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ABSTRACT

In the visual arts field there remains a mystique around artistic process that suggests that success relies on an individual’s tapping into his/her intuitive genius. Artistic process, beyond technical craftsmanship, is not something that is dealt with piece-by-piece, aspect-by-aspect. Art educators struggle for a curriculum that incorporates structure while maintaining artistic individuality.

This study turns to the revolution in the teaching of writing that occurred in the 70’s in which an approach was adopted that delved into the actual process of writing rather than teaching the mechanics around writing. Educators in the field came to recognize common, tangible key elements used by authors that continually re-emerged as they worked. Writing process became definable in manageable, recognizable, teachable components.

Four fundamental skills of writing process (discovering the subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design) as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004) are examined in this study to determine if they are also present and recognizable in the visual arts process. Archival research of writings by and about practising writers and visual artists speaking about their process revealed that the four skills were present and recognizable to the degree that it was possible to select quotes from the works of both that amply represented all four aspects of artistic process as defined in this study. A case study demonstrated that the four skills were observable and evidenced in the artistic process of a successful artist as he prepared for an exhibition in his studio. And finally, an arts-based research study of my artistic process provided insight into how the creative writing model was used by this artist as a tool for critiquing and informing her artistic process, particularly during revision.

As a tool, the discrete aspects of process (discovering the subject, sensing the audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) could provide educators with a comprehensive framework for examining and teaching artistic process. The ability to
name and intellectually address discrete aspects of process could enable artists to gain insight into the mystery of creating and bring them closer to producing satisfying work.

Keywords: artistic process; writing process; visual art; art education;

Subject Terms: Art – study and teaching; Art – education; Art; Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.)
DEDICATION

As a young child I would often make my way down the stairs to a large room in the basement of our house. There, I would sit in the middle of the floor and surround myself with seven 16" x 20" paintings on canvas boards. If I close my eyes I can still see each painting in my mind's eye as clearly now as I did then. I can see each painted rock, each painted tree. I can feel the ridges of hardened paint and the rough weave of canvas. These were my mother's paintings. She painted them one summer in a workshop at the Banff School of Fine Arts when she was a young woman.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who introduced me to the wonderful gift of art that has shaped and enriched my life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank those who so generously shared their knowledge and spirit so that I could embark on this exploratory passage.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks and gratitude to Dr. Carolyn Mamchur who has been a constant source of support and encouragement for me from as far back as my early days as a high school student. She has inspired me to pursue my artistic and creative endeavours with heart. Her insightful approach to pedagogy that encourages students to search for quality and follow paths that fulfil their passions has given me new appreciation for the profession of teaching.

Thank you to Dr. Stuart Richmond for sharing his extensive knowledge of art education and providing direction that fortified my exploration. His understanding and appreciation of art and aesthetics reinforces the importance of experiencing art as an everyday event. His assistance was invaluable.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, friends and family for their patience and never-ending confidence in my journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the following four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) are present and recognizable in the visual arts process.

Why Artistic Process

The particulars of the artistic process are often elusive to both the developing and emerging visual artist. Most will agree that the craft of making art can be taught and some will argue that creativity can be taught. At present, however, there remains a mystique around personal artistic process that suggests that success relies on an individual’s tapping into his or her intuitive genius. Beyond technical craftsmanship, process is not something to be dealt with piece-by-piece, aspect-by-aspect. It is not comprised of manageable, recognizable, teachable components.

Research that has explored and defined the process of creative individuals, such as artists, scientists and inventors has primarily focused on and addressed the more subjective activities an individual goes through in the act of being creative (Bailin, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Ghiselin, 1952; Koestler, 1964; Winner, 1982). And while process has not been bypassed by researchers and educators in the artistic disciplines, many of the artistic processes required in the actual making of a piece of art are often absorbed by the more general, subjective creative process that addresses the concepts of one's ability to be creative rather than identifying the elements of the process of creating. It is at this juncture that a distinction must be made between the more traditional description of creative process which includes preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Wallas, 1926), and any subsequent variations of this model, and the process
of working through a work of art, which will be defined in this thesis as *artistic process*. The ability to be creative or think creatively is not in question.

**Writing Instruction**

In the early 1970s a revolution occurred in the teaching of writing. Writing educators such as Donald Murray, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, Nancie Atwell and Janet Emig were part of a movement that changed the way writing was taught. In an attempt to make writing easier for students, they adopted a new approach that delved into the *actual* process of writing rather than teaching the *mechanics* around writing. This focus on writing process was a move away from teaching grammar and spelling and imitating prose models (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1983, 1986; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983, Squire, 1991) to teaching tangible components of that process (Mamchur, 2004; Murray, 1968, 1990; Spandel, 2001).

At first the process was vague – merely pre-write, write, re-write. But in time, researchers and educators in the creative writing field recognized that there are common, tangible elements used by authors that re-emerge in the process of writing (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1990, 1985). Over time, Murray’s experience as an author and educator of creative writing revealed to him “a set of attitudes that is remarkably similar in writers of different times, backgrounds, experience, and genre” (Murray, 1990, p. xi).

Subsequently, these researchers harnessed this knowledge and wrote extensively on the subject, developing teachable models to aid the writer in their process. In the midst of this change, two things were discovered: that writing was hard work and rarely easy, and that there were specific key elements to the process. Prior to this, there were few if any writings to suggest that the writing process could be defined in manageable, recognizable and teachable components.

Part of the confusion lay in the debate between artistic individualism and a process that is generalizable. This debate existed for years in the paradigm of creative writing. As illustrated by Murray (1968) the act of writing is complicated, but in the tidal conflict between the artist’s freedom and the craftsmen’s discipline a consistent pattern can be identified and passed on to the student writer (p. 1). Once it was accepted that a
recognizable process could be understood and taught, many of the myths around creative writing were dispelled. Understanding process by using a set of recognizable, definable components allows students to focus on, and thoroughly learn each piece before incorporating and building upon the acquired knowledge. As Murray (1985) observes, “Writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up the magician’s sleeve. The process of writing can be studied and understood” (p. 4).

While writing process models describing similar components have been developed over the years, I have found the work of writer and educator Carolyn Mamchur to be the most compatible and conducive to the artistic process discussed in this research. By collapsing Murray’s quintessential seven-stage model into four stages, Mamchur identifies four fundamental skills used by successful writers: discovering the subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design. Mamchur directs attention to the internal workings of the process, intentionally or unintentionally embedding key elements that otherwise made the model specific to writing. Consequently, Mamchur’s four-stage model is more adaptable and transferable to other artistic disciplines as it speaks more directly to the heart of process. For this reason, the model, as defined by Murray and redefined by Mamchur, will form the basis for this research.

Art Instruction

Art instructors live in an ever-changing field that constantly struggles to define artistic process especially in a post-modern era when grand narrative, inclusivity, and social context are more pronounced. The concept of art instruction and what constitutes an “artistic product” has shifted dramatically. Art historian and educator James Elkins (2001) in Why Art Cannot Be Taught acknowledges the difficulties of teaching art in the twenty-first century. He questions whether “art” is even being taught in our art institutes. He argues that while some teaching may be taking place, most art instructors are unaware of what they teach and when they teach (pp. 98-99). Elkins (2001) explains:

Our [teachers’ and students’] informal ways of talking, I will argue, are ways of not coming to terms with a number of fundamental
difficulties....and it allows students and teachers to make continuous adjustments to their sense of what art and art instruction are all about. (p. 41)

The struggle of reputable art researchers and educators to shape worthwhile socio-temporal art instruction is ongoing. In the 1960s this struggle began to shift sharply away from a formalistic, self-expressively constructed curriculum to a more comprehensive, socially meaningful form of art-making (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 308). Instruction such as discipline-based art education (DBAE), funded by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, focused on an integrative framework that circumscribed aesthetics, art criticism, art history and art production (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p. 10). In an era where meaning-making has moved to the forefront, open-ended instruction that relied primarily on the student’s ability to regurgitate emotion, inspiration and self-expression into a comprehensive, significant work of art is no longer adequate. “If art is simply subjective self-expression, it would quickly fade in significance” (Richmond, 2005, p. 111).

Walker (1996) states:

In contrast to meaning making, the creative self-expression approach to art education, which dominated from the 1940s until recently, offered a limited notion of the complexity of the art-making process. Students created from intuitive urges that required little overt instruction. The primary responsibility of art teachers was to provide students with opportunities to encounter various kinds of media and techniques. (p. xii)

Art instruction in education generally focuses on philosophical discussions and critiques of topics such as cultural and political issues, creative and subjective thought processes, the social relevance of art, aesthetics, and tools and techniques used in creating (Clark, 1998; Elkins, 2001; Stewart, 1994; Sullivan, 2005, Walker, 1996, 2001). Elkins (2001) notes:

Teaching at the graduate level is directed toward complicated questions of expression, control, self-knowledge, and meaning – subjects that have little to do with technique or sensitivity or even visual theory, and everything to do with the reasons we value art. (p. 103)

These are extremely important, valid concerns and issues that at some point artists need to address. As art educator Walker (1996) asserts, “Comprehensive art education
contends that, in addition to art production, art instruction should embrace art history, art criticism, and the philosophy of art” (p. xii). No one component of pedagogy should, or need be sacrificed for another. However, in the midst of the technical, theoretical and often subjective components of art-making, the process of art-making as instruction can become unfocused and elusive. Few art instructors introduce a pedagogical structure for the process of making art. A cursory examination of course descriptions in educational institutes offering visual art programs suggests that little if any attention is being directed towards a curriculum that supports recognizable, teachable components of the process such as those identified by Murray and Mamchur in the writing process.

Elkins (2001) acknowledges that attention needs to be directed towards an art curriculum that embodies some organization around the production of art: “Techniques that require systematic progressive guidance are missing from contemporary art curricula” (p. 79). If a requirement of art is that it must be meaningful in a larger context than self-expression (Gablik, 2004; Walker, 2001; Stewart 1994), would it not be advantageous to provide art students with a pedagogical foundation that enables them to recognize what is meaningful (personally and universally) and a sound structural process to see it through? Walker (1996) states, “Often studio instructors explain technical processes and visual decision-making to students, but leave idea development entirely to the students” (p. 15). Walker (2001) continues, “The knowledge-based approach of comprehensive art education offers a less romanticized view of student art-making, contending that instructional intervention is both desirable and necessary” (p. xii-xiii).

Difficulties Elkins attributes to the teaching of art include the lack of organization and informality of critiques, and the multitude of misinterpretations that take place in critiques due to the discrepancy of meaning associated with language. Elkins (2001) explains, “I think that it is important to try to organize and express the ordinary informal conversations of people trying to learn and teach art” (p. 41). Language and terminology may contribute more to the problem of miscommunication and misinterpretation than to the solution. Elkins (2001) notes, “The usual situation is that the instructor is not using any particular jargon and may not even realize that he is speaking in a way that is dependent on some theory” (p. 143). In other words, according to Elkins, it is very likely
that the language fuelling studio discussions and critiques leads to well-intentioned montages of misinterpretation:

This does not suggest that art is never taught, or that students never learn. What it does suggest is that instruction is often inconsistent and unrecognizable. Or worse yet, when art instruction drifts to the point where the art instructor is simply “emptying the contents of her conscious mind.” (p. 93)

Categorization of Knowledge

Both inspiration and formulated design are required in bringing an artistic creation to fruition and neither need interfere nor impede the other. Bailin (1994) argues, “Rules, skills and knowledge are indispensable to creative achievement. In them is embodied the practice of the discipline” (p. 106). Employing a constructivist method of categorization organizes and positions knowledge for easy retrieval and scaffolding. Indeed, the mind of man best understands complex and abstract concepts when they are broken into identifiable categories (Jung, 1923). Murray (1968) notes, “Writing can be taught to students if they are given the opportunity to discover for themselves the basic skills which each writer has to learn and practise while he aspires to art” (p. 107).

Categorizing, according to the constructivist Bruner (1956), allows the learner to interpret and organize concepts in terms of similarities and differences. Categories then form the basis for decision-making and knowledge acquisition by way of instructional scaffolding. In other words, it provides a systematic method of organizing, managing, and articulating knowledge that is anchored to previously acquired knowledge.

Terms such as “stages” and “models” are often anathema to an artist, conjuring up images of suppressed or dampened expression and individualism. This, however, has not been the case in the creative writing field. Constructing and tacitly agreeing on a language (or vernacular) allowed writers to speak intelligibly and explicitly about their craft. Writers have embraced a method of looking at, and talking about, the internal workings of writing. Ironically, rather than causing a sense of loss of individuality, identifying, naming and organizing the more nebulous activities of writing has freed writers to concentrate on the components of writing that are personal and individual.
Formulating a pattern of learning, generally considered contradictory to artistic disciplines, edified the creative writing process and defused notions of genius. As the art historian and educator James Elkins (2001) states, “If art is only inspiration and genius then it cannot be taught” (p. 96). In return, writers and writing educators gained a pedagogical writing model that was neither restrictive nor prescriptive. Calkins (1986) posits:

Becoming aware of their thinking processes gives students a new dimension of control over their writing. Simply having the words – handles – to talk about their writing strategies makes it more likely that children will consciously select ways of going about writing. (p. 152)

As art educators move towards art instruction that supports more meaningful art production they recognize that more structured, substantive, scholarly frameworks are required. As Walker (1997) explains:

It is the art teacher’s difficult job to provide structures for student art-making. Usually, this requires much trial and error with classroom practice, but it is worth the effort since students are quite capable of creative thinking and pursuing meaning through visual expression when given the enabling structures. (p. 33)

Methodology

Three methods were used to determine whether the theoretical ontology of the creative writing process has any kinship or resonance within the visual arts framework: archival library search, case study and arts-based research.

Using archival library research, I have examined the writings (letters, journals, books, interviews, art work) on and by creative writers and visual artists, which describe how they speak to and frame their process. These writings were examined referencing the creative writing process as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004). Given the scope of this research study, it was not possible to explore how the elements of the creative writing process would apply across the vast breadth of artistic movements throughout history. The archival research focused on a number of practising artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Selection was based on the recognized expertise of the artist and his or her having expressed notions of process.
Case study was used to explore in-depth the work of one artist to see if and how the elements of the creative writing process were similar, different and/or present in the visual arts process. For this research, the artist Leo Adams, a practising professional artist who is recognized by his peers in the artistic community, was selected as the focus of study. It was presupposed that as a practising professional he would be able to articulate his concepts and process regardless of how intuitively he works.

The artist was observed in his studio for three days as he prepared for an upcoming exhibition. By observing the artist in his studio, he was free to carry out his production activities with few disruptions to his routine. The only significant change to his working conditions was the presence of the researchers. Given the highly interpretive nature of qualitative case study research, triangulation was used to gather data. In this study, the multiple methods of data collection included videotaping, interviewing, informal discussion and observation carried out by two researchers. Both researchers are artists knowledgeable in artistic process as examined in this dissertation.

Arts-based research was the methodology used to explore my own body of artwork. As art is preferred as my primary method of expression, arts-based research opened the door to a multi-dimensional interpretation and investigation of the research subject. As an artist and researcher aware of the paradigm of the writing process being used in this study, arts-based research provided a method for examining my own process as I created a series of artworks.
ARTISTS IN PROCESS: ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Introduction

Archival research is the process of retrieving data on a life or phenomenon and interpreting that data keeping in mind the context in which it was created. Hodder (2003) explains, “Material culture is durable and can be given new meanings as it is separated from its primary producer. This temporal variation in meaning is often related to changes in meaning across space and culture” (p. 165). Given that retrieved documentation is always removed from its original context, the material is managed and constructed in a manner that may be highly interpretive because it is re-integrated into a new context.

Tuchman (1998) warns: “Do not assume that anything about data is ‘natural’, inevitable, or even true….physical truth may be radically different from the interpretive truth needed to assess the application or test a theory” (p. 256). This does not imply misrepresentation but rather a re-patterning of the information for investigative purposes while maintaining a regard for the original intention. Tuchman (1998) continues, “A social scientist wants to infer patterns….Detecting a pattern requires being open to the material (just as one must be open to hearing what one’s informants say in an interview) and having some imagination” (p. 255).

In this study, the archival research was not an attempt to reconstruct a life or even the artistic life of a writer or visual artist, but rather to examine the writings (letters, journals, books, interviews, art work) on and by creative writers and visual artists. Since the focus of the research was to determine whether the four elements identified were evident in the descriptions of artistic process, the research referenced both writers and visual artists. Artists and writers were selected who have either written about or have documented accounts of their process and have recognizable expertise within their respective artistic communities.
Discovering your Subject

What to focus on, to present, to explore, to discover? These are questions raised by every artist before taking pen to paper, brush to canvas, chisel to stone. Questions galvanized by incidents and events that cause the artist to look upward and inward; to take notice. Questions gleaned from personal encounters and experiences. This is the foundation of subject.

Both Murray (1968, 1990) and Mamchur (2004) remind us that subject matter resides in the fragile median between the universal and the specific. Although subject must speak to the universality of humankind, it originates in the specificity of the individual. Mamchur (2004) declares: “Great writing speaks to the general. That's called being universal. Great writing uses the personal to do it. That's called being specific” (p. 35). While we participate in the milieu of the universal, we recognize what is important and has meaning for us as individuals. Murray posits that authors do not approach subject by laying claim to grand narratives such as patriotism, beauty or truth, but rather through the intricacies of thought, observation, speculation, hints of knowing. Murray (1995) explains:

A line is a fragment of language, a sentence or less, that I hear in my mind or find myself scribbling in my notebook. The line that contains a tension, contradiction, question, feeling, or thought that surprises me and would be productive to think more about in writing. (p. 2)

While we are fed by the universal, it is through the specific that meaning is extrapolated, refined and reintegrated back into the lived world. The philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) postulates that our individual ideas and morals must be set against a horizon of significance (pp. 31-41). Taylor notes, “Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility” (p. 37). In other words, if the artist is unable to connect his expression to something of significance, to something that belongs to the world, then its meaning may be lost to a soft relativism. Or, as the philosopher Collingwood (1938) states, “The poet is not singular either in his having that emotion or in his power of expressing it; he is singular in his ability to take the initiative in expressing what all feel, and all can express” (p. 119).
The artist Anish Kapoor (2005) explains how the phenomenon being explored can only be recognized and understood if it already relates to a universal concept.

Darkness is a fact that we all know about, an idea about the absence of light. Very simple. What interests me, however, is the sense of the darkness that we carry within us, the darkness that’s akin to one of the principle subjects of the sublime – terror. A work will only have deep resonance if the kind of darkness that I can generate, let’s say a block of stone with a cavity in can have a darkness, is resident in you already; you know it already. (p. 155)

The artist Michael Ray Charles (2002) comments, “I realized that I wasn’t just making art about the black experience. My art was about social interactions. My art was about economics, gender, sex, pop culture, high art and low art, all these things” (vol. 2). While the worthy subject resides within the artist’s personal story, it echoes the universal issues that confront the many. The writer Dillard (1982) states, “Whether a writer writes ‘grapefruit,’ or ‘God,’ or ‘freedom,’ his indispensable subject matter is the world beyond the page” (p. 71).

Artistic inspiration will come to an artist in many ways, through many means, throughout his career. “William Styron was enthralled by a woman named Sophie; … Willa Cather said that she never wrote anything that did not come from direct and rather shattering experience” (Hall, 1989, p. 140). The artist Brice Marden (1997) painted on rubble in Greece, a process that he described as “taking an accident and turning it into a form” (p. 21). The painter Catherine Murphy (1997) claims, “So many of the paintings come out of geometry. That's why I'm attracted to certain things over others” (p. 31).

The primary factor is that artists are drawn to a subject because it relates to them personally and passionately. As Eric Fischl (1997) states, “I knew that I was dealing with taboos, and that those taboos carry a tension that needs to be explored, maybe exploded, maybe upheld” (p. 63). “You have to listen to what's gnawing away at your gut” (Murphy, 1997, p. 35).

Although subject selection may appear to be spontaneous, even simple, it is not an idle or random activity. It requires the artist’s attention to what is happening to, and around, her. In Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) study on creativity, he reminds us that in the
artist's continual search through an abundance of raw material, the subject that emerges for selection will inevitably be based on the culmination of experiences that are relevant to the artist. It is from this culmination that the individuality of the artist and her curiosity catalyze a subject that is worthy of pursuit (p. 85). As a black person, Michael Ray Charles, in the DVD Art City, displays some of the objects that he has found and kept as reference material for later use, such as a coon jigger toy and an image of Little Black Sambo. He doesn't discuss them with harshness or bitterness but handles them quizzically and sadly as if in wonder at the implicit messages. The artist Cemin St. Clair claims that the way he learns how to see is “by handling cups and toys and the normal things that people handle” (St. Clair, 2002, vol. 1). In this activity of handling, St. Clair ponders what the object has to offer and how it holds importance. Marden (2002) refers to the skeletal spine and pelvis hanging from his studio ceiling and comments on their reification in his paintings, “It's curious to [look] back and to find how much the shapes relate to this pelvis and spine” (vol. 1).

More important than what the artist chooses as subject, however, is how he chooses. Discovering a subject is not merely the cementing of concentrated facts and events. It is an activity that must be impassioned and energized by emotion, by a personal truth that has captured and suspended the artist in epiphany, recognition, curiosity that triggers an emotionally-driven response. Lari Pittman tells interviewer David Pagel, “I'm fascinated with the pulse of birth and decay, birth and decay. But at the same time it's horrifying” (1997, p. 174). Mamchur explains: “[It] involves focusing, framing, observing, accepting. It demands the writer choose as topics only those things that she consciously and subconsciously knows and cares about” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July 2005).

The seed of good art is predicated on personal experience, curiosity and involvement. It is the collection, chafing and juxtaposing of clippings from personal experiences into compositions that the artist deems worthy of further inquiry and interpretation. Murray (1995) explains, “All effective writing is autobiographical....It is all rooted in personal experience” (p. 11). For Michael Ray Charles, the coon jigger and Little Black Sambo are indubitably far from innocuous. Instead, they are objects embedded in an emotionally personal and historical trajectory.
If there is a lack of deep personal, emotional involvement in which to ground the subject, it is unlikely that the artist will possess the ability to sustain the desire or insight to stay committed to the subject and follow through. “Without meaning it cannot hold. You do not need to know what you are going to write about a subject as much as you need to know what subject holds interest for you” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July 2005). And the eventuation of discontinued interest generally leads to a disintegration of the subject. Murray (1968) posits, “Without the personal involvement, personal engagement, the subject is likely to lose focus, become more confusing and chaotic” (p. 2). The writer Lamott (1995) states, “You have to believe in your position, or nothing will be driving your work” (p. 106). “If your deepest beliefs drive your writing, they will not only keep your work from being contrived but will help you discover what drives your characters” (p. 105). The artist Eric Fischl (1997) reflects on his paintings, “I don’t think there’s ambivalence in these because the emotional core is so clear” (p. 62).

It is reasonable to assume, a priori, that personal experience, interest and emotion are implicit in the artist’s selection of a subject. Mamchur (2004) explains, “It is important to keep in mind that the job of the topic is to reach down inside of you and get you to write with passion” (p. 16). It is not assumed that the artist has (or should have) prior knowledge of his subject. Discovering a subject in the act of creating is exactly that, discovering and coming to an understanding of what the artist believes to be true by way of exploration.

Discovery requires the artist to approach the subject with an openness that is neither presumptive nor prescriptive; approached with a willingness to not know. For discovery to take place, the artist must be open to possibility, without expectations. It is not a definitive or declarative process, but fluid mindfulness, embodied in “a state of open susceptibility” (Burnett, 1983, p. 10). Murray (1995) states: “The effective writer courts and appreciates the unexpected, the unplanned, the contradictory, the surprise” (p. 46).

In the hope of understanding something more of the world, the artist suspends critical judgment regarding the outcome, and instead looks for the connections in conflict that surprise and interest (Murray, 1995, p. 5). The sculptor Goldsworthy (1990) states, “I
can't really say what my intentions were at the beginning – I wanted to come with open eyes – to see what I could find” (p. 65). In Gardner's comments on writers he describes the approach of the author John Cheever:

Cheever simply copies down reality at its fiercest, making no excuses – sets down as unjudgmentally as any machine the crackle of fire in the angry woman's voice, that fake disinterest and specious objectivity, the undying murderous jealousy toward a girl with whom Farragut had long ago had a brief sweet affair. (1994, p. 125)

The congruity, which grows between the artist and his subject, will be based on his willingness to participate from the dual position of examiner and listener, rather than advocate or imposer. The following artists explain: “When the voice speaks, you listen to the voice….It's always a dance between 'over the top' and 'back off.' I'm always giving and pulling back” (Murphy, 1997, pp. 32-33). “The piece still has to decide what it is going to be” (St. Clair, 2002, vol. 1). “It's not that I'm trying to make the straightest line or the most beautiful curve; it really comes from the thing that I'm physically casting and have chosen to cast” (Whiteread, 2005, p. 249).

From this position the artist discovers the truth, the emotional truth about the subject. This depth is difficult to experience while catering to judgment rather than openness. And the truth of a matter revealed and spoken is an important, attractive factor in a piece of art, not only as a personal discovery but also as a human discovery.

Accepting the position of not knowing inevitably lays the artist open to risk. The first risk is the personal vulnerability of self-discovery; the second is the risk of opening that to public display. Mamchur (2004) suggests, “Being vulnerable is one of the essential parts of good writing” (p. 12). With speculation and expectations aside, the risk is unforeseeable because all things are now possible. Murray (1968) concludes in his summary, “The writer has the courage or the compulsion to reveal himself. He commits himself” (p. 13).

The greatest danger for the artist in taking a risk is not that she will find out something about herself that she never knew, but that she will find out something dark about herself that others will witness. Mamchur (2004) reminds us, “The point is, the ‘taking of risks’ is the truth” (p. 9). For the artist to recoil in the face of risk, a risk not
based on a need to shock, disturb, or seek retribution, but a risk based on exposure causes the work to suffer. Exactly how much courage the artist will need is not known. That will depend on what is discovered during the act of creation. Fischl (1997) notes, “These new paintings are the scariest painting I’ve done….I’m confident this is some of the best work I’ve ever done, but it’s also so exposed” (p. 61). Fischl (1997) describes what caused him to feel so vulnerable:

I was very nervous about getting specific. You start to think: If I paint what I know, how much do I know? Who cares about the little life I came out of? This is before you realize how big everybody's life is. (p. 60)

Gardner (1994) reminds us of the value of this search for inner truth when he describes how the writer John Fowles illustrates that both philosophers and writers are engaged in the same effort – to preserve what is worthy in human life (p. 136). We risk to reach that deep, universal level of human vulnerability and connection. It is this grand search for truthfulness that builds strength in a work of art. The following writers explain: “He must not only care about what he is writing, he must believe without question that he is re-creating truth, that the truth of his story is what it must be, and let no one be in any doubt about that” (Burnett, 1983, p. 4). “Telling these truths is your job. You have nothing else to tell us” (Lamott, 1995, p. 103). “Nothing is firm but the positiveness of truth. Don’t make positive lines that are not true!” (Hunt, 1985, p. 14). The artist Murphy (1997) confesses, “Finally it’s a painting about a woman who is totally obsessed with being in control – and who is totally out of control” (p. 33).

In the discovery and development of the subject, preconceived notions are either dispelled or affirmed. The subject begins to take shape, to formulate. And while in the midst of a plethora of facts, surprises and insights, a continuous re-evaluation, a clarification of the subject should be taking place. Mamchur (2004) states: “It is your job as a writer to give us a clear picture, to let us see the picture you are carrying around in your head” (pp. 19-20). “Remember one reason we write is to be understood” (p. 27). Marden (1997) expresses his dissatisfaction with the lack of (and need for) clarity in his work.
It was there if you wanted to try and see it, but it wasn't there enough. So I thought, Well, I'll grow into it. I mean in a lot of ways I had to figure out how I wanted to deal with this stuff. (p. 20)

The process of clarification is one of finding the relationships between the specific pieces of a subject and revealing what is known and unknown, what is expected and unexpected. “It is in the development that we find out what we did not know about the subject and about the surprises … what we did not expect” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July 2005). The sculptor Rachel Whiteread (2005) explains how her continual working of a subject provides insight. “I knew I was a bit irritated that I had to keep these walls in, and it’s just since then, through the kind of plodding nature of my practice, that I’ve realized that’s what it was that annoyed me” (p. 242).

This process is not a drifting away from the subject, but a drifting towards it. It is not that the artist loses sight of the subject but that allowance is made for the subject to show the artist, direct the artist. It is the honing of a premise, a move towards clarification.

It is essential to remember that the creative end is never in full sight at the beginning and that it is brought wholly into view only when the process of creation is completed. It is not found by scrutiny of the conscious scene, because it is never there. (Gheslin, 1952, p. 21)

Murray (1968) describes how a general, vague fragment of a concept is focused into one solid idea: “The writer’s generalizations are nailed down, they are well-made and documented; they have been built, thought through, constructed, composed” (p. 3). “The main reason to re-write is to discover the full depth and dimension of what you have to say” (Murray, 1995, p. 44). As Murphy discovered while in the midst of a painting of a shadow on a stucco wall, “Then I started and realized: ‘It’s the surface I’m interested in, not the shadow’” (1997, p. 31).

Although concentrated, dedicated, rigorous work, discovery is not a forced activity. Murphy (1997) describes her process of discovery: “My experience has been that I keep discovering my obsessions little by little. Something keeps cropping up in my work again and again – and suddenly I’ll realize what it’s about” (p. 35). The author
Anthony Trollope states, “With me, plots are not made, they grow” (Hall, 1989, p. 147). Burnett (1983) comments on Sean O'Faolain’s view on clarifying the subject:

The writer is the eye discovering the object like a camera starting to move from one angle to another, withdrawing to a distance to enclose a larger view, slipping deftly from one character to another, all the while holding firm in the planned direction. In the story we are writing, skipping about a bit will eventually return us to the basic reason for selecting, in the first place, the development that has been troubling us. (p. 68)

In the process of clarification, art begins to take on a rhythm that informs the artist regarding the core and dominant focus of the subject. Murray describes it as a melody that tells him where meaning is located and what it is (1995, p. 30).

Clarification is a process of making sense of chaos, creating order from disorder. Dillard (1982) observes, “The writer is interested in knowing the world in order to make real and honest sense of it. He worries the world and probes it; he collects the world and collates it” (p. 151). The artist Marden (1997) notes, “I was taking a shape – an accident – and turning it into a form. So you take something out of control and bring it into control” (p. 21). Clarification is the reorganization of the peaks and valleys. Anish Kapoor (2005) explains, “We live in a fractured world. I’ve always seen it as my role as an artist to attempt to make wholeness” (p. 164). What predominates should run through the art as a common thread, made visible in the hands of creating, not in the predetermined mind of an artist. As Murray (1995) reminds us, “Good writing has depth and texture, but something should predominate” (pp. 51-52).

The process of discovering a subject is a process of reworking, refocusing and re-evaluating that continues throughout the work. It is a noble and vital task to articulate one thing that brings everything into focus. It is the artist’s attempt to address universal issues the only way she can, from her unique, specific perspective. The writer Brande (1934) clarifies: “There is just one contribution which every one of us can make: we can give into the common pool of experience some comprehension of the world as it looks to each of us” (p. 120). The artist Murphy (1997) notes, “It is connected to my entire life, my entire past” (p. 33). Approached as an adventure of honest, focused discovery that
reaches beyond a record of daily events, not only do we gain compassion and insight into ourselves, but compassion and insight into the world. Gheslin (1952) writes:

But he is not inclined, as some imagine, to mere wandering, to dizzy excursions away from the determinate. He is not a tramp. He is drawn by the unrealized toward realization. His job is, as Wordsworth says, “The widening of the sphere of human sensibility ... the introduction of the new element in the intellectual universe.” He works towards clarification, towards consciousness. (p. 18)

Sensing an Audience

Art provides a common ground for shared human experience and subsequently shared knowledge. Murray describes this artistic interchange as a transfer of ideas from writer to audience. “The purpose of writing is not to arrange ink on paper, to provide a mirror for the author’s thought, but to carry ideas and information from the mind of one person into the mind of another” (1968, p. 3). An important reason artists create is to make a connection with others, to have impact.

The philosopher Collingwood (1938) suggests, “If one person says something by way of expressing what is in his mind, and another hears and understands him, the hearer who understands him has that same thing in his mind” (p. 118). It is debatable that Collingwood meant this literally. Due to the personal nature of expression, it is unlikely that audiences would have exactly the same “thing” in their minds as the artist. The more skilled an artist is at his craft, however, the more likely this can be achieved. Regardless, artists are engaged in the activity of externalizing an idea or image coherently so it can be read and/or interpreted by someone other than themselves. As Murray (1968) states, “The professional writer may write for himself, but he does not write to himself” (p. 3). Stephen King (2001) was once advised by an editor, “Your stuff starts out being just for you ... but then it goes out. Once you know what the story is and get it right – as right as you can, anyway – it belongs to anyone who wants to read it. Or criticize it” (p. 57).

Artistry is an expressive, communicative act. If it is to be shared, it must at some level have a degree of readability in relation to its intended meaning; some groundedness in one of the interpretive languages of the world. The critic, Max Wyman (2004), explains:
So while the act of artistic creation is a singular human gesture that may be rooted in no more than the artist’s drive for self-expression, it is impossible to separate that act from the effect it has on society, however remote the connection....It adds to the sum of shared human experience, insight and knowledge. (p. 30)

In the words of Csikszentmihalyi (1996), “To have any effect, the idea must be couched in terms that are understandable to others, it must pass muster with the experts in the field, and finally it must be included in the cultural domain to which it belongs” (p. 27).

Posited by artists, critics and philosophers alike, the act of creation, more often than not, is for the purpose of communicating and inducing effect. “What a writer wants to happen in a story is concerned with the effect he wants to create – tragedy, comedy, melancholy, or whatever” (Highsmith, 1983, p. 84). Collingwood (1938) reminds us, “For the artist has an audience only in so far as people hear him expressing himself, and understand what they hear him saying” (p. 118). Being effectual, however, should not be confused with prescriptive or dispositional art. There is no benefit in the artist’s preferencing the audience and subjugating her expression for the elicitation of a predetermined response. Murray (1968) explains, “Writing merely written for an audience will have the appearance of cheap plastic. The good writer does not change his truths for the audience” (p. 4). If the artist’s intention is to initiate a specific emotive affect, or experience from the audience, then the artist risks the art becoming amusement (Collingwood, 1938, p. 70). Or, perhaps worse, robbing the audience of the chance and ability to inject and integrate their own experiences. Gardner (1994) notes, “In this scene, the writer's manipulation is painfully obvious, and can only have one purpose – to bully the reader into feeling pity” (p. 108). The artist must be neither superficial nor sacrificial, but must sense her audience.

Although some may argue that great art can and is created without audience (Zangwill, 1999), it is not possible for the artist to separate herself from audience by simply declaring that she is unconcerned about others. An artist may claim that she does not make art for anyone but herself and starts by creating for herself, but generally, it is with thought in mind that she sets about expressing an idea clearly enough that others can share it.
At some stage, the artist comes face-to-face with the audience. It is at this juncture that the artist has the opportunity to meet the world, not only to convey expression but to witness the impact of her work: what is realized, what is misunderstood, what is weak, what is strong. The artist Louise Bourgeios (2002) asks, “Does your emotions carry over? Are you convincing to somebody else? That is the test” (vol. 1). Or, as Gardner (1994) states, “One might put it this way: important thought is important only insofar as it communicates with those at whom it is aimed” (p. 219).

The concept of making art for the self and making art for others does not necessarily lie in opposition, but in balance. Anish Kapoor (2005) explains that while he makes art for himself, he is very concerned with the viewer (p. 155). The heart of the art does not lie in a single entity but in the moment when exchange occurs between viewer and artist. It is at this stage, once attention is engaged, that an opening occurs for the audience to internalize the experience and interpret the artistry for themselves. As Sally Gall relays in conversation with April Gornik, “You give people enough opening to come into the paintings and have their own emotional experience... It's a form of generosity when the artist allows the viewer to come in and have their own experience” (1997, p. 181). Fischl (1997) describes what he hopes for his audience:

You want somebody to internalize it and interpret it in terms that they understand themselves. It's about them. I seek that. What I try to do is narrow the possibility of interpretation to a certain area so that they're never that far wrong. You don't want to control it so much that they have no room. You want them to participate. (p. 79)

Audience response, however, is unpredictable. It potentially will vary according to personal interpretation, over which the artist will never have control. Rachel Whiteread (2005) claims that the artist holds no responsibility for how anyone will respond. “I’m not responsible for how people respond to works, you can't dictate how people respond to works” (p. 248). Marden (1997) states, “I present it as an open situation rather than a closed situation. You don't have to get it. I'm not giving you something you get” (p. 22). At times the art may even produce an adverse affect. Michael Ray Charles (2002) comments,
There is always the implication that the work is controversial and that it is going to piss some people off and specifically black people....A lot of people thought that and still feel that I'm making money off of the backs of black people. (vol. 2)

Although the often-silent discourse between artist and audience is fraught with implicit and explicit meaning as the two parties search for common ground and shared experience, an understanding of the subject opens the possibility of interconnected surfaces. Although unable to predict audience response, an artist’s work may still have impact. Assumptions of difference and separateness can be breached. Fischl (1997) states, “I had my own reasons for making paintings and other people would find other reasons in them that would actually contradict my reasons. But both were equally valid because there was ambiguity in the work” (p. 62).

Regardless of response, the artist is responsible for, tacit or otherwise, projecting a clear, focused voice. Murray (1995) posits, “It is the responsibility of the writer to create a focus that will be clear to many readers, good or bad, interested or disinterested” (p. 53). Successful artists are consciously if not intuitively aware that to be heard by an audience greater than themselves they must make meaning clear. Lamott (1995) explains, “Your job is to present clearly your viewpoint, your line of vision” (pp. 97-98). Collingwood (1938) explains, “It is a bodily or perceptible thing (a picture, statue, etc.) whose exact relation to this ‘mental’ thing will need very careful definition” (p. 37). How can artists speak if they don’t know what their inner voice is saying? How can they be clear if they cannot understand what it is they are trying to say? How can the audience hear, with clarity, if the artist is not clear? Marcia Tucker (2002) states, “I think artists set out to do their work and to do it in as clear and straightforward and honest [a] manner as they can” (vol. 2).

If the artist is able to project an authoritative, honest, clear voice about a subject, then the audience has a foundation from which to respond. Providing this foundation calls upon the true mastery of the artist. Not only does the artist require the ability to clarify intent, he must also be able to exercise that skill to affect another, the audience. Understanding the mood of colour, the capriciousness of line, the temperance of shape; understanding the craft of his art, allows the artist to masterfully move another to
respond. In this way the artist exercises voice. It is the strength and clarity of this voice that is of the utmost importance. “Voice is the most important element in writing. It is what attracts, holds, and persuades your readers” (Murray, 1995, p. 179). “It creates tone. It creates the image that the writer will project” (Coe, 1981, p. 159).

The artist must compose and deliver a personal idea in a clear, truthful manner against a background of intelligibility. By being clear with yourself you will be clear with your audience. Mamchur (2004) teaches:

Being aware of audience helps you to concentrate on being clear. One way to do that is to avoid vague, general, abstract, jargon-filled sentences and to replace them with precise, clear works and concrete images....When I speak of honesty, I refer, to the idea of clarity, of really letting the reader know what is on your mind. That is a hard job. (p. 61)

She stresses the importance of an artist having influence without losing herself, of coming to know her own style so well that in the process of coming to understand her audience she comes to understand herself. In other words, to sense an audience, the artist has the difficult task of knowing how to balance affecting the audience (even seducing the audience) with her style without being manipulative.

Fischl (1997) likens the relationship between artist and audience to a tennis game:

And in a sense, your opponent is your audience because they're the ones who are going to feel and understand all of the intensity and all of the subtlety of your strokes. They're going to know what it feels like when you ace them or you cram a ball down their throat or you drop shot 'em or you pull 'em wider or you mix up the pace. They're going to be affected by it and react to it. (p. 68)

How this is achieved, how the artist becomes truly effectual, is by infusing the art with “voice.” Murray (1995) states:

Voice is the magical heard quality in writing. Voice is what allows the reader's eyes to move over silent print and hear the writer speaking. Voice is the quality in writing, more than any other; that makes the reader read on, that makes the reader interested in what is being said and makes the reader trust the person who is saying it....Voice is the music in language. (p. 175)
Voice has an individual quality that the artist takes pride in and that the audience listens to. Voice carries with it a promise of encountering something beyond mere representation. It carries something personal, individual, humanly common. It carries a relationship between the artist's voice made visible and how that voice it speaks to others. Fischl (1997) explains, "My imagination is not about flights of fantasy. It's really a process of discovering who I am, so it's about peeling away and peeling away. It's about meeting something essential" (pp. 63-64).

Mamchur describes voice as the artist's style. Style reflects the uniqueness, peculiarity and novel perspective of the artist. The artist's style reminds us that an individual is present, that something essentially human lurks in the shadows of the art. It is "a writer, meeting another person, a reader, on the page" (Murray, 1995, p. 32). The writer Coe (1981) notes, "Perhaps the most significant and positive function of style is that it projects an image of the writer – what we call the writer's *persona* – which influences readers' responses to the writing" (p. 157).

Style is difficult to develop and artists often struggle to maintain the richness of individual style without it backlashing into limitation. Cemin St. Clair (2002) explains, "I don’t want to be responsible for a style or a look or a product but a way of looking at things" (vol. 1). In an interview with Robert Storr, the visual artist Chuck Close states: No artist likes to be labeled and no artist is ever comfortable with the group that he or she is lumped together with. We all want to be seen as individuals, and we all have to be respected for that which makes our work different from everybody else’s, not the vague, shared, common denominators of some movement which we may or may not feel that we're part of...I refused to participate not because I hated all that work but because I just wanted to be seen as an individual. I had different concerns, but if I then just threw it all into the pot and allowed someone to stir it up and make bad stew, those differences would be lost sight of. (Storr, 1998, p. 91)

One of the ways an artist develops style is through the ability to hear and don the personas of artists who have come before in order to understand the sophistication of what makes them good. The writer Goldberg (2005) describes writing as "A communal act.... We are very arrogant to think we alone have a totally original mind. We are carried on the backs of all the writers who came before us" (p. 86). The artist Richmond Burton
(2002) notes, “You can learn so much from the way other people in history and in the present have approached the same or similar issues to the ones you are dealing with” (vol. 2). Stephen King claims, “If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write” (2000, p. 147). Good artists are able to make sense of the world, or at the very least, lift the shroud and unveil something that is inherently evident and common to mankind, something that belongs to the world.

But as we observe our friends, lovers and enemies, as writers we must have for them the feelings of sympathy, empathy, understanding, guilt, or regret that inevitably we give ourselves. It is the only way, then that a reader eventually can feel closeness with characters so far outside of his actual experience. It is thus that writers like Franz Kafka, Tennessee Williams, and Anton Chekhov seem to reveal to all of us the secrets of the human race, the deepest truths about ourselves. (Burnett, 1983, p. 4)

Artists’ voices reflect how they think, how they feel, how they pay attention and make others pay attention, surmising the world as they see it. While cohesive, it is not always gentle. It may be demanding, angry, empowering, illuminating. “Hopefully, the viewer comes upon the work, which is alive and functioning on its own – at full throttle” (Pittman, 1997, p. 173). Anish Kapoor (2005) describes the unusual impact his work had on one viewer:

There was a man, who stood in line for forty-five minutes and went into the room, took his glasses off; he was so furious, he’d done a lot of things in the name of contemporary art but never stood in line to look at a black carpet! So he took his glasses off and threw them. And of course then they disappeared into the void of the work. This is total success in my terms! (2005, p. 156)

Voice is powerful and must be used skilfully, not with judgment or finger wagging, but with clarity and honesty, keeping in mind human nature and experience. As Gardner (1994) posits, “Affirmation and righteousness are as far apart as love and hate or art and criticism” (p. 37). Voice used skilfully does not criticize but splits a subject open. Murray (1995) states, “Voice illuminates information. Voice makes what appears to be insignificant information significant, and an ineffective voice can make what is significant for readers appear to be insignificant” (pp. 179-180). Marden (1997) describes the problems with intention that has gone astray.
They were meant as additional reference for the audience's information, like the postcard drawings. Obviously, the postcard drawings were very expository. They were little lectures on my attitudes about the plane and about images....And I saw them as almost embarrassingly literal. It was like giving a lecture. And nobody seemed to get that point. (p. 18)

The task of composing and delivering personal voice with clarity and honesty is difficult, intense, hard work. And although we rely on consistency of style to hold the piece together, a clear focus towards a dominant subject must also be imbedded and secured. It is a cyclical, reflexive process of understanding one's individualism and articulating that expression. It necessitates that the artist come to understand his subject and then essentially to be able to communicate that subject. "The voice of your story doesn't short-circuit at crucial moments, but says just what you mean, in language that is your own" (Frank & Wall, 1994, p. 51).

If the artist projects a voice that is confusing, the audience is denied the opportunity of hearing the artist and may even feel rejected. To settle into a misconception that the artist is the only one that needs to understand the art, deserts the audience in an uncomfortable void of confusion. Without clarity, and understanding of subject, the reader (or viewer) is likely to abandon the art. If left with the labourious task of sorting through disjointed, chaotic pieces, if left to reorganize concepts and patterns in their own minds, with only weak placeholders, the audience is likely to disengage rather than persevere. Murray (1995) observes, "They simply stop reading. Their minds float off the page" (p. 168).

Providing the audience with voice filled with depth and texture entices and promises a worthwhile visit. And the audience is a 'worthy' measure of whether the artist has been understood. It is not as a challenge or test of whether the audience can read the artist's mind but whether the audience can seize some meaning in the artist's work and transition it to their understanding of the world. Murray (1968) notes, "The inexperienced writer repeats the refrain. 'But I know what I mean.' The professional writer knows that that is no test at all....Does the reader?" (p. 4). As Frank and Wall (1994) state, "[Readers] don't want to hear what's convoluted, overly private, or extraneous. They want to hear what's important, intimate, and compelling" (p. 3).
When the artist has made order from disorder the audience can recognize the focus. The writer Highsmith (1983) observes, “All art is based on a desire to communicate, a love of beauty, a need to create order out of disorder” (p. 79). The artist Charles (2002) notes, “It’s sort of an ongoing thing for me that I never really feel like I communicate effectively. I often wonder if someone truly understood what I was saying” (vol. 2). Gardner (1994) comments on the author John Cheever and his ability to lay down a foundation for both his process and his readers:

One of the things a great writer can do, in a mad time, is simply write things down as they are, without explanation, without complicated philosophical, sociological, or psychological analysis of motivation, simply trusting authority of his voice, because he knows that all he’s saying is true, that his ear is infallible, and that in a world bombarded by "communications" he can trust the reader's experience and sensitivity – or can at least trust the best of his readers. (p. 125)

The challenge for the artist is to infuse his voice not only with clarity but also with truth. Not a truth laden with rules of right and wrong, but with an emotional truth. As Burnett (1983) explains, “He must believe without question that he is re-creating truth….And, if one writes as believably as possible, the story will then ring true for the reader” (p. 4). The artist’s conviction and commitment to her subject is salient to engrossing the audience in an ambience of authority and believability. “Dishonest writing sometimes has so little impact on readers that they barely notice whether it is true or false” (Coe, 1981, p. 161).

As Gardner (1994) explains, “The reason Cheever is a great writer – besides his command of literary form, impeccable style, and unsentimental compassion – is that what he says seems true” (p. 129). When interviewing Eric Fischl, A. M. Homes comments on Fischl’s artwork: “There seems to be a determination to be completely honest. I don't want to see this, you don't want to see this, but if I don't show it to you I'll be lying” (1997, p. 63).

If the artist's work emotes truth, it translates into a knowing and revealing that imbue the work with an authoritative tone; an authoritative tone that allows the audience to believe and consequently become lost in the work, trusting the artist, giving agency to the artist. Coe (1981) states, “[Honest writing] establishes a persona contemporary
readers will consider reliable and trustworthy” (pp. 161-163). Not an impositional, moralistic, judgmental authority, but an authority that secures a confidence and believability; an authority which circumscribes the audience’s understanding of humanity.

It is the weight and depth of honesty in a work that will seduce the audience. If the artist speaks truthfully, with conviction, then concurrently, the audience has a foundation for engagement. Burnett (1983) explains:

And if this involvement is lacking in your own work, your story will leave a reader cold and probably disbelieving of all you have to say, because it has come from you with no real emotional persuasion. Any reasonably perceptive reader will spot this coldness, this lack of true commitment on the writer's part, just as a musically perceptive concert audience will wince at a false or misplaced note. (p. 4)

Art is a risky business and not for the faint of heart. It is where the artist risks what she knows, what she believes, what she feels and exposes. Murray (1995) posits, “We become what we write. As we draft and revise we become exposed to ourselves, and when our writing is read by others we become exposed to them” (p. 227). Or, as Frank and Wall (1994) describe a common error of novice writers: “[They] infuse their stories with the writer they'd like to be, rather than the writer they're afraid they really are” (p. 55).

But what sort of adventure would art be without undertaking risk; a risk resulting in unabashed pleasure. “It is true, by the way, that in going unashamedly for emotion, Woiwode [the author] … sometimes slips into the embarrassing. To take large risks is to fail sometimes” (Gardner, 1994, p. 94). More often than not, however, an audience is able to sense the artist's commitment; to sense what the artist is willing to lay out on the table. Whether the artist can trust the audience is not a determinant of whether she should risk. “Such writing is of course risky, but all true art takes risks, and all true fiction assumes a reader of intelligence and goodwill” (Gardner, 1994, p. 125).

While the act of trying too hard may potentially damage the artist-audience relationship, the artist must take the risk and face losing everything in his search for something grand. The artist Lari Pittman (1997) observes:
I like it when I overstretch myself, when it's beyond my grasp and it alerts the viewer that I'm trying too hard. Not in terms of dimension or size or materials, but in trying to tackle something enormous – this tremendous, elegant endeavor. There's a pathetic quality to that type of overreaching, in trying to say something. It's embarrassing that I even had that ambition and that I wanted to say so much. And that becomes touching and pathetic at the same time. These are qualities that are romantically linked. I like that in the work. People will respond, "Oh come on, Lari, please stop!" .... If I have favorite pieces it's because I secretly know how they relate to my life directly. But that's personal and really of no use to the public. (pp. 174-175)

Know what you want to say, and say it. Gather the information, search your soul for what is emotionally true for you and say it, intrepidly, without reservation. At the very least you will create a work instilled with integrity. Dillard (1982) reminds us, “An honest work generates its own power; a dishonest work tries to rob power from the cataracts of the given....literature does not operate on borrowed feelings” (p. 26).

Gardner (1994) summarizes the full, powerful impact that art laced with voice, clarity and authority may have upon a reader:

*Bleak House* is surely one of the worst-written books in English – a serious defect, God knows – but once you have read it you are stuck with it for life. To have this total effect on the reader, a book must be as wise as the reader is in his best moments, stripped of pettiness, prejudice, and obsession; it must urgently support the highest affirmations the reader is capable of making, penetrating – at least by implication – every nook and cranny of his moral experience; and finally it must have the weight of a reality which the reader, at least while he is reading, does not notice to be any less substantial than the world of fire engines, tables, and yellow house cats where he lives. (p. 45)

To capture an audience is where the human connection resides. This is where there is recognition of commonality and reflection of the individual in the universal. Murray (1968) reminds us:

The writer is on a search for himself. If he finds himself he will find an audience, because all of us have the same common core. And when he digs deeply into himself and is able to define himself, he will find others who will read with a shock of recognition what he has written. (p. 4)
Searching for Specifics

The dominant theme of a subject is revealed and honed through the search for specifics. Descriptively capturing what it is one wants to say requires an attentive, refined focus. It is a delicate process that results in the calcification of an idea. The following example given by Murray (1995) demonstrates the power of specifics to deepen and texturize meaning. "He cheated on his income tax but didn’t expect his son to cheat on his biology exam.’ The two specifics in this quote reveal the father” (p. 28).

Specifics are critical in the trajectory of a subject from a vague generality to a masterfully developed concept. Mamchur (2004) instructs, “Details make the story specifically yours. Unique to you. Yet the bottom line, the premise or general statement of life behind the story, is what makes it universal” (p. 95). This is the process of how a subject is discovered. “If you want to capture the general, focus on the specific. If you want to get to the big, look for the small” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July, 2005). The artist April Gornik describes the underlying premise that drives her artwork. “I’m finding the underside of everything. Like how incredibly brief a moment of beauty really is. How intense can it be?” (p. 180). And the type of detail she employs in the exploration of her topic, “Compositionally, when I’m finalizing a painting, I’m going for a tension in which it could almost come apart. Take one little element out of it and it wouldn’t work at all” (p. 180). Gornik works with a universal concept – recognition and regard for the beauty in nature. To do this, she approaches and handles the concept of beauty in the way that she experiences it – intensely.

Murray (1995) suggests that it is the linking of specific details, not generalities, that builds an image. “The details are arranged in a pattern, and that pattern prompts the reader to construct a meaning or experience a feeling. We cannot usually construct a meaning from generalities” (p. 77). Catherine Murphy’s paintings deal with the lingering of time and time passing (1997, p. 29). To capture and hold the viewer’s attention, to suspend time, her chosen specifics are the building blocks of a painstakingly detailed high-realism style. “You may find that every pebble, every pine needle, every hank of wig hair and plastic trash bag will declare and insist on its beauty, its form, its own individual life” (1997, p. 27).
Specifics are how the author comes to an in-depth understanding of his subject, the meaning it has for him and how it may have meaning for others. A tone is set by the specifics; a tone imbued with authenticity and authority built on concrete details that offer the reader something to be believed and believe in. Hall (1989) explains that it is by way of concrete details that an author gives shape to his subject. “Rendering, showing, vivid dramatization, depend upon the concrete rather than the abstract. Concrete details ‘prove’ a scene by convincing the reader of the reality of the characters and the action” (p. 4).

Whether literal or abstract, composition is founded on substantive specifics that must be convincing to the viewer. Marden (1997) explains how he continues to go back into his art, working through the specifics to build the painting. “To start out with this rectangle and make it yours by marking it over and over....I have to go back so many times over to get that black” (p. 19). Marden continues: “You build up these veils of feelings....Each layer was a color, was a feeling, a feeling that related to the feeling, the color, the layer beneath it: a concentration of feelings in layers” (p. 17). One critic’s comments on the work of the artist Anish Kapoor suggests a strength built on specifics. “The colours are at the service of the shapes – excavated holes in blocks of stone and rock; highly polished discs or bowls like domes of heaven” (Kapoor, 2005, p. 152). The author Dillard (1982) stresses, “In all the arts, coherence and integrity go hand-in-hand. One cannot toss onto one's canvas a patch of blue paint and hope one's friends like it or some clever critic finds a reason for it” (pp. 33-34).

Art is an interpretive activity. During the application of specifics the subject is revisited, reviewed and renewed. Assigning specifics sets in motion an exploration for new understanding and interpretation beyond the original instance of the subject. In the words of the educator, Jardine (1998): “Exploring what understandings this instance makes possible” (p. 41). The artist Kapoor states that “one does not set out with the idea that ‘I’ve just had a great idea and now I’m going to go and perform it’” (2005, p. 161). Art is a process and must be treated as such.

For the author to persist in relegating the subject to its original instance, to bracket it a priori to attaching specifics, stifles the subject. Kapoor describes how he begins by
posing a series of problems for himself; then with an image in mind he creates an object. It is at this point that he begins to assign a deeper meaning through the complex process of positioning. "Naming is one of those ways. Context is another. What happens if I put it next to another object?" (p. 155). A subject is not a sedentary decision but an exploration, a discovery, aided by specifics.

Until the subject is investigated and actualized through the application of specifics, the subject is not fully realized. Through specifics, the subject is formulated into a distinguishable entity. The writer Hall (1989) explains: "And make me see, by means of a single word, wherein one cab-horse does not resemble fifty others ahead of it or behind it" (p. 12). Once applied, specifics inform the artist as to the possibilities and direction in which the subject can unfold. As the artist Fonseca (2002) observes, "It's important to look at your work a lot....It's important to look at it and know why you don't like it or why you do like it" (vol 1).

In the process of making art, the author must be willing to accept the unacceptable, to expect the unexpected. Artist Anish Kapoor (2005) posits, "I've learned over the years it is in that cloud of unknowing that something new can occur, that it is precisely in those moments when I don't know what to do, boredom drives one to try!" (p. 161). Murray (1995) suggests that, in fact, it is in the reflexive process of rewriting and reworking using specifics that the topic is discovered and refined. He notes:

The draft will instruct if you follow it. It will ask for a definition here; more description in one place, less in another; an increase in specific detail on one page, less on another; the elimination of good material that slows the reader down; the insertion of material that answers the reader's questions. The draft will tell you what to do if you listen to what it is saying and fool around with possible solutions, playing with words until they make your meaning clear. (p. 50)

Catherine Murphy recounts how a difficulty was resolved once she realized which specific was required to strengthen her painting. "In the middle of the night I woke up and said, 'There's got to be hair.' Because the painting of the sink alone was just too static. It wasn't going anywhere. It was over too fast" (1997, p. 30).
If the author is willing to discard a presumptive relationship with her subject and replace it with a relationship generated and fortified by specifics, the subject will begin to solidify. This is not an abandonment of the subject, but a building on the inspiration and inquiry that originally captured the author's interest. The artist Burton (2002) explains, “I’ve been doing layers of colour interspersed with browns, earth tones, blacks and white building up and each triangle becomes smaller until they start to evolve into some kind of gestural shape” (vol. 1).

Specifics should act as connectors between the patterns of meaning, all moving towards one meaning, one phrase, one sentence, no matter how simple or complex. “The potential meaning is the focus essential to effective writing....Everything in the draft must lead to that meaning or follow from it” (Murray, 1995, p. 48). Marden (1997) describes:

I scraped away the paper so that the card was set into the paper on the same plane as the graphic image. The drawn image, a rectangle of black graphite in combination with the postcard, a flat reproduction of a work of art. They are not layered against each other. They exist in the same spatial plane. (p. 19)

It is through this process of making the meaning clear that the author comes to fully realize what belief he actually holds to be true about his subject, what premise lies in the shadows. Unfortunately, authors must come to terms with the fact that what they thought they believed and what they actually believe may be incongruent. As Marden (1997) discovers, “We were suspending these images in light, glass, air, atmosphere, these colors floating....And in working out ways of depicting these for myself, the physicality of my paintings changed....The matter was no longer the carrier of light” (p. 25).

Fortunately, the premise, if allowed to surface unimpeded, cradles the honesty, integrity and authority that will support the subject and convince the audience. Mamchur (2004) posits, “Writing true detail gives the voice of authority and makes the reader trust the writer. That reader will follow you anywhere” (p. 92). Hall (1989) explains, “It is presumed that if the actual author is caught ‘making it up,’ authority and believability are lost” (p. 29).
Without authenticity and authority, the audience will lose interest or misread the author's meaning. The audience will silently call fraud. When questioned about validity and the amount of intervention she allows when casting her sculptures, Whiteread responds, "I think we'd been working on it for about a week and we came in one night and two of the fireplaces had been ripped out by someone who'd just gone in and nicked them, so we had to rebuild the fireplaces" (Whiteread, 2005, p. 247). Whiteread believed that casting and preserving the room in its original condition was of primary importance. Given another situation, discovering another subject, it may not have held the same importance. For this piece, to remain authentic to the work, she obviously believed the fireplaces, as a specific, were paramount.

Specifics draw the audience in while exposing what the artist knows and believes about his subject. Gardner (1994) explains, "Cheever's stories are realistic in the best sense of the word, anchoring the dream in the concrete example, nailing the reader to the page with ruthless attention to detail, character by character, scene by scene" (p. 147). The writer Lamott (1995) notes, "You can see the underlying essence only when you strip away the busyness, and then some surprising connections appear" (p. 84).

Anything else, any specifics that do not ring true to the subject, that do not support the development of the dominant theme, may threaten the authenticity and authority of the art or writing. In attending to the specifics the artist attends to the potency and credence of the work. Whiteread does not blindly accept the unexpected specifics as they materialize but pays attention to them, and in that recognition makes an intuitive decision as to the role they play in authenticating the work. "It's casting the space underneath a table and really enjoying [the] fact that there are pieces of chewing gum and all sorts of other things that actually become part of the sculpture" (2005, p. 246). And although Marden often projects a randomness in his approach, his attention to detail demonstrates a deep level of caring for precision; a desire to achieve a degree of rightness. "They're drawn very carefully, using a pen that could really get it accurate – how things ended, how things began, how things met" (1997, p. 19).

The search for specifics begins with the search for raw materials. The gathering of information is prolific so that the author comes to understand and realize the subject and
how it is located in a larger context. Murray (1968) explains, “The writer makes a calculated search for his raw materials. This search is based on the knowledge of his subject and of his audience” (p. 5). A plethora of information around a subject furnishes the author with multiple perspectives upon which to draw. Murray (1995) continues:

Writing is built from an inventory of specific details – accurate, revealing information. This information is collected from observation, memory, experience, interviews, reports, books, articles, tapes – a vast abundance of resources. (p. 48)

Artists gather objects, shapes, images as writers gather words. An interviewer comments on the seashells and Chinese calligraphy scattered around Marden’s studio as Marden reflects on the shapes and lines that influence his art (1997, p. 20). “In Greece you have mountains that diagonally frame the water beyond. They become vessels. So when I started using the diagonal, it had the same shape as the mountain/vessels” (1997, p. 20). Michael Ray Charles refers to the coon jigger toy that he has kept in his studio knowing that one day he would draw inspiration from it. He reminds us, however, that raw materials should not simply be a regurgitation or representation of what is already there but developed in a manner that informs the subject being discovered. “But I didn’t want to recreate this toy, more than I wanted to take the established language and abstract from it a different meaning” (Charles, 2002, vol. 2).

The craft of selection is difficult and must be dealt with wisely, creatively, honestly and lovingly in order to find only those specifics that will build and hone the subject into one dominant theme. Murray (1995) warns, “A great deal of good material, information the writer works hard to collect, will be left out” (p. 88). Selection is not made at the expense of the art but for the art.

If you want to reveal the tranquil beauty of a flowery meadow, make sure you have not included the blur of traffic on the highway beside the meadow. If you want to comment on modern life by showing the cars rushing by unseeing, make sure you get both highway and meadow, and that you use an exposure that will show the cars blurring past the stationary beauty of the wildflowers in the meadow. (Murray, 1995, p. 60)

The artist Gary Simmons actually eliminates items in order to fortify his social commentary. “[I work with] stereotypical racist cartoon imagery that I pull out of the
films and draw on a chalkboard surface and then erase ... it's an attempt to erase a stereotype" (Simmons, 2002, vol. 1). Whiteread (2005) reminds us that the artist must only choose those specifics that matter: “Everything that I cast I make a very clear-cut decision about casting it....There's all sorts of things that can inform each piece that I choose, but they're certainly not meaningless” (p. 250).

The author does not choose revealing specifics blatantly or defiantly denying the audience their own realizations or experiences, but implicitly. Murray (1995) explains: “Readers are hungry for an abundance of accurate, specific information that allows them to do their own thinking” (p. 33). The writer Hall (1989) comments, “The best of detail is implicative in motion, and appealing to the senses” (p. 3). The challenge for the author is to seduce, not with cleverness or exposition but with implicative details that reveal a truth and clarity of subject that awakens in the audience a knowing and remembering of their own relationship with the experience (or as commonly phrased by authors, show, don't tell). Mamchur (2004) suggests, “A telling made powerful not by telling at all. A telling made powerful by showing” (p. 79). Fischl (1997) comments: “There is such a difference between something that is spot lit and something that is luminous, shade and shadow” (p. 64).

The abundance of raw information is for selection, not superfluous verbosity or wit to be passed on for the audience to sort through. Lamott (1995) notes, “When you start off writing, if you are anything like me, you may want to fill the page with witticisms and shimmering insights so that the world will see how uniquely smart and sensitive you are” (p. 105). Or, as Anish Kapoor (2005) states, “You have to get beyond that seemingly decorative façade. The exotic's always been a real problem for me” (p. 160).

Tell the audience what matters; what is important in relation to the subject, to the art. Tell them what is meaningful. Select details that are relevant. Mamchur (2004) instructs, “Concentrate on the details that matter. Not just any details. Certainly not all details. Just those that matter” (p. 84). The artist Fischl (1997) observes, “I’ve always tried to edit the objects in my work so that they’d resonate and not be locked in time” (p. 60). In his process of selection, Marden (1997) explains the subtle difference between
eradication and discrimination: “So when I tried to get rid of all the clichés, I ended up with a wall and a rectangle. That’s reductive. Some people said it was nihilist. It wasn’t” (p. 17).

Artistry driven by ego-based, expository cleverness risks placing the audience in a difficult and even uncomfortable position. Murray (1995) warns, “The reader is embarrassed by the writer who tells readers more than they want to know about the subject, often providing an excess of inappropriate, intimate details that do not seem to relate to the topic” (p. 32). The artist Fischl (1997) describes how his desire to push a subject endangered the outcome of the work:

Reality became a passion of mine. I willfully chose to be painfully honest. Initially, my paintings pushed it too far. They wanted to be too painful, too confrontational, but in a way that wasn't authentic. It went past the real content to a sensationalism. A lot of the paintings were melodramatic rather than purely dramatic. (p. 64)

A revealing specific is one that has resonance and truth without offending the reader. Murray (1995) explains, “A powerful detail has resonance; it gives off an explosion of implication in the reader's mind. Resonance causes the reader to begin thinking, taking the text of the page and exploring its implications” (p. 78). Mamchur (2004) follows, “You search for specifics that will bring emotion and clarity and the voice of authority to your work” (p. 95). For Rachel Whiteread selecting a specific that “resonates” means selecting specifics that enrich and fortify. “I always used cast-iron because that was what I could get to rust into the material properly, and to get this very rich surface on the final piece” (2005, p. 245). Applied well, specifics have the ability to cause the audience to see, feel, smell, give authority to the author and make the reader a believer. Hall (1989) provides the following example:

Fatal and solitary and he could smell it now: the thin sick smell of rotting cucumbers and something else which had no name ... Faulkner's authority is such that we accept his comparison of rattlesnake stench to that of rotting cucumbers. (p. 24)

It is important to consider and choose specifics carefully. As most artists understand intuitively, all elements of the artistic process feed back into the others. Knowing what specifics to chose when also means having a sense of your audience and
clarity of subject. Hall (1989) suggests, “It is not the quantity of details that count, but their quality, and that mere lists can quickly become monotonous” (p. 7). The artist Neil Jenney (2002) describes the cognition behind his selection. “I had to make a decision about the kind of clouds that I wanted and I decided I didn’t want the fluffy, puffy….I wanted it to be more tough” (vol. 1). Specifics should imbue the art with authority and authenticity or risk the loss of credibility or of being misread. It is important that the author follow through and “keep the promise made to the audience” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July, 2005). Have we said what we meant to say? Do the specifics speak to the subject? Not explicitly but implicitly so that the audience remains engaged; so that when the audience reaches the end of the story, when they are encapsulated by the image, they can say, “I should have known” (C. Mamchur, lecture, July 2005). The meaning is clear and has been all along. The meaning reads like a snake running underground through the work.

The subject’s fruition is dependent upon the specifics. Without specifics the subject is left lingering in a pool of assumption, never fully articulated, only played with. Murray (1995) explains “Revealing details expose the subject; they connect with other details to construct an opinion, argument, theory, poem, story, report that can be studied, challenged, tested” (p. 78).

Creating a Design

As the artist plans and plots her way through a piece of work there is an intention towards packaging. Not a packaging directed at saleability or commercialization, but a packaging intended to fortify the art with enough integrity, wholeness and life to stand on its own. This requires the implementation of good design. If the piece is solid, the foundation secure, the structure sturdy, then the design is likely to be good. As Mamchur (2004) posits, “Creating a design is the process of giving structure to your work” (p. 136).

The structure of design, at times, is likened to an architectural structure. Murray (1995) comments: “Form gives meaning to your material in somewhat the same way that a house, a barn, an apartment block, a supermarket gives meaning to lumber and nails, steel beams and cement” (p. 99). Lamott (1995) provides the following description, “The
book felt like a house with no foundation, no support beams, which was collapsing in on itself, and there was no way to shore it up” (p. 86).

The architectural analogy speaks to the purpose of design, which is to provide a living space for all components, both large and small, that will connect the art. The architecture blueprints the shape that will keep the pieces from floating off the page while simultaneously mapping a routing system that will qualify the placement of the components. Franklin (1986) notes, “The forces that allow mortar to stick bricks together, for instance, are different from those that keep arches and flying buttresses stable” (p. 92). Each piece serves its purpose and is placed where it will do its best work; no word, phrase, or sentence is silenced, overruled, or subjugated. “Design means putting together everything you know into the place that makes the most sense” (Mamchur, 2004, p. 151).

The challenge for the artist is to present an idea and its meaning in the best possible light. On the exterior, design is a shell holding the pieces in place. On the interior, design is a map charting the undulations and rhythms of those pieces. These are important considerations that are lost if left to hindsight. As Murray (1995) posits, “Shape communicates meaning: The shape of what we say contains and therefore helps to communicate our meaning” (p. 104). Eisner (1997) purposes a similar theory in his writings about art and education, stating that the tools we select represent what we have to say: “Forms of representation are tools, and they are not neutral” (1997, p. 4). “Knowing what to neglect means having a sense for the significant and possessing a framework that makes the search for the significant efficient” (Eisner, 1998, p. 34).

Care, however, should be taken not to displace design by separating it from the content that substantiates and informs it. Although a decision may be made to write a short story or a poem or a novella, what a shame, what a sad circumstance to discover that the subject required more, that the poem begged to be a short story. This is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of the form or subject, but an indication that the subject was unsuitable for the design and the design unsuitable for the subject. “The form lies within the material, and it is our task to see what forms are there and which form helps us understand the meaning of the information” (Murray, 1985, p. 24). Mamchur teaches that one of the greatest errors teachers often make is to assign form (C. Mamchur,
lecture, August 2005). In other words, form in the shape of a poem or short story is specified before the student has even begun to write. In fact, content will inform the design. It is unnatural for the design to dictate the content as content derives from passion and purpose.

Anish Kapoor (2005) describes the infrastructure and the exchange between content and form. “I’m interested in the idea that form in a sense turns itself inside out, that the inside and the outside are equivalent to each other, that we don’t just enclose” (pp. 156-157). The artist Andy Goldsworthy finds that many of his pieces are transient and may go through one or more transformations, synchronously affecting both content and form.

I look forward to seeing the shapes and how much the form reflects the day of making. A snowball made in a day when the snow was good, fresh, not thawing, sunny and calm has to differ from one made in the wind, rains and dark with wet thawing snow. Each snowball is an expression of the times it was made. (Goldsworthy, 1990, p. 117)

Design should be considered in the initial stages of the creative process and not neglected or set aside to be arrived at *a posteriori*. Few pieces of art, if any, whether they are writing, visual art, music or any other art medium can endure a lack of form or design. Mamchur (2004) warns, “It is possible, of course, to deviate from classical structure. Many try, some succeed. I suggest you master this traditional design before you invent your own” (p. 144). Or, as Murray (1985) comments, “Nothing will happen most of the time if there is no design. The writer will simply wander and have to try to impose a design later on, when it is much more difficult to do” (p. 23). Highsmith (1983) explains a time when she was so focused on the content she was writing that she lost sight of the larger picture. “I had kept my nose so diligently to the page, I could no longer see the whole book. I was writing elaborately about small matters, and the book was no longer in proportion” (p. 71). The artist David Deutsch (2002) explains:

When you want to be a painter you know how you want your paintings to look before you decide on what you are going to paint....There is some kind of glimmer of what is eventually going to go on the wall and how it is going to look. (vol. 2)
The artist Brice Marden claims not to do any preparatory planning and seems somewhat lost and unsure of what the results will be. This may be due to his random approach to design.

I mean I’m not thinking this thing out....I don’t have a plan here you know ... I feel very confused with these paintings....There are things happening that I really like. There’s something very, very complete about it. But I really don’t want to leave it this way. I mean maybe that is what is bothering me is this kind of reference to certain forms. Maybe it’s too obvious. But there’s also big areas that don’t really do enough for me....It’s curious to [look] back and to find how much the shapes relate to this pelvis and spine. (Marden, 2002, vol. 1)

Decision-making in design is not random but congruent with subject, specifics and audience and should be awarded the attention necessary to support them. Early stages that inform design, such as outlines and first drafts, are not fixed entities. Murray (1995) suggests, “Scan your draft, imagining it as a blueprint of the exterior walls of a building. Does the shape of the building fit its purpose? Is it a factory, a summer home, an apartment house?” (p. 103). Mamchur (2004), in her instruction on design, informs her students: “The writing of a poem is the search for its precise form, a series of decisions about ‘shape’” (p. 129). In other words, attend to the design and do so in accordance with the subject and content in mind and with a sensibility for the entirety of the work.

Highsmith (1983) states, “Some writers may prefer an easily seen diagram as an outline, or in addition to a written outline....This method forces a writer to see the sequence of events in proportion to the entire story” (p. 72). Rachel Whiteread (2005) describes how design is considered in relation to the other elements: “There was actually a valley roof on the building and I made a decision to just block that off and not actually cast into the roof space, because it would have looked too complicated” (p. 247). “It’s not that I’m trying to make the straightest line or the most beautiful curve; it really comes from the thing that I’m physically casting and have chosen to cast” (p. 249).

Art is constructed. It is built piece-by-piece, whether it is writing, painting, or music. As the artist Close (2002) comments, “The kind of thinking that goes into making a painting like this is more perhaps one of building a painting rather than painting it. Ultimately all these colours together build the colour world I want to make” (vol. 1).
Although not all decisions are in place in the beginning, the author must have an idea of where she is going. Franklin (1986) clarifies, “A story is not a line of dominoes, it is a web, and tugging on any filament causes the whole thing to vibrate” (p. 113). Creating is an organic, reflexive process. All components are interdependent. Form will need to be adapted and modified. “What is key to the rough drafts and the outline is the deciding of form based on clarifying the issue. How this happens may vary ... but the process of design is the same” (Murray, 1995, p. 109). Subjugating one component to another may cause the piece to unravel. Cemin St. Clair (2002) notes:

Then I arrive at this stage, which is more or less like an inch from the surface and I decided that I wanted to cover the entire surface with this pattern of little pyramids so I begin doing it here. I might not go with it in the end. The piece still has to decide what it is going to be. (vol. 1)

The premise of the artwork plays a very important role in design. Mamchur (2004) explains, “Premise is a part of structure. It is a part of the basic inner architecture of your composition. It is the soul of your work” (p. 141). “There may be more than one way to phrase the premise, but however it is phrased, the thought running through the piece must be consistent” (p. 141). In other words, although the components of the design are in place, all the threads must be woven together; must adhere to a common vein. This common vein is the premise. The premise must be systemic to the design. It is the glue. It is the truth. It is the honesty that infuses the work with integrity and authority that builds confidence in the reader. Mamchur (2004) reminds us, “A premise keeps your story consistent and honest” (p. 141).

The necessity of the artist to truly understand the premise is dire to the amalgamation of successfully applied specifics, discovered subject and projected voice. If the premise has been misconstrued, misunderstood, or overlooked by the author, then no matter how well the individual components are structured, there is no unifying force to bring them together. Egri (1960) cautions, “The author using a badly worded, false, or badly constructed premise finds himself filling space and time with pointless dialogue – even action – and not getting anywhere near the proof of his premise” (p. 7). This is not to say that poorly placed specifics, ill-shaped subject, and incoherent voice can be resolved by a clear-cut, concise premise. The premise is not a remedy but a crucial aspect

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of the structure of design. Egri continues, “The premise should show the goal, and the characters should be driven to this goal” (p. 164). If the conditions have not been met at all levels of design, the author risks collapse.

As discussed, design is not merely the selection of a format (poem, short story, novel) but rather the interrelation of concurrent levels of structure, each in service to all the other components that exist within the design. Design is where problems are identified and solved (Murray, 1985, p. 23). Within the parameters of design all the complexities, comprehension and the interrelatedness of the varied elements of a piece congregate. Interestingly, the writer Franklin (1986) has noticed that the infrastructure of design varies in composition from the external structure. “As we look closely at structures, whether they be physical or artistic, natural or manmade, we soon notice something rather odd and very important. The big things often don't relate to one another the way the little ones do” (p. 92). Franklin (1986) clarifies this statement in his description of how elements of writing that are effective at one level may bring ruin at another:

When you deal with sentences, for instance, where relatively simple thoughts interact, the cliché is poison. But when large-scale structures are interacting that is no longer the case; at the conceptual levels, the cliché undergoes a strange metamorphosis: It becomes an eternal truth (p. 93).

In other words, what may weaken the piece as a specific, strengthens the piece as a subject. All levels of structure must be substantive and operative at their individual levels and structurally reliable to the piece as a whole. If we return to the architectural analogy, we are now looking at the floors and rooms of a house or side roads and rivers on a map; all feed and support the composition. Transitions segue the smaller units into larger units, thus forming new focuses. Franklin (1986) posits:

A story is constructed in this fashion. Clusters of simple images form focuses, which in turn are joined by simple transitions to form larger focuses. Those larger focuses then combine to form still larger focuses that are glued together with increasingly complex transitions that guide the reader through changing times, moods, subjects and characters.

Ultimately the focuses combine to form several “major” focuses that compose the principle structural subunits of stories. (p. 99)
Rodin once said, “I was forced to destroy these hands because they had a life of their own. They didn't belong to the rest of the composition. Remember this, and remember it well: no part is more important than the whole” (as cited in Egri, 1960, p. 31).

Design is an aggregate of carefully strung components and transitions. The small is implicated in the large and conversely the large is implicated in the small. Egri (1960) notes, “The small movement, then, becomes important only in its relation to the big movement” (p. 172). Dillard (1982) purposes, “In all the arts, coherence in a work means that the relationship among parts – the jointed framework of the whole – is actual, solid, nailed down” (pp. 32-33). The artist Ashley Bickerton (2002) puts it nicely when she says, “What we do is create a sort of poetry with information” (vol. 1). As Murray (1995) reminds us, “Nothing in writing stands by itself....The word has to fit the words before it and the ones that come next; the phrase has to fit the line; the line the paragraph; the paragraph the section; the section the whole piece” (p. 188).

As the writer composes, he relies on the sequential structure of beginning, middle and end, as well as a set up, a conflict and a resolution. And while these components may be more difficult to delineate in the visual arts process, there is still something that needs to be investigated and resolved artistically. The visual artist must also stimulate interest, present tension, and offer drama.

In any artistic form, however, the artist must keep in mind that no audience can withstand continued exposure to heightened states and ways must be found to soften the exposure intermittently. Gardner (1994) advises, “One of the most difficult problems a first-rate novelist has to solve is that of balancing movement and static detail” (Gardner, p. 48). This balancing of movement and static detail is rhythm.

Rhythm is the vitality in design, excitement and the relief from possible boredom. It is what creates drama. Mamchur (2004) informs, “Without change, the drama is dead, inert” (p. 142). And as Egri (1960) suggests, “The drama is not the image of life, but the essence” (p. 166). It brings us in close and moves us back. Using rhythm, the author innocuously presents the conditions that can cause us to feel too much, not feel enough, threaten us, soften us. It is the mobility awarded to perspective.
Goldsworthy (1990) is conscious of the need to include design in the photographing of his work to ensure that none of the more transient elements, such as light, are lost. He notes:

In these “painterly” works, and in the ones that follow, the role of the camera is crucial, since it is not being used simply to record a sculpture which may be fragile, transient or accessible. More even than those pieces involving illusions of balance, or particular light effects, these works involve using the right angle of view, and relating the image to its frame edges; prescribing for the spectator in the gallery how they should be seen. (p. 18)

The writer Franklin (1986) uses the analogy of a camera panning a crowd to describe ineffective rhythm. “I had panned across my story as the amateur pans a crowd, and the result was a meaningless blur, without emphasis; having no emphasis, it had no drama. Having no drama, it had little interest” (p. 96). Rhythm is the visual lens set by the author. Close-ups create intimacy. Distance provides context for the intimacy. Murray (1995) instructs, “Take your reader in close for emphasis, for clarity, for dramatic effect, to make the reader think and feel. Then zoom back so the reader understands the full implications of what the reader has been shown” (p. 63). “Rhythm is not the regular beat of a metronome but one that reflects the meaning of the draft” (p. 200). April Gornik comments on the effect of rhythm in Sally Gall’s photographs: “There is a rhythmic punctuation to your photographs. The one with the branch sticking out of the water slow[s] the rest of the image down” (Gall & Gornik, 1997 p. 181).

There is wisdom in relinquishing total control and permitting the rhythm of a piece to have voice if the artist hopes the piece to have any say, any life, at all. Murray (1995) recommends, “A writer should respect the patterns into which this material arranges itself … especially if it is traitorous to the writer’s intent” (p. 106). By learning to listen to the patterns of rhythm, the artist will come to recognize where the flow breaks, where the integration of the structural levels fails. These are important matters that can be detrimental to the design and, consequently, the success of the work.

Conversely, fully aware of the aspects of good design, Frank Stella successfully uses the negation of rhythm to support his premise of no emphasis, no focus.
And Stella experimented with the boring repetition of the artist’s mark by creating a methodical process and doing it over and over and over so that no nuance occurred from one side to the other. Your eye would start at the left side and move across the painting’s surface. There wasn’t any variation, any center of interest, or any of the things that used to be what people talked about in painting. It was just the same all over, like yard goods or wallpaper. All of these issues were really extremely important in terms of showing a way out of building a painting the way the Abstract Expressionists did. (Storr, 1998, p. 89)

Handled well, the rhythm and structure of design ensures that the audience is not left to sort through unkept promises, unmet expectations and unanswered questions. The audience is not the enemy. There is little, if any, appreciation by the audience for an experience ending in a state of confusion and bewilderment. Mamchur (2004) suggests, “Whatever method of ending for your piece you choose, it should give the feeling of satisfaction to the reader or viewer” (p. 149). In this case, satisfaction does not refer to a sense of happiness and delight but an instilled sense of completeness and understanding regardless of how dark the work may be.

Every sentence, every word, laid out before the audience is laced with intended or unintended meaning. What is presented is a promise made. Franklin (1986) explains:

I imply to the reader that Dr. Ducker is going to do something very important with his hands. This is in effect a dramatic promise; on my honor, I promise the reader, I’m not telling them all this stuff for nothing. (p. 103)

Design is laden with promising implications that concurrently drive the design and that the design relies on. “As a result there’s an expectation, an implied guarantee, that the writer won’t put something into a story if it isn’t germane” (Franklin, 1986, p. 151).

Design is in service to the author and aids in the careful attention to loose ends; ensuring that all pieces are relevant and have meaning. Franklin (1986) continues:

The rationale behind this is that the reader has become accustomed to trust you not to include anything in your story that doesn’t have meaning within the story. The reader will assume that whatever you tell him will have some importance to the story, and if that meaning isn’t immediately apparent they’ll be waiting, with part of his mind, for the other shoe to drop. (p. 162)
Creating good design is not an easy task. Lamott (1995) states, “Everyone I know flails around, kvetching and growing despondent, on the way to finding a plot and structure that work” (p. 85). The making of art (whether music, visual art, literature or any other art) is hard, disciplined work, and to perceive the discipline of creating good design as an imposition undermines its function. Mamchur (2004) instructs, “Remember, total freedom from discipline is merely a negative state” (p. 135). Discipline in accordance with design does not restrain but builds a solid foundation upon which the other components can rest so that the audience does not become lost and disinterested. Good design does not exclude but invites. Good design identifies and solves problems and inconsistencies. Good design does not suffocate with imposition but rises from a sense of order. The artist Rachel Whiteread describes how she makes decisions regarding design:

I turned it upside down in the studio and I just worked on proportions and how something could look when it was finally a lump in my studio. So I was trying to decide what height it would be and they were also always based on weight and how I could physically move them around the studio, maybe myself and someone else next door that I could knock on the door to help me just shift something for ten minutes. So all of those things were considerations; and they all become part of your working practice. (p. 245)

Some artistic individuals may reject the notion of discipline, order and, at times, painstaking organization, as if somehow it negates their expressive, creative nature. However, design with all its labourious task-mastering reminds us that creating art is not whimsical but hard work filled with intelligence and integrity. The artists Chuck Close and Catherine Murphy often take up to a year or more to complete one painting (Murphy, 1997; Storr, 1998). The writer Dillard (1982) clarifies:

The work of art may, like a magician’s act, pretend to any degree of spontaneity, randomality, or whimsy, so long as the effect of the whole is calculated and unified....In this structural unity lies integrity, and it is integrity which separates art from nonart. (p. 28)

Or, as Franklin (1986) so boldly states:

For it is here, in the coldly logical prefrontal realm of the mind and not in the heart, that the secrets of the masters are kept. He who would
comprehend stories, no less than he who would understand universes or temples, must first grasp the nature of their component parts. (p. 92)

At every stage of the process, design is a decision-making, honing activity. What should stay, what should go, what informs, what obstructs? Murray (1985) clarifies “I had a number of designs, each one more complicated than the last, until I saw a new simplicity. And then that, in turn, became more complex, until it led to a simplification” (p. 23). But when all is said and done, and the artist has sweated and toiled through excitement and tears, good design (if it is good design) will go unnoticed. It will fade into the background. Murray (1968) states, “No one has to see or understand his design but himself” (p. 7). “The construction of a novel, once hidden from view [is] like the machinery on a film set” (Murray, 1995, p. 91).

**Conclusion**

As evidenced, successful writers and visual artists share similar concerns in their attempt to craft a work of art. In process, they confront the issues of discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design. While the language may at times vary between the two disciplines (writing and visual art), the basic elements of artistic process are common to both.

As mentioned, the nature of archival research is highly interpretive as data are reintegrated in a new context. In this case, the examination and interpretation of the data of the visual artists is re-patterned into the four creative writing elements identified in the creative writing model. The intent to infer and detect patterns does not suggest a misrepresentation of data but a reconstruction of data that is knowledge-building. The meanings and messages of the writers and visual artists were respectively maintained during their selection and examination. While other researchers may choose different elements, the description of process for the selected artists spoke to and was embodied by the framework of the four elements described.
LEO ADAMS: A CASE STUDY

In an educational context, case study begs the question as to how meaning is constructed in a specific unit and how this might be pedagogically relevant and valuable. Research is about creating new knowledge (Stake, 1998; Gillham, 2000). Embedded in pedagogy, as Stake (1998) posits, the epistemological question in case study becomes, “What can be learned from the single case?” (p. 86).

The case study used in this research can be defined as instrumental case study as described by Stake (1998): “A particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (p. 88). Although the question of what actually constitutes case study varies among researchers (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1998), in general the case study is described as a method of analyzing “a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1983) describe it as “an instance drawn from a class” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 9) with the stipulation that it is a bounded or bracketed system with some clarification of internal and external factors for demarcation purposes (Stake 1998; Bassey, 1999). Stake (1998) clarifies, “Certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside” (p. 87).

The very nature of a bracketed, bounded system places the phenomenon and the context in an apposite relationship; one cannot be extricated from the other. Phenomenon and context are relative and relational in the observed interpretation. Yin (2003) suggests that case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon from the real-life context (p. 13). It is the interrelationship between phenomenon and context that makes case study complex and unique. This qualitative characteristic makes it highly inductive, descriptive, heuristic and interpretive by nature (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). Given the unstructured nature of the qualitative case study, the case study is approached openly with no presumptions about what will be
found. Although parameters are set, there are no presumptions about what will take place or what information will be revealed.

In keeping with Stake's (1998) description of case study as choice of object to be studied rather than a methodological choice (p. 86), the object chosen for study and observation was an artist. The artist, Leo Adams, was selected for this study based on the fact that he is a practising, professional artist who is recognized by his peers in the artistic community. It was presupposed that as a practising professional he would have significant insight into the many skills required to successfully produce a piece of art. Although Leo Adams would have no preconceived notion of the four-stage process we were examining, he would be able to articulate his own concepts and process and respond to the questions presented during the interview with understanding and depth.

According to Merriam (1998) qualitative case study research is highly interpretive and requires no specific means of data collection or data analysis (p. 10). It was decided, therefore, that observation and analysis would best be substantiated via a triangulatory method of data gathering. Gillham (2000) posits, “This use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research” (Gillham, 2000, p. 2). Flick clarifies:

Triangulation has been generally a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen. (Flick, 1992, as cited in Stake, 1998, p. 97)

In this study, the multiple methods of data collection included videotaping, interviewing and informal discussion and observation. This allowed for cross interpretation, comparison and referencing for recurrence and anomalies of data.

For this study there was one researcher, one research assistant and the artist. The artist was observed, interviewed and videotaped in his home and at work in his studio. As research theory suggests, the phenomenon should be studied in a context as close to real-life as possible. Gillham (2000) states, “Human behaviour, thoughts and feelings are partly determined by their context. If you want to understand people in real life, you have
to study them in their context and in the way they operate” (p. 11). By observing the artist in his home and studio, he was free to carry out his production activities under relatively normal working conditions with few disruptions.

Three days were allowed for observation. Hours spent videotaping and interviewing were dependent upon the artist's schedule over the stipulated time period. Merriam (1998) purposes, “Each participant observation experience has its own rhythm and flow. The duration of a single observation or the total amount of time spent collecting data in this way is a function of the problem being investigated” (Merriam, 1988, p. 91). Since the main researcher was a friend of the artist and had previously established a deep level of trust and respect, the three-day period provided ample time for the assistant researcher to gain the artist’s acceptance and for the team to converse with him, view his environment and finished pieces, and observe him making art in his studio.

The style of observation used in the research was participant observer or more specifically, as described by Merriam (1988), observer as participant. In other words, the participation of the researcher and research assistant was secondary to the principal role of information gatherer (p. 93). The roles of the researcher and research assistant were strictly as information gatherers. They did not partake in the artist's activities. However, because videotaping and interviewing were taking place, the data collection process at times resulted in the artist breaking momentum to answer questions and articulate his process.

A degree of informality and confidence was established with the artist on the first day as we toured his home. He spoke about his finished paintings, his constructions and his environment. This provided valuable insight into how the artist lived, how he conducted his activities, and the integration of his artistic self with his professional self. As Stake (1998) stipulates, “We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience” (p. 95). Although this preliminary visiting and touring may be perceived merely as an opportunity to build relationship with the subject, information gathered (interviewing and videotaping) during this time became unknowingly and unexpectedly edifying.
The categories used to organize the data collection were the four stages of the writing-process model. Case study was used to examine a successful, practising artist's approach and articulation of his process and to examine whether the artist: selects a subject (something to be expressed), senses an audience (someone other than self to express it to), searches for specifics (ways of describing and mobilizing the subject), creates a form or design (a composition that best holds all the pieces together). Because Leo Adams was unfamiliar with the four stages and the vernacular used to describe the stages and writing process, some interpretation of intended meaning was required.
Leo Discovers his Subject

From jackrabbits to trees, to hills, to baskets of flowers and wild foliage, Leo’s art draws on the elements in and around nature. These elements are incorporated not only into his paintings but also into his living space and home that lies in the dry rolling hills of the native reserve of Yakima, Washington.

An old designer friend used to say, “Well, I like Leo’s house because it’s as dead as the outdoors is.” It is on the inside as it is on the outside because I always have a lot of dried and dead things around. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

Elements of nature and the found objects rusted and weathered are embedded in Leo's history, in his life, in his soul.

There was a little garbage dump next to our house that we lived in and it had an old car on it. We kind of lived in the old car. Built a playhouse out of it. So I think I’m still building houses and playing house as an adult not as a kid. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

These products of nature, worn and torn, are in his sense of colour, line and form. They have seeped into his home and permeate his art. “And I tend to like the cracked surface of it, because … I try and create some of those surfaces in my paintings as well” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Although these are not the only things that influence and inspire Leo, nature and the found object are salient to his sensibility and desire to create something from nothing. “I’ve always had the imaginative ability to make something out of nothing” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005).

As we move through the house Leo describes his constructions made from salvaged, broken-down items eroded and worn, discarded objects recovered from fields, dried weeds and chunks of nature dragged in from the desert. All are reconstituted into a functional, artistic life.

This is a piece of an old farm machine here, different parts put together, stacked together. And the table is just an old iron table that they used to use for welding. It was a flat form.
Around the fireplace is an old refrigerator shot with bullet holes.

This is an old butane tank that someone shot with bullet holes, so then I painted it white, so the rust rusted through the white latex. I think it gives it a different enrichment.

Candlesticks here are insulator holders from an old telephone pole.

I’m always collecting dry things....A lot of these things are from the garden and some are from the fields, just dried things on the desert. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

While nature and found objects are part of most people’s lives, how Leo personalizes, draws attention to his subject and rediscovers it time and time again takes place in his studio in each individual piece of art. Leo’s studio floor is filled with paintings, large and small, all at various stages of completion. They lie on the floor to prevent dripping as Leo uses washes and thinned acrylics to build layers of texture and pattern.

Just as he wanders the fields watching for and recognizing treasures in what most would consider trash, Leo watches closely for the shapes that emerge from the drying pools of colour, the scrapings and the splatters of paint. It is from these emerging shapes that Leo discovers his subject.

It just sort of came about on its own ... just by starting the painting it became. The forms later became the rabbits but mainly the underneath layers were built first and then the rabbits just sort of became a part of the whole thing. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

While some artists work with detailed sketches in hand, some literally replicate the study before them, and others work from a collage of ideas, Leo paints intuitively applying layers of paint, moving areas to the foreground and background until he discovers his subject. Writers may work in a similar manner. At times simply beginning is all you can do. “Sometimes I can write 400 pages of a book and then discover my 70-page subject” (Carolyn Mamchur, Interviewer, November 14, 2005).

Leo speaks about how he simply begins painting, waiting and watching for the subject to surface.
I don’t have a subject on any of these yet. Some may become an abstract, others may become something more realistic, but nothing has been established.

Actually, just the action of painting sometimes brings about the subject. The jackrabbit just sort of appeared. Possibly some of these things come from your dreams, your subconscious, and then when you are painting, they actually come out on the surface. (Leo, Interview, November 14, 2005)

He describes how he initially engages in the process of working with the materials.

Sometimes when I start, it’s just a matter of doing that, and that and that and that. And at least I have started to see. And then sometimes, the next step I’ll do this. I’ll use my brayer and move what I have just put down in this fashion. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

Leo moves with the quick movements of a seasoned artist who has been making marks all his life – pushing and moving paint, watching closely for the hidden life lingering just below the surface.

So now I have broken up the space, the blank space so it at least tells me … well, it’s a start. The hardest thing for any painter to do is to get started. So I may just do other things, or I may add a line across here and maybe one that goes here and then I sometimes take my … where did my eraser go? (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

Leo is constantly searching for the first hint of how the piece will evolve. “Sometimes by making a mark, or doing something to it, you’re exercising the paint. You’re moving the paint around. So we have that much started… Let’s go to the gold colour” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). In building the background, layer upon layer, the ground, the essence of the subject begins to flow and determine his next step. “Well once I think I have something established to build upon I can build it into any direction I want to” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005).

Working intuitively, intrinsically allows Leo to approach each piece with an openness and willingness that prevents the subject from feeling forced. The successful artist knows that art is a metaphoric process and that the strength of the work will lie not
in the transmission of declaratives and facts but in the framing and focusing of what the art feeds back to the artist during the creative act. The art always needs breathing room, room to engage in a reflexive process with the artist. Facts and presumptions can only be affirmed or denied, not enforced.

Leo keeps an open mind. He watches for what appears, working with the shapes that emerge to formulate his subject. “Well ... the ears kind of happened first, then they became jackrabbits. And then this one appeared, sort of running across the canvas. And then there is one kind of hidden back in here that you can see” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Leo is not looking for three jackrabbits but once recognized he begins honing and clarifying the image.

As the piece begins to take on a rhythm that informs the artist, he begins the process of securing some of the generalities of his subject. Leo personalizes his art in two ways. He selects the shapes and objects that emerge from the layers of paint that echo his comfort with nature, not his discomfort. They appear as organic hillslides, grasses, trees, wildlife, rather than as angled, broken, disparate pieces. “I think it’s becoming more of a landscape hillside, or maybe the feeling of what you look at down from the window” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). “This is my background for starting. For me this could be a landscape or I can keep building on top of anything else. It could be a big wheat bouquet” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Also as Leo fills in the spaces, smearing and splattering paint, he begins to substantiate his subject with his style, his patterns, textures, colours, lines.

Although Leo does not claim to have one overall subject that predominates and may at times indicate that he is unsure of what form the image will take, it appeared to the researchers that what Leo looks for and recognizes when discovering his subject is not random. Each piece is a reflection of his grand theme – nature. It is familiar to him. It presents itself to him daily, in his surroundings and environment. “Sometimes I do flowers and abstracts all together....All these will be different. Each one of them” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). All different, yet similar. Each one of his art pieces carries the colours of the earth or his garden, engraved patterns that resemble wild
grasses, birds, organic shapes, or surfaces that suggest textures such as the cracked paint on a found object.

When asked if he ever creates a series of work Leo’s answer is vague. “Possibly, not always. I don’t know. It just depends on what I really feel like doing I guess....Or if I’m going to paint a bouquet of flowers I generally know I’m going to paint a bouquet of flowers” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Looking around the studio and his home I see series of works. Consistency and sense of style tell me that Leo has come to know himself and his subject well. Whether an artist comes to fully realize his subject in each piece of work or through several pieces is difficult to say. Whether the artist chooses abstraction or realism, sculpture or paint, he must come to know what is dear to him to explore his subject fully.

Leo works quickly on many pieces at once. Most, if not all, become finished pieces. The hours Leo has spent intensely observing his garden and the fields have resulted in his knowing his subject intimately. Leo’s ability to represent a tree, a flower, a jackrabbit, a weed, although not literal, is imbued with a life and authenticity that leaves no audience questioning his understanding and knowledge of what he has portrayed. His ability to recognize worthy objects and readable shapes from drying paint has been honed by work and time. His ability to work and rework a piece until he achieves the desired results comes from knowing when to continue, when to add, when to subtract, when to stop. His sensitivity for recovering beauty from the discarded reveals the delicacy of a caring touch and a vulnerable soul.

The confidence that Leo portrays when working appears seamless and easy. It is as if the subject magically appears and you say to yourself, “Of course.” His ability to invoke a subject to rise to the surface lies in a lifelong journey and artistic maturity that is close to his heart.

I tend to paint what I see, or what I enjoy. Or colours that I like, or colours in the landscape here can give me so much colour for my paintings, you know the kind of dry desert colours that I use. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005)
It is not important how artists come to their subject but that it holds their passion; that they are emotionally connected and charged. Although Leo paints and constructs intuitively, allowing the materials and colours to direct him, the subject that emerges is always, at least at this stage in his artistry, linked to what has prevailed throughout his life – his love of nature and curiosity of the found object. Through this process Leo seems to be continually rediscovering or reaffirming himself. “These posts are from an old hay derrick I used to play on as a kid....It's kind of neat to have things like that, memories of your childhood” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005).
Figure 1: Leo ~ Subject 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 2: Leo ~ Subject 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Leo Senses his Audience

A common question that often arises is: What role does audience play in the making of art? Once the artist has dug deep, personally connected with his subject and reified that subject, the artist has created something that can be offered to an audience. The opportunity now exists for a communal engagement with others.

Leo argues that an artist paints for himself first. “I think you paint for yourself first and then your audience. Your audience is the reception on the other side” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Leo also states, however, that at times he becomes his own audience:

I am my audience at times by my observations. Or by standing on a ladder, looking down, I look at it as not the artist, but as how it’s going to look vertically, of what it needs. Where is my balance going? Where is the rhythm going? How am I going to make it more interesting? How am I going to keep building on top of this in order to get it going? (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

Leo is not confused as to whether art is self-centric or audience-centric. Rather, he is describing the pluralistic and complex relationship that encapsulates the artist and audience rendering them inseparable. Rather than simply an entity occupying physical space, the audience is the subjective measure that artists use to determine whether they have expressed themselves, honestly and clearly, that they have been heard, that they have a voice. It is the opportunity for the artist to have affect and make a connection with something greater than himself.

How each artist regards or visualizes his audience may vary. While Leo says he paints for himself, he does not deny that once expressed, his desire is to move the art into the world.

I never have a hard time selling anything….A lot of artists fall in love with their work; they don’t want anyone to see it or have it or buy it, but I think it’s better to sell your things and get it out there in the public … get it up on someone else’s wall and not on your wall. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

Fortunately for Leo, his work is widely accepted. He has achieved recognition in both the interior design community as well as the fine art community. He creates
functional, sculptural pieces as readily and easily as wall art. He constructs chandeliers out of paper, tables out of 2 x 4s and Masonite, pillars from old logs and friezes from plywood and paint.

Interestingly, in both cases, the skill and treatment of his materials, his use of line, colour and form are similar. Leo’s architectural style shares a synchronicity with his paintings. The decorative intricacies of the chandelier replicate those layered in the paintings. The combination of space and form created by the positioning of the 2 x 4s that form the base of a table are reminiscent of the wedge-shaped erasures engraved in his work.

Leo’s style is highly decorative. From the foundation where he begins building texture into a single tone to the final layer where the colour, line, scrapings, drippings and splatters combine in a display of bursting bouquets, rambling countryside, organic abstracts, or silent, blissful trees. “Well, my style starts out this way but it may become something more refined on top of it, but it needs the depth of this, or it needs the background of how these were started down here, you see” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Leo has mastered a style of building active surfaces that bounce and flow. This style has evolved over years of practise coupled with a developed sensitivity to how his combined marks affect and engage an audience. It holds the promise Leo has made, the promise that he will remain fully engaged with every mark, every layer of paint, every stroke of the brush, from first to last; that he will make every attempt to fill the work with enough depth to ensure a worthwhile visit.

Leo’s decorative style does not go uncriticized. “I’m criticized a lot because I’m just too decorative. I’m always called a decorative painter and not a terribly serious painter, although I think I’m a serious painter” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005). Although it is noticeable that Leo is slightly wounded by the criticism (not an uncommon response for a creative person) he does not waver or question his direction or style. And why should he? Leo is not the first or the last of the decorative artists. Would it be relevant, worthwhile, gainful to label the works of Henri Matisse, Lari Pitt or Chuck Close, as too decorative?
Leo has honed his craft well. He has mastered the tools and used them to develop a style that is unique and personal. "All the splatters and the different textures create that kind of textured look in the landscape" (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005). It is a style that is recognizable and whose flexibility extends across a wide range of art forms. Leo’s style and chosen subject culminate in voice that becomes his and his alone. His accomplished craft has allowed him to express what he wants to express and infused his voice and presentation with a sense of authority and authenticity.

While manipulating the tools to achieve his desired results Leo does not do so dispositionally. He is well aware that the audience will come with their own sensibilities and develop their own experience. "Lots of people have attached their values onto your painting or onto your print, but that’s part of the purpose of having it on the wall. But I don’t think the artist necessarily thinks that same thing" (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). "And someone may see something entirely different in my painting than what I see in it, or they may take it in a different direction" (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Leo describes his response to one viewer’s comments:

“You must not like women very well because of the way you painted this nude.” And I said, “Well no, that isn’t true at all.” I said, “You’re projecting yourself upon my artwork and putting what you see in it, or what you want to see in it, not what I have actually put there and I don’t have those feelings. But if you think it’s conveying that feeling, that’s entirely up to you.” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

The connection with the audience is always nebulous, never assured. Can an artist ever truly move what is in his mind into the mind of another as Collingwood (1938) suggests? (p. 118). Sensing the audience is not the process of defining a physical body, creating dispositional art, or interpretations or misinterpretations. It is about whether the artist has projected a clear voice. Leo, like most artists, tries to unravel and bridge the gaps forged between artist and audience. Not by trying to predetermine the exact experience the audience will have but by working and adjusting his art to come as close as possible to affecting or evoking a particular emotion or feeling while providing space for the audience to have their own experience.
Leo knows that it takes time for an artist to know himself and his comfort level. Leo is true to a style and a voice that he has spent the time, energy, love and sweat to develop. He has perfected a skill. His movements appear automatic in response to his cognition. Developing this level of comfort with the tools does not mitigate challenge or change, but builds in a confidence founded on artistic knowledge that secures a place for the audience to approach, for the audience to believe. It is only on close inspection that you come to realize that the chandelier is made of paper. It has been artistically and technically crafted. The audience indubitably believes it is a chandelier. Only later do you wonder how it is possible, whether it is strong enough, or for that matter whether it is fire proof.

Leo’s artwork is vibrant and active, yet gentle and innocuous. “I think a lot of people tend to intellectualize art too much and it becomes a little too stifling” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005). Upon viewing Leo’s art, the audience is not left wondering what they have witnessed. Some may suggest that art should be purely conceptual, political, the carrier of a deeply spiritual or social activist message, or if necessary shock the audience into an awakening. Perhaps this is true. All artists, however, whether conceptual, political, abstract, minimalist or postmodern, must create what is true for them or they will surely be lost. Leo paints and creates how and who he is. To walk through Leo’s home, through his garden; to listen to him read aloud passages from Braque in the heat of the Yakima sun, is to know that Leo is in his environment and how he lives is how he creates. His voice is honest. His voice is clear. There are no visible skeletons to be sorted through in his art. There is a focused, harmonious voice throughout. It is where Leo makes peace with his world.
Figure 3: Leo ~ Audience 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 4: Leo ~ Audience 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Leo Searches for Specifics

Leo has been collecting raw materials both physically and subjectively all his life. He has gathered and collected objects from fields, from junk stores, from the dried remains of sticks and stones. He has absorbed the contours of the hills, examined the infrastructure of a single leaf, followed the intricate pathways of a hundred trees and inhaled the dry flat air that hangs in the colours of his palette. These are the specifics that Leo draws upon and utilizes to come to an in-depth understanding of his subject and the meaning that it holds for him. These are the specifics that will hone and clarify the shapes that take form under the swift gestures of his hand across a page. These are the specifics that will call to the audience, “Come see.”

While the writer employs concrete descriptors and verbs to deepen and texturize meaning, the artist draws from his gathered raw materials, incorporating them in a manner that is similar to a skilfully composed collage. Carefully selected and reselected, the raw materials are arranged, combined, and discarded in the constant act of moving towards a dominant subject.

Because of the intuitive nature of Leo’s work, specifics play a significant role in discovering the subject. “Actually, just the action of painting sometimes brings about the subject” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005). In Leo’s case, the act of painting is the application of specifics. The placement and selection of line, colour, pattern, informs Leo who constantly stays attuned, observing, selecting, crafting. He watches the paint closely. He watches for when it is too thick, or too thin, or needs a wash of white.

But all of these different layers are different qualities of paint, some are very watery, some are thicker, and some I pull off before they dry. So I will take something and pull it off where it isn’t dry so it will leave different abstract shapes. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005)

He moves with the painting. The interplay between the selected specifics and the emerging shapes and forms cannot be extricated. One cannot exist without the other. While the shapes may suggest a latent landscape, a particular colour applied or flow of line may shift a painting from a landscape to a bouquet of flowers. Leo describes how specifics and subject operate together: “Or maybe tomorrow after it’s dry, I will … work
on one section and kind of pull it into something else” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). “There’ll be more detail in here and here and then this will grow into something else yet” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005).

This is not to suggest that Leo rambles through his art without a sense of direction and he does not rely on presumptions and preconceptions. Rather he remains open, placing his faith in his acquired knowledge and ability to trust the specifics he has selected and recognize those that need to be reworked or discarded. The specifics articulate the piece and set the tone. “The colour and the movement begin to tell me what is developing. This may end up being a landscape” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). If large, flat areas, earth-tone colours dominate, chances are the art will develop into a landscape; if more vibrant oranges and reds are applied in active multi-patterned scrapings, there is a greater chance the piece will become a bouquet.

Starting with a background, Leo adds layer upon layer of specifics: depth of colour, movement of line, bold scrapings, light scrapings, thick lines, thin lines. He spends time splattering paint, adding washes, scraping away, creating pattern, movement, life, all the while shaping and making. “I think they have to be shaded and outlined and that’s just a laborious process to do that” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). “I could go over those again and make those sharper once I get this background toned down” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). Specifics leak through every layer. Leo watches for those that support, those that confuse. He notes:

Well it’s building up there but it’s not totally there yet and sometimes I take an eraser, … or it can be a spatula and move this again and move it while it’s wet. It will give it another, little bit more dimension, you’ll see in a second. There are many, many steps to my paintings. There are different layers upon layer upon layer. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

It is working with the specifics, the small, that Leo arrives at the large. As suggested by Mamchur (2004) and Murray (1968, 1990), if you want to capture the general, focus on the specific. If you want to get to the big, look for the small. The subject’s fruition is dependent upon the specifics.
As a mature artist, Leo speaks and works in a manner that suggests that art simply flows from his body uninhibited, which tends to reinforce the notion of the unattainable, genius artist. "I just simply watch it build up a background of something. It really didn’t matter to me what it was" (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). "It was just a handy colour and I thought it would work fine with that pinky colour but it’s still going to be built upon and become entirely something different" (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). On further examination and exposure to Leo’s art, it becomes evident that it is neither magic nor genius, but a mastery that lies in the maturity, not the mystique of the artist. The gathering of information has been extensive. The plethora of raw materials has been culled over years. Leo recalls:

On a walk with some friends out here in the pastures, the cows rub against some of the wire meshes and they kind of spin their wool, their fur around the wires, so I thought maybe I could take off on that idea, of seeing this mesh of spun wool or something. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

When arranged and managed masterfully, the origins of the specifics are never questioned in a manner that suggests they were ever disparate from each other or the work of art. The delicate folding and shaping of the paper on the chandelier instills an aura of elegance and fragility. The bullet-holed fireplace sprayed white gleams like a well-crafted façade. Leo’s ability to efficaciously select specifics is convincing; we believe him. The transformation is complete. Leo has managed to choose specifics that engage the audience and bring life to the art. While the audience comprehends that the chandelier is made of paper, first and foremost they see an elegant chandelier. While the audience examines the irregular, rusted holes proliferating the beaten metal framing the fireplace, they are first drawn by the aesthetics of an architectural structure. Through implicit cogent details Leo seduces his audience. It requires an act of remembering to recall that the chandelier is paper and the fireplace a bullet-holed refrigerator. The integration and unification of specifics supports the subject, not the found object or the artist’s ego. The successful artist is adept at recognizing what contributes to a piece of art and what needs to be set-aside for another day.
As the artist discovers and personalizes his work through the use of specifics, he comes to understand what he believes to be true about his subject. Implicative in the details of Leo’s art is a truth and clarity of how he perceives his immediate landscape. He has not chosen specifics that depict a harsh, cold environment but specifics that suggest a cohesive, balanced rhythm of a lived landscape and a lived life. His art is bold, but not aggressive, calm but not silent, full of life but not breath. Herein lies his sense of purpose.

“You were able to pick up something from the earth and make something out of it, make something out of nothing has always been kind of my motto” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005). “There is some sense of inventiveness that you can pull from and make it speak to you” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005).

For Leo there is no such thing as trash. His subject is defined by specifics that support a premise that suggests there is something worthy in all stages of nature, that all can nurture us. As nature marks time on forgotten objects, comfort and use are redefined. The discarded, the battered, the dried, the left behind, are specifically chosen for resurrection.
Figure 5: Leo ~ Specifics 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 6: Leo ~ Specifics 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Leo Creates a Design

Although intricate and involved, Leo's art is not complicated. The viewer moves in and around the pieces easily and gently. The pieces are not forced or demanding, but rather inviting and contemplative. They are assembled as single entities (a painting, a sculpture, a construction), yet are united and contiguous in their placement and surroundings. They are only finished once all loose ends have been considered, just as all forgotten objects have been considered, and a sense of balance has been achieved.

You just know when it’s done. Or sometimes I turn them backwards to the wall and look at them a day or two later. You have to do that every once in a while and then you know if it needs anything or if the painting is a success or not a success. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2005)

The fact that Leo’s works do not appear strained is not an indication that less work is required in the creation of good design. “Well I think a small piece requires just as much as a large piece. It takes just as much time and just as much effort” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). The rhythm that moves a viewer through, into and around a work of art is never simply a matter of tying up loose ends. Paint and canvas may seem easier to reconcile than butane tanks as ornamentation, and paper as a material choice for chandeliers, but all require attention to good design to secure and sustain the other elements: subject, specifics and audience.

Leo creates design through a blended, rhythmic application of texture, space, shape, and pattern. His pieces do not project sharp edges or lines, jarring colours, or obtuse, blatant configurations. When these elements appear, Leo softens them. The bullet holes in the butane tank do not foster an ominicity of violence or destruction but are tempered by the gloss of white paint making them analogous to his splatters of paint. The vibrant oranges and reds of his bouquets are muted as the viewer becomes absorbed by detailed pattern.

Not only is Leo cognizant of the principles of good design within the piece, he is also cognizant of how design can be affected by the placement of the art. All visual artists comprehend the concept of positive space balanced against negative space. Leo lives space. “I’m so involved with space all the time. My house exudes space and has a feeling,
a sense of what space is all about” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). “And a space around things becomes as important as what’s in it, or what the volume is” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). Throughout the art-making process he is continually re-evaluating the internal and external dimensions. Where another artist might bypass the choice of paper as a specific to build a chandelier, Leo works with the qualities of the paper to create a design that projects a sense of both weight and eminence. This results in a chandelier that could reside in a space laden with heavy leather and marble as easily as it adorns the dining area in Leo’s home that has been constructed from and with his desert environment.

Leo builds in three dimensions. He builds by layers, he builds by depth, he builds by breadth. “See now it’s just another, it’s a second step, or a third step” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006). His approach and language at times approximates that of a sculptor rather than a painter. Even in his paintings, Leo relies on pattern and layers to build depth not shadows. “I seldom paint with shadows” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). “Now you realize what needs something and what doesn’t need something and then what gives you more depth and what’s pulling it back or pulling it forwards” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006).

I don’t know, I may just wash over the whole thing and have it seem more subtle and not so bold. If I put another colour over the top of this, it may entirely speak a different language….Or if I applied this white over the top I would have a whole different painting. (Leo, Interview, November 14, 2006)

Pattern functions at all levels of Leo’s design and works to bring a consistency and adhesion to his art. Carefully and expertly managed, he uses pattern to create elaborate, detailed baskets of flowers as readily as he creates loose, expansive hillsides. Accordingly, with such a significant infusion of pattern, the art is also in danger of losing rhythm and becoming lost to pattern. It is Leo’s mastery that prevents the pattern from losing definition and overwhelming the art. He understands when pattern supports or when it interferes, when it gives depth and movement or when it flattens and balances. “Yes, sometimes it’s just a pattern and this one is just like a background, like a wallpaper or something” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). “I am just trying to create a
more enriched surface so that we have some depth in there somewhere” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006).

The stylistic, patterned nuances of Leo’s style are a constant throughout the process, from the first layer to the last. “These are first exercises in trying to create a surface, an enriched surface that has texture and volume. I’ll just continue to build on them all week” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2005). “I’m not sure whether to shave these down in order to get that to come out, or should I glaze over the back, an entirely different colour because they are just conflicting” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006).

In some ways design is an anomaly. In the midst of creating, space is disturbed, disrupted. “So now I have broken up the space” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006). Paradoxically, once space is broken it then has to be reunified. The test of good design lies in the reunification or reconciliation without leaving obvious strains and stresses in its wake. We are confronted with a new creation, not with the distraction of unravelled, unattended to pieces and fragments. Mau (2004) states:

In fact, the secret ambition of design is to become invisible, to be taken up into the culture, absorbed into the background. The highest order of success in design is to achieve ubiquity, to become banal. (flyleaf, verso)

Design, whether invisible or banal, does not occur without struggle. In the restful fluidity of Leo’s pieces is the constant grappling with balancing background, middle ground and foreground; an activity witnessed only in the process, not the product. If we return to the architectural analogy, we are now looking at the floors, the rooms, the hallways of a house. All are systemic. All feed into one another and must find a measure of coexistance.

It’s like some kind of spot in the background isn’t as powerful as the foreground is, so nothing is reading.

That will make the background recede so that some of these things jump more forward, which they’re not doing at the moment.
They are conflicting now with the background … somehow I’ve got to get these things to come out with more life and the background to go back. (Leo Adams, Interview, November 14, 2006).

The ability to manage the complexity of design allows Leo to engage in the creation of an enriched, active surface while inviting the audience into the intricacies of pattern and texture allowing them to subsequently arrive at their own interpretation. “For this one, I’m even thinking of adding a couple of trees that go up … so you look through into something back there” (Leo Adams, Interview, November 15, 2006). He constantly plays with design searching for a flow and rhythm that speaks of an enriched, harmonious balance.
Figure 7: Leo ~ Design 1

Photo © 2007 Linda Apps
Figure 8: Leo ~ Design 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Conclusion

Working with categories (discovering the subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) established prior to data collection freed the researchers to attend to when the stages were observed and evidenced. While the interviewers referred to the stages in the interview process, questions were open-ended allowing Leo to speak openly using his own descriptive language. Although all stages of the artistic process were recognized and described, they seamlessly disappeared in the elegant beauty of Leo’s work.
AN ARTIST'S PROCESS: ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Arts-based research as a methodology allows the researcher to use the interpretive nature of artistic process as a means for addressing inquiry. As Barone and Eisner (1997) explain, “Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing....The more pronounced they are, the more the research may be characterized as arts based” (p. 73). Rather than simply relying on the observations and investigations of others, arts-based research allows artists and researchers to tell their personal stories and give credibility to their interpretations, not as autobiography, but as a means of conducting a thorough investigation into an educational inquiry. Springgay, Irwin and Wilson Kind (2005) comment, “We attend to the process of creativity and to the means through which one inquires into an educational phenomena through artistic and aesthetic means” (p. 898).

Situated on the high end of the qualitative continuum, arts-based research is highly inductive, metaphoric and interpretive, thus prompting questions not only of what is present and obvious but also what is not present or obvious; what resides within the spaces (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005). Pinar (2003) clarifies, “This is, Aoki explains, a space of tension, both ‘and/not-and,’ a space ‘of conjoining and disrupting, indeed, a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity newness emerges’” (¶ 47). “The spaces of liminality speak to a place of agitation. The in-between is unsettled” (Irwin & Sameshima, 2006, p. 7).

It is here, in tension and disruption and new ways of viewing that student, artist and teacher are able to construct knowledge both individually and collectively. In these spaces of inquiry the essence of the subject resides and pedagogy is created. Irwin and Sameshima (2006) explain: “I know at once that the imaginary edges are side by side and yet there is actually infinite depth between myself as a researcher teacher and the possible passages of pedagogy” (p. 13).
We see the space between or the passageway as not a two-dimensional preformed pathway, but a multi-layered complex interplay of dimensions which spans breadth, depth, height, and time ... the liminal itself is eliminated in the process of growth and becomes the evidenced curriculum. Hence, the liminal, once encountered, is curriculum. (Irwin & Sameshima, 2006, pp. 4-5)

Preferencing art as my primary method of expression, arts-based research opened the door for a multi-dimensional interpretation and investigation of the research. Educator Carol Mullen (2002) states, “Discovery learning can become a space in which multiple modalities of learning and the arts are expressed” (p. 6).

As an artist and researcher I was able to use arts-based research as a method of examining my own process as I created a series of art works. It provided the space for revision, for revisiting, for reviewing. Acquiring the skill to execute a piece of fine art generally takes years of practice and/or instruction. What should not be forgotten is that creating a piece of work in an artistic medium for the purpose of interpretation in a social or educational inquiry in qualitative research is very different from creating a piece of artwork to be critiqued by peers in the fine art domain.

In my search for a method of contributing to the field of arts education, I believed an arts-based methodology was the most viable for examining and interpreting my own process. Approaching the research in this way permitted me to see whether the creative writing model informed my practice not merely as a production/editing tool but also as a tool for in-depth exploration of a subject. It was important that I personally experimented with incorporating the four elements into my work to determine whether they would or would not benefit teaching and critiquing in the visual arts. Informing my personal arts-based research was the study previously conducted in the pilot project, which involved videotaping and recording the successful American artist Leo Adams. Interviewing and observing the artist at work created the opportunity for me to determine whether language and application of the writing elements did or did not present themselves throughout his process.

In addition, an archival research of what artists have said about their process provided insight into how artists currently talk about and view the artistic process.
Because I had begun with archival research and case study, I was in a better position to examine not only my own process but the contiguous spaces that lay between and in relationship to the written word, observation and my creative work.

*The Laying on of Hands: The Reification of Touch* is the title of a body of artwork that I have been working on over the past few years. In this research, I have attempted to address and present the images that I believe most comprehensively represent the work in progress from conception to the present. These pieces vary in their degree of quality and completion.

**I Discovered a Subject**

To explain whether you find a subject and then create, or create as a result of finding a subject is a little like trying to explain whether the chicken or the egg came first. There only answer is that artists come to their subject in many ways. They come to it with curiosity and fascination that begs exploration and clarification: “I always wanted to draw people and faces in particular....That was my fascination” (Peyton, 2002, vol. 2). They come to it by simply beginning to draw, paint, construct, mould; by being inspired by physical objects, colours, textures: “That’s the way you learn how to see. [It] is not by watching or by looking at art, but by handling cups and toys and the normal things that people handle” (St. Clair, 2002, vol. 1). Or, perhaps it has been galvanized by a strong reaction to something: “This style was developed to actively avoid the photo technique” (Jenny, 2002, vol. 1). An artist may use any number of methods at any stage throughout her career in order to find her subject. The primary factor is that she is drawn to it because it relates to her personally and passionately.

I came to the topic *The Laying on of Hands* through curiosity. The laying on of hands was a phrase that I had heard many times before; a phrase that always held a touch of the mystical, ephemeral and magical for me. Now, for some reason, it did more than that – it intrigued me, caused me to pause and question its meaning.

As I spent time thinking about the laying on of hands, I began to consider the possible anomalies in the phrase that for so long had been associated with miracles, healing and love. I began to consider the physical implications of hands laid upon the
body: welcoming hands or unwelcoming hands, hands of healing or hands of abuse. I recognized an inherent presumptiveness of caring and healing in the phrase that warranted investigation. What does the imprint, the mark of touch look like? What residue is left behind? And of course, how did other people perceive this phrase? What images or thoughts did it hold for them? Perhaps the effect of touch on our bodies had been underestimated. Perhaps touch had been taken for granted.

It is this type of questioning that often causes an artist to take notice of and confront an issue they wish to explore. The writing process suggests avoiding any pre-judgment of a subject in order to be open to what the subject may offer. If I were to learn more about this topic I would need to move from the general to the specific, as suggested by Murray and Mamchur.

Interestingly, the artist Chuck Close applies the analogy of a golf game to describe his process of moving towards the specific:

Then, I thought, maybe I could look for some other kind of game, some other kind of process, and it occurred to me that it was possible to do something that’s much more like golf. Golf is the only sport in which you move from general to specific in an ideal number of correcting moves. The first stroke is just out there, the second stroke corrects that, the third stroke corrects that. By then you are hopefully on the green, and you can try to place the ball in this very specific three-and-a-half-inch diameter circle that you couldn’t even have seen from the tee. So, it was a different way of thinking about finding what you want, like walking through the landscape rather than going straight for something. (Storr, 1998, p. 94)

At the time I did not relate my actions to moving towards the specific but I began to pay attention to anything that related to touch. I became more acutely aware of anyone touching me and anyone I touched and the discomfort or intimacy this created. As a follow-up to a presentation on touch, I asked educators to rethink how they did or did not use touch in their classrooms and what thoughts came to mind when viewing their painted handprints. I explored the Internet for images of hands, handprints, working hands, idle hands; for bodies bruised from hands gone astray. I took note of how the film artists in the movie Crash presented their concept of touch and listened intently to the opening lines.
It's the sense of touch....Any real city you walk, you know, you brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A. nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we just crash into each other just so that we can feel something. (Cheadle, et al., 2005)

This was not only a search to understand how touch played out in the world, but a search for materials and ideas that I could use to compose art work that reflected this subject. I thumbed through art books in search of how other artists had depicted figures touching each other. Interestingly, there were few paintings before the Romantic era of figures touching each other unless it involved small children, acts of violence, damnation or dying.

As with any subject, it is only theory until you begin, until something is externalized, something exists on the paper or canvas before you. Therefore, to use Close's golfing analogy, to better understand my subject I had to begin by making the first stroke and moving off the tee. I began in the common, awkward way that new artistic ventures often begin. I drew and painted bad images of hands and incoherent religious motifs. I applied areas of colour that I hoped would replicate the energy I envisioned flowing from healing hands. None of this work was good or satisfying so I revisited the subject and returned to something simpler.

Reworking, reinventing, rediscovering is standard in the artistic process. At times it is nothing more that a reconnection with your original intention and commitment; the reason you were first impassioned by the subject. The artist John Willenbecher (2002) comments on the continual re-visioning of his paintings:

Perhaps if I change the painting this way and look at it this way I'll be able to see something, see a way to progress. And then I will begin to work on it some more. And then I'll get myself to a point where I don't know what to do, so perhaps I will turn it again. (vol. 1)

So I started again, and again. First of all, I wanted to see what the laying on of hands looked like and the physical impact of that action. Although I felt that I was unable to replicate the imperceptible emotion and energy that may accompany touch, I could reify the handprint. I began by making black and white photographic images of
handprints on my body. I kept the image compositionally simple, clean, unencumbered and raw. At this point, photography became my primary medium of choice.

If I accepted the notion that subject is discovered through process then I needed only to begin, keeping in mind that one dominant subject with a consistent premise would eventually emerge. As I proceeded, questions continually arose about my dominant subject and whether it was present in both the individual pieces and the series. And more importantly, did the images still embody the concepts that made the topic personally relevant to me? Chuck Close commented on how he believes the personal enters into the artistic equation: “If you ask yourself an interesting question, your answer will be personal. It will be interesting just because you put yourself in the position to think differently” (Storr, 1998, p. 90).

Once I had the black and white images in front of me, I felt I had successfully begun to work with the subject. I also realized that there were many different roads I could take. This brought back memories of crossroads that, as an artist, I have reached many times before. Not the memory of a pleasant crossroads of opportunity, but a crossroads where I felt confused and uncertain, unsure of which direction to take.

I can provide many reasons as to why I felt I had arrived at this juncture but I knew that there was no going back. The only options were to stand still or move forward. Keeping in mind that subject is something worked and reworked and does not just appear offered me the luxury of moving forward while moving towards a dominant theme. Eventually I knew that I would have a larger understanding of where I was or wanted to go.
Figure 9: Linda ~ Subject 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
I Sensed my Audience

In the very early stages of exploration, I thought it would be valuable to gather insights from others about their impression of the laying on of hands. At the workshop for educators mentioned earlier, I asked the participants to apply paint to their hands and make handprints on a piece of paper. My intention was to have them concretize and make visible the mark left by their hands and the way they touched. I wanted them to see what their handprints physically looked like and to encourage them to begin thinking about the impact of touching another. If they were to walk around their classrooms with paint on their hands where would they leave their mark and what would it look like?

Next, the educators relayed personal stories of touch, not all of them pleasant. What seemed to congeal was a universality and commonality regarding the experience of touch and also recognition of how it had affected them at an individual level. Something in the concept of the laying on of hands had resonated with them. What I found important about this experience was that it confirmed for me the potential depth and texture of this topic. Listening to the educators, I felt encouraged to proceed and I realized that I would need to concretize and contextualize my own handprint in some way. Sensing an audience and discovering a subject became a united process.

As I continued with this body of work I had two more opportunities to gather responses from fellow students on their perception and reaction to the reification of the handprint with regard to touch. By this stage I had started to apply colour to the handprints using Photoshop. Only the handprints were infused with colour; the rest of the image remained black and white. I replicated the images and varied the colours, playing with how different colours might invoke different emotions and responses.

Presenting the images to the students, I asked them to write down three or four words that described what came to mind while viewing the image. I fully expected that the colours and the positioning of my body and eyes in each piece would affect their reactions. The descriptions did, in general, reveal some consistencies in the mood the images seemed to elicit. For example, hands displayed in red seemed to elicit more responses that related to pain, anger and fear, whereas images with hands displayed in blue seemed to elicit more responses that related to calm, warmth, nurturing. How they
personally related to that particular mood suggested very different interpretations. For example, one of the images elicited the following responses: a shell, childlike, touching.

Even with a strong body of artwork, audience response will vary according to personal interpretation over which the artist will never have control. At times the work may even have an adverse affect on the audience. However, as artists, I believe we are always hopeful that we have, at the very least, opened a line of communication; that our intentions have been clear and honest. As noted by Louise Bourgeois earlier: “Does your emotions carry over? Are you convincing to somebody else?” (2002, vol. 1).

As I re-examined the images I had created, I could not help wondering whether they were aesthetically pleasing and also what particular “voice”, what “style” they carried with them. I found it difficult to be objective about my work; to determine whether my voice or style fully portrayed my individuality; if I had infused the work with what was recognizably mine.

There are elements that continually re-emerge in my artwork. I frequently use bold colours and/or shapes. The composition is often symmetrical. I prefer loose, free-flowing lines and brush strokes. I believe I return to these elements time and time again, consciously or unconsciously. I have incorporated all of these elements into this body of work, not because I was consciously trying to follow a style I perceived to be mine, but because it seemed to be warranted at the time. Whether there is a consistency of voice with other pieces I have produced in the past ... well, I believe there is but I would have to be able to gather together all the pieces now scattered in irretrievable places and times and take a look. Perhaps it is only possible to truly appreciate and comprehend your own style or voice when viewed in retrospect. Regardless, as I proceeded, I continually questioned whether I had remained true to the art and myself; had I said what I was trying to say; did I have impact.

At this point I was still moving through the work in chunks. I had created a series of pieces based on aspects of touch I wanted to address. At the same time I tried to maintain a meaning and flow that was systemic to all the pieces. I believe it is an ongoing struggle to develop voice that is clear and understandable to both myself and the
audience; to somehow say what needs to be said in a manner that reflects individual uniqueness.

The struggle for voice depicted through style is constant and perhaps, never ending. At different times in their career, artists may purposely deviate from a perceived style as challenge and/or experimentation. The writer Doris Lessing has written under pseudonyms for the sole purpose of determining whether her work was still recognizable. Even in the midst of deviating from a perceived style for the purpose of challenge or experimentation, a strong voice will often seep through because the focus is less on style than on relaying what you want the audience to know or hear.

As an artist, it is advantageous for me to remember that no one can ever depict an image in quite the same way that I can. This places me in a position of acknowledging that each of us, to some degree, has voice, has style, has impact. We may only need to keep searching and defining. In the words of the art critic Dave Hickey, “What art really does in the world is it creates life constituencies around them. Creates people that like it you know. Creates these communities of desire” (2002, vol. 2).
Figure 10: Linda ~ Audience 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
I Searched for Specifics

With the black and white images before me I began adding colour to the hands, following through with my original intention to make them prominent and powerful. I use the term “follow through” because in looking at the images, I realized that I was faced with the same questions that often haunt me: How much do I add? How much do I change? Is it too simple; too complex? Chuck Close recounts similar feelings of dis-ease in the early years of his career:

It may be because of all the years that I spent as a junior Abstract Expressionist in which I never knew when anything was finished, and I went with my so-called taste and intuition and good sense of design and whatever. I felt so unequipped to make a painting that way. (Storr, 1998, p. 99)

Returning to the elements of the writing process, I likened such things as the selection of colour, brushstrokes, patterns to the search for specifics. Keeping this in mind, I began by applying bold colour to the handprints on my body making them stand out, have impact, against the black and white. Once the initial exercise was underway I began to play, and as a result found interesting new ways of manipulating and adjusting the colour of the hands, which in some cases enhanced the images and in other cases weakened them. I began to perceive my art from the positions of artist, researcher and teacher. All fed my actions. I could move between these roles at will.

Chuck Close comments on how creating with both discipline and intuition do not necessarily negate each other, but conversely, balance each other.

Well, the colors are not as arbitrary as one might think but more arbitrary than they look. That is, I will make the choice to put a color down as a kind of base decision so that I will have something to respond to....I want to mix it up. Ultimately it allows me to be intuitive. The system is liberating in that when I used to allow myself to make paintings with any old color, I would use the same color combinations over and over again. I found myself much too much a creature of habit. (Storr, 1998, p. 93)

I found that if I stayed focused on seeing the application of specifics from the perspective of researcher and allowed the strength of arts-based research to inform my process of delving deeper into discovering the subject, that I felt a greater sense of
direction and incentive to experiment. I balanced this with oscillating between the role of artist and audience, trying to read the artwork from both positions in order to gain a richer perspective of when the specifics were working.

When I started the second rendition or series of photographs, it was to fulfil a need to draw directly on the images. To do this I had the photographs reproduced onto watercolour paper. At first, I tried incorporating a charcoal drawing of a skeleton of a bird. It did not work. The graphical materials did not meld. The texture and lines were incongruent with those of the photographs. The image of the skeleton that I intended to read as a metaphor ended up competing with the figure. This prompted me to consider my selection of specifics more carefully. What was not working provided as much information as what was working. The skeleton of the bird made me realize that, in the search for specifics, the choice of materials for application was just as significant as the images and symbols I applied.

Ursula Van Rydingsvard (2002) comments on the importance she places on her chosen materials:

Wood seems to serve me very well. I feel in control with the wood. It has just enough resistance and just enough softness for me to be able to manipulate it with a good bit of ease whether it's with a saw or with a chisel. And I feel that as long as I can control it, as long as it serves my ideas I'm going to use it. But the moment it doesn't I want to be able to go on to another material. (vol. 1)

As a practitioner I recognize the persistent exercise of decision-making. Is there unification and congruency of materials? Do the symbols and imagery add depth and richness? And, ultimately, do the chosen specifics support the subject?

Upon abandoning the chalk I turned to paint. I used the paint to follow the lines of the figures and the handprints. At one point I tried using sketchy brushstrokes to represent clothing, but they were too literal and made the images appear clumsy and messy. By outlining the figures and handprints with paint, the image was strengthened. The figures became painted ladies, more sexual, and oddly, less naked than the ones I had tried to clothe. The painted lines changed the images, causing me to reconsider my premise.
I had started with the belief that touch had such an impact on our souls that we had best be on guard as to whether it came from hands of love, hands of hate or something in between. Now I considered that touch was far too complex for any continuum. What was interesting was that I was no longer simply analyzing the art for research purposes, but was “listening” to the art. I was no longer merely dictating what I believed to be true about touch, but was discovering what I believed to be true, thereby adding dimension to my research of touch and the artwork.

There is one important distinction to be made between the theme of a critique and that of a work of art. In the latter, the theme is never made explicit, rather it lurks beneath the surface of the text, subtly guiding the reading while remaining out of sight. (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 81)

This studiousness, rigour, and attention to the search and selection of specifics helped me creep closer to the images I was seeking. By fully understanding the role they played in relation to the subject, I felt in a better position to support my decision-making, thus giving the art more authority, authenticity and integrity. In my search for specifics I became less concerned with finding the right colour, line, or brushstroke and more concerned with finding the best, most clarifying, engaging specific.

Unsure once again of how to continue, I returned to my raw materials. I reviewed the images of figures touching that I had found in art books and began to incorporate them into the work. Rethinking the raw materials as a resource, not merely a reference, to hone my subject, gave me a different perspective for continuing. After several attempts, however, I seemed to be moving away from a personal connection with the art. It became an exercise of how to effectively integrate two images – one that was extremely personal and one that belonged in another place and time.

The final rendition of the images to be included in this research was a return to mark-making. This time I decided to use pastels on the photographic images. The mark was rough, loose, jagged. The colours were less opaque than the paint and were muted by the greys of the photograph. While I had less control over the precision of the pastel mark, I had more control over the depth and transparency of colour. However, the pastels were more powerful absorbing focus that originally belonged to the handprints. What I then had to consider was whether or not I had deviated from my premise. Had I become
so absorbed in the aesthetics that I subsequently had lost focus? As I applied specifics to each group of images I began to understand the possibilities for discovering a different subject and of slipping into alternate territory. I resisted. As Murray (1991) reminds us: “As we revise, considering each word, each piece of punctuation, each phrase, sentence, paragraph, page, we make decisions that lead to other decisions” (p. viii).
Figure 11: Linda ~ Specifics 1
Figure 12: Linda ~ Specifics 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 13: Linda ~ Specifics 3

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 14: Linda ~ Specifics 4

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
I Created a Design

When I first decided to reproduce handprints on an image of the body, I spent several days deciding the best method to do so. I wanted to have a number of base images that I could work on without spending too much time creating them, and I wanted to be able to manipulate the colour of the handprints. I decided upon photography as my primary medium. It would keep the images as close to real life as possible and I could create a large number of images to work with quickly. With photography, I also felt that I would have more room for experimentation without initially having to contend with the characteristics of other art materials such as texture or opacity.

Since I was originally thinking of showing the negative side of touch, I chose to use black and white film. In this way I could keep the body raw and unadorned and have more freedom to place and manipulate colour. My intention was to have colour only on the handprints. This would keep the handprints as the focus, without competition from the innate power of a body image and would provide more balance in the piece.

I used my own body and handprints because they were readily available. I was originally concerned that my hand might be read as too small or fragile and that a male hand would be better, but this was not the case. And finally, some basic instinctual decisions on design and composition were made regarding background, foreground, positioning, et cetera, that any artist makes. All of these considerations, whether made consciously or intuitively, were based on what I felt was necessary, as an artist and a researcher, to begin working with the content and subject.

Art is constructed. It is built piece by piece, whether it is writing, painting, or music. In retrospect, I was setting up a structure that was going to support a body of work. I was building a shell that would accommodate the space I felt was necessary to create coherent, intelligent images. As Close (2002) comments on his painting: “The kind of thinking that goes into making a painting like this is more perhaps one of building a painting rather than painting it” (vol. 1).

The base set of black and white figures and coloured handprints worked as a series on their own. I was only beginning to discover my subject, however, and was motivated to continue exploring and creating. Throughout the process I had just as many
pieces that worked as didn't work. When the process did not flow and the rhythm was disrupted (as was the case with the introduction of the skeleton and the clothing), I worked through this information and used it to redirect my efforts and reconsider my specifics.

I played with the combination of colours and materials. I experimented with different body positions and handprints. I took more photographs, this time of my back with a male handprint. I played with how and where I applied the paint, constantly questioning its role as a specific and how it interfaced with the handprints. When I switched to pastels, similar issues were raised. The handprints were now no longer the only unit of colour on the images. This fact shifted the rhythm of the work, adding depth and complexity. I had selected four or five primary images to work with and had duplicate copies made. With more than one copy I could experiment with different materials to see how they affected the overall design and composition of the image and subsequently the mood.

At one stage, for presentation purposes, I had to crop the images to avoid showing the breasts. At first I could feel my defiance towards censorship. However, as a result, I began looking more closely at how the images were cropped. I had carefully attended to how the images of the body were placed in the frame and had cropped the background minimally for compositional purposes but I had not actually cropped whole sections of the body. Besides the breasts, I also began cropping the face so that only the mouth was visible. The images now projected a sense of anonymity, but an anonymity that carried with it a sense of tension, an unknown; something only alluded to that must now be completed by the viewer. Mamchur (2004) reminds us that if there is no tension, if there is nothing at stake, the story is not worth telling. (p. 143)

Keeping the writing process in mind, I continually returned to the artwork to determine whether I had gathered the loose ends and made good decisions that would keep the piece both balanced and engaging. The design continued to remind me that the process was not static but fluid and that I was in a constant process of clarifying and rediscovering my subject, sensing my audience, and searching for specifics. And while I applied similar materials or similar techniques to several images, not all pieces were
successful. At times what worked and did not work was the result of a single stroke of the brush. Mau (2004) states, “For most of us, design is invisible. Until it fails” (flyleaf, retro).

I found that my first concern was to create an image that had meaning that honestly relayed my belief and that would have impact on the audience. Being conscious of the writing-process elements while creating provided solidity and backbone to what I was doing. When I made decisions I was able to organize them, thereby creating a framework to refer to and freeing me to continue experimenting and exploring. Mau (2000) reminds us, “Design is not about making things beautiful, but simply about making them what they are” (p. 35).
Figure 15: Linda ~ Design 1

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 16: Linda ~ Design 2

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Figure 17: Linda ~ Design 3

Photo ©2007 Linda Apps
Conclusion

Interestingly, as I reviewed the body of images I had created, I was drawn back to my initial poorly developed images of hands. When I had created them, I had done so influenced by the portrait images of Warhol. The loose, bold marks that adorned his photographic images have always appealed to me. Looking now at my final pieces I am aware of how those influences still lingered.

Presented with a model for proceeding and critiquing my artwork did not limit or replace what inspires and intrigues me. In other words, it did not interfere with my individuality or my freedom of expression. Instead, the model provided a method of compartmentalizing questions that arose regarding my choices. It allowed me a method of critiquing that engendered both the universal and specific of art-making.
SHARED VISION

Instructor-Artist

Language and practice in the interpretive disciplines are at times so subjective that unless one has internalized and realized that experience it is difficult to find common ground upon which to affect change. It is important therefore for art educators to be able to speak about art and be involved in their own practice of creating. Calkins (1991) indicates that only if teachers understand what students are doing and why, can they begin to help (pp. 16-17). Mamchur, in her teaching, stresses that the original work on writing process, conducted in the 1970s, indicated that authority is essential to good teaching. Authority in this instance refers to a deep-seated knowledge of a subject and how it operates. In regard to the arts, this type of authority can come only from practising the craft.

Experts on the creative process agree that to be successful an artist must practice her art, must be able to draw on past experience and must remember how she accomplished what she did (Kramer 1971; Weisberg, 1993). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) remarks, “One cannot be creative without learning what others know” (p. 90). A process taught by an instructor who has not practised himself can only be taught as theory, not praxis. Graves (1983) posits:

The writer who knows the craft of writing can’t walk into a room and work with students unless there is some understanding of the craft of teaching. Neither can teachers who have not wrestled with writing, effectively teach the writer’s craft.... Their students see them in action in the studio. They can't teach without showing what they mean. (p. 6)

Calkins (1986) clarifies, “We are more apt to talk about the topic or the text than about the writer yet it is when we know how our students go about writing that we can best help them improve their strategies” (p. 151). And as the artist Caio Fonseca (2002) states, “It’s important to look at it and know why you don’t like it or why you do like it” (vol. 1).
Although the instructor may appear to be more of a facilitator in process-oriented instruction, it is still important for her to be able to relate to the student's experience of process in order to provide informed, directive instruction. Being knowledgeable by praxis, provides the instructor a context for the complexities and difficulties that may arise in a teaching and learning environment. For the student, knowledge transfer occurs through the act of witnessing and subsequently using that knowledge to self-assess and articulate when faced with indecision. The best position from which to impart such knowledge is from instructor and artist.

Common Ground

While other categories and models for examining artistic process may also be relevant and applicable, the elements (identified by Murray and Mamchur) of what visual artists say about how they work suggests a similar pattern in process across disciplines. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) explains:

Some common threads do seem to run across boundaries of domains and individual idiosyncrasies, and these might well constitute the core characteristics of what it takes to approach a problem in a way likely to lead to an outcome they will perceive as creative. (p. 78)

Comments and articulations made by visual artists are not necessarily dissimilar to those made by writers. Although the language may vary at times, the ideas and concerns attended to in the visual arts are the same as those found in the four basic elements defined as essential to the writing process.

All artists struggle with the same questions, challenges, pursuits. Both interpretive disciplines (creative writing and visual arts) carry the same need for craft of technique and freedom of expression to be embodied in the elements of artistic process. Both disciplines require a flexible, reflexive, organic method of application that is systemic to any artistic process. Because creative writing and the visual arts are interpretive, experiential, heuristic disciplines, a process-oriented model of instruction such as the writing process supports development for the craft and the individual.
The Framework

The four elements of the creative writing model as defined by Mamchur provided both the theoretical and categorical framework for inquiry in this study. In the case study, the questions asked of Leo Adams focused on if and how the artist discovered his subject, sensed his audience, searched for specifics, and created design, and whether his artistic activities correlated with the four elements of the creative writing process. Yin (1994) reminds us that these are questions posed to the investigator, not to the respondent (p. 69). In the self-study, I was able to use the four elements as an editing tool to investigate whether they provided direction during the process. The inquiry was driven by the four specific elements. Multiple measures of data collection supported the inquiry: archival, triangulation case study using observation, videotaping and interviewing, and my own art-making process.

The nature of qualitative methodologies (such as case study and arts-based research) invites interpretation. Interpretation, as a component of a research equation, at first appears to conflict with issues of validity – what is viewed as “real” and “true.” It is worthwhile to consider Eisner’s words and the relationship that interpretation has to validity:

Concerns for verification truth, and precision have led us away from an experiential conception of understanding and toward a verificationist conception of knowledge – something that can be tested, packaged, imparted, and sent like bricks across country to build knowledge structures that are said to accumulate. (Eisner, 1997, p. 7).

Merriam supports the position that what is "real" and "true" cannot be fixed; it is ever changing and perhaps the closest we come is to notions of reality (1988, p. 167). This is based on the concept that reality and veracity resides in the interpreter and subsequently the biases of the interpreter. “[Reality] is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured….What is being observed are people’s constructions of reality” (p. 167).

Qualitative case study and arts-based research often yield different results from studies located on the quantitative end of the continuum. McNiff (1998) comments, “Arts-based research generally does involve more ambiguity, risk and uneven results in
terms of the end product. But the outcomes tend to be more creative, less mediocre, and more conducive to advancing the sophistication of practice” (p. 38). The inquiry in case study and arts-based research is one of relationships and patterns that result in a greater understanding of a whole (Stake, 1998). It is in the accuracy of the inferences of how these patterns have been realized in a particular case that speak to what is measured as “real” and “true.”

Although the subject Leo Adams was not familiar with the language of writing, he understood the terms as the interviewers described them. Reference to subject, audience, specifics and design were points of reference from which he could respond. His ability to intelligibly discuss these elements with regard to his art confirmed that they were not foreign, unrelated entities. Observation and discussion of the finished works of art demonstrated the presence of the four elements. In my own work as part of the study, the elements were employed as instruments for critiquing and editing. Their use was valid to the degree that one was able to recognize and utilize their application and role in the artistic process.

Exploring artistic process from the vantage point of a selected medium (in this case creative writing) may pose questions regarding reliability and transference to another artistic medium. In this study, the interview process occurred while the artist worked in his studio and toured us through his art-laden home. The artist was only required to explicate to the best of his ability how he proceeds through his artistic process, how he makes decisions, how he chooses, how he comes to know what may or may not produce the desired results. Apart from the presence of the interviewers, the artist’s process or method of production was not altered or impeded. Consequently, given the observational nature of the study, replication with another artist or artists would be possible.

Although both the artist Leo Adams and I practise more traditional forms of art-making, investigation of the four elements is not bound to traditional forms of creating. What needs to be preserved is the nature and integrity of the interview. Another study may produce other insights or understandings into the application and effectiveness of employing the four elements, but the proposition is that interpretive studies are for better
understanding, not to compile definitive answers to be trumpeted (Jardine, 1998, p. 50). As Jardine states, “The process of interpretation is not the simple accumulation of new objective information. It is, rather, the transformation of self-understanding….New possibilities of self-understanding have opened up; old ones have been renewed and transformed and rejected” (p. 49). While the case study and self-study are instances, the observational tasks and collection of data can be utilized in similar studies.

It is a difficult task to capture the skills that an artist uses to produce a work of art. “The act of constructive interpretation and the assessment of the particulars of the case meanings that matter is a creative event. Meaning is not encountered, it is constructed” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 101). Findings from the case study and self-study suggest that a theory of transferability can be constructed to open a gate between the two artistic disciplines.

**Transference**

As with any research, complexities and contradictory findings are integral to the investigation. Theory building is not linear and is often messy. Discrepancies may exist and some alterations may need to be considered in applying the writing model to the visual arts. Sufficient generalities and similarities of artistic process exist, however, that a theory of transferability is possible. Gillham (2000) explains, “The actual data that you find may be specific….but your theory (rooted in what you find) may be useable by other people; or generalizable in understanding” (p. 12). The four elements as defined by Mamchur are generic in the sense that they can apply to more than one interpretative art form; more than one artistic process.

Exploring the writing model through the lens of observer-artist, videotaping Leo Adams and working through my own body of work, I was called upon to consider the proposed transfer of the four elements to the visual artist. Despite the many commonalities between the writing and visual arts disciplines, two areas of difference in transference materialized that warrant further investigation.

First, I perceived a difference between the physical construction and format of the writers’ and artists’ products. Writing, with few exceptions, appeared to have primarily a
linear, sequential format. Even if the writer creates an alternative texting format, the reader proceeds word by word. With this understanding, the author directs and dictates the rhythm, velocity and sequencing of the events used to affect audience in a timely manner. The result is a single product deemed complete by the creator.

In contrast, I perceive that a single piece of artwork is generally viewed all at once; all components bracketed into a visual whole that can be absorbed cursively in a relatively short period of time. The exception to this are works that are located in an organized timeframe such as conceptual pieces, performance art, outdoor installations, and more recently social-political contextually-based art pieces. Despite their transient nature, these pieces are often documented and/or recorded to be viewed later by an audience in a controlled setting.

In the case of a body or series of artwork, there are few restrictions for the audience to view art pieces in whatever order they choose; they are free to move through the viewing space in a manner that rarely disrupts the intention of the art. As a result, while the writing container appears to be clearly defined, the bracketing of visual art works is not. While each piece of artwork tacitly constitutes a completed entity, it has rarely been created as an isolated piece. Pieces of art are often composites of a series or body of artwork. A discovered subject would likely wrap around a series of images. Although a selection and order may be applied for presentation, demarcating one piece of art as “the end” is complicated. Perhaps it is more apt to identify when a body of artwork has begun to metamorphize or evolve into another series, rather than when a series has ended. While an artist may continue to discover the subject, the way she manages and expresses this is similar to the beginning of new writings for a writer. Like the artist, the writer rarely completes the discovery of a subject in one novel, one poem, one screenplay. The subject is re-discovered and re-explored in many subsequent pieces of work.

Second, complexities seemed to arise regarding the role of specifics and subject. The complication is not in their assigned characteristics but in the assignment of their roles. In my understanding of the writing process, these two elements are not interchangeable; the subject never becomes a specific and a specific never becomes the
subject. Specifics are in support of the subject, specifics make the subject colourful, specifics give the subject life.

In visual art, what may be a specific in one situation may be the subject in another situation. There are many situations where elements such as line, colour, texture are used as specifics. In another situation such elements may be the subject being discovered. For example, colour is often used as a specific to define the subject, as in a Manet painting. Conversely, colour can also become the subject as in a Rothko painting. An element such as colour, however, can never play conflicting roles in the same piece and must be assigned the position either as a specific or a subject. And while the "big" specific (the metaphor for life and truth) is in fact essentially the subject, and the minor specifics align with and support it, the clarification of subject and specific is useful for the purpose of revision and editing.

These supposed differences stimulated a discussion with my supervisor over the superficiality of the differences. Rather than fusing artistic process, the space (as discussed in arts-based research) opened the door for a more in-depth, complex understanding of the disciplines and their associated pedagogies, and the possibility of the creation of new pedagogies. It was here, through the tension and disruption and new ways of viewing we are able to construct knowledge both individually and collectively. Pinar (2003) posits:

We can dwell in a conjunctive space, not one splintered by binaries, a lived space marked by generative tensions which we can incorporate, embody, and personify in our dialogical encounters with students and colleagues....It is the space where we work (and play) to understand the educational meaning of our being together, in classrooms, at conference, in seminars, engaged in improvisation, that disciplined and creative reconstitution of the past in anticipation of a future waiting to be heard in the present. (p 17)

Working with the photographs as a method of research and investigation between writing and visual art, and not just as an exercise in creating an aesthetic product, provided me with a deeper insight into how I have lost sight of my direction in the past regarding subject and specifics. I believe this can be a common area of confusion for
developing artists if they do not possess the language or identifying markers to recognize
the rightful roles of specifics and subject.

The differences identified, although requiring further discussion and evaluation,
do not impede or negate the four elements of writing process and their application to the
visual arts process. Having to name and consider the elements of the process, I became
acutely aware of the integration and role of process elements that I had not previously
considered.

Conclusion

As a teaching tool, the creative writing model is useful and directive and provides
the instructor with a method for developing artists to examine and critique their work.
Being able to name and intellectually address issues and/or confusion, students will likely
move closer to clarifying and achieving their goals. Elkins (2001) cautions, “Critiques
can become places where a student scrambles to translate a teacher’s language into her
own” (p. 142). It may be wise to heed the words of Ralph Fletcher (1993):

> We need to think hard about how we talk about writing – to our
> colleagues, to our students, to ourselves….In the end, the words we use to
> explain such concepts to our students will be the words they use to explain
> them to themselves. (p. 6)

Spandel, a creative writing educator, supports this concept. “We must know how to
recognize [good writing] – not just the mistakes, but the moments of voice, detail,
 wonder and magic – and we must have a language for talking about it” (2001, p. 86).

The artist does not need a process when she is successfully achieving her desired
goals, but a process for analyzing and evaluating may make a difference when she is
unsuccesful or simply unsure of how to proceed. It is important to remember that this
model is not to be considered a hard-wired process for creating, but rather a tool for
editing. As Mamchur clarifies, “This is a general process that hopefully will help
developing and practicing artists edit their work. It has not, and would not, be imposed as
a definition on [an artist’s] art” (C. Mamchur, personal communication, November 15,
2005).
If unable to achieve passionate brilliance, improvement is still a worthy goal and one that most people aspire to. “Few of us master the cutting edge or come to terms with the most radical work in our field” (Elkins, 2001, p. 69). Providing the tools for self-improvement is perhaps aptly the task of the art instructor. Graves (1994) comments, “Even in my poorest piece, I need to know the best section, the strongest line, or the best use of language” (p. 222). A categorical model such as the creative writing process provides a framework for students to anchor aspects of art instruction and their artistry. Walker (1996) states, “Cognitive learning theorists find that knowledge transfer is not an automatic process. One must recognize the similarities between situations before they are linked” (pp. 14-15).

How to teach art effectively will indubitably remain a complex issue. Questions such as those posed by Walker will likely persist:

What allows the artist to explore and investigate ideas? What permits the artist to find new perspectives and insights, push boundaries, and delve into ideas at deeper levels? How does the artist emphasize the process over the product? How does the artist make artistic decisions? (2001, p. xv)

As in any discipline, it is not reasonable to abandon students to dig through a treasure chest without the teacher indicating what they may be looking for. Perhaps our very best can be more than a poke and a prod. Perhaps our very best can be to provide students with a set of tools and a knowledge base for self-evaluation. As Graves (1994) suggests, “Unless we show children how to read their own writing, their work will not improve” (p. xvi). Rather than a disjuncture between artist, art instructor, and art student, perhaps a comprehensive framework founded on a common vernacular and a solid understanding of the core components of artistic process can provide a stabilizing point of creative trajectory for the artist. Although the creation of art is a personal and intuitive process, underlying elements emerge during the creation of art that are identifiable. These elements can be taught and consciously applied by the artist. Spandel (2001) reminds us, “[Professional writers] must consider which details to include or omit, how to begin and end, and how to make sentences sing” (p. 11).

Although terms such as stages and model are used, Murray’s (1968) and Mamchur’s (2004) research and development on creative writing and teacher education
focuses on a process-oriented model of instruction which allows room for individual interpretation while providing the student with the tools to develop his craft. While each component is presented individually, all components are revisited repeatedly as required throughout the process. Spandel (2001) notes:

Because various steps within the process are interdependent and overlapping, you move through them not like a train on a track but more like the way you bounce on a trampoline, coming back to earth again and again to pick up more momentum and with each rebound launching yourself a bit higher. (p. 148)

Rather than being prescriptive, a framework such as this undulates without splintering, allowing individually and self-expression the opportunity to flourish rather than be inhibited or submerged. Applebee (1991) explains:

Learning is not linear and sequential, but instead will involve a variety of false starts and tentative exploration. Understanding will change and grow as learning progresses....The teacher and student in a process-oriented classroom must accept error as a matter of course, rather than using it as a measure of failure and misunderstanding. (p. 553)

Students in interpretive learning environments need to have the flexibility to choose while receiving direction from the instructor (Mamchur, 2004). A choice-driven learning environment removes attachment to an end result that is categorized as good or bad, pass or fail – detrimental labelling for interpretative disciplines. Instead, students take ownership and responsibility for their work, realizing they need only choose again. Graves (1983) clarifies, “The teaching is centered in helping the child to solve the problem for himself” (p. 231). Farrell (2001) comments, "Emphasis is not on right answers but on the making of meaning” (p. 72). Responsibility returned to the student imbues a sense of agency. "I pretend I am my audience. I read it to myself and then I see if it’s good or bad” (Calkins, 1986, p. 153).

When successful, it is probable that the artist is already engaged in a productive, reflexive, activity of self-critique. However, when unsuccessful or simply unsure of how to proceed, having a shared language to articulate and tools to edit provides the artist with a knowledge context from which revision is possible. As a tool, the process (discovering the subject, sensing the audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) provides a
method for examining and discussing the artistic process. It is the assumption that by being able to name and intellectually address difficulties, artists will likely move closer to clarifying and achieving their artistic goals and bringing about a deeper understanding and new insight to the mystery of creating. As Murray (1995) proposes, "It is not discipline of freedom alone that [is] at the center of craft but the tension between freedom and discipline" (p. 186).

Art educators struggle for a curriculum that incorporates structure and scholarship while maintaining artistic individuality and freedom. Any information that contributes to a more comprehensive art program is of value to both the instructor and the student. As Stankiewicz (2000) suggests, “Perhaps we should try to imagine the disciplinary lens [of art education] as Alice’s looking-glass – sometimes allowing us to see into an art world, sometimes reflecting our own products and perceptions back at us, and sometimes permitting us to climb through into Wonderland (Carroll, 1960)” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 311).
APPENDIX

The CD-ROM contains images taken and/or created by the author that form a part of this work. The images presented are the same images as those included in the body of the text.

The file was created in PowerPoint and does not require any supporting programs to run. The CD-ROM contains one file entitled *Artistic Process: Demystifying Art-Making*. Click or double-click on the title to open the file.
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