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Meet the artist| Art from illumination and reverie

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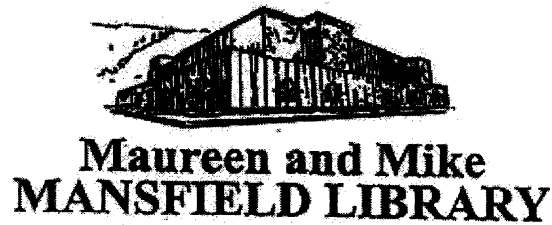
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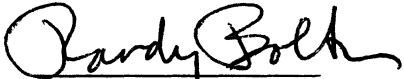
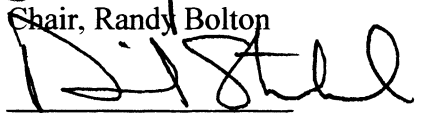
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Meet the Artist: Art From Illumination and Reverie

by
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B.S. Buffalo State College 1972
B.A. University of Montana 1998

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Fine Arts, Integrated Arts Education
The University of Montana
2001

Approved by:


Chair, Randy Bolton

Dean, Graduate School

5-16-01
Date

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Potts, Janet R. Nathe

Masters of Arts in Fine Arts, Integrated Arts Education, May 2001

Meet the Artist- Art from Reverie and Illumination

Committee Chair: Randy Bolton 

Abstract

Meet the Artist is a project that grew out of my Creative Pulse experience at the University of Montana. Its roots stem from my two field projects I completed for the summers of 1999 and 2000. As an elementary art teacher in the Missoula County Public Schools, I have spent the last eleven years working with young children. During this time, I have originated hundreds of art lessons based on the elements of art and art history but I have spent little time creating my own art. I have participated in one public showing of my work and this was in a group setting with other art teachers from this district.

This project was an attempt to change my perspective and to create a body of personal artwork to be shown publicly and with verbal explanation, like a gallery talk. It was called "Meet the Artist" and was held on October 24, 2000 at 7p.m. at Mt. Jumbo Elementary School in East Missoula.

I had two goals for this project. The first was to make public the private and inner meaning of my personal art. The second goal was to instill in my students and their parents the assurance and confidence to create personal art, free of the fear or constraint of what others may think. Six recent pieces of my personal art were on display. After a brief slide presentation and talk about my childhood and my relationship to art, each parent and child created a personal collage entitled "It's All About Me". This was a hands on activity designed to foster the process of creating personal art to be shared as a family. All materials were provided at no cost to the participants.

The project came to fruition and I experienced an overwhelming confirmation of the value of my work as an artist and my impact as a teacher. My confidence soared and has fueled my desire to work openly and without fear. I no longer question my abilities as an artist and feel confident with my art and it's form.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
First Intent- Origin of Final Creative Project	
Working in a Safe Zone.....	1
Meet the Artist- Art From Reverie and Illumination	
Working Closer to the Nerve.....	3
My Enlightenment	
Point of Discovery.....	6
Expected and Unexpected Results.....	10
Discovery of My Creative Style.....	12
List of Appendices.....	14

First Intent: Origin of Final Creative Project- Working in a Safe Zone

When I think back to the beginning of my experience with the Creative Pulse, I realize now I knew nothing of the personal transformation that was in store for me. A kind of innocence prevailed in me, as I was unaware of the power of the program. My first field project proposal for the summer of 1999 was to create a video telling the public why children need to have elementary art instruction. This project grew out of a lecture by Elliott Eisner during the first weeks of the summer of 1998. In discussing the value of art in a child's education, I mentioned that our district had proposed making art videos for the classroom teacher who could show them to her students in place of art instruction. The district had gone so far as to suggest that I make the art videos for them. I balked at this, figuring I would hasten my own demise and promptly consulted with a union representative. In response, Dr. Eisner suggested I turn the tables on the district and make a video-- a video that would explain to the parents the value of art education for their children.

I made the video. It nearly sank me as I had no expertise in video and had no clue about how to begin. Instead of writing a script for my film and planning what I wanted to say, I began filming. My first attempts were awful-- I had never used a video camera and had no understanding of film, tripods, rechargeable batteries or anything else. I stumbled along, dragging huge cameras and extension cords along with my art supplies, school to school, day in and day out. Teaching and filming were difficult, at best. On one occasion, a classroom teacher filmed me with his class and I realized how much easier it could be. I

needed a film crew! This same teacher asked me what I was trying to do and what I was trying to say. Now I knew the script was a necessity.

I struggled on and then a major boost to the project came along in the form of a gift. My husband had listened to me complain all winter and asked what he could do to help. I told him tearfully that the only thing that would help at this point would be a video camera of my own, preferably one of those cute little super eight models that are so small and user friendly. Voila! He bought me the camera. It was as if my batteries had been recharged. I tackled the project with new zeal. I began to write down what it was I wanted to say. Betty Bennett helped me edit and put the clips together. She was invaluable to me and without her expertise, I would never have been able to complete my project.

Looking back now, I realize how “safe” this project was for me. The Creative Pulse demands rigor, risk and irrevocability. I met that criteria in making the video, but it was of little personal risk to me. I made the video, wrote the script and even used my own voice on the video, but the project existed outside of me entirely. Don’t misunderstand, I am passionate about children and the importance of art education in their lives. But by making the video, I told my audience nothing of myself -- nothing personal. It was almost as if someone living outside of me made the video. I revealed nothing. I risked little.

In the following months, it became clear to me that I would have to go deeper and reveal my personal insights as an artist. My next creative project needed to be a body of personal artwork. I had something to say and I needed to commit myself to doing it. I did that by saying yes to the Mt. Jumbo PTA when they asked me in the fall of 1999 to do a program about myself and my work outside of school, my work as an artist.

Intent of Final Creative Project:

Meet the Artist-Art From Reverie and Illumination- Working Closer to the Nerve

What began as a field project developed within my comfort zone of creativity, gradually evolved to become an intimate glimpse of the adult artist I am today. My intent was to go beyond my self-imposed limitations. I did not and would not show my personal work to anyone outside my circle of close friends and family. Even then, the little I did produce was safe, utilizing known media such as fabric and thread. I did not paint or draw, hiding behind the shield of my busy teaching career and family commitments. After all, making art at home could be likened to a busman's holiday. I made art all day long with the children at school. In my spare time, I wanted a complete change. I traveled and read and remained constantly involved in my family life.

Making the commitment to have a public program about me and my art forced me back to my own artwork. In the fall of 1999, I was helping the Mt. Jumbo PTA set up a program called "Meet the Artist." A local artist is invited to the public school to show slides and work and speak about her artwork to the parents and the students in that school. The president of the PTA asked me to be the featured artist in the program. At the time, I was not prepared to do so, but in a split second, I committed to doing the show the following year (Appendix1, pg.15). I was surprised and flattered by the offer. After all, I was their children's teacher, not a local artist in my own right.

The summer classes with the Creative Pulse were a key ingredient to my commitment. I had been successful in free writing and had found a voice in the memories of my childhood. As we explored and examined incidents of the past, I found myself

envisioning work and felt the need to capture my visions on paper. One such assignment began with the creation of a life map. To my surprise, the map emerged as abstracted lines representing family members with my line being the dominant one. I saw this drawing as threads and envisioned it becoming a stitchery. I began to see my writings taking form as visual art pieces. The letter to my body assignment (Appendix 7, pg. 27) gave me the confidence to express visually those feelings of resentment I held toward myself and my family when dealing with my physical size. The Christmas Card collage is the result. (Appendix 3, pg. 23) A memory of a child's drawing of me as an art teacher was the impetus for my three- dimensional self portrait created of new and recycled materials (Appendix 3, pg.18).

What I wanted to happen, or what I intended to happen at my presentation was for the audience to see me as an artist, not only as the teacher of art. I wanted to share some of my personal life so they might know more about me outside of school. In total, I shared seven examples of my recent work as well as slides of my childhood and early artistic endeavors. I created a personal portrait collage (Appendix 2, pg. 16) for that night and demonstrated how to create one for themselves. I assured them that mostly they needed to manipulate and experience the materials and the product would emerge. They were to work side by side with their child and create art together. I am a good motivator and the audience seemed anxious to get started. Work stations had been assembled and set up on the floor of the gymnasium (Appendix 5, pg. 25) These stations were set up on roll paper, in groups of four, at spaced intervals. Matte board, painted papers, wall paper, construction paper, scissors, glue and crayons were centered in convenient containers.

Very quickly, the one hundred and twenty- five participants got to work. It was a buzz of art activity. As the children and their parents became involved, I circulated around the gym, stopping to talk, make comments, offer advice and answer questions. It was amazing for me to see so many children and adults so engrossed in an art activity that I had originated.

My Enlightenment

Through the process of planning and presenting the “Meet the Artist” program, I had expected to grow and develop as a person but not as an artist. What surprised me was that this experience led me to find a new artistic “voice” and vocabulary. This voice took shape for me as a new art form.

I had worked with fifth graders making plaster masks of their own faces for ten years before I actually made a plaster mask of myself. I had always told others that you can’t expect a child to do something you wouldn’t do yourself. Yet there I was, instructing them, telling them how it felt, explaining about the trust that had to exist between the mask maker and the one whose face was being cast. I didn’t have a clue as to the reality, not having experienced it firsthand. I decided to finally end that lie and make it part of my second field project for the summer of 2000.

With help from a colleague, I created a plaster cast of my face. A calmness overcame me as the plaster was applied to my skin. I relaxed totally and enjoyed the sensation of being detached from what was going on outside the mask. There was a definite shift in my senses-- my hearing became far more acute as the visual imagery I rely on was removed. I was not particularly interested in decorating the plaster likeness, but the positive clay casting of the mask intrigued me. When I removed the clay from the mask, I was appalled by the highly defined wrinkles and lines that appeared on my clay face. I knew as a clay technician, I could easily remove those lines and make myself appear more youthful. Coming to grips with one’s appearance at the age of fifty is

difficult at best. Accepting that appearance is almost too much to ask. I wrapped the face in damp cloths and decided to think about what I was doing and how I wanted to proceed.

I finally decided to leave the mask as it was and play up the idea of the lines and wrinkles. After all, this was the real me and I had earned every line on my face. In the past, I had illustrated my life as a series of colorful lines, interwoven like threads. Here were the lines again, created by years of emotional ups and downs, of smiles and frowns. I decided to carve away, defining the areas of my face. Then the unexpected happened. The clay mask broke in two before I had a chance to fire it. I was devastated by the setback. I discussed my dilemma with a friend and fellow Creative Pulse colleague, Maureen Kane. She had little sympathy but encouraged me to deal with my stumbling block and grow from the experience. It proved to be wise advice.

And so I did. I cast my face a second time and this time the results improved. I had a better understanding of the process and the technique I wanted to use. I carved deeper and more deliberately. I colored the carved crevices with under glaze and used clear glaze to accent the different planes of the facial surface (Appendix 3, pg. 19). The result pleased me more than I expected. Out of the broken mask grew a more confident portrait of me as an artist.

Now it was summer 2000 and I was enrolled in a Creative Pulse class entitled “The Art of the Book”. For an assignment, I had to create a personal book. My emotions were running high as I had my immediate family together for the first time in a year. My sons were both at home, but leaving soon, one to graduate school, one to college. I wanted time to stop. I was enjoying the place I was in and wanted my life to

stay the way it was. It was unrealistic of me, but the prospect of the empty nest loomed large. My son, Dan had admired my self portrait mask, saying it would always be me at the age of fifty. When he said that, I knew what I would do next. I would cast his face and make a book of the clay mask, capturing his likeness at age twenty two, effectively stopping time.

Dan was a willing subject and even seemed pleased that I would use him as a model. I cast his face with the plaster and now the clay casting seemed easier. I understood the pitfalls and pace of working with leather hard clay. But new problems surfaced. Dan's book needed words. He loves the written word. How would I artistically inscribe the mask with the words that were descriptive of my son and still hold the interest of the viewer? By reading the words, one would come to know him better, but that wasn't enough. Once again, a discussion of my progress with a Creative Pulse colleague provided the answer for me. I would create small, individual sculptures to illustrate the descriptive words and applique them to the mask.

Upon completion of the clay book of Dan, my artistic enlightenment occurred. My younger son Michael saw the mask that I had made of his brother and asked when I would make one of him. I was thrilled and took this as a compliment of my personal work. Usually, my family sees only my art samples made for my elementary school lessons. These products are not as involved or technical, ensuring success for the young child. In that instant, I knew what I had to do as an artist. I would create a family portrait, casting each of us in clay and adorning the masks with words and sculptures that would define us as individuals and family members. I proceeded to make one of Michael, my reluctant

husband Don and finally, one of myself. My original clay self portrait mask was the beginning of my new art form and no longer fit my present technique or style.

I worked steadily into the fall of 2000, aiming to exhibit the masks at my presentation of "Meet the Artist." I fired and glazed them, leaving some of the terra cotta clay plain and other parts glossed. I liked the play of light on the different textures and finishes on the masks. Finally, the masks were finished. All four masks were mounted on a cedar stump, my first attempt to tie the portrait together and present them as one piece (Appendix 3, pg. 22). The stump represented my family, strong and solid, well grounded yet each root existing separately. I included this piece in the "Meet the Artist" presentation.

The discovery of this new artistic avenue surprised me and pleased me as well. I found myself anxious to share my progress with others and wanted their reaction to my work. This felt like a turning point for me, a defining moment. I discovered this style of working in clay and I owned it. I knew I had something special and the idea that others appreciated it was icing on the cake. I had come to the realization that the only person I needed to please was myself. Maybe the fact that I am fifty years old has helped to bring me to this point. If not now, when? What was I waiting for? I now felt that I could say and do whatever I want, confident in the knowledge that I know myself well. I know my strengths, my weaknesses, what matters to me and what I want to do. Change and challenge are good for me and I now had the confidence to deal with whatever evolved. After all, it was the journey and the process that were important, not the product or destination.

Expected and Unexpected Results:

At this point, I thought I had achieved my intent. I had told my audience about myself and my art and what it meant to me. I had exhibited my personal work and the response was positive. Children and parents told me what a great time they had creating their portraits together. They asked if there would be more events like this and thought it should become a regular part of the PTA program. I was flying high, breathing in the overwhelming support. I felt relief and satisfaction and wondered why I had ever worried about what others thought of my work. The evening turned out to be enjoyable and productive for me and for all the participants. For hours afterwards, I experienced a sense of euphoria as I relived the event.

What I had not anticipated was the interest and the intensity the participants had for the project. They were focused on their work and completely involved in what they were doing. I had worried that the project would not hold their interest long enough but now the project seemed like it could go on for hours. People shared artistic ideas as well as supplies. Originality abounded as new uses were found for everyday materials like scraps of wallpaper and buttons. Whole families worked together, Mom and Dad and the two kids-- all creating self portraits. One parent exclaimed that she planned to have all the portraits framed and display them together in their home. I was thrilled by the excitement that seemed to radiate throughout the room. People openly shared their collages with one another and commented to total strangers about their work. They were proud of themselves and each other and pleased with the outcome. I felt the confidence of these artists as they showed me their work. They were excited and told me the evening had

been a great family art experience (Appendix 4-6, pg. 24-26).

A second unexpected result was a personal realization that the body of work I created for my presentation had all originated inside my head. These works were visual representations of what I saw inside my mind and would never have been seen by others if I hadn't committed to doing the show. These works are somewhat removed from the reality of my life. This is a step away from the way I used to work and a step toward abstraction. Previously, my artwork was representational and realistic. Some artists only create work from actual settings of real places or portraits from live models. In this body of work, I have drawn solely from my imagination and have tried to show others what I see and feel inside (Appendix 3, pg. 17). This may be an attempt on my part to communicate my inner, hidden self to others so that they may know and understand me a little better and see me in a different light.

It is a risk for an artist to put down on paper what others can see in front of them. Their artwork begs comparison to the "real" subject. A different risk is assumed when one illustrates inner thoughts and images; images that would stay forever hidden but for the desire of the artist to share them. I surprised myself by taking that risk.

Discovery of My Creative Style

I have discovered that my creative flow needs a human response. In conversations, I feed off the facial expressions of others, their body language and their verbal responses. It shapes my speech, my expression and my reply. I know this is what I like best about teaching-- young children do not mask their expressions or their responses. They are spontaneous and genuine. We learn to hide our responses as we grow up and to me, that is a great loss.

The same holds true with my artwork. I get ideas for my art from many sources. Visual images, relationships between objects, conversations and dreams stir my imagination. Sometimes, I find solutions to creative road blocks in my dreams and need to get up and draw a picture or write down notes. But I never see a completed work; it is never totally laid out or set in my mind. What I do know is that I need to manipulate the materials and in getting started in that way, let the materials give me ideas and direction. I need the tactile sense of moving fabrics around or molding clay. I need to cut up the papers or shift them around and when I do that enough, usually something emerges. I have developed a trust within myself that the product will come. If I reach a point where nothing is working, I find it helpful to step back and take a break from my work. When I discuss the problem with a friend and try to explain just what it is I am trying to do, it is like opening a window in a stuffy room. I may not realize it at the time, but in the act of conversation, I find answers. I see possibilities and solutions. My sounding boards are people.

The process I go through to create a piece of personal artwork is similar to the way I create new lessons for my students. A few lessons are prompted by a request from a classroom teacher to foster an interdisciplinary approach to a unit of study. More often, I am searching for a new way to present the elements and principles of art. I find myself bombarded with ideas and make sense of them through physical manipulation of the supplies and discussion of these ideas with my teaching colleagues and friends.

I have come to the realization that I need to change the way I teach my art lesson to my students. I have to allow them to experience their own creative processing. Somehow, I need to give them time to handle the art supplies and experiment a bit before they begin their classroom project. Just as I find it helpful to manipulate the materials for ideas, so would they. I only see my students once a month for an hour and fifteen minutes, so time constraints are always a problem. One way to achieve this would be to set out the materials in a central area and have “tactile time”. Just a few minutes for up close visual viewing and handling of the supplies would give the children a wealth of ideas to begin their artwork.

I love to teach art. I love the spontaneity of a classroom full of live bodies and minds that see no strangeness or weirdness to an idea; where all things are imagined and nothing is impossible. This may explain why I have always seen myself as a teacher first, then, as an artist. Through my “Meet the Artist” experience, I have discovered that the teacher and the artist can co-exist. The energy and confidence I have for teaching has infused my artwork and I find this to be deeply rewarding. The teacher and the artist in me form a trusted partnership and together, walk side by side.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1.....	Brochure for “Meet the Artist”	pg.15
Appendix 2.....	”It’s All About Me” sample collage.....	pg.16
Appendix 3.....	The Body of Work for “Meet the Artist”	pg.17
	Self Portrait sculpture.....	pg.18
	Self Portrait-Clay.....	pg.19
	Relationships.....	pg.20
	My Husband, the Juggler.....	pg.21
	Family Portrait.....	pg.22
	Christmas Card.....	pg.23
Appendix 4.....	Pictures from “Meet the Artist”-families.....	pg.24
Appendix 5.....	Pictures from “Meet the Artist”-work stations.....	pg.25
Appendix 6.....	Picture from “Meet the Artist”-Janet Potts with students..	pg.26
Appendix 7.....	Letter to Body.....	pg.27

Appendix 1

The Mount Jumbo PTA presents an evening program:

**** "MEET THE ARTIST" WITH JANET POTTS ****

Tuesday, October 24th 2000 - 7 to 8:30 p.m.- Mt. Jumbo gym



My name is Janet Potts. I am the elementary art specialist for Mt. Jumbo and Prescott Elementary schools. I have been teaching in Missoula for the past 11 years and have the pleasure of bringing art into the lives of your children. I was born and raised in Pleasantville, NY and graduated from Buffalo State College in Buffalo, NY with a BS in Art Education. After moving to Montana in 1979, I completed a degree in Elementary Education from UM. I am currently finishing my MA in the Fine Arts Creative Pulse program at UM.. I have been married for 29 years to Don Potts, a professor in the Forestry School at UM. We have 2 sons, Dan, 23 and Mike, 19.

Art has always been an integral part of my life. In kindergarten, my teacher told my mother I spent too much time coloring and not enough time at the Science table. I knew at an early age I wanted to be an art teacher and took every art class my high school offered. My role models were my teachers-- they inspired me to pursue my passion. My parents supported my decision and made it possible for me to go on to college.

I have always loved to cut things out, so collage is a natural medium for me. I also enjoy working with fabrics and most recently clay. I dabble in all areas of art and find great satisfaction in working with all kinds of materials, new and recycled.

In my adult life, I have taught on every level, but my true love is teaching your elementary children. They are full of energy and enthusiastically try new things. They are natural artists and find such joy in what they create. I love their honesty and their attitude-- nothing is impossible! We as parents and educators need to keep that spark alive in our children so that each one can discover their passion.

Come and meet me and see some of my work. You will have the opportunity to create a collage with your child. If you have copies of family photos, you can bring them along, but it is not necessary. All materials will be provided. There is no cost to attend. Please fill out and return this slip to school as soon as possible so I can prepare the right amount of materials.

Student name: _____

Grade and class _____

Number in family attending _____

Appendix 2

It's All About Me

I created this collage as a sample of a self portrait that the children and their parents could create at my "Meet the Artist" presentation. I find it helpful in teaching to make up a sample of the work for my own knowledge, but also for the delivery of the lesson to the students. I want to know if it is possible and what problems they may encounter along the way. It also helps me to define what size to work in, what supplies are needed and in what quantity.

This is a picture of me, done from construction paper, wallpaper scrap, bits of painted papers and a few buttons. I have tried to illustrate my physical characteristics as well as what I like to do outside of school, when I'm not being the children's art teacher.



Appendix 3

The Body of Work Exhibited for the “Meet the Artist” Presentation

Self Portrait

Years ago, I had a student named Larry. He asked me if I knew what you'd get if you crossed an art teacher with an octopus. He said, "an Artepus!" He drew me a picture of what I would look like and we all had a good laugh.

I never forgot that and so when the time came for me to create a self portrait, I wondered how I could give myself more hands. Every art teacher should have more than two! I had been given two mannequin hands and they are used here. I cast the other hands from my own or by pouring plaster into plastic gloves and hanging them till they hardened.

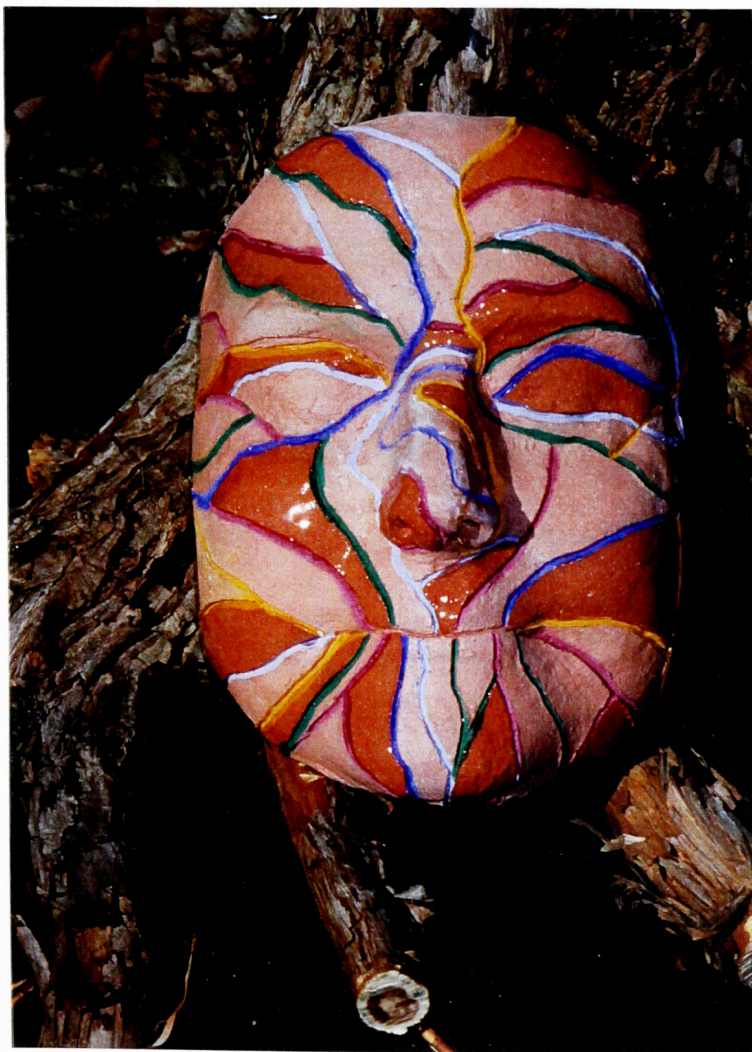
The head is recycled Styrofoam and the base is an old spool I found in the street near Lowell Elementary. I used lots of buttons because I love button shapes and colors. My grandmother gave me her button tin to play with and sort when I was little. The threads represent the different strands of my life and how we are entwined. The art tools attached to the hands are the tools of my trade.



Self Portrait-Clay

This was my second attempt at a self portrait in clay- the first one broke in two before it was fired. But sometimes good things come from adversity and this mask turned out to reveal more details and qualities than I had expected.

When I removed the clay from the plaster casting of my face, I was appalled at all the lines that were visible. I was going to erase them and then I began thinking about those lines. I had earned every one! I laugh a lot, I cry a lot and I use my face for expression a lot. So the lines are like my battle scars. I deepened them and colored them so they appear almost as channels or threads, woven over the landscape of my face to give it character.

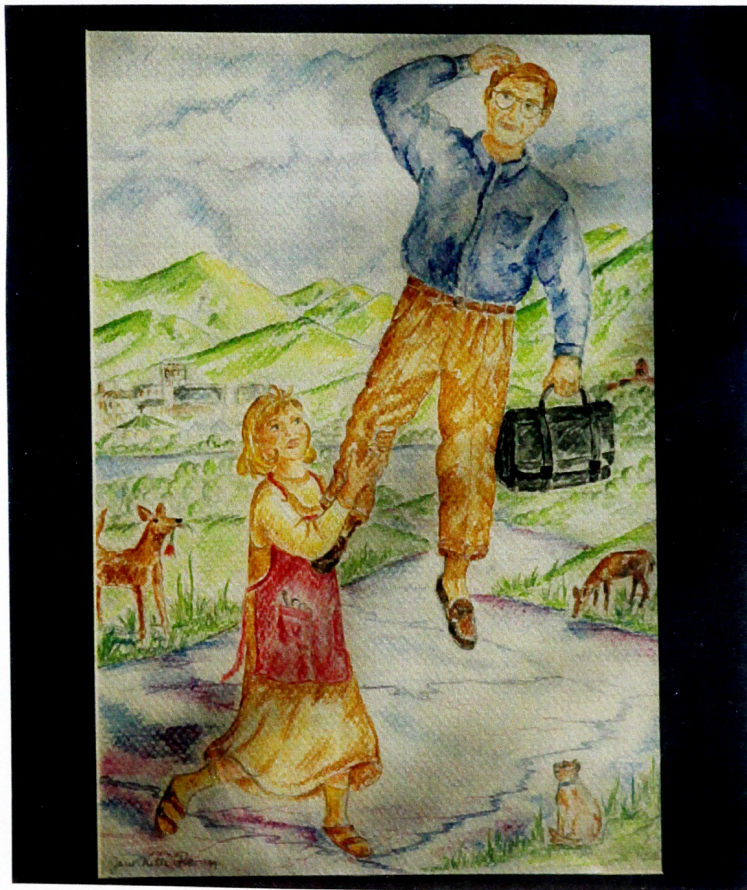


Relationships

When women get together and talk about relationships, I'm always amazed at how they describe them visually. We seem to paint a picture for each other, showing and telling about how we get along with our spouse. I have described my marriage to Don many times, sometimes referring to it as a hike through the Alps, or a ship that occasionally encounters rough seas. But one time I described it verbally as you see it here. My friend suggested the painting.

I think I was put on this earth so as to keep Don connected to the real world. He is a professor and I affectionately refer to him as Fred McMurray, the actor who played the lead roll in the movie, "The Absent Minded Professor" Don is an intelligent, intense individual. He absolutely loves his job and teaching is a joy to him. But sometimes he forgets the everyday stuff, leaving that to me, knowing I will take care of the more practical side of our lives.

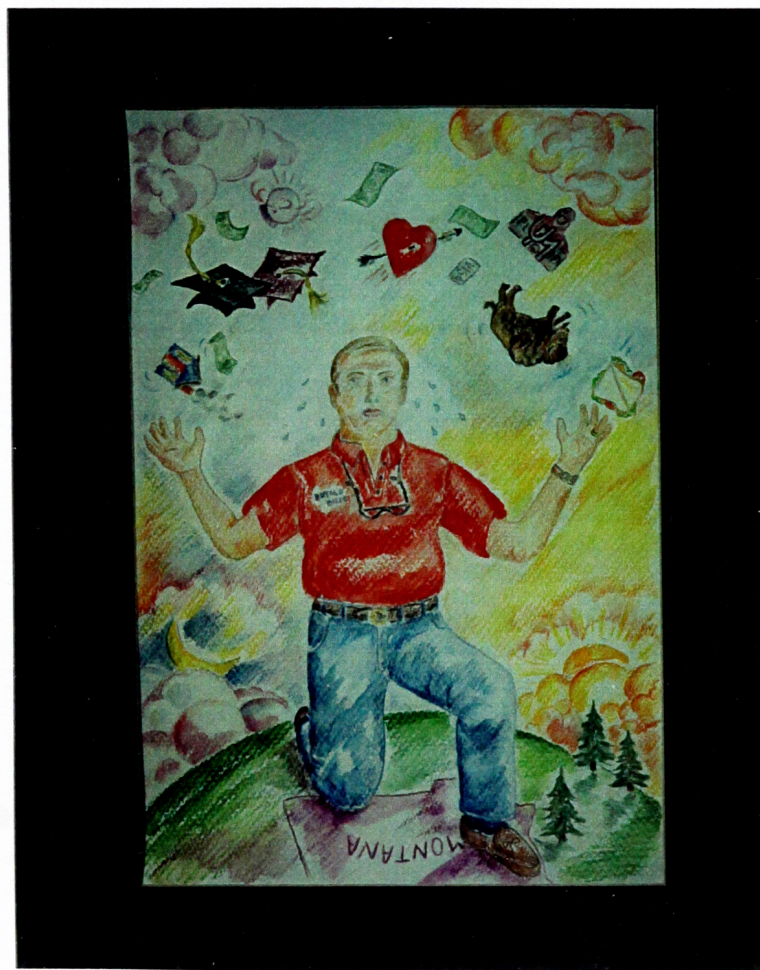
Here we are, in the Missoula valley, me holding tight to Don's leg as he floats above, pondering the problems of the universe. I am dressed in my school clothes, my apron and Birkenstocks. I only have one foot on the ground and am standing on the cracking ice of the Clark Fork River.



My Husband, the Juggler

I once saw a Valentine card depicting a harlequin type juggler, juggling hearts. It occurred to me that this could be my husband, Don, except instead of hearts, was juggling the different parts of his life.

Here is Don, my husband of nearly 30 years. He is kneeling on Montana, our adopted state. The house on the left represents our home and mortgage. The graduation hats are our children, Dan and Mike. Dan graduated from college this year, and Mike graduated from high school. We figure we are halfway through college tuition at this point. The crystal ball is the unknown future. The heart in the center represents me and our marriage. Don's job and responsibilities are represented by Main Hall at UM.. The spinning buffalo represents his folks, now needing his help in Buffalo, NY. The sandwich is Don, caught between the younger and older generations.



Family Portrait

The year 2000 has been one of change for me. I reached the half century mark and had a hard time dealing with that. My children are grown and away at school. My husband is contemplating career options. I have nearly completed my Masters degree in the Fine Arts and my own artwork has surfaced again, taking a new and exciting path.

With this in mind, I tried to slow these changes down a bit. I attempted to capture this time in my family's life by creating these portraits in clay. It began with an assignment to create a book for a class I was taking this summer. The professor challenged us to create a book and to make it as unique as possible. I had made several clay masks this spring and decided I would cast my son Daniel's face in plaster and then clay. I inscribed words in the clay that would describe his personality. When I finished, my other son, Michael, asked me to do one of him. When that one was finished, I knew I would make one of my husband, Don and then myself.

The stump represents the family tree and the way we have grown together. Each of us face a different direction as we face the future, yet we remain connected.



Christmas Card

Every year, my Mom attempted to photograph my brothers and me for a family Christmas card. It was usually on a Sunday in November, right after church. She wanted us to look our best, so we had to stay in our church clothes. It was difficult to get us all together and then if she did, it was nearly impossible for her to get us all nicely posed and smiling sweetly.

This collage is my memory of those times. I created it with copies of the real photos that Mom used as well as some of the out-takes. The quilt in the background is a photo copy of one given to my Grandmother when she married in 1911. The house was her home, in Pleasantville, NY, where I grew up. The Dick and Jane illustrations are from an old textbook from which I learned to read. I grew up in a very Dick and Jane household, with lots of love and extended family, but no Spot or Puff!



Appendix 4

Pictures from “Meet the Artist” presentation-Families

These are photos of families working together on their self portrait collages at the “Meet the Artist” program, October 24, 2000.



Appendix 5

Pictures from “Meet the Artist” presentation-work stations

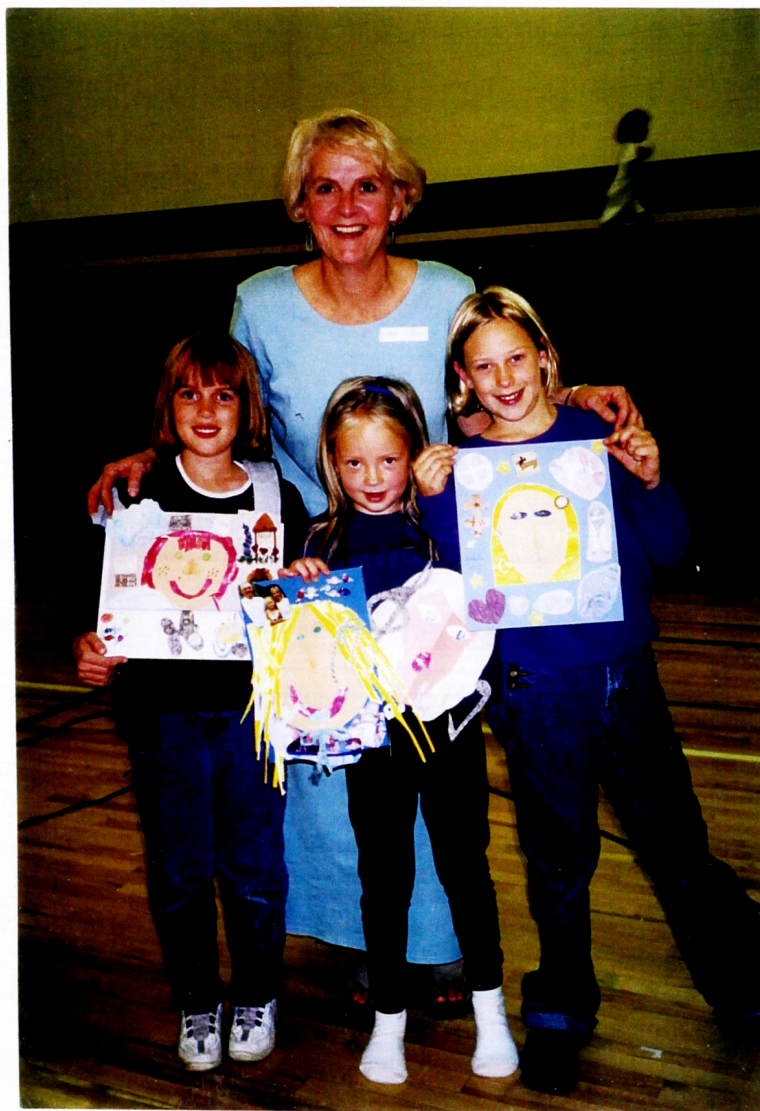
These pictures show the work stations set up on the floor of the gymnasium at Mt. Jumbo School, October 24, 2000. In the foreground a set-up of art supplies for four participants can be seen.



Appendix 6

Picture from “Meet the Artist” presentation- Janet Potts with students and their artwork

This picture shows me with three of the student participants and their self-portrait collages at the “Meet the Artist” presentation, October 24, 2000.



Appendix 7

Janet Potts
July 10, 1999

Dear Body,

O.K., I'm stuck with you, but you're stuck with me, too. I've always wondered why you were so big-compared to other girls your age....and why oh, why do you and I have such big legs? My Mom used to answer with remarks like, "Oh, Janet, be glad you have legs!" I knew she was right, but I also knew I'd never be a cheerleader, ballet dancer or gymnast just because there was just too much of me-or you!

Thirteen is an ugly time in the life of a body- but it was then that I was first proud of you. Mom had enrolled us in weekly ski lessons sponsored by the town recreation department. Every Saturday we got on the bus and traveled to Birch Hill Ski Area, a tiny hill with a rope tow and a T-bar. We took a group lesson and it was apparent early on that this was something we could do and we could do it well! We were big and strong, so the rope tow was easy for us. Once on the slope, our size propelled us downward and we actually were graceful, gliding down the snowy slopes. Here, our big legs were power!

It amazes me- thirty six years have passed since that winter and I am just now realizing why we love to ski. When we are outside, I can cover you in layers of ski clothes and we look like everybody else on the slope. We don't stand out among the skiers- we blend in, just part of the frenzy of arms and legs speeding down the mountain. Our form is good; our skill level matches or exceeds other skiers, especially women our age. Actually, there aren't very many women our age out there anymore. But that's O.K. with

me; I'm proud of you. Proud that you've kept up, even though sometimes I didn't treat you too well.

So, old body, old friend, I want to make a promise to you. I have been trying to listen to you and to keep you safe, but I can do a little better. From now on, I plan to heed your warnings. I will let you rest when you need rest. I will drink more water. I will stretch more before we exercise and worry less about your actual size. I want to celebrate our height and take pride in our appearance. You have served me well and I need for you to be around for a while longer. Maybe we can end this love/hate relationship and be friends at last. What do you say? How about we give it a try?

I look forward to hearing from you soon- and, by the way, I really do love you.

Your friend