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Sustaining a Visual/Verbal Sketchbook Journal to Promote Creativity and the Emergence of the Visual Voice of the Artist

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SUSTAINING A VISUAL/VERBAL SKETCHBOOK JOURNAL TO PROMOTE
CREATIVITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE VISUAL VOICE OF THE ARTIST

by

AYANA WEEKES

Under the Direction of Dr. Kevin Hsieh

ABSTRACT

This arts-based study will discuss using a sketchbook journal to enhance creativity and promote the cultivation of the artist's visual voice. The paper attempts to define creativity, as well as the usefulness of the sketchbook as a creative tool. The results of this study will demonstrate how the effectiveness of the sketchbook journal in the development of the artist can also transcend to usefulness when considering the sketchbook as a curriculum tool in elementary art education.

INDEX WORDS: Art education, Creativity, Sketchbook, Visual voice

SUSTAINING A VISUAL/VERBAL SKETCHBOOK JOURNAL TO PROMOTE
CREATIVITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE VISUAL VOICE OF THE ARTIST

by

AYANA WEEKES

A Thesis Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Art Education

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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Ayana Weekes
2011

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CREATIVITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE VISUAL VOICE OF THE ARTIST

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August 2011

DEDICATION

To my mom and dad, Al and Elaine Thomas, who have always encouraged and supported my creative endeavors.

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INTRODUCTION

Description of Study

I chose to conduct an art-based research thesis as I was in a technical and creative quandary as it relates to my development as a two-dimensional artist. Historically, I classified myself as a three-dimensional artist with a focus on jewelry design, and ceramics; however throughout my journey as an artist I have been enchanted with the many disciplines of art to include the afore-mentioned as well as painting, textiles, sculpture, computer arts, and photography. I truly enjoyed the process of art making, and as such have tried my hand at many disciplines. This experimentation had not only brought me immense satisfaction, as it allowed me to experience the joy of art making utilizing various techniques and mediums, but also tremendous frustration, as my lack of technical mastery in these disciplines stifled my growth as an artist. This was most apparent when faced with the challenge of drawing and painting. Some artists who specialize in drawing and painting view art making as an intuitive process and describe their work as making marks on paper and allowing the marks to lead them to the end product. Brooks (n.d.) describes art making as an innate explorative process whereby the creative method assumes a guiding role for the artist to a place of perennial possibilities wherein the artist's choices inform the work, and through its revelations, the work informs the artist. The process described above is one that I utilized frequently when creating two-dimensional works, as it satisfied my need to create; however when faced with a challenge to create art work that was specific, like a formal self-portrait, this process did not work, as I did not possess the necessary drawing skills needed to execute such a task in a way that was presentable.

When I thought about myself as an artist, the phrase jack-of-all-trades master of none was especially applicable of my two-dimensional artistic skills. Because my interests in art varies greatly, I often found myself immediately starting pieces as the ideas fashioned themselves in my imagination, rather than taking the time to develop them fully by working them out on paper. As a result, I frequently abandoned a piece before it was finished, or I was disappointed with the end result. This practice of rushing to create, and subsequent disappointment or abandonment of the piece not only hindered the development of my two-dimensional skills by limiting practice, but also stifled creativity and the development of a distinguishable visual voice. This hindrance was primarily due to the lack of adequate exploration and problem solving for the previous idea before moving on to the next piece, as well as insufficient reflection upon the instinctive aspects of my art making that may have helped me to discover who I am, and what I wanted to convey as an artist. Ariati (1976) postulates that creativity is one of the major means by which humans liberate themselves from conditioned responses, and deviate from the usual choices to choices that are significantly more original. It was my thought that by maintaining a sketch journal I would not only foster a growth in creativity, as the use of a sketchbook would provide a place for ideas to be explored and expounded upon through manipulation of art materials, but also would facilitate the emergence of a distinguishable visual voice. The sketchbook journal has afforded me the opportunity to ruminate on my intuitive choices as an artist, resulting in the emergence of a unique visual voice.

It has been my experience that I begin with an idea, and somewhere in the process of creating, the idea may change into something much more profound or

remarkable; however I seldom explore the evolution of the original idea because of previous time invested, or fear of destroying the work beyond my ability to correct. The sketchbook journal provided a means for my ideas to be tested and expounded upon exclusively, and also encouraged new ideas for future exploration. The exploration of ideas fostered a growth in creativity, as I constantly reevaluated and tested the limits of my artistic skills. The sketchbook journal also acted as a reference tool when creating larger scaled mixed-media paintings. Through habitual use and practice I learned to rely upon my emerging visual voice and increased technical skills to gain confidence as a two-dimensional artist, which allowed me to begin taking risk in my art work. It was my intent that by conducting art-based research I would be able to explore answers to the following questions about my work as an artist: *How would the use of a sketchbook foster creativity? How would the use of a sketchbook aid in the development of a visual voice that is evident in a cohesive body of work?*

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the habitual use of a sketchbook journal would aid the artist in the promotion of creativity while simultaneously cultivating the emergence of a distinctive visual voice through creative experimentation with mixed-media processes

Key Terms

The following are key terms that appear throughout this study, and are definitions I deem applicable as they relate to this specific study.

VISUAL SKETCHBOOK JOURNAL - An anthology of ideas, experiments, and reflections of the author personified visually through artistic processes and/or written word.

CREATIVITY- The ability to express oneself in a way that is novel to the individual.

VISUAL VOICE- The amalgamation of instincts and feelings that encourage an artist to create resulting in a recognizable artistic style that is unique to the individual artist.

ART CONCEPTS- Theories about art and how they may be understood in terms of aesthetics, production, and art historical contexts.

HIGHER ORDER THINKING- “A complex level of thinking that entails analyzing and classifying or organizing perceived qualities or relationships, meaningfully combining concepts and principles verbally or in the production of art works or performances, and then synthesizing ideas into supportable, encompassing thoughts or generalizations that hold true for many situations” (Armstrong, 1994, p. 8).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Sketchbook as an Instrument for Creativity

A visual sketchbook journal is an instrument that can be employed to elucidate pre-existing ideas or formulate new ones. It acts as a vehicle in the preliminary decision making process for an artist to “preserve many visual options” as well as allows the artist to “foresee the results of the synthesis or manipulation of objects without actually executing such operations” (Fish & Scrivener, 1990, p. 117). The visual sketchbook journal allows an artist to dismiss reticence, and acts as a vehicle for testing artistic boundaries through experimentation resulting in the generation of novel ideas. It acts as a catalyst for challenging the artist to reconsider notions regarding their artistic abilities and methods of thinking (Lytle, 2008). Bartram (2009) suggests that the sketchbook presents the opportunity for him to not only test and take risks in his designs, but also lends itself as a reflective instrument in which he is able to analyze what he likes about his work and what he wishes to avoid in the future. Sketchbooks are a tool that encourage creative and critical thought as they put the owner at the center of their world allowing them to think, consolidate, imagine, reflect, and share (Briggs & Ceccarilli, 2011). They provide a secure structure when creating a personal vision and a new way of seeing things (Parker, 2005). The sketchbook is a place where the artist can study, confront, reminisce and create a vision (Ludwig, 2008). Visual Sketchbooks serve as a record of the artist’s thoughts, which moves her out of the world of impulse and allows her to look beyond

the immediate state and focus on the process of creating allowing the artist to get know herself on a more authentic level (Bell, 2006).

Creativity Defined

There are a myriad of definitions for creativity which can be applied in terms of the individual, circumstance or culture. As I am interested in how creativity can be fostered in the individual artist, for this study I define creativity as the ability to express oneself in a way that is novel to the individual. Creativity involves the origination of an idea and expounding upon that idea in such a way that is meaningful to its originator. Artists are often labeled creative for their ability to present works of art in a manner that the non-artists finds neoteric. The artist through creative processes orchestrates an aesthetic experience whereby viewers experience novelty resulting in the challenging of conceptions and the conversion of worldviews (Pelowski & Akiba, 2011). The aesthetic experience is directly related to the creative process executed by the artist. Creativity is both inherent and learned, as artists not only have the ability through imagination to bring something new into existence, but also through learned processes of creativity the imagined is realized. Marshall (2010) summarizes the creative process first outlined by Wallas (1926) as a delineation of four stages:

[The] first stage is preparation. In this stage, information and related ideas are gathered. Stage two is incubation. In incubation, the prepared material is internally elaborated and organized. The third stage is illumination. This is the stage in which an idea emerges. Finally, in stage four, verification, an idea is evaluated and further elaborated into its complete form.

(Marshall, 2010, p. 16)

Marshall's view suggests that creativity is a systematic course of action rather than an instinctual ability.

Like Marshall's analysis of creativity, Starko (2005) agrees that creativity is decisive, however goes further to suggest that considerations of creativity should include whether the envisaged or product are original to the creator, and appropriate in context. Appropriateness is determined by many factors such as the audience, and social climate, but primarily includes "the cultural context in which the creativity is based" as cultures vary in what they consider creative (Starko, 2005, p. 6). Arici (1964) contends that creativity must be goal centered and produce new combinations that are useful, although need not be applicable at the time of creation. This line of thinking suggests that the creative act is not fanciful, but calculated such that the thinking of the respondent is restructured. This definition like the afore-mentioned emphasizes process, and functionality of the idea rather than intrinsic qualities.

The Artist's Visual Voice: A concise examination of three Contemporary Artists

Mitchell & Haroun (2007) propose that the artist's visual voice is the amalgamation of instincts and feelings that encourage an artist to create. Mexican born painter, Frida Kahlo, embodied this definition in more than 50 self-portraits. Kahlo stated, " I paint my own reality, the only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, I paint whatever passes through my head, without any other considerations" (Kahlo, 1993, para. 2). Kahlo's statement suggests that her thoughts and feelings were transferred to canvas in an uncensored manner. As a teenager, Kahlo suffered a *mélange* of physical catastrophes to include polio, and a horrific bus accident both of

which left her permanently disabled in some capacity, and were the cause of future medical ailments (Cork, 2005). When viewing Kahlo's work her visual voice speaks to both her physical and emotional pain. Kahlo, was an artist who candidly expressed her visual voice to the viewer stating that:

"... my subjects have always been my sensations, my states of mind and the profound reactions that life has been producing in me, I have frequently objectified all this in figures of myself, which were the most sincere and real thing that I could do in order to express what I felt inside and outside of myself." (Life and Times, 2005, para. 12)

Just as Kahlo's voice speaks of physical and emotional pain, Kimiko Yoshida describes her visual voice as one of feminist stance, specifically a stance against the formulation of identities based upon gender as determined by heredity (Fei, 2010). Yoshida's inner voice is driven to create works that transform. Yoshida states that "Art is above all the experience of transformation. Transformation is, it seems to me, the ultimate value of the work" (Yoshida, 2009, para.2). When viewing Yoshida's mixed media photographic self portraits one is immediately entranced by the transformative nature of her work, as the artist's use of monochromy results in her image becoming a part of the environment instead of the environment being ancillary. Yoshida describes this approach as a departure as she asserts that art making and its end result is a faint process of heterotaxy, "...an assiduous struggle with the state of things. to be there where I think I am not, to disappear where I think I am" (Yoshida, 2010, para.1).

Helen Redman, a mixed media artist whose primary work focuses on the life

cycles of women, describes visual voice as “...what we make visible to others that comes from deep within and from what we have observed in our lives.... With 50 years of art making as part of my make-up, I am able to articulate my own and other women's experiences at various stages in their lives. It is almost like breathing in and out for me, as I never inhibit it (H. Redman, personal communication, July 3, 2011). Redman’s visual voice as she describes it is most apparent when viewing her mixed media self-portraits, as the work has a very personal feel in relation to content, and application. A relationship that she deliberately marries in order to convey her artistic intent.

METHODOLOGY

The timeline for this project was a two-month period in which I created an eight- piece body of work inclusive of a sketchbook journal. I used three mixed media pieces that were developed towards the end of fall 2010 as inspiration, as these three pieces not only lend themselves to further exploration, but also were representative of the direction in which I wanted my work to continue to progress in terms of the use and application of materials. The pieces utilize several mixed-media processes; however lack a distinction as they appear to be one-dimensional especially from a distance despite the application of several layers of paint and collage materials. See images below:

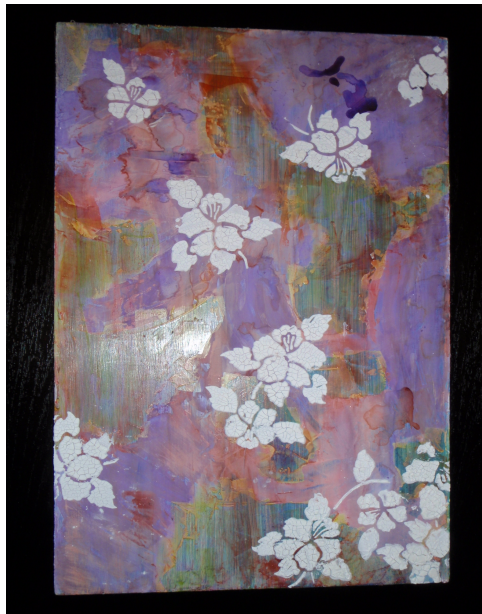


Figure 1. Ayana Weekes, Untitled, Mixed Media, 17”x25”.

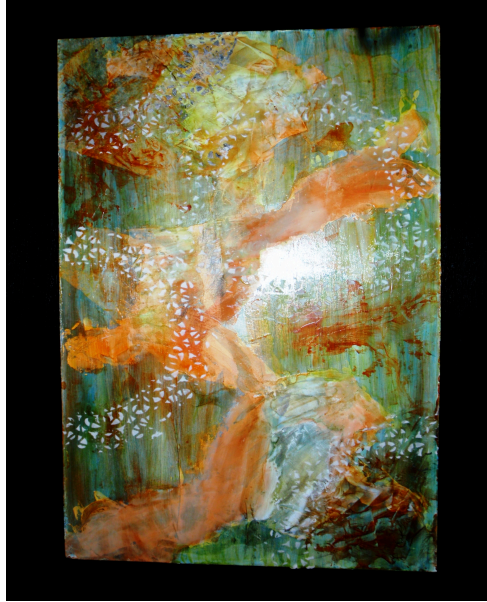


Figure 2. Ayana Weekes, Untitled, Mixed Media, 17"x25".



Figure 3. Ayana Weekes, Untitled, Mixed Media, 17"x25".

Previously, I have gotten extremely involved with the mixed-media application process and allowed the theme of the work to be dictated by the results of

the mixed-media application. Figures 1-3. are examples of paintings produced using mixed-media process; however there is a lack of connections with the paintings. For this study I focused more on theme, and allowed the mixed media process to facilitate the implementation of my theme. As one of my overarching goals was to develop a visual voice it seemed logical for the theme of my work to be more personal than previous works; therefore for this study I produced a series of mixed-media self portraits with the intent of answering the questions :

How would the use of a sketchbook foster creativity?

How would the use of a sketchbook aid in the development of a visual voice that is evident in a cohesive body of work?

I utilized the sketchbook to explore a variety of themes to include in my mixed media self-portraits. I observed myself from life, as well as utilized photographs to aid in the development of my chosen themes. I began with a self-portrait concept and utilized my sketchbook to produce a minimum of three different ways to execute the concept artistically utilizing mixed-media processes before completing a final mixed media painting. By producing three different works that represented a chosen conceptual self-portrait theme I was compelled to create works that involved unconventional approaches. This method not only aided the creative process, but also provided a plethora of possibilities for the final art piece. The preliminary art production as well as written reflections and notes were recorded in the sketchbook journal, and the final self portraits were produced on a substrate separate from the sketchbook journal. Upon conclusion of this study, I considered the technical qualities, context, and material application of my works in identifying my visual voice and evaluating an

increase in creativity. My sketchbook journal was the primary medium used to record progress and reflect upon completed pieces. During the reflective process I analyzed my journal in an effort to determine whether my research questions were being answered through the progression of my art practice.

CREATION OF WORK

Figures 1-3 were utilized as reflective sources to begin the process of brainstorming ideas for my self-portrait series. I took notes in my sketchbook reflecting upon the success and failures in each piece. I made note of mixed media processes used, and finally began producing rough preliminary sketches of my profile from a photograph. As I began sketching, an alter-ego theme originated for my first piece. Over the course of a year and a half my life changed tremendously, as I simultaneously worked as an elementary art teacher, attended graduate school, carried, birth, and now care for a child. I wanted to represent myself in terms of a super woman. When deciding on a super hero character I relied upon the observation of others regarding my character traits, as I often have been told that there is an air of mystery about me. I also reflected upon my own descriptors regarding my personality. I noted that I am reserved when faced with revealing myself to others, and I enjoy action and adventure; therefore I decided my best representation of a superwoman would be embodied in the character cat woman. For the process I weaved a black and white photograph of myself with an image of cat woman. I taped the image inside of my sketchbook and created a grid for the interwoven images (Figure 3) I reproduced the image of myself using graphite pencils and of cat woman with colored pencils. As the image of catwoman is most often found in comic books I affixed the final drawing to a watercolor background and listed the title above in bubble letters in an effort to imitate a comic book cover:



Figure 4. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #1 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media,
10.5"x13.5".

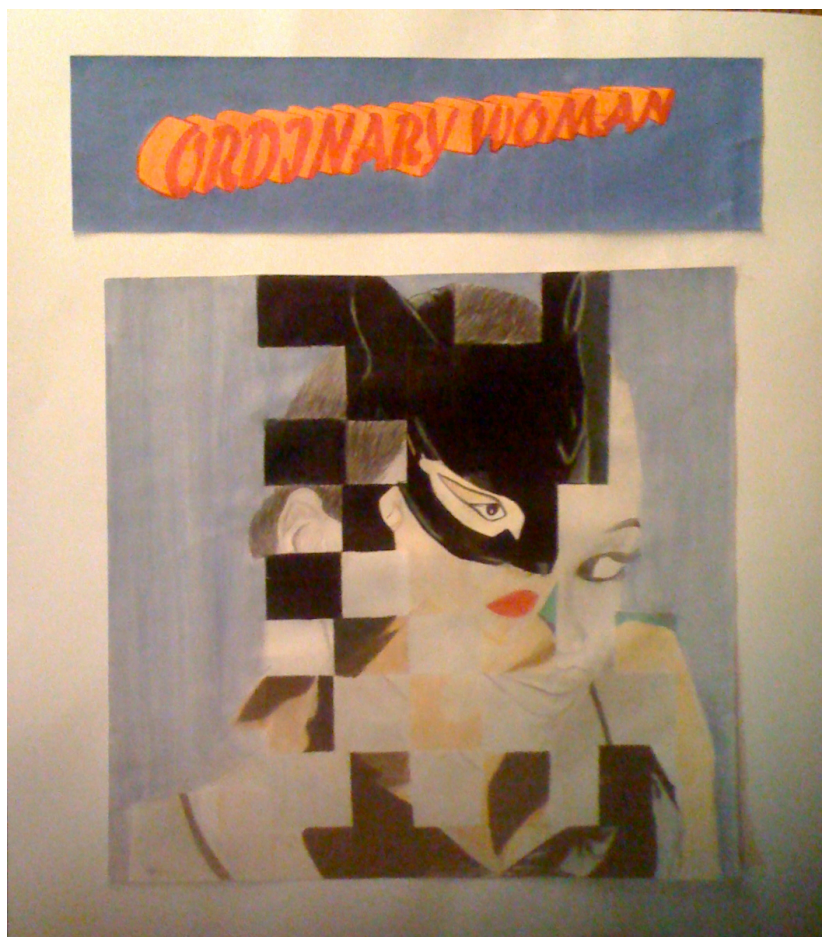


Figure 5. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #1, Mixed Media, 22"x25".

Self-portrait #2 originated from a painting that I began in fall 2009. It is an excellent example of my timidity in further exploring my paintings. Initially, I deemed this painting complete; however I kept coming back to it, as it was not conveying the meaning I had intended. I reproduced the painting in my sketchbook from three photocopied images of the original. From the first image (Figure 6) I enhanced the painting by adding a graphite outline drawing of myself as a child observed from a photo. In the second sketchbook study (Figure 6) I executed the outline drawing with permanent marker and collaged the words ‘...and all the kings

men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again' from an old nursery rhyme. These words are significant, as they reflect a time in my childhood where innocence was lost, and could not be retrieved. In the final sketchbook rendering I added a linoleum block print of two children sharing an umbrella protecting them from the rain (Figure 7.). In my sketchbook, I wrote the words "my sister is my protector away from home", as was the protocol when my parents were away. The final painting (Figure 8.) was completed on canvas with acrylic paint, collage elements, and permanent marker.



Figure 6. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #2 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media, 10.5" x13.5".



Figure 7. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #2 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media, 10.5" x13.5".



Figure 8. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #2. Mixed Media, “30x30”.

While working on Self Portrait #2, I looked at old photographs of my family, and myself and began incorporating them into a collage in my sketchbook. The collage became the catalyst for Self Portrait #3 (Figure. 12) I assembled the collage on a two-page spread in my sketchbook. (Figure. 9) and incorporated pictures of myself, my family, and objects that are representative of my interests, who I am, where I came from, and with whom my legacy will continue. Examples include an old house fondly referred to as the little house by my maternal family. It is a house that my grandfather built with his hands and simple tools, and is an example of a work ethic that was instilled in me from two generations of hard workers, another is a picture of a clock that was taken at the exact time my son was born. The clock is a

reminder of the very moment my responsibility shifted from myself to the life of someone else, and how humbled I was to accept the responsibility. I reproduced the collage in photocopied prints, and affixed the prints to two separate pages in my sketchbook journal. I applied assorted acrylic paints to the journal pages, (Figures 10 and 11) collaged and painted the words 'I am' respectively. I chose a purple monochromatic color palette for the third sketchbook study in an effort to alter the mood of the piece; however ultimately decided it was excessively melancholy and opted to render my final painting based upon the original sketchbook collage and sketchbook study two. The final painting was created on canvas utilizing collaged photographs, liquid acrylics, gel mediums, watercolor inks, and stencils. Self Portrait #3 (Figure 12) is a deviation away from a literal interpretation of a self-portrait, instead is a figurative study derived from representations of who I am. Self Portraits #4 and #5 imitate the process of figurative interpretations of myself.



Figure 9. Ayana Weekes, Sketchbook Study, Collage, 10.5”x13.5”



Figure 10. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #3 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media,
10.5”x13.5”



Figure 11 Self Portrait #3 Sketchbook Study

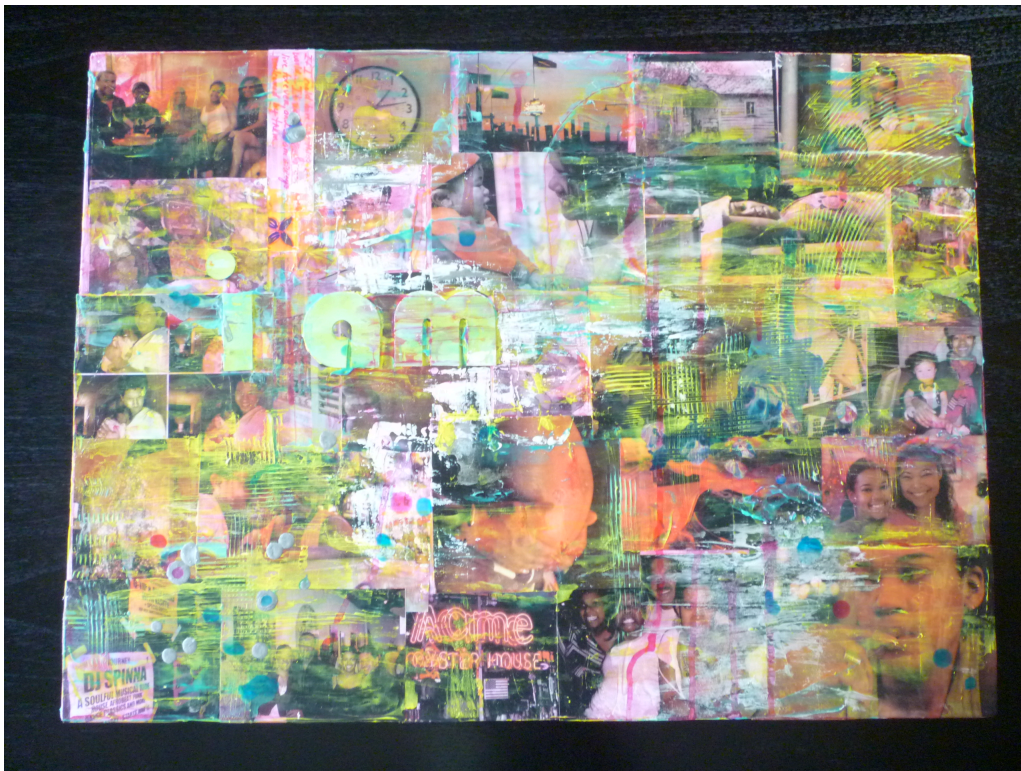


Figure 12. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #3, Mixed Media, 30"x22".

When writing in my sketchbook journal in preparation for Self Portrait #4. I kept returning to the theme of 'I am' previously explored in Self Portrait # 3. 'I am my mother and father's child' was a repetitive phrase that appeared in my sketchbook writings, and I began brainstorming ideas to represent the phrase. I decided upon conception, and relied upon application of material to best represent the theme. I utilized two journal to manipulate different art mediums. My goal was to represent the fertilization process when my father's sperm penetrated my mother's egg to produce me.

For my first sketchbook study for Self Portrait #4 (Figure. 13) I used acrylic paint as a medium to paint a solid yellow background in my sketchbook. I mixed acrylic paint, liquid acrylics, and airbrush paints to create the drips representative of millions of sperm traveling to an unknown destination, I affixed a stamp bearing my date of birth in the middle. My second sketchbook study (Figure. 14) I painted a solid red background in my sketchbook, and applied pumice medium which when dried appears to be a plethora of tiny stones representative of eggs, my date of birth is collaged in the middle. When analyzing my two sketchbook studies there were aspects of each that I thought were executed well and others I decided I could omit in my final painting. Self Portrait #4 was created on canvas where I applied a layer of Liquitex glass beads to the entire canvas. When dry the glass beads are similar to viewing tiny eggs under a microscope. I painted a thin wash of cadmium yellow acrylic paint over the entire surface and allowed it to dry. Once the surface was dry I

mixed liquid acrylics, Golden interference paints and airbrush paints in a cup. I poured the paints from the top of the canvas and allowed the paints to travel the canvas in such a manner that exemplified the traveling of sperm. Once the pours dried, I affixed a pale pink egg cut from an acrylic skin, made by mixing liquid acrylic paint with clear tar gel and allowing it to dry overnight, to the bottom of the canvas where the last paint pour stopped in an effort to signify my conception, at the point where my father's sperm penetrated my mother's egg (Figure. 15).

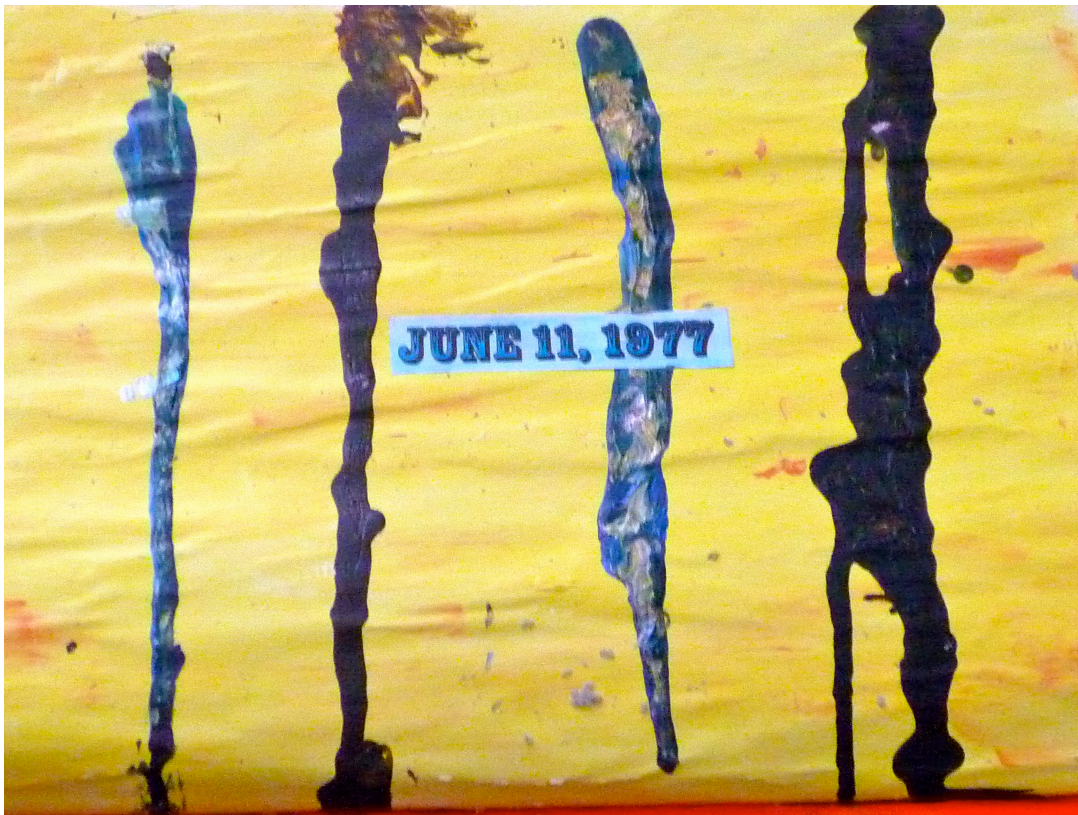


Figure 13. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #4 Sketchbook Study, Acrylic on Paper, 10.5"x13.5".



Figure 14. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #4 Sketchbook Study, Acrylic on Paper, 10.5"x13.5".

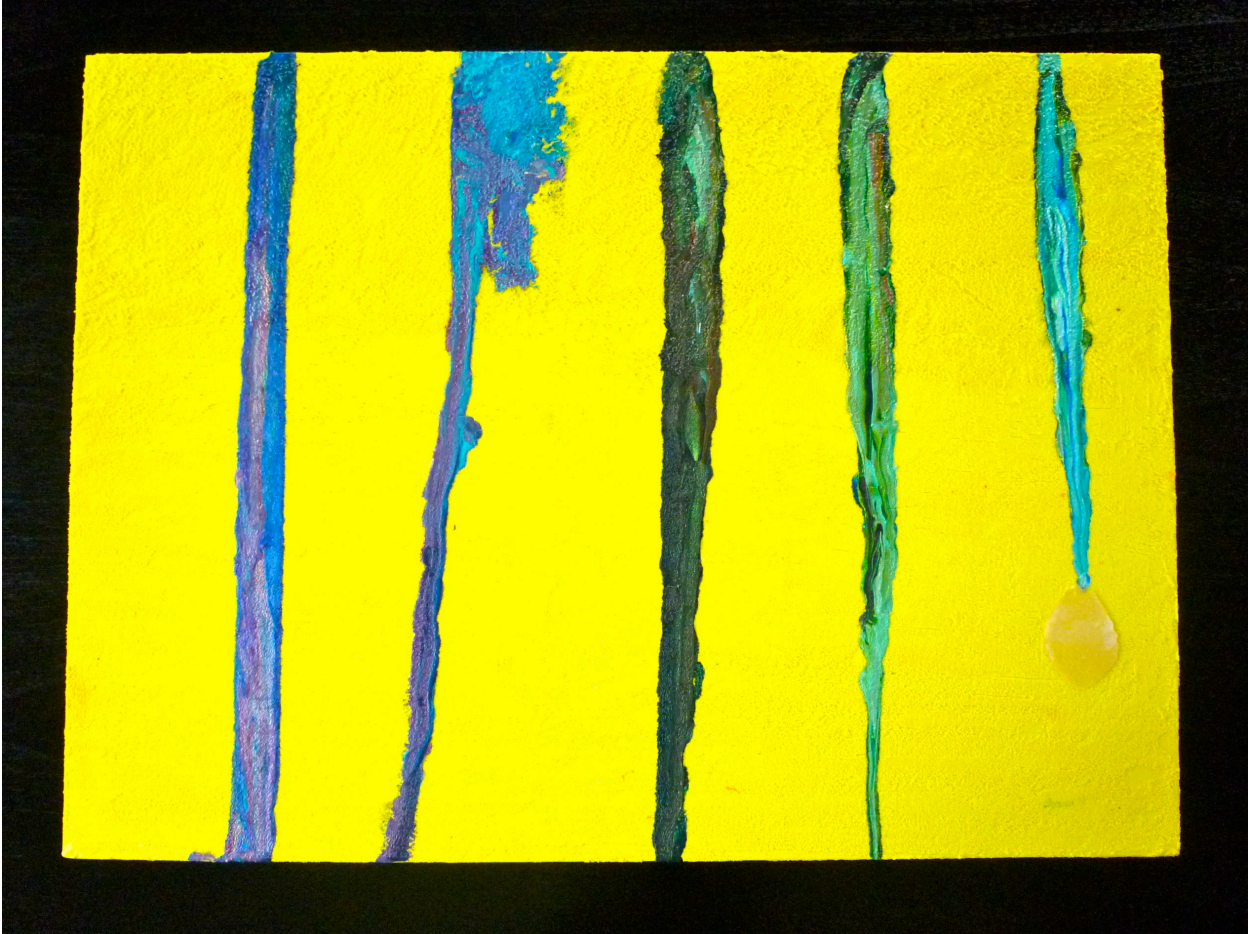


Figure 15. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #4, Mixed Media, 30"x22".

In continuing with the theme 'I am' Self Portrait #5 was created as homage to my name. My name is derived from the Swahili language, and it's meaning is beautiful flower. I utilized watercolor as my medium for three sketchbook studies in which I painted three different flower paintings (Figures 16 and 17). Upon completion of the paintings in my sketchbook, I reflected upon the merits of each, and decided I would like to create a mixed media painting that incorporated elements of each. As with the previous self -portrait, I decided upon a metaphorical approach to this self -portrait rather than a literal one. Utilizing this approach I was forced to think

outside of technical terms and form original ideas about how best to represent myself in terms of something intangible, such as the essence of a flower, as opposed to a photograph or image of myself. I began self portrait #5 by applying absorbent ground to stretched canvas, which allows acrylic paints to take on the qualities of watercolors. I painted several thin washes of liquid acrylics to the canvas allowing each layer to dry before painting the next. After the layers were dry I painted two flower outlines on the canvas (Figure. 18). I documented the painting at this point, as this would have normally been the point where I considered the painting finished as the application of paint, and placement of the flowers were perfect, and I would not want to risk destroying the look of the painting by continuing to paint. This marked a turning point in my work, as I began to trust my voice, and rely on my knowledge of materials. My voice was asserting that I could say more, fill the entire canvas with beautiful flowers! My voice was leading me to express myself in more than two outlines of non-descript flower on canvas. I imagined myself as flowers and painted them as they came from my imagination. I utilized collage elements, acrylic paints, watercolors, pastels, watercolor inks, acrylic skins and a variety of acrylic mediums to complete Self Portrait #5 (Figure. 19). which resulted in what I think was not only one of my most successful paintings to date, but also a new self confidence about my paintings, and a resolve to take risks when creating from that moment forward.

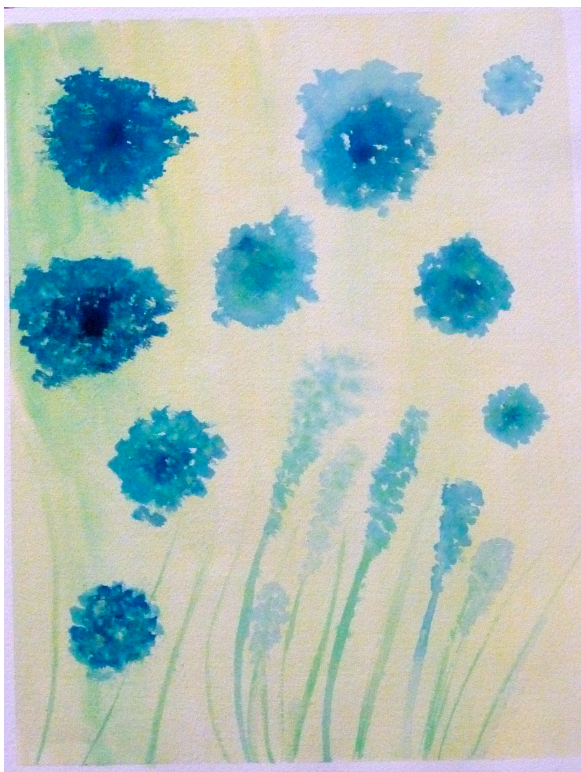


Figure 16. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #5 Sketchbook Study, Watercolor, 10.5"x13.5".



Figure 17. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #5 Sketchbook Study, Watercolor, 10.5"x13.5".



Figure 18. Ayana Weekes, *Self Portrait #5 In Progress*, Mixed Media, 30"x22".



Figure 19. Ayana Weekes, *Self Portrait #5*, Mixed media, 30"x22".

Unlike the previous self-portraits, *Self Portrait #6* was conceived from the state of mind I was in when devising concepts in my sketchbook for *Self Portrait #6*. I was increasingly feeling the loss of time in my life, and felt at a loss as to the direction I wanted for my life in terms of career. I was nearing the end of my graduate program, and was unsure if I wanted to continue teaching in a formal setting or whether I wanted to explore being a full time artist. I represented my uneasiness and confusion in my sketchbook through a watercolor painting (Figure 20) overlain with ink outlines of compasses and clocks. I affixed a picture of a statue of a little girl with wings I had previously photographed while walking through Oakland Cemetery in my neighborhood. The angel statute represents a loss of direction, and a hope of a

renewed path. I wanted to incorporate an image of myself at present to include in my final painting; therefore I created a stencil of my profile from a photograph, and spray painted it black. I painted the background of a sketchbook page one solid color, drew compasses and clocks on top of the painted background and attached the stencil to the journal page (Figure 21). This second journal page produced an entirely different mood for the piece; however I was satisfied with the mood it conveyed, and as a result I completed Self Portrait #6 on watercolor paper utilizing watercolor, permanent marker and a hand made stencil of an image of myself (Figure 22).



Figure 20. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #6 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media, 10.5"x13.5".



Figure 21. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #6 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media,



Figure 22. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #6, Mixed Media, 10"x20".

During the summer of my fourth grade year I read a book entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. I credit the reading of that book to my excelling in reading and language, as it was not only a mature book but also a difficult book to read for my age. I was proud of myself for completing the book, as I deemed it an accomplishment, and I often refer back to that book when tackling a hard task. I am drawn to the title of the book as it implies an answer to a secret that only the author knows. I used the title of the book, and the feelings I had in accomplishing the reading of the book as inspiration for Self Portrait #7. I created two different mixed media spreads (Figures 23 and 24) in my journal which included drawn bird cages, a photograph of magazine cutouts and myself. On a third and fourth sketchbook page I drew several overlapping bird cages in an effort to practice drawing the lines on the birdcages before completing my final piece (Figure 25). Self Portrait #7 was created on canvas. I drew overlapping birdcages directly onto the canvas and traced over the line drawing with polymer medium that once dry, creates a raised resist. I painted over the birdcages utilizing various liquid acrylics. After the acrylics dried I drew birds in two of the bird cages employing the use of a fine line permanent marker, and completed a photo transfer using wintergreen oil from a photograph of me at my sixth birthday party (Figure 26).

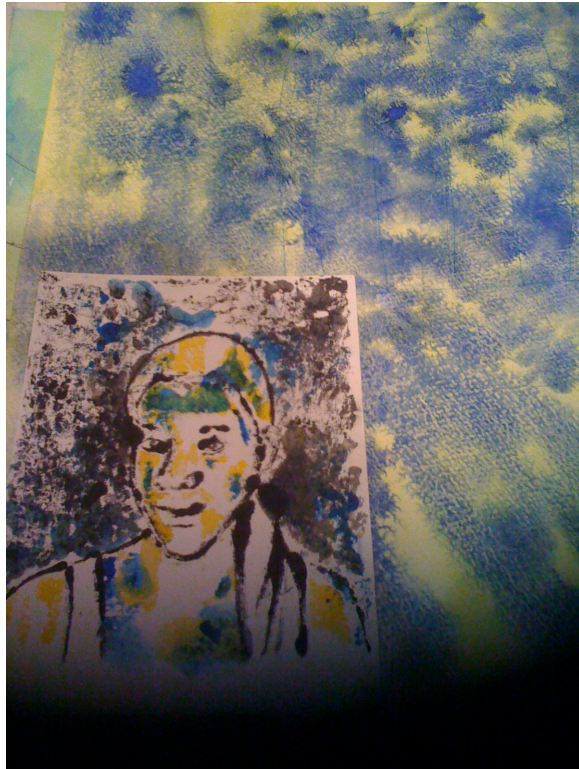


Figure 23. Ayana Weekes, *Self Portrait #7 Sketchbook Study*, Mixed Media, 10.5"x13.5".



Figure 24. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #7 Sketchbook Study, Mixed Media, 10.5"x13.5".

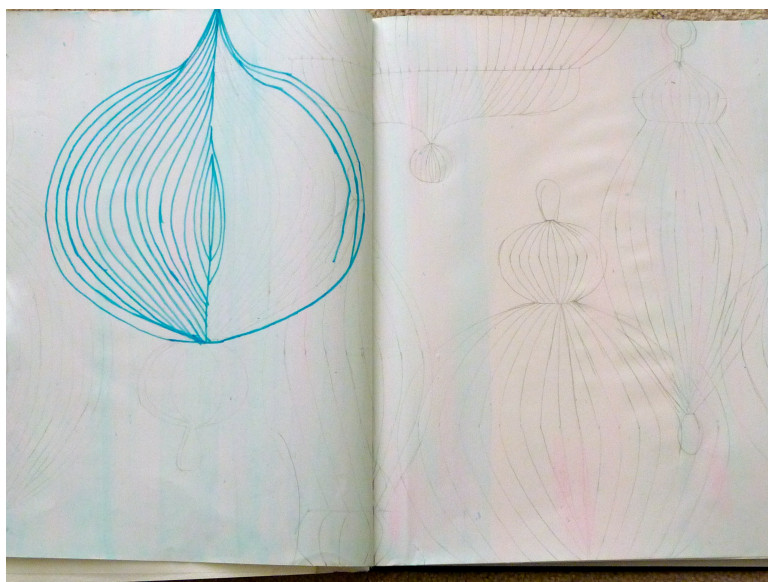


Figure 25. Ayana Weekes, Bird Cage Practice Spread, 10.5x13.5".



Figure 26. Ayana Weekes, Self Portrait #7, Mixed Media. 18"x36".

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study I investigated whether habitual use of a sketchbook journal would foster creativity, and aid in the emergence of a distinctive visual voice that is evident in a series of mixed media self portraits. Throughout the process of creating I kept notes in my sketchbook. Sometimes the notes were reminders of materials or applications I wanted to try, or a list of ideas for future portraits, and other times the notes were more personal as they related to the pieces. In self-portrait #2 I wrote part of the words to the old nursery rhyme Humpty Dumpty, as they were the most befitting words to a reaction I had to an incident in my childhood. It was my challenge to not only decipher the meaning of these words for me as an artist, but also to convey them through creative mixed-media applications. By examining my writings, reflecting on my processes, and constantly challenging myself I pushed the boundaries of my creativity, and with that my creativity flourished and my visual voice emerged. I realized that as an artist I have a myriad of things I want to share with the viewer through my art, and explore within myself. I further began to appreciate that at any given time my visual voice may be shouting I am, or may be quietly whispering I am hurt. It is my challenge to listen to my voice and not be afraid to trust what I want to say for fear of failure. The sketchbook is the vehicle for exploration and creative development, as I can always turn the page forward or backwards, or simply paint over it.

When I began this study the research questions I posed were:

1. How *would the use of a sketchbook foster creativity?*

2. *How would the use of a sketchbook aid in the development of a visual voice that is evident in a cohesive body of work?*

As a result of this art-based study there was an increase in creativity through self-guided experimentation of two-dimensional processes and with materials. By producing several sketchbook samples before completing a final piece I was forced to think of innovative ways to convey my theme not only through conventional means of rendering sketches from photographs or observation, but also through metaphor which forced me to think in abstracted terms. By completing a series of works based upon one theme, I was able to thoroughly study my subject, which was myself, and produce several works that explored my many facets. This process of exploration helped to define my visual voice. Through active reflection I discovered that my visual voice is one that is ever changing depending on my needs of expression as an artist, and that ultimately my visual voice is what is derived from authentic listening, creating and reflecting upon my inner artistic voice.

As an art educator of elementary school students I have been afforded the unique opportunity of aiding in the artistic development of my students before many preconceived notions about art making have been ingrained in their thinking. As such, I am able to instill positive work habits, like keeping a sketchbook journal, that optimistically will aid in the retention of art concepts, and promote higher order thinking. According to Kowalchuk (1996), higher order thinking challenges the individual to infer, investigate, and manipulate prior learned information in an innovative manner. Visual/Verbal sketchbooks which Todorovich (1991) defines as a “collection of thoughts, ideas, and experiences unique to the individual author” (p.

27), are the quintessential medium to promote higher order thinking skills, as it allows the student to gather, investigate and record information. Students who develop higher order thinking skills approach experiences with an inclination that there can be a myriad of potential solutions to solving multifaceted problems, and vigorously reflect upon these solutions before subsequent decisions are made (Lampert, 2006). The development of higher order thinking skills is not only pertinent in the production of art, but also pertinent to many facets of life. Gruenfeld (2010) proposes that “increased critical thinking is fundamental to civic engagement, active participation and social change” (p.74).

I have implemented the use of a sketchbook with my elementary art students on the fourth and fifth grade level as a supplement to ongoing units of study. I have found that by assigning weekly sketchbook assignments that can be worked on during class and finished at home, my students have not only taken a greater interest in their art work by taking the initiative to create art outside of the given assignment, but have improved in the retention of art concepts.

In much the same way as I utilize the sketchbook in this study, my students, in addition to weekly assignments, utilize the sketchbook as a way to test ideas, and create preliminary sketches before working on a final piece. Utilizing the sketchbook in this way provides students the opportunity to create in a safe environment free of fear of failure.

Finally, the sketchbook can be utilized as not only a tool to explore individual self expression, but also as an ongoing assessment tool for both the student and the

teacher, as the sketchbook provides a chronological progression of the students art work.

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