Art Studio Investigation of Flora and Fauna in an Artists Environment

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ART STUDIO INVESTIGATION OF FLORA AND FAUNA IMAGERY
IN AN ARTIST’S ENVIRONMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

An exploration and investigation into how a study of flora and fauna, in a local environment, might impact an artist’s studio work was the impetus for this arts-based autoethnographic study. To collect data the artist-researcher played the dual role of an artist and a researcher. She documented her process of art making with photos, sketches, and narratives, reflecting on her practice, in a visual art journal. Data was gathered using descriptive field notes from three locations: from a 400 acre natural preserve which is the artist-researcher’s local environment; the Chicago Botanic Garden; and in the artist-researcher’s studio. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with nine working artists to gather information about their art making processes and influences. Through a combination of simple content analysis and constant comparative method, the artist-researcher concluded that artistic practice is influenced by an awareness of environment, and insightful reflection.

Keywords: arts-based, autoethnography, flora and fauna, visual journal
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

We become creative thinkers, problem solvers, and compassionate human beings when presented with opportunities to learn about ourselves through the arts. While encouraging students to refine their individual skills we, as art educators, should intentionally develop in our students a culture of appreciation for aesthetics, for the arts, and also for ecological sustainability: essential skills for creative and globally responsible citizens. Art educators should offer art as a means for students to explore and reflect on their connection to their own culture, environment, and environmental aesthetics. “Experiences that engage students in viewing the world as ecosystems encourage an awareness of the importance of environment and their relationship to it.” (Blandy, Congdon, & Krug, 1998, p. 231).

How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment? This art based autoethnological research project was a documentation of a meta-cognitive investigation. The research study incorporated the examination of flora and fauna, documentation of an artist’s discoveries, and finally created imagery of aspects of the local environment through the use of media new to the artist. The project was conducted in an art studio, in a botanic garden, outdoors, and in museums. To understand an art process in relationship to creating work, this study met a personal interest in knowledge construction and validation (Maxwell, 2005). What happens when an artist investigates arenas and techniques of which they have limited skill and knowledge? They observe, deconstruct, draw, paint, and reconstruct. They document thoughts, work, readings, and influences and conduct ongoing analysis “in
order to identify emergent themes, patterns, and questions” (p. 130). The final work invited many possible outcomes; two and three dimensional, realistic and conceptual.

The motivation for this study was to understand the art process by recording ideas and emotions, and documenting which factors influenced artistic decisions. In *Art Education as Ethnology* F. Graeme Chalmers writes: “Art education should deal with the comparative ethnological study of the why of art—what people value and why” (1981, p. 10). This project will also reflect on the question: “What sort of artifacts have to be produced by a person so that a specific group will call him/her "artist"? Why?” (p. 9).

This research project was initially explored through reading of scholarly writing supporting art education and environmental aesthetics; Doug Blandy, Kristin G. Congdon, Don H. Krug (1998), Agnes Denes (1983), Heta Kauppinen (1990), Alice Lai and Eric L. Ball (2002), Ronald W. Neperud (1973), Charles W. Rusch (1970) have all contributed to the fields of art education, ecology, and the art curriculum through academic research and published articles in *Studies in Art Education, Art Education, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and *Leonardo*. The second aspect of this project was supported by artist statements, interviews, and scholarly journals concerning the creative process in artmaking: Laurie Anderson and Marina Abramovic (2003), F. G. Chalmers (1981), Alison Williams (2012), Mario Reis (2004), Ellen Dissanayake (1980), and Liza Kirwin (1987) are all published in this field.

**Research Goals**

The goal of this research project was to identify potential growth of an artist in an environmentally inspired art making process. In order to understand this experience the researcher went through a deconstruction process by examining the chosen subjects and
objects, considered a range of possible outcomes, and then adventured into a reconstruction process of refining an idea.

**Research Questions**

The central research question for this study was: *How might a studio investigation into flora and fauna imagery affect awareness of the artist’s environment?*

Four sub-questions were addressed in support of this research:

1. Once an artist is inspired by nature, what is their process of incorporating that imagery into their artwork?
2. How can an artist/art educator make a viable aesthetic contribution to an environmental ethic?
3. What inspires an artist to create an environmental aesthetic through their artwork?
4. What connection can be formulated from this study for art education theory and practice and for environmental education?

**Conceptual Framework**

This research was influenced by the slow progression of environmental awareness in our contemporary society. From reading the writings of Henry David Thoreau, to flying from Sun Valley, Idaho to Salt Lake City and seeing the entropic art of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), or experiencing Andy Goldsworthy’s collaborative work with nature to being enlightened by the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, & Bender, 2006) we as a society are asked to address environmental challenges, global warming, recycling, conservation, and our complex role as caretaker of nature and culture on this planet. As art educators we can play a responsible role by connecting our students to environmental aesthetics. By exploring art making in relationship to the natural world
we may be able to help transform, inform, change perceptions, create interconnections, and inspire environmental awareness in art education and art practice (see Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework).

**Methods of Data Collection**

Scholarly, personal, and practical art education goals are considered in this research. The research method used in this study will be art based autoethnographic simple content analysis and a constant comparative method. All data was diligently collected and documented in a visual art journal sketchbook. Data was created, collected, compared, color-coded and graphed for recurring themes in the researcher’s personal analysis of scholarly published literature, recorded interviews, personal experiences, researcher identity memos, photography, and daily journal entries on events, progress, and frustrations (Maxwell, 2005). The use of triangulation as a method of collecting information in a documented process led to discovery and understanding, and in the process constructed meaning (Sullivan, 2010, p. 49).

**Methods of Analysis**

Personal experiences and artwork were documented and compared for analysis in an attempt to pinpoint patterns and themes. The framework noted a description of materials, time, and location and included reactions to what was observed and an emotional evaluation of process. Data was collected from multiple sources in journals, interviews, observations, and written documents. The researcher analyzed the data to interpret patterns, events, and outcomes. The researcher wanted to identify key moments in order to analyze the study more efficiently (Maxwell, 2005).

Two of Sullivan’s (2010) Visual Arts Research Domains of Inquiry were applied
as the study of environmental aesthetics and art making were discussed and dismantled:

*Discursive* which investigates *meaning* through structure, writing, reflection and interpretation to “identify patterns and consistencies in information” (p. 108) and *deconstruction* which “draws on the critical research of *action* and empiricist focus on structure” in a research process. As Sullivan writes: “studio art experiences are inclusive of the full range of ideas and images that inform individual, social, and cultural actions” (p. 72)

**Theoretical Framework**

John Dewey (1934) believed that “A primary task of the philosophy of fine arts… is to restore continuity between the forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are… recognized to constitute experience” (p. 2). Edmund Burke Feldman (1996) writes, “Art experience generates knowledge *within* the knower… Art knowledge requires our contribution – direct perception-” (p. 105). Both philosophers believed that life experience is not separate from aesthetic experience. By exploring an environmentally inspired art making process, the purpose of this research validated the connection of art education, the genius loci: the distinctive atmosphere or spirit of a place, environmental aesthetics, and generated an understanding of how practice informs theory and theory informs practice. “Teachers who develop reflective and holistic practices help students understand critical and creative processes and promote self-awareness and deep learning” (Carroll, 2007, p. 14)

**Significance of the Study**

“We watch as students negotiate with works of art, trying to decide what and how much of themselves they are willing to invest in an image… our teaching is the business
of guiding their expenditure of aesthetic capital” (Feldman, 1996, p. 73). Students are asked every day to make sense of the unfamiliar or to fit a new concept into the schema of their understanding. This learning often goes through a period of dissonance before acceptance or harmony is achieved. The researcher delved into the process of creating a personal dissonance, in an attempt to create a product which others may value, and developed a new schema of understanding in the inter-woven connection of art education to environmental aesthetics. The study was significant as it explored and addressed the concept that “all things are related and affected by overlapping processes, resulting in a valuing of biodiversity…” (Neperud, 1995, pp. 235-36), which is a crucial concern for our contemporary global community. There is a need to inspire students to realize there is “a delicate balance between thinking globally and acting independently, for the ego must remain intact in order for the self to act fearlessly, with certainty and confidence, and it must be relinquished in order to think universally” (Denes, 1993, p. 387)

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations were unpredictable weather and limited observation time of particular fauna. There was also a learning curve as the researcher grappled with a new skill. Additional constraints were a limited timeframe and the fact that the researcher did not have access to a class of students to test theories or findings. The researcher did “allow for the examination of competing explanations and discrepant data—her research is not simply a self-fulfilling prophecy” having predetermined results (Maxwell, 2005, p. 126).

**Conclusion**

“If teachers reflect on the reasons why they teach art, artists may reflect on the reasons why they make it” (Feldman, 1996, p. 123). This study was an attempt to find a
way to structure the experience of creating art and provided specific stimuli so that affective connections were made between the researcher and the environment. This study was a window into the process of one art educator’s journey; connecting information in the art making process.

Chapter Two addresses the review of literature and existent scholarly writing, which influenced this study. Chapter Three describes research methods, data collection, and data analysis methods used in the study. Chapter Four explains the significance of this study and the study findings. This research paper concludes with Chapter Five, and an explanation of the findings and possible implication for research in art education theory and practice.

**Definition of Terms**

*Autoethnological based research:* A self-study of the changes that occur in an exploration of personal experiences as an artist introduces a new variable into her artistic practice.

*Fauna:* The animals of a particular region, habitat, or geological period.  
(http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fauna?q=fauna)

*Flora:* The plants of a particular region, habitat, or geological period.  
(http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flora)

*Environmental Aesthetics:* The area of philosophy concerned with the investigation of the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments (Carlson, 2010).

*Metacognitive:* Awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes.  
Learners with good metacognitive skills are able to monitor and direct their own learning processes. (Pressley, Borkowski, & Schneider, 1987).
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Research Question

It is only through a massive effort to change daily interactions within the world's ecosystems that life will continue. Art educators should do no less… Bringing an ecologically restorative orientation to their teaching will allow art educators to encourage their students to see themselves as connected to nature, a part of nature rather than apart from it. (Blandy, 1998, p. 241)

While many who live in United States have heard of the terms global warming and carbon footprint these remain abstract concepts for many. Art could be the bridge or link between an abstract concept and a concrete action. The researcher recently moved from the mountains of the West to the Midwest prairie and there is much that is unfamiliar in the world outside the researcher’s front door; indigenous plants and trees, farming landscapes, unfamiliar birds at the feeder, and new skylines.

The researcher lives in and conducted much of her research in an environmental community of 336 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Designed (LEED) dwellings on 400 acres: 300 of those acres are preserved as open space and natural prairie. The community was designed to strike a balance between human impact, as we are an invasive species, while leaving enough space for plants and animals, that existed pre-human, to thrive. The 10-acre lake that sits central to the community is named after Aldo Leopold, author of *The Sand County Almanac*, an early conservationist, and considered to be the father of wildlife management. Leopold’s legacy inspires us to see the natural world “as a community to which we belong.” (Leopold, 2012, p. 1)
This arts based research project explored the question: How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment? This research combines intertwined topics: Environmental art education, philosophical perspectives in affective art making, and relevance in practice. The following chapter is a review of the scholarly literature accessed to support the context of this research study.

**Conceptual Framework**

As artists and art educators we are obligated to: see, to learn, to teach, and to contribute to mankind’s knowledge by developing a discerning awareness of our world. The focus of this study was to document an aesthetic experience within an environmental approach.

**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework**
The conceptual framework (figure 2.1) is offered as a visual reference guide to explain the interconnections of the research. The framework addressed the researcher’s experience and facility with materials; her goal for addressing learning a new medium, technique and skill; her interest in incorporating an environmental awareness connection to her work; her influences in the process; and the method of collecting and documenting the data.

**Environmental Art Education**

Modern society embraces self-sufficiency, individual uniqueness, materialism, and detached technological autonomy. Suzi Gablik writes, “The boundary between self and other is fluid rather than fixed… We are talking about a more inter-subjective version of the self that is attuned to the inter-relational, ecological, and interactive character of reality” (as cited in Rendell, 2006, p. 150). Art making is an individual endeavor, yet the artist is influenced by and also hopes to influence culture. For centuries artists have been influenced by the natural world. Artistic interpretation of the environment has historically reflected the trends in and of the society in which the artists live: *dominion*: the view that humans dominate nature, *stewardship*: which interconnects the boundaries of art, and science to create an awareness of the natural world, and currently *union*: in which art education examines the interdependence of all living organisms within particular environments through interdisciplinary approaches (Stankiewicz, 1997, p. 4).

**Connectivity**

Having been influenced by the work of Joseph Beuys’ 1982 monumental environmental piece, *7000 Oaks*; the unconventional ecological work of Mel Chin, and Mark Dion; the subtly nuanced ephemeral, almost spiritually reflective work of Richard
Long and Andy Goldsworthy; and Lynn Hull’s dialogue on biodiversity, restoration and preservation of nature in an artistic way has inspired the researcher to use a creative voice to bring awareness to an environmental aesthetic by incorporating local flora and fauna imagery (Denes, 1993, Gablik, 1992, & Lankford, 1997). Teaching and creating art that offers a connective environmental aesthetic can invite multimodal investigations between the sciences, culture, art, and nature, and also demonstrate a balance of cognitive, scientific, affective and aesthetic pedagogy. As Neperud states: “we are concerned with an environment interacting with and contributing to human existence… …patterns of life within a particular social, cultural context join formalistic aspects as a focus in determining environmental quality” (1973 p. 9). Dissanyake addresses this stating: “the ways in which meaning was apprehended by our ancestors were not divided into separate entities called "art," "science," "metaphysics… art is a manifestation of culture” (1980, p. 399).

**Active Participation**

Brit, Krug, and Sheridan found, in a study of an action-oriented inquiry of contemporary ecological art and community, that “active participation was the most valuable aspect of this interdisciplinary project.” They found that “educators and students can learn to understand the complexity of relationships among art, culture, and nature by immersing themselves in and interacting with their environment.” They state: “Nature and culture are interdependent” (1997, p. 9).

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison (1993) are contemporary ecological artists who use action-oriented inquiry processes to engage in multimodal investigations of science, culture, art, and nature. The Art & Ecology 1996 Summer National
Colloquium, Ohio Partnership for the Visual Arts, The Getty Education Institute for the Arts, and The Wexner Center for the Arts are a few organizations that are investigating action-oriented inquiry and ecological aesthetics in research (Brit, Krug, and Sheridan, p. 13).

**Environmental Stewardship**

An environmental art stewardship approach can be strengthened when students spend time outdoors observing and engaging in their environment or when teachers facilitate art discussions framed around an environmental sensibility. In *Art, Culture and Environment*, McFee and Degge (1977) suggest that teachers encourage student awareness, analysis, and participation in cultural responses to their environment. Blandy and Hoffman write that “encouraging art educators to be cognizant of their unique biotic and geologic communities, to promote language as a means to affirm life-sustaining relationships, and to suggest a critical analysis of taken-for-granted concepts” (1993, p. 23) supports this holistic view.

In *Art Education: Towards an environmental aesthetic*, Neperud states:

Art teachers would seem obligated to the role of visual critic, and particularly teacher of criticism, considering the valuative dimension of art. Furthermore, the social nature of man extends these concerns beyond the formal aspects of a work of art into the environmental realm (1973, p. 8).

Our relationship to our environment is dynamic, full of sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tactile experiences alerting our senses. In establishing an art education centered on place we empower voice, understanding, change, and interconnectivity in
future generations. For it is through art making and art education that values are clarified, intensified, and made more vivid for aesthetic appreciation (Gotshalk, 1966).

**Autoethnography**

An autoethnography research study according to A. C. Sparkes “encourages connection, empathy, and solidarity, as well as emancipatory moments in which powerful insights into the lived experiences of others are generated” (Bochner, & Ellis, 2002, p. 221). For Ron Pelias, the goal of autoethnography is the “use of self to explicate culture” (2008, p. 311). Ken Beittel (1990) perceived his writings and art practice as “seamless relationships between knowing, doing, and making” which is the approach this researcher will take as she documents, reflects, and creates a body of work based on her local environment and her personal history.

The artist researcher’s desire to engage in this artistic research study is summed up in the words of Louis Arnaud Reid:

> The desire to apprehend the object of inspiration and to make the valuable moment somehow permanent, is the artist's desire for mastery over the moment, partly for the sheer joy of mastery, and partly because the valuable moment…will be a reflection…of his own vision, of his own spiritual insight (1926, p. 189).

**Self Study and Sense of Place**

Autoethnography is defined as a “genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). This self-study narrative engaged an intense and transparent reflection. The researcher analyzed her personal values, beliefs and cultural background as she conducted this study and in the process the researcher unearthed a better
understanding of the creative process through a direct examination of her artistic practice and influences. The researcher came to understand what Sullivan describes as transcognition: “where forms, ideas, and situations are informing… the artistic self during visual arts practice (2010, p. 133).

This research was inspired by documented interviews of working artists, by a lifetime of reading about art and art history, by interpretation of artist statements in gallery shows, and by a personal quest to investigate a private art practice. It is what Wallace Stegner (1992) describes, as an exploration:

…Inward, toward the core of what supports… physically and spiritually… a knowing that involves the senses, the memory, the history… the knowledge of place that comes from… loving its mornings or evenings or hot noons, valuing it for the profound investment of labor and feeling that you… have put into it (p. 205)

Stegner concluded, “Only in the act of submission is the sense of place realized and a sustainable relationship between people and earth established” (p. 206). This research study was designed to provide a significant connection between artmaking, ecological awareness, and a personal process, which are all themes relevant to the researcher’s teaching practice and sense of place. This self-study will inform future art practice, it will engage the community at large and will have offered insights that invite further questioning (Sullivan, p. 109).

**Philosophical Perspectives on Affective Art Making**

Eisner (2002) regards the arts as a process in which we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves in our world. Gardner (1993) advocates that teaching should
not be exclusively focused on the production of logical and linguistic perception, but should also include thoughts related to music, spatial, body-kinesthetic, the interpersonal and intrapersonal self-knowledge of feelings and motives: a total conceptual thinking process. Gardner believes art making, in its most intense form, is not a simple process but an act that deeply involves affective consciousness, a moment of transformation, and knowledge acquisition. Annette W. Balkema describes this process as “a nameless phenomenon of not knowing what might happen next” (2004, p. 37).

Affective awareness emanates from the relationship between sensory experience and emotional response…. An affective process reveals biases, identifies patterns, and creates meaning in response to this perception. By assessing affective awareness, one gains aesthetic sensibility to respond knowingly and probingly to the myriad appeals to affective consciousness that characterize contemporary culture. (Daemen College, 2012, p. 1)

As the art researcher embarked on the documentation of her own art making for the thesis research she began the process with a structured autoethnographic approach and with objectives, and predictions in mind. The artist-researcher discovered uncertainty, liberation and enchantment. It was these three emotional qualities that gave the art and the research meaning (Heshusius, & Ballard, 1997, p. 28).

**Somatic Understanding**

John Dewey describes aesthetic experience as a constructed event between a work of art and a viewer, stressing that it is the emotional connection that makes that experience memorable (Dewey, 1934, p. 42). Both Dewey and Rudolf Arnheim refer to “visual thinking” in their writings, describing the process as active exploration,
abstraction, synthesis, and an intelligence of perception as the mind manipulates these concepts to convey aesthetic meaning. Elliot Eisner (1994, 2002) describes qualitative reasoning as visual thinking with an emphasis on the influence of emotion and describes the role of art in altering the mind and transforming consciousness. Arnold Berleant (2003) describes aesthetic embodiment as “the active presence of the human body in appreciative experience” with “powerful implications for aesthetic theory as it leads to a somatically grounded understanding of aesthetic experience.” (p. 1)

**Reconnecting**

Clark believes the current age of reason, which began after the dark ages, has disconnected us from the earth. There was a time when “knowing was more emotional, more internal, more connected to the natural world. A person "knew" something by being deeply and intimately connected to it, a knowing that was somatic and emotional” (Clark, 2001, p. 84). We need to return to that early time of knowing in order to access both intuition and intellect for each of us to engage in a thoughtful research process in visual arts practice (Sullivan, 2010, p. 96).

**Affective Awareness**

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002, 2004) used the term “flow” to describe the true act of creating art. He described it as a process of active engagement, when a practiced skill is overlain with emotional immersion, which in turn generates “flow”- it is an effortless, spontaneous feeling that can only be described as an ecstatic state (2002, p. 1). As a doctoral student Csikszentmihalyi observed art students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago enter a state of flow as students almost fell into a trance and lost all sense of time and place as they immersed themselves in painting. When a person is
entering a state of flow Csikszentmihalyi identified the following steps: a focus which once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of ecstasy, a sense of clarity; feedback is immediate and loops constantly through the eyes, hands and ears; all sense of time disappears. In the flow, each artist forgets their surroundings, they feel part of something larger, and they feel that what they are doing becomes worth doing for its own sake. Flow is a phenomenological state: a skill combined with emotions, an inextricably interwoven affective awareness.

**Relevance in Practice**

The researcher aims for a deeper consciousness; emotional, spiritual, or connective, in her process of art making. Reflective engagement allows for the intimacy of a conversational relationship, a personal connection, and a conceptual consciousness (Schon, 1996). Mirroring this idea and advocating a shift from the deconstructive practice of skill isolation to a reconstructive practice are Neperud, 1995; Blandy, Congdon, & Krug, 1998; Hollis, 1997; Gablik, 1991; all believe that an art practice should lead towards an inter-connective, social, and emotional approach in art making.

In published interviews with practicing artists this connectively engaged thinking is described: James Turrell states: “It is not not-thinking, it is a wordless thinking that is a pure, primal sort of thinking” (as cited in Saad-Cook, 1988, p. 130); by Louise Bourgeois (1998) as “understanding as a form of complete assimilation” (p. 33); Ann Hamilton believes “you experience it as all these multiple, physical sequences of movements… responding to something that’s there, but maybe not visible… the more open the process can be to not being set allows me time to trust my intuition” (as cited in Wallach, 2008, p. 59).
Conclusion

The initial questions for research came from real-world observations and dilemmas, and have emerged from the interplay of the researcher's direct experience, tacit theories and growing scholarly interests in environmental aesthetics and the process of artmaking (Marshall, & Rossman, 1999, p. 25). This research study reflects interests that have also captured the researcher’s imagination. This study was designed to answer the question: *How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment?* By constructing an aesthetic human identity inclusive of environment this holistic approach of physical and spiritual understanding in art making may one day become indistinguishable from environmental education.

The explanation of methodology for research, data collection, and data analysis used in the study are addressed in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The researcher conducted this art-based research project as a documentation of a meta-cognitive investigation to answer the question: How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of an artist’s environment? According to Sullivan (2010) “visual practices that explore experiences as a site for knowledge and understanding involve conceptualizing visual ideas and structures in various forms” (p. 195).

The artist-researcher played the dual role of an artist and a researcher as she documented her process of art making. Data was gathered using descriptive field notes from in the field, a botanical garden, and in the studio and through the researchers interviews with nine working artists (see Appendix A.3).

Research Methods

This research study was conducted in a three-week timeframe, devoted to an intense investigation of the researcher’s passion for art making with a new influence of flora and fauna from her local environment. In addition, the researcher incorporated the use of a new media into the study; in essence, the researcher used the unfamiliar (paint) in an attempt to represent the unknown (local environment).

Autoethnography is defined as a “genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). This autobiographical narrative engaged intense and transparent reflection. The researcher analyzed her personal values and cultural background within the context of her own art making. This approach to the narrative articulated a self-
awareness and a reflexivity used in and to enrich knowledge (Trahar, 2006, p. 9). The desire to conduct this research stems from a personal drive to create an art education pedagogy that values environmental aesthetics.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was done using descriptive field notes gathered from the following sites: in the field, a 400 acre natural preserve which is the artist-researcher’s local environment, the Chicago Botanic Garden, and in the artist-researcher’s studio. Data was collected over a progression of a ten-day time frame of approximately five working, sketching, and inquiring hours each day in the afore mentioned locations to determine the researcher’s thought process, artistic growth, and to create at least one piece of art reflective of the environment using new media. The researcher immersed herself in the local environment by observing, sketching, taking notes, and photographs and gathering all this information into a visual journal. All collected imagery was considered as source material by the artist-researcher as potential imagery for new artwork.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artists Name</th>
<th>Art medium</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Frasier</td>
<td>Book artist</td>
<td><a href="http://www.debrafrasier.com">http://www.debrafrasier.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Marks</td>
<td>Assemblage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Rasmussen</td>
<td>Painter, photography, installation eco-art</td>
<td><a href="http://www.artistlisarasmussen.com/">http://www.artistlisarasmussen.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Selarque</td>
<td>Photography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. S. Johnson</td>
<td>Photography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Sieminski</td>
<td>Wood fired pottery</td>
<td><a href="http://www.robsieminski.com/">http://www.robsieminski.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Williams</td>
<td>Multi media art</td>
<td><a href="http://alisonwilliams.org/home.html">http://alisonwilliams.org/home.html</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1 Artists Interviewed**
The researcher interviewed nine practicing artists (see Table 3.1, Artists Interviewed) about their environmental influences and their creative processes. A formal questionnaire, (see Appendix Interview Questionnaire A.2), was sent to individual artists. Their answers to these specific questions in addition to spontaneous and informal questions were added to the data mix. These interviews were conducted over email, in person, and by phone.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was both a simple content analysis and a constant comparative method as the researcher read the artist interview transcripts and compared her own observational notes, her visual and verbal narratives and her artwork and looked for recurring themes and identifying patterns of data descriptions. These recurring themes became the database for data analysis. Recurring themes, words, and phrases were coded into eight specific categories: Art Education background (arted), Flora & fauna inspiration (F&F), Positive Emotional process (EP), Focused investigation (FI), Other inspiration (O), Aesthetics & environment (A&E), Panic, and Integration. Eliot Eisner (1998) wrote “formulation of themes within an educational criticism means identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation… Themes are dominant features of the situation or person, those qualities of place, person, or object that define or describe identity” (p. 104). Maxwell (2005) described coding as a research process of “fracturing the data and rearranging it into categories that facilitate comparison between thing in the same category” (p. 96).

The researcher’s memos documented and compared art created prior to Day 1 with artwork created on Day 10 to analyze information on growth, process, and new
awareness. The researcher also looked for coded relationships that connect statements and events in the informal narratives and questionnaires. Data was systematically organized under the categories of: art knowledge, reflection, frustrations, discovery, and environment (see Table 3.2, Data Collection Chart). The aim was to “better understand what took place, and to present this information” (Simpson, 2012, p. 6) that others may draw conclusions about How a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment?

**Table 3.2 Data Collection Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In the field</th>
<th>Botanic garden</th>
<th>In the studio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date &amp; Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous reflections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations, sketches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental aspect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data illumination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

In approaching this study the researcher explored her relationship and connectedness to a particular phenomenon: flora and fauna in her local environment. The researcher played the dual role of artist and researcher, making art, as she thought about and documented the process of art making. She also collected data from personal interviews with artists about environmental influences and their own creative process.
This investigation of an arts based autoethnographic research study has provided meaning through structure, writing, reflection, and interpretation. The study has identified patterns and consistencies of information in a research process. The following chapter will report on the findings of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results of the Study

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to begin to understand how a studio investigation of flora and fauna imagery affected awareness of an artist’s environment and sense of place. The study has yielded valid data of researcher self-reflection, and includes 100% feedback from the nine artist questionnaires. By analyzing and comparing these outside responses with the researcher’s own documentation of process, observations, and body of artwork created during the research project timeframe, the researcher has discovered concrete data that confirms a change took place in her studio investigation.

These valid findings address Patton’s (2002) four prompts of significance in research projects. The findings provide evidence of valid results, and an increased understanding about environment and art process. The research supports previous knowledge, and are useful as new information for the researcher, as she examined environmental art education, her philosophical perspective in affective art making, and the relevance of her practice.

In our contemporary society of globally aware citizens we need to address environmental challenges, global warming, recycling, conservation, and our complex role as caretaker of nature and culture on this planet. As art educators we can choose to play a critically responsible role of connecting our students to environmental aesthetics. By exploring art making in relationship to the natural world the researcher hoped to
transform, inform, change perceptions, create interconnections, and inspire environmental awareness in art education and art practice.

The results of this study are presented in a thematic framework based on eight themes: art education background, flora & fauna inspiration, positive emotional process, focused investigation, other inspiration, aesthetics & environment, panic, and integration. The researcher examined all documented work; coded data gathered from personal quotes, narratives, artist interviews, reflections, observations, and images of the researcher’s own artwork and the artwork of nine artists.

All participants in this research are practicing artists or art educators and were not shown each other’s responses. A comparative method was used to study the researcher’s data and the interviewed artists’ data for patterns, themes, recurring words and observations, (see Appendix 4.1). The researcher received insightful answers to her questions; yet the questions may be too broad in scope. On reflection, the researcher would have asked the additional question: Do you ever introduce new media into your art practice?

Narratives, sketchbook work, and finished artwork offer consistent personal data from the researcher that confirms a new awareness of the environment and that a personal motivation to create new artworks took place during this study. Additionally, the study informs the potential for the development of an interdisciplinary practice.

**Bias and Validity**

A bias in this research may come from the researcher’s own perceptual lens. In designing this study she had preconceived ideas concerning the outcome. The research study was designed to provide an opportunity to create positive results in her knowledge
and artistic growth. As the study progressed her ideas were challenged, the researcher remained open minded and discovery and change did occur.

Validity was addressed in that the researcher did exactly what she set out to do. The study was a twelve-day intensive involvement in the study of flora and fauna in a local environment in which the researcher collected “Rich Data.” As a component of the research design a triangulation of systematic feedback of reflection, discussion, and artwork from a controlled group of participants was compared for evidence. Evidence found in the narratives, and in the artwork created by the researcher validate that the artist-researcher’s awareness of environment was influenced by this intensive study. The researcher claims that this study is truthful, and authentic, and was conducted as rigorous research. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 26)

Analysis of the Data

Data Sources

The artist-researcher kept an eight-hour working schedule for twelve days in which she documented narratives, took photographs, and made sketches documenting observations of her local environment. These observations and experiences were referenced and interpreted as the researcher visualized ideas for new artwork created in her studio.

In addition to the art based autoethnological investigation, a letter of introduction and a set of eight questions were emailed to nine artist participants. Participants of the artist questionnaires are a Chicago based visual artist (S. Eichhorn), a children’s book author and illustrator (D. Frasier), a children’s book illustrator (K. Howard), a poet and assemblage artist (T. Marks), a Transformative Arts educator (L. Rasmussen), a high
school photography teacher (A. Selerque), a watercolor & photography instructor (M. Sheplis Johnson), a Raku potter (R. Sieminski), and a mixed media installation artist and Chair of Painting at New Hampshire Institute of Art (A. Williams). All artist participants wrote and emailed their individual responses back to the researcher, except R. Sieminski whose answers were transcribed from a telephone conversation.

**Theme Analysis**

A coding system (Key 4.1) was used to compare and analyze both the researcher’s sketchbook narratives and artwork, and the collected artist interview questionnaire responses. Data analysis was a simple content analysis and a constant comparative method as the researcher analyzed all text for themes that emerged based on tonal cues, and key words that would offer the most insightful and relevant data. The refined results were then categorized as primary and secondary findings.

**Key 4.1 Coding system used for both the researcher and the artist interviews.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Key:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keywords:</strong> Solitude, absorbed, lost, zone, spirit, nature, exploration, plants, flora, fauna, intuitive, discovery, connected, inspire, influences, panic, time, integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview Theme Categories:</strong> Art Education (arted) Flora &amp; fauna inspiration (F&amp;F) Positive Emotional process (EP) Focused investigation (FI) Other inspiration (O) Aesthetics &amp; environment (A&amp;E) Panic Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those comparative results are found in the following two charts based on the eight categories listed in Systematic Coding below. The statistic criteria for the artists was based on their responses to the phenomena listed in the eight questions, the statistics for the researcher was based on the daily occurrence of the phenomena listed in the eight questions and in her visual analysis of her artwork.
Systematic Coding

- Art Education background
- Flora, & fauna inspiration
- Positive emotional process
- Focused investigation
- Other inspiration
- Aesthetics & environment
- Panic
- Integration

Systematic Coding of the Artist-Researcher’s Responses

**Researcher’s Personal Data**

![Graph showing researcher’s personal data](image)

**Chart 4.1** Graph showing researcher’s personal data

**Results**

- Art Education: 3
- Flora & fauna: 10
- Prairie process: 9
- Focused investigation: 6
- Other inspiration: 5
- Aesthetics/environment: 10
- Panic: 4
- Integration: 9
Systematic Coding of the Nine Artist’s Responses

Art Interview Responses

![Graph showing art interview questionnaire data](image)

*Chart 4.2 Graph showing art interview questionnaire data*

Results: 3 6 9 7 9 9 3 5

**Primary findings:**

1. An engaged art practice produces a positive emotional connection to that process, building confidence, skill, and encouraging a sophisticated level of experimentation and reflection.

2. Full engagement in an art making process requires time, self-awareness, and a connection to a place or idea.

3. An artist’s environment plays more than a subtle role in art making. Deep exposure to flora and fauna will induce inspiration and critical thinking.

4. Mindful reflection on inspiration occurs. When given time to filter through new information and experiences new ideas come to light.
5. Artists fluidly integrate with other subjects.

6. Keeping a visual art journal documents and encourages a reflective art process.

Secondary findings:

1. Creating art is work. Organization, and a disciplined regular working schedule become necessary to create a body of artwork. Creating original artwork requires physical, emotional and critical thinking skills. The process is both conceptually and manually taxing.

2. When deadlines loom, and when creative thoughts are in doubt practicing artists experience panic. Problem solving, collaboration, and time contribute to resolution.

3. Awareness of the integration of another subject with art is often unconscious but seemingly always present.

4. Introducing a new medium into a practice is exciting and invites new potential.

5. Studio work vs. Plein Air offers different benefits. Plein Air: Immersing oneself into an environment offers an experience of integration of senses. The researcher captured, heard, saw, smelled, and felt moments in real time. She used a limited set of art materials, and worked quickly. Studio: In the studio there was a luxury of time to reflect, create and rework artwork. Art materials are organized and a wider variety of choices are available.

Results of the Research

“Visual arts research, is dynamic, reflexive, and fluid as creative and critical practices are used to shed new light on what is known and to consider the possibility of “what is not” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 192). This research project allowed the researcher to
build on the limited information the researcher knew about her local environment and also what she knew about herself as an artist teacher.

Findings in Eight Themes

Chart 4.3 Artists’ Answer Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artists Name</th>
<th>arted</th>
<th>F&amp;F</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>A&amp;E</th>
<th>Panic</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. Eichhorn</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y-architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Frasier</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y-literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Howard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y-literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Marks</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y-poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Rasmussen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y-psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Selarque</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S. Johnson</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Sieminski</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Williams</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y-science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Art Education Background

Of the nine artists interviewed three have a formal art education background, five artists answered affirmatively to the question of formal art education, and all but two artists have taught art classes, three of them at the college level, one practices art making outside of another career. D. Frasier prefers the term teacher of “creative process" and modeler of a “creative person being alive and well in the 21st century” over the term art educator (personal communication, March 19, 2012). This echoes what Manuel Barkan referred to as “the aesthetic life” (as cited in Efland, 1990, p. 240) and is what the researcher considers a desired outcome for all in a balanced and integrated education.

A. Selarque asked two pertinent questions about art education: whether schools and the art curricula are “designed to inspire an aesthetic synthesis with the environment?” and whether artists or artist educators “reflect the environment or create it?” (personal communication, March 20, 2012) See Figure 4.3 for a visually provocative
example of Selarque’s work and his philosophy. As an explanation of whether one needs a formal art education or not R. Sieminski quotes Duchamp, “It's not what you see that is art. Art is the gap …for me it’s in the gaps” (personal communication, March 31, 2012).

![Figure 4.3 A. Selarque, American Trash, Grantville, Utah, 1988, 16x16”, Gelatin silver photographic print](image)

The researcher enquired about the art education backgrounds of each of the nine artists interviewed to establish a broad representation of a range of backgrounds in this demographic group. Respondents work in a variety of disciplines in the visual arts and come from a variety of backgrounds.

**Flora and Fauna Inspiration**

Artist and illustrator K. Howard, potter R. Sieminski, and assemblage artist T. Marks, each describe the tactile experience of leaves, grass, and bark as a way to keep them close to the earth, offering peace of mind and solitude. Sieminski states, “Nature is the teacher. Hands on, touch the surface, to know an internalization that will be referenced later in life.” Offering a viable aesthetic philosophy that “everything that is
made that is soul stirring for even a second reminds us of our environment.” Sieminski
does not “speak in terms of imagery and process… before everything is spirit & thought…
to live in the direct midst of the natural world is to have its soul become part of my work”
(personal communication, 2012)

A. Williams only begins to address her experimental and conceptual investigation
into flora and fauna when she writes: “I investigate memory, the passage of time, as well
as our desire to remember.

There is an effort to preserve, protect and yet also expose my experiences and
memories, in this case the memory of the abundant summer garden” (personal
communication, March 23, 2012) Evidence of the influence of the biology of local flora,
as she allows “dirt, water, and plants to create marks on different surfaces” (Alison
Williams, 2009) in this process is demonstrated in her work (see Figure 4.5).
Flora and Fauna Inspiration in the Researcher’s Studio Investigation

On Wednesday March 7, 2012 the artist-researcher began her sketchbook documentation. Feeling anxious and aware of her tendency to procrastinate she started this journey with an observation of new growth on a branch of American Cranberry (Viburnum trilobum) (see Figure 4.6) cut from the local prairie.

“I picked this branch last week, today these beautiful new green growths have appeared. The chartreuse green is a reminder that spring is approaching.” “Incredibly blustery day, the wind might be a liability. The birds are being blown away.” 3.8.12 the researcher writes, (see Figure 4.7), “there are vacant birds nest everywhere, the sun is streaming in but the wind is bitter… I can shelter myself on the front porch. The redwing blackbirds are chirping. Trilling their songs. Chit.chit.trilllling. Children’s voices echoing as the school bus arrives. The scene in front of me is an open meadow of cattails and tall grasses. The birds have found a place to perch. Last week we had cardinals, mourning
doves, and warblers… it may be the wind that keeps them away this morning. Trees… trees… trees… not mountains on the horizon.” The researcher begins investigating Latin names for the flora and fauna, a recurring theme of science and art integration, which is addressed in the subsection on integration. “Redwing Blackbird, Agelaius Phoeniceus, beaks and head shapes are difficult to render correctly. Tackling the design of the eggs is fascinating. I use watercolors and a tiny 0 brush” (see Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Whittington, Redwing Blackbird, Agelaius Phoeniceus

Figure 4.9 Whittington studio

The researcher remarks “organization also essential… materials and a space prepared for work (see Figure 4.9).” “The frogs are out. Walked the prairie taking photographs. Signs of life are emerging, but dry Milkweed pods are everywhere (see Figure 4.10). The silk inside was gathered during World War II and used to stuff life preservers. Native Americans used the stalks as fiber for twine, most of the plant is edible for humans and Monarch Butterflies eat the milkweed.” All these narratives are provided as examples of an investigation of local flora and fauna and also as a beginning
of an integration of two subjects in the researcher’s art making and pedagogy. Lowenfeld believed the purpose of art education was to develop creativity so that it could be transferred to other subjects and spheres of human activity. (Efland, 1990)

Tuesday 11:30 “Sparrows are moving into the Bluebird houses. I continue sketching, trying to capture the essence of this landscape, and the flora and fauna here. There is water in the bog and this area is full of frogs and Blackbird nests… soon mosquitoes too.” The researcher investigates cattails: “Candlewick (see Figure 4.11) Wetlands plant, Typha species is considered a wild supermarket. The green stalks are edible; the jelly from the leaves is medicinal. Water and soil quality improves wherever cattails grow,”

(see Figure 4.12)
Positive Emotional Process

The researcher’s studio at this point is transformed from organized to a chaotic frenzy, as her confidence increases, and her creative ideas seem endless. She creates a series of small landscape studies and writes “I have loved investigating a variety of painting media: acrylic, watercolor, and water-based oil paints (see Figure 4.13). I’ve stayed away from collage work for the most part. I love working with the palette knife, the physical gesture of applying the paint, the thickness of the paint… everything about it feels right to me.” She writes, “I feel focused, calm & confident.”

Figure 4.13 Whittington, two in a series of landscapes

S. Eichhorn notes that he occasionally experiences a “dissociative state followed by deep thinking and an affective awareness” (personal communication, 2012). K. Howard addresses the dual role of the environment as inspiration, (see Figure 4.14) but also as “integral to my peace of mind.” She goes on to describe “those beautiful moments where I “gift” myself with time to create art for art’s sake, I can find a magical emotional release or have an epiphany and find my own story within the physical process of art making” (personal communication, 2012).
L. Rasmussen, director of Art 4 All People, a Transformative Art Center in Malibu, CA., has taught At-risk teens, emotionally traumatized children, and the elderly. Rasmussen writes that the “true nature of the creative process” allows you to “transcend time and space just BE-creating and tapping into the ebbs and flows of the Source—which is divinity” (personal communication, March 23, 2012). A. Selarque describes the emotional level as “meta-conscious,” he becomes “hyper aware of feelings, emotions, and energy. It's a visual dance of music and sensation… happening simultaneously” (personal communication, 2012). In describing this positive emotional experience R. Sieminski writes, “Thoughts float through you” (personal communication, 2012). A. Williams describes the desire for “something that I have not anticipated to happen” and thus she will “give myself over to the experience” (personal communication, 2012). M.S. Johnson writes that she is, “at that moment grateful for where I am, what I am doing, and what I am experiencing” (personal communication, March 20, 2012). T. Marks writes that she believes that as we create art we relay “information on a subtle but deeply personal level” (personal communication, 2012).
Focused investigation

Three artists mention the notion of art making as “work” when answering the question about getting lost in the process of creating art. D. Frasier writes when producing a book such as her children’s book *On The Day You Were Born*, (see Figure 4.16) she will “find myself in a computer nightmare” (personal communication, 2012) and R. Sieminski notes, “much is just work. It is not an escape. Survival matters” (personal communication, 2012). K. Howard presents a realistic scenario, when she states: “As an illustrator, I am working in collaboration with an art director and editor and very specific problem solving is in effect” (personal communication, 2012).

![Figure 4.16 D. Frasier, 1991, paper collage](image)

Selarque describes this state of focus as “an internal target of balance.” He does not agree with the notion of "lost in ones work" but writes that he does believe “the intentionality of discovery does not require one to be lost to find something new… it is just as important to discover something old than to stumble across the unknown.” Knowing what we leave behind as we seek an internal target of “balance between conformity and creativity” (personal communication, 2012).

The artist-researcher is invited to exhibit her work at a newly opened local Environmental Library. In preparation she writes a reflective artist statement to
accompany Appendix Figure B.2 which demonstrates clearly an awareness of local fauna and environmental issues:

**Artist Statement:** A glimpse of the brilliant yellow of the Prothonotary Warbler (Protonotaria citrea) can give hope that spring has arrived. Yet these birds are declining in numbers due to a loss of habitat, and are currently listed as endangered in Canada.

In my work I have an inclination to create pieces from mixed media materials, but always with the artists’ hand in evidence. I see my work as an opportunity to recycle fragments of our world visually and to respond to these elements creatively. Art is not an isolated subject; it is a core subject that gives us a vocabulary to function as humans, to examine our world, and perhaps give attention to a diminishing bird.

As she becomes immersed in her work the researcher experienced an overwhelming sense that “Time is essential… an open-ended period of time to work facilitates relaxing, enjoying the process and finishing a piece of artwork. This is a missing and critical element in an art classroom.” Spending so much focused time outside observing, listening, taking in the images has made her more curious about her local environment. She writes, “I’m finding myself intrigued enough to go home and research the plants and the birds in particular… this is not something I would have done before.” She also asks two pertinent questions “How can schools begin to provide these extended periods of time to art? To the outdoors?” The researcher reflects on authentic instruction in art, and considers how schools provide connections for students to real life themes, and ideas in meaningful ways that have significance beyond their classroom.
A focused investigation is what Enid Zimmerman (2010) believes we need to “allow bodies of work to evolve over time through self-directed learning because this is where true creative self-expression can be supported and valued” (p. 10)

Other Inspiration

“The leafless trees look so fragile… the trees collect empty plastic bags blown in by the wind, (see Figure 4.17), I’m thinking of wrapping a tree in all the plastic bags I collect on my walks.” This statement from the researcher’s journal references a recurring theme of other inspiration, and interest in other techniques such as conceptual or performance art. Another narrative observation notes, “the wind shift the cattails just enough to trick my imagination into thinking I’m watching the movement of water – swaying waves – another inspiration.” This inspiration peaked for the researcher when she “played with Photoshop for hours today. Sorted through all my images of nests, plastic bags in trees and assembled them with one single image of the oak tree to begin to address this pollution problem.” As the study progressed the researcher confidently experimented with a wide range of ideas, concepts and materials.

The researcher spent the day at the Chicago Botanic Garden in the Japanese Garden, Sansho-En: Garden of Three Islands. She learned the symbolism of the garden: “Bridges symbolically carry people across, linking one world to another. Rocks
symbolize mountains, or a philosophical idea; they are the bones of the earth.” The meaning of a rock tied with string, (see figure 4.18), sitting at the entrance of a garden or Sekimori Ishi, the message is: “don’t step forward anymore” and when it is untied and hung by the path it signifies a suspension of time, and the path is now open to your journey.” This tied rock symbol appears later in the researchers’ artwork with stones collected from her local lake.

Figure 4.18 Whittington, Sekimori Ishi, photograph

The researcher writes, “I stop to sketch and paint the bridge and snow temple shrine, (see figure 4.19) a place to ponder, to collect one’s thoughts, and in the winter to appreciate the differences in each individual snowflake that settles on the shrine.” The researcher notes that unscheduled time allows her to focus on the garden environment, to learn, observe, and create, critical processes in her visual journal work.

Figure 4.19 Whittington, Snow temple, and beehives, sketchbook, watercolor
Aesthetics & Environment

“Everything that is made that is soul stirring for even a second reminds us of our environment” (R. Sieminski, personal communication, 2012). Brice Marden (1998) once asked: “How would you paint a walk in the woods? It’s about respect for nature” (as cited in Kimmelman, p. 195). There has been a noticeable attunement to the environment, to an aesthetics awareness experienced by the artist-researcher through out this study. In the field the researcher observes, “There is a subtle fragile harmony here. The oak tree is so majestic, a single powerful living sculpture. I cannot express my emotions in words.” At the botanical garden she observes: “it changed my life momentarily, actually it reminded me of forgotten moments in my life.” The artist-researcher recognizes that her intense work in this study has been a transformative blending of aesthetics and the environment.

S. Eichhorn believes that “Art educators and working artists set an aesthetic benchmark for students” to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment (personal communication, 2012). Author and Illustrator D. Frasier addresses the impact awareness of her environment has had on her work. The Animal That Drank Up Sound, a book she illustrated with poet William Stafford, “is a metaphoric story in pictures of the coming of winter. I could never have seen into this poem in that way had I not experience the extreme winter of the far northern life” (personal communication, 2012). Frasier believes that “many influences arrive from the periphery” and that artists/art educators inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment by inspiring “ATTENTION, and since we only save what we love, that attention is the very
first step. We artists offer the pointing finger: look here!” (personal communication, 2012)

Susan Sontag once advised, “Pay attention. It’s all about paying attention. Attention is vitality. It connects you with others. It makes you eager. Stay eager.” (Goodreads, 2012, p. 1) The artist-researcher realizes her interest in the ecosystem of influences from nature, the environment, and from other artists. There is an ongoing dialog concerning what it is that inspires each of us. Unanimously all the artists interviewed for this research study described some manner of nature as a source of creativity in their life and in their artwork. In creating a connection to nature we awaken a curiosity, foster a sense of place, and we learn to respect our natural world.

Art educator and photographer A. Selarque makes an interesting aesthetic observation visually demonstrated in his photography when he writes of his interest “in the juxtaposition of where nature and man clash and coexist” (personal communication, 2012). R. Sieminski expresses his optimism for an aesthetic environmental connection when he states: “my hope, a little bit of hope, is that little things reconnect us… through the ground, through the mountain, artists have to have the capacity to dream….” (personal communication, 2012)

Panic

Wednesday 3.14.12 10:45 a.m. the artist-researcher documents a lack of confidence and sense of panic, a recurring theme. “Not feeling confident at drawing birds, worked on some collage pieces which incorporate bird images. Trying to get proportions down. Starting to panic.” She painted 5”x5” wood substrate with acrylics, used bird images from 1956 flashcards, which are detailed with information about the
Bobolink and the Goldfinch migratory habits (see Figure 4.20). She also writes of her frustration with “realism, and have tried the palette knife again, trying to remember information from my BU summer studio session Plein Air class.” Evidence that although panic may set in the researcher is a problem solver, and quickly moves toward other solutions.

S. Eichhorn was one of three artists that mention experiencing anxiety or panic attacks in his process, he states, “That focus usually leads to an affective awareness or occasionally a panic attack” (personal communication, 2012). A. Williams uses her anxiety to influence her work, explaining it as: “my anxiety about the loss of summer and the death of all the plants and the tension between these two emotions - love and anxiety - that becomes something new, my artwork” (personal communication, 2012). When deadlines set in, D. Frasier expressed the anxiety of finding herself in a “computer nightmare” (personal communication, 2012). The researcher admits that this is a familiar anxiety in her current life.
swaying, swaying… *chak, chak, conk-la-ree.*” Observations such as these inspire the artist-researcher to begin accessing Cornell Lab of Ornithology to phonetically translate the call of this bird (Cornell, 2012). The researcher has come to believe that one cannot successfully investigate the environment on an aesthetic level without knowledge of biology, ornithology, and meteorology. A basic knowledge of science is a critical cross-curricular subject to integrate. The artist-researcher has also realized the power of words, and narration in art, as John Baldessari (art: 21, 2012, p. 1) states, “Words are just a way we communicate. Images are a way we communicate. And I couldn’t figure out why they had to be in different baskets.”

![Image](S. Eichhorn, Orchid Stack IV, Collage on acrylic coated panel)

**Figure 4.21** *S. Eichhorn, Orchid Stack IV, Collage on acrylic coated panel*

S. Eichhorn was one of five artists who saw their work as an integration of another subject area. He explains his detailed cut and collaged work with flora and fauna imagery (see Figure 4.21) in a nontraditional way, he writes: “I initially saw the natural components that I use in my collages as more formal architectural components.” He imagined “architecturally diverse spaces through the natural occurring forms in the found
imagery.” As he examines and manipulates the collage components, he has honed in on “different mythology, rituals and histories surround the types of flora and fauna” (personal communication, 2012). Other artists, Frasier, Howard, Marks, and Rasmussen, practice an integration of art with literature, poetry, and psychology.

**Significant Findings**

The researcher has provided solid, coherent, and consistent evidence in support of the findings. Offering a triangulation of evidence from her personal documented narratives as well as from nine working artists describing an answer to the question: How does a studio investigation into flora and fauna imagery affect awareness of environment?

The researcher’s walks through the prairie have amassed a collection of images of plastic bags stuck in trees. This previously unrealized phenomenon has developed an empathic understanding of human behavior or Verstehen and has led to the creation of new art that represents her new found feelings about the problem of pollution and plastic bags in particular. This discovery could be considered an innovative significance in her practice. The artist-researcher is eager to practice *intention*, to continue to be curious and investigate the natural world, and to enhance her knowledge, and to grow and contribute by creating an attention to aesthetic awareness of our environment.

Recurring themes mentioned in the artist-researcher journal are: integrated appreciation of aesthetics, environment, intellectual curiosity, a focused state of investigation, and the emotional components of calmness, indecision, and panic. This study confirmed positive results experienced by the researcher awareness, curiosity, and motivation to learn and to create art utilizing her local environment. Introducing a new medium into a practice can be exciting and invites new potential in art making. The
researcher also documented and experienced a new appreciation of science and art as integrated learning. The researcher was able to engage all aspects of this experience by creating pieces of artwork that reflect her local environment, and also reflect growth in her work, (see Appendix B) as well as a new confidence as she stepped out of her comfort zone.

The significant findings of this study indicate that an investigation of a local environment, specifically with respect to flora and fauna, engaged the artist-researcher, enhanced her practice and brought new awareness. The researcher’s investigation was compared to that of nine working artists to gain insight concerning others influences, reflections, and studio processes. This information was gleaned from a formal questionnaire (see Appendix A.2 and A.3).

**Conclusion**

David Thomas (2007) describes art-based research as: “a complex informed physical, theoretical, and intellectual activity where private and public worlds meet” (p. 85). This research project began with a clear objective; an art based autoethnographic study of flora and fauna in a local environment. This research process became an intertwining of both a rational and an intuitive process that created significant insight for the researcher, which enlightened and empowered the artist-researcher in her practice, and in her critical thinking.

Personal impact of this study, conclusions on how this study has altered the researchers thinking and art practice and final recommendations will be shared in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

The final chapter of this arts-based autoethnographic study discusses the personal impact for the artist-researcher, it offers a rationale for the unit lesson designed from this study (See Appendix A), and explains how the findings of this study might influence the art practice of others. This chapter concludes with advice to those in the field of art education as well as advice to other art teachers.

Discussion

Personal Impact of the Study

One might describe this study as a labor of love for the researcher. It provided an opportunity to go step-by-step through the process of academic research, it connected the researcher with practicing artists in ways not previously explored, and forced the researcher to set aside time to contemplate an art making practice. The researcher initially began this study with the intention of simply investigating the impact of flora and fauna on a studio practice, but the breadth of knowledge gained has been transformative.

The artist-researcher experienced awareness of environmental issues, environmental aesthetics, a connectivity of science, culture, art, and nature, and the value of documenting and reflecting in her art making practice. Birt, Krug, and Sheridan found that “educators and students can learn to understand the complexity of relationships among art, culture, and nature by immersing themselves in and interacting with their environment” (1997, p. 9) and this is exactly what the researcher did.
**Impact on Practice**

A ritual documentation of thought processes, visual sketches, aesthetic inspiration, and spontaneous research has enlightened the researcher’s rational for visual journals in her art practice. The visual journal has been the tool that has facilitated the researcher as she refines and articulates her personal voice in her work.

The researcher’s practice was also impacted by her recognition of the critical need for education to embrace an integrated curriculum of authentic education. The research study was initially focused on an investigation of flora and fauna; however, as the study progressed the investigation grew to a deeper understanding of the interconnection of art, biology, philosophy, and literature.

**Rationale for the unit**

A well-documented visual journal offers a springboard to reflect on existing knowledge in new ways. The journal, when dissected has the potential to create entirely new ways of seeing and understanding when one’s narratives or artwork are reconsidered or seen from a different perspective or distance. The researcher’s visual journal became her companion, her guide, her mantra, and her vade mecum. It is in this spirit that she was motivated to write a series of lesson plans (see Appendix A.1) that would introduce and inspire art students to embrace their own visual journals and engage in rich human experiences with the environment.

**Recommendations**

**Implications for Further Research**

Limited time may be a constraint in further research of this study, although the time frame of two weeks did not impact the validity of the research findings, a longer
term study may yield different results. The results of this study, along with the results of the completed lesson unit could be shared with other art educators at a state art conference or a professional development workshop.

This study is a beginning; hopefully, it has opened a door for others to walk through, creating a starting point to inspire engagement and to ask questions. A few persistent questions have surfaced from this study: Can data be collected that authenticates a need for integration of journals into the school curriculum? What data exists that determines the appropriate length of time for art class periods? Could a study be designed that collected data that supports the impact of time on creativity? How can we invite authentic instruction, and an active engagement with practicing artists into our schools?

Conclusion

Advice to the Field of Art Education

Suzi Gablik (2009) affirms that “we need to cultivate the connective, relational self” (p. 2). This shift from a discipline centered approach to integrated or holistic approach “makes art more socially responsive… an empathic means of seeing through another's eyes, of stretching our boundaries beyond the ego-self to create a wider view of the world” (p. 6). Such relationships demand a more complex and sensitive consciousness and may gain momentum if we foster an interconnected dialog of an integrated curriculum designed with a balance between the arts, the sciences, and the humanities. For example, an art teacher may wish to engage her students in the study of the physical form of the butterfly. By inviting the knowledge of a biology teacher, physics teacher, English teacher, local architects, and filmmakers into the classroom the
administration may find the resources needed to create a butterfly garden or habitat project. An authentic interconnected learning experience such as this could prove life changing for most students.

The researcher is an advocate for autoethnographic arts-based research, and is a proponent of a balance of data driven rigorous academic research and the provocative ambiguity of art to coexist in a research program.

**Advice to Art Teachers**

The researcher advocates that art educators frame art instruction as a creative, cognitive, and conceptual activity in which art students begin to develop skills and techniques to solve art and real life issues. Allow students time to be self-reflective as they problem solve in their art making, be flexible in your own practice, network with local artists, be a life-long learner, and never lose your own sense of discovery. The artist-researcher encourages art educators to take their students outside to create artwork in the field, to allow “students to see them selves as connected to nature, a part of nature rather than apart from it” (Blandy, 1998, p. 241).

A most significant finding of this study has been the impact of visual journals in the artist-researcher’s art practice and she now encourages other art educators to consider introducing their art students to visual journals. As Hannah Hinchman (1991) so eloquently illustrates “opening the journal, was to open a door, or more truthfully, to become the door. Images and events passed through me to settle on the pages…a tangible record” (p. 12) of memory and imagination.
References


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Appendix A.1

Unit Plan

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION
Art Education Department

TEACHER: Toni Whittington
CLASS: 9 - 12th grade
THEME: Visual Journals
TIME FRAME: Lesson 1: 1-2 Days, Lesson 2: 1 –2 weeks, Lesson 3: 2 weeks
UNIT RATIONALE:
The purpose of a visual journal is to document the processes of your art making. “The Visual Journal is similar to, yet different from a sketchbook. It is kept as a type of journal, the content showing visual thinking in a variety of forms: drawings, sketches, collages, photographs, graphics, and personally meaningful symbols. Words invariably become an important part of the Visual Journal, as they describe and support depictions, become graphic devices, and aid reflection on personal themes and metaphors” (Grauer & Naths, 1998, p. 14).
Please see Chapter Five for the full unit rationale.

Descriptive Title:
A Visual Journal Through Sense of Place: Exploring a local environment.

Unit Goals: (Visual Art Standards of NAEA):
Students SHOULD:
Understand
• How different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses (1.b)
• Use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner (1.d)
• How to create multiple solutions to specific visual arts problems that demonstrate competence in producing effective relationships between structural choices and artistic functions (2.e)

Know
• How to apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks (1.a)

Be able to
• Communicate ideas regularly at a high level of effectiveness in at least one visual arts medium (1.c)
• Synthesize the creative and analytical principles and techniques of the visual arts and selected other arts disciplines, the humanities, or the sciences (6.c)
• Reflect upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others (5)
Describe the origins of specific images and ideas and explain why they are of value in their artwork and in the work of others (3.c)

**Instructional Concepts:**
The artistic thought processes and skill levels of most high school art students are developed enough to expect a sophisticated level of results as they collage, draw, paint, cut, staple, weave, tape, glue, texture (impasto), sew, and print in their art practice. This unit incorporates all these materials and techniques as students observe and document their local environment. Students will be encouraged to develop their own ideas, and improve observational and creative skills over an extended period of time as they create a body of artwork in their visual journals. Students will learn that traditional representational drawing and painting is not the only way to create artwork.

**Lessons:**

**Lesson 1 - Beginning the Visual Journey**
This lesson introduces students to the importance of observing their world and visually recording their ideas and feelings. A brief history of sketchbooks will be shared. Artist-students will be introduced to a range of artist sketchbook images from:

- The Sketchbook Project: http://www.arthousecoop.com/library
- The Artists’ Sketchbook on Line at http://gis.net/~scatt/sketchbook/links2.html
- Archives of American Art: http://www.aaa.si.edu/exhibitions/visual-thinking-sketchbooks

followed by a discussion of ideas, observations, insights, questions, and beginning the journey.

**Lesson 2 - Color in the environment**
Artist-students will explore and then choose three “personal” spaces in their local or school environment that they would like to develop into color study compositions. They will examine these spaces as places of inspiration in their visual journals by taking pictures, sketching, and creating color charts of ‘collected colors’ found in these three locations. Students will focus on refining and expanding their artwork through aesthetic awareness, reflective choice, and refinement of technical skills to create three finished studies in an art style of their choice.

**Lesson 3—Organic object as Symbol**
Artist-students will choose a single symbolic organic object found in their local environment to examine, interpret and represent in their visual journals. They will represent their interpretation of this object in 10 different ways in a visual progression from simple to complex using a variety of media and technique. Students will write narratives reflecting the symbolic nature of this object.

**Lesson 4—Investigating environmental art in performance**
- Introduce students to the work of artists:
- Mel Chin, http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mel-chin/videos
As a class we will discuss local environmental issues that students find concerning. Working individually or with partners the students begin to find provocative pro-active solutions to communicate these concerns. Class time will be spent creating visual plans and writing a verbal narrative, which will explain the performance. All brainstorming, and reflective problem solving will be documented in individual visual journals. Each final performance piece will be presented to school community members. Students will be assessed on their journals and their performance piece.

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint presentation of various artist sketchbooks:
- Individual sketchbook journals with a heavy weight paper
- Pencils
- Watercolor sets and brushes
- Acrylic paints
- Digital cameras
- PrismaColor pencils
- Black Sharpies or other permanent fine line marker
- Computer
- Teacher Visuals and collection of sketchbook journals
- Color printer (optional)
- Other materials as needed

**Assessment:**
- Observational evaluation of new knowledge
- One-minute daily comments/reflections/concerns
- Student self reflections (ongoing)
- Rubrics for artwork and performance art at various stages of completion
- Rubrics that assess evidence of time invested in visual journal entries, creativity, originality, observational drawing, narratives, and craftsmanship

**References:**
Appendix A.2

Interview Letter and Questionnaire

Dear

Hello, my name is Toni Whittington and I am conducting a research study for my Masters in Art Education at Boston University. My thesis question is: How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment?

I am intrigued by your artwork and believe that you and your work would speak volumes in helping me define my research study. The desire to conduct this research stems from a personal drive to create an art education pedagogy that values environmental aesthetics. My goal is to integrate environmental aesthetics, art education, and art practice.

I am writing to ask you to participate in this study by answering a few questions about the philosophy behind your artwork, and to share examples of your artwork. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to review my transcription of your answers. If you include an image of your artwork it will be credited and include title, year, size, and media.

I look forward to working with you and would be grateful for your participation in this research. I would appreciate your feedback by March 23, 2012. If you have any questions please contact me by cell: 208-720-2526, or email: twhitt4@gmail.com

Below are the questions I would like to ask you:

1. Do you have a background in art education? If so, please briefly describe.
2. Please describe the environment where you currently live.
3. Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. You might address themes, imagery, process, and or media.
4. What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork?
5. Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork?
6. Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment?
7. When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe.
8. Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create art? If so, please briefly describe.

Thank you for considering this endeavor,
Toni Whittington
Appendix A.3

Artist Questionnaire Coded Responses

How might a studio investigation into flora and fauna imagery affect awareness of the artist’s environment?

----- Art Education background
----- Flora, & fauna inspiration
----- Positive emotional process
----- Focused investigation
----- Other inspiration
----- Aesthetic & environment
----- Panic
----- Integration

Chicago based visual artist (S. Eichhorn), a children’s book author and illustrator (D. Fraser), a children’s book illustrator (K. Howard), a poet and assemblage artist (T. Marks), a Transformative Arts educator (L. Rasmussen), a high school photography teacher (A. Selarque), a watercolor & photography instructor (M. Sheplis Johnson), a Raku potter (R. Sieminski), and a mixed media installation artist and Chair of Painting at New Hampshire Institute of Art (A. Williams).

1. S. Eichhorn

Do you have a background in art education? Is so, please briefly describe.
No background in art education.

Please describe the environment where you currently live.
I live in a 2 story, single family home in Ukrainian Village, Chicago, IL. The first floor is domestic, traditional living space. The second floor is set up for studio, split between myself and fiancê.

Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. You might address themes, imagery, process, and or media.
No, it doesn't influence my artwork. However, I like to have a specific space designated to work in a maintain my studio practice. The environment also dictates, to a certain degree, the size and media in which I work. An example would be the large panels that I collage onto; the max size to navigate up and down the stairs is 6' x 4'. This becomes the max standard that I work in, if I get a larger, more accessible space I'll change the max size.

What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork?
I initially saw the natural components that I use in my collages as more formal architectural components. I used these to build up imagined architecturally diverse spaces
through the natural occurring forms in the found imagery. Through the gathering of collage components I've been able to hone in on different mythology, rituals and histories that surround the types of flora or foliage.

Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork?

No fine art/visual artists, really. I am most inspired by films and music. Right now I am making most of my work to the films of Alejandro Jodorowsky and to the music of: OM, Sleep, Lichens, White/Light, Black Sabbath, Slayer.

Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment?

Art is a constant reflection of the world environment (since art does not exist within a vacuum). This reflection, typically, presents itself in a scope otherwise not seen by the viewer.

Art educators and working artists set an aesthetic benchmark for students. This takes the form of slideshows, art history, lectures and critique that shapes the aesthetic contribution.

When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe.

The internal dialog happens all the time when I'm creating a piece or cutting the components for the work. While this is mostly executing the task at hand and problem solving; I tend to meditate on the process, intention and the next step towards the finished piece.

Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create art? If so, please briefly describe.

Yes, I do tend to get lost in my work especially in the finishing phase of a piece (composing and adhering all the components down). There is a different type of focus that carries me through the compositional process. That focus usually leads to an affective awareness or occasionally a panic attack. The affective awareness comes as a heightened sense of my process and connection with the piece. Lately I have been working on sculpture that has multiple time consuming processes that are very repetitious. There is a jewelry making portion that involves a lot of hand work and then a coating of the work in a black graphite mixture. Through the repetition of making this work I will some times go into a dissociative state followed by deep thinking and an affective awareness.

2. D. Frasier

1. Do you have a background in art education? If so, please briefly describe.

I never studied art education formally but have always worked with children since my first teenage job as art teacher at a local pre-school/kindergarten summer program. Since then I've worked in Artist In Schools programs with long term projects, as well as appeared a Visiting Author in numerous schools around the USA and Europe. Art
education is a core mission in all of these venues, with teaching "creative process" a better description than art education. My job is often simply to model a creative person being alive and well in the 21st century.

2. Please describe the environment where you currently live. I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I have lived since 1983. I am a fourth generation Floridian so this could not be a more contrasted environment. In my growing up days in lived in a house facing the Atlantic Ocean and this constant contact with the theater of water has had a huge impact on my work and love of the natural world.

3. Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. You might address themes, imagery, process, and or media. Now I live in the far North and the weather is a BIG issue. Winter is actually good for the author/illustrator as we must be inside a lot for half the year and that gives a lot of focus to the studio. When spring comes, however, it is hard to keep a Minnesotan inside! We must soak up every ray of sunshine, see every burst of green, ride every wave of loose water as we know it will disappear when the great world spins again.

The leaving of the benevolent life beside the sea to living in such a harsh climate has made me see the beauty of the world more clearly, in both what I miss, and in learning to fortify against weather. THE ANIMAL THAT DRANK UP SOUND, a book I illustrated with the American poet William Stafford's poem, is a metaphoric story in pictures of the coming of winter. I could never have seen into this poem in that way had I not experience the extreme winter of the far northern life.

4. What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork? Growing up beside the sea and facing that arc of the earth's water meeting the sky is the single most important LINE in my life: the stretch of blue horizon. You will see it repeated time and time again.

5. Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork? I am most inspired by artists who love color, line, and motion: Henri Matisse is my teacher, the California painter Debiencorn (spelling?), the Fauvres, the poet Mary Oliver, William Stafford—every waking day.

6. Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment? I think we can inspire ATTENTION, and since we only save what we love, that attention is the very first step. We artists offer the pointing finger: look here!

7. When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe. I am totally lost in my work when I am amid a book. This means a focus and a magnetism develops and ideas, people, materials, all start pulling in my direction. It is a wondrous experience. I carry a small journal with me as I've found that many of these
influences arrive from the periphery, and might be lost if I am not prepared to capture through glimpses, not full faced obvious presentation.

8. Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create your art? This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”? If so, please briefly describe. This is the moment I live in and was trying to describe above. However, I currently find myself in a computer nightmare and THAT is the opposite of flow! But when I am working at my studio table, time is suspended. Proof: Just ask my landlord for my studio: I have worked past the evening automatic alarm clicking on, having lost all sense of time, and suddenly find myself locked in, unable to move or the police will be automatically called!

3. K. Howard

Yes. I have taught children privately and in classroom workshops since 1991. These classes have been in Drawing/Watercolor/Acrylic and with a variety of themes: Hand painted birdhouses, floorcloths, self portraits, handmade cards, puppets, and other crafts. All classes have been in studio situations, other than one class through the Sun Valley Center for the Arts with an on location class in Ketchum and in Silver Creek Preserve. This particular course had a “horizontal and vertical” theme, completely inspired by our natural surroundings. I have taught adults since 1991. These are largely plein-air classes with:
Drawing/Watercolor/Journaling/Pen&Ink and take place in private gardens and in wild mountainous spots next to rivers and comfortable to get to. I also teach courses in Paris and in Provence, both of which have been out of doors when the weather permits: parks, outdoor cafes, vineyards, cliff side villages, etc. I find that these classes inspire students to work quickly and loosely, which is ideal for beginning artists.

I currently live on 1/3 of an acre on the outskirts of the small town environment of Hailey, Idaho. I still own and spend time on a 7.8 acre property in Nelson, BC, Canada, on Kootenay Lake. I prefer living with nature closely wrapped around me and quiet and solitude within close reach. There are trails out my back door for hiking and walking my dog.

Yes, my environment is integral to my peace of mind when working. Although, I have primarily been a children’s book illustrator, in which case I use reference materials through a library as well as the internet, I prefer to work outside. My watercolor paintings are done on location during the three months a year of warm weather. I camp in my westfalia vw van in a comfortable place with a work-ftable outside as well as a table inside of the van incase the weather changes. Otherwise I work in the studio during cold winter months in the Rockies. The themes of my art are both Nature based and Fantasy based. Themes are within my local landscape: flowers and trees, mountains and animals and bird life. I use found objects and create structures using wood/wire/beads and metal within the studio and place drawings and paintings done in nature into these constructions. I need power tools to build these structures, as well as acrylic paint, gesso, plaster and varathane to complete them. Also, my childrens book illustration needs to be
completed in a controlled environment as illustration is exacting and with designated prepared paper used.

The tactile touch of leaves, grass, water, bark and the earth keep me close to myself and to my work. I find comfort in the solitude of this kind of study and meditation. Nature is pure and I always go to it in life before using photographs of nature within my art. The pieces grow out of the time I am outside in the elements, most of the time. When the weather is bad, I use it as my “signal” to wrap up the painting and move inside to work. This is fun for me and spontaneous. I like the surprise of nature’s direction.

The artists who move me and inspire me are:

a. **Van Gogh** and his tenacity to work outside in all conditions. His sanity was dependent on his work and discipline. He needed nature to breath and live.

b. **Hannah Hinchen** and other hands on botanical and scientific journal-keepers inspire me to work outside and be honest with the “eye” in the work I create.

c. Mexican folk artists and painters such as **Rudolpho Morales** use animal, biblical and natural images to recreate the spiritual internal narratives and show heart and relationship in their work.

d. **Alexander Calder** uses the elements like the wind to stir his mind with his mobiles as well as fountains that he has built.

e. **Artist, Ginny Ruffner** uses flower imagery to create blown glass sculpture that is full of color and whimsy and hope, inspite of her physical limitations after a brain injury.

f. I love the “earth” artists like **Andy Goldsworthy**. They work completely with sticks, leaves, stones, snow, and their hands. They honor nature and use nature to guide their decisions and tell them what to do.

g. The variety in nature: the patterns created in Russian Yugoslavian rug makers and illustrators as well as the color.

Absolutely, environmental AWARENESS motivates me to produce. I donate a great deal to environmental causes and when the art market is soft and my sales are down, I feel that art can be used to raise money towards bigger causes than my own pocketbook alone.

One of the highlights of my career is to work with the underprivileged and teach children and women without means to honor their inner thoughts and life through journaling. So yes, I think as an art educator I have an opportunity to work together with other educators to bring young artists together with natural beautiful places. The other viable aesthetic contributions are through public space and funding. We can collaborate with our various talents as individual working artists; ie, glass blowing, welding, sculpture and stone/wood work, painting and design. This is exciting and stretches us to think outside of our own box.

My inner dialogue is generally quite self critical within the studio. So I enjoy working outside where the art making process is softened by the warm air, or wind, or beauty in nature.
Yes, I am occasionally swept away and become lost in my work. It isn’t often enough, however. As an illustrator, I am working in collaboration with an art director and editor and very specific problem solving is in effect. However, in those beautiful moments where I “gift” myself with time to create art for art’s sake, I can find a magical emotional release or have an epiphany and find my own story within the physical process of art making.

4. T. Marks

1. Do you have a background in art education? Is so, please briefly describe.
   I do not.
2. Please describe the environment where you currently live
   Rural NE U.S. 300-year-old mill house situated on Red Clay Creek. Tranquil and beautiful but for the constant flow of traffic and testosterone fueled motorcycles cruising the back road behind me.
3. Does your environment influence your artwork?
   I believe that it will, but in retrospect. Other than writing, my creative life is on hiatus. If so, please briefly describe. You might address themes, imagery, process, and or media.
4. What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork?
   Growing up in a home at the edge of a forest, I was influenced by Nature from an early age. Drawn to the solitude and comfort of the woods, I began writing my way through adolescence, while noting the many examples Nature gives us to carry into our lives and actions. This influence presented itself through my Spirit Doll series in combination with poetry. I see common characteristics between the composition of Nature's creations and our own humanity.
   Veins in leaves, the limbs of trees, expressions on the faces of stones. The durability of fragile blossoms to hold life and luster throughout the elements of weather and time.
5. Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork?
6. Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment?
   Yes I do. Maybe more than others because art shares information on a subtle but deeply personal level, allowing us to experience our role if we are open.
7. When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe.
   When I am creating a Spirit Doll, I may begin the process but at some point, the "spirit" of the elements emerge and lead the rest of the way.
8. Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create art? This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”?
   If so, please briefly describe.
   Yes, I have found myself losing track of time and place. Feeling completely absorbed by and connected to the piece as it develops and grows.
5. L. Rasmussen

Do you have a background in art education?
Yes. My background in Art Education is I have BA in Studio Arts Sculpture/ Ceramics and I have MFA in Painting. I have over six years of teaching Transformative Art to At-risk teens, emotionally traumatized children, and elders. Also, I created an award winning Transformative Art Program for emotionally traumatized children at a mental heath institute in Oakland, CA. I was creator of the program, core teacher, and program fundraiser.

Please describe the environment where you currently live?
Currently I live in Santa Monica near the beach and I recently opened a Transformative Art Center in Malibu., CA called Art 4 All People.http://www.art4allpeople.com/

Does your environment influence your artwork?
Yes, I think all aspects of life affective ones art --mind, body, and spirit. Life is a process and my art is a marker of that. My work spans from the residue of sacred sites, the in between, cosmos., the micro, the macro, intuition, nature, and Alchemy.

What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork?
When I am in nature I have connect and experience transcendent states of the sublime. Nature is divinity, expansion, creativity, beauty...

Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork?
I feel many artists are my artistic ancestors, they are like guides, mentors into an affinity with the creative source. My ancestors have delved deep into the exploration of spirit, psychology, transformation, and empowerment through the creative process.

Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment?
Yes- Absolutely that is our role

When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog?
Yes, sometimes its mind chatter from the baggage of the day, that as I create it transforms from negative into positive. Other times it is the residue of a transcendent experience--that dialogue is more a re kindling of my direct experience of experience the source.

Do you ever get “lost in your work”?
Absolutely! Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create art? This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”? If so, please briefly describe.
All the time-that is the true nature of the creative process. You transcend time and space just BE-creating and tapping into the ebbs and flows of the Source-which is divinity.
Great questions! Toni
Let me know when it is published or if you have any other questions
All the Best, Lisa

6. M. S. Johnson

Do you have a background in art education? Is so, please briefly describe.
My background in art education is mainly having gone to school to earn my masters
degree in art education. I am currently teaching a community education class in
beginning watercolor and I will be teaching a couple of courses at the Art Institute in
Minneapolis starting in April.

Please describe the environment where you currently live. I live in central Minnesota in a
small rural community that is surrounded by lakes and woods. It is a beautiful, peaceful
environment where expansive landscapes dominate.

Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. You might
address themes, imagery, process, and or media. My environment has greatly influenced
my artwork, specifically as it relates to photography. I become immersed in the beauty of
the colors, the sky, the lakes, the foliage, and the numerous wildlife such as deer, birds,
butterflies, and bees. I want to capture every moment, every morsel, every detail.

What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your
artwork? Nature is visually dominating to the senses and the soul. It isn’t scripted,
unique moments just happen that make you inspired to capture its phenomenon.

Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery
into your artwork?

I have a love for photography...for capturing a beautiful moment in time, for
documenting a rare or special environmental moment. There is no particular artist or
environment that particular influences me. I am inspired by it all.

Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic
contribution to the environment? Oh yes, who is better suited than an art educator to
inspire others visually through their teaching. Art educators can influence our care and
appreciation of the environment by reflecting such issues in their lessons.

When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please
briefly describe. Internal dialogue is usually, “Oh, I have to get this picture, look at how
beautiful that sky is, or that flower is, or that butterfly is.”

Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional
immersion, and affective awareness as you create your art? This is what Mihaly
Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”? If so, please briefly describe. Yes, I completely
get lost in what I am trying to capture. As I am witnessing the beauty of a natural setting,
I am at that moment grateful for where I am, what I am doing, and what I am experiencing.

7. A. Selarque

Do you have a background in art education? If so, please briefly describe. I graduated from the UCLA Film School in 1982. In 1992, I began teaching at the Art Center (Europe) College of Design in Switzerland. Since 1996, I have been teaching secondary art at Punahou School in Honolulu, Hawaii that includes foundation art, photography, and video. In 2012, I received my Master of Arts in Art Education from Boston University.

Please describe the environment where you currently live. I live on Oahu, the most populated island in the Hawaiian Archipelago. Hawaii is the most remote spot on Earth from another land mass and has the most indigenous and endemic species in the world. I live about 100 yards from Kaneohe Bay on the windward side of Oahu. I commute to work/school in Honolulu, the capital and most populated city in Hawaii.

Parts of Oahu are as urban as any city on the planet, but within minutes, you can be lost in a tropical rainforest or beyond the reef in the Pacific Ocean.

Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe.

Absolutely. I am not an artist/photographer that constructs or artificially creates images. I am an observer that is seeking truths of the universe in moments of time and space. My camera and I is a lens on the reality we perceive. Surfing is a sport that was born in Hawaii. The art is in taking what you are given and expressing yourself harmoniously with the wave.

Recently, in a New York subway station, I fell into the rhythmic groove of a street drummer, a crowd, and the trains. There was too much happening simultaneously for me to consciously understand all that was going on, but instead I could feel a swell of energy rising, starting shooting, and captured this image. At a meta-conscious level, the muscle memory in my index finger knew to hit the shutter release on my Nikon, but cognitively, I could not explain what I was witnessing.

What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork? I do not believe man and nature are mutually exclusive. Therefore, human environments are just recently evolved expressions of nature. In nature, as in man, I see order and I see chaos. I am attracted to imagery that reveals this order and chaos occurring in the same place and time.

Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork? Sebastiao Salgado and Steve McCurry are two living photographers that have inspired me. I am influenced (attracted or repelled to some degree to everything I come in contact with) including my life in San Diego, Los Angeles, Paris, Switzerland,
and Hawaii. My travels to Japan, Europe, Egypt, and throughout North America have also forced me to not take culture, people, or the environment for granted.

Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment?

**Artists:** Absolutely, in constructive and destructive ways. Cinema, the media, and the internet brings aesthetics and anesthetics from neighboring communities to distant nations. Architects have created synergetic living and working environments as well as ghettos and the loss of identity in suburbia.

**Art Educators:** Yes they can, but will they? Are schools themselves, and art curricula designed to inspire an aesthetic synthesis with the environment? Are art classes and schools integrated into the environment, or are they isolated? To become an artist or artist educator, does one reflect the environment or create it?

When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe. My left brain, is a critical thinker, and its internal dialog is skeptical, cautious, doubtful, uncertain, strong-willed, and unwilling to relinquish control to my right brain. I do not wish to engage my left brain when creating art, and therefore instead of dialog, I become hyper aware of my feelings, emotions, and energy. It's a visual dance of music and sensation.

Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create your art? This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”? If so, please briefly describe. I call the "flow" the "zone". To me it is not a process of movement and change, but rather an internal target of balance. There is a threshold between conformity and creativity that I seek to enter without destroying the foundational elements. Before you move on, you must know what you are leaving behind.

I understand the meaning of "lost" in your work, but I do not agree with the notion of "lost". I do believe that intentionality of discovery does not require one to be lost to find something new. Rather, it is just as important to discover something old than to stumble across the unknown.

How might a studio investigation into local flora and fauna affect awareness of the artist’s environment? An island is a macrocosm of a continent or larger ecosystems. In the urban and suburban environments on Oahu, there is virtually no evidence of local flora or fauna. Coconut, mango, monkeypod trees, lawn grass, and bushes like hibiscus were all introduced from over 2500 miles away. Same with the domesticated cats and dogs, as well as the zebra doves and mynah birds, mongoose and rats. At the edge of the "civilization" or the forest, you will find hybrids like feral pigs and goats, strawberry guava and mesquite trees...sort of the weeds or unwanted imports. After about a 90 minute hike into the rainforest, you will be surrounded by a majority of native endemic
species, some of which are only found on that specific island. These include Hawaiian honeycreepers and owls, koa and ohia trees, and rare insects and spiders.

The same effect happens to the human environment. The greater the concentration of people, the more likely you will find a franchise or chain store or non-Hawaiian architecture. As you move toward a lower density of people, you will find independent shops (only), and architecture much more visually harmonious to the environment. It should be noted that this transition in the ocean barely exists. In less than a few yards, the ocean is a wild. Man may deplete certain species, but I am not aware of any introduced or alien species.

Student artists are most attracted to the novelty and exaggeration of the extremes. It's simpler to conceive and there is little clash of aesthetics. As I've matured, I have become much more interested and fascinated in the juxtaposition of where nature and man clash and coexist.

8. R. Sieminski

Do you have a background in art education? Is so, please briefly describe. No, but have taught at the university level. Duchamp said: “It's not what you see that is art, art is the gap” …for me it’s in the gaps.

Please describe the environment where you currently live. Northwestern Maine. Moose in the yard, in the middle of 36 acres.

Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. Can’t speak in terms of imagery and process… before everything is spirit & thoughts …to live in the direct midst of the natural world is to have it’s soul become part of my work. You function through “no mind it’s an integrated result not separate, the process is greater than me” Charlie Parker said, “you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail.” It’s in you at that point.

I’ve been reading a lot of Cormac McCarthy, recently The Road… he writes succinctly 3 words and your heart is jumping out with understanding. Ceramics is a direct physical thing, touch, intimate…. That same understanding is conveyed

What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork? Nature is the teacher. Hands on, touch the surface… never sketch, internalization that will be referenced later in life. For me I really try to find a way out of my own mind, this process helps and art flows from this place.

Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork? Rothko, Waterlilies, Christo… Running Fence…. Could not go into an engagement of society directly, …Political art can become fascist, no personal interest, art needs a sustaining message. Kiefer has a physical energy in the object. I can
INVESTIGATION OF FLORA AND FAUNA

Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment? Everything that is made that is soul stirring for even a second reminds us of our environment, tribal society, dependent on environment, Avatar… all is linked, the thread between everything, people are not motivated… my hope a little bit of hope, is little things reconnect us… through the ground, through the mountain, artists have to have the capacity to dream….

When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe. Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create your art? This is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow”? If so, please briefly describe. Sometimes there is none. Responding directly to each step, in tune to the fire, kiln, rhythm makes you be part of it, if you become part of it, the pots speak to that…

Thoughts float through you… You respond… but in a small part. Much is just work. It is not an escape. Survival matters. I’m just able to have a different perspective. Myth is glamorized but we are struggling with the rest of the world.

9. A. Williams

1. Do you have a background in art education? If so, please briefly describe. I have taught art to High School students as well as College level students for approximately 13 years - before this I taught Continuing Education classes and workshops.

2. Please describe the environment where you currently live. I like 4 miles from the city center but you wouldn't know that when you are there! Our house is on a small lake/river. We have built a garden that steps down to the river and along the banks of the river.

3. Does your environment influence your artwork? If so, please briefly describe. You might address themes, imagery, process, and or media. The environment that I live in influences my work a great deal and in many ways: I love to garden and so am constantly going from my studio (which opens out onto the garden) into the garden and back again, plant matter is included in a lot of my work as is imagery inspired by the garden.

Conceptually my work is influenced by the New England environment, my love of summer and being able to garden; as well as my anxiety about the loss of summer and the death of all there plants and the tension between these two emotions - love and anxiety - that becomes something new, my artwork.

4. What is it about nature that initially inspired you to incorporate that imagery into your artwork? Same as above but also I have always loved landscape painting, when I lived in Scotland I liked how abstract the forms and patterns of the land were, when I moved to New England those abstract forms are not as visible (especially in the summer) so I started getting closer to the things that grew on the land itself.
5. Which artists and/or environmental influences inspired you to incorporate this imagery into your artwork? Abstract expressionists - specifically Richard Diebenkorn, Peter Layon, Ben Nicolson, Anselm Keifer, Joan Mitchell, Elizabeth Blackadder, Williams Gillies and the Scottish Colorists...

6. Do you think artists/art educators can inspire others to make a viable aesthetic contribution to the environment? Yes - artists is general often bring issues in front of the public eye, hence (whether they intend to or not) they influence how the public thinks and considers things.

7. When you are creating your artwork do you experience an internal dialog? If so, please briefly describe. Yes and no - I constantly am thinking about what I am making, the colors and textures I am creating, the plant or plants that I am working with. (see answer below also).

8. Do you ever get “lost in your work”? Have you experienced deep thinking, emotional immersion, and affective awareness as you create art? If so, please briefly describe. Yes - my work, though it has a deep conceptual basis, is also very intuitive and often based on chance, a connection between wildness and constraint, so I do try to give myself over to the experience of being influenced by, or lost in, what is happening. I want something that I have not anticipated to happen, I can only do that if I stop thinking and immerse myself.
Appendix B

Artist-Researcher Artwork

Figure B.1 Whittington, Four sketchbook observation examples
Figure B.2 Whittington, Prothonotary Warbler, 2012, 14x18”, watercolor, Acrylic, recycled and mixed media
Figure B.3 Whittington, untitled, 2012, 8x14”, Digital images, Prismacolor pencil
Figure B.4 Whittington, Collected Prairie Landscape, 2012, 14x22”, oil paint, glass vials, wax, linen thread
Figure B.5 Whittington, theater of water. sekimori ishi, do not step forward. 2012, 14x18”, Acrylic, oil, rocks, linen thread

Figure B.6 Whittington, places.plastic.pollutes, 2012, 4.5x14” Acrylic paint
Figure B.7 Whittington, plastic bag pollute, 2012, 14x18”, Acrylic, Pentel, Prismacolor, Sharpie

Figure B.8 Whittington, redwing prairie, 2012, 6x6”, Acrylic on paper
Figure B.9 Whittington, 2012, manipulated plastic bags, Photoshop

Figure B.10 Whittington, 2012, polyethylene organic, scanned local flora, Photoshop
Figure B.11 Whittington, Heart of a Tree Photoshop study

Figure B.12 Whittington, Plastic-Tree, Photoshop study
Interviewed Artist’s Artwork

Figure B.13 R. Sieminski, Large Oval Lava Bowl