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**Facilitating the Process of Becoming an Art Therapist:
A Heuristic Inquiry**

Jessica L. Arsenault

A Research Paper

in

The Department

of

Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Facilitating the Process of Becoming an Art Therapist:

A Heuristic Inquiry

Jessica L. Arsenault

This heuristic inquiry examines how the author's process of creating artwork has enhanced and accompanied her on-going development toward becoming an art therapist. Creative practice is both the subject matter of the research and part of the method of inquiry. Moustakas's stages of heuristic research are discussed, along with the use of art making as a useful means of exploring those stages. Theory and literature related to the use of art making as a part of art therapy education is presented along with art making for professional self-processing. Winnicott's theory of potential space is applied to the author's concept of creating a personal, sacred and reflective space through individual art making. Overall, this research project is about a process of self-discovery and of gaining a deeper understanding of the potential art making has as a vehicle for transformation.

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FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF BECOMING AN ART THERAPIST:

A HEURISTIC INQUIRY

Introduction

As far back as I can remember I have made art. Art making is like an old friend, it forgives my frequent absences, and welcomes me back warmly whenever we are able to reconnect. Art making has helped me through countless difficult and stressful times in my life, each time giving me a sense of peace and comfort. Art making has also helped me express positive emotions, acting as a creative outlet that allowed me to feel deeply connected to myself. Two years ago when I began the long and difficult journey to become an art therapist, I was well aware of the potential art making has to change one's life; this was something I wanted to be able to share with other people. I imagined that art making would accompany me once again through another emotionally challenging experience.

It seemed natural that my own process of art making should become my research area, as I hoped to better define what I knew and felt about personal art making. However, in the end, I wanted to delineate my experience of art making in the course of my studies within an art therapy master's program for selfish reasons; I decided that I wanted to focus on me for a while and allow myself the space I give so many other people. The gift that I decided to give myself was that art making would become part of my means to become an art therapist.

I have conducted a heuristic inquiry into how my process of creating artwork has facilitated my becoming an art therapist. My creative practice is both the subject matter of my research journey and part of the method of this inquiry.

As a new graduate student of art therapy I felt that something was missing in my learning experience, namely a connection to my own art making. I was searching for a way to

understand and reflect on my experience of becoming an art therapist as an integral aspect of my artistic identity and vice versa, for my artist practice to provide a means of reflection and understanding in the therapeutic process. My research question is entirely subjective in nature, as is my search for discovery and knowledge; following are some of the reasons why I chose to engage myself in a heuristic inquiry. My question of how art making facilitates my process of becoming an art therapist can only be described as 'an intense itch that cannot be scratched'. I was not searching for a definitive answer as to whether making artwork was important in my developmental process of becoming a therapist. I was interested in exploring *how* artwork facilitates the path toward becoming an art therapist. This initial research question acted only as a guide, as I allowed the heuristic process to take on its own course, a process that this research paper explores.

The decision to engage in heuristic research methodology flows naturally out of an unanswered personal question. This type of research must come from the personal experience of the researcher; the research concerns must present themselves with a certain measure of intensity (Carolan, 2001). The principal goals of heuristic inquiry are exploration discovery, self-transformation (Sela-Smith, 2002) and insight into the nature and meaning of an experience (Moustakas, 1990). A heuristic inquiry aims to uncover meaning and knowledge deeply embedded within oneself through experience and understanding (Sela-Smith). I felt that a heuristic inquiry fit my research question because it involves a more global process that was less restrictive and deductive in nature.

True to the heuristic research design, my research question involved a large degree of uncertainty in its outcome and findings. As both the subject/object of the research study and the researcher, I remained open throughout my inquiry to new findings, possibilities, and

emergent goals that would benefit my private and professional selves. Initially I imagined that through the process of creating artwork I would be better able to reflect on and understand my experience of becoming an art therapist. The direction my research took in the end surprised me; it was far from where I expected it to go. This journey, not unlike many others, was a process that went through many stages of evolution. I was emotionally involved in the research as the subject matter is deeply personal and connected to my sense of identity.

In the very beginning of my journey toward becoming an art therapist I remember feeling frustrated about the lack of time and energy available to devote toward my art making, therefore within this research paper I explored how art making is (or isn't) integrated into art therapy educational programs. The evolution of the research moved through a phase of understanding personal art making as a way of intentionally processing the therapeutic work I did with my clients. During this phase of the heuristic research, I examined the literature about art making as a way to professionally process clinical work for learning therapists. My heuristic research then brought me to a place where I realized the importance of personal time and space in becoming a well-balanced therapist and person; art making facilitated a valued physical and psychic place within myself. I applied Winnicott's (1971) idea of *potential space* to my process of generating a space through art making in which there was the potential to both play and be creative. It is a space that is all my own.

A research inquiry based in art making fits naturally into the heuristic research model, as the process of creating art includes our use of tacit knowledge (Carolan, 2001). Tacit knowledge is a key component of heuristic research (Sela-Smith, 2002). A heuristic research project that integrated art making as a method of inquiry allowed me the opportunity to

engage in research as a practical and multifaceted experiential endeavor. It also assisted me in uncovering the truth and meaning behind my research question in a familiar and comfortable way. More practically, art making as a method of inquiry helped me to collect data, and document the process of my heuristic research. My art responses were the primary methods used to further the heuristic inquiry. Most importantly, I see the artwork as a tangible record and representation of my subjective experiences.

Within the larger frame of research conducted in art therapy, art-based inquiry provides the researcher the opportunity to work in a way that is reflective of our (art therapists) primary way of integrating information; through art and imagery. Carolan (2001) argues that as researchers within the field of art therapy we also have a responsibility to engage in research that helps us (and others) to understand what therapeutic elements making art evokes.

Overall, this research project has been a process of self-discovery, of gaining a deeper understanding of the potential of my personal art making as a vehicle for transformation. The emphasis of this paper lies in the process of transformation, a process that I applied to my own journey. Although this paper is about my process it is also meant to highlight the potential art making has as a facilitator of any process, whether therapeutic, artistic or otherwise. The research paper describes, documents and has enabled the heuristic process of self-discovery to take place.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Art Making: Art Therapy Training and Education

Art making is an important part of the experience and training of an art therapist (Allen, 1992; Moon, 1992; Wadson, 2003; Wix, 1995, 1996). Within the profession of art therapy there is some concern over educational training models emphasizing the verbal-psychological strengths of the profession over the artistic strengths (Wix). In fact, within a training program it can be difficult for the art therapy intern to find the physical and psychological space to create personal artwork on his or her own (Seiden, Calisch, & Henley, 1989). In part, I am grounding the model of a studio approach to art therapy training in a heuristic arts-based inquiry because of the similar working premises the two models share. I am also interested in evaluating an educational model that emphasizes the importance of personal reflection for the professional development of the therapist, in this case such reflection results from and occurs within the practice of art making. When I embarked on my own educational inquiry, I considered creativity, professional experience, and the ongoing search for a deeper understanding of oneself to be part of the journey to becoming an art therapist and an integral part of the practice itself.

Throughout the dozens of art therapy programs currently operating in North America, there is a substantial difference between the ways each approach the role of art making for interns. In part, this difference speaks to the broader academic-institutional context within which the program lies, and the theoretical model of each program (Wix, 1996). Some art therapy programs place more emphasis on quantitative research and concepts related to other mental health disciplines (Dulicai, Hays & Nolan, 1989). Other training programs place more importance on grounding art therapy within the greater field of fine art (Seiden et

al., 1989; Wix, 1995). Both training models (and all of those that fall in between) have their own inherent strengths and weaknesses.

This discussion focuses on the model that highlights the use of art making for art therapy interns. In the literature, this approach is a studio-based model (Wix, 1995, 1996). Seiden et al. (1989) provide a rationale for using a studio-based model in art therapy education by emphasizing that art-making contributes to an art therapist's personal growth, depth of understanding, problem solving, and creative thinking. Wix (1996) conducted a study to better understand the experience of studio-based art making for interns. The results found that students benefit from personal art making in various ways. Studio-based art therapy training deepens the connection students have with clients and better their understanding of what they are asking of their clients in therapy. It also enables them to connect more deeply with themselves and encourages them to reflect on the internship experience itself while offering them an expressive outlet, and providing increased opportunity for relaxation (Wix). Overall, the study showed that through art making art therapy students were better able to have trust in the process of art therapy.

When art therapists engage in their own personal art making experience during their training they are able to connect to the heart of the creative process. This includes experiences that might be felt by the client as well—frustration, personal struggle, confusion, stagnation, intimidation, and likely increased insight (Seiden et al., 1989). Through making artwork, intern therapists are able to reflect on their own experience in a way that is familiar because already well practiced. Interestingly, interns have found that their clinical training has positively influenced their art process, and given them deeper insight into their own artwork (Seiden et al.) In this way, artwork acts as a reflective and

documentary space for the process of becoming a therapist. Art therapy interns also need an expressive outlet to serve as a familiar structure during a period in their lives that can be difficult (Wix, 1995). Wix (1996) eloquently summarizes the process of art making in light of the learning therapist's journey, "...art is a way of coming to terms with experience" (p. 175).

Professional Self-Processing for Learning Therapists

The use of the term professional self-processing in reference to training art therapists is mainly used as a term referring to the students' response to clinical work (Wadeson, 2003). The idea of professional self-processing is common to many branches of the helping fields, at times referred to as 'intern self-care' (Turner, Edwards, Eicken, Yokoyama, Castro, & Tran et al, 2005). In this instance, it suggests a more personal experience rather than a clinical response. Some studies undertaken examine the effect of stress on intern populations (Julliard, Intilli, Ryan, Vollman, & Seshadri, 2002), and suggest that by making artwork interns are better able to express ideas and feelings about their experience that cannot be verbalized. A review of the current literature found that art therapy interns are often encouraged to make art work in response to their clinical experiences (Fish, 2008; Malchiodi & Riley, 1996; Wadeson, Marano-Geiser, & Ramsayer, 1990; Wadeson, 2003). Art therapy literature does not seem to completely separate the intern's personal experience of becoming a therapist from their clinical experience, this may suggest that these experiences are difficult to separate. Some authors (Brown, Meyerowitz-Katz, & Ryde, 2007) believe that while often images are referenced in the supervision of student therapists, that the images belong to the clients not the therapists. In general, there is support and rationale for the

encouragement of student therapists to use their own art making as a way of processing, investigating, and communicating their experience of becoming an art therapist.

Some of the literature suggests that professional self-processing for art therapists can occur outside of supervision, in post session image making (Kielo, 1991), while other studies encourage image making for professional processing in supervision (Wadeson, 2003). In one recent study, (Fish, 2008) the author set out to better understand how art therapy interns integrate the experience of making their own artwork in supervisory sessions. More specifically, she wanted to know if students view art making as a container for their experiences, for professional development, and for insight into their client's experiences (among other perspectives) (Fish). The findings indicated that the majority of students found art making important for self-care both within and out of supervisory sessions. In addition, the majority of students found that arts-based supervision helps them integrate their experience of being an artist with their clinical work as an art therapist. Some students reportedly preferred to create images related to their intern experiences at home using their own art materials, and on their own time. Making artwork in supervision is one way of processing the experience of becoming a therapist; image making is another way of communicating our experiences (Brown et al., 2007).

D.W. Winnicott and Potential Space

British psychoanalyst and pediatrician, Donald Winnicott introduced the concept of *potential space* (Jemstedt, 2000). Potential space is a hypothetical concept used to describe “the potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world...” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 103). Winnicott thought of

potential space as an area of existence that was neither completely internal nor completely external, rather a combination and intermediate area between both of these states of being. He used the idea of potential space to describe and explain the existence of our perception of illusion and reality (LaMothe, 2005). Frankel (2002) describes Winnicott's theory of potential space as, "...the location of the encounter between the psychological existence of a human being and the facticity of the world" (p. 8). The realm of potential space brings together our fantasy life with the reality of our real life (Frankel). Other words that Winnicott used to describe potential space include: transitional space, intermediate area, third area and in between inner and outer reality (Jemstedt). Originally, Winnicott used the term to illustrate the space that develops between an infant and its mother once the infant starts to separate from its mother in a bid for more independence. The inherent possibilities of the potential space are considered highly variable, depending on one's early experience with their mother (Jemstedt). The growing space between an infant and its mother is very important because as Winnicott thought, it was here that the infant learns to play; within the potential space exists a play space (Winnicott).

Within our capacity to play lies our capacity to become a creative individual (Jemstedt, 2000). Winnicott (1971) writes, "*It is play that is the universal*, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships..." (p. 41). Winnicott believed that the most important aspect of being able to play was that playing allows an individual to feel free to be creative. He further explains this idea, "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self" (Winnicott, p. 54). Potential space seems like a sacred space in which a person can explore

their creativity or artistry while drawing on dimensions of both the imagination and their surroundings.

While originally Winnicott described the development of potential space in the relationship between infant and mother it can be generalized and applied to the productive space adults experience later in life. Winnicott (1971) applied his theory of potential space to adults as well. The potential space that an adult might experience is a *psychological space*, referring to an intermediate area that bridges subjective and objective reality (Robbins, 2001). Art therapy naturally creates room for psychological space; a place similar to potential space or transitional space where one is free to play and be creative (Robbins). Langarten and Lubbers (1991) further this argument, “Art therapy can replicate this potential space. The ability to form symbols (within art making) brings meaning to the world of shared reality” (p. 102). Once a children experience the joy of play they learn to play mutually along side other children; after, they move on to a more intense experience of creativity and culture that is developed out of their play (Jemstedt, 2000). As adults these experiences manifest as “...experiencing that appertains to culture, art, religion and creative activity” (Jemstedt, p. 129).

Overall, the concept of potential space is a hypothetical construct. However, it is a construct that represents the lived experience of being in a protected private space, based on the original experience of space between mother and infant. This is a containing, quiet place where play and creativity are only limited by our own inability to welcome the space into our lives.

METHODOLOGY

Heuristic Research Defined

Heuristic research is a phenomenological approach to research aimed at understanding the researcher's personal experience as opposed to the experience of others (Junge & Linesch, 1993). The researcher must have both personal experience and intense interest in the phenomenon under study in order to authentically and appropriately engage in heuristic research (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, Patton, 2002). As a qualitative research model, heuristic inquiry is inherently appropriate for art therapy based research given that it allows for more interpretive subjectivity, which is a natural outcome of both art and art therapy (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998). In addition, this qualitative method allows for human experience to emerge and often takes the researcher's perspective into consideration (Bloomgarden & Netzer).

Moustakas (1990), the birth father of the heuristic research method, defines it as, "...a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation" (p. 9). Further, when engaging in heuristic research, "The object is not to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem of phenomenon itself..." (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). In other words, unlike quantitative research methods that strive to test hypotheses, heuristic inquiry aims to uncover meaning and knowledge deeply embedded within one's self through experience and understanding (Sela-Smith, 2002).

A heuristic research question is developed out of an awareness of one's internal self, out of significant personal meaning, and out of inspiration (Moustakas, 1990). The validity for

this type of research comes from within the researcher, and from an adherence to the six stages of heuristic research originally outlined by Douglas & Moustakas (1985), later expanded on by Moustakas, and more recently modified and critiqued by Sela-Smith (2002).

Stages of Heuristic Research

The six stages of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research methodology include: engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and synthesis. Each of these stages evolves naturally from the use of the researcher's intuition as opposed to formal methodological techniques (Sela-Smith, 2002). Sela-Smith strongly cautions that the researcher should not be on a fixed time line when moving through the stages of heuristic research. Each stage cannot be planned or meticulously controlled, but instead must flow naturally from the researchers process and genuine completion of the phase before it. Sela-Smith writes, "...the researcher must release control and discover whatever the stage has to offer" (2002, p. 63).

In the first of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research phases, initial engagement, the researcher attempts to discover and further clarify their research interest and question in relation to the phenomenon under study. Moustakas encourages the researcher to dialogue with her self, define and clarify her terms, and elucidate the context from which the research question took its form. Sela-Smith (2002) suggests that the search for the research question comes from something within our self (consciously or unconsciously), an experience that needs to be completed.

In the second, immersion phase, Moustakas (1990) believes that everything crystallizes around the research question. The researcher enters spontaneous self-dialogue, self-

searching, conscious focus, and pursuit of intuitive clues. Further, the researcher sets out to live the question in waking states, while sleeping, and in dream states (Sela-Smith, 2002). As mentioned previously these phases should come spontaneously and unforced. However, immersion must involve the *entire self* in order to engage fully in the process of uncovering and self-discovery (Sela-Smith).

During the third and fourth phases of incubation and illumination, the researcher retreats from the intense immersion and focuses on the research question (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher stops seeking any new information, having naturally obtained all of the information the unconscious requires to reorganize understanding and create meaning (Sela-Smith, 2002). The fourth phase of illumination may happen for the researcher in a moment or over time. Like many of Moustakas' phases, it is unpredictable in timing and content. Illumination involves a breakthrough into conscious awareness, something that occurs naturally when the researcher is open to intuition and tacit knowledge (Moustakas, Sela-Smith).

Next, the researcher proceeds to the fifth phase of explication. In this phase, the purpose is to consciously examine and awaken that discovered in illumination (Moustakas 1990, Sela-Smith, 2002). The researcher continues to explore, self-search, and focus so that she can be open to her feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Sela-Smith also outlines that this is the period for the researcher when new meaning and understanding start to resonate.

The final phase of creative synthesis occurs when the researcher has mastered and integrated the knowledge of the new material their inquiry has uncovered (Moustakas, 1990). At this point Moustakas challenges the researcher to put the core components and themes into creative synthesis. The synthesis aims to tell a story about their discovery,

“some new whole” that emerged from the heuristic inquiry (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 68). The goal is to share this experience through creativity with others for whom it may resonate.

Assessment of Heuristic Research

There are some inherent obstacles and inconsistencies within Moustakas's (1990) heuristic research design that make it a demanding research model to follow. Sela-Smith (2002) believes that Moustakas contradicted his own research design when he conducted a heuristic research study on the experience of loneliness. Sela-Smith writes, "... due to unacknowledged resistance to experiencing unbearable pain, Moustakas's research focus shifted from the self's experience of the experience to focusing on the idea of the experience" (p. 53). In other words Moustakas moved away from the foundation of his research model by not focusing on the feelings associated with loneliness and more toward the idea of loneliness. Overall even Moustakas was unable to remain truly self-focused. Heuristic researchers may have a hard time being open to their emergent feelings and experiences if the subject matter is deeply personal. As with the example of Moustakas, Sela-Smith found that in ninety percent of the heuristic research projects she reviewed the researchers studied external situations as opposed to internally felt experiences.

It appears as though conducting a truly authentic heuristic research study is easier in theory than in practice. A researcher must be able to remain focused on feeling the experience and releasing control of the process in order to complete each stage with integrity. Releasing control of the process, while adhering to a formulated research model, creates a certain amount of ambiguity within the heuristic researcher. Moustakas created a

methodological structure that states one should not follow a methodological structure (Sela-Smith, 2002).

It is especially challenging for a researcher to release herself from methodological structures when conducting the research in order to fulfill an academic requirement, such as I am doing. Sela-Smith agrees, a student researcher who is conducting research in order to graduate may not personally and ideally connect with their research question. In addition, academic requirements mean that the researcher's focus shifts from being self focused (crucial to the immersion phase of research) toward external concerns such as time constraints and the completion of each of the phases of heuristic research.

It is further argued that under these circumstances, the heuristic researcher is unable to immerse in a process of self-discovery and therefore the research fundamentally lacks integrity (Sela-Smith, 2002). Sela-Smith's viewpoint is being offered as consideration here merely to present the reader with a critical assessment of this research paper within the context of a larger institution. As the researcher, I made every attempt to adhere to the methodology of the heuristic research design to uphold the integrity of my research project.

Using Art to Facilitate Heuristic Research

Heuristic research places emphasis on the experience of the researcher, and on the process of creating discovered knowledge (Carolan, 2001). A heuristic model is used by art therapy researchers, often in combination with an art-based creative process (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998; Fenner, 1996; Kapitan, 1997; Kaufman, 1996; Lett, 1998; Ratcliff, 1977). It seems as though the two research models often go hand in hand, especially within the art therapy community. Researchers use art-based creative processes in order to further their

inquiry into the heuristic experience. Heuristic research is valuable to art therapists as it promotes personal development, which is necessary toward increased professional development and competency (Bloomgarden & Netzer).

Known more formally as arts-based research, which is a relatively young research model (Carolan, 2001; McNiff, 1998), inquiry through creative process may focus on the relationship art has to therapy, the therapeutic process of creating artwork, and the power of the relationship the image has to healing (Carolan). A number of authors are strong advocates for arts-based research (Finley, 2005; Junge and Linesch, 1993; Landy, 1993; Linesch, 1995; McNiff, 1986, 1998; Patton, 2002). I am also a strong supporter of art-based research, as I tend to agree that researchers should use methods that best fit their personality, and that are best-suited to answer their research question. However, for my inquiry, I used a simpler and less formalized version of arts-based research and refer to my inquiry as a creative process based in art making.

Junge and Linesch (1993) believe that it is important for a researcher to use research techniques to which they are attuned to, they add, “Crucial to effective and enjoyable research for the art therapist is that there be a match between his or her personal style of engaging with the world and the particular research methods utilized in the inquiry” (p. 63). Landy (1993) simply states that the profession of art therapy is aesthetically based, and that the heart of our profession is founded on the idea that healing occurs because one is involved in the creative process. I would also like to add to his argument by saying that not only is the creative process healing; it is also introspective and illuminating. It is my assumption that art therapy is healing and offers people insight into themselves. One of the

strengths of arts-based research lies in its potential to bridge our understanding of art and healing (Carolan, 2001).

Heuristic research and arts-based research rely on the idea of tacit knowledge; it is on this point that both research models converge with art therapy. Moustakas (1990) defines tacit knowledge as “the deep structure that contains the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and judgments housed in the internal frame of reference of a person that governs behavior and determines how we interpret experience” (p. 32). Kaufman (1996) conducted a heuristic, arts-based inquiry in which she used artwork and journal writing as a way of studying the use of boxes in art therapy. Subsequently Kaufman used both her artwork and journal writing to identify and confirm emergent themes in her research. Another researcher, Fenner (1996) used a divergent adapted model of Moustakas’ heuristics to determine the value of brief drawing experiences in the enhancement of personal meaning and therapeutic change.

My Experience of the Heuristic Process

I perceive this research experience as a process, one that is somewhat limited by time constraints and institutional guidelines. Never the less, my art making is a process of evolution that will not stop when this research paper is completed or when I finish my graduate program. This I know because the process and the evolution existed long before the current inquiry and it is closely associated with my sense of identity. I saw this project as an attempt to clarify the role art making played in my development as an art therapist. The initial engagement phase of research helped me to contextualize my ideas and my concerns by allowing me to explore the immense amount of literature on the topic of being an artist

and a therapist. Much of the exploration in this phase of the heuristic research materialized through literature. During this time I produced a few images that will be discussed in greater detail in the findings sections of this paper. I spent a great deal of time reflecting in this phase, more than the other phases. I then continued to follow Moustakas's (1990) heuristic research model with some awkwardness.

As previously mentioned the research model contradicts itself and does not necessarily lend itself nicely to a researcher who is under time constraints. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the way the process seemed to naturally unfold and by some of the insights I obtained as a result of the time spent in my studio making artwork. I see my research question itself as part of the evolution and transformation of the research process. In the end, I found that my research question needed further explanation in order to uphold the essence of this research project.

Initial Engagement

The search to define my research question started almost from the moment I entered the Master's in Art Therapy program. I say this because this is when the tension began between art making and academics that I mentioned earlier. This initial phase of concern about my identity as an artist closely matches Moustakas's (1990) first phase of heuristic research of initial engagement, the stage where the researcher discovers an intense interest in a subject that has undeniable personal implications. I remember feeling frustrated in the early days of my degree, as though I had chosen one identity, to become a therapist, over being an authentic artist. My feeling was that these two distinct identities could not exist simultaneously within me. Later I was relieved to unearth a great deal of literature written

on the subject of artists who are therapists. It seemed as though I was not the first to question this awkward identity, our profession as a whole has struggled many years to clearly define a collective identity.

Naumberg and Cane (founders of early art therapy) accurately represent the ancestral divergence and identity crisis of art therapy, the “two poles” as it is described (Wix, 2000, p. 169), which correspond to the artistic focus and the therapy/psychiatry focus of the art therapy profession. Moon (2002) outlines a number of factors that may have contributed to a perceived focus on therapy, intellect, and psychiatry rather than a smooth convergence between art and therapy practices. He states that for more than fifty years art therapy has placed emphasis on the psychological aspects of art therapy, with little emphasis on the artistic roots. He attributes the emergence of this professional identity to art therapists wanting to be seen as truly ‘professional’, a therapist’s perceived need for recognition by government and American insurance companies, and lastly, a resistance toward identifying with the art world. It is Moon’s first and last points that seem to be at the heart of much of the discussion around the polarity of the art therapy profession. He suggests that early in our profession’s history there was a tendency to not want to identify with the art world, mainly because artists were seen as a frivolous part of society.

The title of *artist* carries a lot of weight: it implies a number of professional standards such as exhibiting and selling work, maintaining a studio and more (Moon, 2002). Also of significance is the idea of professional credibility, in the early days of art therapy practice (and arguably currently) it was vital for art therapists to be credible and meet the professional standards of various medical settings (Moon).

This belief in itself seems to imply that artistic or a more intuitive based art therapy is not credible. In order for our profession to not only survive its formative years, but also thrive in them, art therapists had to inherit the language of other disciplines and focus on the intellectual therapeutic roots of our profession (Moon, 2002). The apparent polarity of art therapy's inherited identity can be summed up with two questions. Are we therapists who use art based techniques? Or are we artists who work in treatment settings? (Moon).

Ault (1977) believes that it's possible that as art therapists, each of us will struggle with our professional identity as a result of trying to strike a balance between art and therapy (AATA proceedings); a struggle that is closely linked to our collective history as well as to our personal experience and identity.

Allen (2001) describes a frustration, which is central to the identity development of an art therapy intern who is trying to navigate the waters of her own professional identity. It seems as though there is a disconnection and therefore a disturbance by not having a common goal between the art therapist's personal artistic process and the way one might work with her clients (Allen). Artwork is not spoken about in the same way as it would be if one was speaking as an artist not a therapist, and this is a significant point of convergence (Allen). It is where artist and therapist meet to form a "hybrid identity" (Rigg, 2004, p. 2) drawing on the strengths of both art and psychotherapy. Ault (1977) believes that there doesn't need to be a dichotomy or polarization between art and therapy, that the two are actually very compatible (AATA proceedings). He further states that the artistic process and treatment processes are very similar in nature, both requiring a set of unique skills that not every artist or therapist individually possess.

Numerous authors have written about the unique qualities that art therapists need to possess, including the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). In 2001, the AATA released a brochure *Art Therapy: The Profession* (reviewed in Feen-Calligan, 2005) that lists personal qualities that are attributed to individuals in the art therapy profession. Some of the qualities listed include: “sensitivity to human needs and expression, emotional stability, a capacity for insight into psychological processes, and an understanding of art media” (p. 123), amongst others. Art therapists have a special quality and energy derived from both our understanding of art processes and therapeutic background that contributes to the way we work with clients (Moon, 2002).

Moon (2002) has spent a great deal of his career seeking to find out what informs and motivates our professional identity as art therapists, essentially why do art therapists believe in the process of art therapy? He sets apart five contributing factors: art making as self exploration, art making as a form of documentation in therapeutic work, responsive interaction with clients, a form of personal clarification and containment for the art therapist, and art as a spiritual practice (Moon). Through their work art therapists continually validate their inherent belief in the art product and the artistic and therapeutic process (Moon).

In his 1994 book *Introduction to Art Therapy: Faith in the Product*, Moon comprehensively examines the historical divergence in art therapy’s professional identity. He believes that it is essential that the art therapist identify with both artist and therapist, not doing so “does violence” to our profession (Moon, p. 23). Further, he writes, “...taking apart the words of our title, breaking them into their separate parts, is a typical western, lineal thinking thing to do. This is flawed thinking that is needlessly divisive” (p. 23). Given the conjoined nature of our work it seems essential that art therapists have many strengths. We

identify with both being an artist and being a knowledgeable and skilled clinician. However, this seems easier said than done. Moon goes on to clarify that although art therapists must certainly be artists and clinicians they must identify with being an artist primarily; because foremost art therapists must have regard for the “image, process, and product” (p. 27).

Marks-Fleming (1993) writes about the importance of maintaining strong ties to one’s artist identity; working as an artist can inform and benefit our clinical practice through skill development and an increased sensitivity to the creative process. McNiff (1998) echoes both Moon (1994) and Marks-Fleming by stating that art therapists should have a solid grounding in scientific thinking, but he is quick to add that an art therapist’s scientific training should never be exclusive of aesthetic knowing, and artistic problem solving. Further, McNiff (2004) expands on his previous idea by emphasizing the artist’s ability to artistically problem solve through being able to face conflict in art therapy. He believes that conflict is the subject matter of art therapy, and that the art therapist is able to engage with the client in the energy of conflict through the art process (McNiff).

The creative process and self-discovery.

Mary Huntoon, arguably one of the founding ‘mothers’ of arts based art therapy, once said that she believes that all artists are practicing self therapy (Wix, 2000). Art making inherently has curative properties, which is the idea that lies at the foundation of the art therapy profession and at the heart of my own experience. It is this understanding of the healing value of art making which originally brought me into the art therapy profession, and has here fuelled my heuristic research exploration. McNiff (2004) confirms this notion of art

as healing. He believes that the understanding of how art heals is a very personal experience, an experience that for me has been a life long journey since childhood.

Creativity and art are healing; in my experience, the bulk of the hard work happens within the process of art making where one works through problems and conflict. As art therapists who remain practicing artists we engage in a similar process as the one we might engage our clients in, the process of self-discovery (Moon, 2002).

As artists and art therapists we use art making as a ‘working through’ process, giving a therapist a sense of relaxation, while lowering stress levels, and providing the opportunity to deal with issues of loss, memories, and joy (Moon, 2002). All of these reasons have contributed to the reason I felt that art was important in my life, and especially as I began the process of becoming an art therapist.

Some theorists believe that there is a danger, as an art therapist, in not maintaining a place for art in our daily lives. Dr. Gladys Agell (1986) (as reviewed in Marks-Fleming, 1993) felt that not practicing art making has an impact on the clients we work with; she felt that art therapists may suffer a narcissistic injury. This narcissistic injury suggests that art therapists who do not engage in the creative process do not (on a conscious or unconscious level) create an environment of success for healing. Both the therapist and artist need their own creative space and outlet (Moon, 1994).

Upon entering the profession as a graduate art therapy student, I instinctively felt the polarization that our profession has been tackling for over fifty years. I found myself questioning my identity and separating my own loyalties. Was I an artist or a therapist? It is from this place that my heuristic process of initial engagement arose from. As I dove further into the art therapy program and my own art making I realized that this perceived

professional polarization was not at the heart of my research question. Through literature and discussion, I began to resolve my own internal conflict between artist and therapist. I then began wondering how my own art making applied to my understanding of the therapeutic benefits of creativity. I wanted to clarify and better appreciate how my art processes were helping me through both a challenging and rewarding time in my life, namely the process of becoming an art therapist.

During the initial engagement phase of heuristic research, I created a number of images (figures 1-5) that focus on the idea of art making for professional processing. Some of these images were a reaction to the pain and personal suffering I witnessed in my clinical work. While in other images I tried to gain a deeper understanding into my own feelings of becoming an art therapist. These initial images, along with the literature presented here lead me toward the next phase of heuristic research, immersion.

Immersion

I moved on to the next phase of heuristic research, immersion, when I had gathered enough information to be able to clarify the focus of my research. This was a natural progression, not intentionally planned. My guiding heuristic research question was: how does my artwork facilitate my process of becoming an art therapist? I wanted to examine how I, as a new art therapist, would reconcile my own art making with my own process of becoming a therapist. Undoubtedly this question, in part, came from the self-conscious history and experiences of my new profession but also came from a much deeper longing to be more attached to the process that brought me to the profession. According to Moustakas (1990), once the research question is clear, the researcher lives with the question whole-

heartedly in the phase of immersion. It was at this stage that my art making really began to become a natural part of my exploration. The artwork made during this period stretches out over the course of a few semesters, and varies widely in themes and intention.

In the beginning of my art making process, I had to work at finding the time to make artwork. I had set up a studio in the extra room of my house for this purpose. Unfortunately, often, I did not give my art making the priority I thought it deserved. A class project at the end of my first semester in the art therapy program helped me to reprioritize and stay connected with art making. While working on the art for this final assignment I started to consider my art making as a vehicle for processing and understanding the therapeutic work I did as an art therapist (figures 1-5). This type of artwork is sometimes referred to as professional processing, countertransference drawings or post session therapy imagery (Kielo, 1991). These drawings are discussed in greater detail in the findings sections of this paper.

The work made during this period opened me up to a new sense of reconciliation and exploration around art making for processing therapeutic work and helped to bridge the transition from the initial phase of engagement to the phase of immersion.

That series of drawings left me feeling connected with myself as an artist and opened me up to the possibility that I could use my art making as a way of bringing clarification to my experience as a therapist. However, over time, this new direction and understanding of my personal art making process felt adopted, disconnected and somewhat shallow. It was at this intersection in the research process that I realized I was looking for a much more personal relationship with my creative process; I wanted my art making to be something that was only for me. I started creating art that focused around the idea of creativity for the purpose

of self-care, an idea that linked to my clinical therapeutic work in art therapy. The drawings made during this part of the immersion phase of research (figures 6-9) started moving away from understanding the work as a way of processing clinical work and moved toward making art because it felt good to do so. In other words I stopped putting parameters around my intentions.

It is challenging to describe the immersion process as I felt it came very naturally to me over a significant period of time. After I moved beyond my initial uncomfortable feelings with fitting art making back into my life (in the first phase of heuristic research), I felt as though the process and phases took on a life of their own. I did not set up designated studio time but instead made art when I could and when I felt compelled to do so.

While engaging in this type of research as a student, it was not possible for me to be entirely absorbed in the immersion phase as originally designed. It is important to emphasize that during this research process I was partaking in a significant parallel process as a student who had both clinical and academic responsibilities. Undoubtedly both of these factors influenced the content and development of my research in various ways.

At the end of the fruitful heuristic phase of immersion, the artwork became a process of discovering new ideas and building upon old ones. Finally, the work developed into a means of symbolizing a connection with my past and my childhood.

Incubation

I did not move through the heuristic phase of incubation as intended by Moustakas's (1990) research methodology. Sela-Smith (2002) describes this phase not as a phase where the researcher intentionally puts the project aside, but a phase where they feel nothing else

gained in the immersion phase of the project. During what would have been the incubation phase of heuristic research, I put my project aside for a number of months as I was preoccupied by other pressing academic responsibilities. It is difficult to say if given the time and opportunity I would have lingered and spent more time within the immersion phase of research, and then moved naturally into a state of incubation. Perhaps I was satisfied with the knowledge gained during the previous phase and therefore shifted my attention away from art making and toward academic work as a way of relieving myself of the work done in immersion. Whether or not this was an unconscious intention remains unknown. I did however, make use of this dormant phase of creativity and set my research project aside for a number of months.

When I felt free to make artwork again it was clear to me that the content of the work had changed a great deal. The work brought new insights and meaning and as a result launched me into the next phase, illumination.

Illumination and Explication

The phase of illumination gradually came about as a result of a series of drawings produced over a number of weeks. At the time I was working on the drawings (figures 15-17) I was not yet consciously aware that they represented a shift in my work, bringing about new insight. It is only in retrospect that I realized the importance of the process of making them, as well as the significance of their content. The heuristic process of illumination can come quickly in an instant bringing the researcher new clarity, or come as new insight revealed in bits and pieces over time (Moustakas, 1990).

I would argue that my process of illumination was both instant as well as prolonged. Because the drawings made during this time contributed greatly to creating new meaning out of my research question I understand the illumination process as taking the form of “clustered wholes that form into themes inherent in the question” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67). The moment in which I really understood the meaning and significance of these drawings happened quickly during a conversation I was having with a friend while discussing my research project. After that conversation, the phase of illumination continued to develop new insights for me as I dove deeper into the connection between my art making in relation to my work and life. This stage offered me the most significant insight into my research question. Deeper insight further occurred when I considered all of the images from each phase as a whole. Illumination went hand in hand with the phase of explication. In my research process illumination flowed naturally into the phase of explication, as I wanted to try to organize and clarify the information collected. In essence, my task was now to start to apply meaning to what I intuitively understood.

The explication phase truly began when I started relating Winnicott’s theory of potential space to the artwork made during the phase of illumination, viewing it in a new light. Instinctively I sensed that the valued space I had created for art making was a principal element toward clarifying my research question; I was unable to organize this insight without applying a clear theoretical framework. Through the application of Winnicott’s theory I gained new insight that held a huge potential for my research but more broadly for my life. I realized two significant things, that my research is really about process and that through a process oriented approach I discovered a space for myself in my art making that is nurturing and reparative. This realization will transcend my educational experience and

continue to affect the way I work throughout my life. It is linked to my on-going development and learning.

The illumination phase of heuristic research is disorganized by nature. The phase is meant to produce a great amount of *material* that can later be synthesized and better organized. A way to begin to organize the information gathered in the illumination phase is through further reading and written translation. I suppose that art making can also be used as a method of clarification of the work produced in the earlier phase, however this is not a method I found to be useful within the time constraints of my research process.

Creative Synthesis

If the phase of explication is the discovery and application of theory to the work done in the illumination phase, then creative synthesis strives to tie together and present the work through writing. Typically, the phase of creative synthesis is spontaneous in nature (Sela-Smith, 2002) and tries to creatively present the research findings in a linear way, such as through storytelling. This research paper is meant to represent my research phase of creative synthesis; when all of the work comes together and is presented to those who may also gain meaning from it.

Sela-Smith (2002) describes Moustakas' phase of creative synthesis as though it is a magical time of synchronicity and deep meaningful integration. Having read this, I question whether it was possible for me to cross the heuristic threshold into creative synthesis, authentically, the way it was intended. In reality, I found the process of explication and creative synthesis to be very similar in that both were useful toward the goal of organizing and expressing my ideas and findings. The process of creative synthesis did not come

naturally to me as Moustakas (1990) suggests, in fact, I felt it to be more of a requirement toward completing this research paper. This does not mean that I did not enjoy the process or find it useful in helping to clarify the essence of my heuristic research question, rather that the necessity of achieving a goal propels the process in significant ways.

The final phase of creative synthesis allowed me, as the researcher, to put closure on a process that I have been whole-heartily and personally very engaged in for a long time.

PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Overview

In order to reflect on the artwork made during this research process it was useful to view it both in the chronological order in which I made it, and as an entire group of works. When I reviewed the artwork this way, I was able to gain greater insight into the development and transformation of both the work and of myself. The artwork was made over a period of two years, during this time I was enrolled as a full time art therapy student. A great deal of artwork was produced over the course of two years, and only a selected few are being presented in this paper. The pieces selected to be a part of the research paper best represent the themes and transformative process I wish to share. Subsequently I have grouped the works into four different groupings. Each of the groupings corresponds to some of Moustakas's (1990) heuristic phases; these phases include initial engagement, immersion and illumination. I did not make artwork during Moustakas's phases of incubation, explication or creative synthesis.

The sequential organization and personal reflections applied to the artwork within this paper came during the phase of creative synthesis. At the time the artwork was made I did not intentionally label or classify it into a specific phase. Once I was able to pull back from the creative process of making artwork I was able to organize the process and categorize the work into its appropriate phase.

Discussion of My Images

The artwork made during this heuristic research process bridged many of Moustakas's (1990) research design phases. However, most of the artwork was made during the

immersion and illumination phases of research, which are the stages in which I also experienced the most dynamic period in the transformation of ideas. For the purpose of organization and clarity, I have presented and discussed the images in four separate groups (A, B, C and D). The artwork discussed is addressed in terms of its individual content, its connection to other pieces, and its overall contribution to my process of working through the heuristic phases of research.

All of the work being discussed in the following pages is being offered as a means of communicating my evolution and visual representation of the stages of heuristic research. None of the associations or statements made about the work is meant to be definitive, but is simply offered as my own perspective and discussion. Over many years of making artwork I can now recognize common themes and possible associations within the content of my work. However, it is likely that even common themes take on new meaning during different stages of development and evolution. In addition, the artwork being presented is being discussed with a certain amount of personal distance in order to ensure that the process of making the work remains the focus rather than the actual content of the work. Even more practically, it would not have been possible or relevant to present each image in great detail. In a few instances I have referenced a symbol imagery dictionary as a way of contributing to the discussion.

Group (A) images

Figures 1-5 bridge the initial engagement phase with the immersion phase of research. Overall these images were intended to explore the relationship my art making had to the therapeutic work being done with my clients. Upon reflection, almost two years after they

were made, I now realize that their content differs from their initial intention. What I did not see before was that these images are a very personal reaction to the difficulty I was having at the time accepting and witnessing my client's pain and personal struggles. The images seem like an attempt to enter a private reflective space, in which I tried to better understand my own feelings surrounding other people's intimate thoughts.

The images that encompass group (A) are all images that were made early during my art therapy program and the heuristic research process. These images, in part, represent the initial phase of heuristic research and help bridge my research process to the next phase of immersion. The images depict and document my evolutionary development toward defining my research question.

The first image being presented is entitled *Being Split in Red*, it shows a person encased in a small blue space, possibly struggling to get out. The space represents a safe, private space that acts as a protective personal barrier against the outside world. This protective space is encroached by a series of foreign objects, objects that literally translate as my client's personal experiences. Likely, the figure in the protective space represents me, or my psyche. For me, this image also shows a clear physical divide or split down the middle of it, possibly representing some of my discomfort around the merging of my artist identity and my therapist identity. It also shows my ambivalent feelings toward becoming a therapist. This image reminds me of the feeling I had at this time of being uncomfortable in my new position as a therapist. I was often left wondering how I ended up in this graduate program, armed only with the perception that art making has the potential to make a difference in someone's life.

All of the images produced at this time came to me with ease and comfort. In fact, I felt relieved to be making art once again. Over a number of years, I have remarked that my work changes significantly during a period of transformation or change. This period in my life was no exception. The images flowed out of me and were almost unrecognizable in their style and content compared to previous work. I attributed these artistic changes to my personal transformation of becoming a therapist. Interestingly, I produced my new images with a great deal of careful consideration, where before I used to be less self-conscious during the creative process. This observation has no definitive explanation and still leaves me with a number of unanswered questions and speculations.

Love Divided and Encased (figure 2) further speaks to my ambivalent feelings of becoming a therapist. It was around this time that I feared I had made a career mistake in choosing to begin the journey of becoming an art therapist. Again, central to this image is a figure surrounded by, what seems to be an intimate personal space created just for her. The adjoining paper and white thread are delicate in nature and suggest a certain amount of fragility in the image. Sewing is a large component of my art making. For me, sewing signifies a dichotomy in all of my images. The thread appears thin and breakable, but in reality bonds layers of paper together stronger than glue. I relate to the thread as a visual reminder of a process that shows the viewer the beauty and utility of the image's construction.

Disconnected Closeness (figure 3) is similar to figure 2 in manifest content. Although the central image is not literally figurative, it suggests the presence of a heart. Like the images that came before, this image uses fine papers and sewing to imply both fragility and inherent strength. The circles bring to my mind individual components that gather to

create a collective whole. The central image of a circle and heart is encased, protected by many other circles; this alludes to the desire to remain defended and safe from harm. It is not clear to me whether this image is autobiographical or if it speaks of a greater desire to also protect and take care of those with whom I was working therapeutically.

Figure 3 links the initial engagement phase of heuristic inquiry with the immersion phase of inquiry as the images moved toward containing more countertransference drawing content. It was around this time in the heuristic phase of research that I seemed to have more or less resolved the internal conflict of artist versus therapist and integrated both identities, so at this time also began to clarify the role art making played in becoming a therapist. This integration happened gradually over time and cannot be attributed to one single image or moment. I simply realized that a clear distinction between the two was no longer necessary or relevant.

Figure 4 is entitled *Pink Scream*, this image was spontaneously made after returning home from a particularly difficult day at my practicum site. The image was finished in its entirety before I realized that I was staring at the image of a face with what I interpreted as a very painful expression. The *person* appears to be screaming from a gapping mouth with red teary eyes. This image visually represented the feelings experienced after a demanding and emotional session with a client. I felt that the client's emotions were trapped inside of me and that they needed to be confidentially purged, the only way I knew how to rid myself of those feelings was to express them on paper. Fish (2008) calls this type of art making *response art*; she defines it as, "...the use of the art therapist's images before, during, or after sessions in order to understand and advance clinical work, and to practice self-care" (p. 71). Undoubtedly I wanted to better understand the clinical

work I was doing, and gain insight into my client's experience. However, I believe that primarily I made this image as a method of self-care, in order to rid myself of the overwhelming emotions I took on at my internship that day. In the early days of my internship it was not easy to separate clinical work from home life, emotionally I often brought my work home and let it continue to effect me.

Within the same period another image was produced (figure 5) entitled *Their Delicate Pain Surrounded by Me*. As the title suggests, this image was also made in response to clinical art therapy work, both as a response to the work and as a form of self-care and purging. Most of this image portrays light colours and the use of beautiful Japanese and hand made papers. Roughly affixed to this drawing is another drawing that I made from dark red paint and bright orange thread. This later drawing means to represent painful feelings. At the time, I began to ask myself whether or not these were projected emotions from my clients or if they were my own feelings being entangled in the clinical work I was doing. This type of back and forth self-reflective process is a routine that I often engaged in on my journey to becoming a therapist. I think that making concrete, tangible artwork was a way of trying to identify and pull apart my many complicated feelings.

Group (B) images

Four images (figures 6-9) mark the beginning of the heuristic research phase of immersion. Generally, these images move away from an intentional focus on clinical work and deliberate art making for self-care. In fact, these images had no specific intention at all; this is what makes them distinct from the previous images discussed in this paper. The first image, of group (B) is entitled *Constructing and Connecting* (figure

6). This image, along with *All the Little Pieces* (figure 7) suggests a process that conveys a reconstruction or building up. Both images contain *paper quilting*, in which I pieced together different and significant pieces of paper in order to make a new whole. For me, this process is a visual representation of my internal process and attempts at constructing new meaning, possibly in reference to my art making. I continuously asked myself, why was it important for me to make artwork? How has the significance of making art changed for me? Both images (figures 6 and 7) still seemed to show a certain amount of disconnectedness, seemingly demonstrated by numerous *free-floating* circles scattered around the paper quilting. It seemed as though, at this time, the construction and feeling of being connected were not fully developed and integrated into my internal thought process.

The following two images (figures 8 and 9) that also assemble group (B) make a marked departure from the themes discussed in figures 6 and 7. *Little Kid Me* (figure 8) is an image that shows a figure of a cabbage patch doll, reminiscent of the types of dolls I adored in my childhood. This was the first time childhood imagery entered my creative process. Quite literally, this drawing was in response to a class discussion on play therapy. I felt that it was important to be in touch with my experience of play and childhood memories in order to facilitate play clinically. I made this image with that intention in mind, but it took on a spontaneous and organic development. What strikes me about this image is the amount of blank space in the composition of the drawing; usually I tend to naturally fill the empty spaces in my drawings. This new sense of space seems to represent a shift or evolution in my method and my thinking; the drawing allowed for more physical and psychic space and therefore potential to develop new ideas. The

presence of the psychic space suggests to me a link in my artwork to Winnicott's (1971) theory of potential space.

Figure 9 is entitled *Crows on a Wire*; it visually corresponds to Moustakas's (1990) heuristic research phase of immersion. This heuristic phase permits the researcher to live their research question wholly (Sela-Smith, 2002), and in my case through art making. *Crows on a Wire* was made at the end of my first year as an art therapy student while I was on the path toward clarifying how my artwork helped to facilitate my process of becoming a therapist. This image (figure 9) is deeply personal and shows a much darker, tenuously side of my personality and experiences. I am attracted to this image more than the other images because it reminds me of earlier work that I had made as an undergraduate art student in that the image is simple but intense. It is devoid of any colour as I used pen and black India ink to make it. I am also partial towards it as it visibly describes how I was feeling at the end of a long first year; I felt as though I were literally hanging on by a thread or balancing on a very fine wire. In other words, I think that at the time I was unable to create a picture full of colour and life and only able to express feeling tired and devoid of creativity. This image shows a series of drawn and painted crows hovering over a thin wire. Cirlot (2002) discusses the significance of the crow as a powerful symbol. He writes:

Because of its black colour, the crow is associated with the idea of beginning (as expressed in such symbols as the maternal night, primigenial darkness, the fertilizing earth). Because it is also associated with the atmosphere, it is a symbol for creative, demiurgic power and spiritual strength. Because of its flight, it is considered a messenger (p. 71).

Upon reflection, I realize that this image marks a significant turning point in my relationship to my artwork; I was clearly expressing the way I felt because I needed to. I also wonder if the crows do suggest a level of spiritual strength that I was not entirely aware of at the time. Often there seemed to be no words to describe the range of emotions attached to becoming a therapist, both good and bad. At the point of complete exhaustion it seemed as though art making was a good way to express what I was feeling.

Group (C) images

For me, the heuristic phase of immersion was distinct from the other phases of heuristic inquiry because of the tremendous amount of artwork made during this time. I felt as though I was truly immersed in my research using a creative process. The images that comprise group (C) (figures 10-12) all represent a change in content and focus. These images explore a deep personal connectedness to my own past and the many stories that helped to formulate my experiences. Sela-Smith (2002) believes that in order to experience the type of transformation suggested by the heuristic research model, one must be able to enter an intentional internal subjective space. Sela-Smith outlines this space as the "*I-who-feels*" (p. 58). When the researcher is able to overcome the resistance inherent in self-study they are able to more deeply examine and focus on their own material and processes (Sela-Smith). The three images (figures 10-12) that embody my shift toward an *I-who-feels* state explore past personal experiences through collage while using old images and self-portraiture.

Mapping the Past (figure 10) assembles a variety of images and meaningful pieces of paper. I now see that all of these images are significant pieces of my history in that they

are all directly linked to how I eventually found myself in this graduate program. As I have mentioned, I frequently asked myself, and those around me how I ended up here; this question asked mostly on the most difficult of days. *Mapping the Past* is a concrete visual diagram of my process of becoming a therapist. I unconsciously made this image in order to answer my own question and to better understand my journey. The collage includes a piece of a lithograph I made over six years ago while I was on exchange in Philadelphia during my undergraduate years. This piece is so important because it was on that exchange that I took an introductory art therapy class; signing up for that class changed my path completely. I was amazed by how my artwork seemed to unintentionally take its own avenues and led me in new directions; directions that led to greater insights and ultimately toward clarifying the role art plays in my development.

Self Portrait (figure 11) is a tangible representation of an internal focus. I have always found self-portraits hard to make; I wonder if this is because I have traditionally never been comfortable with spending a lot of time focused on myself. In order to make a self-portrait you have to spend a lot of time examining your image, studying the contours of your face, your lips, ears, nose and eyes. In many ways, it is as if spending good quality time with oneself. How many of us can say they take the time to do this? The process of making a self-portrait can be uncomfortable. The image of my self portrait appears sad, although it reminded me of a time many years ago when I called myself an artist without hesitation. This self-portrait led me to create the next collage image (figure 12). A smaller photograph of the self-portrait image appears in *Assimilation Map* (figure 12), stitched to the middle of the drawing. *Assimilation Map* is very similar to *Mapping the Past*, but as its title suggests it differs in that I felt it took on new knowledge and tries to tie it together

with past experiences. In retrospect, I see the drawing as a piece that represents a state of mourning. It expressed my need to let go of and mourn an identity that I felt no longer applied, which is artist. I know that art and art making have taken on new meanings since beginning the process of becoming an art therapist; this is both good and bad.

Understanding what new sense of personal meaning or significance art making has in my life is at the very heart of this research paper. The shift toward an internal focus and spending more time on my self led to the production of the next group of images, and toward the heuristic phase of illumination.

Group (D) images

It is only in retrospect that I now realize that the next set of images represent my leap from the heuristic phase of immersion to illumination. Sela-Smith (2002) writes, “illumination is that moment when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of wholes and clustered wholes that form into themes inherent in the question” (p. 67). Even though this set of drawings do not represent a sudden realization, they all laid the ground work toward a moment sometime after they were made when I realized why I was making them. Before creating these images I had spent a number of weeks in a dormant period of creativity, in part this was because I had other pressing academic commitments. However, it was equally likely that due to this dormant period I was able to reenergize and create the five drawings that comprise group (D).

Sela-Smith (2002) explains that the work of the phase of illumination could not happen without the internal work of the phase of incubation. She writes about the phase of illumination, “It may bring new experiences, new interpretations, new meanings, or it

may correct distorted understandings... It may take place in a single moment, or it may take place in waves of awareness over time” (p. 67). In my experience of the phase of illumination, I gained increased awareness and brought new meaning to my process of art making over this time. This increased insight occurred after the artwork was completed and thoughtfully considered.

Protected Space (figure 13) is the first of five images made during the illumination phase of my heuristic research process. This image is noticeably different from any other image presented in this research. *Protected Space* is more than double the size of most of my drawings, and in some cases even larger. The title along with the size of the drawing suggests to me a bold statement, as though I was saying: “this is my time!” I find the drawing joyful, full of colour while using loose fluid movements. To me it seems to represent a state of *creative freedom*.

I clearly remember the rainy afternoon I spent making this drawing. My studio space occupies the second bedroom of my house, and due to space constraints, my work office is also in the same room. I have always found the juxtaposition of these two spaces in the same room interesting, especially in the context of my earlier internal struggles between artist and therapist identities. Nonetheless, the two desks reside amiably in the same area. On the day I made the drawing I had been sitting at my work desk looking over at my art desk and decided to abandon the assignment I had been working on. I figured that it could be finished later. I knew that by making this drawing I would be no closer to finishing my assignment, or checking off another item on my large ‘to-do’ list. I happily worked on the drawing for hours anyway. I think that it was with this choice that my approach to making art really started to enter a new phase of the heuristic research and

become clearer to me in the context of my research. I started to create an *in between* space where I could relax and spending time playing with my images.

The images that followed *Protected Space* continued to focus on art making for pleasure and deeper personal insight. The title *Protected Space* relates to the idea of Winnicott's *potential space* in the sense that both forms of space represent room that one has in their life for creativity. *Baby Bear* (figure 14) and *Playing With Space* (figure 15), maintain a similar style and use of materials as *Protected Space*, which suggests to me that I made them with related intention. Overall, the intention is self-discovery and self-realization through providing my self with the time and the *potential space* to allow for playfulness and creativity. Landgarten and Lubbers (1991) liken the process of self-discovery to the realization of one's individual potential.

Figures 14-17 include the use of animal symbols, which was new to my work at the time. Landgarten and Lubbers (1991) write about the use of symbols within the realm of potential space, "In the potential space the creative play arises in which the use of symbols develops. The use of symbols is a way of being in touch with the inner psychic reality, that is, of discovering the self" (p. 101). I would argue that during this phase of my research my creative process became much more playful, using and developing symbols as a part of my drawings.

In the beginning of the research process, I set out to intentionally clarify my research question and gain more knowledge about myself as an art therapist. The research processes took on a life of its own and lead me toward a path of new revelations and self-discovery. *Heart Birds Flight* (figure 16) and *Heart Bird* (figure 17) are both drawings that correspond to the end of my art making as a part of this heuristic research. Each

image includes the use of bird figures. Birds have deep symbolic meaning. Their symbolism is diverse and variant across many cultures and religions. One commonly associated meaning attributed to birds is their symbolic representation of spiritualization (Cirlot, 2002). In *Heart Birds Flight* there are images of many birds flying together, originally I found comfort in the fact that the birds were not alone in the image. In the next image *Heart Bird* I have drawn a single bird standing alone in the middle of the picture, sewn into her is a bright red heart. The bird in this final image stands alone for good reason; she has come to the end of her journey, one that ultimately only could be made alone. I used the colours gold and red liberally in this image; both of these colours suggest to me weightiness as well as spirituality.

Summary of My Research Process and Goals

During the past two years (and through this heuristic research), I discovered that I was looking for a *space* to call my own, especially as I continue to find out and redefine who I am as a person and a therapist. I needed a place to be able to retreat from the intense work of becoming an art therapist; but even more, I needed a space where I could feel connected to myself as an artist. I was able to define and clarify the space I needed as my art making space, a creative space. I discovered that art making gave me the time and the space to be internally focused; a place to play and to be creative, a space similar to what Winnicott calls *potential space*.

Through conducting this inquiry I also realized that the focus of this research is on processes, both personal and related to art therapy. My research intention was to focus on the process of becoming an art therapist. I decided that the best way to do this would be

through the process of making artwork. What I realized in the end was that the research is not really about what the content of the artwork is, but about the potential space art making allows when one is engaged in a creative process. For me, these ideas are closely linked to the work that is done in art therapy sessions. An art therapist helps to guide a client through a process of self-discovery using art making.

My guiding research question asked: *How does my artwork facilitate my process of becoming an art therapist?* While conducting the research, I started to feel as though this question no longer seemed to get at the heart of what I was trying to uncover. I wondered if perhaps my question should have been more internally focused, such as; *what place does my art making have in my life?* During the research process I often asked myself if my research question felt relevant. It seems as though questioning my research focus was a part of the process and evolution of the research. My original research question provided a guide in my investigation but began to transform as I uncovered new meaning and insight into my research. Through the process I started to feel as though I wanted to clarify how art fits into my life as my outlook has developed and grown over the course of becoming an art therapist. In the end I decided to maintain my original research question as I felt that it best represented the process oriented approach I wished to convey.

Winnicott's (1971) theory of potential space describes the relationship between two entities. He used the example of mother and infant or individual and society. The idea of 'potential' suggests a place of possibility or likelihood of something occurring. However, it seems as though potential space cannot be explained so simply; it also represents the relationship we have with ourselves. Winnicott thought that the idea of potential space

represented a space that encompassed both our internal world and our external reality. More interestingly, it is within this space between mother and infant that Winnicott believed we first learned how to play and subsequently learned how to be creative beings. It is my understanding that if this early relationship space with the mother was adequate, one would be able to recreate this space or apply the knowledge of it throughout one's life. To me, the idea of potential space represents a space that is sacred, belonging to one's own psyche. The space can be literal or imagined; it is not easily defined, but instead felt and experienced as a place of deep contentment and creativity.

Figures 13-15 illustrate my early visual representation of developing my own version of potential space. As discussed, I made these images without this insight; insight came later when I was able to gain some reflective distance from the artwork. Figures 16 and 17 show further development and again change in their content and themes. Both images use symbols representing spirituality and seem to be whole in their composition and use of colour. For me, these final images embody the peace I felt knowing that the space I created was definitive. Upon reflection I am taken aback by the way these images reflect my internal process; this only strengthens my belief that art making acts a good container for one's experiences and helps art therapists to better be able to have trust in the process of art therapy.

The heuristic research method is a difficult way of conducting research. Heuristic research requires one to be focused on themselves and honest in their insight and reflections. As an art therapy student conducting a heuristic research study, I found it challenging to stay immersed in the process while balancing the requirements of being a full time student. In addition, it was difficult to move toward being self-focused in a

profession that I perceived as being so much about caring for other people. Initially the concept of working (and researching) in a profession focused around other people's well-being suggested an interesting paradox; how is a therapist both selfish and selfless? What I realized was that it was important that I look after myself in order to be able to help others through my work. I imagine that (in part) this was some of the motivation as well as the result of conducting this heuristic research inquiry.

Heuristic research methodology is not goal oriented by nature. However, it does strive to bring the researcher through a process of self-transformation. When I started out on the journey of conducting a heuristic research inquiry I had the intention of clarifying what role art making played in my two year process of becoming an art therapist. I was surprised and delighted that the evolution brought me to a very personal place where I discovered that my art making helps me in a way that is much bigger than becoming an art therapist. I created a space for myself where I have found personal meaning. I also feel certain that this entire research journey has been about a process, this awareness leaves me feeling more connected with the intrinsic value of art therapy.

Deepened Understanding and Usefulness to Professional Development

Professional development

There are a number of ways in which this heuristic research project contributed to my professional development as an art therapist, potentially to other art therapy students, and possibly to the larger field of art therapy.

By engaging in an arts based heuristic research method I am better able to connect to the experiences and feelings that might be common and shared with clients. Some of

these feelings may include frustration, impatience, joy, anger and disappointment. When art therapists engage in a similar process of self-discovery as their clients we are better able to understand what we are asking our clients to do in therapy, we further deepen our connection with our clients and ourselves and increase our own sense of relaxation (Wix, 1996). I can better empathize with how difficult or how rewarding engaging in a process of self discovery is, having now experienced the ebb and flow of a creative process.

Through this personal research inquiry, I also provided an example of a model for other art therapy interns who wish to gain insight into their experience of art making as a learning therapist. Through the use of the self-exploratory process of heuristic research and art making I am able to creatively share the collected data with other students (through the synthesis of this research paper) who are engaging in the experience of becoming an art therapist. It is my hope that through viewing the artwork other students will be able to identify themes in my work and my heuristic process that may be applicable to their experiences or offer a departure point for further investigation into their own processes. Through my heuristic process, I often wondered if other students had similar experiences to me; wishing that they had more time and space for themselves and for their creative process.

Through my research project I hope to contribute to the existing body of research that promotes knowledge and self-discovery through arts-based and heuristic inquiries. The combination of using a heuristic and art-based approach to art therapy research allowed me to enter more deeply into the research process in a way that was personally meaningful. One of the inherent strengths of arts based inquiries lies in its potential to

help the connection between our knowledge of creative processes and our understanding of how art is healing (Carolan, 2001).

Within research conducted in art therapy, art-based inquiries, such as mine, provide the researcher the opportunity to work in a way that is reflective of our (art therapists) natural way of integrating information; through art and imagery. Carolan (2001) argues that as researchers within the field of art therapy we have a responsibility to engage in research that helps us (and others) to better understand the therapeutic elements that the creative process evokes.

Personal development

By exploring my research question, I had hoped to better understand how my art making contributed to my own self-awareness and my work as an art therapist. It is my belief that increased self-awareness is important to the process of becoming a therapist. Bloomgarden and Netzer (1998) feel that heuristic research inquiries are valuable to art therapists as they promote personal development, which is necessary for increased professional development and competency.

Through the process of producing the artwork and later reflecting on the content of the artwork, I was able to recognize and acknowledge the value that making art has in my own life. This is especially important because art making offers me a creative space in my life that is reparative, self-soothing and joyful.

Most importantly, what I think I have gained from this research process is the knowledge that creating balance in one's life is very important. I imagine that creating balance between work, life and time spent with oneself will continue to be a challenge. I

am grateful for the knowledge that art making gives me the space to continue to try to achieve a sense of balance, especially within a career that so deeply requires it.

What I have learned and gained through this process will undoubtedly carry over into my work as a therapist. Through this research, I have reaffirmed my belief that art and creativity are transformative processes. Through clinical work I hope to offer my clients the *potential space* within the art making and therapeutic relationship to embark on their own process of self-discovery.

My art making helped facilitate my process of becoming an art therapist by helping to show me that growth is an on-going process. I have gained so much from having a self-reflective space; it feels difficult to summarize this point in a small paragraph. This whole process supported and paralleled my education and growth by offering me a kind and supportive place to sort out and reflect on my feelings. This place I created is a sacred, preserved, potential space within a creative process, is available to anyone who wishes to welcome it into their own lives. I think that any process that puts us more in touch with our authentic selves and helps us to be more understanding in our work is valuable.

As a learning art therapist, I would like to say that I believe in the intrinsic value of art making and creative processes. Through art making and play we can help facilitate a creative space that is conducive to healing. I believe that through a creative process we are able to work through challenges, find joy, as well as discover new parts of ourselves that otherwise would remain unknown. It is not easy for me to convey this process through words; I understand it best through imagery and experience.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of my heuristic research study, I struggled with preserving my artist identity, as I felt like it was disappearing and no longer a part of who I thought I was. I started to question how art and psychology fit together; I wanted to know why it seemed as though my chosen profession wrestled with this pairing.

I engaged myself in a process of examining how my personal art making has helped to accompany me through my development toward becoming an art therapist. In the beginning, I attempted to use art making in a way that other art therapists have; as a means of processing the content and emotions associated with clinical work. However, this way of working felt adopted and foreign, after a while I abandoned this approach.

Further, into the research process I moved toward deliberately making artwork for the purpose of self-care, which is also a well-recognized method of integrating art making into the life of an art therapist. From here my research process took me to a much more personal place where I started using art making as a way of looking into my past, and as a process of self-discovery.

Finally, I began to understand the relevance of my art making process as a personal way of creating a sacred and protected space, a *potential space*, to continue the process of self-discovery and creativity. This created space allowed me to retreat and recover from the difficult task of being an art therapist.

The research presented in this paper followed Moustakas's (1990) heuristic methodology through six stages of development. In addition to following Moustakas research design, I found it helpful to also consider Sela-Smith's (2002) critique of the

heuristic research methodology; she offered a current and relevant perspective on the original design.

Some of the research stages came to me naturally, while others such as incubation and creative synthesis felt obligatory. Following in the footsteps of many other art therapists, I integrated art making into my research methodology as both the subject matter of my research and part of the method of inquiry. By using art making as part of the research methodology, I was able to process and integrate information in a way that was familiar and comfortable to me, through visual imagery. In addition, the artwork is a concrete record of my research process.

After working through the heuristic research process, I identified three key areas and themes in my work explored through current literature. In reference to the themes uncovered in the initial heuristic phase of engagement, I considered the literature on art making as a part of art therapy training and education. Subsequently, the phase of incubation lead me to the research literature on professional self-processing for learning therapists. The phases of illumination and explication allowed me to discover and later apply Winnicott's theory of potential space to the space I feel that I have created through my practice of art making.

My heuristic research inquiry was successful in helping me clarify the role my art making played in my process of becoming an art therapist. This research has brought me new insight into the value and place art making has in my life. As a result of this research I have a deeper connection to myself as an artist and a therapist. I no longer search for a healthier relationship with my art process, as I have uncovered one. This heuristic art

based inquiry was an effective way of approaching my research question, offering me the chance to learn more about myself on the path to becoming an art therapist.

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APPENDICIES

Figures

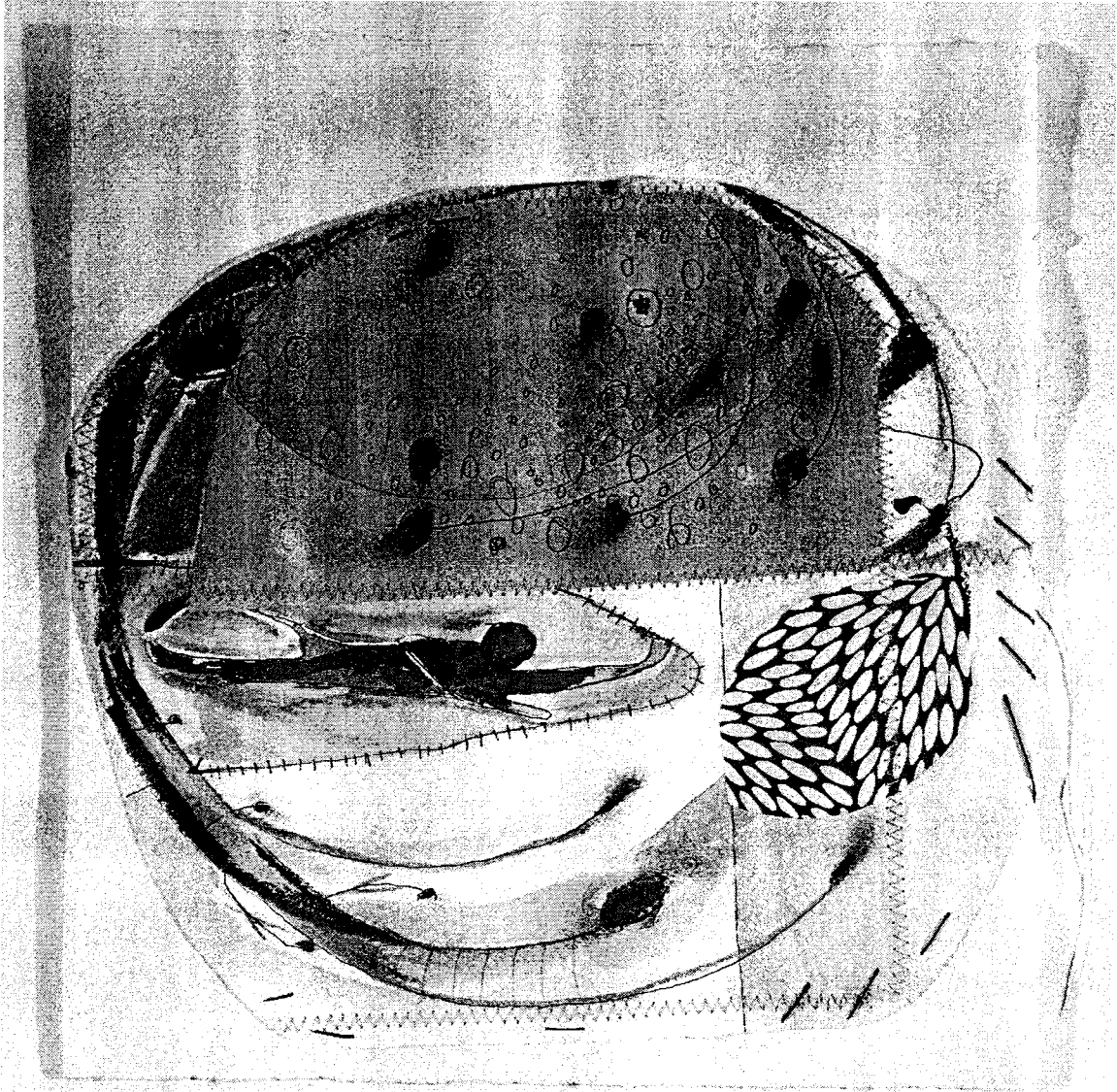


Figure 1. *Being Split in Red*, Hand Made Paper, Pastel, Watercolour and Sewing, 11' x
11", 2007

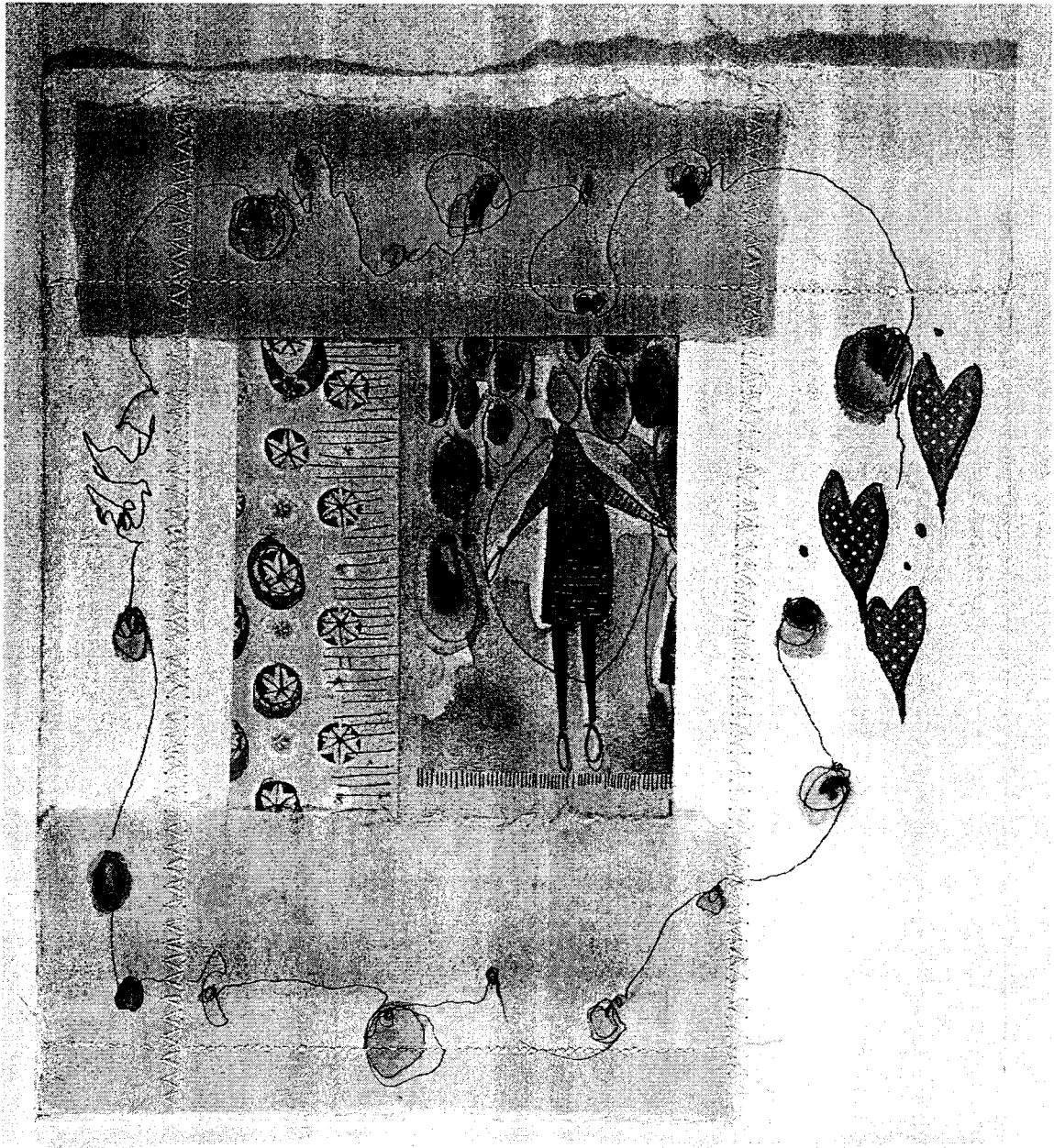


Figure 2. *Love Divided and Encased*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Paper,

Watercolour, Ink and Sewing, 11" x 11", 2007

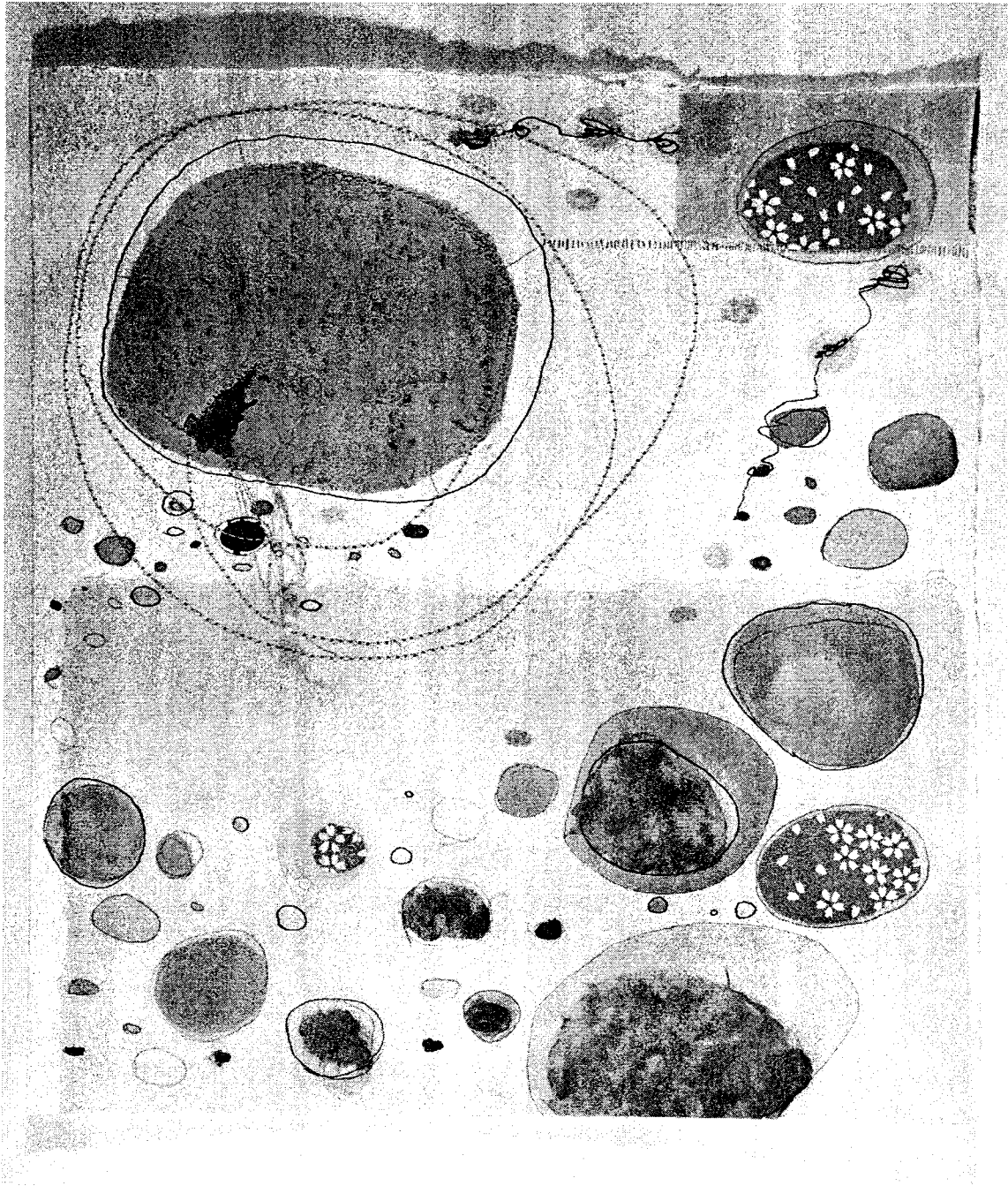


Figure 3. *Disconnected Closeness*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Paper, Watercolour,
Ink and Sewing, 11" x 11", 2007

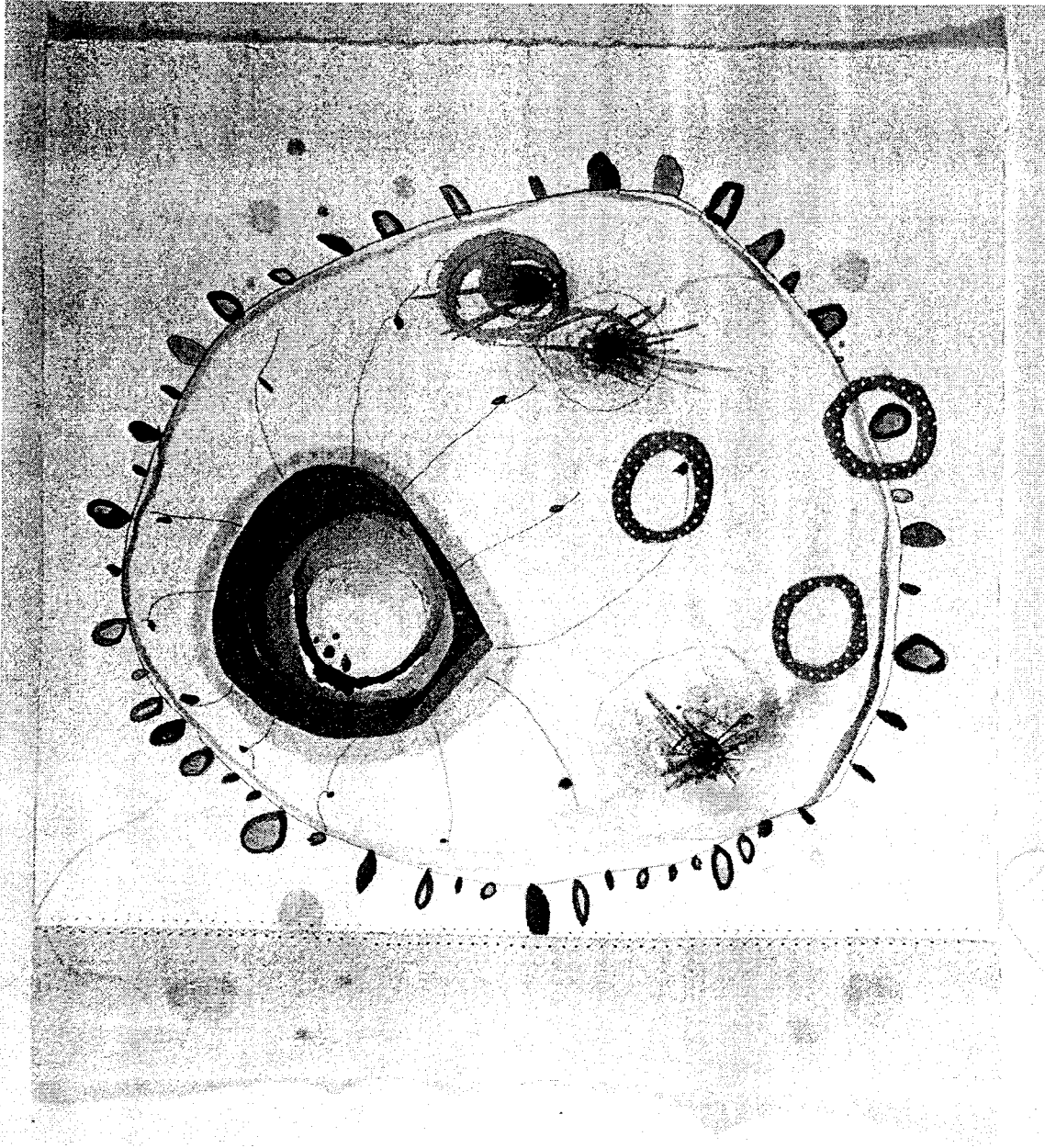


Figure 4. *Pink Scream*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Paper, Watercolour, Ink and Sewing, 11" x 11", 2007

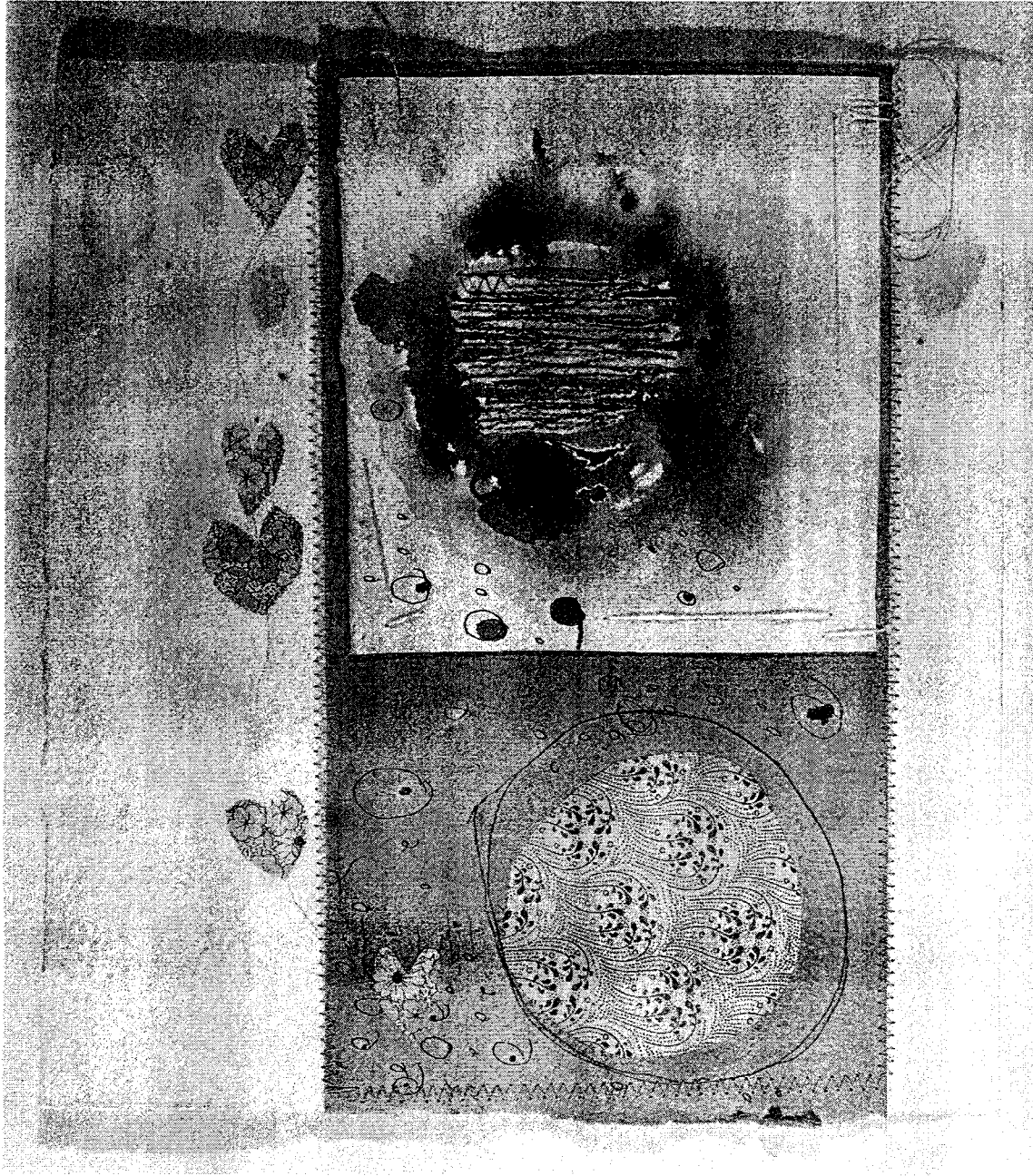


Figure 5. *Their Delicate Pain Surrounded by Me*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Paper, Watercolour, Ink and Sewing, 11" x 11", 2007

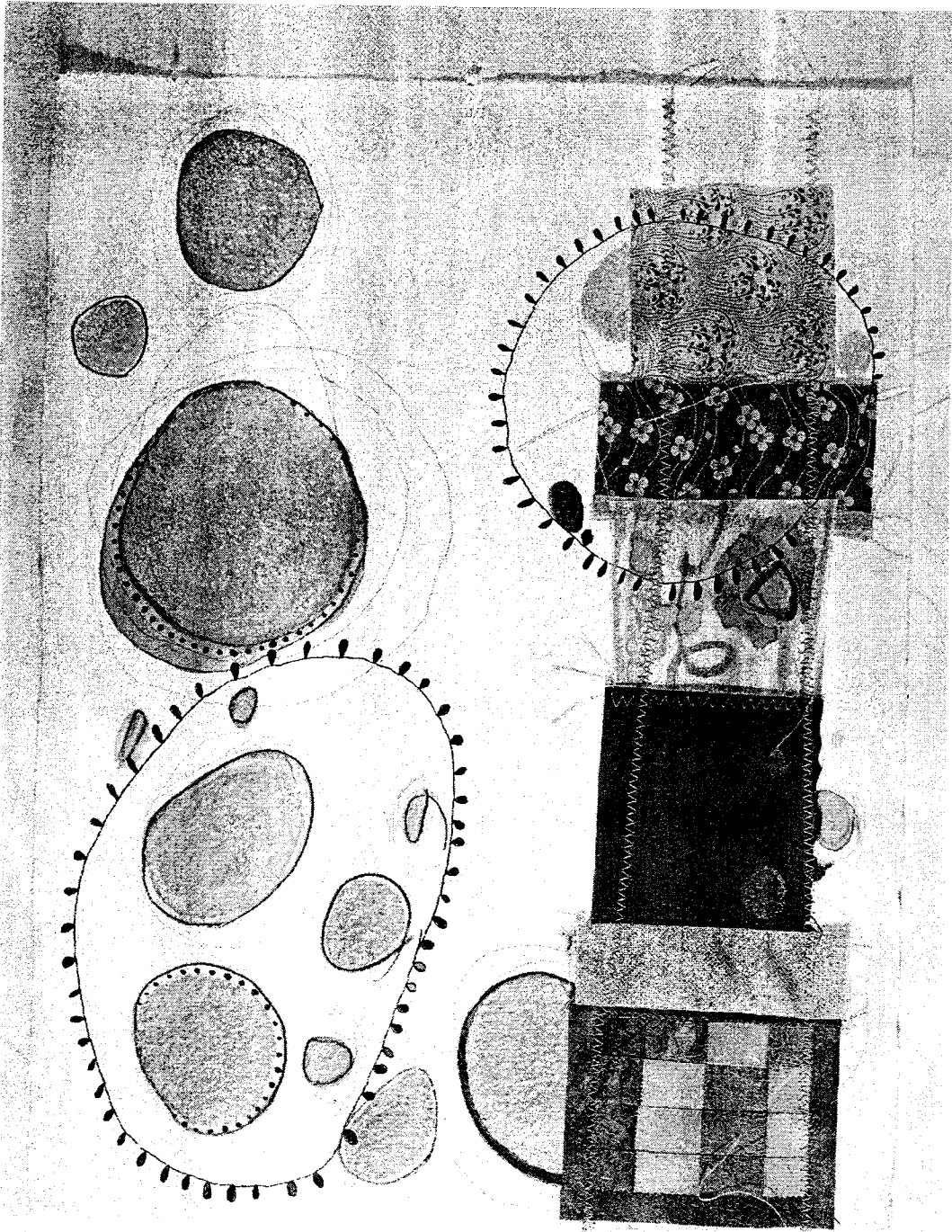


Figure 6. *Constructing and Connecting*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Japanese Paper, Acrylic Paint, Watercolour, Pencil, Ink and Sewing, 11" x 14", 2008

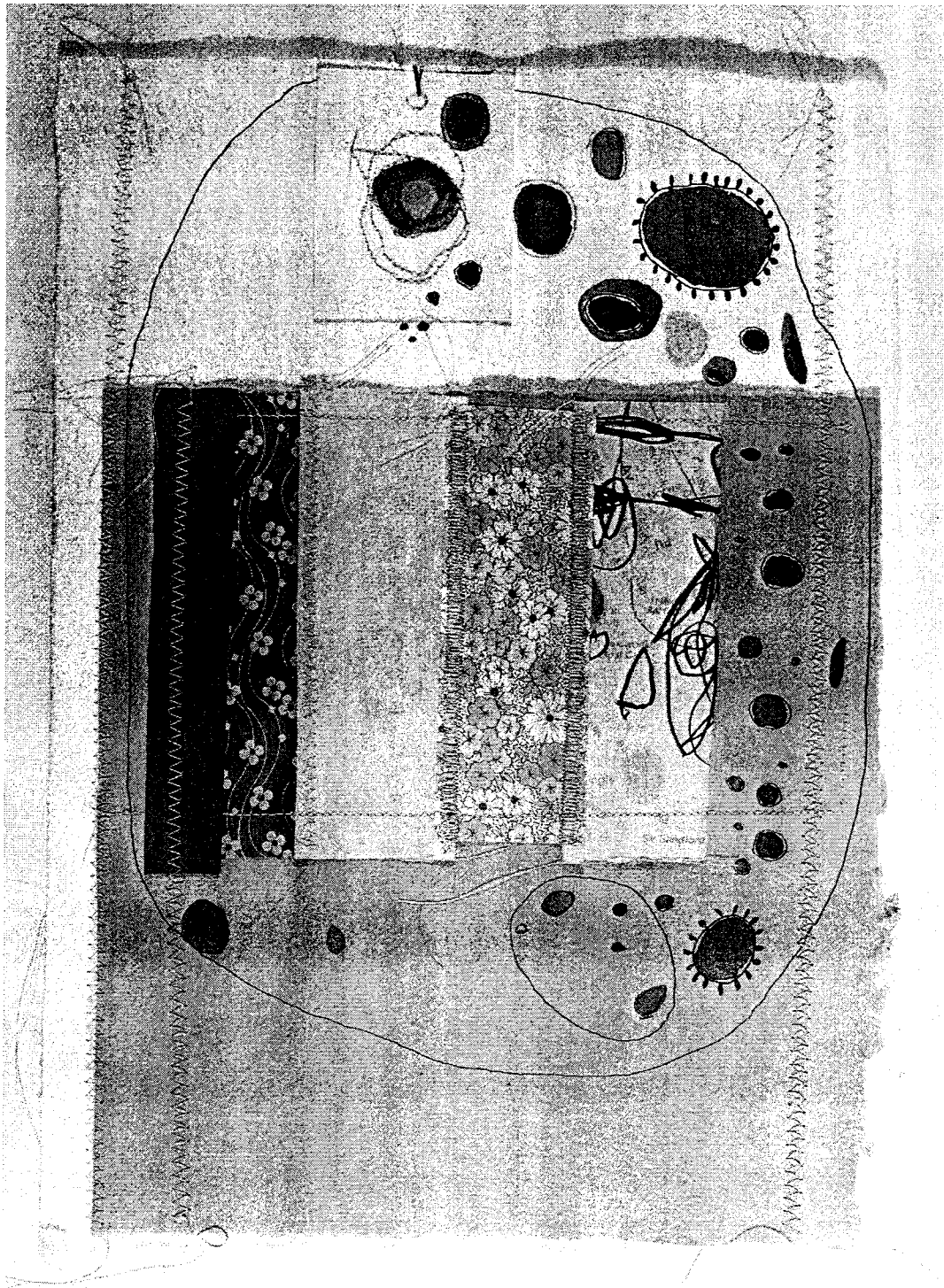


Figure 7. *All the Little Pieces*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Japanese Paper, Acrylic

Paint, Watercolour, Ink and Sewing, 11" x 14", 2008

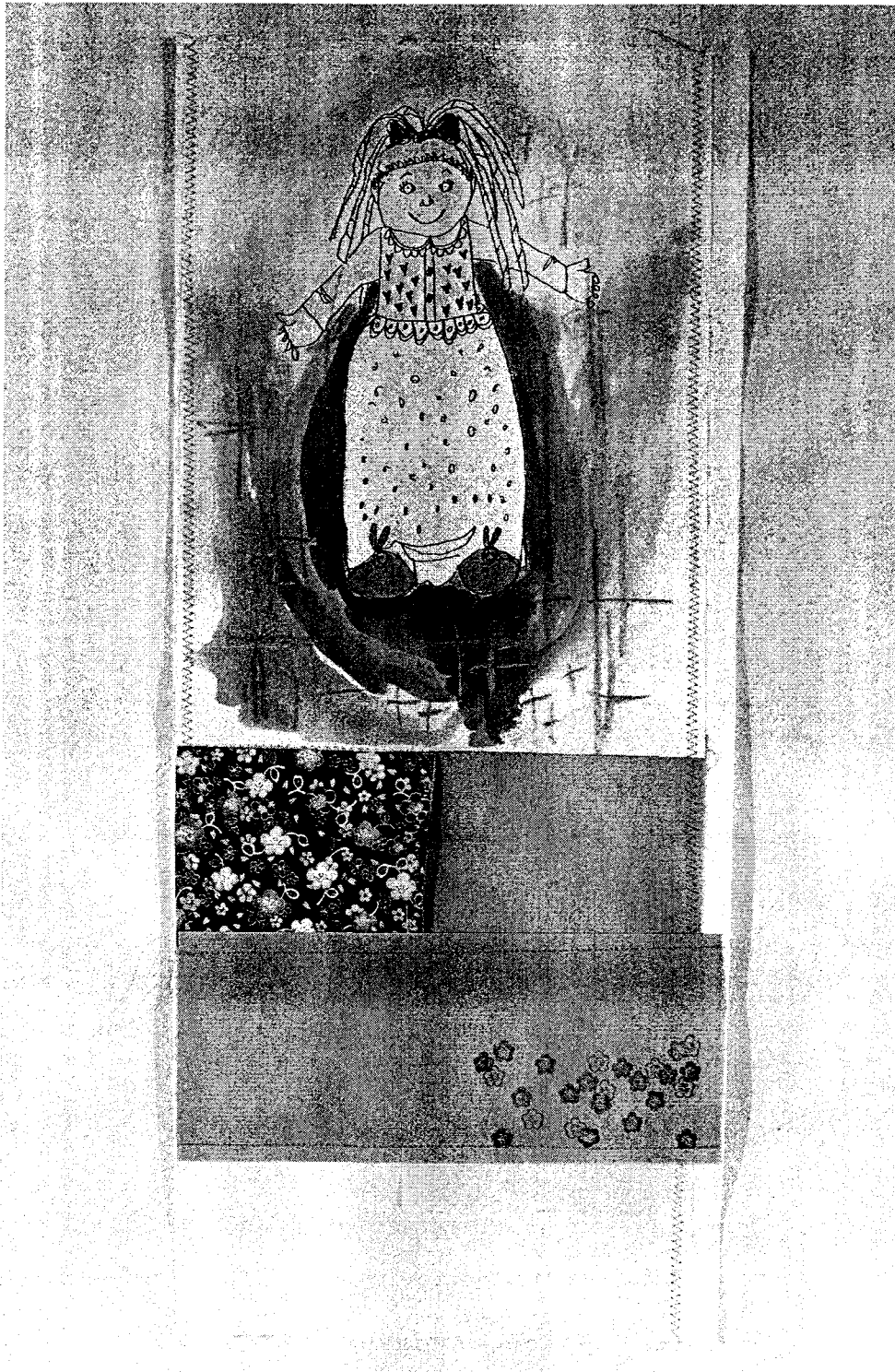


Figure 8. *Little Kid Me*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Japanese Paper, Acrylic Paint,

Watercolour, Ink and Sewing, 10" x 22", 2008

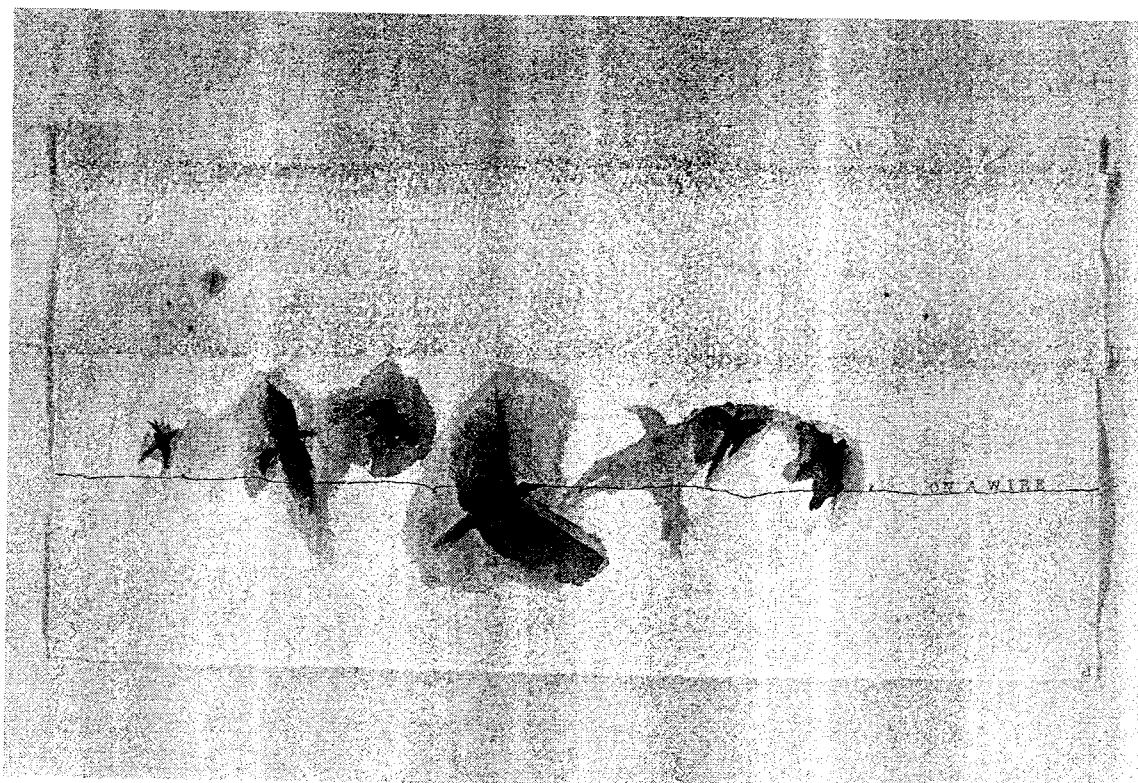


Figure 9. *Crows on a Wire*, Hand Made Paper, Linen Cloth, Sewing, Black Ink, Pen, 11”
x 22”, 2008

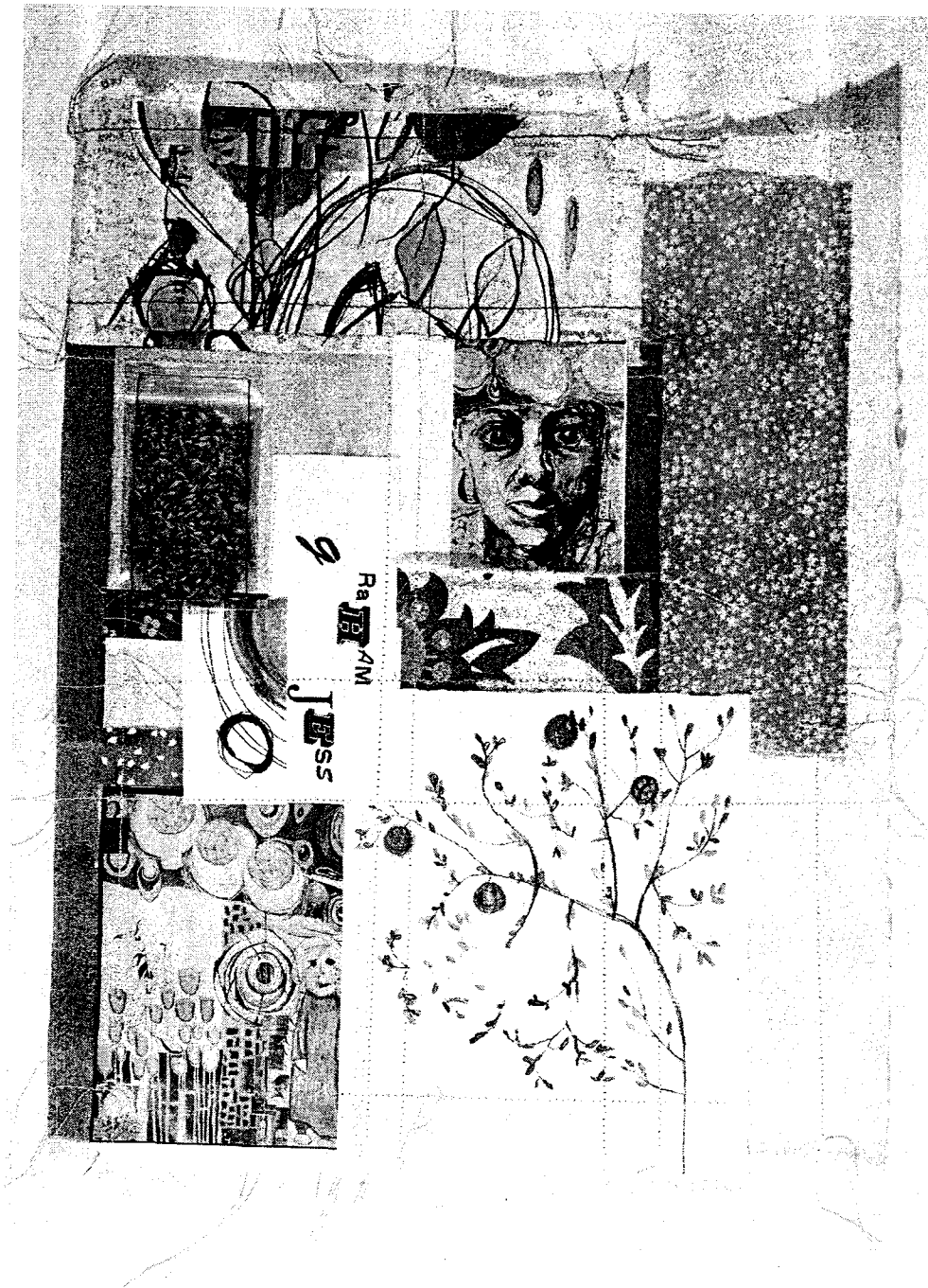


Figure 10. *Mapping the Past*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Japanese Paper, Acrylic
Paint, Watercolour, Ink, Sewing, Photography, Lithography, Letter Press Printing,
Screen Printing, Plastic Bag and Lavender Plant, 13" x 15", 2008



Figure 11. *Self Portrait*, Hand Made Paper, Sewing and Photography, 7" x 7", 2008

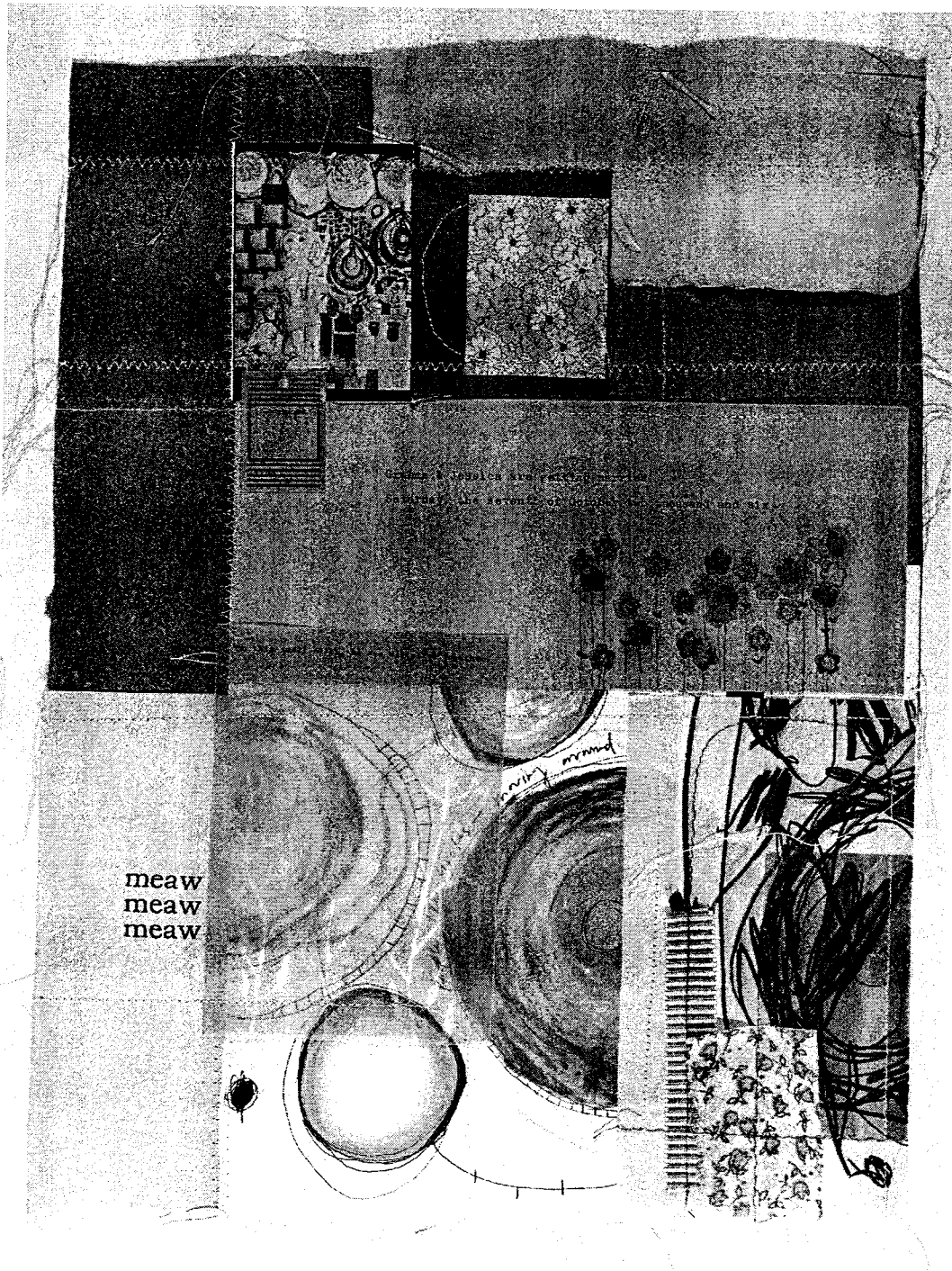


Figure 12. *Assimilation Map*, Hand Made Paper, Commercial Japanese Paper, Watercolour, Ink, Oil Pastel, Sewing, Photography, Lithography, Letter Press Printing, Type Written Words, Screen Printing and Fabric, 12" x 14", 2008

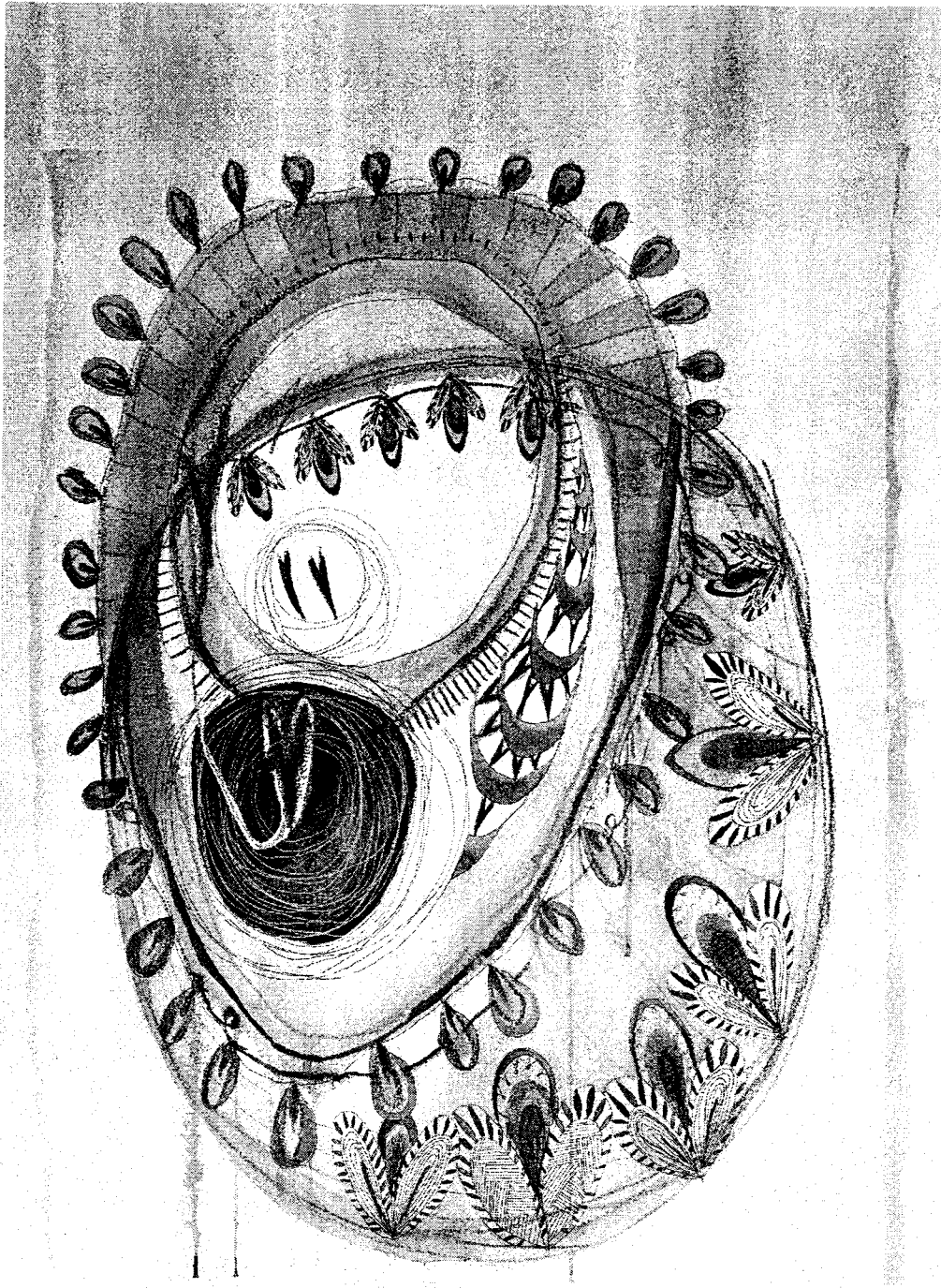


Figure 13. *Protected Space*, Hand Made Paper, Watercolour, Ink, Oil Pastel and Chalk

Pastel, 22" x 30", 2009

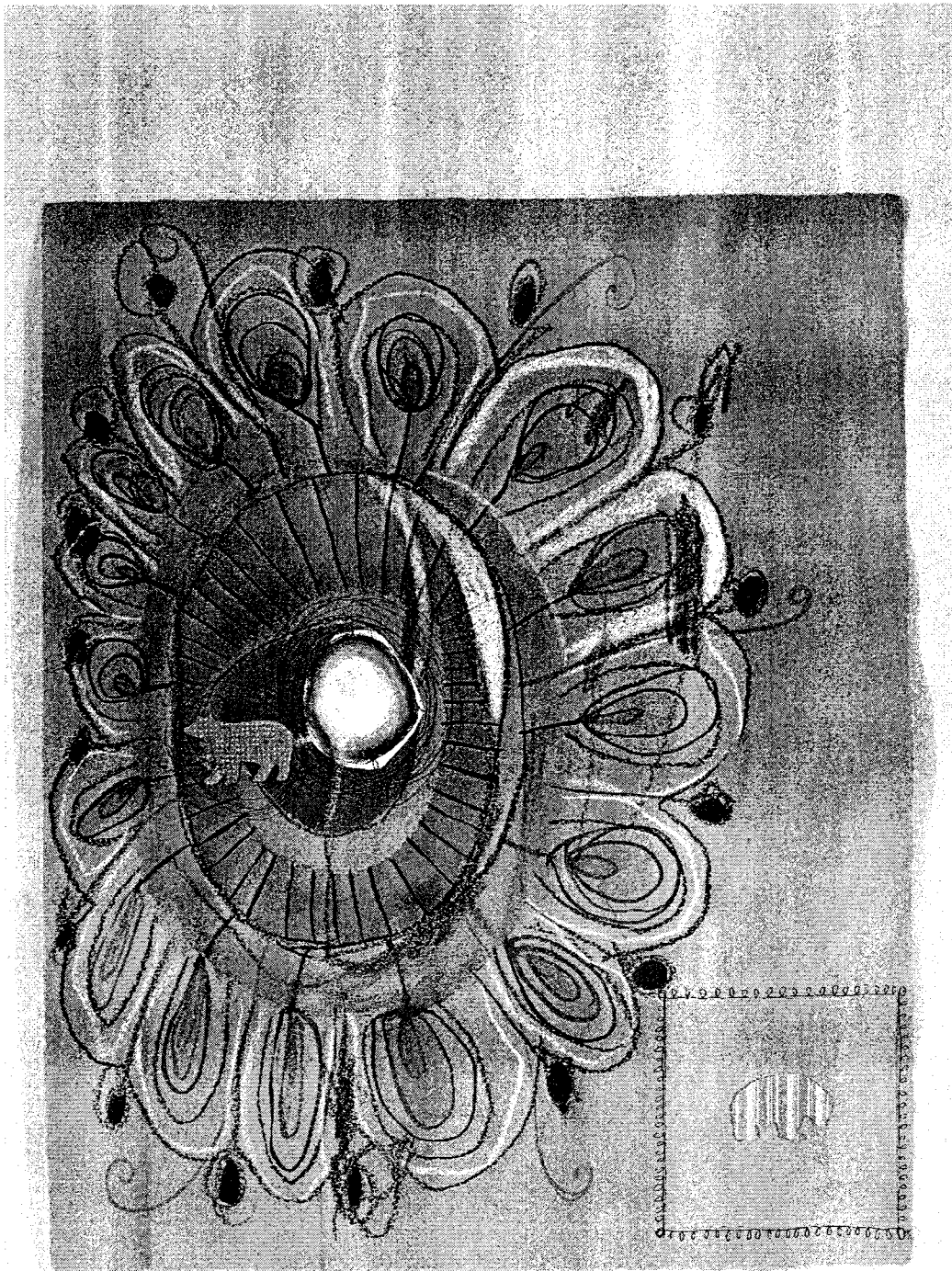


Figure 14. *Baby Bear*, Hand Made Paper, Oil Pastel, Chalk Pastel, Cardboard Bears, Ink and Watercolour, 22" x 15", 2009

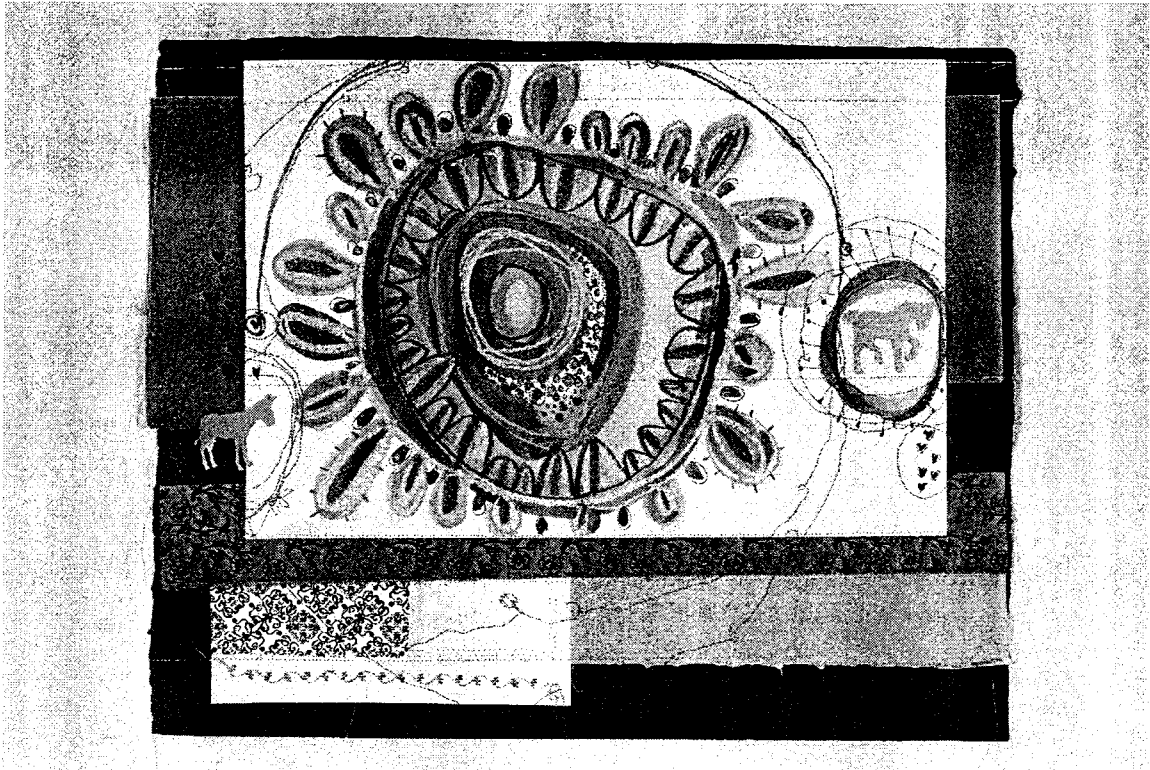


Figure 15. *Playing With Space*, Hand Made Paper, Sewing, Acrylic Paint, Japanese Paper, Ink, Cardboard Horse Pieces and Watercolour, 22" x 15", 2009

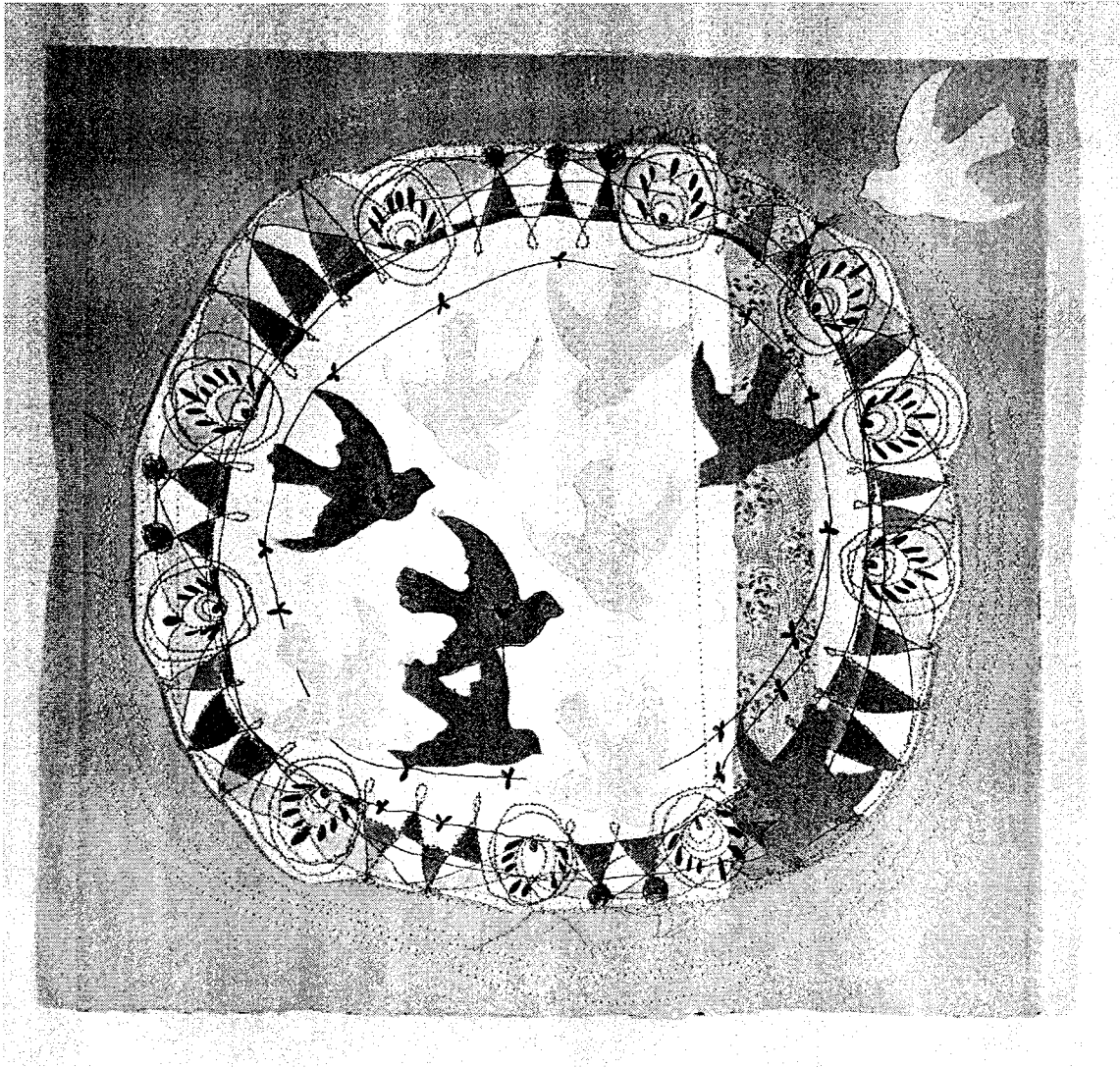


Figure 16. *Heart Birds Flight*, Hand Made Paper, Sewing, Acrylic Paint, Japanese Paper,
Ink and Watercolour, 12" x 12", 2009

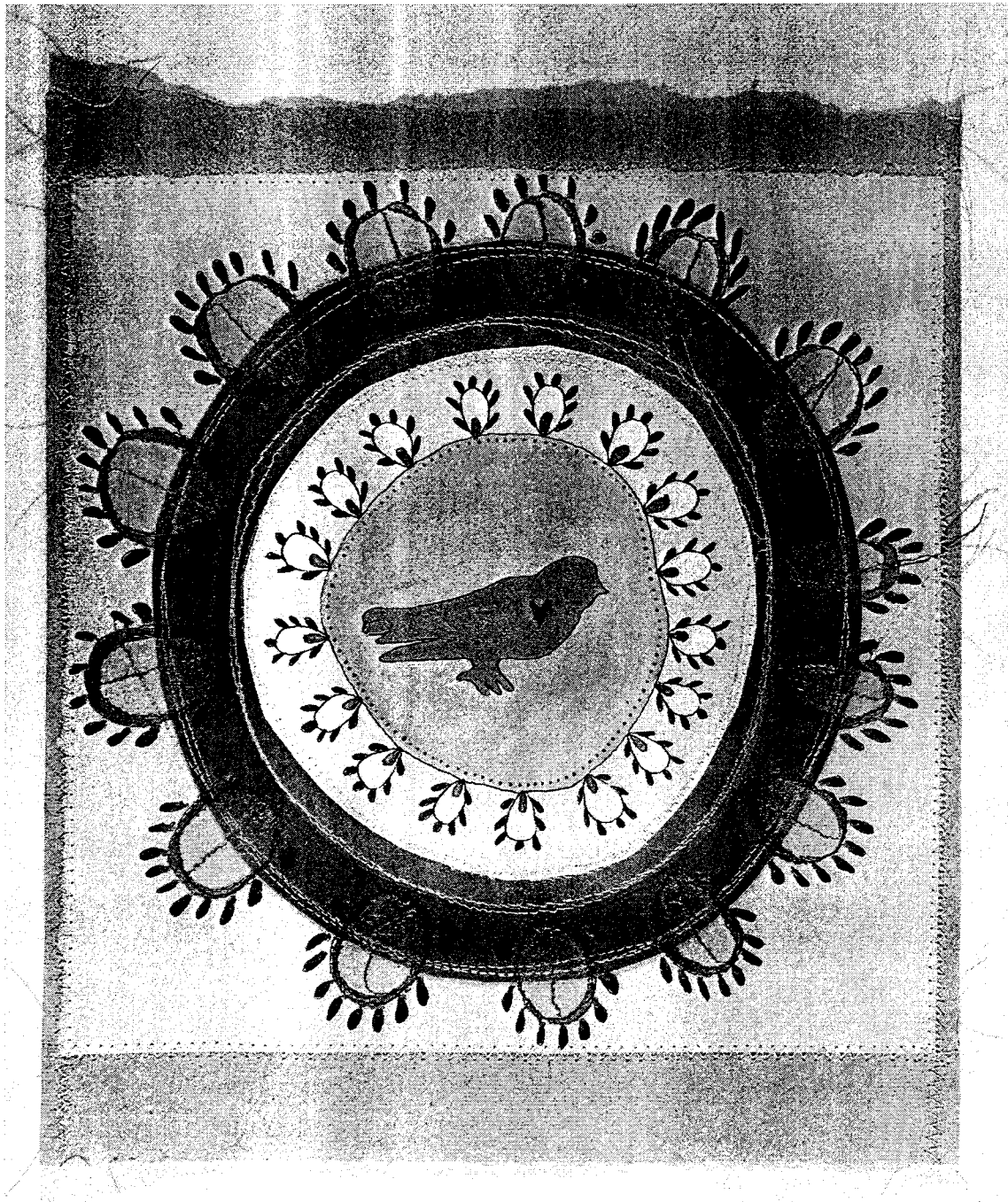


Figure 17. *Heart Bird*, Hand Made Paper, Sewing, Acrylic Paint, Japanese Paper, Ink and

Watercolour, 10.5" x 9.5", 2009