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Journey into the Process of Developing a New Skill

By

Virginia McIntyre

An Abstract of a Project

In Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the requirements

For the degree of

Masters of Science

May 2006

Buffalo State College

State University of New York

Department of creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

A Journey into the Process of Developing a New Skill

Learning a new skill is comprised of several characteristics, some which are necessary and others which are desirable. An individual embarking on this endeavor needs practice, persistence and perseverance. It is desirable to possess intrinsic motivation which leads to available energy for the task. The approach to the process should be conducted with an open mind that embraces the fortitude required to overcome obstacles and celebrate achievements. This project includes the process and offers examples of how the reader may strive to meet such a challenge. Included in the process is a note on art and artists, background of the passion for this self-discovery, and the blocks that had to be challenged to succeed. Creative Problem Solving (CPS) tools are used intentionally and naturally in the process. The Key Learning Section offers a simplified learning experience record for anyone wishing to develop a new skill.

Signature_____

Date_____

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

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INTRODUCTION

This is a creative project journaled by a mid-age woman who deliberately challenged herself to achieve a new skill in the visual-art arena. In addition, it includes a process that began with a young girl's development and followed her through adulthood. The process includes a girl's eagerness for the arts and how this enthusiasm matured along with her chronologically. Art has been a part of her everyday life and culminated with an

affront to her beliefs. Also this project includes how she overcame obstacles to actually render the human figure. The reader will delve into her thoughts, fears, insecurities and doubts, as the love of art and the desire to be a competent artist has been a constant in her life. In addition, the process the author embraces as she learns to paint the human figure will be explored. The author chose to attain this skill after returning to school later in life and meet the barriers that unleashed her creativity. Despite the critiques from others, messages the author received, and the intrinsic negative thoughts that have hindered her progress, she has crumbled some of the obstacles that have led to this project. The author courageously imparts her struggles and triumphs, thus exemplifying how the creative process endured naturally and deliberately to success in learning.

Virginia McIntyre

BACKGROUND

Though resources were meager, art supplies were always on hand in my home as a child. There were crayons, watercolor pans and tempera paints. Art was always a part of our lives. Art was on the walls and placed on the coffee table in books my grand mother and mother bought me. It was part of every celebration. We were instructed to

make holiday cards, pictures, ornaments and hand made gifts. While my mother sewed, crocheted and knit, we children made art for family and friends.

There were no artists in my family. However, my mother would take me on yearly excursions on the bus to the art gallery. It was at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery that I first fell in love with the work of Vincent van Gogh. I found his art work amazing! This discovery led to Christmas gifts of his art and life in books. Christmas was always a grand time for me, because I always received art supplies from Santa and family!

My earliest memories of my art making were books about characters that were animals. I still have copies of these books locked safely in a box in the basement. How I loved to illustrate my stories with the watercolors! My mother would read the novellas aloud and show them off as if they were Pulitzer Prized creations.

Certain artworks of mine can bring back memories of my life. I distinctly remember a piece I did that my mother still refers to as a premonition. It was a self portrait that rendered half the face as distorted. Soon after drawing this piece, I became a victim to acute mastoiditis that left my face paralyzed for quite some time. In addition, my teenage years were typical. They were a time of turmoil, dark clouds, personal development, and self-discovery. My paintings reflected this. I remember another self-portrait at this time that evoked an atmosphere of spookiness. I was concerned that my art teacher exhibited it, because it was not pretty, beautiful or even remotely pleasing to the eye. The typical response to the piece was not favorable from my peers. It was then that I learned from an art teacher that one of the jobs of the artist is to evoke a response, period, and in that arena I had succeeded.

As I aged and became more aware of the injustices in the world, I found that my art took on a new emotion in global politics. I became keenly aware of and concerned with the women's struggle and the global poor. If I wasn't engaged in an actual live protest of some cause, it found its way onto my canvas. Therefore, much of the art rendered in my adult life and childhood has had a gloomy tone. I was never one for gay bouquets and relaxing landscapes.

Though I experimented quite privately and infrequently sketching the human figure, I had resigned myself to the fact that I would never become a figure artist. The very thought of becoming a figure artist was daunting. I believed that this skill was reserved for the masters who developed their skills over a lifetime of practice and instruction. I didn't realize that I could still pursue this goal and actually do it! It was not until this assignment that I realized that this quest could become a reality and worth the effort at this juncture in my life.

THE JOURNEY

Art is the very fabric of who I am and who I have been through my life span to date. My journey through the arts in any medium may be typical of many artists past and present. I have always dabbled in art making since I was a young child. I have sketched,

drawn, painted, made pottery, crafted jewelry, formed sculpture and woven fabric and wall-hangings. However, I have always been petrified of others concluding that I was not a competent artist. This self-doubt adversely impacted my determination to paint the human figure

I grew up in a lower-middle class medium-sized family. I had to work at a young age to help bring home the necessities of life. Though art was always part of my life, the time and resources hindered my development in skill level. My mother tried hard to nurture my artistic spirit as much as she could. I remember, how she would garbage-pick and scour the Salvation Army for old window shades for me to use as a painting surface. My public school art teacher conveyed that he could not take me any further in my artistic growth. These influences led to me becoming a self-taught artist with sporadic skill development at best. Nonetheless, art has always been a part of my life in some shape or form.

RATIONALE

My first option in achieving this master's project was learning a new skill-learning to paint the male human figure. However, I felt foolish as I listened to my fellow classmates expound on what they intended to do. They chose writing books, developing new CPS tools, developing support groups and curriculum, accomplishing

research and other mechanisms to help the center. My goal seemed selfish and self-centered in comparison. Helping others is what I feel comfortable with, not accomplishing something to make myself the beneficiary. However, then it occurred to me that this documentation of developing a new skill may help another embark on a journey to fulfill a lifelong quest such as mine. There, I found my justification for doing this and kept my psyche intact.

In this endeavor I hope to break barriers that have kept me from even contemplating learning to paint the human figure. The Creative problem Solving (CPS) tools will be used simultaneously with the art process to overcome challenges in this pursuit. In this project, I will affirm that everyone can unleash their creativity by paying close attention to their intuition and by using the CPS tool. Indeed, it is my hope that others are compelled to use the CPS process to challenge them to break down barriers.

As a political artist I hope to communicate my thoughts, feelings, and ideas through the medium of art and the human figure. I wish to convey the effects of oppression on the poor man through my art form. Art is a communication method that maintains a visual vocabulary. I chose this form of communication to challenge myself.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Where do I begin? Do I find an art educator or try to teach myself? I am committed to painting man and I only have one semester to accomplish it. I began my search for learning opportunities by listening to others and asking questions. I

implemented CPS tools to generate ideas and to narrow my list. In the first week, I identified participating in the nude drawing sessions at Buffalo State College, attend art lessons at the Locust Street Art School and draw from art books. I decided that all three would be accomplished simultaneously.

I was intimidated, even at my age to attend the drawing studios. So, I enlisted my friends to accompany me. That helped to calm the butterflies in my stomach. I even purchased a new pencil set for the occasion. I got quite discouraged at my initial session. Though, it was a diverse group of artists of all ages, the skill level was highly proficient. Everyone had beautiful drawings of the models. I found that sketching from books in private allowed me more time to render the figures

Next, I had the challenge of securing a nude model to pose for me. This proved harder than I imagined. I guess human sexuality crept into everyone's mind. I received one affirmative response. As the session date neared, he backed out. The best I could do was find someone willing to pose with their back facing mine and to use photographs. No live model was willing. Also, after the painting was finished the photographs had to be destroyed.

This put a glitch in my plans. I really desired to paint from life. This was more of a challenge to me and I really wanted to stretch myself for this assignment. After all, I was pursuing a lifetime goal. However, I was forced to compromise, as I had exhausted my options. I diligently sketched everyday during this time period. Mostly, I sketched human figures, but other times I drew inanimate objects. I also sketched in public. I would go to taverns because they were dimly lit and I wanted to train my eye to see clearer.

Obtaining a pose to paint was difficult. The backside of man leaves for few options that appealed to me. I sketched several poses and narrowed my options by using a matrix. I finally settled on a pose that slightly curved forward towards the stomach hoping to communicate despair.

The classes at the art school were not progressing as planned. The art teacher was not available when I was able to attend. Therefore, I relied on my fellow students for input. They were quite encouraging. They really appreciated my sketches.

Outlined in my concept paper was a schedule that I worked hard to stay true to. I began painting on schedule. I chose a palette of blues, blacks, purples and yellows. I kept the canvas small to narrow down my painting time. Plus, a large canvas seemed to overwhelm me. I spent a week painting. I was pleased with the results. I did it! As an extra, I felt that I had accomplished my task competently.

Next, I braced myself and took it to my art teacher for review. I proudly presented my piece to her. However, the critique she gave was harsh. She relayed that it looked like paint by number painting and that I should start over. Moreover, she explained that my entire process was faulty and immediately initiated a plan of drawing bones that would eventually lead to bones with flesh and muscles over them! Start over! Who had time for that? I was crushed! I felt that I had failed. In a panic, I contacted my mentor, who implored me to keep on task and continue with the other critiques and art exhibit.

I was discouraged. How could I show this art work to another person? Timidly, I did just that after making a few improvements and alterations. I returned to my instructor with the changes. She was relentless in stating that I begin all over. I refused.

I mustered up the courage and took it to other critiques and the art exhibit. To my delight the feedback was positive! Others relayed positives and rooms for improvement with the piece. I began to realize that it was not a loss cause and the rendition was not a total failure. Someone even expressed an interest in buying it. I had succeeded in my goal!

PERTINENT LITERATURE

As I progressed through my journey, I started to look through the literature to learn more about the psychological factors that may support an individual pursuing the development of a new skill. As a former psychology major in my undergraduate years I

had an idea of what avenue I wanted to further my study. I knew of theories in a superficial manner that could help me in my quest.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Maslow's theory of personality (1954) has a set of five fundamental areas. They include physical health, security, self-esteem, love-belongingness and self actualization. Maslow proposed that individuals need to feel the biological requirements of a human being are satisfied, a sense of order and predictability within their lives, a sense of personal worthiness and importance, a sense of love and affection with important others, and that they are moving toward an ideal world or version of themselves.

However, while Maslow forged new territory in many areas, like many of his contemporaries, he assumed a common process of psychological development for both sexes. He characterized the height of human development in terms of individuation and achievement. This assumption has been used to encourage as well as to constrict a comprehensive psychology of women. It is certain, that" when the needs hierarchy is applied to women they consistently cannot be characterized by some of Maslow's levels" (Maslow, 1987, p.260).

Women's experiences and development are different from those of men, centering on attachment and intimacy rather than separation and autonomy. (Norman, Murphy, & Gilligan, 1982). Maslow puzzled over the differences when he stated in his journal in 1962," Only the woman needs to be loved, first and foremost..." (Maslow, 1987, p.260). His own questioning foreshadowed the study of these differences. Yet in emphasizing

the qualities of detachment and independence, Maslow's hierarchy overlooks some essential differences between men and women.

In the book, *In a different Voice*, Carol Gilligan wrote that "the psychology of women, that has consistently been described as distinctive in its greater orientation toward relationships and interdependence, implies a more contextual mode of judgment and a different moral understanding. Given the differences in women's conceptions of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities" (1982, p.22). Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Women's place in the life cycle has been that of nurturing, caretaker, and helpmate. She is the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. Maslow's work appears to describe women's values and priorities as deficiency motivated. (Maslow, 1987).

The reader should keep in mind, that while Maslow was attempting to define self-actualization on both sexes, his definition of psychological health does not fundamentally represent the psychology of women. When the focus on individuation and individual achievement extends into adulthood and maturity is equated with personal autonomy, concern with relationships appears as a weakness of women, rather than a human strength. (Miller, 1976).

Therefore it was not unusual for me to wait until past middle age to pursue developing a new skill, because as a woman, I had other priorities. These priorities concerned those of family, thus exemplifying the basic need for a woman to cherish

relationships. I am confident that other women my age will awaken to new desires as they age and their families grow.

SELF-ACTUALIZING CREATIVENESS

In his lecture given at East Lansing, Michigan in 1958, Maslow spoke about creativity and self-actualization at a creativity symposium sponsored by Michigan State University, Maslow applied the word creative not only to products but also to people, activities, processes and attitudes. He further came to apply the word creative to many products other than the standard and conventionally accepted poems, theories, novels, experiments or paintings to which he had in the past restricted the word. (Maslow, 1987). According to Maslow, self-actualizing creativeness sprang forth much more directly from the personality and showed itself widely in the ordinary affairs in life, and which showed itself not only in great and obvious products but also in many other ways, in a certain kind of humor, a tendency to do anything creatively: for instance, teaching and so forth” (Maslow, 1987, p.160).

Maslow observed certain traits in creative self-actualized people. These personality characteristics included perception, expression, second naiveté, affinity for the unknown, resolution of dichotomies, absence of fear, and peak experiences. What screamed home to me was the resolution of dichotomies. (Maslow, 1987). This is what I did in my project. I put together clashing colors, forms that fight with each other, and dissonances of all kinds into a unity. My painting accomplished this realm of unity against separate parts.

I also practiced and absence of fear in the sense that I had to get over my fear of failure. I had to be less afraid of what other people would comment or demand or laugh at. According to Maslow it was this approval and acceptance of myself that made it possible for me to perceive bravely the real nature of the world and compelled my behavior to be spontaneous and less controlled, less inhibited, less willed and designed. By deferring judgment I was less afraid of my own thoughts even when they contradicted the experts in art and seemed silly. This left me less afraid of others.

In addition, I was child like with a freedom from stereotypes and clichés. I painted man the way I chose to with the happiness of a secure child. Maslow refers to this as second naiveté. He characterizes a spontaneous, effortless, innocent and an easy course of action (Maslow, 1987). Almost any child can perceive more freely, without a prior expectation about what ought to be there or what must be there or what always has been there. Children create without planning or previous intent.

This information helped to guide me as I ventured both on my path of self discovery and growth. Overall I had to be true to myself to succeed. This literature and the creative Problem Solving (CPS) process shaped my success. During this, I found myself following my instincts. Fortunately, I had Maslow's insights to chaperone me through the obstacles.

CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

In an effort to better understand the multi-faceted phenomenon known as creativity, Rhodes (1961) set out to find a universal definition of creativity. He believed that creativity, "when analyzed, as through a prism, the content of the definition form

four strands “(p.307). These four strands Rhodes refers to are person, product, process and press. This framework for understanding creativity has become a cornerstone for previous and current research conducted by the Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College.

Osborn (1979) introduced the structure of CPS as a method for solving problems creatively. Developed by Sidney Parnes, Creative Problem Solving is an approach based on first conceptualizing the creative process as involving observation, manipulation, evaluation, and then on setting up optimum condition to nurture participants innate need for self-evaluation (Sankowsky, 1987). The first CPS process depicted three distinct stages: Fact-Finding, Idea-Finding and Solution-Finding (Wheeler, 2001). The concepts of deferred judgment and quantity yielding quality were also explored. According to Wheeler (2001) “Imaginative and judicial thinking were brought forth to demonstrate that people engage in both types of thinking”. These fundamental beliefs set forth by Osborne have prompted those who followed to continue to research and develop the CPS process. Currently, the CPS process maintains five stages, to include Problem-Finding and Acceptance-Finding (Noller 1977). The Problem-Finding stage was developed to discover the broad perspective of the situation, and Acceptance- Finding allows individuals to consider how an idea or option will succeed or fail (Wheeler, 2001).

Several revisions have taken place over the years. However, Vehar, Miller and Firestein (1999) introduced the latest revision of the CPS process. This CPS version contains language that is “easier to learn and use” (p.91). The languages of the divergent and convergent guidelines were also altered, and a fifth convergent thinking rule was added. (Wheeler, 2001).

Ideas are not generated in a vacuum. They take a lot things in our conscious and unconscious minds. Ideas are birthed from facts, fancies, old ideas, and musings and the trillions of informational bits whirling all around us. A fresh, original idea can occur when you put two or three of those bits together in a new way. (Lefkon, 1982). Further, good ideas often involve out of bad ideas. This exemplifies the importance of deferring judgment when thinking up ideas to solve a problem creatively. The authors of *Current Applications of Creative Problem Solving* (1993) refer to deferring judgment as a “basic principle of CPS” (p.8 in the glossary).

Deferring judgment is particularly important in the creative or divergent phases of each stage in the CPS model. It emphasizes the need to refrain from evaluation of any sort (criticism or praise) of ideas during the process of generating many options. I utilized deferring judgment throughout the process of developing a new skill, including in generating drawings and selecting the pose for painting. Paramount is that I deferred judgment in executing the final pose for the painting. Indeed, if I did not defer judgment I would have succumbed to my art teacher’s negative critique and never realized success.

KEY LEARNINGS

When learning a new skill, such as Painting Man, it is essential to possess energy for the endeavor as a whole. A way to ensure that energy abounds is to navigate the

availability of motivation. A person embarking on acquiring a new skill needs to maintain a level of intrinsic motivation.

The fullest representations of humanity exemplify that people are curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, individuals are inspired, striving to learn, extend themselves, master new skills, and apply their talents responsibly. “That most people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears, in fact to be more normative than exceptional, suggesting some very positive and persistent features of human nature” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.68).

Yet, it is also clear that the human spirit can be diminished or crushed and that individuals sometimes reject growth and responsibility. Regardless of socio-economic status or cultural origin, examples of both children and adults who are apathetic, alienated and irresponsible are abundant. Non-optimally functioning people can be observed not only in mental health clinics but also among the millions of people who, for hours a day, sit passively before a television, stare blankly in the back of classrooms, or wait listlessly for the weekend as they perform their jobs. The persistent, proactive, and positive tendencies needed to learn a new skill are clearly not invariantly apparent.

“Intrinsic motivation is the prototypic manifestation of the human tendency toward learning and creativity” (Ryan & Deci 2000, p. 69). Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and all aspects of activation and intention. Motivation has been a central issue in the field of psychology, for it is at the core of biological, cognitive and social regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). We can also use this function of the human to drive the spirit to self-actualization and achieving a new skill. More importantly, in the real world, motivation is highly valued because of its consequence: Motivation produces.

Therefore, it is a preeminent concern to those in supervisory roles and those embarking on learning a new skill. Motivation is needed to increase our energy for tasks of all nature.

Although motivation is often treated as a singular construct, even superficial reflection suggests that people are moved to act by very different types of factors, with highly varied experiences and consequences. People can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion. People can be urged into action by an abiding interest or bribe. They can behave for a sense of personal commitment to excel or from a fear of being surveiled. These constructs between cases of having internal motivation versus being externally pressured are familiar to all. The issue of whether people stand behind a behavior out of their interests and values, or do it for reasons external to the self is a matter of significance in every culture (Johnson 1993) and represents a basic dimension by which people make sense of their own and other's behavior (deCharms, 1968; Heider, 1958; Ryan & Connell, 1989). Comparisons between people whose motivation is authentic (literally self authored or endorsed) and those who are merely externally controlled for an action typically reveal that the former, relative to the latter, have more interest, excitement, and confidence, which is in turn manifest both as enhanced performance, persistence and creativity (Deci& Ryan, 19991; Sheldon, Ryan, Hawthorne & Ilandi, 1997) and as heightened vitality (Nix, Ryan, Manly & Deci, 1999) self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995) and general well being (Ryan, Deci & Grolnick, 1995). This is true even when the people have the same level of self-efficacy for the activity.

Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, the inherent tendency to work out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capabilities, and to explore and to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Developmentalists acknowledge that from the time of birth, children, in their healthiest states, are active, inquisitive, curious and playful even in the absence of specific rewards (Harter, 1978). In this sense, an individual on a quest to gain a new skill must be childlike and have fun with the tasks involved. Moreover, the construct of intrinsic motivation describes this natural inclination towards assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration that is so essential to cognitive and social development and that represents a principle source of enjoyment and vitality, throughout life (Csikzentmihalyi & Rawthunde, 1993; Ryan, 1995). For this endeavor I possessed intrinsic motivation, as learning to paint the human figure has been a lifetime quest of mine. In addition, I had external motivation as I had to complete this as an assignment for my schooling. In other words, I had the best of both worlds in motivation.

In my investigation and reflection of learning a new skill I drew on Maslow's theory of personality (1954) and its set of fundamental needs; physical health, security, self – esteem, love-belongingness and self actualization. In brief, Maslow proposed that people need to feel that the biological requirements of their physical organism are satisfied, a sense of order and predictability within their lives, a sense of personal worthiness and importance, a sense of love and affections with important others, and that they are moving toward an ideal world or version of themselves (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim & Krasser, 2000). Learning a new skill provides for self-actualization. It brings forth a sense of being the best that you can be. I also found that keeping a written journal of my

thoughts, feelings and insights was helpful in this journey. In addition, this journal helped me to overcome obstacles by bringing them to the conscious level in a tangible form which in turn allowed for solutions to be generated. I practiced meditation at least four times a week while tackling this endeavor. What I found extremely helpful was the visualization process. I deliberately engaged in visualization exercises. I visualized painting and completing the picture in detail. This spurred incubation that allows for the ‘aha’ experience in idea/solution finding. I also experienced a sense of ‘flow’ where the ideas flourished and I forgot to eat and did not need much rest. Moreover, below I suggest the reader to follow my guidelines for developing a new skill. No order is necessary as all suggestions are interchangeable.

Guidelines

1. Use Creative Problem Solving tools to identify goal, wish or challenge.
2. Use Creative Problem Solving tools to generate and select ideas.
3. Select a goal that you are motivated in accomplishing.
4. Always defer judgment from your self and others.
5. keep a journal of thoughts, ideas, feelings , and obstacles.
6. Be aware of the mind’s ability to harbor affirmative and negative thoughts. Keep negative thoughts to a minimum and let them leave your consciousness and unconsciousness quickly.
7. Identify realistic goals and utilize a time frame for completion.
8. Question others.

9. Don't allow negative thoughts from others define your enthusiasm level.
10. Be prepared to adjust and reconfigure goals.
11. Research domain in question to identify how others tackled a similar challenge.
12. Work through frustrations. Persevere!
13. Foster incubation by walking, meditation and/or image streaming.
14. Embrace mistakes and learn from them!
15. Celebrate triumphs.
16. Practice daily the new skill.
17. Relish your creativity!
18. Be childlike, playful, and humorous and have fun with the process! It is an adventure worth embarking on!
19. Frequently engage in visualization exercises of completing the task.

I am pleased that I strived to learn a new skill of painting the human figure. It has been a quest long in the making. However, my journey doesn't end here. I will continue to hone my drawing and painting skills in this realm of art. I will use the guidelines outlined above as I continue painting.

A Word about Art and Artists by an Artist

As an artist I agree with Sir Ernst Gombrich's, "There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists" (Gombrich, 1951, p.5). These words reflect a long held Western belief that individuals matter and make a difference (Vaizy, M., 1999). Once artists took colored earth and roughed out forms of bison on the wall of a cave. Today they buy their paints, and design posters. Paramount is that they did many things in between. There is no injury in calling all these activities art as long as we keep in mind that such a word may mean very different things in different times and places, and as long as we realize that Art with a capital A has no existence (Gombrich, 1951). Art with a capital A has come to be something of a bogey and a fetish. You may crush an artist by telling him that what he has just done may be quite good in its own way, only it is not "Art". In addition, you may confound anyone enjoying a picture by declaring that what he liked in it was something other than Art.

Actually, I do not think that there are any incorrect reasons for admiring a statue or a painting. Someone may favor a landscape painting because it reminds him of home or a portrait because it hints of a friend. There is nothing wrong with that. All of us, when we see a painting, are bound to be reminded of a hundred and one things which influence our likes and dislikes. As long as these memories help us to enjoy what we see, we need not worry. It is only when we instinctively repel a magnificent picture of an alpine scene because we dislike climbing. We should search our minds for the reason of the aversion which spoils a pleasure we might otherwise have had. Indeed, there are wrong reasons for disliking a work of art.

Most people like to see pictures of what they also like to view in life. This is quite a natural preference. We all like beauty in nature, and are grateful to the artists who

have preserved it in their works. Nor would these artists themselves have rebuffed us for our taste. However, all art can not be beautiful to the viewer. Nor is all art intended to be beautiful. If we fight against our first repugnance to a work of art, we may be richly rewarded. Sometimes, in fact, the beauty does not really lie in the beauty of subject matter.

The trouble with beauty is that tastes and standard of what is beautiful vary so much. What is true of beauty is also true of expression. In fact, it is often the expression of a figure in a painting which makes us like to loathe the work. Some people like an expression which they can easily understand, and which therefore moves them profoundly. Many people throughout the centuries have drawn strength and comfort from representations of Jesus Christ and other religious people. The feeling these artworks express is so strong and so clear that reproductions are found in chapels, temples, and far away farm houses where people know nothing of "Art". Even if this intense expression of feeling appeals to us we should not, for that reason, turn away from works whose expression is perhaps less easy to understand. When we first understand an artist's methods of drawing to understand his feelings we learn to appreciate the work of art more. When we have come to understand the different languages artists employ, we may even prefer works of art whose expression is less than obvious, just as some prefer people who use few words and leave something to guess or ponder about. In the more primitive periods, when artists were not so skilled in representing human faces and human gestures as they are now, it is often all the more moving to see how they tried nevertheless to bring out the feeling they want to convey. In addition, some artists prefer to prepare works that are minimalist in form, composition, and color.

On occasion, people are often brought up against another difficulty. They want to admire the artist's skills representing the things they see. What they like best is paintings which represent reality. I do not deny for a moment that this is an important consideration. In fact, I attempt to accomplish this very thing in this project.

Additionally, the patience and skill which go into this faithful rendering of the visible world are to be admired. Great artists of the past have devoted much labor to works in which every detail is carefully recorded. However, some artists are such wizards they can give us the feel of a detail with a few lines of charcoal.

However, it is not only sketchiness that offends people who like their pictures to mirror reality. They are even more repelled by works which they consider to be incorrectly drawn, particularly when they belong to a more modern period when the "artist ought to have known better." As a matter of fact there is no mystery about these distortions of nature about which we hear so many complaints in discussions on modern art. Everyone who has ever seen a Disney film or a comic strip knows all about it. He knows that it is sometimes right to draw otherwise than they look, and to change and distort them in one way or another. Mickey Mouse does not look very much like a real mouse, yet people do not write indignant letters to the papers about the length of the tail. Those who enter Disney's enchanted world are not worried about Art with a capital A. They do not go to these films armed with the same prejudices they like to take with them when they are going to an exhibition of modern painting. However, if a modern artist draws something in his own way, he is apt to be thought a bungler who can do better. Whatever we may think of modern artists, we may safely credit them with enough

knowledge to draw realistically. If they do not do so, their reasons may be similar to those of Mr. Disney.

Therefore there are two things which we should always ask ourselves of we find fault with the accuracy of a picture. One is whether the artist may have had his reasons for changing the appearance of what he viewed in life. The other is that we should never condemn a work for being visually incorrect unless we have made quite sure that we are correct and the painter is wrong. We are all inclined to be quick with the verdict that “Things do not look like that.” We have a curious habit of convincing ourselves that nature must always look like the pictures we are accustomed to. It is easy to illustrate this by the astonishing discovery which was made not too long ago.

Thousands of people, for centuries, have watched horses gallop, have attended horse races and hunts, and have enjoyed paintings and sporting prints showing horses charging into battle or running after hounds. Not one of these people seems to have noticed what it really looks like when a horse runs. Pictures and sporting prints usually showed them with outstretched legs in full flight through the air. When the camera had been perfected for snapshots of horses in rapid motion to be taken, these snapshots proved that the painters and their public had been incorrect all the while. No galloping horse ever moved in the way which seems so natural to us. A horse draws its legs in turn as they come off the ground. If we reflect for a moment we realize that it could hardly get along otherwise. Yet, when painters began to apply this new discovery, and painted horses moving as they actually do everyone complained that their pictures looked wrong (Gombrich,1951).

This no doubt is an extreme example, but similar errors are by no means as rare as we think. We are all inclined to accept conventional form or colors as the only correct ones. Children sometimes think that stars must be star shaped, though naturally they are not. The people who insist that in a picture the sky must be blue, and the grass green, are not very different from these children. They get very indignant if they see other colors in a picture. However, if we try to forget all we have heard about green grass and blue skies, and look at the world as we had just arrived from another planet on a voyage of discovery and were seeing it for the first time: we may find that things are apt to have the most surprising colors. New painters sometimes feel as they are on a voyage of discovery. They want to see the world afresh and discard all the accepted notions and prejudices about flesh being pink or brown and apples yellow or red. It is not easy to get rid of these preconceived notions, but the artists who succeed best in doing so often produce the most exciting works. It is they that teach us to see new beauties in nature of whose existence we had never dreamt. If we follow them and learn from them, even a glance out of our own window may become a thrilling adventure.

There is no greater obstacle to the enjoyment of great works of art than our unwillingness to discard habits and prejudices. A painting which represents a familiar subject in an unexpected way is often condemned for no better reason than that it does not seem right. The more often we have seen a story represented in art, the more firmly we become convinced that it must always be represented on similar lines. About biblical subjects, in particular, emotions are apt to run high. Though we know that the scriptures tell us nothing about the appearance of Jesus, that God can not be visualized in human form, and though we know that, it was artists of the past that first created the images we

have become used to, many are still inclined to think that to depart from these traditional forms amounts to blasphemy.

Harm may be done by those who dislike and criticize works of art for the wrong reasons. What is more important, it brings home to us, that what we call works of art are not the results of some mysterious activity, but objects made by human beings for human beings. A picture looks so remote when it hangs glassed and framed on the wall. In museums it is, very properly, forbidden to touch the objects in view. However, they were made to be touched and handled. Art works were bargained about, quarreled about, and worried about as they are today.

Let us also remember that all art is the result of decisions by an artist. These decisions may have been caused the artist to ponder and alter their work many times. Most of the paintings and statues which are now strung up along the walls of museums and galleries were meant to be displayed as Art. They were made for a definite occasion and a definite purpose which were in the artist's mind when he set to work (Gombrich, 1951). These ideas that the outsiders usually worry about (notions of beauty and expression) are rarely mentioned by artists. It was not always like that, but it was so for many centuries in the past, and it is again now (Gombrich, 1951).

I further contend that the reason behind this is partly that artists are often shy people who would think it embarrassing to use ambiguous words like "beauty". They would feel priggish if they were to speak about expressing their emotions and to use similar catchwords. Such things they take for granted and find it useless to discuss. However, there is another reason. In the actual everyday worries of the artist these ideas play a much smaller part than people would suspect. What an artist worries about as he

plans his picture, makes his sketches, or wonders whether he has completed his canvas, is something more difficult to put to words. Perhaps he would say he worries about whether he has got it “right”. I found this to even be true in my project. When I initially finished that art work for this project, I did not really feel that the piece was complete. Therefore, I went back to the canvas and reworked a section. It is only when we understand what the artist means by the modest word “right” that we begin to understand what artists are really after.

We can only hope to understand this if we draw on our own experiences. Of course we may not be an artist; we may never have tried to paint a picture and may have no intention of ever doing so. This need not mean that we are never confronted with similar problems as those which make up the artist’s life. In fact, I am anxious to prove that there is hardly any person who has not at least had an inkling of this type of problem. Anybody who has ever tried to arrange flowers, to shuffle and shift the colors, to add a little here and take away from there, has experienced this strange sensation of balancing forms and colors without being able to tell exactly what kind of harmony it is he is trying to achieve. We feel a patch of red here may make all the difference, or this blue is all right by itself but it does not flatter the others. Suddenly a little stem of green leaves may seem to make it come right. “Don’t touch it anymore,” we exclaim, “now it is perfect.” Not everybody, I admit, is quite so careful over the arrangement of flowers, but nearly everybody has something he wants to get “right”. It may just be a matter of finding the right belt which matches a certain dress or nothing more impressive than the worry over the right proportion of custard and pudding on one’s plate. In every such case, however

trivial, we may feel that a shade too much or little upsets the balance and that there is only one relationship which is as it should be.

People who worry like this over flowers, dresses or food, we may call fussy, because we may feel these things do not warrant so much attention. But what may sometimes be a bad habit in real life and is often, therefore, suppressed or concealed, comes into its own in the realm of art. When it is a matter of matching forms or arranging colors the artist must always be fussy or rather fastidious to the extreme. He may see differences in shade and texture which we would hardly notice.

Moreover, his task is infinitely more complex than any of those we may experience in ordinary life. He has not only to balance two or three colors, shapes or tastes, but to juggle with any number, at any given time. He has, on his canvas literally hundreds of shades and forms which must balance till they appear correct. A patch of green may suddenly look too yellow because it was brought into too close proximity with a strong blue. Therefore the artist may feel that all is spoiled, but there is a jarring note in the picture and that he must begin it all over again. While I was painting the human figure for this project, my art teacher instructed me to abort my entire painting and start afresh. As a result, I suffered agonies over this problem. The artist may ponder about it in sleepless nights. Indeed, I pondered over the decision of how to proceed. I chose to persevere and continue with my final painting. I was concerned with others opinions. However, in the end, I was happy with the outcome. Keep in mind, that the artist may stand in front of his picture all day long trying to add a touch of color here or there and rubbing it out again, though the viewer may not have noticed the difference either way. However, once the artist has succeeded we all feel that he has achieved something to

which nothing could be added. When this is achieved an example of perfection in our very imperfect world is realized.

It is fascinating to watch an artist clamoring to achieve the right balance, as I did during my studio time at The Locust Street Art School. However, if we were to ask the artist why he did this or changed that, he might not be able to articulate why. The artist does not follow any fixed rules. The artist feels his way. It is true that some artists or critics in certain periods have tried to formulate laws of their art. Frequently poor artists did not achieve anything when trying to apply these laws, while masters could break them and yet achieve a new harmony no one had thought of before (Grombich, 1951).

The truth is that it is impossible to lay down rules because one can never know in advance what effect the artist may wish to achieve. He may even want a shrill, jarring note if he happens to think that is right. As there are no rules to tell us when a picture or statue is right, it is usually impossible to explain in words exactly why we feel that is a great work of art. That does not mean that one work is just as good as any other, or that one cannot discuss matters of taste. If they do nothing else, such discussions make us look at pictures, and the more we look at them we notice points which have escaped us before. We begin to develop a feeling for the kind of harmony each generation of artist tried to achieve. The greater our feeling for these harmonies the more we enjoy them, and that after all is what matters. We may not be able to argue matters of taste, but taste can be developed. This is a matter of common experience which everybody can test in a modest field. To people who are not used to drinking tea, one blend may taste like the other. If they have the leisure, will and opportunity, to search out such refinements, they may develop into true connoisseurs who can distinguish exactly what type and mixture

they prefer. Their greater knowledge is bound to add greatly to their enjoyment of the choicest blends.

Taste in art is something infinitely more complex than taste in food and drink. It is not only a matter of discovering various subtle flavors; it is something more serious and more important. After all, the greatest masters have given their all in these works, they suffered for them, sweated blood over them, and the least they have a right to ask of us is that we try to understand what they wanted to do.

One never finishes learning about art. There are always new things to discover. Great works of art seem to look different each time one stands before them. They seem to be inexhaustible as real human beings. It is an exciting world of its own strange laws and adventures. Nobody should think that he knows all about it, for nobody does. Nothing is more important than this: that to enjoy art we must have a fresh mind, one which is ready to catch every hint and to respond to every hidden harmony. Necessary is a mind, most of all that is not cluttered up with high-sounding words and ready made phrases (Gombrich, 1951). It is infinitely better not to know anything about art than to have the kind of half knowledge which makes for snobbishness. The danger is real.

In this paper, I chose not to discuss the history of art. I think that knowing something of the history helps us to understand why artists worked in a particular way or why they aimed for certain effects. People who have acquired some knowledge of art history are sometimes in danger of falling into a trap. When they see a work of art, they do not rest to look at it, but rather search their memories for the appropriate label. I want to be quite frank about the danger of half-knowledge and snobbery, for we are all apt to succumb to such temptations. I hope to open eyes, not to loosen tongues. To talk

cleverly about art is not very difficult, because the words critics use have been employed in so many diverse contexts that they have lost all precision. To look at a picture with fresh eyes is far more difficult, but a much more rewarding task. There is no telling what one might bring home from such a journey.

I have discussed my personal process of developing a new skill in art with the hope that it would compel the reader to embark on his own challenge in the arts and therefore embrace self-discovery and self-actualization. I hope this section has taken out some of the mystery about art for the reader. Above all, I want to share the excitement and enjoyment that art endeavors can bring forth. We all have favorite pieces of art, new and old. Individual works of art themselves can tell many different stories. Visual artists choose this arena to communicate in a language of their own. There is an artist in all of us, waiting to be expressed. How about you?

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APPENDIX A

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Painting Man

Virginia McIntyre

February 14, 2005

Project Type: Develop a Skill

What Is This Project About?

“Painting Man” is a personal endeavor in learning a new skill. Some people contend that an artist is born. However, as an artist, my experience has been that artistic skills are learned, honed, and must be practiced to remain sharp. It has been a desire of mine for quite some time to use the human figure in the political art genre. This project will allow me to learn to draw and paint the human figure. In doing so, I will convey emotions through the vehicle of art. I plan to render a painting that depicts the emotions felt when man is oppressed. Using a visual vocabulary through visual communication the painting will relate the adverse impact of political and social forces in our society. The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) will be involved in the project in terms of generating ideas, strengthening and selecting solutions, and forming a plan of action throughout the art process. Paramount is that the CPS process and corresponding tools will be used in generating and selecting sketches to use for the painting.

Rationale for Choice:

I am a lifelong artist who has chosen to use art in the political arena. As an artist that lives in a capitalistic society, I have had to put my art on a back seat for the goal of making money to survive. I have always wanted to learn how to draw the human figure in a professional and representational manner. Moreover, I have been thinking about the emotions that are felt when a person in our society is oppressed. I hope to make a political statement of life in America through my art. The human body is a symbol of who and what we are as individuals. Learning to render the human figure is a task that always eluded me. As a result, this project will chronicle the toils of learning a new skill in mid-life and the relationship of creativity and self-actualization.

What will be the Tangible Product(s) or Outcomes?

The result of this work will be a portfolio of sketches of the human figure. These sketches may be used in the future for other art works. In addition a sketch process folder will be produced. The sketch process folder will illustrate the process strengthening and selecting the final figure for rendering in paint. In addition, a journal will be kept. This

journal will provide a record of my thoughts, creative blocks, inspirations set-backs and successes of learning a new skill. The final project will be a painting of the male human figure.

What Criteria Will You Use To Measure The Effectiveness Of Your Achievement?

- The art piece will be of original design, based on the male human body
2. The art piece will convey emotions derived from political plight of the oppressed.
 3. The art piece will be constructed within the boundaries of sound composition

I will know that I am successful by receiving feedback from an art instructor from the Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes and artists Kevin Curthoys and Oscar Rodriquez. In addition, I will also be in contact with peers, colleagues and other artists.

Will Be Involved or Influenced; What Will Your Role Be?

I will be a student at the Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes. The instructors at the school will be involved and guide me through my skill development. Also a nude male model will be involved to pose for the piece. This individual wishes to remain anonymous. A professional artist named Kevin Curthoys will help me stretch and prepare the canvas for painting. In addition, Kevin Curthoys and Oscar Rodriguez will also evaluate my work. As a student, this project will allow me to stretch myself as an artist and provide me with a new challenge.

When Will This Project Take Place?

This project will take place during the spring semester of 2005. I will begin the process by finding a nude male model in February and begin sketching nude males in various forms at Buffalo State College. I will draw nude figures from photographs for practice in February as well. In March, I will begin the painting and finish the piece in May.

Where Will This Project Occur?

The live nude model sketching will take place in Upton Hall on Buffalo State College campus at 1300 Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, New York. The adult painting classes will take place at Locust Street Art classes at 138 Locust Street, Buffalo, New York. Both locations are in the United States of America

Why Is It Important to Do This?

I wish to expand myself as a professional artist and to be able to express my political views. I wish to impact the world and facilitate change by accomplishing this. I also wish to improve my skills and focus as an artist. I also contend that I will bring value to others by documenting the process of acquiring a new skill and the creative process involved in the quest for self-actualization.

Learning Goals:

- I will learn how to draw the human figure
- I will learn to draw people from live models
- I will learn to paint the human body
- I will learn to use color in painting the human body
- I will learn to make a frame, stretch a canvas, and prepare a canvas for painting

How Do You Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes?

I plan to achieve my goals by rendering a painting of the human body. I plan to develop drawing and painting skills through research and actual practice. I plan to achieve my goals by executing the following:

- Research the art of figure drawing
- Investigate the use of art to convey emotions and ideals
- Execute new and original ideas
- Review successful art works of the human figure
- Ask colleagues and teachers to review the art critically

Evaluation:

I will measure my success by receiving evaluation from the art instructors at the Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes, Kevin Curthoys and Oscar Rodriguez. I will use their evaluations as a criterion for determining the effectiveness of my accomplishment in the visual-arts. I will also solicit input from the general public who may or may not have an expertise in the arts. This will take place in the form of a reception for viewing.

Prepare Project Timeline:

February

- Find nude model
- Research figure drawing in books and galleries
- Join art classes and live nude drawing studio
- Generate 15 sketches
- Select final sketch to paint
- Comprise sketch folder

March

- Complete painting
- Photograph painting and sketches for final presentation to class
- Present piece to community
- Draft project write -up

May

- Present to class
- Hand-in draft of project write up on or before May 2

Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources:

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