
empty canvas : wondering mind

an artisan's workbook

compiled and written by miriam louisa simons

for all the extraordinary students
I have been privileged to work with and befriend

you asked for it: here it is

may it nurture your own creative questions
as they form the ground beneath your feet



Blind Men on a Log bridge
By Hakuin Ekaku
(The Gitter Collection)

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'Zum Erstaunen bin ich da' - I am here to wonder.

Goethe

Satisfaction of one's curiosity is one of the greatest sources of happiness in life.

Linus Pauling

This oceanic feeling of wonder is the common source of religious mysticism,
of pure science and art for art's sake.

Arthur Koestler

CREATING FROM WONDER

Wonder is a wonderful word to wonder about:

**wonderful wondrous a wonder with wonder to wonder wondering
to do wonders wonderland wonderment wonder-worker wonderstruck ...**

We can talk about wonder and wondering in so many ways – it's one of those English words that baffle foreign language students. We call something 'a wonder' when it is an astonishing thing or accomplishment like the Seven Wonders of the World, or when it is miraculous like the birth of a babe. It is also the *"emotion excited by the perception of something novel and unexpected, or inexplicable."* And sometimes this emotion of astonishment can be *"mingled with perplexity or bewildered curiosity."* (Shorter Oxford Dictionary) And again, it's the *state of mind* in which these emotions are held. When we observe something marvelous, wonder-full, we are filled with wonder, which is like being infused with awe.

But then we sometimes say "I wonder..." and there is a shift in meaning. To simply say, "I wonder" usually implies doubt. Yet to preface a phrase with "I wonder if..." is to imply curiosity. In French, one says *"Je me demand ..."* - I ask myself. Then it implies that I'm going to explore, to inquire *in and of myself* about something. The way I've used the word *wondering* in this book embraces all these meanings. For to wonder in the sense of exploring, with doubt and curiosity, is to never be far from the wonder of marvel. Perhaps the greatest wonder of all is that we have the ability to wonder, to reflect. And to have that capacity as a natural by-product of being alive is simply amazing.

The Greeks said that to marvel is the beginning of knowledge
and where we cease to marvel we may be in danger of ceasing to know. (1)

Marvel and wonder go hand-in-hand, and their offspring is true learning. One of the most exciting things about the kind of activity that occurs in the art room, (the *educating* art room), is that it is firmly grounded in experimental processes. We are, as novice or professional artisans, deeply involved in both *wonder* and *wondering*.

Questions are the life-blood of the artisan, and the prime question in any artisan's mind is "*What if ...?*" This is a question that makes many parents and teachers wince. At the same time, it's the one that generates exploration and experimentation in the fields of science, sports, philosophy – what area of human endeavor can be excluded from its penetrating, "*But perhaps...?*"

The "*What if ...?*" of wondering mind is the fuel for any investigation into creativity. Dana Zohar writes that creativity is the dynamic of unfolding consciousness. (2) If, as she proposes, the unfolding consciousness of reflecting human beings forms the bridge between the contemporary world with its fragmentation, alienation, inhumanity, and the "reconciled universe" of coherence, integration and meaning, then it is clear that we need to stop ignoring the beckoning call of creative acting and thinking. We need to start asking some "*What if ...?*" questions about what we presume creativity to be, and why we aren't able to experience it in a sustained way in every aspect of our lives. There are few better ways of doing that than by engaging in practical encounters with the processes involved in looking, seeing and making.

creating from wonder brings to synthesis all the experiences we've had as we moved through the previous books. **creating from wonder** closes the circle. It brings us back to the wonder of perception and to the space in which *that-which-is* can speak. But we arrive there richer in every way – richer in insight, in technique, and in our ability to play with the unfamiliar. The empty canvas is our lover, at last.

We have thought hard, questioned hard, and played hard. Now we can bring our new perceptions and perspectives to larger projects – projects that unfold from the activities of the previous chapters. We have established some basic ways of looking and working that we can apply to *themes*, without being blinded by their abstract qualities or our notions of what we *ought* to do.

There are fifteen projects offered here. How you choose to approach them is up to you. They don't follow any sequence, but you'll notice that they each relate, in some way, to one (or more) of the previous chapters. You could start at the first one and work your way through the lot, or simply pick and choose those that have some special appeal. Any of these projects make good workshop activities – they can be explored as deeply as you are inclined to dig, and since there are no ideal outcomes, the need for an authoritative leader is redundant.

unfold your myth ...

If you enjoyed making the *Janus masks* and feel that activities like that one can be instrumental in getting to know yourself, you might enjoy pushing the inquiry deeper. This project was inspired by a workshop led by American fiber artist Julie Felix. It will take you on a wonder-wander into yourself and help you to – as the poet Rumi expressed it – "unfold your myth".

- **me, myself, I**

What are the 3 or 4 most memorable events in your life? Write about them in your X-file, and try to find a photo of each event.

Find papers and/or fabrics in your favorite color – 'your' color.

Find an old piece of your clothing that holds some meaning for you; be prepared to cut it up.

Think of people who are very special to you. Select a little object that you will use to represent them. (Not a photo.)

Find a few small objects that you feel represent you, yourself.

Make a list of 10 words that describe wonderful you.

Where is your most favored place to be? How can you represent that place?

Select a favorite poem, and find the line that you love most.

What is your favorite food, music, flower? Find some papers of fabrics to represent these things.

Draw or photograph something in your house, or room, that you love.

Find a swatch of the ugliest fabric you can find, to represent your 'bad times' – the experiences you may want to forget.

Find some textile that matches the color of your eyes, and one that matches your hair color.

Cont ...



Who is your favorite artist? How could you represent him or her?

Make a carved stamp out of an eraser. The design will be your personal 'crest'.
(See **notes & anecdotes.**)

Can you find one very significant item – a small object – from your childhood?

Do you have a dream for your future? How could you symbolize it?

Who are you now? What do you do? How can you best report a typical day in your life?

Can you think of more aspects of yourself that you would want to include?

All these lists and bits and bobs make up your palette.

Make a decision about the type of ground, or surface you wish to work on, and the scale of your self-portrait.

Think about using a *container* rather than a flat sheet of paper – a box, an old tin, or something that is also part of your palette.

You may want to concentrate on only a few items – don't feel you must incorporate everything.

All we have been doing is gathering a rich repertoire of raw material with which to play. We could say that *you, yourself*, are the *scaffold* in this project. What will you choose to use as your *skeleton*? What title? All the activities you have explored in all the previous e-books are at your disposal ...



veritable vestments

Vestments are ritual garments used by keepers of High Office, usually in the context of state, legal or religious functions.

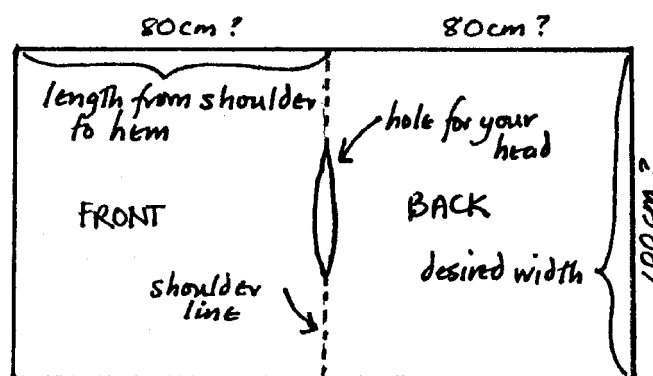
We are all keepers of a Most High Office. We are the keepers of a miraculous human body that has danced, limped, trudged and tippity-toed through the years of our life. It is fitting that we own at least one ritual vestment, and even more fitting that we have made it ourselves. To create such a garment incorporating our life story with all its amazing array of happenings is a true celebration of the wonder of it all. And to *wear* it is to be invested with power, power that comes from the acknowledgement and acceptance and celebration of a life well lived.

- **stitch up a life-vest**

This is rather like a wearable version of the Rajasthani *phadas*.

How will you design your vestment? If you have an idea, or a pattern that you like, great. Otherwise consider the humble poncho. It's an easy garment to make. Look at pictures of those made and worn by the people of Peru and Bolivia. Those are usually beautifully woven, but ours will be made of patches stitched together.

Here's a poncho pattern:



The dimensions given may need to be adjusted for your size. Cut a pattern out of old newspaper. Find some fabric that will serve as the underneath, supporting layer. Calico is fine, or you could use an old sheet.

Cont ...



Now decide how many patches you will need to tell your story – your own life-story. This will take some thinking and writing about, so that you can select all the significant passages of your life. Some patches might be smaller than others, some might be different shapes – just keep in mind that you will need to be able to stitch them together at the end in such a way that they cover your supporting fabric.

Gather up the items you need to make your patch paintings – a variety of fabrics, and suitable paints for working on textiles. These can be purchased at any craft supply store.

You might want to dip into the pile of items you collected for your self portrait, and stitch small objects onto your pictures. And don't forget stamps, batik, embroidery – your palette is limited only by your imagination.

When your patch pictures are completed, stitch them together and onto the supporting fabric. Stitch the front and back pieces together, leaving a hole for the poncho to fit over your head.

This project will take time. It could be a good one for long winter evenings. By the time it is completed you will be ready to create an Occasion at which you can wear it.

What will you do? Invite your friends and family? Dance? Music? Banquet? Celebrate? Wonderful!



Buddha-body

We have explored and expressed our preferences and aversions. We have celebrated our history. But how well do we really know our physical body? Do we think of it as something we *have* – an accessory that is often troublesome and fickle? Or do we see it as our most important ally on the journey through this life – and especially on the journey into creating?

If we call the things we cannot comprehend miracles, our bodies are a miracle. We have no idea, really, how it *works*. We cannot beat our heart or grow our fingernails. If we were required to breathe our breath consciously we wouldn't have a spare second to live our lives.

This is a source of great wonder. Worthy of a book.

- **my body book**

Either make or purchase a large (A 4 at least) sketchbook. It will need to have top quality cartridge pages that can take glue and paint as well as drawing tools.

Think about how you would begin to study your own body – at the top? At the extremities?

You may already have some studies that you can include if they are a suitable size.

Wherever you choose to begin, just start studying little bits at a time – a toe, an eye, the wrinkles on your wrist, your lips, your belly-button. The important thing is to really see, not to attempt to draw illustrations for an anatomy book.

Refer back to **wildsight – the innocent eye** for all the different ways you can experiment with seeing your body-bits: the edges, the negative spaces, the relationships, and so on. Your finder will be useful, and so will a hand mirror. Include samples: scabs, nail clippings, toe prints, blood, hair ...

Try using your body to make prints. Take photographs from unusual angles, and of 'un-photogenic' places.

Cont ...



Encounter and dialogue with all the taboos that have been invented about the body.

Have someone else photograph you as you dance, swim, work out, bathe – anything body-focused.

Play the matching game as you go along, including any lettering, poems, quotations, or pictures that want to be juxtaposed with your studies.

What about the inside of your body? You may not have access to the equipment necessary for photographing your innards, but you could find and use anatomical illustrations as part of the matching game.

This is your personal exploration, so you can turn it into whatever form you want. Let it unfold, as you did with some of those other books we made – rather than having a fixed idea (creativity killer) about its direction.

When we are babies we are considered cute enough to be immortalized in baby photo albums, but the idea wanes with age. I wonder why?

Your *body book* can make up for too many lost years. Start one now – it will probably take you the rest of your life to finish wondering about such an awesome creation.



the heart of the story

This project asks you to quietly assess all that you have gathered up, inquired about, and expressed in the course of your wonderings through the previous activities, and answer a very thought-provoking question. The basic idea for this project comes from Peter London's book, *No More Second Hand Art*. (4)

- **the 'hub' of me**

There is an essential quality that each of us has,
without which we would no longer be the person we are.
Jack London

What is that quality in **you**?

Don't rush this question; take all the time you need to go deep enough.

We have seen how the person we think we are is made up of many attributes, capacities, ideas and preferences. We have probably noticed the way many of these can be traced back to our inherited genetic material, or to our acquired archives – our conditioning from parents, schooling, church and society.

But if you had to think of one irreducible quality that underscores all that you take to be yourself, what would that be? Could you put it into words? If so, and it is helpful, write some notes in your X-file.

Whether or not it was possible for you to write about it, consider how you could put it into color and form, line and pattern, texture and shape.

When you are ready, gather up the materials you want to use to make an expression of this quality.

What format?

What media will be appropriate?

Will it be a two or three-dimensional object?

What colors?

What textures, shapes?

Will it move?

Will it be static?

Cont ...



Will it be contained in some way?

Will you use familiar, recognizable imagery?

Or will you need to invent a new imagery?

Could part of your expression be a performance?

If so – where, and for whom?

Keep your musings to yourself – in fact, this project really demands to be done in silence, for it is only possible to work at this depth when you are undistracted by your chattering mind – or anyone else's.

This project takes us right to the creative edge and leaves us there. No one can answer this question for you, and the artwork that will express the nub of you has never been created until now. You have all the tools, and as this book keeps on repeating, you have the resource material hidden in your heart.

Wonder and wondering are the way into the heart.



galactic grey matter

This project will appeal to anyone who is curious about neurophysiology and how our brains seem to work. It follows on from the guided visualization in **outside-in & inside-out**, *the big brain workout*. But instead of making a work about *the big brain picture*, we will recreate the journey itself. We did something along this idea in the last e-book – *borrow someone else's eyes*. Then, we used the work of someone who has journeyed the path before us as a starting point for our own exploration.

To prepare yourself, repeat the guided visualization *the big brain workout*. Your experience with it will be different from when you did it last, because your brain is now different. (Even if you haven't done any other activities in this book since then, your brain will be different.) Make notes about those differences. What imagery was vividly accessible? What tasks were tiresome for your brain? Now get ready to *act as if...*

- **cartooning the brain**

You are a celebrated comic-strip artist, and your brief is to create a popular comic about the workings of the human brain.

You will portray the brain as a cartoon character of some kind – perhaps a 'live' skyscraper or spaceship or ...?

You'll need to find out all you can about current brain research and theories.

Think about why *the big brain workout* was written the way it was. What do you think the writer was trying to help people experience? Do you think she succeeded? Could you make any improvements? Here is your chance.

Create your own version of this guided visualization, stating your reasons for approaching it the way you do. Try your version out on your friends and seek their ideas and feedback.

When you are happy with your version, gather up pictures, symbols, words, and images with which to illustrate it. Use whatever you can find, as well as making your own using a wide variety of tools and techniques.

Cont ...



Create the 'cast' for your cartoon. Apart from your brain character you'll need someone to be the adventurer within the brain.

Are there any other characters living and working in there that you want to include? Make them into visual caricatures that express their whimsical or tyrannical ways.

When everything is prepared and assembled, make a collaged, painted, drawn and lettered comic strip in which your adventurer explores and interacts with the amazing contents and functions of the brain.

How will he/she/it travel? What dialogue will you include? What language will the brain speak? How will the adventure end? What will you call your comic strip?

More:

Could you turn your comic strip into a puppet play? Think about how a *Journey to the Center of the Brain* could be scripted on the basis of your creation, and how it could be humorous and serious at the same time. What music (sounds) would be appropriate?

Did your fresh safari through the brain open up any insights or juicy "What if ...?" questions? Don't forget – *what is now proven was once only imagined*.

Wonderful wisdom from Einstein.



a sanctuary for the secret senses ...

If you've a scientific bent you will also enjoy this next project, and there is now so much fascinating research into cognitive and neurological sciences that a dip into the domain of the secret senses can no longer be considered only fit for fanciful daydreamers.

What if we could create an *environment* in which to *experience* the domain of the secret senses for ourselves – an environment that provided the conditions that seem necessary for inner imagery to arise, and which could call upon our contemporary technologies to foster our familiarity with the not-so-common senses?

We know they exist because we have evidence of our own adventures in their domain – not to mention the evidence of our most enlightened scientists and artists. But there are no printing presses publishing maps and directions for the journey into the unknown domain of the secret senses. There is no King James Standardized Version of what we will find there. Worse still, we do not even have a language with which to write such helpful guides – and it seems that, by definition, we never will. Bereft of guides and instructions, we can only *experience for ourselves*. But in one respect we are fortunate – we do have technologies that might assist us, if we use them inventively.

Robert McKim, whose *Experiences in Visual Thinking* (5) has been one of our valued sources of activities in this series, once created an environment in which students of engineering at Stanford University could deepen their experience of the domain of their imaginative thinking. He called his environment an *Idearium*. We will borrow his inspiring idea, but change the name to *Sensorium*. This will truly tax your secret senses. It's a great group project.

- **the Sensorium project**

You might want to begin by thinking about how the 5 non-secret (common) senses can be experimented with and heightened. If people are deprived of their senses of sight and hearing (by way of blindfolds and ear-plugs) what happens to their other senses? And does this deprivation foster the arising of inner imagery?

Cont ...



How could you design situations and experiments to explore this?

What kind of space?

What furniture? Can it generate movement, sensation ...?

What 'props'? Things for feeling, touching, smelling, tasting ...

What technologies? Projection screens, sound equipment, feed-back systems ...

How can the results be noted and collated? Questionnaires, perhaps?

Next, you could extend your experiments to explore the vastly-more-than-5 secret senses. Use some of the ideas in **outside-in & inside-out** to get you started, adapting and inventing more of your own.

How can you create the conditions necessary for deep relaxation?

What kind of ambience?

What music, and how – headsets or speakers?

What aromas? What temperatures? What body-covers?

How can you foster inner 'travel'? Directed fantasy? Guided visualization?

How can your voluntary "guinea pigs" express and communicate their inner experiences?

How can you assess the results? Another questionnaire?

What if places like this, where people can explore the terrain of the 'non-verbal' part of their brain, were considered as important as libraries and cinemas by our city councils?



playing with process

This project takes us back into the heart of **making fun of play**. It would be at odds with the spirit of play to offer prescriptions here – rather like instructing someone to "Be creative and make a crocheted, blue, tea cozy – following this pattern." Yet we are, by now, very familiar with the way that constraints empower our play by rescuing us from the paralyzing specter of infinite possibilities. And so the offerings here are simply suggestions of ways to focus our play a little, at least to begin with.

You'll explore one of those categories more deeply by experimenting with relevant processes suggested by keywords. This is such a fundamental activity for the maker that it could be seen as a kind of *practice* – a way of warming up, as well as refining one's artisanship.

- **process, play and practice**

We explored five playful categories in **making fun of play**: chance, connections, color and line, constructions, and cloth and cord.

Which one did you enjoy the most?

Look back at your work and at your notes in your X-file if it's difficult to decide. Your words and your work will reflect a quality of enthusiasm if you were really enjoying yourself.

Choose one category, and note down the keywords suggested here as starting points for more experiments.

chance	connections	color and line	constructions	cloth & cord
flooding	joining	simplifying	wrapping	binding
blowing	pairing	dancing	suspending	tying
tossing	mending	shading	rising	weaving
crumpling	twining	heaping	supporting	feltting
splashing	matching	impressing	hanging	texturing
numbering	complementing	curving	storing	cutting
groping	grasping	dappling	enclosing	layering

Cont ...

Let the process keywords start a brainstorming session in your own mind – write down as many others as you can for the category you have chosen. Then gather up all the materials and tools you'll need, and immerse yourself in playful exploration.

Remember to record everything in your X-file – you just never know what ideas will arise in that playful space. And although this is an unstructured project, it still requires documentation so that you can see where you have been, and what has been noticed.

Think about 'accident by design.' Some artisans, for whom *process is practice*, play with chance in a very conscious way. For them, apparent accidents and mistakes form the heart and soul of their work – its *raison d'être*.

Do you think these artisans are genuinely creative?

Do you know of any artisans for whom involvement in a particular art or craft process is undertaken as their personal spiritual practice? Look at Sister Wendy Beckett's books.

metaphorically speaking ...

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another. When you were playing your way through the activities in **making fun of play** you no doubt thought of other art and craft processes you could explore in that playful manner. This project is an invitation for you to do so.

As a starting point, reflect on the processes you explored in the previous activity from the aspect of *action*. For example, the action of crumpling is very different from that of enclosing. It's likely that as you played with these active processes you found them linking up with ideas and emotions within yourself. For your focus here, explore the way you could enlist the help of processes to express something that you feel needs to be explored more deeply.

- **process as metaphor**

First of all decide what art or craft area you wish to explore: photography, jewelry, book-binding, printmaking ...

Or it might be one of the elements of art that we explored in **creative constraints** – space, shape, texture, pattern ...

Or perhaps it will be a function, like motion, poise, generation, reflection ...

What really interests you, now?

And what is it you have an urge to express via metaphor?

Once you have decided on your playing field, take some time to brainstorm a list of related keywords that suggest operations or processes you might like to begin with.

The lists in the previous project will give you some ideas: for example, playing with motion might elicit key words like

rolling twisting floating rotating flowing hopping

How you explore and play is completely left for you to decide.

Cont ...

Look at your list of keywords. Which ones connect with your ideas and feelings? If necessary make another list of keywords describing those ideas and feelings. Match the two lists together to see where the most powerful juxtapositions occur.

Think carefully about your format, because everything you choose to include in your work needs to have relevance to what you wish to express. Formats have metaphoric possibilities too. Will you make a book? An artifact? A garment? A sculpture? A drawing? A painting? A puppet?

Will your intentions be subtle, covert? Or will they be displayed overtly for all to see?

Begin by spending time simply seeing what is possible with the processes you have chosen. You might need to learn some technical tricks. Combine different processes for complex effects that could express multiple metaphors.

As you play like this, the work in your hands will take on a life of its own and if you listen carefully, it will tell you what it wants to become. Some of these whisperings will be faint, like dreams, so be sure to have your X-file at hand to catch them as they float on through you.

It's impossible to know where a project like this one will take us, and that's the beauty of it. One thing is almost certain – the direction will be inwards. This is because of the mysterious way that the workings of our hands seem to have a direct connection with the secret senses. Connections are the mechanics of metaphor, and also of truly innovative thinking.

And in another deeper sense, to create is to connect – with Creation.

objets trouvées

When I visit a country such as India I take no papers, paints, brushes, pencils, needles, threads, and I try to take no ideas. I find everything for my *makings* there. I find handmade *khadi* papers to stain with tea or coffee. I fold them, tear them, bury them in rich ochre mud to see what will happen when the rag content of the paper absorbs the natural earth pigment. I beat them with blood-red stones, spread them under the rain trees for the birds to mark with their berry-hued droppings. What stories these papers can tell!

I gather thorns two inches long and fasten torn papers together. I scrape chalky peeling paint from village houses – it has a wonderfully faint ultramarine tint – and grind it to a powder. Mixed with a little locally-made adhesive paste it will become paint for my paper.

I pick up things that catch my eye on wonder-wanders through the rocky hills, the fertile rice-fields, the rainforest, the little villages – feathers, scraps of torn *sari* cloth, a discarded *bindi*, a stained fragment of mosquito netting, a little trap woven from grasses to catch something (a bird?), some stones, shells, seedpods, odd-shaped twigs. And I might buy a stencil used by the women when they dye intricate patterns on the palms of their hands with henna. Or, some gold thread, gold dust, little lacy doilies, and other strange and wonderful bits and pieces from the colorful stalls at the local market.

And so my palette is created out of the wonder that lies in front of my nose, and the wondering of my mind. All that remains is to play with everything and see what happens.

- **nature, culture, and 'found' objects**

The first two words provide a clue as to our scaffold. Wherever we find ourselves now is our natural and cultural context for the purposes of this project, whether you are at 'home' or a visitor in a strange land. The last two words describe our skeleton – both the content and the media we will use to create our expressions of the experience of being in that context.

Please limit yourself to only using materials, pigments, tools, and objects that you can find in that particular place.

Cont ...

Where are you? Begin by finding out about your cultural context, especially about the things that fascinate you. Fill your X-file with notes, keywords, questions.

Then explore your neighborhood with your nose to the ground for anything interesting – let nothing be too silly or too obscure. If you like it, and it is freely available (and your collecting it will not harm anything, in any way), gather it up. Keep your eyes open for treasures in the junk people discard. You might find papers, scraps of cloth, fragments of a life. Collect used postage stamps and clip interesting words out of the local newspaper.

Play some of the juxtaposing and connecting games from **making fun of play**, looking for surprises, resisting the cliché and the stereotype.

Begin to notice very carefully what your secret senses are suggesting as you gather, inquire, and experiment. What is taking shape? What do you need to find out? What do you need to find a substitute for? (For example, fine art papers or tube paints.)

How can you blend your findings about culture, and nature, into a creation that utilizes only the locally-found bits and pieces? Will it be 2 or 3 dimensional? Will it be a book, an installation, a performance, or all of these?

Look at the work of artists Chris Drury and Andy Goldsworthy who explore found, natural objects in the environment, transforming them into works that express their wonderings about the wonders of nature.

deconstructing & recycling

I grew up in a household where money was scarce and everything was saved for recycling into necessary functional items. Worn-out sweaters were painstakingly unraveled and re-knitted into singlets or socks. Broken furniture was taken apart and made into something else. Appliances that didn't work any more were dismantled and their recyclable components kept for repairing other things.

We all knew the potential value of bit-and-pieces of this-and-that and saved items that most folk would have considered to be trash. I still do this, and sometimes years will pass before these treasures turn up in my works. When they do, they are always the *perfect* solution to my need, and often they would be impossible to buy.

Hampshire artist Diane Theissen has played extensively with the idea of recycling appliances in her work. Not, however, just *any* old appliances. She chooses something that has a metaphoric significance for her – for example, an electric stove with all the connotations of hearth and home and women's roles around the world. Her work inspired this project.

- **deconstruct to reconstruct**

Spend some time thinking about household appliances and how they could contain rich metaphorical references. One example is given above. Another could be the way a radio suggests communication. Another could be the way a vacuum cleaner exposes value systems around cleanliness and women's roles. Think about appliances that are stereotypically associated with men as well. How about making a creative exploration of the wonders and the tyranny of time by deconstructing a clock?

If you have an exciting idea about a different type of item you could use for this project – a piece of furniture or a bicycle perhaps – don't hesitate to follow it where it takes you.

The next consideration will be the accessibility of your item. Is it lying in your basement, or will you have to buy it from the junk-yard? How will you transport it if it's something as big as a refrigerator? And where will you find space to play?

Cont ...

Once all these questions are solved and you have a playground with your appliance sitting in it, you can get started. You'll need access to tools, because the first step is to take the whole thing apart – meticulously.

Keep absolutely everything, no matter how tiny or unpromising. Make little piles of the nuts and washers and screws. Line up the panels, lay out the insulation.

Whatever it is you are de-constructing, begin to see it in terms of the amazing array of components that went into its creation. When the entire thing is in bits, and the bits are arranged in their piles, make an inventory. This will expand your wonderment further. You'll be astounded at the sheer quantity and variety of bits-and-pieces.

Now forget about the original item. It doesn't exist any more. (But don't forget about your metaphors.) Take each group of components in turn and assemble them somehow into a design, or series of designs, that says something about the issues around the use of the original item. Not literally (although you could use letters and words), but symbolically.

Can the bits be strung together, hung in space, dipped in paint and used to print shapes?

Can you stitch them, burn them, draw marks with them?

Can you mount bits on card or paper and use them as doodle-starters?

Let your secret senses lead the way. Experiment with any processes that are suggested by the material, the shape, the texture of your stash of items.

Make an installation of your work with wall pieces, spatial pieces and floor pieces, and design a catalogue for your exhibition that tells the viewers what you did, why, and the way it all grew out of your insatiable appetite for wondering!

shape-shifting

In **outside the square** we 'changed places' with another creature of our own species. We researched their lives, what they looked like and how they acted, and we made two masks to portray their private and their public personae. This time we will be on much less familiar ground, for our object of research will not be a member of our own human species.

We will identify with a strange and perhaps unappreciated form of life. We're going to choose a creature with which we share no affinity. It may even be a creature we are afraid of – but it does need to be something we can easily access so that wondering mind can do its research.

- **changing places**

Choose from an insect, a spider, a beetle, a snake, a reptile, or a rodent. Make sure your subject is large enough for you to study, and that you have easy access to it for the purposes of your research. You will need a good magnifying glass.

It's important to understand that you will imagine that you *are* this creature – you are going to study it from the inside out, so to speak. So your findings will be a synthesis of what you can record objectively, and what you can imagine with your secret senses.

What do you need to find out? Make a list of questions. For example:

- Do you have warm blood or cold?
- What kind of skin, eyes, ears, lips, teeth, legs, arms?
- How do you communicate with others of your kind?
- What do you like to eat?
- Where do you like to live?
- How do you produce your young?
- Do you live in a light or a dark world?
- Can you see colors?
- What scares you?
- Do you have feelings, or a sense of self?

Cont ...

Use all your strategies for looking and seeing, along with your finder, to make visual notes about the observable characteristics of your creature. Annotate your drawings. Take photographs, find pictures in books, find examples of stories and poems that your creature has inspired.

Then switch to your secret senses and, using whatever media you prefer, create images that represent the world as seen by your creature.
Add your own poetic lines to these images.

And finally, step right back to observe the 'big picture': where does this creature fit into the overall ecology of the natural world?

What role does it play?

What would be the consequence if it did not exist?

Is it under threat?

Write a short piece about your new understanding and appreciation of the creature you have 'swapped moccasins' with.

And to bring your project to completion, assemble all your material into a format that you can show to others. If you are inspired to do so, make a model of your creature. Base the design on how you think it *sees itself* rather than how you/we see it.

This is always an eye-opening experience. All our usual distaste and aversions for our miraculous fellow travelers on planet Earth quickly rise to the surface. To get to know them 'inside out' fosters a sense of awe at the miracle they truly are, and rarely leaves our aversions in place. Instead, they are replaced by pure wonder.

quantum realities

Think back to the guided inner journey called *the dance of the universe*. Did you go on to find out any more about the quantum universe? Have another look at the notes you wrote then, for they will start us off on this project. Our objective is to become a piece of quantum matter, to imagine what it would be like to live in that universe. Like the physicists who theorize about this strange world of the infinitely small, and who create the experiments that demonstrate their ideas, we will need to suspend our common sense view of how things work, and enter the world of the secret senses where anything is possible.

How can we express the fact that an electron can be found simultaneously here and there? How can we explain that it acts both like a minute, mobile speck of matter, wandering through the atom, and like something outspread, undulating throughout that space? How can we describe this dual personality? To make any headway, physicists had to turn their thinking upside down and accept the existence of a world where the rules are not those of our familiar universe. To describe the new reality, they had to invent, little by little, an abstract language called "quantum mechanics." (5) But as well as a new abstract language, they needed to create the tools to aid their perception, to test their new ideas for truth or falsity, to make their discoveries measurable, and to uncover new and unexpected facts. (6)

So first the scientist observes, questions and imagines, then he or she creates a scaffold of ideas – and then produces the tools for further exploration and measurement. The odd thing about the quantum world though, is that it seems to merrily conform to our expectations of what it will be like, and what it will do. Where does this leave our tidy theories about the nature of our physical world? It would seem to imply to the lay person that we are able to choose whatever version of the quantum picture we prefer, and thus experience it. This is surely fascinating fodder for wondering mind as it contemplates stepping into the boots of a friendly schizophrenic electron.

"... I, a universe of atoms, an atom in the universe ..."
Our poets do not write about it;
Our artists do not try to portray this remarkable thing.
I don't know why.
Is no one inspired by our present picture of the universe?
This is not yet a scientific age.
Richard Feynman

Cont ...

- **enter a new universe**

Do some more reading about the habits and lifestyles of electrons.

How do they behave? What determines their behavior, if anything? Are they sociable, unsociable or both? What can you find out about the 'quarks' that inhabit them?

What is their world like – light, dark, colored, crowded, empty?

Is there any 'order' to their activity?

Find any photos of electron activity within experimental 'bubble chambers,' or any other relevant illustrations from scientific journals. Ask your physics teacher for any other information – and for suggestions of reading material.

Find out what you can about quantum-level discoveries relating to *being, movement, relationships*. (Dana Zohar's book *The Quantum Self* might be helpful. (2))

When your data is all in, spend some time letting the secret senses play with it. You might like to repeat the *dance of the universe* visualization, or to write your own expanded version.

Decide how you will format your project.

Will it take the form of a book? It will need to be large enough for your visual and written reports about your life as an electron.

Will you stage a performance? What masks, costumes, movements, music?

Would your electron character be interesting cartoon material?

How will you express in line, form, and color, your amazing habitat?

(Read Marie-Simone Detoeuf's wonderful little book, *La Danse de L'Univers* for inspiration. (7))

culture & creativity

Culture can be considered to be the full range of practices through which we give meaning to our lives and through which our community expresses its identity.

Creativity is essential as a survival strategy in a rapidly changing world. Across the spectrum of human endeavor everyone wants creativity and innovation - new policies and programs insist on this. Creativity facilitates new ways of thinking and new ways of solving problems - not only in the arts and cultural fields but also in urban development and renewal, in ensuring ecological balance and sustainability, and in the creation of wealth and social cohesion.

Creativity requires the ability to think through problems afresh, to discover common threads amongst seemingly disparate influences, to be willing to experiment, to rewrite rules, to visualize and to have the courage to act upon those visions.

Stevie McKinless, ArtSynC, Queensland Australia

We have wondered our way around many worlds – the world of our common senses, the world of the secret senses, the quantum world, and the world of our thinking. Can we now talk about the wonder of creativity and know where we stand?

What, if anything, has made a difference to our experience of living with ourselves, with our fellow humans, with all the beings that inhabit this extraordinary Earth, and with our home planet herself?

Do we understand the difference between genuine creation and invention or innovation? Do we know from that place of great poise, the difference between the joyful ecstasy of genuine creation, and the pleasure of the known and secure? Can we say, with Einstein, *The greatest formal talent is worthless if it does not serve a creativity that is capable of shaping a cosmos*, and understand what we utter?

Let's consider (creatively, of course!) the mission statement above, from an arts administrator in Australia. If you were a person responsible for fostering creativity in the arts within a community, a culture, what would your mission statement say? And – from your own experience on your own *via creativa* – how would you act to implement your policies? What kinds of resources, facilities and activities would you encourage the community to engage in?

Cont ...



- **create a culture of creativity**

This project is a wonderful group activity – it will be richer and fuller if a multi-cultural mix of contributors is involved. However if you are working alone there's no reason this project can't be fruitfully explored.

It will take some planning, and the best way to start will probably be with a meeting to establish your scaffold and structures.

The scaffold is the theme of your project: culture and creativity.

The skeletons will be decided by the group in discussion – you might begin with Stevie's areas of consideration:

- arts and culture
- urban development and renewal
- ecological balance and sustainability
- prosperity and social cohesion
- and any you might wish to add

Once the basic plan is designed, people can elect an area they would like to contribute to, and can form their own brainstorming groups to create the material aspect of the project. How will you research? Questionnaires? Interviews? How will you promote and publicize?



the three questions

The final project in **empty canvas : wondering mind** brings all our experiments into a sweeping synthesis. We now have the tools, we know the language, we've explored many aspects of the nature of phenomena, and we've pushed our inquiry deep into both the personal and transpersonal worlds. We've learned a great deal about how our perception has been conditioned and the ways our natural creativity has been sabotaged by acquired beliefs. We have moved closer to authentic 'direct seeing'.

We are now well equipped to bring all this hands-on experience to bear on three questions which form the heart of the matter for creative artisans in any medium:

- **what really matters to me?**
- **why does it matter?**
- **how can it be expressed?**

Over to you – your game, your empty canvas, your wondering mind!

ENJOY!

We have applied the “*What if ...?*” question to our thinking, our questioning, and our making. Our hands, our head, and our heart were the playground equipment upon which thinking, inquiring and creating was explored. Our hands can think, inquire, and create, so can our heart, and so can our head. Most of the activities we've explored have called upon one, two, or all of our body-bits to be engaged in one, two, or all of our ways of being involved in the making process. Why is this necessary?

Firstly, because we all acquire, process, and use knowledge in different ways – some verbally, others visually, others kinesthetically, for example. (There are other learning modes as well – refer to Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind; the Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (3) for more information.)

Secondly, because if we understand even the most elementary basics of the quantum world-view, we must accept that the body/mind split that was such a basic premise of Newtonian thought simply doesn't exist. From that perspective it becomes impossible to dissect and define the seat of creative endeavor. Creativity is a holistic process going on within a holistic organism that is itself part of the Whole. But within that holistic process the players are involved in exquisitely orchestrated relationships, and Zohar suggests that the relationship between mind and matter is probably the basis of all human creativity – *Mind is relationship and matter is that which it relates.* (2)

I cannot resist the “*What if ...?*” questions that bubble up in response to this suggestion:

What if the Mind of the Universe – the Ground, the Wholeness, the quantum potential, whatever it's called – is also relationship, and matter (we, us, and co) is that which It relates?

And what if that process of relating was genuine creativity?

What if all other creativity was merely a shadow of that process, a pale imitation?

Would such possibilities make any difference to the way we live and work? Would we see our creative play in a new light – as something we might even come to consider as sacred? Would we perhaps have a radically different understanding of who and what we are? Would we understand our role *as* the play of Creation? Would such explorations be possible within the limitations of our current thinking – especially the structure of our language? And if not, how could we create a limitless language that would serve our purpose?

In the end, after all our work and all our play, after we have wondered and wondered and wondered some more, what it all boils down to is this. We have a deep interest in something. We could even say that we absolutely *love* something. It fills us up to think about it, to find out about it, to explore it. It might be an idea, the earth, a species, a person, humanity, or words or an image. Whatever it is, we have so much passion for it that

... all that can be done with the overflow is to create.
It is not a matter of wanting to, not a singular act of will; one solely must. (9)

The denial of that passion is the denial of one's humanity. This is the awesome responsibility we have towards our own creative lives, and the lives of our children and students. There is no substitute – mental or physical – for the heartfelt happiness, peace, and joy that identifies genuine encounter with the spirit of Creation. If the questions and activities explored in this series serve to acknowledge and kindle that spirit, its purpose will have been accomplished.

Wonders - and wonderings - never cease ...

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