A/maturity in Art:
On Instructing the Midlife Novice Painter

by

Lena Leszczynski

B.F.A., Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, 1998

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Arts Education Program

Faculty of Education

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2008

Approval

Name:	**Lena Kristina Leszczynski**
Degree:	**Master of Arts**
Title of Thesis:	***A/maturity in Art:*** ***On Instructing the Midlife Novice Painter***
Examining Committee:	**Chair:** Lynn Fels, Assistant Professor

Stuart Richmond
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Heesoon Bai,
Committee Member
Associate Professor

Vicki Kelly
External Examiner
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Education

Date Defended/Approved: April 4, 2008

Partial Copyright Licence

Abstract

The purpose of my thesis is to examine issues relevant to part-time, adult students first embarking upon painting in midlife, to interpret their educational requirements in light of these issues and conclude with a constructive educational methodology to meet their particular needs. As an unaffiliated (private) artist/instructor I work with very small groups of adults (two to five at a time) in my own studio classroom. Each of the relevant factors — the students having reached midlife or later maturity, the part-time nature of their involvement in painting, and the fact of being first-timers — give rise to particular and significant challenges and questions, which I shall endeavour to examine in the pages to follow. The issues and obstacles, which inevitably arise, include: the fact of aging into midlife and beyond; the genius myth; the inner critic; and the trickle-down effect of poor instruction in the art colleges for the past twenty-plus years. How might we most constructively handle these intrinsically meaningful issues in an age of instrumentality? What curriculum content constitutes a 'solid foundation' in the hands-on practice of the visual arts, for these students? What is the role of aesthetic experience in fostering development in these painting students? Considering the limited scope of their painting practice, one might raise the question: *Can art be taught* to this student group? Or are the products of their practice necessarily 'mediocre'? How do we regard 'everyday' or 'ordinary' art?

For Tracy Good,
who did what she said she would.

Acknowledgements

Many people helped me through the process of writing this thesis, offering intellectual, moral, spiritual, and even financial support.

First, I want to thank Dr. Tracy Good, who made it all possible with her unique and unforgettable support over the last six years, especially in regard to managing my own Inner Critic. And many thanks to my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Stuart Richmond who hung in there with me through one false start and numerous subsequent delays, graciously tolerating many undoubtedly frustrating moments, and who supported me so beautifully at the Oral Defence. I would also like to thank Dr. Sharon Bailin for opening my mind to questioning previously unexamined assumptions and culturally constructed notions about artistic creativity. And Dr. Heesoon Bai whose crystal clear writings about the role of Buddhist mindfulness and compassion in education and aesthetic experience, helped me to build a bridge between my understanding of Zen and my experiences as an artist and unaffiliated art teacher.

I also wish to thank my dear friends and associates for their support: Naya Kee, Miro Cervenka, Lisa McKee-Johnson, Alex and Ted Alain, Jean Taylor, Vicki Kelman, Jane Baker, Mary Ringwald, Annie MacReynolds, Michael Bird and Rita LaTulippe, Norval Wener, Mark Williams, Connie Kim, Michael Ricketts, and Shirley Heap, without whose guiding spirits, this magnum opus could not have been born.

Very special thanks to Marlowe Irvine for being a most generous and helpful "Night of the Template" and helping me to crack "the Leszczynski (computer) code".

Special thanks also to my dear sister, children's author and illustrator, Loris Lesynski, for many late night pep talks and insights into the creative process of writing.

I also wish to acknowledge my wonderful long-term students, Heather Miller, Brita Owen, Michael Stunden and Deb Wright, who kindly allowed me the time-outs from teaching necessary to produce my thesis. Many thanks as well to my more recent students, and the hundreds of past students in Toronto and Vancouver, from whom I have learned so much.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.

The Novice Midlife Painter

Introduction:
Purpose and Personal History

The purpose of my thesis is to examine issues relevant to adult students first embarking upon painting in midlife, to interpret their educational requirements in light of these issues and conclude with a constructive educational methodology to meet their particular needs.

On a more personal level, my purpose in choosing this topic was to further my own process as an artist and teacher, in theoretical and practical terms, through the study and comprehension of issues relating to artistic identity and practice.

I have exhibited my work on numerous occasions in the Toronto and Vancouver areas, and completed several mural commissions. I have been teaching adults since 1990, and have taught at several reputable art institutions. I now teach privately from my home studio. My students tell me that I am a very good teacher, and I enjoy teaching a great deal.

However, my personal journey to reach this point in my career, as a painter, teacher and graduate student, has been a rocky one. I find it is true, as John Izzo (2008) says that, "Adversity introduces us to ourselves" (Izzo, p. 12).

Noting that there will always be setbacks, he adds, "Perhaps what often determines our happiness in life is the step we take after a setback" (Izzo, p. 60).

Following a number of setbacks, including that of a very poor art school education, I was determined to take steps fill in the blank spots with knowledge and understanding. More recently, my course work at SFU, and the thesis process, which followed, gave me the opportunity to repair many of the broken places in my relation to 'the art world' and its issues.

From the first course our academic cohort took, on "Creativity" with Sharon Bailin, I found I was encouraged to challenge many of the 'unexamined assumptions' — notions formerly graven in stone — which had become problematic in my painting practice. In particular, I began to dismantle the bugaboo of the genius myth (which dovetails neatly with the psychological construct of the inner critic), and the nihilistic aspect of postmodernism. These issues, taken together, had had a negating effect upon my painting practice since the early nineties. Deconstructing problematic beliefs regarding artistic practice and identity remained my 'continuing thread' through the remainder of the coursework at SFU, and the commencement of my thesis.

I now understand that a particular combination of detrimental factors had impacted upon me: a lack of support growing up; a strong sense of Otherness; an almost total lack of confidence despite various gifts; and a shoddy art school education. Together, these factors impeded my ability to connect with my true, or authentic self on any kind of consistent basis. It took a crisis, a car accident in 2002, to break my defences down enough to give me access my core issues. I was physically and otherwise ill and in pain for several years. Since that time, having

had excellent guidance, and having worked very hard, I have recovered my health, and am in the process of recovering formerly lost parts of my artistic self.

As a mixed-European immigrant (born in post-war Sweden) I started school in '50's suburban Toronto with an abiding sense of Otherness. As a 'Lena Leszczynski', I felt — and was — very different from the 'Debbies' and 'Susies', and 'Smiths' and 'Browns' in our neighbourhood. My small family had 'funny' names, wore 'funny' clothes and ate 'funny' food. My mother, Dagmar, from Finland, born in Russia, and my father, Bruno, a Polish orphan and a former Siberian concentration camp inmate, spoke broken English and were nothing like 'the other kids'' parents. Due to our mixed ethnicity, we did not particularly 'belong' to the Polish, Finnish, Swedish, Russian nor Canadian communities. Our sense of isolation was heightened by the fact that we had no extended family in Canada; to this day I have never met any of my European relatives.

The absence of extended family *and* ethnic community affiliation, placed my family of origin in the unusually isolated and difficult position of having virtually no external support. This took place at a time of high, post-war conformity and much denial concerning issues such as domestic violence and child abuse. My sister and I virtually raised ourselves as our parents worked all the hours God gave. When I was a young teenager, the cumulative stresses finally boiled over, fragmenting the family. The family, the only social 'container' I had, fell away. I fell with it, becoming truant and eventually dropping out of high school.

I had always drawn and painted, and done well at school, but, having been deeply wounded, I lacked the confidence to attend art school until well into my twenties. In the interim I worked with emotionally disturbed children at

Browndale, Ontario, and it was there that I first led arts and crafts classes and began what would become a life-long quest for healing and wholeness.

Additional steps along this path included a year in a Zen Buddhist monastery, numerous forays into various spiritual and personal growth practices, including the Diamond Approach; much psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and bodywork; five years of art college, and, eventually, the pursuit of a Master's degree at SFU.

As you will read in the chapters to follow, in the years during and after my rather shoddy art school education, I took my lack of know-how in painting and drawing (apart from intuitive abstraction) to be proof of personal inadequacy, rather than a deficiency in the instruction I had (not) received.

When the opportunity arose to teach, I made it a priority to give my students the 'solid foundation' I never had. I will describe that foundation at length in a later section. I was determined that my students would not suffer as I had, from a lack of basic skills and knowledge in the disciplines of drawing and painting. I swore to myself that I would provide both the necessary content *and* the encouragement and support which a fledgling painter requires in order to make reasonable progress: both the "how-to" and the "can-do". By giving these to others, in practical terms, I give them also to myself.

In intellectual terms, my experience at SFU has altered my relation to the world of ideas about art. Whereas I formerly felt that I was 'standing outside the fence', I now see myself as having a legitimate place *inside*. This is a new feeling, one of being good enough, knowledgeable and experienced enough, to claim membership within the cohort of my fellow artists. I notice this subtle shift most

clearly when reading about art. My mind feels as open as the book I am reading. I think it is safe to say that "education" has indeed taken place.

Previously I sensed a barrier, preventing me from taking the ideas *in* — as though I had no right to them, or they were written in undecipherable code. I grant that some art writing does seem deliberately obtuse — but I now understand that the conditioned beliefs I held about myself formed psychological, emotional and intellectual barriers to participation and comprehension.

As a result, I feel more strongly than ever that, what we hold to be true shapes as well as limits our experience of what is possible. It delineates what we are potentially able to achieve in a given endeavour. Our pre-conceptions and presuppositions, and, most particularly, who we take ourselves to be, consciously or otherwise, serve as a template, formatting our experience into what each of us individually perceives as their own personal 'reality'. We create this reality, to a great extent, through our own states of consciousness.

I heard an interesting story on the radio recently, that demonstrates how the imagination is a powerful agency and can conjure up negative fantasies as well as positive hopes. The host talked about how people who do not believe that they can change, when met with unexpected success, became anxious. People who did believe change was possible were elated by it.

The greater our maturity and our willingness to see ourselves in a clear and honest way, the more freedom of choice we will have in our life's journey. I hope to demonstrate how this dynamic operates in relation to my midlife beginners in part-time painting class, particularly with regard to the obstacles which arise along the way.

Questions

As an art educator, I am interested in the teaching and learning dynamics that take place in my studio classroom, where I work with very small groups of adults (two to five at a time). With a few exceptions, my students are mainly midlife adults. These are 'hobby,' or 'continuing education' students, who typically come to me with little or no experience and varying degrees of 'natural propensity' for painting and drawing. They attend one three- or five-hour class per week, rarely painting outside of class time.

Each of these factors — the students having reached midlife or later maturity, the part-time nature of their involvement in painting, and the fact of being first-timers — give rise to particular and significant challenges and questions, which I shall endeavour to examine in the pages to follow. Given this context, my thesis centres upon the question, 'How best to teach painting to this group?'

Considering the limited scope of their painting practice, one might raise the question: Can art be taught to this student group? If it is not 'art', then what *is* being taught 'in art's name' in continuing education classrooms across the country?

I hope to address these and other questions related to my students' painting practice without getting caught up at length in the question, "What is Art?", since all possible answers will be contingent upon consensus (in other words, it depends on who you ask). The term 'Art' may be employed in a myriad of different ways, depending upon the context, from the banal photos accompanying newspaper copy, to so-called 'masterpieces' in the Western canon,

to scarcely decipherable, contemporary 'artworks' designed to frustrate our culturally conditioned expectations.

My 'hobby' students are not attempting to create what Elkins (2001) refers to as "history-making art" (Elkins, p. 70). Rather, they hope to become *competent enough* to satisfy themselves, in making what might be called 'everyday' art — what some would refer to as 'mediocre' art.

In his book, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (2001), Elkins examines the notion of 'mediocre', as opposed to 'history-making' art. Definitions for the word 'mediocre' include the following: of middling quality, commonplace, passable, average, normal, ordinary, everyday, tolerable, bearable, better than nothing, so-so, run of the mill, indifferent, middle-class, bourgeois, no great shakes and nothing to write home about.

Mild as any one of these adjectives appears here in the context of this paper, it's a different story in the art world (including art schools), where any judgment of art alluding to 'mediocrity' is derision most foul, a weapon of verbal attack, and a scathing indictment — if not a complete invalidation of that art.

From the foregoing smorgasbord of possible definitions for the term 'mediocre' which Elkins employs, I prefer the less judicative terms 'ordinary', 'average' or 'everyday art'. Bayles and Orland (1993) define 'ordinary art' as follows:

> Ordinary art means something like: all art is *not* made by Mozart. After all, art is rarely made by Mozart-like people — essentially (statistically speaking there *aren't* any people like that. But while geniuses may get made once-a-century or so, good art gets made all the time. Making art is a common and intimately human activity, filled with all the perils (and rewards) that accompany any

> worthwhile effort. The difficulties artmakers face are not remote and heroic, but universal and familiar.
>
> (Bayles and Orland, unnumbered Introduction page)

Elkins defies a long history of exclusionary artistic convention when he makes a convincing argument for the celebration of 'mediocre' or 'everyday' art (Elkins, 70). He argues that, while average people will make average art, average people also *appreciate* average art. He goes so far as to say that it will become obvious in retrospect that most of the visual art made in art schools at any given time is 'mediocre' and should be accepted and validated as such, since no amount of pretence will deem it otherwise.

Some would say that the work of Sunday or Thursday painters is, by definition, 'mediocre art'. They might argue that the product of anything less than one hundred percent 'serious', full-time commitment to art might produce an occasional fluke, a successful painting born from lucky accident — but such a painter's part-time dedication to their *oeuvre* irrevocably contextualizes their works in the lowly category of the hobby — a frivolous pursuit, not to be taken seriously.

This raises several interesting questions. How do we regard the significant hobbies in the lives of midlife adults? With respect or derision, and why? Are non-income-producing activities and interests automatically to be disdained? What does such an instrumentalist system of values foreordain for individuals of retirement age who have the free time and can 'finally' spend it doing the things they most enjoy?

The question also arises: is it necessary for a painter to *appear* to be 'serious, one hundred percent dedicated' etc. in order for their work to be taken

seriously? In other words, must there be a pose, a performance, a repertoire of particular personality traits or behaviours in evidence for a painter and her work to be considered 'the real thing', worthy of consideration?

And apart from posing and appearances, is it necessary, in this multi-faceted, multi-tasking, multi-cultural, multi-national day and age for individuals to define themselves and the products of their labour so narrowly and exclusively, in order to rate ordinary respect, recognition and notice in the world of the visual arts? Or are we grappling here with an obsolete Romantic definition of the artist as a solitary genius, immersed in '*his*' work to the exclusion of all else?

It is interesting to me that, within the field of scholarly inquiry into art education (excluding hands-on studio programs at art colleges and universities), the judicative notion of 'mediocrity' in art does not seem to arise. The concerns of scholars enquiring into art education are, rather, how best to teach, to encourage and to facilitate the expansion of young and not-so-young minds — a benevolent undertaking for the most part. These art educators have no stake in judging work as being 'mediocre'. There is nothing to be gained from it, and much to be lost.

Conversely, 'the art world', which Thomas Wolfe refers to as 'Cultureburg' (*The Painted Word*, 1975), consisting of professional artists, dealers, collectors, critics, and various hangers-on, most definitely has a stake in employing the denigrating label of 'mediocrity'. In a marketplace where artistic and monetary value are assigned in a seemingly arbitrary and inconsistent manner, *something* must serve to separate the valuable from the valueless, the wheat from the chaff. The term 'mediocre', applied to artworks, serves as the dividing line between 'good' and 'bad' art.

I am not suggesting that all art has equal value. There is what we judge to be better art out there, and what we judge to be worse art. We have all seen what we would call 'bad' art, for whatever reasons we so designate it. Some art may move us while other art leaves us unresponsive. We may have a difference of opinion with regard to the artist's choice of colour, compositional elements, and the degree or absence of skilful craft in the execution of the artwork, as well as its content or conceptual basis.

However, while there is an absence of fixed standards in today's art world — which is a blessing, considering the alternative — it appears that as individuals we still have our more-or-less-well-informed subjective preferences.

As teachers, we may have good educational reasons for our assessments. We may see, in a student's work, what he or she does not *yet* know how to do well, that which looks clumsy (but which is not *intentionally* so). Even non-objectively abstract paintings will offer the viewer or the viewing teacher, grounds for evaluation, on the basis, for example, of how the eye moves through the abstract composition. Does it move in a fluid and pleasing manner, or is the image so composed that the eye gets stuck in a corner, or tossed out of the rectangle altogether? Alternately, we may find the combined elements of a so-called 'good' painting bring us to a state of speechless appreciation (in which case we are having an aesthetic experience). We may vehemently dislike the work of a much-lauded contemporary artist, on display at the city's largest municipal gallery — while responding very favourably to the works shown at a local studio crawl. Are these responses based on ignorance, education, personal preference or something more 'disinterested'? It is very hard to say.

Responses to artworks are so subjective that the judgment of 'mediocrity' is virtually meaningless except as a term of denigration. When Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson passed away recently, CBC radio ran a series of programs about his long and illustrious career. In one program of the series, a music critic was interviewed (whose name I did not catch, regrettably). Had I not known it was a serious interview I might have interpreted it as a Monty Pythonesque spoof, as the critic came across almost as a send-up of art critics. His manner of speaking was a 'plummy', quasi-British-sounding inflection, communicating indifference, superiority and snobbishness, as he pompously devalued Peterson as a merely technical virtuoso, whose *musicality* was actually 'mediocre'.

I believe that to employ the term 'mediocre' in relation to the work of painting students of any age is to injure their natural developmental process. None of us has a crystal ball; we do not know which individual will produce what work in the future, nor can we know how future generations will value it. Painting students are like gestating eggs; should we stamp on all the eggs for their seemingly ordinary uniformity, or shall we let them hatch and see what emerges?

If we have managed to continue to love art despite the unpleasantness rife in 'the art world', we will want to foster it in all its forms and manifestations, to nurture it through its 'awkward' phases, and to be merciful and compassionate towards its valiant, would-be practitioners.

To employ the first of several gardening metaphors: I would rather have a fertile garden with a few weeds in it, and naturally abundant flowers, than a weed- free flowerbed too chemically toxified to support a single dandelion,

however magnificent its artificially enhanced flora may be. Let's hear it for the dandelions, for they are ordinary and will always be with us.

On Hobbies and Hobby Painters

It's a beautiful morning in late spring. The air is fragrant with blossom. Luscious new green life springs forth all around me. I could happily spend my day outdoors puttering in the garden, enjoying the sights and sounds.

But I cannot. I have a thesis to write and a deadline to meet. At just the time of year when schoolchildren are looking forward to escaping scholastic demands, I must go indoors, sit down at my computer surrounded by books and notes, and write.

Happy as I am to be looking forward to completion of my Master's degree, the overwhelming truth is…*I'd rather be gardening.* Gardening is my hobby, the 'alternate stress' that rounds out the numerous other activities and demands of my life.

As a professional visual artist (painter) and self-employed painting teacher, I cannot de-stress by picking up a paintbrush. That activity is too fraught. It is too close to me. Art making is not my hobby, but my job — the life's work I have chosen. As with most adults and their primary roles in life, I am *identified* with it. I not only make art but I *am* an artist. *An artist* is who I hold myself to be. For me, painting is loaded with pressures and identity issues: professional expectations, disappointments, and assessments of self-worth based on my successes and failures

Happily, my hobby is not so freighted. In the garden, whatever I do is pretty much okay. I might feel a twinge of guilt if my bedding plants rot before I get around to planting them, or if I neglect to do something or other properly because I am too impatient — but for the most part, when I am working in the garden, creating beauty and fostering life, *the world goes away, and all thought of it*. I am completely in the present. My inner critic simply vanishes. I feel the delicious freedom to create, a freedom long since crowded out of my painting practice by self-consciousness, and the tensions, pressures and identity issues mentioned above.

I believe I have the very best possible hobby, except for the downside of wintry rain. On the upside, gardening is infinitely challenging and endlessly creative. There is no 'final point' to be reached. I will not run out of things to do. I am not troubled by perfectionism or adherence to any particular schedule. Gardening allows me an intense participation in Life itself, grounded in the earth. It teaches me about the natural cycles of birth and death. It exercises my body as much or as little as I desire on any given day. Gardening unclenches my soul. I relax. Whatever other horrible pressures may exist in my life, financial, academic, interpersonal or otherwise, when I am busily fostering plant life in my garden, my world reduces to that activity alone. Gardening keeps me sane.

I have taught painting and drawing to hundreds of adults in Toronto and Vancouver. Many of them have told me that, in their lives, the hobby of painting, and participation in art classes serve as the critical link to sanity that gardening provides for me. Their painting hobby shares many of the same features that gardening has for me: infinite challenge and endless learning on all levels, the

fostering of beauty, slipping into that delicious timeless feeling, and the satisfaction of creating something that did not exist until they put their hand to it.

I do not presume to teach my students to make Art or to become Artists. Whether art can actually be taught, and what kind of efforts might be made in that general direction, are interesting questions. In my classes, the A-words rarely come up. I am too busy teaching the *craft* of painting, and my students are too busy learning it — though my curriculum is of course interwoven with a psychological subtext and much mentoring, which I will discuss at greater length in further chapters.

By 'craft' I mean the acquisition of skills and knowledge about the medium, including techniques, methodology, ways of seeing, composition — everything that is teachable about drawing and painting, and within my power to pass along. As Ben Shahn (1957) says, "Craft is that discipline which frees the spirit, and style is the result" (Shahn, p. 124).

My students want to learn to paint for reasons of personal meaning and aesthetic pleasure (which, given the difficulty, uncertainty and agony of learning to paint, is quite a challenge). They want to enhance their humanness, though they may not be conscious of this motive.

Their undertaking may be seen more as a pursuit of greater awareness, personal authenticity, meaning and insight, interwoven with the achievement of a degree of mastery of the craft of painting. They seek personal fulfilment through a deeper understanding of their own unique and deeply personal creative process.

I enjoy teaching adult 'hobby' or 'continuing ed' students, whom I find to be a unique group of learners. They are not children and teaching them is not like teaching children. They are in class by their own choice. Like all adult learners, they need to know why I have given a particular instruction. Although I am still their teacher and something of an authority figure (an authority, at least, on painting), our power relations are equal (I teach; they pay me). They have longer attention spans than children or youth, so they can be (gently) pushed farther. They get my jokes and are fun to talk to and interesting to get to know. They will not be graded, nor will their work be exhibited in the immediate future. Therefore, any meaning their work has for them is internal and intensely personal.

My students are also very unlike 'serious' art school students. Though they value their painting endeavour highly, they do not wish to become ponderous about it, as that would spoil their fun — nor do they intend to become full-time professional artists. I enjoy teaching my continuing ed students *because* they have no grandiose plans to set the world on fire with their paintings. They are unpretentious. They have reasonable expectations, and they come to me with the humility and open-mindedness necessary to learn.

My typical student is a midlife adult whose primary motivation is clearly *not* the desire to become a famous artist or create 'historically important' artworks. My typical student probably would not recognize a historically important artwork unless it bit her (nor would I). They want only to learn to paint with a recognizable degree of competence and progress.

They happily remain outside of the 'world class' fray, leaving behind the pettiness, competitiveness, impenetrable critical theory and other accoutrements

of art college and the art world. Their hobby is not freighted with densely written critical theory, which tortures them on sleepless nights. Though they value it highly, they hold their painting endeavour lightly. Their primary identity is aligned with their families or jobs, rather than with their painting practice.

Many do not practice at home at all, painting only during class time. I am rarely confronted with a student's inflated artistic ego and all the misery associated with that phenomenon. On the rare occasion when I encounter an ego so inflated as to resist all instruction, our association tends to be blessedly brief.

To my students, 'Art' is *still* 'beauty and truth'. They have no theoretical problem with easel painting; for them painting is anything *but* dead. Postmodern cynicism and nihilism have not penetrated this group. They remain innocent of it. They are an altogether simpler, less sophisticated and less complicated group than you would find in any post-secondary art school class anywhere in the Western world.

My students are not, primarily, cultural critics or consumers of critical theory. They are not paralysed by the question, 'What is Art?'. Unlike myself, they have never stood by, suffering helplessly, as their painting came to a dead halt over the "brutally impenetrable theory" (Dissanayake 1992, p. xvi) of postmodernism.

Rather than attempting to achieve excellence in painting at the level of 'the art world', they are happy making 'ordinary' or 'everyday' art. They do not demand masterpieces of themselves. It does not trouble them to imagine that they are not making *'real'* art (whatever that may be): they are *just painting*, for the joy of it (which of course requires much intestinal fortitude). The goal of 'just painting', like the Soto Zen practice of 'just sitting' *sounds* simple, but is not by

any means easy. Aspiring to 'just paint' engages the whole self, mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and psychologically.

Sometimes my job is to help thaw out the frozen (self-censored) 'artist within'. An alarmingly large number of my students had the art urge squeezed out of them at a tender age by a ridiculing or scolding teacher or parent. Sometimes students come to painting class in an attempt to heal depression. (It has been known to work.)

For my students, art making meets a basic human need. They come to my classroom 'merely' for the pleasure of learning, rather than to fulfil some other, functional or instrumental purpose.

Painting will not put bread on their table, nor solve any number of life's more prosaic problems. Yet the students' level of motivation is strikingly high, sufficient to see most of them through the inevitable struggles and crises of confidence — those genuinely difficult and painful phases of the course that seem to touch excruciatingly sensitive chords in the psyche.

In my midlife students, I have observed a potent inner need driving them to visual art. How best to describe this compelling force? While it has the outward appearance of a desire to work with colour, or the sensuality of paint, wanting to draw recognizable objects from the observable world, or wanting to find out if one can be 'any good at it', I sense much deeper motivations, which are occasionally confirmed by my students' own testimony.

This deeper need has the character of an urgent search for self-expression, particularly the expression of one's authentic self. Indeed, the entire undertaking of painting and drawing could be seen as a means to discover this authentic self.

Their quest is like a search for the spring from whose inexhaustible depths one may draw infinitely, trusting that what is drawn forth will be 'pure'. This desire may be veiled in various ways — few are openly conscious of their motivation — but the passion, the intensity of feeling that drawing and painting arouse, indicate to me the tremendous personal importance of this undertaking.

While superficially it may appear that I am 'just' teaching basic skills of visual language and the management of various media, I am *always,* on a subterranean level, teaching self- acceptance, courage, persistence, fortitude and forgiveness. This subtext might be in actuality the main course. No doubt, teachers of other subjects find the same thing. The joy and satisfaction I derive from teaching are definitely anchored in the mentoring, the fostering of greater awareness, and an expanded selfhood for my students, neatly embedded in the teaching of technique, creative process and the handling of paint.

I suspect I am more likely to facilitate a successful experience with students whose 'shells' are sufficiently cracked, by life, 'to let the light in'. Midlife art classes provide an opportunity to achieve a kind of enlightenment, both requiring and further creating the openness and patience to allow for unimagined possibilities.

While the characteristics I have listed above to describe my students may sound fairly ordinary, they are in fact a remarkably mature set of attitudes and behaviours, and represent some of the best aspects of our human nature if encouraged to ripen slowly over time into authentic, adult human beings.

But what is meant by 'authenticity'?

On Authenticity

In *Care of* the *Soul* (1992), Thomas Moore states that the great illness of our time is "loss of soul" (p. xi) and exhorts us to overcome inner emptiness by growing closer to what he calls our 'soul', not to be confused with ego or self. Moore admits, "It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine" (Moore, p. ix). He adds, "We know intuitively that soul has to do with genuineness and depth, as when we say certain music has soul or a remarkable person is soulful" (Moore, p. ix).

In my teaching, I am sharply aware of the hunger for self-knowledge and soulful affirmation, which underlies the desire to attain even a rudimentary level of technical skill in painting. This hunger has driven these students from their regular lives into my classroom.

Making art is not just a matter of getting the colours right, or any other external, technical thing. Taking an introductory painting course represents a decisive moment for many of these students in which they 'out' their heartfelt appreciation of art, welcoming it into their lives in a new and fuller way. Through the aesthetic experience, art serves as the natural doorway or bridge between the materialistic world and the aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual worlds.

I cannot meet this burning desire for knowledge and self-expression with merely intellectual responses, or materialistic problem solving. The inner human being must be acknowledged, nurtured and supported in becoming not only improved draftsmen and painters, but *people* of greater breadth, of increased

sensitivity, to whom permission has been given to cultivate this secret and sacred, innermost part we think of as our *authentic* selves.

Charles Taylor speaks to the notion of authenticity in his book *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991). Authenticity, he says, is a legitimate moral ideal which has, in recent times, been corrupted into its negative counterpart, which he refers to as "the dark side of individualism" (Taylor, p. 4), i.e. narcissism. As the freedoms of individualism have gained prominence in our culture, we have lost the sense of being part of a larger, cosmic order. We assuage the ensuing disenchantment and loss of passion and purpose with what Taylor calls "pitiable comfort" (Taylor, p.4). We are tempted to seek consolation in an excessive degree of self-indulgence and self-absorption, to the exclusion of all concern with "horizons of significance" (Taylor, p.39) such as the community, the environment, and active participation in political life.

The situation is worsened by what Taylor calls "the primacy of instrumental reason" (Taylor, p.6), which is a system of values seeking only to *use* and to *profit from use*: cost-effectiveness at all cost. People become 'production units' from whom maximum output is demanded. We make instrumental use of the earth and its creatures, despite the threat of ecological disaster. Technology is glorified, such as high-tech medicine, while we undervalue those humans who give care (i.e. nurses, teachers).

These impersonal mechanisms are powerful global forces, which push against our humanity and good sense. The individual feels alone in a vast bureaucratic system, and, not surprisingly, seeks the private satisfactions of personal fulfilment.

While critics of the individualism of self-fulfilment view the culture of authenticity as narcissistic, Taylor points out that we need to understand the moral ideal behind it, which is to be true to oneself. "Critics of contemporary culture tend to disparage [authenticity] as an ideal, even to confound it with a non-moral desire to do what one wants without interference" (Taylor, p. 21).

Taylor also points out that the self is always and ever 'dialogic', that is, existing in relation to and in dialogue with others. He also points out that "I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter" (Taylor, p 40), and to eliminate those elements (those horizons of significance), would result in a trivial identity.

Thus, Taylor validates the search for authenticity, though he considers that the original ideal has been degraded and requires "a work of retrieval" (Taylor, p. 23).

I would define authenticity as mature forms of 'personalness' and 'presentness'. 'Personalness' actually *is* authenticity, which can be accessed only in the present moment, in a state of presence, as it were.

What I refer to as 'personalness' is a deep and profound acquaintance with the self, a lifelong, intra-psychic evolution, which may have begun with a single moment of insight, a single glimpse of 'something more' within the self.

Based on the mindful awareness of long observation and inquiry, it becomes a knowing, a recognition, a friendly, forgiving and compassionate relation to oneself. 'Oneself': the product of a unique personal history, with a particular set of predilections, and, as well, the 'something more', which is undeniably 'there', beyond personal history and personality.

Authenticity is a hard-won loyalty to oneself, as Rousseau said, "le sentiment de l'existence" (Taylor, p. 27), "It is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences" (Taylor, quoting Rousseau, p. 27). He adds, "I am called upon to live my life this way and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*" (Taylor, p. 29), and "Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself" (Taylor, p. 29).

Experience has taught me that many of my midlife students come to painting precisely to discover this authentic personalness — at first, in the hope that there exists such a thing — a genuine personal depth — and then to give it expression through visual art. After a certain point in life, when one has been around the block a few times, had some losses and gains, and learned the lay of the land — there comes a point when nothing external will satisfy. Possessions, status, reputation — it all grows stale, like a meal gone cold, and we want *something more, something deeper,* something which is not based on circumstance, not meant for display or to be admired by others.

In her book, The *Sovereignty of Good* (1970), Iris Murdoch gives a hint of what that *something more* might be, when she says, "…beauty is the only spiritual thing we love by instinct" (Murdoch, p. 85) and, "…what is popularly called beauty…is an occasion for unselfing" (Murdoch, p.84). She adds, "The appreciation of beauty in art or nature is not only (for all its difficulties) the easiest available spiritual exercise; it is also a completely adequate entry into (and not just analogy to) the good life, since it *is* the checking of selfishness in the

interest of seeing the real" (Murdoch, p. 65). She argues that this experience of beauty has the power to contribute to a "change of consciousness" (Murdoch, p. 84). Specifically, the perception of beauty, which is an aesthetic experience, can bring about a shift in our consciousness from discursive to non-discursive functioning. As Heesoon Bai points out, non-discursive thought is still a function of the mind, which *can* be non-conceptual.

I strongly suspect that the 'something more' that we seek in midlife, through the aesthetic experience of art making, is *precisely* this change of consciousness, this release from the prison of the small, separate self.

As Martin Buber suggests in *I and Thou* (1958), in our deepest seeking for authenticity, we search for a unity of being, which some might call 'God'. In order to stand in this relation, we must choose between two dialogical attitudes, or 'forms of address' between ourselves and the world: *I-Thou*, which is a subject-to-subject relation, unmediated by thought, or *I-It* which is a subject-object relation, and a product of the rational, or discursive, mind. Within the I-It relation, the 'I' is also objectified, remaining separate and detached. I-It involves only abstractions — incomplete parts of myself and the other. One can learn to 'address' the world as 'Thou' by first finding the authentic core of 'I' within. The authentic self exists in a state of reverent relationship, thereby joining with all beings. According to Buber, the *I-Thou* relation is "…spirit in its human manifestation…" (Buber, p. 89).

As Taylor has noted, the authenticity of which he speaks is much more than an urge towards narcissistic self-indulgence. Taylor's 'authenticity' can only exist in relation to 'horizons of significance', having developed and maintained a meaningful connection with concerns beyond those of the self, which is a feature

of emotional maturity. Thus the notion of maturity — having matured beyond total self-absorption — is embedded in his notion of authenticity.

Perhaps, surrounded as we are by inauthentic, instrumentalist 'marks' (mass media and all its signifiers), aesthetically-oriented twenty-first century humans are particularly motivated to make their *own* authentic marks, in response.

However much we might value it in principle, the authentic or true self may be difficult to access, buried in our consciousness, under layers of personae, defences, habits, memories, scar tissue etc. In the pursuit of an authentic voice in art making, it takes real sinew to plough through those many layers and go looking for the kernel of authenticity. Much that we dig through in our search is, comparatively, dross. It is not 'I', and it takes our attention away from a subject-to-subject relation in the present moment. Being present in the moment is a prerequisite for authenticity. It is not a pose. It has to be the real deal.

The present, manifesting one nanosecond at a time, is eternal and spacious. Everything else is just a thought form. In order to experience one's authenticity it is necessary to locate one's attention in the present — this second, this breath, then the next and the next, beyond the grasp of concepts.

To reach a place of mature and present personalness, or authenticity, requires a letting go of past and future constructions of reality, leaving only a mindful presence in the now. Something is happening in the mind, thought forms are drifting by; bodily sensations arise and pass away. The point of one's concentration wavers, sharpens, returns. This would be 'the flow' we are all hoping to 'go' with. Heesoon Bai (2001) describes this process as Mindfulness,

the point of which "is not so much getting rid of thinking as recovering the underlying foundational field of non-discursive awareness" (Bai, p. 92).

Part-time, midlife painting students are consciously choosing to step out of the well-rutted grooves, habits and roles of their lives for a few short hours every week. Because of this 'stepping out', I believe that *their* search for authenticity and meaning may be *more* pointed, more poignantly felt, than that of the full-time art school student, who can too easily create a seamless groove and doze off it, or shift into auto-pilot and drift along on it. If only by sharp comparison with the rest of their workaday week, my students *know* they are stepping off the treadmill, and they know precisely when and where they are doing it.

Moreover, they want it badly enough to arrange their lives to accommodate class time, week after week, year after year.

As Charles Taylor points out, there are enormously powerful influences, which would have us conform, deny our spark of uniqueness, our imagination, our vision and our point of view, to merely replicate the life forms and conventional art forms which surround us — to stay in step. Some of us do not take kindly to being fashioned into a re-run of someone else or a re-tread of something else. These influences are antithetical to the search for our true selves and our authentic voices; our commitment to the many steps required will eventually bring us 'there'. In the painting studio, we want to allow the spark of the true self within us to ignite a firestorm of — we do not know what, exactly — but we are willing to risk it, just for the chance to bask in its incontrovertible, life-giving warmth.

Chapter 2.

Obstacles & Issues

For my midlife students, learning to paint is a personal journey of self-discovery — and the learning never stops. This is equally true for the professional artist. As Victoria Nelson (1993) says,

> To mature as a writer [or artist] requires maturing first as a person. The mark of a civilized person is not education or accomplishments but how well one has faced and civilized one's own nature. Artists can be sensitive and perceptive about other people to beat all, but in this other life task they start at zero just like everybody else.
>
> (p. 74)

A number of predictable and provocative obstacles must be faced and handled by the beginning painter in order to clear the way for genuine progress and development. Primarily these are unexamined assumptions with an unfavourable skew, i.e. cultural constructs such as negative stereotypes about aging; discouraging notions regarding the nature and value of artistic production (i.e. the 'genius myth', and an instrumentalist stance towards art works); the psychological construct of the 'inner critic' (the super-ego, or internal judge); and the unfortunate reality of what can only be called 'bad' teaching.

Unexamined and unchecked, these constructions individually have the power to thoroughly undermine the student's confidence and courage, when

confidence and the courage to act on it are really all that the student has to go forward *with*.

Taken together, each plays off the other, with the inner critic utilising aspects of the genius myth or the stereotypes of aging as ammunition for internal attacks upon the student. When that happens, the impact upon learning, creativity and self-expression can be absolutely devastating.

I believe there are many midlife adults who yearn to take drawing and painting classes, but are too frightened by these interacting constrictions and the ensuing painful states of mind, to risk it.

There are, undeniably, numerous difficulties in learning to draw and paint, such as: learning to truly concentrate one's attention, and mastering particular skills, whether these be technical, perceptual or conceptual.

However the perceived journey from 'challenging' to 'impossible' can be a very quick trip when the tour guide is our inner critic, holding us hostage to the genius myth, while telling us we are 'too old' to develop what Eisner (2002) calls "artistic intelligence" (Eisner, p. 43), and asking, 'What use are paintings anyway?' Every one of these potential obstacles can be significantly ameliorated or exacerbated, by the quality of instruction the students receive.

I find it beneficial to mention these potential stumbling blocks, starting on the first day of class, so that the student can anticipate and prepare for their appearance. The best defence against each of these obstacles is awareness, a bit of education and common sense, awareness being the greatest of these. In the forthcoming section, we will tackle and unpack these obstacles one at a time, and examine how the instructor's influence upon the student can alter their impact.

The Inner Critic

The inner critic is a part of every one of us. It is the voice of judgment, the disparaging commentary, which runs in our heads so continuously that it goes unnoticed, like the wallpaper. Or, like a radio station playing non-stop in the background, it seems so normal that it often remains below the level of awareness. "Many people are completely unaware that there is a voice or a self speaking inside of them because the Inner Critic's constant judgments have been with them since early childhood and its running commentary feels quite natural" (Stone & Stone, undated internet posting, p. 9).

Originally identified as the Superego by Sigmund Freud and seen as the very necessary voice of conscience, the negative aspect of the inner critic was later characterized as 'guilt' in the psychotherapeutic domain. The 'inner critic' is nowadays seen as the internalized 'harsh' or 'negative' parental authority.

The inner critic develops as a sub-self in the very young child between the ages of one and six (Brown, 1999, p.153). In technical jargon it is an 'introject', that is, a constellation of attitudes or ideas unconsciously incorporated into one's personality (*Penguin English Dictionary*, 2001). The do's and don'ts of the inner critic are primarily garnered from parental admonitions, as well as those of influential elders including siblings and other family members, teachers, religious authorities and other cultural influences. It may collect additional influences later in life such as friends, teachers, employers, peers and colleagues who are more successful than we are.

The inner critic's original purpose is to function as a survival mechanism, to protect the small child from danger, pain and shame. It proscribes the child's

behaviour, influencing the child to be 'good' in order to win the parental love and approval, which are crucial for survival.

Observing a small child at play, it is sometimes possible to see the internalized inner critic in action, as the child punishes or rewards her dollies or teddy bears for 'good' or 'bad' behaviour.

As Chris Zydell (2006) points out, "Inside most people's psyches there is a huge imbalance of power between the real self (the source of your creativity), and the inner critic. The inner critic was formed when you were about two years old, so in that internal psychic landscape you are still a child and the critic is a scary adult authority" (Zydell, p. 28).

While the judgmental inner critic may appear to be 'adult' to the two year old, it is formed so early that it has only achieved the developmental level of a very small child itself, with a small child's limited understanding, simplistic thinking and underdeveloped emotional intelligence. If we were to hear the inner critic's haranguing commentary verbalized by a living adult, we would think that person was extremely emotionally immature. When seen as a childish adult at best, the inner critic is an excellent example of the old adage, 'children can be cruel'. Given its ignorance and low level of emotional maturity, the judgmental inner critic does not know when to quit, and carries on the internal commentary long past the age when the individual requires its guidance to avoid shame, pain and danger. Rather, the inner critic itself becomes the cause for these effects, in its pose as an all-knowing authority.

Our inner critic, as the introjection of many 'authority figures' from our early childhood, has in its arsenal many guises or voices, with which to frighten and persuade us. The scariest authority of all is, of course, 'God', particularly the

God of the Old Testament. Religious ideologies are a rich source of material in the formation of the inner critic and its attacks. Hitchens states unequivocally in the subtitle of his book *God Is Not Great*, "…religion poisons everything" (Hitchens, title page, 2007). He points out that, Christian or not, we midlifers emerged from a predominantly Christian culture, which was inflicted upon us as children, many of whom suffered terrible fears of sin, hell and damnation (Hitchens, 2007). Through religious instruction or through osmosis from the culture, we have absorbed notions of an all-seeing, all-knowing and punitive God. The doctrine of original sin dooms us to forever being 'wretched sinners', threatened with everlasting hellfire for minor transgressions.

One wonders if man's inner critic created Jehovah, or if Jehovah created man's inner critic. Either way, an internal critic which carries the authority of 'God', has been the source of unspeakable volumes of suffering and cruelty in this world. In its milder forms, repression and self-abnegation, the inner critic uses 'God' to suppress creativity and crush self-acceptance.

George Carlin has worked up an extremely funny skit on the subject of God's mood swings, pointing out the contradictions between the fatherly God who supposedly loves us very, very much, and the same fatherly God who would send us to hell to burn in fiery torment forever and ever, should we displease him or break any of his ten commandments!

In Buddhism, a religion without a supreme deity, the absence of a 'big daddy upstairs' is, to my mind, a fact of great compassion in and of itself, as we cannot project our inner critic nor our parental object-relations onto a non-being. Buddha Nature is a principle, not an entity.

Another enormous relief in Buddhism is the Buddha's directive (opposite to Christianity's) *not* to "believe" anyone or anything, but to trust only one's own experience. The Buddha said, "See for yourself". That is, through the practice of mediation and the Eightfold Path, see True Nature for yourself, and you will not require 'belief'; you will *know,* from your own direct experience.

For many of us who were raised in a Christian context, on purpose or by default, the *catch-22* of faking 'belief' separates us from our true nature, which in turn makes us dependent on the external authority of others. We must find a way to reclaim the authority of our authentic selves in order to become free of intimidation and bullying from all external authorities, included the introjects which make up the inner critic.

By the time we reach adulthood, the inner critic is not our friend. It knows everything about us and there is nothing it won't use against us. Like an over-protective parent it is afraid for us and wishes to keep us 'safe', keeping us away from 'dangerous' parts of the world, of ourselves, and others, and guiding and directing us to whatever it thinks will make us acceptable and successful in life. It feeds on the very aspects of ourselves that we are most uncomfortable with and have disowned (what Jungians would call our 'shadow').

The inner critic is the voice of self-rejection: one can never be good enough. If one chooses A, the inner critic judges harshly and rejects the choice: why was B not chosen? The reverse works equally well. Similarly, perfectionism arises from the inner critic. As perfection is unattainable, there is ever more grounds for criticism.

Unmediated, the inner critic is a self-esteem destroyer. Like an inquisitor who is our constant companion, it employs blame, rebuke, shaming, anxiety,

threats, chastisement, name-calling, punishment and contempt, without mercy. It leads to a paralyzing fear of mistakes, a desperate need to do things 'right', addiction to the approval of others, performance anxiety, second-guessing, self-doubt, procrastination, workaholism, addiction…and just plain giving up.

Depending on the individual's experience of childhood, the inner critic is more or less negatively powerful. A person who had a fairly happy childhood will have a less intense inner critic than someone who suffered a great deal in childhood. The child who was abused, neglected or abandoned, will develop a much more vicious internal inner critic, relentless in its excoriations and utterly impossible in its demands.

However, even if we have had relatively 'good' childhoods, we have all experienced some degree of frustration and self-rejection in early life, and therefore have some degree of self-rejection (which is a polite term for self-hatred). In his book, *Soul Without Shame; Liberating Yourself From The Judge Within* (1999), Byron Brown argues that this is due to the many times that our parents or caregivers, despite their best efforts, were unwilling or unable to be completely attuned to us as essential beings. Additionally, the inner critic becomes the repository for all the 'no's and don'ts' children hear from parents who are overwhelmed by their offspring's exuberant aliveness, or frustrated by bratty behaviour.

Brown (1999) says, "Comparison is a very close cousin of self-judgment…Comparison becomes self- destructive when it becomes constant self-assessment relative to the behaviour and appearance of others at the expense of aligning with the truth of your own experience" (p. 25). The judge, as Brown

refers to it, promotes deep-levels of self-distrust, exposing feelings of extreme vulnerability. Later Brown notes:

> ..the judge says you cannot question what you assume or believe; in fact, you cannot even bring this conditioning into awareness. According to the judge, doing that will cause too much pain, be too shameful, cause others to reject you, make you wrong, or be overwhelming. This is not learning what works from your experience; this is suppressing your experience to preserve a limited perspective on life. (Brown, 1999, p. 83)

The inner critic is particularly threatened by change or expansion, which it reads as danger. Thus, when an individual attempts to make strong, positive changes in life, such as opening up to their creative, artistic side and taking a painting class, then the inner critic redoubles its efforts, invalidating our efforts, discouraging us from continuing, tempting us to give up, using its exquisitely detailed knowledge of our hidden weaknesses and desires to accomplish this objective.

It is in the area of creativity that the inner critic does its dirtiest work. Zydell (2006) points out that, while most children consider themselves creative, most adults do not, having lost the liberty and innocence of free creative play to the unbending rules and judgments of the inner critic, representing the culture at large. Zydell adds:

> The inner critic is born of fear. The critic thinks its job is to keep out of harm's way at all costs. To keep you protected, shielded and secure, which it does by not allowing you into uncharted territory. But to stay protected, you also need to stay small, stay stuck, stay where we are, because where you are is safe. Where you are is *familiar.* The critic's job is to keep you from ever leaving what is familiar, and that means never trying anything new, never experimenting, never making mistakes, never being confused or

> unsure of yourself, no adventures, no going out on a limb or taking risks. All of the types of things that are *essential* if you are going to be creative. The critic also has a huge problem with the unknown. And if it ever does consent to leave home, it wants to have a clearly marked map, again anathema for the creative journey.
>
> (p. 30)

In her book, *On Writer's Block,* author Victoria Nelson (1993) cuts to the chase (or the quick), stating that it is our own self-rejection or self-hatred that most seriously interferes with our ability to be fully engaged with the creative arts. "In the middle of the night, when a lifetime of accomplishments turns into the pitiful antics of a trained pony, the absence of true self-worth becomes starkly apparent" (p. 5).

While this may feel like a painful "expulsion from Eden" (Nelson, 1999, p. 17), Nelson views writers' block and other forms of resistance to creative activity as an opportunity for true growth. "…what seemed a barrier — resistance — is actually the secret door to the unconscious. If [the writer] approaches with love and careful attention, it will open of its own accord. This is the way in which writers discover that the block is actually a building block in their unfolding development — that resistance is an essential component, not the final chapter in their creative lives" (p. 9).

As Ann Landers' famous aphorism goes, No one can abuse you without your consent and participation. We allow our inner critic to abuse us in these many ways due to our lack of awareness of its existence and its modus operandi, as well as not knowing how to fight back.

Several models for 'fighting back' have been proposed. The first step is to become aware of the inner critic's activity in the present moment, to simply notice when the inner critic is active by learning to 'listen' for it.

Byron Brown points out that judgments may make us feel humilated, sad, depressed, angry, ashamed, etc. He says

> The actual sensations can be uncomfortable or unpleasant, but even more difficult are the associated beliefs and memories connected to these states. In fact your beliefs about these negative feelings are what cause them to affect your sense of self worth….You dislike and reject yourself for having certain feelings.
>
> (Brown, p. 50)

He explains this phenomenon when he tells us,

> You were never taught that feelings are just feelings, they are not statements about the kind of person you are. You automatically assume that there is something wrong with having feelings you characterize as negative. (Brown, p. 50)

Brown points out that a judgment by the inner critic *is an attack*, and that it can also be sensed somatically, through the body. When overwhelmed by negative feelings, "The result is an inability to respond appropriately to the attacking energy…" (Brown, p.51), resulting in a shutting-down defence mechanism. This leads to sluggishness, reduced energy and dullness. Conversely, Brown points out that when an animal is attacked it responds immediately with heightened awareness, energy and presence. Even when humans are *physically* attacked, they too become more alert, poised to fight, take flight or freeze. But when the inner critic attacks, our beliefs about ourselves are involved. "The result is not a heightened awareness and groundedness, but quite

the opposite" (Brown, 51). Brown advises, "Focusing on judgments as attacks makes it easier for you to respond appropriately, because you recognize an outside energy aggressively threatening …your own *inner* state — in particular, your sense of worth" (Brown, 52).

The inner critic operates in the shadows, drawing its strength from secrecy. Thus, simply becoming aware of it causes a significant degree of detachment from the inner critic. One realizes, 'This is not me. This is a phenomenon taking place within me, which I am observing'. This begins the process of disidentifying with the inner critic. It can also be helpful to give voice to the attack, to make it audible.

Having learned to identify and 'hear' the judgments and verbal attacks of the inner critic, one can defend oneself by talking back to it, saying things like, "No! That's NOT true! Stop it!" It may be helpful to identify particular 'voices', perhaps from experiences of being shamed in childhood. Depending on the intensity and tenacity of one's particular inner critic, it may be necessary to do some deeper personal inquiry work on unresolved issues from the past.

It is helpful to realize that everyone experiences the judgments of their inner critic, including the people who we think 'have it all together'. The truth is more like, 'we're all in this together', facing similar obstacles and challenges. Accepting this makes for a safer, more enjoyable teaching environment.

I have observed the inner critic's impact on my students' creativity, manifesting in a variety of ways. Once upon a time, I taught a collage class in which students tore up, cut and otherwise dismembered colour copies of small paintings they had laboured over for months. The learning objective was to loosen up after a rigorous observational exercise, and to experiment with non-

objective abstraction, while learning something about colour and composition. One of my students in particular became extremely animated and joyful as he 'violated his masterpiece' and produced a truly marvellous abstract artwork. He was truly 'on a roll', way outside his usual comfort zone, and enjoying every minute of it. His body, face, comments and gestures radiated aliveness, humour and creative energy.

The next day he came by to give me a copy of his collage, as I had requested, and I noticed at once that something was wrong. His energy was very low; he seemed sad, dragged down and kind of deadened. He told me that when he looked at his work that morning he experienced 'lunch-box remorse'. What, he wondered, was the point of spending five hours sticking bits of paper together to make an abstract composition when what he really wanted to do was to make *real* art, like a landscape?

This student's inner critic had clearly done its work on him. It responded to his foray into the unknown with denigration, invalidating his beautiful, adventuresome work. Believing is seeing, and he could no longer see its beauty or wondrousness. He took the inner critic's judgment to be true.

The inner critic can also manifests as crippling self-doubt, preventing a student from taking the risk of making any creative decisions. Instead, at every tiny step, the student might ask me for very specific direction. As this dynamic became repetitive, I attempted to lead that student back to self-trust. First I insisted she phrase her question as specifically as possible. As every teacher knows, being able to formulate precisely the right question brings the questioner half way to the answer. I then suggested that when such questions arose, rather than asking me, how about if she posed that question to herself? Most of the

time, she already knew the answer and was simply afraid to trust herself to act on her own authority. Her confidence grew noticeably as she claimed more authority for herself while she painted.

As an artist and teacher who has suffered a great deal from my own inner critic attacks, I can certainly empathize, and I can educate. I can and do make my students aware of the existence and strategies of the inner critic. I can support and encourage my students towards awareness, and recommend ways of fighting back against it. I find it helps to mention the inner critic regularly, as I believe we all learn through repetition. Ultimately, however, every individual has to make the voluntary choice: whether to seriously address this destructive phenomenon, or to let it continue its predictable course.

The inner critic will never completely go away, but we can change how we respond to it. From feeling blind-sided, sucker-punched and overwhelmed by an attack, we can reach the point where we can deflect our old nemesis like brushing aside a gnat, with barely a pause in our consciousness — 'Oh that again. Knock it off.' Getting to this point requires real work and dedication, but it is worth it, as it allows us to develop a true sense of self-acceptance.

Although the inner critic is not strictly speaking 'us' (i.e. our true or essential selves), because we initially identify with it, and are certainly entangled with it, it is necessary that we take responsibility for it and get to know how it operates. Brown points out that, "Both sides of the judgment process exist inside you. A full exploration of judgment also requires seeing things from the viewpoint of one who is attacking. This means knowing yourself as the judge" (Brown, p. 127). As long as we are engaged with the judge, we both project our inner critic onto others (for example, hearing criticism when there was none), as

well as inflicting our judgments upon them, identifying with 'the aggressor' in order to feel certain and powerful. Brown points out that, "…with growing self-awareness, you will recognize times when you are invested in being judgmental, even when you wish you were not so" (Brown, p. 127).

The extent to which we choose to do the inner work of disengaging from the ongoing war with our inner critic in order to 'declare peace' is a personal choice. Brown might say that the ultimate antidote to the inner critic is the cultivation of 'Presence', an essential, mindful or meditative state of mind requiring fullypresent awareness, as mentioned earlier. We will further discuss the role of mindfulness and loving-kindness in education in a later section.

Because the negations of the inner critic can cause tremendous unnecessary pain in students, I believe that it is very important for teachers to be aware of the existence of this phenomenon — preferably without judging the suffering student! A teacher in any discipline is in an excellent position to help or hurt students troubled by inner critic attacks. Simply introducing the concept of the inner critic is often sufficient; the student will take it from there. The important thing, for teachers in any subject, is to practise rigorous self-awareness while engaging with students, and establishing a zero-tolerance policy in their communications, i.e. making sure that they are not inadvertently communicating in a way that exploits their position of relative power, or takes advantage of the student's comparative lack of it. Teachers are only human; sometimes people make inappropriate comments in order to discharge their own frustration, which amount to subtle, unwarranted verbal attacks (and no attack is warranted).Perfection is not available, but I think it is important for teachers to

hold the conscious intention to allow no 'violence' their communications with students.

On Midlife

In the almost-twenty years, since I began teaching Painting and Drawing I have conversed with and taught hundreds of adult students. Many — most — have come to painting and drawing later in life. Why now, well into midlife, are they willing to become rank beginners at such a challenging and difficult undertaking? Is there something about midlife in particular that prepares them for, or predisposes them to this kind of challenge?

I would argue that there *is* a natural predisposition in maturity for complex learning and creative achievement. That predisposition is drawn from several realms, including the emotional (the confidence and self-acceptance of maturity), the cognitive (the development of postformal thought in midlife, which we will discuss a bit later on) and the existential or spiritual (the desire for 'something more', the search for a deeply personal, authentic mode of experiencing). These phenomena typically coincide in that long afternoon of our lives known as midlife.

However, as an aging Baby Boomer myself, I am also given to wonder if there any factors *intrinsic to midlife* which militate *against* undertaking new challenges in lifelong learning. To answer these questions, I have found it helpful to develop some theoretical understanding of the age-related issues my students may be struggling with in the privacy of their own thoughts.

How we regard our potential at any age, but most particularly during the latter stage of our lives, has an enormous impact on our overall perception of ourselves as lifelong learners. As mentioned earlier, what we hold to be true shapes our experience to a large degree. Perception goes a long way to creating reality. Conversely, simply being aware of having choices frees one to claim them.

In her book, *Aged by Culture* (2004), Margaret Morganroth Gullette identifies herself as a 'cultural critic of aging'. Gullette states, "If we mean by ideology a system that socializes us into certain beliefs and ways of speaking about what it means to be 'human' while suppressing alternatives, it is useful to call this training 'age ideology' [in reference to aging]" (Gullette, p. 7). This phenomenon relies hugely on image, (i.e. the product of the camera). Gullete quotes Susan Sontag as saying, "The camera has ended by effecting a tremendous promotion of the value of appearances" (Gullette, p.7). She points out that, "Appearance and selfhood, increasingly, are stickily twined" (Gullette, p. 7), but she looks farther afield and finds abundant similar evidence for the belief in human obsolescence. Highly critical of anti-aging marketing, Gullette notes that "…youthfulness is symbolic capital …As such, it can be a possession only of the chronologically young, and then only briefly. After that, dominant culture soon exposes the aging to the various kinds of identity stripping related to the category of age" (Gullette, p. 22). The passage of time leads to the loss of our symbolic capital (Gullette, p. 22), i.e. our worth and identity. Gullette acknowledges that while women are more affected by these factors than men (p. 23), both sexes are aged by culture, leading to a situation in which simply *having an age at all* as a human being in a world of glossy images is grounds for shame

and self-rejection (Gullette, p. 181). "Your age in itself, neutral as a fact, can work like aging-as-decline to strip away other idiosyncratic identities. You can add age –not only old age, but other age states — as another identity that, lacking consciousness-raising…can feel totalizing" (Gullette, p. 180).

By midlife, the adult has had a lifetime of exposure to' aging by culture', or, as Madge would say in the old Palmolive commercial, 'You're soaking in it'. Regrettably, the midlife adult who unquestioningly accepts the negative myths and cultural conditioning about aging is much less likely to approach a challenging new activity such as painting and drawing with wholehearted gusto. Perhaps this accounts, in part, for the enormous trepidation I sense from my midlife beginners when they first come to my classes.

The negative impact of being 'aged by culture' cannot be minimized. The self-rejection, which corresponds to negative beliefs about aging, can radically limit an individual's sense of possibility, turning it into *im*possibility. Adults who do not (dare to) question the over-the-hill myths, or who are afraid that they will appear ridiculous if they do, may never commit deeply to interests outside of their jobs and families. A heavy heart may secretly burden even those students in midlife or later maturity who do undertake painting classes, if they believe they are too old to do anything of value.

I am not contending that there is no physical decline in one's latest years. Certainly, we lose some sharpness of vision, some suppleness of flesh. We may have more aches and pains, or more serious health concerns. However, living long and living well are not only functions of the physical realm. Excluding illness, the mind does not age. Our attitude of mind and spirit is a crucial factor in the quality of our lives *all our* lives and especially after our 'first youth'.

I feel it is extremely important to expose my students to alternative models regarding the developmental stages of the adult, particularly the logic-driven stage of formal operations, in order to compensate for the negative stereotypes we have been acculturated to believe. Otherwise, these myths may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

While each student brings different issues to the painting class, it is my job, as their teacher to 'diagnose' their difficulties and assist them as much as I can with both internal and external challenges. Much of my job as an art teacher is to foster and facilitate a state of 'presence' — present moment awareness — in my students. To this end, I attempt to 'diagnose' and deal with issues, which are detriments to my students' progress in painting as they arise. There is a sign on my studio wall, which says, 'Keep going, you're doing fine'. I posted this sign to help myself through moments of severe doubt, but it has been very useful to my students as well. It encourages them, and me, to aim for an attitude of equanimous acceptance, when the road to painting is particularly bumpy or the inner critic particularly obnoxious.

As most of my students are in midlife, let us examine what is meant by this term, and look at how this life stage and its various definitions might influence my adult students' experience of their own aging process, and consequently, their attitudes towards all possibilities (including education) that are coming to them 'later in life'.

Our ideation regarding midlife speaks directly to the subject of education, life-long learning, and, consequently, to the challenges of undertaking painting as a beginner in midlife.

Until recently (and some would say *still)* the lack of serious research on the complex and multi-faceted subject of adult development has led to misconceptions about adult midlife.

Only a few years ago, while I was completing the course work for this degree, I mentioned 'Adult Development' to an S.F.U. sessional instructor in the Education Faculty, who astonished me by saying "Adults don't develop!" The notion of fixity in adulthood is deeply rooted and pervasive in our culture.

As late as 1967, Bernice Neugarten, a pioneer researcher into adult development, wrote, "as yet we have no developmental psychology of adulthood" (Hudson, 1999, p. 37).

Current conceptions of adult development grew out of stage theories from the 1950's, in which midlife was held to be a brief station along a linear timeline, somewhere between adolescent immaturity and old age, lasting perhaps a decade.

Middle age was seen as a time when nothing much happened; a holding pattern was established and maintained. The term 'middle aged' became a pejorative term with connotations of dullness, stagnation, sexlessness, boring routine, robot-like work, and intimations of a culturally conditioned 'false self', entirely lacking the hope, interest or courage required to uncover an authentic self.

Ironically, these negative stereotypes, which were at their zenith in the '60's and '70's, may have been generated by the very Baby Boomers who are today re-writing midlife. Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boomer

generation have redefined each of life's previous developmental stages, by virtue of the sheer power of their numbers.

Their parents' generation operated under the assumption that life's trajectory could be made to proceed along a universal and predictable course, a more or less straight line leading from adolescence to adulthood to old age, with little or no growth or development after the early period of childhood education.

Having lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War, this generation had, I believe, experienced quite enough surprises, losses and changes by the time they 'settled down', got married and had children. Their desire for stability and security is extremely understandable, given their history and cultural influences. Unfortunately, like everything in life, it came with a price.

In the '60's and '70's, the young Baby Boomers formed the highly influential 'youth generation', whose catchphrase was 'Never trust anyone over thirty'. The earliest Boomers' formative years occurred in the 1950's, during which they observed their parents' and grandparents' compliance with the post-war culture of conformity. They scorned the older generation as being 'over the hill', out to pasture, deadened by decades of convention and, most damning of all, inauthentic.

Boomers exercise more control over their *perception* of aging, its limitations, and the choices available to them, than any previous generation in Western recorded history. This, most of all, is the significant factor in revisioning midlife in 2008.

To a large extent, Baby Boomers have redesigned the world to meet their own needs for pleasure and comfort, and this is nowhere more obvious than the marketplace, where foods now come in a multitude of new flavours, and much adult clothing bears a very close resemble to that of toddlers in day care. These two examples, what we eat and what we wear, are indicative of the world the Baby Boomers have created, which in many ways is a grown-up child's dream come true.

It may be observed that some or many Baby Boomers have been reluctant to grow up (or perhaps to grow up into the kind of adults their parents were). This lingering adolescence (some call it 'middlescence') has further delayed the onset of midlife. It appears that we will be young and middle-aged longer, and be getting old later.

Unlike their parents ('the silent generation') the Boomers are, as a group, more willing to look inward for personal fulfilment, rejecting culturally constructed stereotypes, including those of the ageing adult.

Today, we regard midlife as much more than the mathematical mid-point of a person's life (which of course could not be accurately calculated until after death). It is now seen as a larger, more profound and longer lasting deep stage of transition than any other phase of life.

A number of factors have altered how we are now beginning to view midlife. These include the preponderance of midlifers in contemporary society, greater life expectancy, and the Baby Boomers' reinvention of adulthood.

In his book, *The Adult Years; Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal* (1999), Hudson attributes the evolution of this view to the turbulence of our times. In

earlier times, when North American society was more stable, order prevailed over change, while today change prevails over order. Where, previously, the adult years were largely determined by society's rules, today's midlife adult must chart their own course in an ever-changing landscape of social, familial and political upheavals. "We can design our lives more or less the way we want them without inviting cultural scorn" (Hudson, p. 9).

While the Baby Boomers' parents found stability and security in what Hudson calls "the social containers of our lives,…family, workplace, community and nation,…we find those containers to be in constant flux, sometimes pulling us apart, but often allowing us to experience new roles and opportunities" (Hudson, p. 9).

He adds, "Our parents moved passively through their maturity, believing the rules and roles for getting older were definite and fixed….Invisible rules guided their lives, measured by predictable time points: when to marry, when to have children, when to retire. Cultural expectations were relatively uniform" (Hudson, p. 9). Previously, people lived 'in the shadow' of dominant institutions (government, church, marriage, corporations, and educational institutions) and sought progress through hard work, assuming their children would inherit the same ordered world.

According to Hudson,

> In a world of chaotic change, what seemed linear in the past seems cyclical today. What felt stable is turbulent; the once permanent is transitory. What we know most of all is that the society around us doesn't seem as safe or dependable or honourable as it used to be. Our institutions are discordant and our global destiny is questionable. (Hudson, p. 10)

Life is no longer seen to be a linear and stable progression. (Whether it ever actually was, and for whom, remains an interesting question.)

Life expectancy has increased also substantially, adding up to thirty years to our life expectancy. What, Hudson asks, are we supposed to do with all that extra time? "Where do we turn when we run out of script?" (Hudson, p. 10)

The format of the family group has changed. Long-held cultural rules for intimacy, marriage and family life have undergone tremendous upheavals. "With the arrival of effective birth control on the second half of the twentieth century, social patterns of intimacy changed more dramatically than at any previous point in history" (Hudson, p. 11). Adults now have numerous choices unavailable to their ancestors: marry or remain single, have children or don't, divorce or stay together — as well as increasing acceptance of same-sex alliances, which may or may not include marriage, children and blended families. Adult friendships have become more meaningful to today's midlifers of both genders, who area forming networks of created or 'chosen' families to complement or replace traditional biological family groups. "In today's world", says Hudson, "intimacy is a series of bonds and attachments, not merely *a* (italics mine) significant other" (Hudson, p. 11). (North) American adults are much more health conscious and have changed habits regarding diet, exercise, smoking, drinking, relaxation, and stress management. As Hudson says, "Today's adults see the connection between taking care of their bodies continuously and extending the quality of life into elderhood" (Hudson, p. 12).

By necessity or choice, many midlife adults will experience multiple careers in their lifetime. This might include female homemakers going back to school and into the work force once the nest has emptied, or long-employed

individuals in senior positions losing their jobs due to changes in the globalized economic climate.

As well, many Baby Boomers simply feel the inner need for a change, and are willing to take on the challenges and risks of transition in order to create a more satisfying life.

Because our cultural milieu has become increasingly changeable, Hudson proposes a cyclical rhythm of transition and self-renewal, rather than a linear progression. He recommends "…a fundamental change of consciousness, from linear to cyclical notions of how life works" (Hudson, p. 30).

Hudson points out that the way we think about our midlife has an enormous impact on our actual experience. The linear perspective can so easily lead to feelings of frustration and failure when the surprises and crises of real life fail to fit the model of consistent linear progress. He notes, "Many of the frustrations of adults today stem from the dysfunctions of the linear way of thinking, not from human incompetence. If we would alter the way we think instead of feeling bad and inadequate, our lives could be challenging and rewarding again" (Hudson, p. 31). Hudson describes the major characteristics of the linear and cyclical views as follows.

> *Linear* means, in a straight line, implying that our lives and society are supposed to get better, year by year, generation by generation. According to this point of view, adult lives progress through predictable sequences: learning, loving, working, living, leading, and succeeding. In linear thinking, adult life is viewed as an orderly development following universal principles and rules. Life is lived for future goals and results and is driven by perfectionism and social restraints…

> …*Cyclical* implies going in circles, with the repetition of familiar patterns — night and day, the four seasons, birth and death. From this perspective, the purpose of life is to master the repetitive patterns in our ever-changing experience. Cyclical thinking looks for human meaning in the ongoing flow of daily experience, from world news to family events to personal concerns. It assumes that life can make sense in good times and in bad, in growth and decline, in beginnings and endings. Cyclical thinking tolerates high levels of ambiguity and finds pathways for living in dark and unseemly places if necessary. (Hudson, p. 30)

A lifetime is seen to evolve through cycles of transition between times of stability and continuity, honouring the ups and downs as natural parts of the system of human cycle. Lifelong learning is an essential component of continuing adaptation to change. By 'learning' Hudson refers both to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and to the development of increasing self-awareness as aging midlifers examine and unlearn old ways of being in the world, rediscovering a more authentic self in the process.

I think that that the dynamics of midlife come into play at whatever time in an adult life when significant transitions are made, important life directions are changed, major expansion is attempted or one simply feels 'at sea' in a small boat, in the middle of the ocean of their life, without a compass. Significant transitions might take place at twenty-seven, forty-seven, sixty-seven, or all three. However, any attempt to attach age numbers to the term can only be presumptuous and inaccurate. I like the notion that 'midlife is the afternoon of our lives' and that it is the longest developmental period of our lives, as it reclaims a former desert (negative view of middle age) for an orchard (positive view). Given the abundance of negative age-related stereotyping which we have

been conditioned to expect in other and ourselves, I am equally disinclined to suggest an end point for midlife.

However, many would argue that midlife comes after the first flush of adulthood and certainly by retirement age. Many internal and external factors are said to provoke the cycles of transition and renewal of midlife. These include the empty nest, retirement, the retirement of a spouse, fear of the unknown, fear of more of the known, illness, divorce, death of a spouse or a parent, an abundance or a lack of retirement income, a panicky awareness of 'how long I need to keep working before I can retire safely', a fear of decline into old age, an abundance of free time to follow one's dreams, and a fear of too much empty time.

In order to further elucidate the process, I turned to the Jungian model of midlife development, referring to *The Middle Passage; From Misery to Meanin*g (1993), by Jungian analyst James Hollis.

While Hudson describes adult development largely as adaptation to external forces of change (social and cultural), Hollis views it more as the interior process of individuation.

Hollis begins with the question, "Who am I apart from my history and the roles I have played?" (Hollis, p. 7). This brings to mind Hudson's question, "What do I do when I run out of script?" and leads to some interesting thoughts about false and authentic selfhood, which require a lifetime to understand and manifest.

Hollis points out that we develop a 'provisional personality' based on childhood trauma, which may have taken the form of neglect, abandonment,

and, even in happy families, the experience of being overwhelmed by life (Hollis, p. 12).

In order to manage existential angst and prevent further hurt, the child develops defensive strategies that serve as a lens through which all experience is perceived. The child may choose "patterns of dependency …in the search for a more positive Other" (Hollis, p. 13). The Jungian model identifies such responses as autonomously operating personal complexes that are mostly unconscious and charged with energy. Hollis says, "Complexes are unavoidable because one has a personal history. The problem is not that we have complexes, but that complexes have us" (Hollis, p. 13).

Hollis points out that the so-called midlife crisis is a time to "question the conditioned nature of our own perceptions" (Hollis, p. 10). The suffering caused by the gap between our provisional personality (based on outer truth) and our true character (representing inner truth) becomes so great that old strategies and projections collapse, bringing the individual to a kind of psychological death which must precede the entry into 'second adulthood'. Hollis states that "symptoms of midlife crisis are in fact to be welcomed, for they represent not only an instinctually grounded self underneath the acquired personality but a powerful imperative for renewal" (Hollis, p. 15). Hollis appears to trust that the natural momentum of this internal process will lead the individual towards individuation, as natural part of life as teething or puberty.

Other scholars, coming to the subject of adult development from very different perspectives, have proposed similar, sometimes parallel notions. In *Adult Development, Therapy and Culture; A Postmodern Synthesis* (1997), Gerald Young takes the view that, rather than being a period of stasis, "there are steps in

development throughout the adult period" (Young, p. v). He offers a neopiagetian model, proposing, "the last stage in development concerns collective intelligence, or postmodern, postformal thought" (Young, p. v). His primary contention is that: "…neopiagetian stage theory in development offers a valid theoretical framework and leads to the development of the adult stage that is at once postformal and postmodern" (Young, p. 36).

Young seems to be drawing a parallel between the changes in our culture at large (from the traditional, to the Modern to the Postmodern) and the maturation of individuals through the concrete operational, formal and postformal stages of development.

Modernist 'fallacies', such as the myth of endless progress have been gradually bumped aside by a Postmodern psychology which is fundamentally relational rather than representational. Young notes an analogous shift in how we define the self. Within the Modernist paradigm, the self, as well as the world at large, was seen to be unified and ultimately knowable, whereas the 'Other' was seen as a threat to the autonomy and integrity of the self, rather than an opportunity for joining together in community. This led to a characteristically Modernist alienation — the exclusion of self from others. The grand meta-narratives of Modernism suppress, censor and colonize the Other into oblivion. Conversely, according to Young, "Postmodernism implies that there is no distance between reader and text, or self and other" (Young, p. 35). While the Modernist self might be said to be *ex*clusive, the self in Postmodernism appears to be *in*clusive.

Young notes that Postmodernism does not have only one face, and is in a continuous state of evolution. The face of *his* Postmodernism is extremely

positive and reconstructive. He sees even its deconstructive, skeptical and negative side as a means by which "suffocating modernism is demythified" (Young, p. 35), liberating the individual from its constrictions.

While acknowledging that "the strength of the term 'Postmodern' is [its] very absence of set characteristics", Young manages nonetheless to produce lengthy lists of attributes, such as "affirmative, multi-voiced, contextual, relational, other-sensitive" (Young, p. 45), etc. Young describes the postformal, postmodern adult mind as being:

> …relativistic, nonessentialist, multiplicitous, differentiated, constructive, accepts possibility, options, contradiction and conflict and rejects objectivist or unidimensional, perspectives of reality. It is marked by fusion in traditional oppositions such as cognition and emotion, self and other, and abstract values and their opposites…Adult thought is self-created, or narrates its own stories and constructions, and ultimately becomes aware of this process.
>
> (Young, p. 45)

Rather than disputing its very existence, Young states that "truth is perceived as shifting, fragmentary and without foundation" (Young, p. 35) and that it is "…respected for its inherent uncertainty, ambiguity, diversity and complexity" (Young, p. 36). For him,

> …Postmodernism is appealing because of its optimism. Humans are not to be trapped by prefigured truths, but should continuously refigure their emergent truth configurations about the self, the other and the world in a contextually sensitive manner... Living with and through the other is an authentic, empathic, respecting, responsible, agency-promoting (dare I say loving?) communion which becomes the linchpin process in developing the self, the other and the earth in their constitutive mutuality.
>
> (Young, pp. 42-43)

Both Jung and Young seem to suggest that self-awareness is the maturational leap forward which can overcome nihilism and despair, which may, as in Hudson's cycles, be seen as a temporary stage in the trajectory of adult development, perhaps not unlike the terrible two's of infancy.

Young says, "At this juncture, the individual realizes the incompleteness of material plenitude and of the self, and manifests deep spiritual desire to meet infinity in the face of the other" (Young, p. 43).

Young's Postmodernism offers a holistic and affirmative interpretation of contemporary Postmodern thinking about the self in adulthood, taking us from the binary, Cartesian 'certainties' of extreme youth to the ambiguous, diverse, complex and uncertain truths of postformal thought in mature adulthood. In art as in life, the self, and the culture never stop evolving. It is in this transition from exclusivity to inclusivity that hope is to be found.

In his book, *The Adult Learner; A Neglected Species* (1973), Malcolm Knowles demonstrates how the gap is closing between adult- and child-focused learning models. Contemporary pedagogy is moving away from authoritarian methodologies, toward a respect for the whole person, whatever age they may be. He makes the point that traditionally, adults have been taught like children because teaching methods are based on child learning theories (pedagogy); whereas "adults bring motivation, goals, expectations and experience to a learning situation that are totally different from a child's (Knowles, p. v)". In the alternative 'androgogical model' Knowles prescribes he notes that adults need to understand *why* they need to learn something before undertaking it, that their life experience and self-concept must be respected, and that their learning styles and motivations may be idiosyncratic.

In *The* Third *Age; Six Principles for Growth and Renewal After Forty* (2000), William A. Sadler offers yet another model of midlife. His title refers to the extra thirty years of our increased life expectancy. He opens the book with a story about a trip to Africa, where he noticed the enormous vitality of 'older' men (in their fifties, sixties and seventies). He concluded that American men of the same years are aging prematurely, and unnecessarily so. He attributes this to our cultural assumptions about normal patterns of adult development and aging, a pattern of stereotypes, which are, quite simply, frightening: equating midlife and beyond as a period of predictable identity crisis, degeneration, decline, and generally *feeling lousy*.

Sadler points out that *fear* of this process may age people much more quickly than the simple passage of years, and offers the premature decline of his own mother as an example. He points out that midlife is an unknown country and we do not yet have useful maps. He talks about midlife as a potential time for renewal, and offers the analogy of an airplane; we have to decide if we are taking off, or landing. He boils the choices down to risk or stagnation.

Referring to the midlife period as one of new growth, second growth or the Third Age, he identifies the primary obstacle as one of failure of imagination: we must be able to see past the myths that have throttled our imaginations regarding our future beyond midlife. We need maturity to defy the mainstream cultural construct of aging, which must be examined and dismantled in order to free up the runway for our take-off into the next stage of life.

In *Transformations*: *Growth and Change in Adult Life* (1978), Roger L. Gould describes the journey we take from childhood to autonomous adulthood, as a process of gradually shedding layers of defensive devices, or myths, which we

initially form and employ in childhood to create and protect the illusion of absolute safety which is so necessary to a young child's survival. Gould argues that our full developments as adults at various stages in our lives, depends upon letting go of these assumptions, a process that includes a sense of loss followed by temporary disorientation. Over decades, with the added push of significant events and upheavals in our lives, as we gradually relinquish the false assumptions and self-deceptions which kept us unconsciously identified with our relatively powerless (but seemingly 'safe') child-selves, we gradually come to trust our own adult experience and judgment.

The developmental process Gould describes is clearly not for the faint of heart and cannot take place without the shedding of many layers of childhood illusions. Bringing the process to its full fruition requires willingness to open up to what is inside, and face the contradictions between received lore, defensive illusions and lived experience.

In Gould's closing chapter, he describes the opportunity that can accompany mature years, of reaching full self-acceptance, and claiming personal authority. In his admittedly optimistic scenario, all that is false or culturally conditioned, can be burned away by the friction of decades of living. The willingness to confront the unknown (i.e. to undergo rigorous self-scrutiny and personal inquiry) provides tinder for the spark.

Most of the writers I have mentioned here have acknowledged that the cycles of transition, while necessary for renewal, are accompanied by painful feelings of ending and loss. One cannot progress through these stages on automatic pilot. Real consciousness and courage are required — the same features at the heart of any creative endeavour.

In *Creativity and Successful Aging* (1998), Jan D. Sinnot offers additional insights into the postformal stage of adult development in relation to creativity. She states

> …creativity in midlife and old age takes on specific cognitive qualities (i.e. those of postformal thought) that are adaptive in everyday life because they regulate the integration of intellectual and emotional stimulation from events or people…The products of this mature thought are better reflections of the union of emotion and cognition, of heart and mind, than are the products which the younger person creates. (Sinnot, p. 43)

She adds,

> Since it is the process (rather than the product) that is inherently creative in postformal thought, and the process that is productive, if a thinker has access to a postformal process in an domain at all, she or he has the cognitive processes that equate with creativity. (Sinnot, p. 52)

It is clear that creativity is key to achieving a satisfying midlife, and that the natural progression to the process of postformal thought predisposes the midlife adult towards it, balancing out the so-called deficits of aging **(**with**,** for example, the benefits of divergent thinking**)**. We will examine creativity, inspiration and motivation in the visual arts in the following chapters.

The Genius Myth

As a teacher of painting, I am aware that the 'exemplar' of the professional artist at the back of our minds impacts significantly upon both my hobbyist students' and my own sense of what is possible and 'legitimate' to create, as

painting, as art. This imagio trickles down to us from media representations of the professional art world, and culturally constructed myths about the artist. We are influenced by numerous, often-unexamined assumptions about past and present philosophies and approaches to art making, as well as notions about talent, creativity, novelty and originality. These notions tend to 'trickle down' from our highest institutions of learning, eventually making their way into the public domain and, inevitably, the continuing ed classroom.

Any inquiry into the question of creativity in the visual arts must ultimately rest upon our notions of what art is, what art making is and what constitutes artistic identity. Our ideas about creativity are intimately bound up with notions of 'genius', a word we use to refer to the highest level of creative achievement. The *myth of genius* is central to our discussions of creativity and must be taken into account, for it is here that all the crucial questions intersect, shaping attitudes towards creativity in artists, art educators, students, consumers, therapists, critics, and the public.

Despite its advanced age and chequered history, the genius myth is alive and well and still doing damage in the twenty-first century. A humourous piece in Vancouver's most prestigious art school's newspaper spoofs students' interpretations of their grades; "A" means "genius", "B" indicates a "genius" whose work is incomplete, and "C" (which the student takes as a failing grade) means "misunderstood genius". The author cautions that teachers who mark below a B do so at their own peril (Moisiewitsch, *Planet of the Arts,* 1998).

The notion of genius comes up again in another recent publication, in the editor's column of another local art school's winter brochure. "There is a myth", she writes, "which many of us were raised believing, that artists are born, not

made. Many of us have been fed the legend that we are not artistic if we were not churning out masterful artworks since the age of three." The editor goes on to dispel the notion that real, practicing artists are "supposedly just born talented with no effort required on their part" (Fowers, 1998). She points out that art can be learned at a serious level in adulthood with sufficient work and practice. She cites Van Gogh as an example, and encourages her readers to sign up for a course.

These unscholarly publications reveal a number of commonly held beliefs about artistic production. One must be a "born, not made 'genius'" from the outset in order to do it. If you are a born genius, execution is easeful; no actual effort is required to develop your potential, nor need you learn from others; you need only 'express yourself'. Anything less than a brilliant performance, even as a student, indicates an absence of genius and, therefore, utter failure. And the role of education in cultivating visual artists is believed to be dubious at best; standards of evaluation appear to have lost all meaning, and there is considerable doubt as to whether art can be taught at all.

According to Kieran Egan (1992), myths are "evidence of great intellectual energy, not of some infirmity of the mind" (Egan, p. 10). I believe it is safe to assume that the myth of genius still turns up in art school publications precisely because it remains an issue of great intellectual consequence to the students and faculty there. Joking though the first piece quoted may be, its choice of subject is significant, a topic that is still 'on the table'. Yet, with all the detrimental baggage the genius myth still so persuasively carries, we have to wonder if the joke's on us.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am taking the position that the 'myth' of genius is an ideational construct and a historically determined cultural artefact. In *The Stigma of Genius* (1992), Joe L. Kincheloe agrees that the notion of genius, as a cultural artefact, is socially constructed to correspond to tacit manifestations of power. He says, "The vocal, the power elite, define what is socially acceptable to be called genius" (Kincheloe, p. 136). Similarly, members of the art world such as critics and their readers *construct* notions of greatness. Kincheloe disputes the notion of 'undiscovered genius', suggesting that "unless the consenting public approves in some collective manner that genius exists, it does not" (Kincheloe, p. 136). 'Genius' exists by consensus (as does art). Kincheloe states: "…the understanding of consciousness construction involves ex-posing how social values, epistemological assumptions and dominant views of the world unconsciously shape the beliefs, values and actions of individuals" (Kincheloe, p. 64).

I do not hope to affirm or deny the appearance of so-called 'geniuses' throughout human history; that is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, I wish to investigate the effects of a belief system about art making, handed down to us in its present form from the 19th century Romantics.

The English word "genius" arose from a conflation of Italian and Latin terms. The Italian 'genio' like the Latin 'genius', referred to divine forces associated with and protective of male fertility. Clearly, genius was constructed as a male attribute. 'Ingegno' like the Latin 'ingenium' was associated with good judgment, knowledge, talent, dexterity, facility, skill, etc. By the 17th century these terms had collapsed together, though the term 'genius' was still ambiguous. By the 18th century, the name 'genius' was applied not just to the

quality (dexterity, skill, etc.) of the achievement, but to the *individual manifesting it* (Battersby, 1989).

Changes in the usage of the word 'genius' paralleled developments in artistic identity. Thus the development of the genius myth can be traced in the evolution of the individual artist from primal shaman, to manual labourer/artisan to the exemplary specimen of humanity we call 'genius' today (Haynes, 1997).

During the Renaissance, the role of the skilled artisan, a commoner who worked with his hands, began to give way to the persona of the Great Artist, the Great *Man.* Educated in the arts and sciences, the 'gentleman' artist was eager to assume the cachet of *fame,* which so perfectly complemented the Florentine atmosphere of wealth and public display at that time (Feldman, 1982). The notion of 'easeful execution' in the genius myth originated at this time. Battersby (1989) explains the idea of 'effortlessness' attached to genius in this context:

> Being able to execute one's design without sweating over it became one of the qualities most valued in an artist. It harmonized well with the class pretensions of the new group of painters and sculptors who wanted to play down the manual work associated with their professions. (Battersby, p. 27)

These developments took place in the service of upgrading working conditions, wages and professional status of the artist/artisan.

Simultaneously, however, the genius myth was further advanced by the placement of enormous emphasis on the *personhood of* the individual creator. Creative brilliance was explained by means of that person's innate specialness. The artist was seen to be one of the chosen few, an individual mysteriously

singled out, ostensibly by God, from the undistinguished mass of uncreative humanity. We carry this notion of the scarcity and exclusivity of creativity into the present day, as well as the sense of separation of art from everyday life.

The Romantics associated artistic greatness with the qualities of madness, melancholy and mystery, which further validated the artist as genius. The notion of the *very special individual* - had come into full flower. "The typical genius was atypical…an Outsider, misunderstood by society and at odds with it" (Battersby, p. 13). Here we see the beginning of a schism between artist and public, a stereotype which still exists today in many quarters.

During the rise of Romantic art, an oppressive religiosity was on the decline, and with it, spirituality. Progress and science were the new gods. Romantic artists are discussed in pseudo-religious language, but mystification replaces genuine mysticism, elitism replaces a perfectly natural, human, "species-centric", rather than a wholly cultural, art-making tendency (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 3).

Egotistic concerns for fame and gain replace transpersonal methodologies for the good of the community; nihilism replaces a reverent awe for life. Thus we see the emergence of a counterfeit spirituality, a secular, materialist distortion in the service of inflating, rather than transcending, the artist's own ego. The Romantic artists of the 19th century could not have been farther removed from their primal ancestors, the shamans, those anonymous, visionary messengers of the gods who created transformational artefacts for the good of the whole community (London, 1989).

These specially selected, privileged, male, white heroes basked in their power and position; their Outsider status distinguished them from the 'common

herd' of humanity. At a time when social upheaval, industrialization and the move to city life began to rewrite the role of women, they reinforced the essential superiority of males by claiming the ground of 'genius' for their gender and their race

Feminist critic Christine Battersby (1989) notes that the category of genius had to work by a process of exclusion, notably that of females, and that we still lack the language to discuss female artistic excellence in anything but gendered vocabulary. She points out that, creative women must still negotiate aesthetic concepts taken from a biology and mythology, which are profoundly anti-female (Battersby, p. 23). Insofar as it operates on sexist and racist premises, the genius myth is elitist, exclusionary and destructive.

The unexamined assumptions embedded in the myth of artistic genius, function as a hindrance to artistic development and production in a number of different ways.

The genius myth sets up erroneous criteria for artistic aptitude, and an impossible model for artistic identity. The genius myth misrepresents the nature of artistic production, (i.e. the idiosyncrasies of 'creative process'), disparaging the ordinary work required in order to achieve excellence in a given discipline — the 'perspiration' which must precede 'inspiration'.

The sense of predestination in the genius myth functions as a detriment to imagination and encourages an inappropriate passivity. Skinner (1976) points out that "waiting for the genie" amounts to "making a virtue of ignorance" (Skinner, p. 271). Wallas (1976) mentions the undesirable possibility of an excessive focus on relaxation, or 'incubation' in the hope of courting 'illumination' (Wallas, p. 95).

Bailin (1993) too points out the folly of merely waiting for intuition to strike, while doing no cognitive work (Bailin, p. 47). Based on the belief that 'either you have it (genius) or you don't', the genius myth has a particularly deleterious effect on the budding artist's work ethic, as it is believed that you can't 'get there' by steady work; this is disparaged as 'plodding', what the 'cattle' do.

Hattiangadi (1985) points out that the notion of the 'born, not made' genius who must defy his training downgrades the validity of both work and study in the pursuit of artistic excellence.

But it is in the area of education that the genius myth does its greatest damage. "The single question that has haunted the history of teaching art from the Renaissance to the 20th century is precisely what should be taught and whether the essence of art can be taught, or, simply — *can art be taught?"* (Goldstein, 1996, p. 4). The consensus seems to be that art, as a product of genius, cannot be taught anyway, so we need not bother trying. This belief reveals an extremely negative view of education per se.

Which brings us back to our question: if the art of genius *cannot* be taught, exactly what can? What *is* being taught in art schools and night school painting studios? Reinforcing the assumption that art cannot be taught, the genius myth perpetuates itself, resulting in poor quality art education and hence a dumbing-down of otherwise gifted, intelligent people

Bailin (1985) notes that a skill-building focus in arts education is often seen as counter-productive, limiting to creativity, even as an educational evil (Bailin, p. 111). This viewpoint suggests that our untutored instincts are more valuable than what we might develop those instincts into through learning. Bailin

couldn't disagree more. She argues that mastery of the rules, skills and knowledge of a discipline can foster creativity by giving one the freedom and control to transcend existing rules and boundaries (Bailin, 1994, p. 100). In her view, the skilled practitioners of an art are in the best position to innovate traditions. Eisner (2002) is in agreement, stating, "There are no complex tasks or forms of thinking whose mastery is best optimized by pedagogical neglect" (Eisner, p. 46).

Implicit in the genius myth is the notion of needing to have 'the talent' as a pre-requisite to learning basic skills. Betty Edwards, author of *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (1986), discusses the notion of inborn versus learned skills in drawing. She makes her point by comparing drawing ability with the ability to read. Supposing, she says, that we thought of reading ability as a special, mysterious talent that only some people are 'born with'. We would expose children to reading materials as playthings, but not actually teach them much of anything (as we do with art works and art materials). Some few kids would pick it up and learn to read. Most would not. The ability to read would be seen as something not everyone can do. People would say, 'No wonder little Jimmy can read; he was born with it. His grandfather was a really good reader,' and others would say, 'Oh, I could never learn to read, I just don't have the talent' (Edwards, p. 6).

Buying into the genius myth encourages a distracting and destructive ego trip: 'God picked *me*', or, perhaps worse, the secular conceit that ' *I* am great'. This involves unnecessary side issues of celebrity, power and superiority over others, in the making of art. The notion of superiority must then be maintained, wasting creative energy on appearances rather than the artwork. And even if one

is seen to 'have it', the sense of fraudulence lingers. 'Am I really getting away with this? How long can it last?'. The discrepancy between inner self-perception and the outward 'hype' of the 'genius act' leads to a sense of deception and self-loathing.

Unexamined, the genius myth leads to unnecessary anxiety and depression for the beginning painter, who wonders, "Have I got 'it'? Am I one of the chosen?" Being seen as 'uncreative' by other students is an agony to be avoided at all cost. Just as the designation of 'genius' carries the authority of a divine message, so does the apparent lack of it. It is as though, when difficulty arose in the production of visual art, one was being told to give it up, stop trying; you will never be good enough.

Thus we see that the flip side of the genius myth is the scrap heap of mediocrity, causing many creative individuals enormous pain and frustration, a pervasive feeling of inadequacy and, finally, the sense of failure. Often this leads to an abandonment of art making, and much creative energy goes to waste.

'Genius' supposedly permits the artist to create artworks which are stunning in their novelty and originality, as though they arose 'out of the blue'. Both Weisberg (1994) and Hattiangadi (1985) have pointed out that an excessive emphasis on novelty tends to backfire, resulting in humdrum ideas or outright paralysis of creativity. The pressure to do something completely original, something you have never done before, and which no one else will think of, is a negative instruction that cannot be followed.

The notion of the genius creating 'something out of nothing', god-like, denies the validity of antecedents in the creative process and discourages would-

be artists from utilizing their accumulated life experience. Again, this leads to a fundamental self-rejection and a tragic waste of talents.

On the subject of originality, Bailin (1994) points out that what we regard as works of genius, are examples of excellence within the rules of their discipline. Innovative departures are less radical than we tend to think; only a small part is innovated out of the whole, and we tend to focus on that small part. Thus we see that even innovative art-work adheres largely to the rules of the tradition. Bailin shows us how the old is part of the new, which is what makes innovations comprehensible. There are always continuous threads and antecedents arising from a previous, intact framework. She argues that the value of an artwork is grounded in its form, which is inseparable from its content. What we identify as artistic quality includes both the innovative and the accomplished in terms of style and technique (Bailin, 1994).

Hattiangadi (1985) points out that the abandonment of tradition in the slavish pursuit of novelty in art making leads not to better [i.e. more significant] art but to less art. Thus, he whimsically leans in the other direction, exhorting artists "not to abandon cliché but to perfect it", for it is through mastery of the genre that innovation will naturally evolve (Hattiangadi, p. 48). In *Art & Fear* (1993), Bayles and Orland point out that, setting out to make one perfect work of art (aiming for *quality)* is doomed to perfectionist paralysis and failure, while setting out to make as many works as possible (aiming for *quantity*) leads to the development of much greater skill and creativity (Bayles & Orland, p. 29).

Hattiangadi's sardonic send-up of the genius myth paints a chilling picture of the difficulty and the misery of attempting to actually live it. The genius "must be seen as a madman" (Hattiangadi, p. 42) who "rejects all that

other people seek to achieve" (Hattiangadi, p. 45), for whom conventional success is a sure sign of failure by genius standards. Torn between "a lonely, higher or happy, lower truth" (Hattiangadi, p. 44), the 'genius' is destined to become an anguished, cynical, disparaging character, dedicated to remaining obscure, misunderstood, reviled; he (and it is always "*he*") looks down on others, who in turn hate him. And, "because genius cannot be judged by ordinary standards, art loses all standards" (Hattiangadi, p. 47).

While Bailin (1994) acknowledges that there is no technique for expression, nor is there an exclusively linear progression in art, she also disputes the notion that creativity depends entirely on 'extraordinary thinking', noting that "the view of divine inspiration excludes craft from the realm of art" (Bailin, p. 30). She maintains that all thought combines both vertical and lateral modes**.** She concedes that "there is *an element* of conscious and active agency needed in the execution of products of the imagination" (italics mine), suggesting that, while judgment always operates, unconscious processes also have a role to play in creativity.

Thus we see that genius has been viewed alternately as the effortless interpretation of God, and as simply the results of higher-order 'ordinary' thinking. While the Romantics downplayed the cognitive, 'ordinary' aspect of creating, today's creativity scholars downplay the ineffable. Can either of these partial viewpoints be correct? *Is* 'genius' just 'mere creativity', no special state, as a number of scholars have claimed? If not, what *is* the role of divine inspiration, illumination, leaps, intuition, and ecstasy? Need an artwork exhibit 'genius' in order to have value? How then are we to regard more ordinary or 'everyday' artworks, and more ordinary or everyday art-makers?

The notion of artistic genius, with all its associated values and conditions, represents a way of thinking about creativity, which is fundamentally flawed. It functions as a hindrance to artistic production and education insofar as it negatively conditions and circumscribes our thinking about artistic creation. It fails to accommodate the complexity and diversity of creative practice, setting up hierarchies (i.e. art vs. craft, male vs. female, Western vs. non-Western) in the service of elitism. These reductive and harmful conventions diminish, rather than empowering, the artist and the student of art.

Thus the genius myth — deterministic, exclusionary and arbitrary — is catastrophic as a model for would-be artists. It represents a model of art making so flawed that it cannot be lived, and, as such, is destined to self-destruct. One hopes it won't take too many students down with it.

Bad Teaching

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) defines 'bad' as: inferior, inadequate, defective, unpleasant, unwelcome, unsatisfactory, unfortunate and/or harmful.

The problem with bad teaching is that one often does not know it was bad until it is over. Unless one is already thoroughly familiar with the subject being taught (in which case, one likely would not be seeking instruction), or is well acquainted with pedagogical frameworks, the nature and quality of instruction seems perfectly natural, especially when it carries the authority of a respected and hard-to-get-into teaching institution, such as the various art schools across the country. This is especially true of young people studying at an introductory or foundation level, who are, through inexperience, more likely to feel

intimidated by the institution. It is usually only in retrospect, after graduation perhaps, that one realizes that something, or a lot of things, were missing or misrepresented in their education.

The trickle-down effect mentioned earlier regarding notions about artistic production, applies equally to the nature and quality of studio art instruction. In both style and content, the influence of teaching styles in university and art colleges' studio programs will eventually reappear in continuing education courses at the same institution and other venues.

Bad teaching generally replicates itself, unless mighty, individual efforts are made to the contrary. Graduates of bad instruction in painting departments will themselves become teachers. If their foundation is shaky, they will be in no position to pass on a better version to their students. They may sense the gaps in their skills and knowledge, but the inadequacies of their education may be misinterpreted as inadequacies within themselves. This gives the inner critic the opportunity to run riot, resulting in further damage to that artist/instructor's confidence, as well as feelings of fraudulence and shame.

On the other hand, the poorly educated would-be painting teacher *might* recognize the flaws in her own education, and commit to the considerable task of privately repairing the potholes in her knowledge, effectively re-educating herself so that she can provide a better, more solid foundation for her students and for herself in the process. However, because of the investment of time and energy required, I believe that this is a rarely occurring phenomenon. Without this voluntary re-education, the cycle of bad teaching replicates itself, as does any uninterrupted and unexamined cycle of abuse or neglect.

What is 'bad teaching' in studio art? Having had what I would consider to be a poor, even damaging 'education' at two different art schools, thousands of miles apart in this country, I will refer to my own experience in answering this question.

Failure to appear, never mind teach, heads this list. However, failure to appear carries one small advantage; an instructor who did not show up in class could at least do no actual damage to students.

The next item on my list is failure to teach. The absence of instruction in first year at School A was particularly problematic, as 'the basics' were meant to be covered in foundation year, seemingly to be ignored thereafter. After first year, the absence of instruction on colour, composition, brushwork etc., was justified with the comment, 'You learned all that in foundation year'. While we did receive a bit of instruction in each of our foundation courses, it was by no means comprehensive, as there is always more to learn. It was unfortunate that my instructors in later years were not inclined to teach it.

My painting instructors at the School B prepared no lesson plans, developed no curriculum, and demonstrated nothing at all in a hands-on manner. They failed entirely to pass on the skills and knowledge of the discipline of painting, or to stimulate their students' growth in a coherent fashion. In numbers beyond counting, teaching opportunities were missed. These instructors, mostly older men, appeared to have formed no *intention* to teach. Elkins (2001) argues that *intentionality* is the first requirement for the profession, saying,

> Before I can ask whether art can be taught, I need a working definition of teaching…Though I think teaching can be many

> things, I also think there is an indispensable component to anything that could be called teaching, and that is intentionality. The teacher must *mean* to impart something at a certain moment, and must *intend* it for a certain audience… what matters is that she intends to teach and does not teach by mistake or randomly… Because no matter what else teaching is it is not a comprehensible activity unless the teacher sets out to teach" (Elkins, p. 92)…"Teaching isn't teaching unless the teacher *intends* to teach at any particular moment. (Elkins, p. 93)

It is a sad fact that the painting teachers at School B did not take their responsibilities to their students very seriously at all, and their employer, the art school who paid their salaries, failed entirely to hold them accountable.

I can recall numerous occasions, in drawing classes at both art schools, when we were presented with an enormous tangle of items (a still life set-up), and simply told, "Draw that," before the instructor left the room for his break. Naturally, it was overwhelming. Where to start? How to begin? Little or no instruction was offered. We interpreted our bewilderment as personal inadequacy rather than non-performance on the part of the faculty.

Today I would see to it that students used viewfinders to select a portion of the set-up, and had learned various strategies for analyzing form (contour and gesture drawing, negative space and geometrical analysis).

Whether the instructors who ordered us to "Draw that!" did not know about these helpful concepts and tools, or did not approve of their use, we will never know. What I do know is that their non-instructional approach caused unnecessary suffering and self-doubt in sincere and sensitive art students. Failing to teach, yet expecting students to be somehow able to perform as though we already knew how was an abuse of their position of trust. The situation also

fostered unhealthy competitiveness; there were always a few students who *had been* 'learned how' usually during a previous stint at a community college. Their ability to successfully 'draw that' set them apart as 'the highly talented', and also, nonsensically, set them up as 'stars' in the eyes of the teaching staff. This only heightened the others' sense of inadequacy, by comparison.

What the painting instructors did do, when not literally snoring, asleep in their offices, was to walk around the painting department and chat up a student here and a student there. These mini -'critiques' were delivered in the style of free association; if you were doing this, why not try that; look up a dead artist who had similar interests; or, be careful not to make work that too closely resembles that of the same dead artist

Elkins is critical of peripatetic painting teachers who pass off improvised, stream-of-consciousness monologues as 'teaching', because they lack intentionality. "…to see why I would not consider that to be teaching, imagine what would happen if a physics professor were to do the same thing…such a professor would take limited responsibility for trying to understand what the student might need" (Elkins, p. 93).

At School B, group critiques tended towards this same free-associative style, instructors offering commentary, which was too scattered, shallow and confusing to be helpful. In his book, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (2001), Elkins discusses the inadvisability of these kinds of critiques, arguing that no one knows what an art critique is or should be, that they are too short, and tend to drift from topic to topic, according to the idiosyncratic pronouncements and emotional outbursts of the instructors (Elkins, pp. 112-132). He says, "Almost any statement that occurs in a critique has this characteristic: it does not include its

rationale" (Elkins, p. 171) and "…almost everything said in art critiques ultimately depends on unexamined assumptions and axioms" (Elkins, p. 175).

His strategy for detoxifying the effects of a confusing, harmful or useless critique is brilliant. He tape-records the critique, and has it transcribed into text, eliminating identifying features of all individuals involved. Then, he and his class will study the text in order to deconstruct the critique, using a "chain of questions" (p. 170).

The class first looks for judgments, ("A statement made in the course of a critique"); then, the reason for the judgment ("The justification given when someone asks for it"); the assumption behind the reason, ("The unexamined or unrecognized principle behind the reason and the judgment"). Elkins notes that, "The principal difficulty in going further is that evoking deeper, unexamined assumptions is like pulling teeth" Elkins, p. 173), as it becomes increasingly different to frame the questions. Eventually, the questioning reveals the "final assumption [which] could better be called an *axiom*, since like the axioms of mathematics it cannot appeal to a higher authority for justification… Philosophers also call statements like this dogmas, unexamined terms, givens and postulates" (Elkins, p. 174). Elkins notes, "Often axioms have little to do with art" and that they tend to boil down to "e*ndoxa*, universal, trivial truths akin to 'Don't go out in public without clothes'" (Elkins, p. 175).

Thus, Elkins' analysis of art school critiques offers much insight into the grounds for his questions, "Can art be taught?" in art schools.

If art can be taught — with intention — it rarely was, in the second art school I attended. As students in the painting department were not given assignments, we could not possibly know what was expected of us. We were, I

think, meant to 'paint our ideas'. This sounds acceptable enough until one imagines it being the case across the board and all the time. Without intelligent instructor input, the educational downside to this approach was that we were then limited by our currently extant ideas, rather than using them to expand our present thinking within the stimulating context of a curriculum.

As well, instructors tended to critique the paintings we produced through this approach as though these products and the ideas they grew from, were the committed 'statements' of mature, experienced artists — rather than the experiments of second year painting students who were working their way through a smorgasbord of possibilities in the process of finding ourselves as painters. One had a sense, from the glaring lack of generosity of spirit, that the instructors were engaged in an unhealthy competition with the students. The ensuing critiques (aka 'attacks') on our work left us afraid to experiment, as we felt we would be humiliated if we tried something that we could not easily justify in that unsympathetic environment.

This is one example of an appalling lack of positive nurturance at the second art school, in those years. This lack and its constant companion and corollary — destructive criticism, bullying and verbal abuse — were extraordinarily harmful to sensitive, sincere young painting students.

For example, when I was laid up with a bad back in third or fourth year, I took advantage of my immobility to explore still life painting at home, working from the objects nearest to hand. This was quite a departure from my usual abstract work. When I showed these small studies to my instructor, he became very angry and insulting, and told me, if I wanted to paint stuff like that (reflections in a toaster) I should not be in the painting department at all, I should

be in the commercial art department! The content of his advice may not have been far off; since this instructor seemed incapable of teaching anything of a technical nature — but his unmistakeably abusive tone of denigration and rejection left me with the impression that still life was not a legitimate subject for painting, and I'd be very foolish ever try it again. My motivation and curiosity for still life painting went deep underground for a very long time after that.

His reaction was complete nonsense of course. Nonetheless, at the time it was psychologically damaging, emotionally wounding and artistically stultifying.

Another incident: A lovely young man joined the painting department and began to paint vases of flowers. His choice of subject was so brazenly *corny*, so politically incorrect at Art School B at that time, he and his work became the butt of many instructors' jokes. We students were mortified for him and not surprised when he left after only one term. However, no one thought to ask the instructors for an explanation: what, exactly, was wrong with painting flowers?

I now understand that some of these incidents occurred because of the unspoken 'rules' for 'acceptable' painting which were rigidly held by our instructors at that time. In 1983 most of our instructors were about 53 years of age, which means that they were impressionable young painters in the 1950's, when Abstract Expressionism was in vogue. The then-revolutionary Ab-Ex credo included a number of ideas and ideals, which were antithetical to the teaching of skills and knowledge in painting. Here are some examples of 'the rules of abstraction' (MacGregor, 1981): "To eliminate intellectual control and paint with emotion, spontaneity and feelings; Not to use concept or colour sketches; The

conscious effort to obliterate obvious literal subject matter; Non-imitative use of colour." Decorative or narrative painting was considered decadent.

Painting was believed to be an entirely intuitive process, which had to stand alone, without cognitive or conceptual supports. If the rational and conceptual aspects of painting and drawing were not valued, not seen as 'worth learning', of course they would not be taught. Looking back to 1983, it appears that the instructors of whom I speak did not believe that [this kind of] painting could be taught and to attempt to do so would violate the students' idiosyncratic intuition and invention, as well as violating the ideals of Ab-Ex, which strove to release painting from the decadence of mimesis. These instructors believed that the teaching of mimetic technique would hinder the development of ideas.

From the perspective of 2008, it is now obvious how the 'rules of abstraction' tie in with the genius myth. Intuition is definitely something one has or one does not have, at any given moment in time. Intuition cannot *specifically* be taught. However, the many component ways of knowing, seeing and doing that combine, quickly and through long experience, to make up what we *call* 'intuition' can, I believe, be taught. But it doesn't make for a very flashy process. If the instructors and the institution in 1983 wanted to *appear* to be turning out 'cutting-edge painters' — perhaps a last vicarious kick at the can for some instructors whose careers hadn't quite panned out as expected — *it wouldn't do* to teach students the time-honoured if time-worn skills and techniques of drawing, watercolour and genre painting (landscape, still life, figure, portrait etc) — however valuable those skills might one day become.

Such teaching, although it would have provided a solid foundation and most certainly prepared students to be postmodern painters twenty years later,

would, in 1983, appear old hat, old fashioned, behind the times, outré. To appear to be avant-garde was the objective, and this required indenture to the gods of novelty and originality. As Ben Shahn confesses in *The Shape of Content* (1957), he did not wish to "epatez le bourgeoisie" as much as he wanted to "epatez l'avante-garde", so pressured did he feel to conform to the 'non-conformist conventions of painting' (i.e. abstraction), even if those conventions originally started out as acts of defiance and rebellion (Shahn, p. 37).

Having never examined (i.e. deconstructed) it, the instructors subconsciously clung to the genius myth and used it to justify their failure to instruct. I do not believe they saw much causal relationship between the instruction they offered to students, and the students' ultimate achievements (or success) as painters.

The unexamined assumptions that were necessary for the genius myth to survive in 1983 were heavily weighted in favour of intuition, novelty and originality, rather than progress in any existing genre, which required mastery of craft.

The problem, again, with all of this is that many students believed that what they were being taught, or not taught by default, was the objective truth about painting when, as ever, fashions in painting and philosophies of art will always come and go, and none of them — minimalism, the anti-aesthetic, conceptual, academic, and various other styles — represent the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

But the educational philosophy behind the instructional attitude of School B, and many others of its kind, was never elucidated. Like the instructors'

personal points of view, it remained phantom like. It could not be disputed or challenged, as it was never openly stated in the first place.

At the same time, there most definitely *were* unwritten rules about painting — what was acceptable and what was not. Never explicitly stated or justified at the level of ideas (i.e. as theory), these criteria could only be inferred from critiques. Numerous unexamined assumptions operated at a covert level, with the withering subtext: 'If you have to ask, you'll never understand; if you don't already know, you're *not really artist material* — so we're not going to tell you'.

I have read accounts of art colleges in England in the '40's and '50's, when painting students were graded *on their character and commitment* to art, which was evaluated through an written essay, rather than by assessment of actual artworks produced (although grading artworks may be equally specious).

At School B, to question was to reveal shameful ignorance. This attitude stifled healthy curiosity in students and prevented open, objective discussion of what was being validated as 'good art' or vilified as 'bad'.

The situation was worsened by a system in which competitiveness between students was encouraged, resulting in a 'star' system, again lacking any analysis that could be openly discussed and challenged. A great deal of creative energy was wasted on comparisons and striving to be noticed rather than feeling free to seek authenticity in one's own work.

The worst instructor I had, when leaving his job at the school, advised his replacement to 'just give all the students a B grade, they won't complain about it; then pick the few (stars) you'd like to work with and pay attention only to them'.

Fortunately, the new replacement was caught out when a student whom she had never spoken to asked for an explanation of her grade.

I now believe that these instructors were completely suckered in by the genius myth themselves, and applied it equally to their students. As an unexamined set of assumptions, the genius myth is set-up for fraudulence. The instructors may have felt obliged to maintain the pose of the mad, moody, debauched and irrational artistic genius who could certainly not (!) be held accountable to quotidian details such as lessons plans and schedules — and whom you had to follow into the pub, or their beds, if you wanted to get the 'real insider goods' on painting.

Art school was exhausting. One had the sense of nervously tiptoeing through an obstacle course, hoping to avoid stepping on a land mine. It is not surprising to learn that many art school graduates require a substantial period of recovery before they are themselves again.

Chapter 3.

Overcoming Bad Teaching

John Izzo (2008) tells of an old Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is today" (Izzo, p. 143). Similarly, for me, the best time for having been exposed to good teaching was twenty years ago, but the next best time is now.

When I first began teaching adults in the studio program at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, my personal mandate was to provide my students with the solid foundation I had never received. I was motivated by the desire to prevent the suffering I had experienced due to a lack of information and support. To accomplish this, I realized, I would have to learn a great deal of material, which was never taught to me despite having spent five years at two different art colleges. As I was already teaching a couple of classes a week, it would be an understatement to say I was flying by the seat of my pants.

I will never forget my first class at the AGO. I was utterly terrified. I got through the class on bravado. I recall keeping my fists clenched in my pockets, trying, hoping, and finally succeeding in not blurting out, 'I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing!' The students seemed pleased with the class and I was encouraged to carry on.

For the entire four years I taught at the AGO, I spent many hours each week at my desk in my studio, surrounded by foot-high stacks of library books, researching the fundamentals of drawing and painting. One of the toughest questions I faced was, "What comes before what?" Was there any kind of natural order in which things ought to be taught? The more I researched, the more shocking it was to realize how large the gaps in my knowledge of the fundamentals were. Where to begin? Why did I not *know* this material after five years in art schools?

However, as I was already teaching and gradually getting to know the student population (mostly midlife adults) my research was driven by the desire to answer their needs, questions and challenges. It was helpful, as always, to have a clear, motivating focus.

The question remained, how best to give my students a solid foundation upon which to build? The question remains today. It is something I continue to work on constantly.

This long period of intensive research turned out to be a blessing in disguise, from which I have greatly profited. The drive to learn what to teach, and how and when to teach it, while under the gun to put it into practice with actual students, compelled and allowed me to start to fill in the numerous gaps in my own art school education. As time went on, and I continued to demystify the various aspects of painting and continued to learn and understand, all the benefits I was gaining seemed to be a fitting counterweight to the enormous *dis*advantages with which I graduated from the second art school in 1984.

One of my better ideas, which I adhere to still, was to have my students use only the primary colours and black and white, and mix everything else. I had

a gut feeling that for students to truly understand colour relationships and colour mixing, it might be best to work exclusively with primary colours of acrylic paint. But did I know what they were? Regrettably, and unbelievably, I did not. I knew to choose 'a' red, 'a' blue and 'a' yellow. But, not knowing any better, I incorrectly chose ultramarine blue, which is a warm blue that makes for a muddy green. I learned that the true primary colours were a cool red, a cool blue and a cool yellow. How I could have graduated from five years of art school, time spent mostly in painting departments, without this knowledge, is hard to fathom.

Then again, the art supply stores in Vancouver, to this day, operating from similar ignorance and misunderstanding, providing 'kits' of primary colours that are all wrong, (i.e. not the cool red, cool blue and cool yellow); however they are mixed, they will not produce clear examples of all twelve colours of the colour wheel.

Colour mixing is a matter of simple *fact*. How can elements of painting *this simple* be so utterly misunderstood?

I was not a poor student, though I had unquestioningly absorbed the Abstract Expressionists' credo without realizing it. I believed that anything apart from intuitive, abstract painting was nothing more than 'cheap tricks' to quote a bad art teacher I had as a Toronto teenager. In his class, when I asked for help painting an apple, this rather arrogant self-taught painter scooped up paint from my palette with his thumb and repainted my apple perfectly, without my permission, and without explaining what he was doing. When I asked for the knowledge, he said it was 'just cheap tricks'. He did not teach me anything, only

proved that he knew how and I did not. I was humiliated and never returned to his class.

However, the notion that learning the 'how-to' of painting was nothing more than cheap tricks struck me deeply. It is possible that this suspicion on my part made me resistant to the very instructional approach I have laboured for years to understand and pass on.

The genius myth was also a factor in my artistic misery. At the age of twelve I attempted to paint some day lilies, and to my delight and amazement, somehow intuitively 'just knew' how to mix the colours I wanted. I was overawed. In all sincerity I got down on my knees and thanked God for 'making me an artist'.

Until I was half-way through writing this thesis, I had always regarded that moment fondly, as 'proof' of my dedication to being an artist, and to the miracle of having been chosen by God, to become an artist.

However, having deconstructed the genius myth, I began to see another, darker side to my epiphany. I 'bought into' the genius myth wholesale (and without awareness) at the age of twelve. If God chose me to be an artist, I assumed that all the features of my genius myth would automatically follow. It would be (as it always had been, up to that point in my short life) 'easy'. I need not think, learn, nor work hard. I needed only to 'turn on the tap', let the self-expression flow, and all would be well.

Not so. At about fifteen, I had a painting on the go, of a Raggedy Ann doll my mother made me. On one day, I understood exactly how to paint the cylindrical bits of yarn-hair. The next time I worked on it, that knowledge had

completely vanished and I had not a cognitive clue how to go about it. Not only could I not paint it, I suffered the emotional horror of first having been chosen by God to be an artist, and then 'having been abandoned by Him'. My self-worth was entirely identified with my status as 'a real artist'. Without it, I was nothing. I suffered horribly. I was afraid to go to art school. It took me until I was almost twenty-seven to apply to the first art school I attended.

Until I was a student there, I drew almost continuously. Once a student at School A, I *stopped drawing* in that natural way. I was far too aware of judgment, evaluation, and the possibility of failure. To fail as an artist was identical with failing to be a person of any worth whatsoever. My drawing was no longer 'mine'. I allowed the art school experience to relocate my locus of validation to external factors.

After transferring to School B, I recall similar agonies resulting from the genius myth, my inner critic and poor instruction. In Life Drawing class, on 'good' days I could draw quite well, intuitively. However, on bad days, when my intuition deserted me, I had nothing cognitive to fall back on, and I simply couldn't draw at all. I spent a lot of Life class time in the washroom weeping; if I couldn't draw easefully, I wasn't an artist, and if I wasn't an artist, I wasn't anything.

Now, after about forty years of therapy, spiritual practice, personal growth work, and study, I understand that, because of a regrettably inadequate upbringing I 'had' to put all my self-esteem eggs in the artist basket. This made me a very vulnerable sitting duck for unexamined assumptions about artistic production (the genius myth), evaluations from the inner critic, and inadequate art school instruction.

After an appallingly poor foundation year at art School A, I was accepted into the sought-after Fine Arts Department. However, I immediately became disenchanted with it, as all the students seemed to be making identical work, which was — worse yet — identical to that of their instructor who was also the department head. I fled to General Studies, and left painting behind for photography.

School A had been, rather famously, through a student-led 'revolution' in 1975, when a large number of students, disenchanted with the rigidly academic approach to painting prescribed by the Fine Art Department, insisted on the creation of an Experimental Arts department, the antithesis of the Fine Art Department.

When I asked an artist friend of mine who attended the School A the year after the revolution, what basic painting skills she was taught, she laughed and told me, her assignment was to walk down the main street of the city with a paper bag over her head.

School A was split between a fusty approach to 'academic' painting in the Fine Arts department, and an 'anything goes' approach in the Experimental Arts department. Neither department offered what I needed, which was a melding of the two. However, those times were those times.

I entered School B as a photography student in 3rd year, but by Christmas realized I *had to paint*, and agreed to take an extra year in order to graduate from the Painting department, which was happily known as "2-D". No schizoid splits, unlike School A.

The approach to painting at the second art school was much influenced by the Abstract Expressionists credo as well. While I had a wonderful time socially at this school, the painting instruction was very poor, as I detailed earlier.

Teaching as an Independent Cottage Industry

While I have taught painting at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg, Ontario, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Emily Carr Institute and the Vancouver Academy of Art and numerous other venues, these days I teach in my studio at home because I enjoy being self-employed.

I have never taught, nor studied to teach, in the 'school system'. Rather, I emerged from art school with a few ideas to build on, and learned the rest through study and by following intuitive leads.

My teaching practice is in something of a class by itself. I am not affiliated with any school, institution or other bureaucracy, and therefore not subject to any external agenda. There are no requirements dictating the number or length of my classes, the suitability of my lesson plans, the topics I cover, the assignments I give or the learning outcomes I set out to achieve.

I believe this is something of a unique situation. Unhindered by the obligation to please anyone except myself and my students (let alone a vast bureaucracy), I am free to teach in the purest sense, to meet my students' needs for information and instruction as those needs arise. The form of my teaching and their learning is thus liberated from outside influences and allowed to find its own shape.

Once I began to teach in my painting studio at home, I had much more control over a number of elements, which were, in the institutional setting, decided by my employers, such as the length of courses, class size, physical arrangement of painting 'stations' (easels, palette tables, etc). Teaching in my own studio, I could arrange the physical environment — the studio setup — as I wished, within the space limitations of my home. The 'studio' could be expanded beyond the painting room, including the remaining indoor space, and the outdoor space as well.

There are distinct advantages to teaching in one's own studio. Ready to hand are the instructor's vast collection of resources, which include a large and diverse accumulation of art supplies, reproductions of artworks collected over years, hundreds of photographs, a substantial library of art books, numerous early artworks, and a vast collection of beautiful, amusing or ridiculous objects from which students may select subjects for still life painting. It is a rich environment indeed and compares favourably with the institutional bleakness of the large, blank, evenly lit rooms of the art college.

Institutions generally cannot escape associations with that mother of all institutions, the jail, as Kincheloe (1992) points out. The architecture itself can convey an authoritarian quality, as it did in School A, where students' artworks had to be displayed under lock and key due to frequent vandalism (which I understood to be rebellion against same). When the same school required expansion, unbelievably it purchased the former premises of the roughest police station in the city. The closed spaces and Victorian architecture seemed populated by ghostly vibes of the troubled and troublesome, which I found to be anathema to creativity.

In my classes, which are held in a small, somewhat cluttered but intimate setting, in a nice old house, in a garden, the disadvantages of a depersonalized environment are happily absent. It is impossible to say with absolute certainty the exact effect this setting has on my students' work, but I would confidently surmise that the very idiosyncrasies of the environment, promote and encourage students' expressions of their own personal idiosyncrasies — which takes them one step closer to authenticity in their work. We are ever sensitive to our environment, which impacts upon our states of mind, and our feelings. Eisner points out that "the setting itself teaches and is subject to the teacher's design choices. Teaching is not restricted to the direct interactions between teacher and student" (Eisner, p. 57).

Before I itemize a few practical strategies, which I have found to be very beneficial, if not crucially so, in my teaching practice, let's look at some theoretical underpinnings.

In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002), Eisner too considers the question, Can art be taught? "More than a few think art can't be taught, only 'caught'. Others believe that even if it could be taught, it shouldn't be…" (Eisner, p. 46), — on the grounds that to try to teach art is to risk blocking students' imagination and creativity. Eisner's take on the subject is that pedagogical neglect accomplishes nothing. He states, "Two of the most important factors affecting students' experiences in the classroom are the quality of the teaching they encounter and the quality of the curriculum provided" (Eisner, p. 46).

He humourously points out that "good teaching… cannot be shipped, pumped or transmitted like the contents of a letter, into the heads of students"

(Eisner, p. 47). Rather, the teacher must design situations and processes, which will facilitate student engagement and learning. He points out that students always mediate, and hence modify, what is taught (Eisner, p. 47). Eisner points out that "the teacher needs to have some sense of where [the students] are with respect to the ideas or skills to be learned" (Eisner, p. 47), in order to engage students in meaningful learning.

There is no formula for this kind of teaching, rather it is in itself a form of artistry. Eisner says, "By artistry I mean a form of practice informed by the imagination that employs technique to select and organize expressive qualities to achieve ends that are aesthetically satisfying" (Eisner, p. 49).

Much of a good art teacher's skill is in the area of communication, "Knowing how to make clear what is not obvious is a critically important pedagogical skill in teaching the arts" (Eisner, p. 55).

He also expresses the necessity of art teachers behaving towards students in a "skilled, sensitive and supportive" (Eisner, p. 63) manner. The good art teacher, he implies, "displays a kindness that creates warm relationships with students" (Eisner, p. 63). "What a teacher says to assist a student can either advance or undermine the student's ability to solve the problem at hand" (Eisner, p. 72).

He notes that the teacher, while teaching students, is also teaching him- or herself (Eisner, p. 57). **"…**We need to treat teaching as a form of personal resear**c**h,…to use the occasions of our performance as teachers as opportunities to learn to teach" (Eisner, p. 56).

Much teaching takes the form of modelling, that is, showing students how certain behaviours are more effective than others in relation to solving particular problems. "How we as teachers treat ideas, the exhilaration we display in the company of good ones, how we relate to our students, how we handle conflict, how differences in perspective are reconciled — or not — also teach, perhaps more vividly and surely than anything we do" (Eisner, p. 57).

Sometimes the teacher will need to model particular cognitive strategies, such as 'flexible purposing' (Eisner, p. 52), which is the ability to "redefine one's aims when better options emerge in the course of one's work" (Eisner, p. 77). This is a faculty that runs counter to our everyday, linear and rationalist approach to producing results in ordinary life, wherein we might alter the means to an end but rarely think it sensible to alter the end itself. Flexible purposing has more in common with jazz improvisation than with step by step progress towards a fixed objective. Flexible purposing applies both to art-making and art-teaching, as teachers must be willing to 'turn on a dime', change directions and objectives when unexpected situations arise and required quick, improvised responses. Good teachers will also model specific techniques through hands-on demonstration, as students learn much through observation (Eisner, p. 54).

Eisner mentions the need for teachers to become sensitive to "entry points the art teacher can use to comment on the students' work" (Eisner, p. 52) and emphasizes that "Art teachers need to know when to back off and to allow the student to find out for him- or herself" (Eisner, p. 54).

Eisner makes it clear that the purpose of these many skilful means is in "helping students form purposes to guide their work" (Eisner, p. 51), as "one of the important abilities artists employ in their work is the forming of purpose"

(Eisner, p. 51), based on the student's ideas. This supports students in their search for personal authenticity: "Helping students to understand that artists have something to say — and that they themselves have, as well — is a fundamental aspect of learning in the arts" (Eisner, p. 51).

Eisner (2002) points out that art has within it the power to transform consciousness, and that this is based on the sensory makeup of the human being. He points out that "The senses are our first avenue to consciousness" (Eisner, p. 2), the means by which we experience our own feeling-responses to the world. We feel with the senses, with the body. Eisner describes aesthetic experience as being a *somatic* event, that is, one of feeling-sensitivity. "What is aesthetic heightens feeling" (Eisner, p. 81), and feeling is an embodied, somatic event.

He notes that "most perceptual activities are instrumental in character…[i.e.]we look for our house in order to know that we have arrived home" (Eisner, pp. 83-84). However, he is in synch with Bai when he discuss the need for embodiment in [art] education**.** As Bai points out in her many erudite articles linking mindfulness, loving-kindness and education, a small gap occurs between percept and concept in which nondiscursive 'thought', or pure perception, in and of itself, is possible, before the monkey mind rushes in to label and categorize our pure experience.

Awareness of this gap can be developed through practice. Nondiscursive thought is directly linked to both ethical and aesthetic experience, which are non-instrumental in character, having rather a quality of attention akin to meditation, in which intrinsic properties of, say, a rock, are simply contemplated.

Eisner says, "Seeing the rock aesthetically" — that is, seeing or being-with its intrinsic qualities in an I-Thou relation, "…is a way of being moved; it is a way of exploring the deepest parts of our interior landscape. In its best moments it is a way of experiencing *joy*" (Eisner, p. 84).

Elements of Good Teaching

In the following section I will itemize and describe some of the key strategies I have employed in order to put theory into practice, using certain strategies I have found to be most successful in effectively teaching painting to midlife beginners: group facilitation.

Building Rapport

Creating a comfortable atmosphere for my students is very high on my list of priorities as a painting teacher. From our first contact by telephone, I strive to create a friendly, welcoming, safe and open environment. I find it necessary to create rapport with each individual student, in order to clear the way for good communication. I try to ensure (as much as one can) that they will trust me enough to follow my instruction. To this end, I employ humour and positive reinforcement.

Positive Reinforcement

When I was first hired to teach, I asked an experienced Grade One schoolteacher if she had any advice for me. She responded that teaching is 90% positive reinforcement and 10% content. I followed her advice then, and have done so ever since. My students soon learn that, in my class, they are safe from

harmful or negative criticism. I find tactful ways to suggest changes. A positive, encouraging atmosphere helps to melt away the fear provoked by the inner critic, and builds trust and rapport. Even when the students' experience in painting class is one of struggle and difficulty, an atmosphere of optimism generally prevails.

Introductory Talking Circle

At the beginning of the first class with a new group, I always facilitate a 'talking circle'. This gives each person a chance to introduce themselves and talk a little bit about what brought them to class. I try to gently lead the speaker to go a little deeper, and share what painting or drawing means to them and what they are looking for in it, how they would like it to impact their lives. They become much more at ease with one another — they start to make friends. I also talk about my background, and about how I am going to teach them things that I was never taught in art school. I share just enough about my past difficulties with painting to give them permission to do the same. I also talk about some of the obstacles (the inner critic, the genius myth and notions about aging). I find, by acknowledging the existence of fear and the courage it takes to come to class at all, much of the students' trepidation is normalized. I believe it helps the students to talk about their nervousness so that they will understand that they are not alone in it, however confident the others may appear.

Small Class Size

Space limitations have played a great part in determining the number of students I can teach at any one time, resulting in very small classes, varying from two to five students. The upside of this limitation is that it easily creates a

pleasant atmosphere of intimacy, and each student receives a great deal of personal instruction. The small class size enables me to stay attuned to each student. From the vantage point of my own painting spot, I can see and watch over all of my students and their works in progress from a distance. It is valuable to be able to do this without looming over them, or distracting them with my physical presence.

The small setting thus allows me to guide each of my students as they go along, observing both their work and their body language. I can make a quick comment when necessary, addressing them first by name so they know who I am talking to. When needed, I move to the student's workspace and offer specific suggestions and demonstrations.

Conviviality

Small classes also facilitate a friendly social atmosphere. I try to foster a convivial atmosphere in the studio/classroom, which is, I believe very enjoyable for my students. It is a well-known fact that 'fear of speaking in public' rates a very high stress response. It is much less alarming for students to speak out in a small class of four, than a large college class of sixteen students.

The conviviality in the class is a very significant factor in the pleasure students take in coming to class. For some, such as the wife/mother who is a caregiver and support system in her family's life, it is really the only time that they can step outside of their main role in life, meeting people they would not otherwise meet and allowing their own needs to come first, for a change.

Working on similar challenges bonds my students, and I rely on humour and good spirits to inspire all of us to help each other. Students have told me, 'I

love coming to your class'. And, 'You have a talent for making us feel so comfortable'. Some moments in class have all the merriment of a party — soon to be followed by sustained periods of silent, concentrated work.

Mixed Classes

Often my four students will all be working on different projects, or different stages of the same project. The developmental variety of such 'mixed' classes is beneficial to all of them: to observe and possibly learn from students who are slightly ahead of them, shows them something of the way ahead, rendering it less off an unknown. To be so regarded by other students at earlier stages increases their confidence.

Students Teaching Students

I believe students learn a great deal by sharing their knowledge amongst themselves. It has been my experience that one learns a great deal by teaching, and I encourage more advanced students to share their knowledge and insights with one another, and with students at an earlier stage in the curriculum. Something about having to verbalize their gains, to accurately employ words and concepts in order to communicate ideas to another student, seems to have the effect of solidifying understanding.

Communicating with Students

I think good teaching has an energetic component, and by that I don't mean I rush around the room or lift large objects over my head. I am referring to the energies we sense between ourselves and other people. In class I try to 'tune

in' and feel the energy of the students, in combination with each other, myself and the environment.

Becoming a good teacher is a complex phenomenon. It presumes not only an affinity for the subject in one's own private/personal practice, but, more importantly, it requires an affinity for verbalizing non-verbal processes. This requires a powerful ability to observe oneself and to cross over from so-called left-brain to so-called right-brain functioning. Good teaching is not exclusively a function of language, as it often generates from inchoate experience. A great degree of self-awareness is required to *notice* one's own experience very specifically and in detail, and then to translate that experience of noticing into words, which, by and large, are the intellectual currency of our cultural (educational?) interactions. However, much subtler 'languages' are also in play. The shrug of a shoulder, a second's delay in timing, the silence before the response, sounds made that are not words…these are only a few examples of the many non-verbal language skills a good teacher picks up on and embodies. The good teacher has at her disposal myriad forms of communication with which to nurture students along. Much of the fun of teaching is finding ways to hit the bull's eye on the communication dartboard.

Thoughts on Teaching

My students, rank beginners all, come to me for a way to begin painting, and that is what I give them — *a* way, not *the* one and only way to begin. I emphasize that they will, inevitably, customize and rewrite this approach completely as they carry on painting. I teach craft and perseverance in the service of achieving a serviceable degree of visual literacy (an understanding of

perception and form: how we 'read' a painting), as well as a high degree of aesthetic excellence.

My students want a solid technical curriculum, *and* the sensitive, skilful support from me, to help them put it into practice. I can meet my students' needs for information, instruction, inspiration and support, as those needs arise. The form of my teaching and their learning is thus liberated from outside influences, freed to evolve into its own ever-changing shape.

Spontaneous solutions to students' problems can be reached intuitively, in the moment, in class, the *first* time the situation arises. Then, having made note of that new cognitive knowledge, it can be ploughed back into future lessons. It is in many ways an ideal situation, in which both the teacher and the students may actively engage in the process of learning.

The 'intuition' to which I refer is of course no magical quality; rather it involves a very rapid, almost unconscious form of cognition; a way of thinking (or inviting thought by opening a space for it) which condenses many years of experience into a seemingly 'sudden' constellation of knowings.

As a fledgling teacher, I was motivated by the desire to prevent the suffering and frustration I had experienced due to a lack of information and support. I set out to teach what is teachable about drawing and painting.

Most of my midlife students come to class with a mixture of fear and courage. As fear is the primary detriment to development as a painter, I set out to minimize its effects. I find it necessary to deal with both the hard content, i.e. the skills and knowledge of painting and the psychological 'stuff' that seems to consistently come up in relation to painting.

My strategy was, and is, to structure the learning of skills and knowledge into small, gradual steps, while providing the cognitive context for each exercise. By breaking the curriculum down into small steps, clearly outlined and demonstrated, it becomes doable, neither mystifying nor overly difficult. By not taking on too much at any one time, or assuming facts not in evidence (i.e. that the student will understand something they have never been previously exposed to), difficulties in comprehension or execution remain relatively uncomplicated and can be resolved with relative ease.

I feel it is important for students to have an experience of success and satisfaction at the completion of each step, as opposed to incomprehension and frustration. My objective in every class is to work with each student until they have this achieved this state. The experience of having been successful at the last exercise helps to build the student's confidence in their ability do the next exercise successfully.

Gradually, the students learn how to learn, and the learning process becomes recognizable and familiar. Students discover that 'not knowing' in advance is not the obstacle they had feared. It is more of a boogey-man, only a thought-form, rather than an abiding truth or 'reality'.

It is very helpful if, from the outset, the teacher reassures the students that not-knowing is perfectly okay, that they are not expected to know, and that *nobody* 'knows it all' or knows exactly what they are doing when it comes to painting — including herself. From the teacher's generally supportive approach, the students correctly deduce that they will not be shamed or criticized for not-knowing.

In painting, one is in a state of 'not knowing' a very great deal of the time, and it takes some getting used to. Keats referred to this state as 'negative capability', the ability to tolerate holding open a question (or perhaps only an empty space, more like an inchoate question *mark*) in the mind. Not-knowing *now* can easily lead to the fear of not-knowing *ever*. Hence, at first, not-knowing leaves one feeling anxious and vulnerable. It can be uncomfortable to hold open a question in the mind without giving in to the temptation to shut it down with an expedient answer.

This discomfort is based on a number of incorrect beliefs — that the past determines the future; that not-knowing, once we admit to it, will become a shameful, permanent state, thus to be avoided at all cost; that there is nothing within us which can respond to the open question with tentative or insightful answers; and that that things will stay the way they have 'always' been — whereas they are in a constant state of flux, i.e. merely holding open a space for the answer shifts the question.

The teacher must model a positive response to the unknowns of painting, while balancing it with the knowns. While demonstrating a particular bit of problem solving with a painting, it might be helpful to put her internal dialogue on external speaker — that is, verbalize her thought processes for her students benefit. For example, she may say, "Hmmm, what am I going to do with this area, I need to distinguish it from the one adjacent, how can I do that? Maybe I'll try a bit of glazing here, with this value…." Modelling problem-solving with serenity, in the face of not-knowing, supports the students' acclimatization with that state.

It is somewhat paradoxical that what makes tolerable the not-knowing, or the state of stepping into the unknown, is one's acquired familiarity with that it. One grows familiar with the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, which arise each time one encounters the unknown. This 'familiarity with the unfamiliar' develops after a succession of non-catastrophic encounters with the state of not-knowing. As one gradually becomes accustomed to not knowing, venturing into the unknown loses its fearsomeness. It may even become thrilling, a state in which one feels especially alive.

As these experiences of success accumulate, the student becomes orientated away from fear of failure, which is the primary detriment to development as a painter. A positive outcome with each small step orientates the student towards a successful completion of the next exercise.

I set out to ease my students into an increasingly courageous state of mind so that taking on new challenges will not be obstructed by fears of not-knowing.

As Eisner says, teaching is an ongoing research project, a process of lifelong learning for the teacher, which takes place on many levels, from ever increasing one's self-awareness, to further acquisitions of knowledge regarding the technical mastery of the materials (Eisner, 2001). As a teacher I seek the same things my students want from painting: flow, increased self-awareness, an aesthetic experience, authenticity and — very importantly, a good time (fun) with other people.

On very good days, I am able to put my best intentions and ideas into practice. Often, on those days, my students tell me that I am a very good instructor. However, I do have occasional bad days, when I am too tired,

distracted or stressed to put my best foot forward. Still, I strive to be as mindful, compassionate, attentive and helpful as I can be.

When personal stresses or health issues threaten to prevent me from meeting a certain minimum standard of professionalism and effectiveness, I would rather cancel the class than do a half-baked job of it. Again, this is one of the advantages of being an unaffiliated painting teacher. I am accountable only to my students.

Wherever I run into the same difficulties repeatedly, I try to take time to work out solutions to whatever the problem is. This can involve journaling, research, talking it over with someone else, trying things out in the studio and sometimes asking my students themselves for feedback on their experience in my class.

Curriculum

While the spontaneous, intuitive problem solving is an indispensable part of my approach to teaching, I do of course have a curriculum. I am happy enough with the standard definition of curriculum, as "a course of study". To go a little farther, I would regard curriculum as a structure designed to take the student through a process, which is laid out in a series of steps, which serve as a framework for the teacher's intent. The curriculum I now employ has evolved over many years of research, study and practice.

Given the parameters of my students' engagement with painting, I must discern their particular needs and desires, and how can I best meet those needs. Primarily, my students want to learn the craft of representational painting,

within the Western tradition of realism. I meet this need through particular instructional approaches to drawing and painting which are outlined in detail below.

I also make a point of touching upon useful material regarding non-representational artwork, so that my students who are unfamiliar with it can start learning how to look at and appreciate it. Also, as all paintings are essentially abstractions, whether or not they create the illusion of realism, this exposure increases my students' comprehension of colour/composition.

I will refer now to the actual, step-by-step, hands-on curriculum I employ in my introductory acrylic painting class, which includes drawing, brushwork, tonal painting, colour mixing and full-colour painting. Together, these form what I would call "a solid foundation" in drawing and painting.

Warm-Up Scribbling (or Improvisational Drawing)

We begin each and every class with a twenty minute period of mark-making, or scribble-drawing. This exercise is intended to help the student shift focus from the rest of their week's activities and segue into visual art. It also gets the student warmed up and engaged with the materials. As we are only scribbling, the exercise has the smallest possible potential for provoking fear or dashed expectations.

We stand at our easels and work with crayon, chalk or oil pastels, on big (18" x 24") paper. In the first class I always demonstrate, making sure that each student is watching me. I talk about what I am doing and why. Taking a powerful, grounded stance, I show students *a* way to begin, using my forearm

(rather than my wrist) to make big, strong marks. We make use of the whole paper, adding layer upon layer of bold, non-representational marks.

In this exercise, we are not attempting to draw any 'things'; in fact I gently discourage it. This is 'improvisational drawing', which means we are making it up as we go along, as an exercise in non-objective abstraction. The scribble-drawing 'get the juices flowing' without rousing the inner critic. As we are not attempting to meet any standard, only to make marks, there is nothing in their work that the inner critic can latch onto and judge. Given my newest students' timidity in mark-making, I find this simple beginning very useful, as you cannot 'do it wrong'.

I encourage students to use as many senses as possible while drawing; for example, to draw along with the music they are hearing in the studio; to feel the rough or smooth surface of the paper through their crayon, noticing variations in pressure; and to simply see how different colours look together.

As the students are drawing, I find something positive to say about each person's work. This kind of commentary from the instructor encourages the students, helps them to value their drawing as '*work*' and perhaps to bring to their attention something they had not seen previously.

After about twenty minutes of warm-up drawing, I ask students to move as far away from their drawings as they can, to look at their own and each other's work. The drawings look very different from a distance than they do up close; they coalesce into a unified whole. I tell my students that it is always a good idea to periodically step back from one's drawing or painting work and view it from a distance.

At this stage of looking, the students are usually laughingly dubious about the merit of their own scribble drawings (although they often complement each other's). I validate the students' doubtful response by verbalizing it, (teaching awareness and self-acceptance) and counter it by telling them a little about the tradition of non-objective abstraction, and showing them examples of work by 'scribble' artists such as Cy Twombly.

I also point out how every mark, every line or patch of colour they make carries evidence of the energy that went into it, which communicates to the viewer as expressions of different moods or states, such as: peaceful, locked-up, dynamic, dreamlike, etc.

This moment in the course gives me the opportunity to model positive reinforcement, and to establish my policy of constructive-commentary-only. It is very important to set this tone at the very beginning of a new course. Students usually feel pretty vulnerable at this point in the proceedings, and are much reassured when I model an open, curious, appreciative and above all, non-judgmental attitude towards their work. I want them to know that, in my class, they are safe from negative criticism from me and from each other.

In the very first class of a course, after our initial 'polite' scribble drawing, we do a second one with a very different feeling-tone: 'No more Mr Nice Guy'. I suggest they recall a moment of road rage, or something that really frustrated or annoyed them recently. As I demonstrate, I model a ***fierce*** demeanour, using my whole body. I crouch like a ferocious animal, clenching my fists, gritting my teeth, scrunching my face and growling! I grasp red, black and white oil pastels in my fist and make huge, wild, intense, aggressive, slashing marks, and encourage students to do the same.

This exercise gives students permission to let their work express 'rude', 'nasty' or 'inappropriate' feelings, which are usually kept concealed. It is an opportunity to 'blow the gunk out of our pipes', so to speak. Letting my students know that it's okay to have intense and vehement feelings come up in their work, adds to the overall atmosphere of safety and self-acceptance. The exercise is a wonderful icebreaker for a new group, as it always gives rise to laughter, joy, and a palpable increase in everyone's energy level.

After about twenty or thirty minutes on the warm-up drawing, students are loosened up and ready for the lesson to follow.

With more experienced students, the improvisational drawing provides a necessary balance to the closely observational work that learning realism entails. It develops into an opportunity to draw non-representational imagery 'from within', allowing deeply personal expressions of feeling. Many students' warm-up drawings are exquisite, layered abstractions, certainly suitable for framing. It often surprises and pleases my students to discover this unexpected side of themselves. With the more advanced students I take it a step beyond scribble warm-up, showing them how the eye moves through the composition, and sometimes making suggestions to keep the eye moving.

I find it helpful to ease students along from actual scribbling, to increasingly controlled scribbles, to slower, more observational scribbles, and so forth, so that at any given time they are only moving a little outside of their comfort zone and therefore not becoming too frightened or frustrated to think at all.

Drawing

Each course begins with a 'review' of drawing strategies, which is, for some students, more of an introduction. We cover a series of essentials, which begin with variations on line, and coil forms. I always demonstrate 'how it is done', making sure that students are close enough to see me working. I also show them finished examples of a particular exercise before they begin. In the course of the following exercises, I teach the use of sighting, viewfinders and simple grids, where applicable.

A coil form is a controlled scribble, which produces stacks of circles and elipses that look something like slinky toys. Practicing coil forms teaches speed and control in drawing circles, ovoids and elipses, and is excellent for developing one's hand-eye co-ordination. We then build recognizable imagery, such as bottles, figures and animals, from massed coil forms, rather than relying on outlines to create forms. This makes a refreshing change from most students' usual understanding of drawing, in which one has to get the outline of a form 'right' the first time. With massed coil forms one can search for the form and gradually build it on. Students are usually astonished and delighted that they can already draw a recognizable human figure at this early stage.

Gesture drawing naturally follows upon coil forms, as it too is a controlled scribble. Working from artificial flowers, we draw very quickly, loosely, scribbly, to capture the movement implied by a given form. As with everything else, I demonstrate gesture drawings and show students examples of earlier gesture drawings.

From here, we proceed to contour drawing, first 'blind', and then 'modified'. Contour drawing is a wonderful approach for drawing complex

organic forms. A contour exists anywhere you find an edge, whether it is the edge of a form, or the edge of a patch of light and shadow upon that form.

We practice blind contour drawing by working from our subject, crumpled paper, but drawing 'blind'. This means that we are looking at the subject (crumpled paper pinned to our drawing board), but we are drawing *underneath* the top sheet of paper on our pad, so that we cannot see what we are drawing. It is a process-oriented exercise intended to train the eye to slow down, and to co-ordinate the movement of the hand (and the drawing tool) so that it corresponds with the movement of the eye. One draws only what one sees, without making anything up.

This is pure responsive drawing; what is seen, is drawn. But first, we must learn to use our eyes in a different way than we normally do. We must discipline ourselves to slow the eye movement to a molasses-in-January crawl. Nicolaides (1941) advises his students not to begin contour drawing until, gazing upon their subject, they are convinced that they are actual touching and feeling the contour of the subject with the point of their pencils.

One has to come fully into the present to do this, and it is best done in silence, with no distractions. Many students go into a timeless state of 'flow' (or so-called 'right-brain' activity) when practicing blind contour, as their eyes slowly and contemplatively follow the contours of the subject, and their drawing tool responds and follows along at the same slow pace on the paper. The result is usually somewhat fragmented but exquisite, the feeling of intense observation visible in the unusual sensitivity of the line.

Modified contour drawing permits quick glances at one's drawing, for orientation purposes, though it still relies heavily on keeping one's eyes on the

subject and following the contour as though one were touching it. I have my students work from artificial flowers or actual plant forms (depending on the season), using an ultrafine Sharpie marker on white card stock. Later we colour these drawings with Prismacolour pencils. Sometimes we practice modified contour drawings using brush, ink and wash on newsprint, which is very freeing and gratifying because of the absorbency of the paper.

It is a natural next step to undertake negative space exercises. In normal everyday life we tend not to notice negative space (the hole in the doughnut, so to speak, with the doughnut as positive form), whereas in drawing and painting, every square inch is as important as every other square inch; positive forms and negative spaces must be aesthetically balanced. Negative space and positive form share edges, so that learning to see negative space can be a great help in seeing and drawing positive form.

Working on a darkly painted cardboard surface, not unlike a blackboard, we draw with chalk and use a wet cloth for erasures. Our subjects are Xerox reproductions of tree forms, quartered to form a simple grid. Students draw only the negative spaces visible between the positive forms of the tree. The positive forms are left blank. Once this exercise has been successfully completed, we try it again from actual three dimensional plant forms, using a viewfinder. The negative shapes in these drawings are very beautiful and could not have been achieved in any other way.

Our next drawing strategy is geometric analysis, using basic shapes as a guideline.

I take the students through a full 18″ x 24″ page of two- and three-dimensional basic shapes, such as circles, spheres, elipses, ovoids, egg shapes,

cylinders, cones, wedges, rectangles, cubes, etc. We then approach drawing our subject (bottle forms) by first noticing what basic shapes they are comprised of. I show them sighting techniques for guesstimating relative size and proportion.

I believe that, taken together, these strategies — gesture drawing, contour drawing, negative space and geometrical analysis — are absolutely essential to learning to see and draw recognizable imagery in the observable world — which is an essential pre-requisite for representational painting.

Tonal Painting

When we first begin working with acrylic paint, I prefer my students to work 'tonally', that is, to use only black and white paint to create gradations of light and dark, otherwise known as 'value'. This simplifies the potentially overwhelming complexities of learning to use paint, and sensitizes students to seeing tonal value. When we begin I show students how to set up their palette table and identify each of the items they have purchased, according to the materials list I gave them. I show them how to use a palette knife for mixing paint, which is not as obvious as one might think. Having painted a canvas and some heavy paper middle gray, in preparation for future tonal projects, we commence upon a value scale. This is a strip of paper about 2" x 24", which begins with a patch of pure white, ends with a patch of pure black, with even gradations of gray between the two ends. This exercise allows students to start gaining experience in paint handling, and sensitizes them to subtle gradations of lighter and darker values. The value scale also serves as a tool for gauging values once we begin the tonal landscape.

I encourage my students to use lots and lots of paint, as midlife beginners are notoriously shy about using up their materials. I promote the 'globular' approach, as I call it (the brush so unbelievably loaded, you would think it was a spoon). I ask them to mix far more paint than they think they'll need because, as I will tell them repeatedly, "It's easier to paint with more paint than with less paint." Many midlife students don't feel they deserve to use up art supplies, and unless I can wean them from their stinginess, they will waste a lot of time remixing. So I tell them, "We're here to waste art supplies!" Sometimes I bully them a little bit until they give in and do as I ask…but always with humour and sensitivity.

Following the value scale, we do a Brushwork Chart, sectioning a gray-painted paper into twelve parts. We mix up an array of about five different grays on our palette pads, which, along with black and white paint, give us seven values to work with. I then demonstrate twelve different types of brushwork, varying the consistency of the paint, the size and shape of the marks, and the use of different types of brushes. We do thin wash lines, opaque lines, dry brush, scumbling, split bristle, something I call 'curligraphy', short choppy strokes going off in all directions, wet-in-wet blends and gradations.

The brushwork exercise further develops students' fluency in paint handling, and begins to acquaint them with the various possible effects achievable through different combinations of values, marks, paint consistencies and applicators (brushes). Students are also further sensitized to the beauty of the tonal relationships they see on their brushwork chart.

Our tonal landscape comes next, which we will paint on a 16" x 20" canvas. "Working tonally", I tell my students, "you only have to make one

million decisions instead of ten million decisions". This is because we are dealing only with the contrasts of lighter and darker, whereas with colour we also have the contrasts of warmer and cooler, *and* brighter and duller.

I choose landscape as a first subject because it is very forgiving; if a tree flops this way or that way, it is still a tree, which is not quite true of teapots, buildings or people. We work on a middle-gray ground because against it, light values look light and dark values look dark, whereas on a white 'page' or canvas, all values look comparatively dark at first.

Working from a detail of a landscape photograph which they have chosen, and which I have had enlarged, I have students trace it on acetate with a fine Sharpie marker.

Tracing requires students to look at their subject very closely, so they will get to know every square millimetre of it. Then we trace it again, reducing it to its geometric components.

Tracing is fun because it is, in many students' minds, the apotheosis of 'cheating' and therefore a forbidden and outrageous pleasure. It is fun for all concerned, when I ask them to ally with me in a 'conspiracy of rebellion', saying 'Let's do it anyway!' I tell my students that artists throughout history have used every imaginable new device or technology they could get their hands on, in the service of their work, and the only thing that's truly cheating in painting is passing off you're your own work as someone else's (otherwise known as forgery).

After the tracing, we draw the landscape image on newsprint with charcoal, first as a geometric analysis, which will form the 'strong, simple

structure' I heartily encourage my students to base their image on. Then we tackle it gesturally, working quickly and loosely, to give the geometric underpinning some energy. Finally, we draw it upside down, with its various lights, darks, and details. This is a right-brain exercise inasmuch as the disorientation of drawing from an upside-down image bumps us into the so-called right brain, which frees us to simply see shapes without naming them. Thus it helps us to step out of the linear, conceptual mind into the speechless, shape-reading mind. Often, the upside down drawing is the best ones.

By this time, students are pretty well acquainted with the image and well prepared to draw it on the gray canvas with chalk, which, again, works like an erasable blackboard.

I like this method because it removes some of the taboo my students feel about making mistakes. When they see how easily they are corrected, they relax. I also make sure they realize that one of the great advantages of acrylic paint is that changes can be made so quickly and easily. And that many a painting is little more than a collection of corrected mistakes.

They draw the image on the canvas in chalk, referring to some or all of their previous tracings, drawings and the original photo. Once the drawing is on the canvas in chalk, I show my students how to put a thin wash line over the chalk line, and once that has dried, erase the chalk line altogether. Suddenly it is starting to look a wee bit like a painting, which is very exciting, as for most students. This is the first acrylic painting they have ever made in their lives.

The next step is building up the layers of a 'washy' underpainting, looking for the darkest darks and the lightest lights, using thin solutions of almost-white and almost-black. With each subsequent restatement of darks and lights,

rendered in increasingly opaque mixtures of paint, the image starts to take on value separation. Once the underpainting has gone as far as it can, it is a natural transition to proceed beyond that point using increasingly thick paint and all manner of combinations of brushwork and value.

The first day of the tonal landscape portion of my curriculum is by far the steepest learning curve of the course, as it brings together drawing, brushwork, composition, tonal value and painting. However, it always amazes and pleases me to see how simply (!) putting some watery paint on a toned canvas in a semi-orderly fashion magically produces — a painting! As I write these words I think back to last evening when three of my midlife students did precisely this, turning the blank gray canvases they came in with into evocative if incomplete landscape images. We were all rather in awe of the process which produced such a lovely start.

Students work on their tonal landscapes for three to four classes. I assist them, demonstrate where necessary, assign mini-lessons to show them how to do various things, and generally guide them along as best I can. On nice days, we take the paintings outdoors and look at them from a distance in a new location. Moving the painting off its home easel puts it into a different context, and helps the student to see it anew. As always, I encourage students to comment constructively on each other's work, and a good time is had by all.

Colour

After the tonal landscape project, my students are eager to get going in colour. I have them work in primary colours and black and white, so that they will develop a rock solid understanding of colour relationships. We use a cool

red, a cool blue and a cool yellow. The first task is to fill in the spaces on a Xeroxed colour wheel. I have a detailed handout (information sheet) outlining the basics of colour theory, and we go through this as we proceed. They learn what are the primary colours and why they are so called, then the secondary and tertiary colours, and the complementary colours. I show them how to make brown and 'black' from the primary colours, usually mixing together two complementary colours or all three primaries.

Ideally, what follows is a large number of colour 'strips' on quarter sheets of heavy gray-toned paper which, together, can be bound as a colour reference book, which will be very useful to students in future painting projects. I encourage students to use the 'globular' approach when doing these colour strips, to ensure opacity.

All twelve colours of the wheel are tinted (incremental additions of white until pure white), toned (incremental additions of gray until pure gray) and shaded (incremental additions of black until pure black). We turn each colour on the wheel into its opposite, and tint out some of the intermediary colours.

As well, I have a long list of oddball or 'fun mixtures' such as: to a tint of purple (mauve) add incremental amounts of a tint of blue green (pastel turquoise) until pure mauve. Add red-violet to yellow until pure red-violet. Hot pink to lime green. Yellow orange to red-violet. Pale orange to a tint of blue-violet. The possibilities are many, if not infinite.

I also find it beneficial to teach students to see colour as value (lightness/darkness) and intensity (brightness/dullness) rather than only as hue (blue, red, orange, green, etc.). For this exercise, I choose a Ralph Lauren paint chip (because they are large and square) and ask the students to exactly

reproduce the colour in the centre of a quarter sheet of gray toned paper (an interesting project in itself). Then I ask them to place any other colour of the same value in a same-size square beside the first colour. You can tell two colours have the same value because the edge between them seems to vibrate like neon; it is hard to focus on, as the eye does not know whether to make one or the other advance or recede. Adding additional squares is an interesting challenge.

For some, these exercises are tedious and repetitive. For others, the true colour lovers, they are a blissful respite from the more difficult aspects of painting. If it becomes too tedious, I break it up by inserting portions of the next project into each class.

The next project is a full-colour painting on a 22" x 28" canvas, working from (i.e. copying) a detail or a whole 'Fauve' image. The Fauves were the first modern art movement of the twentieth century, occurring between 1902 and 1907. Their work was a response (one might say a reaction formation) to Impressionism, which was so strictly observational. As it is said of Claude Monet, 'He was only an eye, but what an eye!' The Fauves wanted to take a more playful, expressionistic approach, taking artistic liberties with drawing, brushwork and colour. Their only mandate was to express the joy in life, through colour. The Fauves' influence had an enormous ripple effect, which is felt to this day.

I have my students work from a Fauve landscape for several reasons. One, it is a landscape, with all the advantages mentioned earlier, but a very loose one. Most midlife beginners, left to their own devices, tend to paint very tightly using a tiny brush in an attempt at photo-realism. I want them to expand beyond this self-limiting tendency and use lots of paint, lots of colour, inappropriate colour,

even, wonky drawing and loose brushwork. I also want them to closely regard a Fauve painting and reproduce the colours, which requires them to put their recently acquired colour mixing knowledge into practice. So copying a detail of a Fauve painting is an ideal next step for them. Here too they will work on a toned ground so that they can execute the drawing in chalk, but this time they can tone the canvas any colour they choose.

Once they have made their Fauve copy, we can go in a number of directions. One direction would be to make a drawing from a landscape photo, and then add colour to it in the style of the Fauves. Then, *paint from the drawing they made, not the photo*. Working from one's own work is a wonderful way to develop and expand one's creativity and confidence, and can lead to working in series.

Another extremely valuable exercise is based on the book, *How to See Colour & Paint It* (1984) by Arthur Stern. Stern introduces the notion of 'colour spotting'. Using a small gray viewfinder card with a small hole in it, one can compare paint mixtures precisely to the subject being painted. The point is that we sometimes "think" rather than "see" the colours we are looking at.

For example, a red barn bathed in twilight would probably be revealed as purplish through the colour spotting viewfinder, but we would "think" it was red, and paint it as such. In this exercise, as per Stern's instructions, students work from a setup of two or three fruits in a three-sided setup box. Each plane of the box has been covered with a sheet of paper in different colours, which will reflect colour onto the fruit forms and onto the other planes of the box. Having drawn the setup on a very small (9" x 12") gray-toned canvas, the student looks for the fewest possible colour 'spots', then mixes the colours, comparing them

until they are exactly accurate, and applies the paint with a palette knife. This is the 'first statement'. In the 'second statement', the student looks for colour spots within the earlier colour spots, mixes the exact colours, and paints them in with the knife. Stern advises that if we put the colour spots where we see them, as we see them, the object will appear to be three dimensional and lifelike. This exercise is extremely valuable for advancing students' understanding of colour. Also, while students start out feeling rather clumsy painting with the palette knife, by the end of the exercise, they have become extremely adept in its use.

I like to follow up the foregoing colour spotting exercise with a slightly more complex still life, using some man-made objects and patterned paper in the setup boxes. This project will be painted with brushes, rather than knives on a 12" square canvas, which will allow for blending a greater degree of realism.

Once these quirky little still life paintings are completed, I suggest that my students make half a dozen colour laser copies of the image and bring them to class. These we rip, cut, tear, shred and generally dismember. Then we reassemble the pieces into a non-objectively abstract collage, and I point out how the eye moves through the compositions (or not) and make suggestions. Once the collage is completed, we choose a small portion of it (with a viewfinder) and then paint a very loose interpretation of it on a large canvas with big brushes.

The point of these two exercises is to loosen up after the rigour of the colour spotting, to violate and re-assemble a representational image and turn it into an abstraction, which can serve as merely a jumping off point for a work of the imagination.

Following these exercises, I am inclined to offer assignments to my more advanced students, which resonate with their particular needs and desires. If

they want to paint big, blurry landscapes, I will help them with that. If they want to paint small, intimate kitchen still lifes, I will help them with that. If they want to paint abstraction, I will assist them with that.

It has been my observation that the students who stay with me long enough to get through these exercises (about two years) do very good work (not at all 'mediocre'). On several occasions, I have organized exhibitions of paintings by my 'student body'.

By this time, we will have spent several years together and have a very warm and friendly relationship. I am proud of their focus, hard work and commitment, and grateful for their custom. They are happy with their class experience and grateful for my instruction and inspiration. I continue to learn and grow, always aware that there is so much more that I do not know and am not yet ready to teach. I do not dare to become cavalier nor formulaic about it. But my students, for the time being, need a leader, and as long as I need students to lead, we have a very agreeable give-and-take which is beneficial to all concerned.

Seeking an Authentic Aesthetic Experience

As a teacher at the introductory level, I deal for the most part with the concerns of visual rather than conceptual art, imparting a foundation of basic techniques and ideas from the long tradition of painting. From this basis the student may grow in any direction they choose. As well, I feel a large part of my task is to provide emotional and psychological support to my students. Teachers will know that 'much of what cannot be taught, can be caught', tacitly imparted

to students through their teacher, who, consciously or unconsciously, models behaviour, attitudes, and values for her students.

My students are a small and particular group. As autonomous midlife adults, they are in attendance of their own accord, unlike schoolchildren who are subject to the curriculum decisions of parents and school boards. Also, while I have taught in two of Vancouver's most reputable art schools, my private continuing ed students are not looking for grades or credentials. They attend my classes voluntarily, usually working very hard, garnering no academic credit, gaining, in fact, nothing at all apart from the *experience* of painting itself.

What is it about this *experience*, which motivates them to come to night classes week after week in wet, wintry weather? I would argue that these students are drawn to painting in general by previous aesthetic experience of works seen, and to painting class in particular by the desire to generate a further, deeper aesthetic experience by taking up painting themselves.

I believe that the so-called 'aesthetic experience' is embedded in the art-making process, and that it is paradox. On the one hand it is detached and contemplative, akin to meditation. On the other hand, it is as sensuous and physically engaging as any pleasurable human bodily response. In both these capacities it is, by its very nature subjective and non-dualistic. Further, I believe that it offers the student much-needed food for the soul. I would also argue that the aesthetic experience is intrinsically contemplative.

My students' relationship to *Art* is neither scholarly nor critical. Rather, they operate within the *everyday* meaning of art, that collection of behaviours and attitudes which constellate around the social reality of the art object "whose only and proper use is to be beheld" (Maquet, 1986, p. 17). It is unlikely that any one

of them could define *Art.* Neither could most of us provide comprehensive definitions of everyday things like *love, electronics* or *time*; nevertheless we all know what is meant by these terms on a practical basis.

While *Art* may be seen as a complex, socially constructed reality 'built' by art historians, philosophers and critics, my students' grasp of it is closer to that of the anthropologist, whose construction of art is not fragmented, but seen as "a whole, in which [human] activities and creations are not considered each apart from the others" (Maquet, p. 3).

My students come to painting class to fulfil a passionate desire to paint. In Kantian terms, these most urgent and subjective human interests, involving the making of meaning in life, would ironically be seen as 'disinterested interest', the state of mind he deems to be prerequisite in order for 'the aesthetic experience' to take place.

This process of inquiry includes taking a closer look at the 'aesthetic experience' itself, for which we will now consult several authors in the field.

In *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (1986), Betty Edwards offers a persuasive description of the aesthetic experience as a 'special' way of seeing which facilitates drawing. Whether or not the so-called 'Left-' and 'Right-Brain' modes of thinking she espouses actually correspond biologically to our left and right brain hemispheres, I have no doubt that we have at our disposal (at least) two distinctly different modes of perception. The L-mode is described as verbal, analytical, symbolic, abstract, temporal, rational, digital, logical and linear, whereas the R-mode is said to be nonverbal, synthetic, concrete, analogic, non-temporal, non-rational, spatial, intuitive and holistic (Edwards, p. 40). Edwards' premise rests on the notion that if we give the dominant L-brain tasks it dislikes

or finds difficult to do (such as copying a complex, upside-down line drawing), we will accomplish a shift to R-mode. Drawing tasks which require extremely close observation, a form of seeing which does not rely on naming (using verbal skills) or symbolizing, will often have this effect, which I can attest to from my experience in teaching drawing (Edwards, 1989).

Once the drawing student has shifted into R-mode, she experiences a slightly altered state of consciousness, including a disinclination to speak, unawareness of the passage of time and, while alert, a pleasant, relaxed feeling of absorption. Edwards points out that viewing the works of some artists can cause this shift from linear, verbal mode to non-verbal, holistic mode, as well.

Jacques Maquet, in *The Aesthetic Experience; An Anthropologist Looks at the Visual Arts* (1986), states that "the beholder's mental preparation for an aesthetic encounter…appears to be similar, in fact almost identical, to the preparation recommended to meditators in some classical Eastern traditions (Maquet, p. 51)". He refers to a deep state of mental concentration (Samadhi) which is "favourable to a non-verbal understanding of the object" (Maquet, p. 53). He draws further parallels between the aesthetic and meditative experiences, noting that "the aesthetic attention should be nondiscursive" (Maquet, p. 52) and adds, "It is widely recognized that the aesthetic vision is disinterested, characterized by detachment, as Harold Osborne reminded us. The term, *detachment* is also used by teachers of meditation; affective fluctuations of emotions, feelings and desires make concentration impossible if they are left uncontrolled" (Maquet, p. 52).

Ellen Dissanayake (1992) faces the sensuous, physical component of aesthetic response squarely. She points out the taboos surrounding 'aesthetic emotion', noting that, in our postmodern age, where intimate details of sexuality

are openly discussed, mere mention of strong, *aesthetic* emotion is treated as bad form, an embarrassment. Instead, the subject of aesthetic response is seen as a disembodied phenomenon –bloodless and bodiless. She says that aesthetic response "may be as sensuous and physical as any human experience" (Dissanayake, p. 25) and traces the rejection of physical sensuality in aesthetic response to our Judeo-Christian denial of the body and its pleasures (the better to get into heaven). "These and other dualisms inherent in Western philosophical tradition — spiritual/physical, objective/subjective, form/content — have been as firmly entrenched in aesthetics as in any other branch of philosophy, thereby ensuring the persistence of the belief that art is incorporeal" (Dissanayake, p. 27). She states:

> Sheer sense experience, whether conscious or unconscious, without mental mediation, is aesthetically meaningless. It is *what the mind makes* of the physical sensations that is interesting and relevant. Hence, to anyone who stops to consider the subject of aesthetic response, the mind (or soul or spirit) seems to be the relevant vehicle for the experience of art…An aesthetics that tacitly or overtly holds to an obsolete duality of "body" and "soul" and, by extension, of "biology" and "art" seriously and unnecessarily restricts its scope and power. (Dissanayake, p. 29)

In my Continuing Ed classroom, I see evidence of the aesthetic experience arising in several different ways. I watch students move back and forth, from contemplative receptivity to activity, from so-called R-mode to paint, then, in L-mode, stand back and, with my help, analyse what they have done. I observe their silent absorption as they seem willing to paint on into the night and must be urged to pack up and go home at the end of class.

I see the degree to which painting — theirs, that of other students or works of the greats — has the power to move them deeply, to provoke extreme emotion; fury, despair, joy, terror all make their appearance in my classroom. It is a highly charged situation, made more so by the considerable content that I assiduously teach. I rely heavily on humour to dispel the mounting tension and defuse the serious intensity, which can become paralyzing.

In an intrapsychic sense, the stakes are very high for my students. They have come to my classroom by subtle invitation — something in their soul has identified a hunger for whatever art may have to offer them. They have gone a step beyond enjoying the art of others, and are taking the risk of attempting to make art themselves. As they are utter beginners with no grounds for confidence other than sheer determination, I am called upon to carefully nurture this fragile desire, supporting it where I can by technical, psychological and intellectual means. Most of all, I have enormous respect for their willingness to set aside the prosaic concerns of daily life, make themselves vulnerable and, with brush in hand, embrace Art, the antidote to all predictability.

Works Cited

Bai, Heesoon. "Beyond the Educated Mind: Towards a Pedagogy of Mindfulness", *Unfolding Bodymind.* Brent Hocking, Johanna Haskell, Warren Linds, Eds. Rutland, Vermont: Foundation for Educational Renewal, 2001.

Bailin, Sharon et al. "Panel Discussion", *Interchange, V. 16 #1 (Spring 1985).* CAN: U. of Calgary, 1985.

Bailin, Sharon."Rationality and Intuition", J.P. Portelli and Sharon Bailin (eds), *Reason and Values*. CAN: Detslig Enterprises, 1993.

Bailin, Sharon. *Achieving Extraordinary Ends, An Essay on Creativity.* CAN: University of Manitoba, 1994.

Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius, Towards a Feminist Aesthetics.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Bayles, David and Orland, Ted. *Art and Fear; Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking.* Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993.

Brown, Byron. *Soul Without Shame; A Guide to Liberating Yourself from the Judge Within.* Boston: Shambhala, 1999.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou.* Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Scribner Classics, 1986.

Dissanayake, Ellen. *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why.* Toronto: Maxwell MacMillan, Canada, 1992.

Edwards, Betty. *Drawing On The Artist Within, A Guide to Innovation, Invention, Imagination and Creativity.* New York: Simon and Shuster, 1986.

Edwards, Betty. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: A Course in Enhancing Creativity and Artistic Confidence.* Los Angeles, J.P. Tarcher, 1986.

Egan, Kieran. *Imagination in Teaching and Learning,* London, Ont.: Althouse Press, 1992.

Eisner, Elliot. *The Arts and the Creation of Mind.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Elkins, James. *Why Art Cannot Be Taught..* University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Feldman, Edmund B. *The Artist.* University of Georgia; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1982.

Fowers, Carmel. *Vancouver Academy of Art,* Winter 1999 Brochure.

Goldstein, Carl. *Teaching Art; Academies and Schools From Vasari to Albers.* US: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Gould, Roger L. *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life.* New York: Simon and Shuster, 1978.

Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by Culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Hattiangadi, Jagdish. "Novelty, Creation and Society", *Imagination in Teaching and Learning.* CAN: University of Calgary, 1985.

Haynes, Deborah J. *The Vocation of the Artist.* Washington State University: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hitchens, Christopher. *God is Not Great; How Religion Poisons Everything.* Toronto: MacLelland & Stewart, 2007.

Hollis, James. *The Middle Passage; From Misery to Meaning.* Toronto: Inner City Books, 1993.

Hudson, Frederic M. *The Adult Years; Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.

Izzo, John. *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishing, Inc. 2008.

Kant, Immanuel. "Genius Gives The Rules", A. Rotherberg and C. Hausman, *The Creativity Question.* US: Duke University press, 1976.

Kincheloe, Joe L., Shirley R. Steinberg, and Deborah J Tippins, *The Stigma of Genius.* Durango Colorado: Hollowbrook Publishing, 1992.

Knowles, Malcolm. *The Adult Learner; A Neglected Species* .Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1990.

London, Peter. *No More Secondhand Art; Awakening the Artist Within.* Boston and London: Shambala, 1989.

MacGregor, John. *What Is Abstract Art?* The Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art. The Canadian Art Database: 003 Canadian Writers' Files. Toronto: 1997.

Maquet, Jacques, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks At The Visual Arts*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986.

Moore, Thomas. *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life.* New York, NY. HarperCollins, 1992.

Moisiewitsch, Carel. *Planet of The Arts,* Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, Spring l998.

Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good.* London: Routledge Classics, 2001.

Nelson, Victoria. *On Writer's Block : A New Approach to Creativity.* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Nicolaides, Kimon. *The Natural Way to Draw: A working Plan for Art Study.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

The Penguin English Dictionary. London: Penguin Books, 2001.

Sadler, William A. *The Third Age; Six Principles for Growth and Renewal After Forty.* Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 2000.

Shahn, Ben. *The Shape of Content.* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press. 1957.

Sinnot, Jann D. "Creativity and Postformal Thought: Why the Last Stage is the Creative One" , Ed. Carolyn E. Adams-Price, *Creativity and Successful Aging.* New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1998.

Skinner, B.F. "A Behavioral Model of Creation", A. Rotherberg and C. Hausman, *The Creativity Question*. US: Duke University Press: 1976.

Stern, Arthur. *How to See Color and Paint It.* New York: Watson Guptill, 1984.

Stone, Hal, PhD and Stone, Sidra, PhD. www.voicedialogue.org

Taylor, Charles. *The Malaise of Modernity.* Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1991.

Wallas, G. "The Art of Thought", P.E. Vernon, *Creativity.* US: Penguin Publishing, 1976.

Weisberg, Robert W. *Genius and Other Myths; What You, Mozart, Einstein & Picasso Have In Common.* New York: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1986.

Weisberg, Robert W. *Creativity; Beyond the Myth of Genius.* New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1994.

Wolfe, Thomas. *The Painted Word.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

Young, Gerald. *Adult Development, Therapy and Culture; A Postmodern Synthesis.* New York: Plenum Press, 1997.

Zydell, Chris, MA. *Who Is This Inner Critic And What The Heck Is It Doing Inside My Head?* Creative Juices Weblog, www.creativejuicesarts.com, 2006.