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# Bearing Witness to my Creativity: Exploring my Artist Identity Through a Practice of A/r/tography

Tamara K. Doleman  
tdoleman@ashbury.ca

## Advisor

Susan Keller-Mathers

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Bearing Witness to my Creativity:  
Exploring my Artist Identity through a Practice of A/r/tography

by

Tamara Doleman

An Abstract of a Project  
in  
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May, 2017

Buffalo State  
State University of New York  
Department of Creative Studies

## ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

Bearing Witness to my Creativity:  
Exploring my Artist Identity through a Practice of A/r/tography

This master's project follows the personal journey of a creative studies master's student as she engages in an a/r/tographical process paired with a weekly practice of mindfulness, meditation and Lectio-Divina to explore and restore her artistic practice. The author shares creativity routines, her sketchbook, mini artworks, ideas, culminating collaborative artwork and key insights that enabled her to consolidate her seemingly disparate roles of artist-researcher-teacher. Insights made over the course of the investigation have resulted in the realization that creative expression is a dynamic construct that expands, contracts and evolves in relationship and in response to its host's experiences.



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Tamara Doleman

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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Date

Buffalo State  
State University of New York  
Department of Creative Studies

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Susan Keller-Mathers  
Associate Professor

May 3, 2017



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Tamara Doleman- Student

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## Dedication

I am moved to tears as I think about all of the things that needed to come together for me to spend this valuable time exploring my passion: creative expression. I am most grateful to my immediate family: Adam, my amazing husband who continues to be my pillar of strength and grounding influence. Eamon, my beautiful first born who never ceases to amaze and challenge me to be my best and most patient self and Harry, my baby and a creative force to be reckoned with. You are the loves of my life and my most cherished co-creators.

I must also acknowledge my larger family:

My parents from whom my love of everything creative has stemmed; Ronald Harry Doleman, Joanna Tse and Linden Gray. Thank you for providing me with grit and passion. My siblings: Dane, Tristan, Kaley, Neil and the Cobbs.

I want to thank my supportive community of women:

Tara, Ashanta, Kelly and Celia, you are always here when I need you. My sounding board partner, Nicole. My creativity partners: Dorota, Elisabeth, Lisa C, Lisa B, Alina and Megan, we make magic together and, to my amazing guardian angels: Lina, Peggy and Donnalyn, what a ride!

To the creativity greats:

Basquiat, Rollo May, Paul E. Torrance, Peter London, my advisor Susan Keller-Mathers, professors Cyndi Burnett, John Cabra, the entire ICSC faculty/staff and my incredible cohort of shiny jewels from whom I have learned so much.

To all my students - who I have taught already or have yet to teach, it is an honor to work with you. Finally, to Ashbury College, I would have struggled to complete this degree without your financial and professional support. I am so grateful.

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**“There are times in life when the highest honor, the greatest love is paid to another by simply bearing witness to his or her experience. Bearing witness is largely nonverbal. It is the choice to give the gift of a pure expression of love and respect — being a compassionate observer to the unfolding of...a particular moment or event.”**

Judith Johnson, 2011

## **SECTION ONE: PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### **Purpose**

It seems like forever that I have struggled with my own creative expression. This has been very difficult for me to accept and as an art teacher, I feel hypocritical instructing others to create while I myself am artistically unproductive. It pains me to admit that I have spent little time developing my own creative goals. I spend most of my time applying my creativity to develop and support creativity in my students and in my department and there does not seem to be the place nor time left for me to work on my own artistic creative passions and interests. I came to the International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC) at SUNY Buffalo State College to enroll in the Masters of Science in Creativity with the goal of exploring what might be causing me to resist creating art. I hoped that as I learned about creativity, I would uncover the barriers I face, break them down, and get back to being a productive artist. In my quest to explore my artistic shortcomings, I have recognized that I am also passionate about creativity research and that I love my job as an art teacher. Still I feel pulled between my current life roles as parent, teacher, visual artist and researcher and it feels like one role must always take precedence over the others. Sadly, it has been my artist role sacrificed for the benefit of the others I play. But, might there be a way for me to forge a new path where I can integrate art making into my life again? I

started to think about how this project might allow me the time I need to explore this possibility.

Reflecting on my experiences at ICSC, I realize that I had already been re-activating my creativity in a new way; my notetaking was the catalyst. Over my master's courses I began spontaneously articulating my understanding of creativity material in colourful sketches that included words and images. This type of making came naturally and easily although in my mind at the time, far removed from my previous, more traditional art practice. Yet, I discovered that I enjoyed synthesizing my learning visually and other people took notice of these creative products (see Appendix A). Recognition from my peers led me to consider how I might use artmaking to explore and research creativity. I spent an independent study course working to synthesize the work of the classic creativity scholars. I felt there was an opening in my creative work, with this new material. A novel thought occurred, perhaps I am not an artist, nor a teacher nor a researcher - I am all three, all the time. As I continued to ponder this complicated discovery and shared my interests, creative struggles and goals with other art educators, I learned that many art educators were experiencing similar frustrations. I was directed to investigate a wonderful research practice called *a/r/tography*, which aims to consolidate the three realms of knowledge identified by Aristotle: *theoria* (knowing), *praxis* (doing), and *poesis* (making), allowing an "artist-researcher-teacher" to embody all three identities through active and creative investigation and inquiry. ("theartographitrail", 2017)



**“A/r/tography is an emerging form of inquiry that recognizes the merit of the arts as a way of re-searching the world to enhance understanding and the educative potential such acts of inquiry may provide to teaching and learning. In this practice, research is expressed through artistic means”**

*(Irwin, 2004, p.1)*

I got excited about this and found myself curious about how embracing these roles simultaneously might influence my creative productivity? It was my hope that using an artistic process as a methodology of research (a/r/tography) to explore my own experience and understanding of my own creativity would enable me to integrate my seemingly separate roles of artist, teacher, researcher (and hopefully mother) and inform me as to how I could become a more productive creator. It would be wonderful if this project could put me on my path to making my unique (and artistic) contributions to the world.

### **Project Description**

For the duration of my master’s project, mirroring an ancient devotional approach used by Benedictine monks called **Lectio-Divina**, I envisioned using a (modified) contemplative practice consisting of 4-stages: **lectio**, **meditatio**, **oratio** and **comtemplatio** partnered with deliberate creative studio practice. I would begin my weekly “creativity devotions” with relaxation and meditation to clear my mind using yoga, tai chi and mediation. Stage one, **Lectio** – would serve to initiate my weekly research as I selected and read creativity texts. Stage two, **Meditatio**- required me to reflect on these readings and to identify a

direction of inquiry to explore for the week. Stage three, **Oratio** - challenged me to respond to the readings from an intuitive and emotional place as I interpreted information through a creative process using art materials. The process would conclude with stage four, **Contemplatio**- where I would reflect on my own creative response and search for insight and then summarize my experience in my journals. This process would be influenced by, but not limited to, the inquiry methodology of a/r/tography (Irwin & deCosson, 2004), which approaches artmaking from the vantage point of artist-teacher-researcher. I hoped that this practice would allow me to explore how the work I do with my students might be considered expression of my artistic creativity. Essentially, I expected that I would be excavating long buried attributes of my own creativity through this reflective, biographical process. I planned to culminate this inquiry with a project report and an art exhibition that would serve to synthesize my personal discoveries about my own creativity. I anticipated that through this process I could put myself back on a path to living a productively expressive creative life where my artist-researcher-teacher selves could cohabitate within my creative process so that I could make my own unique and purposeful contributions to creativity research and art education. I was hopeful that this journey might serve as inspiration to others who felt they had lost their creative and artistic voices to seek a way back.

### **Applied Creativity Skills**

Through this master's project I applied many of the creativity skills and concepts I learned in our program, namely:

- I manipulated my “Press” to maximize creative expression. (Rhodes, 1961). This included improving physical, as well as psychological factors of influence.
- I participated in activities to enhance and support my affective traits: meditation, warm-up activities, art conferences, physical exercise and creative excursions in preparation for studio practice each week.
- I dedicated at least 6 hours a week to artmaking and process work: journaling and reflecting.
- I identified and applied many of Torrance's 18 creativity skills such as highlighting the essence, looking at things in new ways and visualizing content rich and colorfully. (Torrance & Safter, 1990).
- I explored and applied a modified form of the inquiry method of a/r/tography.

### **Project Rationale**

I've identified two areas in which this work is important; personally, and professionally. An essential question guiding my personal inquiry was how I might use this independent project time to explore and reconcile the role of

teacher, artist and researcher within myself as they related to my own creative art-making practice. The project would allow me to identify key concepts and practices that I found pertinent to returning to my own creative artistic expression.

From the professional perspective, I recognize that there exists a gap between the creativity research being conducted and the people who apply it. Scholars and researchers - in their academic way - sit on knowledge that desperately needs to be shared in accessible forms. Jack Davis in *Looking Back and Looking Forward: Creativity Research and Art Education*, shares that there has been a decrease in the number of studies published in the field of art education related to creativity since the 1970's (Bastos & Zimmerman, 2015). With this in mind I recognized that I would address teaching goals with this project. I could inquire into how I might become a bridge (in my role as a/r/tographer) between academic research and the people who need to use it. The artist in me would produce novel and useful art objects for consideration and inspiration. The researcher in me would inquire into my own attitudes, understanding and application of creativity concepts as I applied and reflected on my creative process. The teacher in me would simplify and deliver my discoveries in a digestible form and structure that I believed could serve to inspire others to explore their own unique creativity. I believed that this project would help me to weave my personal and professional goals together, resulting in creative work that would serve to inform others about the creative process in a new, unique and personally meaningful way.

## SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

### **A/r/tography Resources**

Being new to the research methodology of a/r/tography, I needed to understand how the practice is used in art education. I gathered the following resources to guide my application and understanding of this practice. Strangely, most of the published pieces on this topic were done so in a very conventional and text-heavy format. These publications speak more to the practice in theory rather than as published collections of an emerging form of research:

<http://theartographictrail.com>

Irwin, Rita L. & deCosson, Alex (Eds.). (2004). *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts based living inquiry*. Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press.

Macleod, K., & Holdridge, L. (Eds.). (2006). *Thinking through art: Reflections on art as research*. New York: Routledge.

Sullivan, G. (2005). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sullivan, G. (2006). Research Acts in Art Practice. *Studies in Art Education*, 48(1), 19-35.

### **Art Making Resources**

Each week I employed exercises and activities from the following texts to prompt, inspire and support my work. All of these books were already in my personal library. I have elaborated on the texts that provided the most applicable readings to support my inquiry, the ones I drew on to identify and justify my weekly investigations. Interestingly, most of the texts I selected acknowledge a

spiritual and healing component to art making. I found these components lacking in most of the deliberate creativity resources we worked with at ICSC and I continue to wonder if the element of the spiritual is what differentiates the creative process in the arts from that in other domains?

Allen, P. B. (1995). *Art is a way of knowing*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Barry, L. (2015). *Syllabus*. Montréal: Drawn & Quarterly.

Barry, L. (2008). *What it is*. Montréal: Drawn & Quarterly.

Linda Barry's work was an incredible inspiration for me. Her books are part graphic novel, part creativity exercises and part personal journals. She is a professor and an instructor of creative writing and she gives workshops that help people to find their creative voices. In her books, she sets up creativity investigations by asking questions related to aspects of creative expression, writing and drawing, and then answers them using her own sketches, drawings and experiments as well as the work of her students. I decided to model my own research process in much the same way. These books are wonderful to look at. She visualizes her ideas rich and colourfully and uses humor frequently, very funny and enjoyable reads.

Gold, A., & Oumano, E. (1998). *Painting from the source*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

This book helped me to use art making as a spiritual practice. The author makes suggestions about how to start a making process from the internal prompts; she gives permission to the artist to use imagination, memory and feelings to start the artistic process. During times of frustration and blocks, this book helped me to get started and to be curious to see what might happen.

Harrison, S. W. (2000). *Spilling open: The art of becoming yourself*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

This beautifully published art journal is a visual example of work and process at the same time. It is amazing that this book was penned by the artist in her early 20's. Sabrina Ward Harrison uses a beautiful and expressive art style in this book that employs text, photography and mixed media techniques that shows the artist inquiring into her life using the artistic process. This book served as a visual and conceptual model for my own a/r/tographical approach. It is part self-exploration, part auto-biography and part experiment in the making.

Judith, A., & Goodman, L. (2012). *Creating on purpose: The spiritual technology of manifesting through the chakras*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

Anodea Judith explains the creative process through a spiritual lens in this book by aligning different stages of the creative process to energy centers in the body (Chakras). From her point of view, getting through the process involves understanding how to move energy through these systems. The book explores physical and emotional exercises you can use to facilitate energy flow. It is rooted in Yogic philosophy however her background in Western psychology

serves to bridge the insights in a framework that is palatable to our own culture. I have done two intensive workshops with Dr. Judith and can honestly say her blend of mystical and psychological exercises are transformative.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2006). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn is a renowned medical doctor who has brought the concept of mindfulness to the rhetoric of our time. What started as a way for people to learn to manage pain has evolved into a movement that serves to help us feel more connected, regulate sleep, deal with depression, anxiety and physical pain. This book offers up ways to open up and employ your senses more deeply and deliberately. These practices are valuable to an artist, who communicates in the language of the sensory. I used his work to help me to become more aware, more in tune, more mindful of the activities in which I was participating and how I was responding to experiences.

Kondō, M. (2014). *The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing*. New York, NY: Ten Speed Press.

Everyone always says that the best way to get inspired is to clear your space and start fresh. I turned to this best-selling author's book to help me rid my studio of clutter however, I soon discovered that her tidying process is a very demanding one and would essentially take up the majority of my studio making time. Like creativity, decluttering takes a commitment, a frame of mind and a willingness to be present with your stuff as you determine if it has value for you.



London, P. (1989). *No more second hand art: Awakening the artist within*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.

This book was my main text and guide, essentially informing and transforming my entire art-making practice. London, whom I have had the privilege of doing workshops with, in this case, and perhaps from now on, served as my mentor for this project. Most important to me, is how London reframes art to be understood from the context of an earlier time. Art in our past was used for purposes we do not acknowledge it for now. Through making art he advocates, we learn to question, to honor, to confront, to commemorate, to come together, to show gratitude and to heal. London's point of view has opened up a floodgate of possibilities for me to explore. Because of this writing, where my creative well had once run dry, it is now replenished with intention, ideas and possibilities to keep me engaged creatively for some time. This book was vital to my redefining the purpose of my work and my understanding of how I might continue to employ my creative and expressive energy in the future.

Maisel, E. (1995). *Fearless creating: A step-by-step guide to starting and completing your work of art*. New York, NY: Putnam.

Maisel begins this book by addressing the anxiety one often feels when creating. He states that creating is not an easy process and that different kinds of feelings come up at different stages of the process. "If you are to create, you must invite anxiety in." (p. xvii) He identified seven specific "anxiety types" one encounters at different stages of the creating process and presents remedies to

each. The book is filled with self-care tips and exercises that can support exploring creative blocks and re-framing challenges. I knew that I felt anxiety during the making cycle and assumed it was because I found it hard to make art. I did not recognize that anxiety was married to the creative process, indeed a part of it.

May, R. (1975). *The courage to create*. New York, NY: Norton.

May, speaking to the idea of requiring courage for the creative encounter, was eye opening for me. This read helped me to understand the relationship I have to my art and also the subjects of my work. My resulting artwork can be understood as an embodiment of the experience, the connection I have with the materials, the ideas and the energy I experience in process. “What genuine painters do is reveal the underlying psychological and spiritual condition of their relationship to their world” (p. 52). May validates the conscious and unconscious aspects of the creative process, he has written a (still) relevant guide to the creative encounter.

Mcniff, S. (1998). *Trust the process: An artist's guide to letting go*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

“The way we label in relation to creativity is one of the strongest inhibitions to broader participation” (p. 53). In this text McNiff provides the reader with many different ways that we can approach creative expression. Particularly helpful to me was his chapter on blocks in which he shares that so many of us feel blocked as we wait for an idea to appear. He suggests we just get making and moving

and take action to work through the block. “If the materials of creation are envisioned as partners, we learn to follow their leads” (p.78). There are many suggested activities and inspirational bits shared in this book. A very helpful tool for practice and inspiration for any working artist.

Miyata, C. (2016). *How to draw almost everything: An illustrated sourcebook*. Beverly, MA: Quarry.

This book is a little collection of exquisite drawings of all kinds of things. I loved to peek at it and remind myself how simple, adorable and imperfect our drawings can be and yet be effective and enjoyed. Miyata is a graphic artist and illustrator who has a knack for simplifying objects. I have used this book to enable me to visualize some of the ideas that had been appearing in my head.

Osho. (1999). *Creativity: Unleashing the forces within*. New York, NY: Griffin.

Osho was a provocative spiritual teacher whose work is still highly regarded today. In this text Osho makes a key distinction between action and activity. “In action, you are. Activity is your escape from yourself- it is a drug. In activity, you forget yourself...Action is good. Activity is ill” (p.13). This was very valuable information because in essence my problem with my own creativity was that I was too busy, I had too many activities on the go and now realize this fullness of schedule as the way I was numbing myself. Osho speaks to our need to learn to sit in ourselves so we can start to recognize our motivations for doing and not doing. He suggests that we revisit our motivations from a place of

intention and mindfulness. He identifies five obstacles we face to being creative and four keys to supporting it in our lives.

Reis, S. M. (1998). *Work left undone: Choices & compromises of talented females*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, Inc.

As I explored what got in my way, what stops me from participating in my own creative expression, I turned to this book for advice, insight and inspiration. Much of the research we have with regard to eminence speaks to male success along a male timeline for success. This book shares that a woman's journey to discovering their purpose and meaningful life work is in many cases, a less direct one. There are many reasons and things that get in our way, or cause us to pause and as a result, many women come to their most important work later in life. It is very important for creative women to know what they may confront as they dream to balance work, family and future in their busy lives. This book offers us inspiration of women who have found a way to do what matters to them despite the challenges.

Simon, J. F. (2016). *Drawing your own path: 33 practices at the crossroads of art and meditation*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

This book is one that I used as inspiration for how to practice mindful artmaking. Simon articulates how he got started using artmaking as a form of mediation and offers up exercises and approaches and advice on how to build your own meditative art practice. One method he shares is called noting. The individual makes marks or takes notes in relationship to the feelings and

experiences that come up in a sitting session. For instance, sitting still I notice sensations of seeing, feeling, hearing for this practice I would note what I hear, or saw or felt as a mark. You are then encouraged to revisit your collection of marks afterwards to look for patterns. While not my favorite book, it did have some original exercises that help to discipline my practice.

### **Creativity Resources**

The following list of resources was used to identify concepts and ideas to explore in my art process.

Bastos, F. M., & Zimmerman, E. (2015). *Connecting creativity research and practice in art education: Foundations, pedagogies, and contemporary issues*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.

This book opened my eyes to the fact that not much research has been published with regard to creativity in art education. I am fascinated about how my own field of art education views creativity. You would assume that creativity is at the center of teaching art, but alas, it is not. This book shares where the research is currently with regard to creativity in art education and where it needs to go. It has informed me about future directions for my own research.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

This book spells out the psychological benefits you get from the artistic process and introduces us to the concept of flow. It has enabled me to attempt to set up my artistic encounters to encourage flow, a psychological state akin to

ecstasy that many people experience when engaged in a creative act. The author explains the basic criteria you need to encourage flow through action.

Davis, G. A. (2004). *Creativity is forever*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub.

Isaksen, S. G., Lauer, K. J., Ekvall, G. & Britz, A. (2001). Perceptions of the best and worst climates for creativity: Preliminary validation evidence for the situational outlook questionnaire, *Creativity Research Journal*, 13(2), 171-184.

Jindal-Snape, D., Davies, D., Collier, C., Howe, A., Digby, R., & Hay, P. (2013). The impact of creative learning environments on learners: A systematic literature review. *Improving Schools*, 16(1), 21-31.

Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond big and little: The four-c model of creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(1), 1-12.

Kaufman, S. B., & Gregoire, C. (2016). *Wired to create: Unravelling the mysteries of the creative mind*. London, England: Vermilion.

Kirton, M.J. (1976). Adaptors and innovators: A description and measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 61, 622-629

Kounios, J., & Beeman, M. (2015). *The Eureka factor: Aha moments, creative insight, and the brain*. New York, NY: Random House.

Puccio, G. J. (2012). *Creativity rising: Creative thinking and creative problem solving in the 21st century*. Buffalo, NY: ICSC Press, International Center for Studies in Creativity.

Rhodes, M. (1961). An analysis of creativity. *The Phi Delta Kappan* 42(7), 305-310.

Torrance, E.P. & Safter, T. (1990). *The incubation model of teaching*. Buffalo, NY: Bearly Limited.

This text allowed me to ensure that the activities I was doing in the studio supported the development of my creative traits. In this book 18 traits are discussed as applied to the Torrance Incubation Model (TIM) for teaching, a

three-phase teaching model that works to weave creativity skills in with content.

This reading supports the teacher in me and enabled me to sort and support my discoveries as I reflected on them for applications in the classrooms.

## **SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN**

### **Plan to Achieve Goals and Outcomes**

My first week started with generating an exhaustive list of things I could inquire about with the prompt: What are all the aspects of creativity I may want to explore? These ideas would serve to fuel each week's investigation that would be supported with research, additional readings and affective practices: mindfulness, meditation, and excursions to inform my making process. I concluded each week's activities with reflective journaling to summarize key discoveries as well as identifying support for these insights in the literature I used to inform my creative work. My entire project would result in a week by week reflective visual art and journaling practice where each artwork could be understood as a physical embodiment of my process, ultimately highlighting the essence of my experience and thoughts on my selected topic of inquiry. Over time my practice evolved into a more organic and intuitive process where I became more improvisational in my approach. I might select a reading first or begin with an excursion. I learned to become mindful of my own needs and to support myself as necessary.

### **Preparation and Art Practice**

#### **What would I create?**

- I gathered creativity resources, inspirational artwork, materials, supplies and began sketching out some of my thoughts about what I could develop.



- I read creativity research and books to prompt creative encounters and journaled my experience and responded through materials.
- I envisioned creating between 4-12 artworks depending on where my ideas carried me.

### **Where would I create?**

- I made improvements to my workspace to ensure that I had a physical and emotional space where I could work without interruption.
- I created a studio space and engaged in activities to support an effective and affective studio practice.

### **How would I get motivated?**

- I explored and practiced support exercises and returned to meditation and yoga practice.
- I would identify creativity exercises and use them to grow motivation, affective sensibility and creative courage.

### **A/r/tography practice (February)**

- I read and re-read the books on my list and considered how I might begin the making process. (ongoing)
- I recorded and explored ideas as they came and documented and reflected on this process in my sketchbook.

- I set up my studio space and started to gather materials I feel compelled to use for my projects and experiments.
- I played with ideas and tested out materials. I stayed open to what transpired.
- I continued to practice meditation and mindfulness.

### **A/r/tography and studio practice (March)**

- I attended a 4-day art education conference in New York City and signed up for sessions that I felt would support my A/r/tography practice. I went for inspiration walks and attended shows and exhibitions to collect inspiration for my project.
- I made creative pieces (mini works), engaged in journaling and reflected on process discoveries with the goal of connecting these impressions and ideas to my understanding of my own artistic creativity and to producing an artistic body of work.
- I planned and developed the student art show framing this work as an a/r/tographical investigation of student/teacher collaborative creative process and product.
- Over my 2-week March break, I created something every day for 10 days.

### **Sharing my work with others (April-infinity)**

- I determined formats of display for my work.

- Curated the art show, April 8<sup>th</sup> at Ashbury College.
- Photo documented the student art show. The student art show called *The Art of Becoming* showcased what we had come to discover through our collaborative efforts. In it we featured work at various stages of the creation process as well as our culminating collaborative installation called *The Creative Process*.

*Table 1. Week by Week Project Plan*

Week	Task	Hours
Feb 13 - 19	Review literature	7 hours
	Re-visit art making	10 hours
	Art Inquiry: what does your creativity look like? Where does it come from?	3 hours
	Qi Gong practice	
Feb 20 - 26	Readings from Peter London and additional resource readings	4 hours
	Reflecting on key insights in journal	4 hours
	Art inquiry: What stops you?	
	Felting experiments	4 hours
	Qi Gong Practice	1.5 hours



Mar 20 – 26	Inquiry: Where do I come from, who am I, what do I need to say?	4 hours
	Art supply shopping	3 hours
	Start draft of sections 4 – 6	3 hours
	Organize first section of my paper, draft acknowledgments	3 hours
	Qi Gong Practice	3 hours
Mar 27–Apr 2	Building the student show	6 hrs.
	Inquiry: How might the work I do with my students be part of my own artistic process?	
	Creating a group Creative Process Installation	40 hours
	Continuing my own studio projects	4 hours
	Qi Gong	3 hours
Apr 3 – 9	Art Inquiry: What do I wish to share?	
	Setting up the group art show: Building art exhibits	20 hours
	Documenting the student art show	5 hours
	Hosting the student art show	4 hours
	Reflecting on Group process and gathering student experiences	6 hours
	Qi gong	3 hours
Apr 10 - 16	Compile documentation of art show and my work.	10 hours
	Continue with sect 4-6 key learnings	15 hours
	Qi gong	3 hours

Apr 17 – 23	Ask Lina, Peggy, Donnalyn and Adam to read over my draft and edit changes	4 hrs.
	Organize images and label images	10 hrs.
Apr 24 – 30	Revise Finished Project based on Sue's feedback	5- 10 hrs.
	Create video presentation of the Creative Process room project to share and to create a video link in appendix	6 hours
	Qi gong	3 hours

Practicing Art is not making pictures...  
 It is a practice of approaching the other  
 -MY CLASSROOM IS A SANCTUARY OF BEINGNESS  
 everything and everybody  
 it turns out to be...  
 different from  
 more than  
 better than  
 you will ever know it to be  
 explore  
 how it is going  
 to be  
 just have to  
 continue...  
 look for the  
 glint and teach  
 to that  
 P. London  
 each work you  
 do brings you to  
 a threshold you  
 could not have  
 known before you  
 made it...  
 THE LANGUAGE  
 OF LOVE'S  
 PRESENCE  
 Peter London

March 3, 2015  
 PETER LONDON  
 9am.  
 garity is a  
 planet that  
 never breaks.  
 a gravity is  
 earth's way of  
 keeping us  
 close  
 We are all part of this  
 change big family...  
 ART IS AN ACT  
 OF THANKSGIVING  
 every gesture you make is  
 imparted for a love  
 go ahead

He happened to be giving a workshop at the National Art Education Association conference I attended in New York City in March, 2017. I had just decided to use his book *No More Secondhand Art - Awakening the Artist Within* (1989), as one

of the texts to fuel my weekly creative Lectio-Divina meditations, and I realized he was presenting a session. His workshop left me with inspiring and insightful concepts to ponder, some of which would put me back on an authentic path of making:

- Teachers are enablers of our student's forthcoming.
- Our art can be seen as a map of where we are, where we have been and what may come.
- Practicing art is not about making pictures, it is a practice of approaching the other.
- Art is more than creating aesthetic objects for the admiration of others. Art can be used to celebrate, to mark significant events, places and people, to honor others and ourselves, to show gratitude, to help us heal, to help us connect and, to explore what is possible.

So many of the discoveries and experiences I will reflect on in this report stem from Peter London's advice and the ideas he shared. It was as though this opportune meeting served to alert me to his work and to remind me of the importance and relevance it would have to my own work for this project.

### **Creative Encounters**

One of the most valuable outcomes of this journey was my introduction to the practice of understanding an art-making process as a creative encounter. At



the outset of this project, I had intended for my weekly artistic responses to be inspired from passages from the works of creativity researchers. In preparation for this academic inquiry, I set aside many books and readings in a great big inviting pile on the floor of my studio space; this approach served me well to get started. For my first few weeks of practice, I scoured these books until a line or a concept triggered the desire to respond. I would then pause, incubate, and invite myself to pick up materials to see what would happen. My earliest artistic responses using this Lectio-Divina approach resulted in sketchy infographics-style images that translated the information I was reading into visual form. This work, although interesting and even attractive, was not what I would describe as my artwork. A couple of weeks of this left me feeling indifferent and directionless. Nothing I created at this point would I ever consider putting on display and, since exhibiting my work was one of my declared outcomes, I began to feel discouraged and questioned the value and purpose of my project. Frustrated and angry, I instinctively took a trip to the fiber arts store Wabi Sabi (fittingly, Japanese for the art of imperfection) returning home with many colourful strands of wool roving and a variety of felting needles. I decided I would needle felt to pass the time until my next week's challenge. I began shaping the wool and found it extremely rewarding. I enjoyed the repetitive stabbing motion of the needle as it poked the wool into compliance. The felting process demanded my presence as each time I lost focus, I inevitably stabbed myself with the needle and back into sharp and painful awareness. Before my very eyes, what emerged

between my bleeding fingers was a little shriveled troll like creature that morphed (with the help of my son Harry) into a small felted sculpture of a swaddled Donald Trump; I called this piece *Babushka Trump* (Figure 2) and I consider this piece my first breakthrough.



*Figure 2. Babushka Trump, felted wool, 2017.*

Making this project allowed me to cathartically express my frustration and feelings of helplessness over the U.S. election through the act of repeatedly stabbing this little felted “voodoo” doll into being. In this process, I woke my artist self. I believe this because the very next day on my drive into work, my mind was flooded with images. Crystal clear pictures emerged from my mind’s eye of the woman’s march, and as I pulled into my parking space, I felt compelled to rush into the school and to whip open my sketchbook and to catch images I had seen for fear they would disappear from my awareness (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Sketchbook excerpt: *Protest, Power and Process, 2017*.

So, my Lectio-Divina process necessarily evolved. The initial academic prompts were augmented with excursions and field trips, eventually replaced with what I would come to know as creative encounters. Initially, I felt guilty deviating from my plans; my negative and judging voice attempted to delegitimize the academic merit of my activity and yet, as I learned to ignore this aspect of myself and allowed myself to seek out authentic tasks, I found it easier to use my materials in an artful way. I began to improvise with my process. Sometimes I would respond to text in a visual way and other times I would explore the text to make sense of what came into being or knowing through my process. It was during one such experience like this, where I had reversed my process and seeking to justify my outcome from my texts, that I stumbled on Peter London's explanation of how

to set up creative encounters. The notion of the creative encounter was not new to me as Rollo May (1975) coined the term in *The Courage to Create*:

**“the first thing we notice in a creative act is that it is an encounter. Artists encounter the landscape they propose to paint—they look at it, observe it from this angle and that. They are, as we say, absorbed in it...the paint, the canvas, and the other materials then become a secondary part of this encounter; they are the language of it.” (p.41)**

Elaborating on May's description of the creative encounter, London (1989) dedicated a significant portion of his book, *No More Second Hand Art: Awakening the Artist Within*, to providing examples and guidelines regarding how to set up relevant creative encounters. He identified important things to consider in their formulation:

- An encounter is an invitation, and the invitation you create should not intimidate or discourage.
- Encounters should aim to cultivate fullness of engagement over a correctness of effort.
- The encounter should be proposed so that “any genuine response offers genuine reward” (p.78).

I began to invite myself to engage with materials by asking myself questions such as:

- What does my creativity look like and where is it in my body?
- In what way can I honor ideas?
- How can I create an offering of love to those affected by POTUS 45?

- How can I create ongoing work that does not demand so much time, but allows me to make a statement?
- How can I create a symbol for the courage it takes to generate and foster ideas?
- How might I turn moments of shame into symbols of strength through the process of creating?

I knew I had set up an appropriate and meaningful encounter when I found myself compelled to ideate my responses and felt energy and excitement in the process of doing so. Prompting myself to create artistic responses from a place of inquiry was liberating. This shift to asking the right question to elicit a response was what allowed me to reclaim the artist voice in myself that I was convinced I had lost. “In seeking the meaningful rather than the beautiful, we nurture an endeavor which lies at the deepest levels of traditional function of art: the uniquely human quest for establishing personal meaning in a possibly meaningful universe.” (London, 1989, p.20). I found that my acceptance of the results of my creative expression was rooted in the way that I phrased my questions at the outset. As I learned to set myself up for creative encounters, the experience of creating became less about what the resulting exercises looked like, and more about what they revealed to me about my questions. I found myself responding to my results with curiosity rather than judgement -another important breakthrough. I realized, I had never been taught how to set up an art encounter other than through the observation of an image, object or person. The emphasis

of the task (in my art classes and art education training) had been mostly to capture what I saw, rather than to reveal a response to a question. I had forgotten there were other ways to connect with materials.

## Sketchbooks

In response to these weekly creative encounters, I was able to generate investigative notations and an impressive collection of visuals. For the first time in my life, I experienced the emergence of an authentic sketchbook practice. What evolved from the process were hybrid like scrapbook pages of collected ticket stubs, quotes, images, lists, doodles, ideas, lecture notes, sketches and drawings -an organized hoard of data and experience-artifacts (see Figure 4). I found this new way of working fun, exciting and liberating.

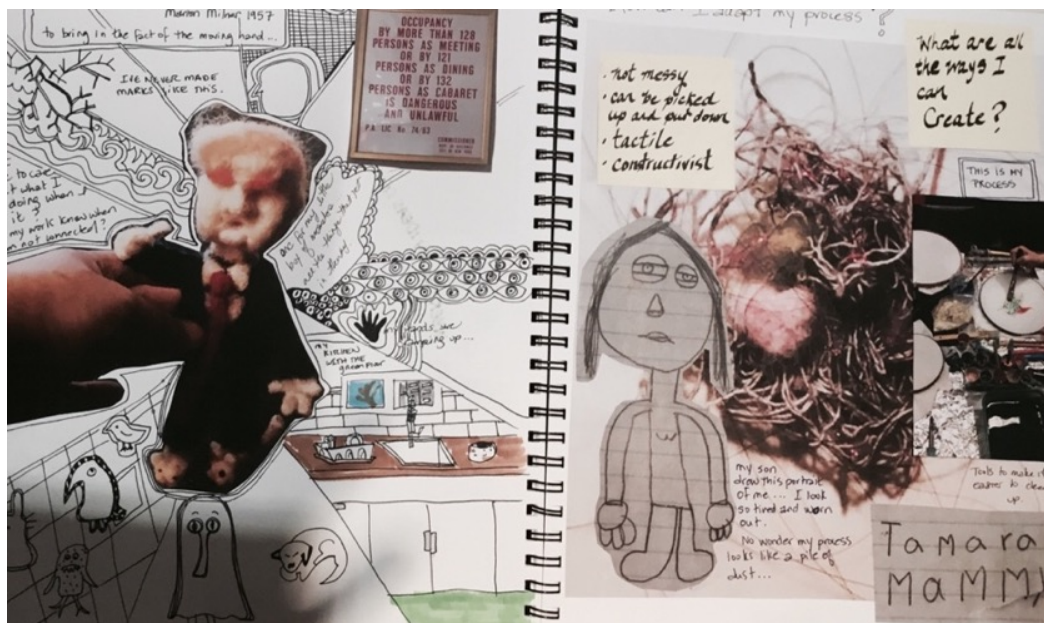


Figure 4: A Sketchbook Page to Call my Own, 2017.

My sketchbook became a portable place to collect the stuff of ideas. I enjoyed using these sketchbooks the way I felt like, rather than the way I had been taught over many years of art classes. In the past, I was always trying to fill my books with what a sketchbook “should have”: pretty images or plans for images - the right images, the right notes for the right outcome. What I have come to recognize over the course of this project is that I don’t use my sketchbooks to create pretty or impressive drawings or to necessarily plan a work of art. Rather, I like to use my sketchbooks to collect stuff, all kinds of stuff. I am happiest constructing my sketchbooks using a collage and scrapbook process. Returning to my sketchbook to record my initial insights, thoughts and ideas felt exhilarating. Most importantly I began to “own” my sketchbooks and understand their value in reference to myself.

### **Idea Seeds**

The more I used my hands felting and the more successful I was at discovering meaningful creative encounters to reflect on and collect for, the more visual ideas would appear to me, often during the 25-minute drive to school. Interestingly, the images that would flood over me were often not related to my creative encounters at all. They might be a response to an encounter I had set up for myself a while back or they might arrive as a mystery. Looking back on my process work, the images (or idea seeds, as I have come to call them), could be organized along four strong thematic pulls:

- Art as form of protest and empowerment. How to deal with the despair and anger I was feeling about the injustice I was witnessing. These ideas appeared as images and projects related to my feeling about POTUS 45.
- Images in the form of revisiting past experiences and coming to terms with particular moments and memories in my life.
- Images that communicated ideas about creativity. These ideas had already begun to take shape and are perhaps the most product focused in that the intention for them is to communicate aspects of creativity research in the form of artwork to be digested by an audience. I had already begun to create work of this nature through a variety of courses I had taken at ICSC.
- Images of seeds and gardens. I became increasingly drawn to plants and seeds. I gathered many images of seeds and also discovered that many artists were also interested in this; I began to understand my own artistic voice and creativity as a garden and my ideas as little seeds of possibilities. I began to see the garden as the perfect metaphor for my own creativity.



### Mini Artworks

As these images and idea seeds appeared to me I began the task of developing them into resolved artworks. After all, creating artwork and putting it on display was what I had anticipated would serve as the main measurable outcome of my efforts. I found this prospect exciting but, in my attempts to complete works, I was very quickly reminded why I was not creating art for myself: time. There was very little time for me to sit in solitude and create works. My art process had always involved me developing work, usually in one very long and exhausting sitting. I would stay up all night, creating in flow, oblivious to the passing hours, immune to hunger and fatigue, coming into consciousness just as the image seemed to reveal itself in full form before my eyes in the wee hours just before dawn. I would say to myself in these moments “I can’t believe I made that”; it felt magical. I was hoping that this project endeavor would show me a way to return to this immersive artful practice, but alas, it was not to be. I realized it would be impossible for me to create in this way and also meet the rest of my responsibilities. If I was going to make art, I had to change things. I realized I would need to adapt my artmaking practice to suit the time and space I had available to me, which as it turns out, was not very much. Searching for validation of this discovery in the creativity texts, I found these words comforting:

**“Each of us must experiment and find the correct developing time for ourselves-not once and for all, but periodically, for that time will probably change as our lives evolve. We need to keep adjusting our time frame to accommodate our creative needs and enterprises.”**

(London, 1989, p. 59)

I was inspired to seek out alternative tools, techniques and processes and ways of working that might enable me to create things in shorter periods of time. Art forms that left less of a mess and required less sitting time became my preferred approach. I began to create smaller works that elaborated on my idea seeds in each of my thematic clusters whose parts could be done in short spurts and stages. I explored printmaking, sewing, digital art and different ways I could combine them. My experiments with “art developing” time resulted in nine mini works that I felt willing to share with others at least in an informal way, as artifacts in this reflection. The mini work I am most excited about continues to be developed and will end when POTUS 45 leaves office. It is the felting project that I have called *Every Day my Heart Breaks* (Figure 5). This ongoing work requires that I make one “broken” felted heart each day, each takes about 5 minutes. I then gather sets of seven hearts on a strand of fishing line, each strand representing a week, and hang them up.



*Figure 5. Everyday my Heart Breaks, detail, 2017.*

This collection of broken hearts represents all of the days that Donald Trump is in office. I plan to develop other mini artworks to explore their potential as my time opens up in the summer months. All the mini artworks I created are shared in Appendix B.

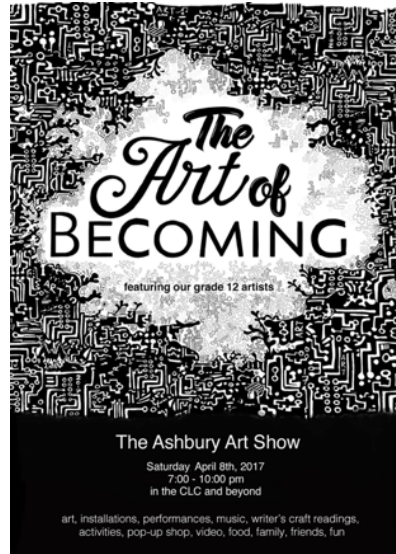
### **Artwork Worthy of Display**

**“The most fundamental skill of the creative person is the ability to constantly re-vision the world. Everything is subject to reconstruction and renewal. The “re-factor is the basis of resurrecting, reshaping, regenerating, reviving and rejuvenating. Creative persons live in a state of constant search and exploration”**

*(Mcniff, 1998, p. 69)*

The most important realization over the course of this project was that I had never bothered to reframe my own understanding of my artist self. My identity as an artist was tied to an outdated version of myself. As the month of

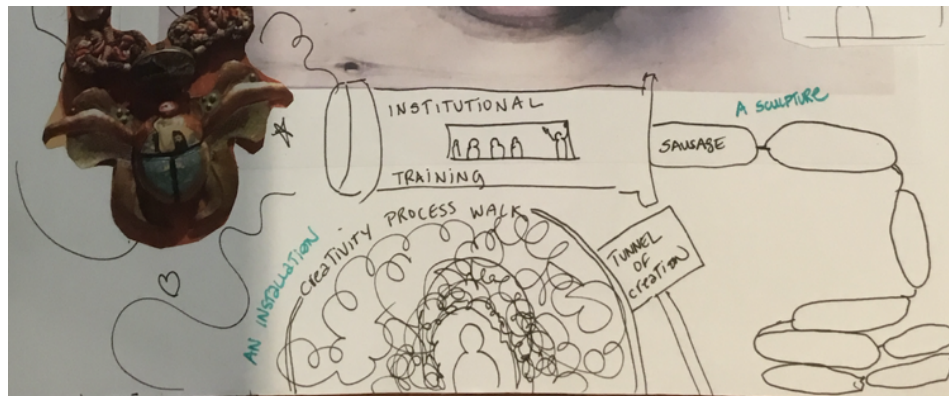
April approached and the end of my project time was nearing, I found myself without major artworks to share with others. Sure, I had my mini pieces but I did not believe these to be resolved enough to be shown, nor were they at the scale I had imagined I would conclude this project with. On top of this, the annual art show at Ashbury, where I am employed, was upon us, so I would have little time to get anything done. Due to a series of unfortunate events, this show, which annually requires my department of three teachers to organize and put on display the work of over 200 students as well as coordinate performances and activities, was scheduled three weeks earlier than usual. Looking ahead, it became obvious that many of our kids were not ready, they did not have polished work to share. In a funny and synchronistic way, the kids and I were in the same boat. We were unresolved and unfinished, nowhere near a position to feel prepared to share completed products. Overwhelmed and full of dread I procrastinated by felting and again, as my hands took action, ideas came to me that could solve all of our problems. With a calm desperation, I invited myself to reframe the situation. I asked myself many questions: How can I look at this mess in front of me in a new way? How can I make this easier for myself? What if our art show was all about the process of creation? What if we simply shared where we were in our process? I was on to something promising. I shared the idea of showing work in progress with my student art committee and they loved it.



*Figure 6. The Art of Becoming Invitation, 2017.*

We decided to call the show *The Art of Becoming* (figure 6), referencing the wise words I had gathered and stored in my sketchbook from Peter London's workshop a month earlier. Our show would honor the creative process. I was feeling better, excited and, I continued to employ my elastic mind with the hope that I might salvage my own project too. As I reframed my own work, revisiting the little seed ideas and mini works I had created, I wondered what it might look like if I were to create my work in tandem with my students. What if instead of trying to create work by myself, I developed some of my idea seeds into an artwork with my students for the art show? I could feel my heartbeat speed up at the thought. Yes, I could make impressive work at an impressive scale if I did it in collaboration! I shared these initial thoughts with my teaching colleague, asking her if she would be open to collaborate with me and our students to develop an installation piece for the art show that people could walk through. It would serve

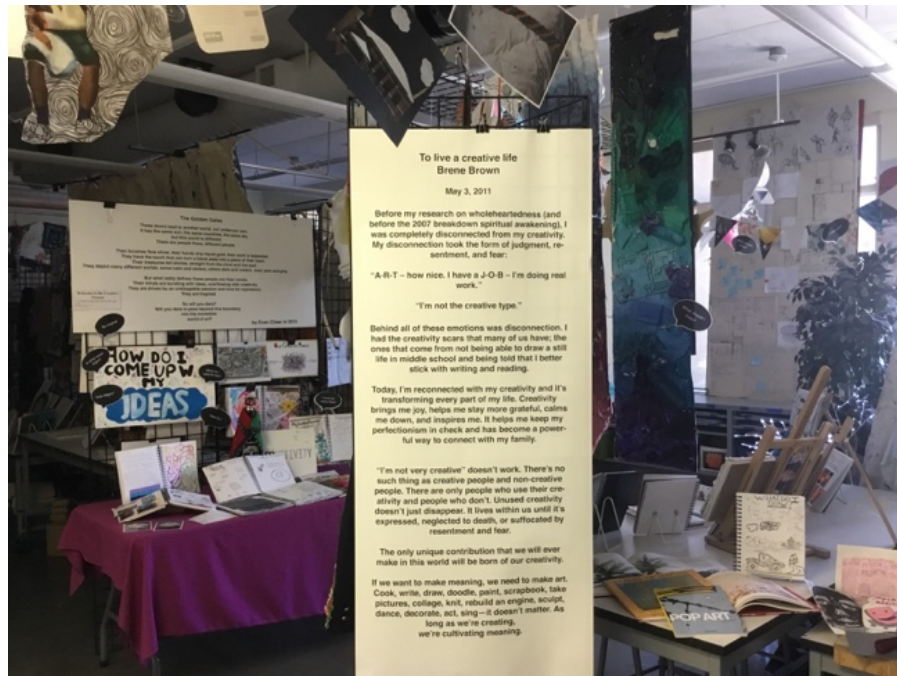
to visualize what our collective creativity could look like if it became a room. One of my “ideas seeds” had led me to dream up a series of creative process rooms where I would physically represent the different stages of the creative process in a physical space (Figure 7).



*Figure 7. Tunnel of Creation, installation sketch, 2017.*

I envisioned people being able to familiarize themselves with the creative process by literally being able to walk through it. I had put the idea to rest as it was just not at all possible for me to find a space or the time to actually create such a thing, plus where on earth would I show it! But, looking at the idea in a new way, I realized I could do it if I made the activity and outcome collaborative. I could visualize the creative process in an installation with the help of my students! Furthermore, this artmaking activity would allow us to explore the creative process in a tactile and meaningful way and share the outcome to a very large audience of supportive and engaged individuals. It met my project and research goals, teaching goals and artist goals! My colleague, being an art-making deprived artist-researcher-teacher herself, loved the idea and agreed to

do it. And as though part of the plan all along, in our amazing way, we began what I would consider to be the most incredible artistic project I have participated in to date. Our entire art show ended up being themed around the creative process and at the center of the show itself was our creative process room (Figure 8). We would physically dedicate different areas of a room to represent all of the different things that we would do from the outset to the end of a creation cycle. We revisited our making cycle with our students and asked them to think about how each area of our space would look, feel and sound? I brought one of the creative encounters I had explored independently to our students in groups as I asked them to use discarded fabrics and materials to collaboratively create a response to the question: What does creativity and experimentation look like? As groups of students worked with fabrics and paper and plastic and cardboard to create their responses, we filmed the groups working and interviewed them with questions about their process: “How do you know when a work is finished?” “Recall a time when something stopped you from being creative?”, “What is the hardest things about sharing your work?”, How to you deal with judgement?”, “Where do you get your ideas?”, “What inspires you?”. It took a solid three weeks of daily curation: hanging, adding and enhancing, both during and after school for our classes to transform one of our art studios into a site specific collaborative installation of the Creative Process. This process room is shared in Appendix C and D.



*Figure 8. Gateway to the Creative Process, installation detail, 2017.*

What I claim in this project as my final artwork (on display) was the result of the work of about 150 students and 2 teachers over many weeks. This was the first time I had ever made a collaborative artwork, the first time that I had ever considered myself “as a partner” with my students in the role of the artist. We were all over the moon with our results and my teaching partner and I swore that every show from now on would involve a collaborative installation. I had never considered that I might create in tandem with my students and consider this exercise my art. Over the course of my 20 years of teaching, the art show and working with students I had only considered my teacher work. While I understood how I could see the art show itself to be a collaborative endeavor that demanded creative thinking, I never once, despite many interesting and successful shows,



considered it as a potential form for my artistic expression- an artwork.

Furthermore, I never once considered that I might engage in the contemporary and post-modern approach of creating art with others. My colleague Lisa and I were reenergized by this newfound realization (Appendix E). The experience has opened up for us the way we can work in partnership with each other and our students in the future.

## SECTION FIVE: KEY INSIGHTS

### **I had Been Creating for Others, Rather than Myself**

**“We cannot act with integrity or be spontaneous and original when we place on ourselves and our canvas the conclusions and values of others.”**

(London, 1989, p.57)

Reflecting back on my experiences with the expressive arts, I see now that so much of my training in drama, music and the visual arts put a strong emphasis on the end product. We engaged in a creative process in order to create a valuable and valued outcome to share with others. If we were good, hardworking, and “talented”, people would reward us with feedback that validated our work and our worth as creatives. This constant focus on outcome, on the way that people perceived my expressions made for an incredible experience when people liked what I was doing and praised me, but also filled me with anxiety when I felt I might not produce something worthy. I believed that my training in art school placed too much emphasis on formal qualities: composition, form, and technical skill; success of an artwork depended on how people perceived the aesthetic choices I made. The merits of my artwork were determined through a rigorous, public critical analysis session where you defended your work to your peers, often enduring a wrath of judgement in the process. Other times, you reaped the rewards of their praise. I loathed these sessions. The experience trained me to avoid feeling anything about my own work until it passed critique

and was validated by others. Art school required thick skin. I hated critique sessions and the more I endured them the more my creative light dimmed. This project allowed me to reconnect with my feelings about this misguided practice and to reclaim the purpose for which I make art. I realize that I enjoyed making art because I love the way it feels to be engaged in the creative process. What I yearned for was not praise, but the experience of being one with myself, connected and engaged in a meaningful creative encounter. I had forgotten what this connection felt like; as long as I was creating work to “look good” and to satisfy others, I could not access this experience. A purposeful process required of me to leave criticism behind, something impossible to do if I was fixated on the outcome- the product.

### **One’s Creativity Evolves Over One’s Life**

When I started the ICSC program I was convinced I had lost my creativity at least as it pertained to art-making. I was no longer finding the materials I had trained with to be engaging or exciting and I had no desire to make anything. I was struggling to activate motivation and momentum. I could no longer rely on sitting with my materials in front of a still life to get me started and I mistook this inability to envision and execute a final product as an inability to create. I also chose to understand this situation as having to do with a problem with me rather than a problem with my practice and the way I was approaching making. My first meaningful insight into what was missing for me in my practice came when I

responded to the creative encounter challenge “what does my creativity look like and where is it located in my body?” The response to this in artistic form ultimately resulted in the idea seed that led me to creating our collaborative process room for the art show. As soon as I asked myself this question, without hesitation, my head, heart and hands got to work to answer the challenge. The question led me to make a rather homely and small artwork that looked like an old neglected dust ball (Figure 9): I noted in my journal of this work:

**“I make this image of my creativity. I gather little bits of frayed canvas, string and hair, and I sculpt the mass delicately, carefully, artfully. I have never imagined my own creativity let alone tried to visualize it...I spend about three hours carefully composing this hairball like mass and attach it to wood. It is made of all natural materials. “**

*(author’s journal, 2017)*



*Figure 9. What does my Creativity Look Like?      Figure 10. Creative Nest at the Top of a Tree.*

Upon closer observation, I began to understand this mass as a tangled confusion and I started to wonder what it might look like inside. I continued to journal:

**“Tangled in this little mass are gems, shapes, bits and bobs of glitter, beauty, shards...seeds. Oh! There are still little seeds of possibility. I imagine this mass to be very, very small. Over the years, it has been reduced to a pathetic little mass, almost gross, like a ball of hair you might pull from...”**

*(author’s journal, 2017)*

It also started to look like a nest to me. Aha! a place for ideas to incubate and a safe place for fragile things. I could interpret this tangled mess as my creativity transformed into a nest for others to grow in, a symbol of my role as the teacher, but surely there could be room in the nest for me too? Perhaps I could also see this tangled mess as my own nest, one holding and keeping my ideas safe until I could get to them. I developed a mini artwork of a silver nest in a gnarly tree (Figure 10). Later, while meditating, I imagined that I walked inside my tangled knotted pathetic mass to look for the gems that were incubating inside and the vision of creating a wonderful walk through sculpture of my creativity appeared to me and I drew it, scribbly in my sketchbook. I thought to myself, it would be great if my project could show people physically what the creative process looked like. The rest became the final work, a collaborative installation and its creation has provided me with a new direction for my art and my work as an integrated artist-researcher-teacher. Perhaps this was one of the gems I saw in my meditation.

### **Activity Can Serve to Numb You from Experiences**

I have spent a long time filling up my life with activity as a measure of my worth, yearning to be valued and legitimizing myself through the act of doing. Validation would come from external acknowledgement. I enjoyed seeing just how much I could get done. My frenzied schedule allowed no time to stop and feel, literally much of anything. I was running myself ragged and burning myself out in an attempt to prove something to myself. I valued myself and my work when this work felt hard, difficult, exhausting and I blew off the things that came through enjoyment labelling them frivolous, easy and trite. I failed to notice that I was addicted to being busy, that I was numbing my senses and relying on adrenaline to keep me working, doing and accomplishing tasks. Exhausting as it was, as soon as things would slow down, I would immediately seek another challenge or obstacle to get my adrenaline going again and to propel me toward another incredible superhuman feat of doing. Barely pausing to catch my breath from the last ride, sometimes I would hit a wall, reach exhaustion and then lounge, justifying my inactivity and fatigue because I had just worked so hard.

This exercise in bearing witness to my practice and process has allowed me to see this insanity for what it is and to want to do something about it. I have in my moments of reflection become increasingly aware of all of the other things that have tremendous value that I have been, up until now, too busy to engage in. Indeed, these lesser “valued” activities are the very things I needed to engage with in order to reconnect with my true motivation to create and express myself. I

needed to engage in small things like walking the dog, staring at seeds and playing with materials without a need to reach a result, and to value what these activities might open to me. Important yet overlooked things, like hugging my boys and spending time in front of the fire playing cards.

## SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION

**Dorothy:** Oh, will you help me? Can you help me?

**Glinda:** You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas.

**Dorothy:** I have?

**Scarecrow:** Then why didn't you tell her before?

**Glinda:** She wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself.

**Scarecrow:** What have you learned, Dorothy?

**Dorothy:** Well, I—I think that it, that it wasn't enough just to want to see Uncle Henry and Auntie Em — and it's that — if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with! Is that right?

**Glinda:** That's all it is!

**Scarecrow:** But that's so easy! I should've thought of it for you -

**Tin Man:** I should have felt it in my heart -

**Glinda:** No, she had to find it out for herself. Now those magic slippers will take you home in two seconds!

*The Wizard of Oz (1999)*

I am left at the end point of this amazing journey sans ruby slippers but, similar to Dorothy, with a surprisingly simple yet profound recognition of truth. What I was seeking, the ability to recover my artist voice and to integrate my seemingly disparate and warring roles of mother and artist-researcher-teacher was available to me all along, I was simply unable to see the way to it. I had anticipated that this project would lead me to discover new experiences and breakthroughs that would require significant changes in practice to achieve my goals, that I would learn how to do things to fix my problem. It turned out that all I really needed to do was change the way I was choosing to see myself and my art. The path to my own artistic voice was with me all along but invisible to me until I paused to bear witness to what it required to reveal itself to be heard.



**“if you hope to change your creative life by dropping everything you do and starting a new way of creating...you may not be building on a reliable basis. Everything depends upon the quality of attention you bring to experience. As a way of beginning, I suggest becoming a witness to your life as you live it”**

(Mcniff, 1998, p.141).

I feel such gratitude to have been afforded this unique opportunity to take the time to become a witness to myself, to observe carefully and mindfully through a deliberate and disciplined modified a/r/tographical practice my actions, activities and feelings about what I was doing creatively. Engaging in a practice which demanded my presence, attention, intention and reflection allowed me to discover that I had been holding on to an old and outdated view and definition of what I was requiring of myself to be an artist. Over these project weeks I came to rediscover the reasons I value artistic expression and what inspires me to feel like creating. I realized that I had been spending all my time beating myself up for not making art rather than asking myself why and for what purpose I wanted to create. Pining for the experience, the nostalgia of an outdated and no longer useful artistic form of creative expression and identity had kept me from discovering how I might be able to experience expressive creativity in the present, and in new ways. What had been required of me all along was for me to “look at my creativity and art in a new way”, one of E. Paul Torrance’s essential 18 creativity skills (Torrance & Safter, 1999).

I see and understand my very same self in a new way too. I no longer see myself as someone who must struggle to find the time to be all things, a mother, a teacher, an artist and a researcher. I see someone who has an incredible opportunity to be all of these things simultaneously, and that my art can come from the place where these roles intersect. I now know that I can use art-making as a legitimate form of research to explore creativity as well as art education. A/r/tography supports other ways of knowing as it draws from a different part of me- my heart and the research outcomes I arrive at using this new approach allow me to truly embody the concepts that I learn cognitively. Most importantly, I realized through this project experience that I am not interested in selling my work or even motivated to exhibit it. I make art because I love expressing my thoughts and feelings about important and impactful experiences using the creative process. I find being in the process invites Flow, an optimal human experience identified by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as an amazing feeling of integration, wholeness and peace where “people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic, they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing.” (p.53). It is not the outcome of my art that allows me to experience this, it is only during the process that I feel this way. This is what has attracted me to art all along. It was never about the outcome.

Understanding that my life presents me with many opportunities to feel connected and to enter flow, and that it is my responsibility to slow down enough to take notice- that is my biggest discovery. Additionally, my work does not need to feel like work in order to be important. I can be content playing, experimenting and making meaning by sharing the experience of process with others. I now see how I was misdirected and how I have over these many years robbed myself of joy and fulfillment that was always there for me by putting all of my attention on the outcome, rather than the process itself.

I have been provided with a fresh start from which I can continue to live out the next and hopefully most fruitful chapter of my life with a new perspective. This project has allowed me to come to some significant realizations about the direction my work will take from this point forward. Where I once perceived a life that was divided into four demanding roles, where I was stretched and all torn-up from a self-imposed medieval drawn and quartered torture session, I see My mother, artist-teacher-researcher selves can cohabitate. All that was ever required of me to do was to meet them in a quiet room, set up a meaningful encounter and allow them the time to be together to work and then wait, patiently and without judgement, until they had something to say.

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## Appendix B- Nine Mini Artworks:

The following are the results of my studio exploration over the course of the project. All projects are small in scale. I see them as initial iterations to be explored further. Most represent projects that I would love to develop but due to time constraints, it is not feasible for me to do so at this time.



### ***Every Day My Heart Breaks*** 2017

An Ongoing performance of felting one (broken) heart each day POTUS 45 is in office.

Each week I link seven hearts together on fishing line to represent one week of POTUS 45 in office. The process is ongoing and serves as a daily meditation as well as a small, everyday creative act.



detail: each heart is unique



### ***Words of Wisdom*** 2017

Fired tile with underglaze pencils

I love the idea of making tiles to honor all of the resistance taking place. In my hurry to complete this piece, I got the quote wrong. It should have read: Nevertheless, she persisted.





***What Does my Creativity Look Like?* 2017**  
String, hair, paint, wool, glitter and felted heart  
on birch panel.

These two works are related.

The nest piece came after my initial exploration  
of my creativity.

I discovered that while I envisioned my  
creativity as compressed, shriveled and  
knotted up, like a hairball one might find under  
the couch, it could also be understood as a  
nest.



***Creative Nest on Top of a Tree* 2017**  
Found wood, metal wire and glue



(detail)

**Idea Pods 2017**

5 fired clay pots, plants, soil, pebbels and found wood

I plan to develop this further in my garde. It serves as an homage to ideas. My colleagues and I are also exploring possibilities of developing this into a collaborative artwork with our students next year.





***MAGA Monster in Pussycat Slippers*** Felt, 2017.



***Where is my Creativity?*** Felt, 2017



***Idea Seeds* 2017**

Mixed Media: Monoprinted paper, collage, felt, sewn paper and markers on watercolour paper.



An elaboration on my Idea seeds using papers I created when experimenting with new materials and ways of working.

***What Gets in My Way?* 2017**

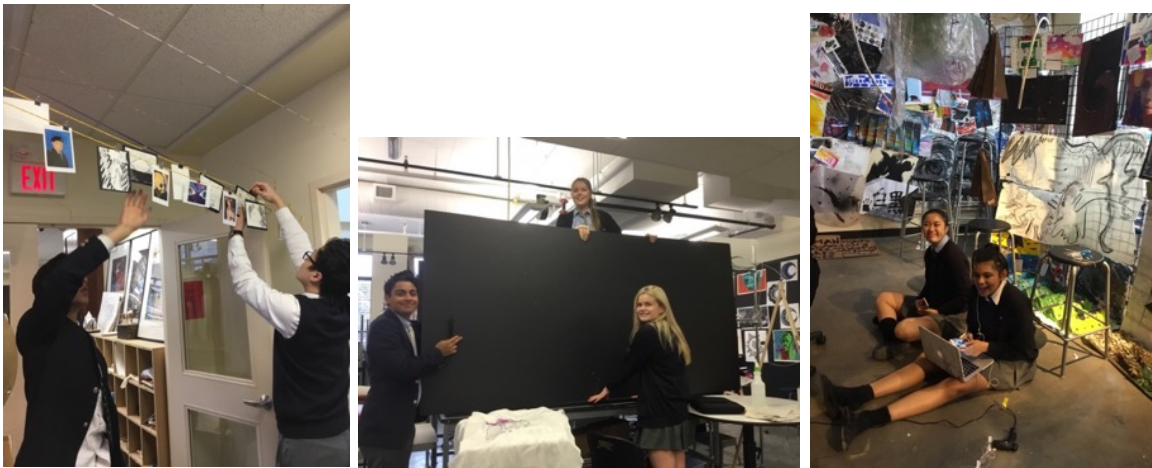
Acrylic paint, ink, paper, collage and gold markers



## Appendix C- The Creative Process Installation 2017

Photo documentation of the project.

This installation project was the result of many hours of work by over 150 students and 3 teachers. Turning our classrooms into galleries and an installation took major effort and organizing. It was all hands on deck.



The installation represented the various stages of the creation process. As people walked through the room they could hear our students speaking about their process via voice recordings. There was a projection of our students working playing on a video screen in one of the areas to showcase collaboration in the process.

### Stages of the Process:



Welcome to the process

Where do I start?

What can I use?





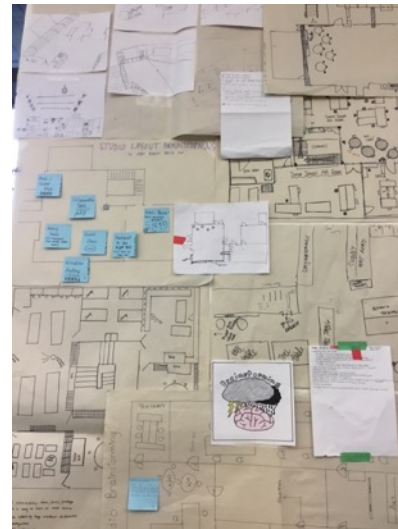
What motivates me?



How do I come up with Ideas?



Experimentation



Planning



A place to incubate

## Appendix D- Link to Audio-Visual of Installation



### Fear and Judgement

Taken the night of the show with lighting and ambiance

Have a look this link will connect you to a video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNiFkYL5ya4&feature=youtu.be>

## Appendix E- Feedback from my Teaching Partner.

A new spotlight comment for Tamara Doleman has been left by Lisa Chrolavicius.

The art show happened last night, The Art of Becoming. Tamara, your vision for this show was brought to fruition through the undeniable engagement of our students, through the cohesive theme 'of becoming' that interwove through every room and every corner. It was beautiful, exciting, fresh and well-executed. The sheer amount of students, parents, alumni, artists in the community coming out to support and experience this mammoth and inspiring event was unbelievable. Your exceptional leadership continues to be a reason why the art show is THIS outstanding. You are truly an amazing leader who draws out the best in those around you, who supports ALL ideas that comes your way, who is willing to be honest about not being perfect but who strives to be your best and it's all for your students.

Many comments were made from parents and colleagues about how capable and passionate our students were when speaking about their art work. Comments were made about the quality AND amount of art that was on display. Comments were made about how many people were involved and how interactive the show was. I watched the faces of parents, who had awe and fascination in their expressions, walk through our creative process room, the room we began building the ideas for, over a month ago, and then carried out, with the help and ideas of our students, over the last couple of weeks. I loved how we honoured PROCESS in that room and I love how we dug into what artists experience when creating, from how we begin and what inspires us, to the materials we could use, to what holds us back, to the 'no turning back' execution point. I really think this is something we can guide our students to reflect deeper into (starting next week as we're keeping it up for a little while, right?) and develop into our classes every year from here on in.

I saw the excitement and thrill for the Virtual Reality room and how you brought in students to lead this experience such as Seamus and Ali who may struggle with traditional modes of academics, but who SHINE in our art program because we are flexible and see potential in their strengths.

Tamara, you draw out such authentic, meaningful work from your students. I watch you every day, build their confidence, provide inspiring suggestions for your students to push their ideas in ways that are engaging and dynamic. This was evident in the stunning Grade 12 exhibitions. The Dinner Party installation, although I know we were frustrated that many students rushed to finish this as the opening drew closer, was touching and personal. I saw many parents in there quietly reading and contemplating.

Congratulations on yet another successful art show (arguably the best one yet :) You continue to be such a joy to work with!!!

4/9/2017

Lisa Chrolavicius