm always sharing art and links to buy stuff on all the major social media platforms.

- x is my favorite even though it's a nightmare @catswilleatyou there
- @catswilleatyou_art on insta
- website: catswilleatyou.com
- cwey.link/shop - is a link to buy physical/traditional art
- cwey.link/tree - has links for people that want to collect digital work

please don't be shy and dm me on any of the platforms if you're interested.

🎤 See Greg Live in 2026



Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference, Feb 12, 2026

- **MIMA Keynote:** “2026: The Year of Vibes” - February 26 - get tickets
- **South by Southwest:** Mentor Session - March 12 - RSVP here

To learn more and inquire about Greg speaking at your event or with your team, visit gregswan.net/speaking.

🎙️ Greg Swan Explains the Internet



For my segment on DriveTime with Jason DeRusha this week, we talked about my two recent Substack posts:

- The 5 Most Innovative Super Bowl Ads
- 1000+ Person SOS Signal from a Frozen Lake in Minneapolis

Be sure to check out: The DeRusha Download: official newsletter of Jason DeRusha

---

⚡ Social Signals

jengumbel 15h

Millennial Minnesotans will tell their grandchildren of the following: the Halloween Blizzard of '91, the missed field goal of the '98 season, COVID, and the ICE OUT of '26.

- Meta was granted a patent for an AI “digital clone” that could learn from your past activity to keep your accounts active after a long break or even after death, replying, liking, and messaging as if you were still online. The company says it has no plans to build it, but the concept is a signal at how “grief tech” is inching toward the mainstream. Maybe my digital clone will keep writing this newsletter after I’m gone? It could actually happen today with little effort!
- ICE is authorized to covertly infiltrate and interact with social media accounts under a new program called “masked engagement,” per documents leaked to Ken Klippenstein you can read here.
- **Term of the Week:** automatic programming (h/t Jamie Thingelstad)
- **Stream of the Week:** Secret Mall Apartment was an amazing watch. "*In 2003, eight Rhode Islanders created a secret apartment inside a busy mall and lived there for four years, filming everything along the way*."
- **TikTok of the Week**: Staples Queen
- **Thread Video of the Week:** Watch this dog run down an Olympic ski hill!

See you on the internet! Keep going! ✨
Greg