

**Nature-Based Art:
An Exploration in Studio Practice**

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ABSTRACT**Nature-Based Art:
An Exploration in Studio Practice****Athanasia Antonopoulos**

This dissertation is the culmination of my past experiences and values, particularly my love of an art practice that deals with nature. As a result, this thesis questions how and why nature-based art production can be incorporated into art practice to produce sustainable and meaningful art making in the studio and discusses the implications of this way of working for the elementary school classroom.

Through a studio-based research, I explore the possibilities of a nature-based art production that includes working with natural, recycled and traditional materials. This is done using qualitative research and reflective practices in the creation of three works of art, and the study of nine environmental artists who create similar art. The data from the studio component consists of journal entries and photographs to illustrate salient points for the reader. This forms the basis for a discussion about art and nature. The thesis concludes with both practical and educational implications for a classroom setting including feasibility and potential values, as well as personal findings stemming from my own experience of a greener studio practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical Grounding of Research:

All my life I've loved art. My mother has a small collection of my childhood works executed on large pieces of coloured Bristol and the backs of menus. I dabbled in it any chance I got. Today, I draw, paint, sculpt, I throw pots and create stained glass landscapes. Pastels, inks, watercolours, and graphite pieces adorn my walls with equal admiration. I don't limit myself to traditional media, occasionally producing a bit of conceptual or video art. Because of the variety of my work I never looked for a link between the individual pieces, a motivation, a muse. I believed that when the mood struck I made art and other than the fact that I created them, my pieces had little in common.

When I arrived at Concordia and started my first formal art education at the graduate level, I took a class on contemporary art. Considering myself to be more of a modernist with no formal training, I wasn't expecting to be impressed. In the first class however, the professor presented a slide of Giuseppe Penone's "To be a River": it consisted of two identical rocks (one found, one carved) lying together on the floor of the National Gallery of Canada. It intrigued me that there were artists who used materials from nature as a medium for their work. I flashed back to a piece I had made as a child of a witch, created out of leaves, flying through the air on her pine bough broomstick. It was one of the few pieces of my childhood art that I had kept. As I began to reflect on my work, I saw a trend emerging. Many of my favourite pieces and most of my body of work reflected or commented on nature in some way.

Research Focus:

Now that I recognized there was a connection between my works, I wondered if I could use that influence to focus my art practice and produce a more meaningful and cohesive body of work. I also wondered that in doing so, how could I as an art educator share my passion and use this experience to show how nature-based art can and should be brought into a classroom. My original focus was the use of natural materials in art. Due to my introduction to Penone, I began researching other artists who used natural materials, items like leaves, dirt, stones, flowers, branches, etc. I was amazed by the works of artists like Andy Goldsworthy, Anya Gallaccio, Nils Udo, Chris Drury, Roger Ackling and Concordia professor Therese Chabot.

I wanted to know how I could combine this new found appreciation into both my studio practice and my teaching. My first question was, could natural materials be used to sustain a DBAE art curriculum in an elementary classroom for a certain period of time? The curriculum had to be both stimulating and effective for the students and both cost efficient and manageable for the teacher. I chose DBAE as the philosophy of instruction because I felt it was an approach that reflected my own teaching practice, a study of known artists, producing art, and conducting criticism and aesthetic activities. Through academic research I was able to determine that a nature-based art curriculum was possible in theory, so I put it into practice in a pilot project using my own students as participants.

The project encountered both successes and problems. It became apparent in the early stages of planning that the question was too limiting. Although I loved the idea of using natural materials, and even created a few new pieces of my own, I didn't want to be confined

to just that form of art in my own practice, let alone in the classroom. A curriculum which works with a highly varied media base is very important to both my art practice and teaching. In addition, winter had reduced the availability of natural materials to be found, and hampered the amount of time which could be spent working outdoors with young children. This approach also caused problems because it demanded that too much had to be covered in the amount of time I had available. One lesson in particular; an artist study of artist Erich Heckel, additionally dealt with the concepts of positive and negative space and an introduction to printmaking. With only a 90 minute period to work with, justice couldn't be done to any one topic in particular. The time limitation wasn't only noticeable on a period to period basis but was also a factor in total time spent on the pilot. I wanted the purpose of the art itself to be meaningful and connected to real life. I wanted to develop a mutual relationship between art and nature through my work and in the classroom, a relationship where students are encouraged not only to take from nature but give back to nature. In my mind, this can not be accomplished in a few short periods but something that must be nurtured in order to become a way of life.

Despite these problems the idea showed great promise. The students were engaged, and they produced creative pieces of art with both natural and recycled materials which was a new foray for them. They even showed the beginnings of a connection to nature. I wanted to take this experience and spend more time on it, explore the questions and challenges raised in the pilot through my own art practice. I wanted to examine how I could explore other art forms and artists, to find those that were inspired by nature and/or that raised a concern for the environment. I decided to call my approach 'nature-based art production' as I felt this

would be broad enough to encompass the ephemeral creations of natural material artists as well as the message driven works of eco-theorists and other environmental artists. So evolved the question, *how and why should nature-based art production be incorporated into art practice to produce sustainable and meaningful art making in the studio? What are the implications of this way of working for the elementary school classroom?*

Rationale:

Nature has had a long history of influencing art, one that has extended from the masters bringing their palettes into their gardens to the contemporary earthworks of Andy Goldsworthy and others. However, in order for art to continue to be influenced by nature there must be nature to be influenced by. In a society where the population and urban landscapes are ever burgeoning, we must raise our own and others' level of environmental consciousness. What better agent for this catalyst than the relationship that has already existed for centuries? Kelly, a Kantian philosopher, describes Kant's view of the relationship between art and nature as such, "art and nature, while not reciprocal in their allusions, nevertheless derive their greatest powers in reference to each other" (Kelly, 1997, p.340).

Initially, I was enticed by Kant's belief that art and nature are strongest when they draw from each other but I was further spurred by the idea that they were not reciprocally beneficial to each other. When Kant developed his philosophy it was believed that art benefited greatly from the beauty of nature in its representation and influence but offered less in return. However, through time, and with the advent of contemporary art, nature has the ability to benefit from art. Trends like environmental or ecological art raise awareness for the

environment by encouraging people to look at their surroundings more closely and realize how their decisions affect the world around them. It is my position that this type of art can benefit both artists and art educators, as there are many realistic contributions of using a nature-based art practice, particularly for art education.

An art practice which uses in large part natural or recycled materials means that there is a ready, available and inexpensive supply of media at all times. This is something that can hardly escape the attention of a classroom teacher or 'starving artist'. Beyond the cost effectiveness of the material lies a deeper intrinsic value involving the process of the art making itself. As Elliot and Bartley (1998) so eloquently state, "The materials are not precious, in that they are plentiful and usually free of charge [but] the opportunity to make non precious materials precious through creative activity is at the heart of what art is often about" (p.53). They further state that when students or individuals are encouraged to use materials that challenge traditional ideals of what art media should be, they are given "the opportunity to discover visually interesting objects in their environment and to see materials as the combined substance of function and expression" (p.53). Gaye Leigh Green, a university art educator (1996) also brings attention to the benefits of using non-traditional material as it "expands students' awareness of other forms of art and informs them that the accepted canon of *significant* artwork includes more than painting or drawing" (p19). Finally, while the use of natural and recycled materials is also a wonderful vehicle for the examination of basic elements such as line, colour, texture and composition, they also present the students or artists with an avenue for activism.

In addition, nature-based art production connects classroom learning with the outside

world, making learning authentic. This idea is reflected by educator Pamela Taylor (1997) when she states “if what happens inside school has little to do with a student’s outside experiences, we can expect very little actual learning or achievement” (p.15). Protection and respect for the environment as well as what constitutes it are issues that students are faced with on a daily basis. This can be particularly important for students living in an urban environment because they may not be regularly exposed to green space. By connecting the values learned inside the classroom to practices which affect the outside world, teachers can initiate deeper learning in their students, leading to the production of more meaningful and personal art.

Nature-based art production forces students to look at the surroundings and each item more critically than usual. This was shown in an exercise I conducted where a group of university students used natural materials found in the yard outside the Visual Arts building to create a piece of art. During the discussion period that followed I heard comments like, “I walk through the yard almost everyday without really noticing what’s in it” (Aaron Sennitt, personal communication, 2002). One student noted for the first time how dirty the yard was, “It was difficult not to be distracted by the garbage and junk that littered [the yard]” (Claudine Ascher, personal communication, 2002). Like contemporary artist Andy Goldsworthy, the students were exploring the space around them through the natural materials they found there. While they originally thought they knew the place they were getting to know it better, and they were “building a relationship in layers” with their work.

In addition to making artists and students more aware of the environment around them, a nature-based art practice helps protect their natural surroundings. By using natural or recycled materials to create art, more of what could be considered waste can be used again

to produce something new, therefore reducing what actually goes in the trash. Taylor (1997) states in her article, "We need to think about our materials, our methods, and treat them gently... to reduce the amount of waste we throw in our own home (our earth)" (p.16). If we use leaves and sticks to create pieces of art indoors, the waste products are still quickly biodegradable, which is not the case with some media, like resins or oil paints. If the pieces are created outdoors then the earth slowly reclaims the materials. Using recycled materials like fabric or paper scraps, old magazines, and cardboard boxes, not only cuts down on waste but also the need for new paper products which depend on the environment for their creation.

As can be seen, the values in art and in art education that can be gleaned from a nature-based art production approach are plentiful. It is art which expands traditional ideas of media. It can provide challenges for the retail market and gallery settings, as art made from natural materials is usually ephemeral and/or created *in situ* and therefore can not be bought or sold. It is art that will challenge people to be critical of their natural surroundings or the waste they generate. And finally, it is art that encourages people to become involved with art as a form of communication which can deliver powerful political or social messages. Arthur Efland (1976), a respected art education theorist, believed that the value of a philosophy of art education was primarily determined by its communicative ability. These are all concepts and values that can and should be addressed both in the studio and in an art education classroom. Through a qualitative inquiry of my own studio practice I hoped to put these theories into practice and become more aware of their implications.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While some would argue that nature is art in itself, it is not. Richard Lachapelle (2001) provides this working definition of art, “art is an imaginative and creative form of visual communication that has as its main function to engage the viewer in an aesthetic experience. It is based on a language of aesthetic symbols replete with meanings” (Class notes, ARTE 660Q). We can find symbolic meanings in items from nature, such as stone representing strength, stubbornness or reliability, but these meanings were not intended. We as a society have applied these symbolic meanings to these objects. Nature frequently engages viewers in an aesthetic experience but that is not the intent of nature. Its shape, line, colour, all function to attract, repel, and survive in the world. In fact, philosophers like John Ruskin or George Santayana would deny that nature has any inherent aesthetic value (Kelly, 1997, p.339).

So while nature is not art, the two do share a unique relationship that is time tested. Artists have been using nature and natural materials as a model, an inspiration and even a medium for thousands of years. From the prodigious stone heads of Easter Island to Michelangelo’s *David*, from ancient cave paintings to modern charcoal sketches and many a landscape in between, much of art and nature have been nearly inseparable. Historically, art imitated nature. Artists like Vincent VanGogh, Claude Monet, Emily Carr, Anne Savage, and countless others have dedicated time to representing nature in their works of sunflowers, water lilies and forests. The beauty of nature has influenced almost everyone who has ever painted a landscape. Today, trends of contemporary art have brought the relationship between

art and nature to a new level of symbiosis. Some artists use items in nature as well as found or recycled objects as the medium to create pieces of art. Other artists use traditional materials to draw society's attention to ecological issues. The works these artists create, whose function *is* to engage the viewer in aesthetic response, use the manipulated materials to communicate a message of respect for our environment. This art and the literature surrounding it is the basis of my research.

There are two bodies of literature available that are relevant to my topic: 1) theoretical inquiry dealing with why nature-based art instruction should be fostered to develop a heightened sense of environmental awareness, and 2) interviews with and/or studies of environmental or ecological artists detailing their processes and motivations.

One important limitation is the lack of published literature. Several months of research turned up a few more than a dozen articles or books. In such a case, each text must be carefully considered for the quality and relevance of their arguments, even though as a whole, they do not contribute to my research. Articles like those by Blandy, Congdon and Krug (1998) and Anderson (1999) offer excellent arguments for the teaching of environmental art. Blandy et al. conclude, "experiences that engage students in viewing the world as ecosystems encourage an awareness of the importance of the environment and their relationship to it", allowing them to "redefine their role in society" (p.231). Anderson (1999) argues that because art education allows students to look and interpret and value what they see, nature based art provides "a heightened awareness and appreciation of the environment ... a better understanding of [artistic] interpretations of the environment and an art experience for students to see, understand and express how these things are related" (p.1-2). In yet another article, Blandy and Hoffman (1993) explain how "from conceptions of environment

imagined by contemporary eco-theorists and eco-activists we derive an “art education of place” with which artists and educators can imagine new relations among art, community and environment” (p.23). Even though the majority of these authors deal with a classroom setting, the values presented are universal, and are as applicable to the artist as to the student. It is equally important to me as a practising artist to define my role in society and retain an awareness of the environment and my relationship with it. As Blandy et al. emphasize, environmental art work is valuable because it heightens awareness of our environment. It communicates consciousness and models problem-posing and problem-solving skills that are not unique to environmental concerns. These are values and skills any artist, not just students, can benefit from.

The second area of literature was more focussed to art practice and while more plentiful, at times, it lacked the depth I was hoping to find. This field contained both general information and artist specific material. There were three texts in particular that dealt with a spectrum of artists and their approaches. They are *Fragile Ecologies*, by Barbara Matilsky (1992), *Balance: Art and Nature* by John Grande (2004) and a section of “*Art, Ecological Restoration and Art Education*”, by Blandy, Congdon, and Krug (1998), also discussed in part one of the literature review. Blandy, Congdon, and Krug (1998) and Matilsky (1992), discuss a number of specific environmental and ecological art works and artists. The authors do so because they feel that by studying and participating in this type of art, art educators and students can take part in the environmental restoration, that is, doing something which positively affects the environment. This then becomes a value-based process which is paramount to the survival of our natural environment.

Both Blandy, Congdon and Krug, and Matilsky outline the history of ecological and environmental art which gained prominence in the 1960s with artists responding to environmental concerns through their art. Over time, environmental art has grown to encompass many different forms and mean different things to different people. Matilsky (1994) defines environmental art as a “multi-directional movement that embraces many currents” (p.8), “part of a long tradition whereby artists creatively respond to extreme environmental changes by introducing new art forms” (p.7). Meanwhile, in Sue Spaid’s (2002) book, Eco-Vention, she defines environmental art as art that “tends to employ nature as a medium, so as to enhance the viewers awareness of nature’s forces, processes and phenomena” (p.11). Blandy et al. attempt to outline different forms of environmental art for the reader. According to them, contemporary environmental art has evolved to include differing media, for example, the use of ordinary (natural) or recycled materials. In addition, contemporary environmental art can include work using traditional media, like paint, photography, installation, sculpture or text, which reflects various environmental ideals and philosophies.

Balance: Art and Nature (2003) by John K. Grande is less historical and more critical than the other texts of this field. Grande’s book is a series of chapters dedicated to types of environmental art and the artists who work in them. He describes the processes and motivations of Andy Goldsworthy, Ashley Bickerton, David Mach, and others in order to show how artistic expression affects the way in which these artists relate to the world. In his introduction Grande familiarizes the reader with different types of environmental artists and then goes on to discuss the role these artists play in environmental preservation. While we become aware of the value of such a process through his writing, he concedes that working

in this fashion is no effortless matter;

It is now up to us to regenerate our social and environmental landscape, to adapt ourselves to it in a more provocative, new and varied ways ... To think, act and create 'naturally' is not an easy task in a culture that emphasizes distraction, distortion and decontextualization. It requires the awareness that everything does indeed matter. The solution is neither structural nor syntactic. It involves a basic confidence in perception, intuition and the ritual of exploration of materials with a sense of their potential power and magical properties. (Grande, p.5, 2003)

This text is important to me because I appreciate the way Grande describes the properties of the materials environmental artists use as powerful and magical, but it is not only the properties of the materials but the entire process of creating the art and even the art itself. Grande describes what I hope to accomplish in my own studio practice, to create my very own solution for environmental awareness and preservation by using natural and recycled materials and/or creating art which conveys environmental messages.

In addition to the literature which deals with environmental art forms and artists in general, I reviewed a number of texts which described or interviewed specific environmental artists. To establish a parallel with my thesis I have sub-divided these into three categories: artists who use natural materials, artists who use found objects/ or recycled materials, and artists who use traditional materials to send a message of environmental awareness. In this body of literature it is foremost the artists themselves (through interviews and gallery catalogues) and the multiple writings of John Grande which provide the bulk of the information. Each category has a number of appropriate artists but in the interest of time I have chosen three from each category, for the way they compliment and/or contrast my own studio practice.

Natural Material Artists:

Andy Goldsworthy, Nils-Udo and Therese Chabot are all artists who use natural materials to create their works of art. Goldsworthy, arguably the most recognized of this group, has spent the last few decades creating his own brand of non-intrusive, mostly ephemeral, environmental art using organic and non organic materials found at the locations of his creations. In his book *Balance: Art and Nature*, Grande (2004) describes Goldsworthy's art as such;

His work is usually more modest [compared to work of artists like Christo and Robert Smithson], almost microcosmic in scale. Time is taken to access the site, materials, climate, life forms, vegetation and location before work is begun on a piece. Goldsworthy seeks to 'uninvent' art by removing any metaphoric, subjective or idiomatic associations we might have when considering art. [It is] a direct response to local [and] specific ecologies. (p.88-90)

The specific ecologies Grande describes are to be found all over the world. Goldsworthy has created his ephemeral art in various countries but the bulk of his work is created at Stonewood, a two acre piece of land in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, a gift from Lord Dalkeith to Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy's process is to revisit the site time and time again, getting a feel for the elements it possesses before creating a piece and documenting it with a simple 35-millimetre camera. Goldsworthy (1994) himself admits that, though he considers what the piece will look like, the end result must have been fuelled by "intuitiveness and instinct". He does this because as he states, "the intention of my art is the artist's way of learning, of getting to know the place, my art teaches me about the land" (p.41). Similar to Goldsworthy, but less known, is artist Nils-Udo. In his article, "*Nils-Udo: Nature Works*", Grande (1999) describes how Udo's work "retains a sensitivity to site, to the permacultural matrix of living elements" (p.19). Udo, who has been active in environment art since the 1960s, creates work

which exhibits the “colours, shapes, weight, luminescence, and durability of nature’s diverse elements” and creates a language of expression which heightens our awareness of our relationship to nature (Grande, 1999). Some of Udo’s works include *New Delhi, India* (1994) where the artist hung curtains of marigolds from an ancient arch and *Red Rock Nest* (1998) which consisted of bamboo sections layered and twisted into a spiralled nest partially embedded into a red canyon wall in California surrounded by local multicoloured citrus fruit. In an artist statement from TICKON, Udo (1994) describes his process and intent:

A basic idea of the work [is] the attempt at absolute purity. Nature should, so to speak, present itself as on a stage. Any unnatural element [is] excluded as impure.... it is the characteristics [of the natural materials present] and the appropriate possibilities they offered and the character of the site itself that largely determines the shape of my work. (p.59)

Often contrary to Goldsworthy and Udo’s outdoor pieces, but still in keeping with the use of natural materials, are the works of Montreal artist and educator Therese Chabot. After receiving formal training in ceramics, Chabot moved to working predominantly with fresh, cut and dried flowers (which she grows herself) to create large installations of geometric patterns on gallery floors. Unlike Goldsworthy, Chabot plans out her work in advance, tapes out the pattern on the floor and then works from the centre outwards to create often large, sometimes intricate, sometimes simple, but always visually striking patterns of layered flowers.

Chabot’s art depicts what she calls “universal themes from the human psyche”, including death, the life cycle and the changing of seasons (Grande, 1999). She is sometimes considered a feminist artist because her work parallels the feminine arts of embroidery, quilt making, and other needle crafts. Indeed, as Grande (1999) reports, Chabot has admitted that

she uses flowers both for their aesthetic qualities but also their validation of feminine traditions. In the same article Grande states of Chabot's work, "Her art fulfills a social need to integrate with nature so sadly lacking in a world of technobabble" (p.41, 1999).

Recycled/Found Material Artists:

At the other end of the spectrum from artists working with natural material are artists working with man-made material, and not just any man-made material, but waste specifically. Included in these artist are Louise Nevelson, Dan Peterman and Charlie Lucas.

Louise Nevelson is the least contemporary of the artists studied though her work is nevertheless both an inspiration to found object artists and apropos to this study. Nevelson gained most of her recognition for her sculptures towards the mid 20th century. Nevelson was influenced by Cubism, and both Mexican and Central American art. Her work consists of three-dimensional boxes and pillars created from bits of demolished buildings and scrap wood, which she completely painted black, white or gold. It has been written that she chose this medium because it suited her limited means and that her family had a long tradition of working with wood in lumber mills (Bakalar Gallery, 1986).

Contrary to the other artists researched, not much is said about the environmental quality of Nevelson's work. This may be attributed to the fact that in her prime, the movement of environmental art had yet to be named. Her medium however, classifies her directly within the category of artists who use recycled materials and in her own words, "as everyone knows, a great many elements -- some consciously intended, some not- enter into the creation of a work of art and it is an illusion to suppose we can ever identify them all" (Kramer, 1983, p.72). Regardless of whether or not Nevelson's intent was to clean the

environment, the end product did reduce waste, as much of her media was recycled. At times, the waste reduction was two-fold, as she disassembled old pieces to create new ones.

With a similar process is self-taught folk artist Charlie Lucas. Lucas scours junkyards and dump sites in order to find scraps of metal which he reworks and welds to create his sculptures. Lucas spent years as a plumber, janitor, and electrician before becoming an artist, using his great father's old trade of black smithing as an initial reference. Journalist Rebecca Beardan quotes Lucas as describing "the vision that inspired him to start creating works out of old car parts... 'The *Tin Man* brought me out of the closet and into a brighter light. I realized that people throw so much stuff away. God wanted me to send a message through this kind of art. (Beardan, 2004, para.44). As a further way of presenting his message, Lucas is particular about leaving the scrap in its raw form,

I want the kids to see this thing- I don't want them to see it in the shiny, in the newness of it. I don't even attempt to paint so much of my work... because you want the kids to see the whole society is not shiny and pretty, glamorous the way we pretend it is, because it's not. (Alabama Arts Council, 2001, para.2)

While Lucas draws a hard line about the condition of society, Dan Peterman's "approach is non judgmental; he looks at waste as yet another area of concern where creative problem solving can be applied ... [that], and the systems this process set up ... are what interest [him]" (Warren, 1994, p.1). His process, like the other artists of this category, involves using recycled materials to create sculpture and installations. As for intent, some of the best descriptions come from gallery sites that have exhibited his work;

Peterman's artwork is focused on the consistent movement and

transformation of materials that are especially reprocessed plastic, aluminum cans and flammable garbage. In using human waste for his sculpture work or installed environments he reveals the interrelated social, economic and political effects of our generation of waste. (Klosterfelde, n.d., para.1)

and from the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art (2004);

recycling, reusing and reworking, are the core of Dan Peterman's art...He scrutinizes the environment and social exhaustion of goods and resources in today's society...He seeks to reveal processes by which people interact with both the natural world and their technological surroundings. (para.1)

Traditional Material Artists:

Art that conveys a message of environmental awareness through the use of traditional materials is arguably the oldest form of environmental art. As early as the first part of the 19th century, artists like Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and John Martin (1789-1854) painted scenes warning of the perils of overpopulation, the drive to extinction of certain species, and the general ravage of nature by man (Matilsky, 1992). Contemporary artists like Sandy Skoglund, Karen Stahlecker and Richard Misrach present similar themes with a wider variety of media.

Sandy Skoglund is an American artist, who has been creating her visually striking, dreamlike installations since the early 1980s. The installations and the photographic images that document them have generally dull monochromatic backgrounds sharply contrasted by colourful repeated elements such as sculptured fox, cats or goldfish . Skoglund researches her subjects for months before beginning the task of casting their likeness in epoxy. After the casting she begins the process of setting the installation that she then photographs. Her media include paint, mannequins, live human models, epoxy casts, props and lately even

food. Her works include *Fox Games* (1989) a restaurant scene where a couple (the woman is wearing a fur stole) is plagued by a pack of foxes.

Skoglund's surreal environments commonly depict society's interaction with the environment and particularly animals. In an interview with Walker, Krug and Burkhart (1995) Skoglund states,

Part of the problem [with urban society] is that we've alienated ourselves from animals. We think we're different from them and we set ourselves off and we have so much to learn from them.... they can offer us another point of view. And another point of view is healing. Just getting out of that sense of the world as seen through the eyes of human beings. (Ans. 40)

That being said, the art she creates is for herself as opposed to society in general. In the same interview she describes her intent:

As an artist I don't try to think of myself as teaching people how to live better. I mean, I don't really like the sense of museums being classrooms. I think that's like setting up the artist as knowing more than the public, and personally that's not my philosophy. My philosophy is basically to be dumb and to be a participant in the society and to just sponge, just sort of let it all come in and enjoy it, or be disgusted by or whatever. (Ans.2)

Contrary to Skoglund's intent is that of artist Karen Stahlecker, another contemporary artist, whose intent is to impart to others what she feels is an important message. According to Stahlecker, her art "is a way to communicate ideas about our natural environment and human relationships to the earth.... I am trying to express just some sense of what we are losing and destroying" (Krug, 1999, para.3).

Stahlecker's process includes the traditional craft of paper making, which she then uses along with paint, wood and other materials to create two and three-dimensional works

that reflect the relationship between humanity and nature. One of her better known pieces is *The Wreckage II* (1990), which is a response to the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. *The Wreckage II* is a sculpture in the form of a sinking hull; Krug (1999) describes the ship as “a metaphor to explore relationships between creating and sustaining a healthy place to live on planet earth” (para.5).

While Stahlecker works with media she creates in response to environmental incidents, Richard Misrach documents the results of these incidents in print. Misrach is an American photographer who began his work in the early 1980s.

Whether photographing a flooded town, a desert fire, an abandoned nuclear testing site, or the colours on the horizon emanating from a small town miles away... Misrach's work chronicles man's involvement in the desert while paying homage to the intrinsic beauty provided by nature. (Edelman Gallery, n.d., para.2)

As part of his process, Misrach puts considerable emphasis on location. He spends most of his time in the desert, sometimes choosing his locations intuitively, sometimes going to places that ‘call’ to him, and occasionally choosing a spot at random from his Rand-McNally map. After shooting, he groups the images for exhibition.

In an interview with John Caponigro (1998) Misrach expresses how exhibiting is something he finds challenging at times as he feel he is exploiting the negative aspects of man's relationship with nature in his own interests. He counteracts this feeling by sticking to his agenda of politicizing his message of how humans can affect their environment and what the repercussions of that are. Caponigro (1998) expresses the sentiment that land and man share a co-dependant relationship; so that when the land is in peril so are we as inhabitants of that land. Misrach is an artist who brings these perils to light.

As a whole, the strength of the literature in this section lies in duality of its components. The theoretical framework on the values of nature based art production discussed by authors like Congdon, Blandy, Krug and others, is complemented by actual concrete examples of the artists like Goldsworthy, Peterman and Misrach, who create this type of art. Together, they provide the beginning of a methodological foundation, the how and why, to those who, like myself, wish to work in this manner.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY and PROCEDURE

Method:

In developing my method, I looked to others who, like myself, used studio based inquiry. My studio inquiry was a form of qualitative research which involved creation as well as reflective practices. Watrin (1999) maintains that studio production is a form of research because “art seizes the fullness of lived experience by describing, interpreting, creating, reconstituting and revealing meaning - the same tasks of qualitative research” (p.93). Using this model, I created art, while documenting and interpreting my process through sketchbook entries and photos. The sketchbook entries were a combination of journalistic writing, stream of consciousness and notes in point form which included thoughts on the origin and development of my ideas, comments on materials, the meaning I wished to convey through the piece, and the obstacles I encountered as the work progressed. Numerous photographs supplemented my notes as I did not trust myself to be consistent with words. When I was growing up, writing and art making were always completely different activities. Apart from a period of time where I wrote a great deal of poetry for myself, writing was something that had to be done for others as opposed to the art that I did for myself. To this day I realize I have trouble doing the two at once. While both incorporate my emotions and thoughts, writing has always required a great deal more thinking - something I find difficult to do when my mind is lost in the process of creating. As such, I generally reserved my journaling for after the studio session once I had moved to another area, or before I started my art making activities while my mind was still fresh.

In her MA thesis, Caldareri (1996) describes the process of keeping a journal for reflection:

In my creative process, I use reflective inquiry by outlining and describing what it is that I want to say visually; the ideas, emotions, and opinions I want to express, deciding what is the best way to express them and with what materials. Then as the work progresses, I also record the decisions that I make at any given point and try to understand why I made those decisions. I proceed to analyse the flow of thought and action that I recorded to understand how the creative process happens for me, until the art work is completed. Because of reflective inquiry, the understanding I obtained in the studio helps me to guide the student in the class. (p.24)

As an art educator with the intention of bringing what I learned about creating environmental art into the classroom, I felt that the process I followed and the difficulties that I faced could also be present in the works of my students. I believed, like Caldareri, that through recognizing and analysing my own work I would be better equipped to help guide my students both technically and emotionally. I felt that producing my own work in the studio might allow me to accrue information relating to technical and content issues, resulting in what Caldareri describes here,

... [I] have developed certain sensitivities relating to physical, intellectual and emotional understandings, which I translate to the level of the student in my classroom. This understanding allows me to guide students to a level where they can become sensitive to issues, acquire a language of art, practice creativity and experience their own process, just as I experience my process in the studio. (p.117-118)

There were limitations of course, as each situation would be different. Anyone who has ever taught the 'same' class twice knows that even though the material and/or intent is the same, the dynamics of the group and individual personalities can make for large

differences. Even after completing the art, I am aware that not all of the experiences I underwent will transfer to my students, or that I can ever anticipate every challenge my students will encounter in the classroom. These limitations did not negate, however, the value of my own reflective inquiry, as I learnt a great deal through the process.

Ethical Considerations:

As I am the only participant, there were no ethical considerations concerning others. But, if I wished to be true to my belief of environmental consciousness, I had to be aware of ethical concerns as to the owners of the property and to the land itself for the natural materials artwork which was produced *in situ*. The rest of the studio work was completed in my home where I usually conduct my normal art practice. It is an 8' x 10' space with large windows that provide some natural lighting. In this space were two tables, my desk and my various art materials.

Procedures:

Given that I was conducting a studio inquiry to tackle implications for the classroom, I felt that time parameters were very important. I worked under a time constraint of no more than one and a half hours at a time in the studio; this was usually on a day-to-day basis. On the occasions where there was more than one session on a given day, I was sure to make a clear delineation between the two periods (ie: morning and evening). I did this because in the classroom setting students are expected to work consistently for the art period and then move on to another subject at the given time whether they are finished or not. Artists rarely work in this format. If we are not interested in working on a piece, we move on to something else.

If we are moved by our production we can work for hours without a glance at the time. As an art-educator who is also a practising artist, I recognize how I may have forgotten this in my teaching. How many times have I asked a student to hurry up and start working instead of simply thinking? How many times have I seen students excited and engaged in art production, but have to stop abruptly to line up for their next period? Sometimes these things can not be avoided, but in forcing myself to work like a student I believe I was able to experience similar challenges and emotions. In a normal academic year an average public elementary school student will have 36-40 art class periods of approximately one hour each in length. This is the format I used for my studio inquiry.

During 37, one hour to one-and-a-half hour sessions, over the course of a month and a half, I worked on three large pieces. There were 12 to 14 studio sessions dedicated to each project. The sessions not only included my art production but also some of my planning and reflection as that is what I might expect from my students as an art-educator. My production also included research on the individual artists who create similar art so that I could reflect on their intent and process and compare it to my own. The pieces embodied what I feel are the three major 'styles' of environmental art as I have categorized them from the relevant literature. They are: 1) the use of natural materials (environment as a resource), 2) the use of recycled materials (positive action in the conservation of materials) and/or 3) the use of traditional materials but communicate a message concerning environmental awareness (conceptual focus on values and attitudes). While I alternated between the three projects, only one of the categories of environmental art was reflected in each piece.

As the three pieces consisted of differing media with differing meanings, I wished to give them a unifying aspect and decided to use the form of tapestry. The Merriam-Webster

OnLine Dictionary has two definitions for the word tapestry,

1: A heavy handwoven reversible textile used for hangings, curtains, and upholstery and characterized by complicated pictorial designs and 2: something resembling tapestry (as in complexity or richness of design). (Merriam-Webster OnLine, n.d)

With rich elements of complexity and design, but without being handwoven textiles, the artworks were tapestries in the second sense of Webster's definition. To further resemble tapestries, the pieces were worked as 5' x 5' pieces to give them a true to life feeling.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF THE ART

General Discoveries

The creation of these three artworks resulted in the reaffirmation of things I was aware of in my art work, as well as the introduction of new realizations. An analysis of my art journal revealed two predominant themes, one that I was previously aware of and one that came almost as a revelation. The first had to do with feelings of self-confidence and inadequacy. Because this art was being created not only for my own enjoyment but for the purposes of this thesis, a number of entries questioned the quality both of the progress and of the work itself. In fact the first line in my journal, after the outline of the goal for the first session, was “doesn’t feel like art yet.” Another excerpt went, “ I wonder if this feeling of being overwhelmed and nervous has more to do with the scale of the art or the fact that the project is my thesis.” The combination of working on pieces that were so large compared to my usual compositions and the awareness that the project may be the pinnacle of my academic career was very challenging. For weeks I worked on the recycled-materials piece, even stretching some sessions out, doing more research when I should have been working on the traditional materials piece. Instead, the traditional materials piece stayed a blank canvas, gessoed, and nailed to the studio wall. I tried to stay away from it so I wouldn’t feel so guilty about it. By session 19 (out of a max of 40) I still hadn’t truly started it. That day I questioned my feelings as such;

No real challenges except for the fear of putting brush to canvas – do all artists fear what will come out or is it just me? Are my students even more afraid (lack of talent/ experience) or freer (don’t care about expectations/ fun vs. bottom line)?

Unfortunately these were questions that I could not answer through my self-reflection or research and so I put them aside and started to work through the art.

The second theme had to do with the decision-making process. While I was never able to pinpoint or express why I made the choices I made in the past, after reflection I have come up with the formula for all of my artistic decisions. FATE /PRACTICALITY+ AESTHETIC= DECISIONS. Perhaps a little oversimplified, but it summarizes every move I make when producing art. Regardless of the type of art I create or enjoy viewing in or out of the museum setting, I am a formalist at heart. From Impressionism to contemporary art, the pieces I enjoy most are ones that impress me with their sense of line, composition and colour. Though it may be taboo in these times to say I respond to aesthetic beauty in art, that is not to say that it must be a pleasing subject matter. There can be aesthetic beauty in the ugliest of things providing they incorporate certain formal elements. This is the aesthetic of my decision making process. What colour will it be? How does this compliment or detract from the other colours I have already used.? How does the size of this figure affect the overall composition of the piece? Then comes the fate aspect: do I have this colour/material available? Can I make it? Do I already have something that I want to incorporate? How much will that cost if I have to purchase it? A perfect example of this was the recycled-materials piece where I wanted to use a solid 5 foot by 5 foot cardboard backing on which to collage the recycled materials to create the quilt. As **fate** would have it, after reminding my husband of the dimensions that I needed several times, he came home with two pieces of cardboard which were closer to 8'x 3'. Initially I was annoyed and worried that I would have to push back the starting session, but on looking at the pieces of cardboard I realized the **aesthetic** would not be affected by having 4 pieces which could be combined to create the one larger

piece and it would be more **practical** in transporting the piece (something I would up doing several times).

Finally, in the words of artist Sandy Skoglund I found a sentiment I had often experienced but was never able to communicate. In her interview with Walker, Krug and Burkhart (1995) she states;

In my darkest hours when I totally lost faith in art and hated it, because I thought of it in terms of theory as a device to separate the masses from the intelligentsia. You know a device to separate those who know what they are looking at from those who don't know what they're looking at. Those were my darkest hours in terms of art making, when everything I saw in contemporary art looked to me as a thing put out into the world to basically humiliate the unknown person and to make them seem inadequate because they could never grasp this. (Ans. 56)

As a result, each piece attempts to reflect ideas we can all understand and relate to: ourselves, our families and the world around us.

Piece # 1

Figure One shows the natural materials piece. The natural materials piece was the last one completed, although I had intended for it to be the first. While looking for an appropriate site, I learned that I would be going to the oceanfront in Prince Edward Island for a week towards the end of my fore-planned studio time. This is one of my favorite places to commune with nature and so I decided to wait and create the natural material art there. As far as sites go, Martin's Folly is an ideal location for any natural material artist. The contrast between the blue water, the green horizon and the strikingly red sand is a colourist's dream. The beach is a short walk down a path lined with elms, birches and ferns backed by fields of gold wheat and white daisies. It is our own private beach, which was of tantamount importance to me.

I find the process of art creation, particularly with natural materials to be a truly personal and intimate experience.

My process and the art work itself bore both similarities and contrasts to the artists discussed earlier in the review of literature. Like Goldsworthy, to complete this piece I spent several days walking up and down the stretch of beach, “building [my] relationship with the land in layers”. Nils-Udo describes the introduction of artist to site as such, “Anything a man can perceive with his five senses is part of the conception. The nature site should be experienced by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling: also as a kind of Utopian comprehensive work of art, born from nature and sinking back into her” (p.59, 1994). And, as clichéd as it sounds, that’s what I did. I walked along taking in all I could see, from the tall sharp cliffs lining the beach to the blue herons feeding in the shallow waters. I listened to the gentle rolling of the tides, smelled the algae drying in the sun, tasted the salt on my fingers and felt the cool water and hard packed sand beneath my feet. There was potential art media everywhere but it was not without challenge. This excerpt from my journal records my reflection at the time,

I wonder how Goldsworthy performs this task, is he serious or does he do as I do?- hum and sing, dance in the sand, talk to the animals/birds and the Ocean. I feel at one [with the site] but I also lack the initiative to start – I could keep scouting for a long time.

It reminded me of how, in my pilot project, my second grade students were initially a little overly playful, having to adjust to the fact that it wasn’t recess and they were outside. It took them some time to settle down and see what they had to work with, even though they knew the area. I originally dismissed this as a childish trait, but now understand that even as an

adult I needed to reacquaint myself with the area in a way that wasn't so much thinking as partaking. At this stage of the art making process I began to collect some materials I thought I would use, that I knew would not disintegrate or rot until I would need them. Unlike Goldsworthy's use of one or two media at a time (reflected in the one-word titles of his books, *Wood, Stone, Snow*) I prefer to have a range of materials with various textures and colours. Also unlike Goldsworthy who prefers to work with existing lines in nature, I created new ones for this piece. Here is where I encountered several more challenges. While the one to one-and-a-half hour sessions were perfect for the recycled and traditional material pieces and even for the reconnaissance and collecting activities of this piece it was clear that the limited time sessions would not provide sufficient time to create the actual art. Not working with dried flowers or indoors like Therese Chabot, I knew I would have only one shot at creating the piece before the flowers died or it was swallowed up by the rising tide. The actual creation of the natural materials piece took me four hours and so the bulk of the piece was created outside the parameters of my preset time constraints.

Beneath my Feet is a self portrait. It is the recreation of a childhood memory meeting the present. Therese Chabot frequently repeats one phrase throughout the catalogs and artist statements that accompany her exhibitions. It goes, "I am a maker of images that belong to ancient memory, to the accumulated memory of the spirit, that is inside ourselves". This is what *Beneath my Feet* embodies. My reflection before the work began describes this relationship;

All of the places in my life that currently bring me peace have a rag rug, those multi-coloured braided things- there used to be one in our bedroom when we were young- I grew up doing handstands on it and even sleeping on it occasionally – I think the varying colours and textures would suit my artistic style. At the same time I worry that it will not be 'complicated' or sophisticated enough for a thesis- at that point it truly becomes me.

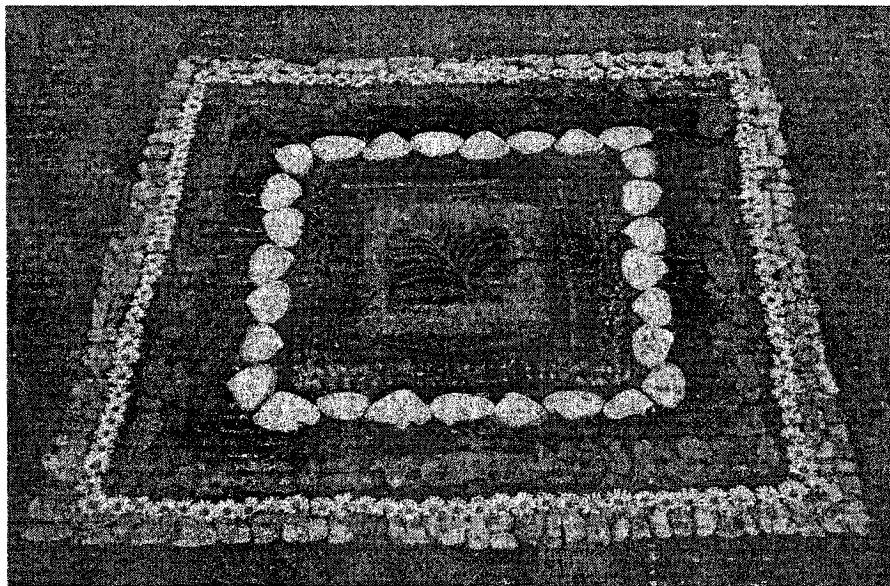


Figure 1- *Beneath my Feet* (2004)



Figure 1 (a)- Cliff view at low tide



Figure1 (b) -At work

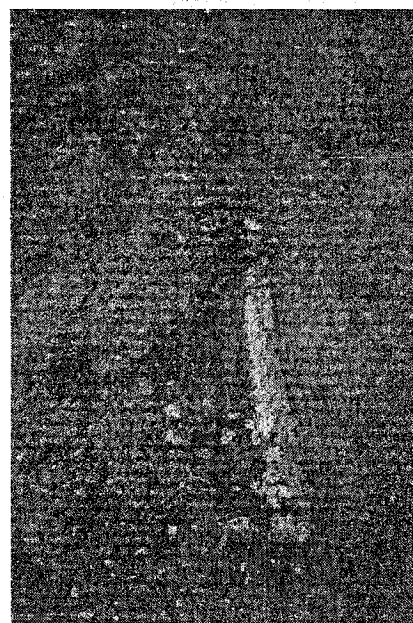


Figure 1 (c)- Following high tide

As a final note, I went back to the beach the following morning to see what had become of the artwork after high tide. I expected to find the materials I had used washed up at the high tide line. Instead I found the top line still exposed, the stones, the daisies perfectly placed where I had buried their stems in the sand and the tiniest bits of bar clams peeking out beneath the sand. The bar clams and the smallest sliver of fern tipped me off to what had become of it. Where sand met art I brushed gently to reveal more of the art perfectly in place and I realized that the tide had come in so gently it simply buried the piece whole. It reminded me of a line from Grande's (2004) *Balance: Art and Nature* where he quotes Goldsworthy who describes how at least one of his pieces created 16 years before in Morcambe Bay was still there buried beneath the sand. It is hard to describe the feeling I have that my artwork, though technically ephemeral still exists under the red sand, like a private gift from myself to the ocean that was graciously accepted, and tucked away.

Piece #2

You Are What You Eat, the recycled materials piece shown in Figure Two, was the work that I was least experienced with in terms of both the medium and process. Therefore, it produced the highest number of challenges and errors. *You Are What You Eat* is a family portrait, inspired by the recent losses of my grandfather and great grandmother. Through my studio practice for this thesis, I was reaffirmed that I was able to work in a "green" manner and connect with the environment while still allowing my art to reflect other issues that are important to me, such as family. The format of this tapestry is a quilt, as quilts have had a long history of individual and family importance. In her article Speaking of Quilts:

Voices from the Late 20th Century, Horton (1999) describes the role of quilts: “We have adopted quilts as a symbol of what we value about ourselves....traditional quilts exist largely in a private sphere inside the home, within families”(para. 1 & 7). To further reinforce the feeling of home and family I chose a traditional ‘Log Cabin’ quilt pattern whose central red square represents the hearth.

My process involved a lot of trial and error as my research on known artists did not describe in enough detail how it was that they manipulated their materials. Unlike the work of Charlie Lucas, my recycled material had to be altered (cut into appropriate size strips) before I could use it. As for Nevelson and Peterman, I didn’t come across any information on whether they left the recycled material raw until the moment of use or processed it in some way in anticipation of a future project. In my own work, I discovered that the raw material often took up too much space (as with Nevelson, my studio space is also my home). Additionally, I often found myself almost too embarrassed to have people visit because my apartment was literally littered with trash. On the other hand, the one time I tried to process the materials before I was ready to use them, the lengths turned out all wrong which presented yet another challenge.

The recycled materials were by far the most difficult of the three media for me to use, both physically, practically, and philosophically. From a physical standpoint some of the materials were difficult to manipulate even with my adult hands. From a practical standpoint, because I was collecting food packaging from family members, I had to rely on them to provide the packing from their homes. To this day one quilt piece was not completed honestly because I could not get the materials I needed from one family member. In addition to the difficulty I had getting my own family to put packaging aside, I also struggled with

everyone's values including my own. Family members 'censored' their waste so it did not include items that they perceived to be unhealthy, embarrassing or would make them look cheap. My mother repeated over and over (as I ransacked her garbage to collect items I needed) that she was disgusted by the fact that I was creating art with garbage. When people are unfamiliar with something, they are challenged by it. With natural materials, even though my family didn't necessarily understand it, it was something pure and beautiful and so it made sense. To create art with something used and disposable conflicted with their value system. Finally, in pushing others to give me what I wanted I came across my own unsettling realization, revealed here in an excerpt from my journal,

Even though I knew going in to this about environmental issues I am still shocked by what we throw away EVERY DAY! We truly are a disposable society and this weighs on me a great deal. I collected tons of materials and I was only working with food wrappers/labels → bottles/ bags/ cans/ other packaging/ and street trash are all still out there.



Figure 2 (a)- Detail of Eli and George

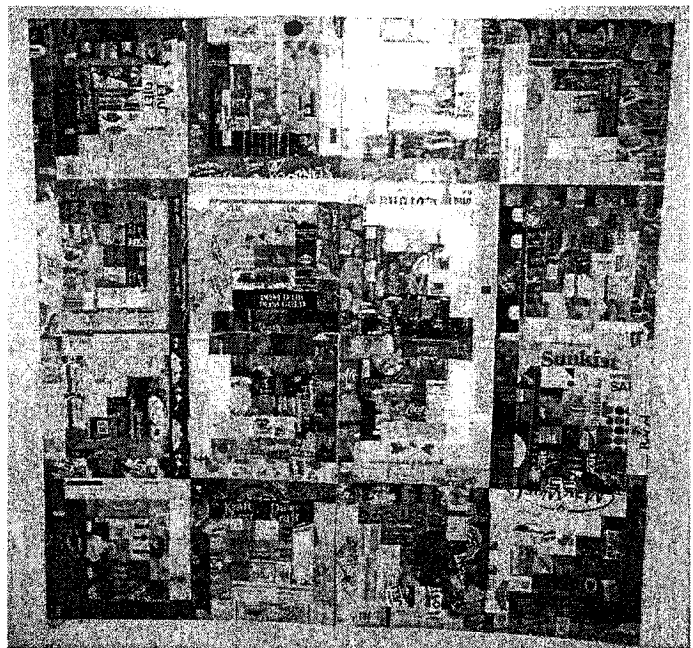


Figure 2- *You Are What You Eat (2004)*



Figures 2 (b) & (c)- Contrast of volume of raw material before and after processing

On a positive note, there were also many benefits to using recycled materials. They were free, easily or readily available if you took the time to collect them, and came in a wide range of colours. The latter was important to me because unlike Nevelson's work, most of my own artwork, and this one in particular, has a strong emphasis on colour.

Piece #3

Harmony of Life (Fig. #3) was inspired by a clipping from a *National Geographic* magazine I found as I was researching animals for another art work I had been working on. The clipping had a blurb on species classification and a computer generated 'tapestry' of icons. "Life's Rich Tapestry" as it was titled, was a circular artistic arrangement consisting of 386 clip-art images representing the living things that inhabit planet earth. The number of icons was determined by the proportionality of the number of each species for any given group. For example, there were 214 beetle like icons to represent the 963,000 species of insects, nine lobster like icons to represent the 40,000 species of crustaceans and two lizard type icons to represent the 10,500 species of reptiles and amphibians. It struck me as very interesting how small humans were and yet how significant they were in the survival of all of the rest (*National Geographic's* representation used a singular bear to represent approximately 4000 mammal species). I believed that the concept expanded, would make a visually intriguing full size tapestry and communicate a message of our roles as humans in relation to the other living things on the earth.

Initial decisions in the process had a lot to do with how I wanted to represent each species. What type of bird/fish/insect was I going to use? Which would be more aesthetically appealing? Which would communicate my message better? How should they be arranged? In addition to aesthetic form, I enjoy the intellectual stimulation of symbolism in art. Therefore, it was important for me to incorporate symbolism within my own. For my intent with this piece to be clear it was important to represent humans as the most powerful, though one of the smallest number of species presented. The structure of *Harmony of Life* is loosely

based on the layout of an orchestra as a metaphor for our relationships with the living things that share our world. Each category of species plays it's own role but together they create harmony. As such, a human becomes the conductor, their decisions affecting who plays and who doesn't. How to represent the human was my most difficult challenge. I am not a figurative artist by nature or training and was worried I wouldn't do him/her justice. I toyed with the idea of incorporating a mirror so that each person would see themselves as the conductor but the layout didn't allow for that possibility. I settled on collaging an image of a human but then had to decide who it would be: presidents, activists, people in my everyday life, God, myself... all crossed my mind. It was my sister who suggested the final result. The human portrayed in *Harmony of Life* is Noah of the Ark, downloaded and blown up from an on-line Bible for children. For me, Noah represents the original steward of all living things, and allows me to incorporate my religious beliefs in my art.

Media decisions again followed my aesthetic + fate/practicality formula for art making. The working surface became canvas as opposed to paper, for its seamless and true fabric-like aesthetic and its durable and flexible practicality. Species were added group by group in varying media for their colours, textures, balance and availability. A challenge I encountered again and again was the urge to use natural materials like sticks and shells; but I set out to keep the three categories separate and I stuck to my agenda.

Harmony of Life had the longest process of the three pieces but perhaps still not long enough. Walker, Krug and Burkhart (1995) describe how Sandy Skoglund's six-month process frees her up from what she sees as contemporary problems of having too many ideas and feeling too conscious of herself trying to make art. Maybe if I had given myself more time between sessions some of my similar challenges wouldn't have been an issue. Despite

that difference, this piece most paralleled the work of other artists that I had researched. Like the works of Stahlecker and Misrach, *Harmony of Life* tries to convey a message of what we are losing and destroying while paying tribute to the beauty of nature. The words of Black Elk, a 19th Century Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, best describe



Figure 3- *Harmony of Life* (2004)

this piece;

It is the story of all life that is holy and good to tell, and all of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit. (as cited in Matilsky, 1992, p.5)



Figure3 (a)-Artist at Work



Figure 3 (b)- Detail of Fish

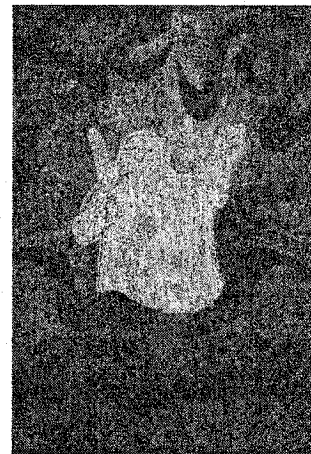


Figure 3 (c) - Detail of Noah

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Personal Conclusion:

Working with a nature-based production approach challenged me to bring my art to a new level. *Beneath my Feet*, *You Are What You Eat*, and *Harmony of Life* are each replete with personal meaning that has great significance for me. I feel that despite my limited financial means as a student I was able to create meaningful pieces of art. I also felt that if I entered the studio tomorrow I could continue to work in this fashion without feeling bound to a specific medium or the message I wish to convey.

Working through nature-based art production is not without doubts. In his book, Grande (2004) questions the social value of work done by natural material artists;

Prominent environmental artists... express these concerns by creating natural constructions: installing plantings, welding ice assemblages, making dandelion chains, grafting tree forms, arranging patterns of leaves and berries in idyllic backwood settings far from the hue and cry of urban centers where most of us live. But the question arises, while these works may present themselves as ecologically sensitized, how socially involved is this new vision? (p.3)

However, I feel that change need not be appreciated only on a large scale. I know I can't necessarily change other people, but I can make my own choices. If my individual studio practice makes me a better person then I can only be a better example for my students, who in turn (and through their own art practice) might become better examples for others. Since my first peek at Penone's work I've looked at every outdoor experience a little more closely, at times like a double edged sword. Every leaf has a different edge, each flower petal another colour, but I have also come to notice every scrap of paper in my yard and how many garbage bags there are on my street. Through this, I have come to appreciate the

abundance of living things that can be found in my everyday experience and how my choices affect them. This is what I want for my students as well.

The other day, a month after the completion of the artworks, I was in the hardware store picking up painter's tape to paint the difficult trims of my new home. I was almost at the cash before I turned around and went all the way back to the aisle to exchange it for a thinner roll. Why? Because there would be less waste after I was done. Was this way of thinking the result of a 'greener' art practice? I can't say for sure but, the year before, I bought the thick one.

Pedagogical Implications

As a result of my experiences in the studio, there were a number of issues that have implications for the classroom. In the interest of clarity, I have divided them into two categories: practical and educational implications.

Practical Implications

The foremost practical aspect is the issue of time. Through my own artistic process I developed empathy for my students who habitually work in such a structured time parameter. I found my time was most productive when I set clear and manageable goals at the beginning of the session. This is something that will be of importance in the classroom especially if the project is one that will take several sessions. In addition, it is never reiterated to often or too loudly the importance to give oneself a little extra time. Things always take longer than we think. While these are common sense implications and ones that are relevant to any teaching situation. They are particularly important when working

with something unfamiliar like a new art medium. This was best demonstrated by my work on the recycled materials piece. The first few squares on the quilt each needed an entire session to complete; but as I familiarized myself with the process I was able to complete two to three squares per session.

My studio work showed that a nature-based art production approach is possible within the time constraints of an elementary classroom. The only instance when I was unable to work in my pre-defined sessions was for the final construction of the natural materials piece. This challenge is one that can be avoided by using smaller scale projects (as I did with my pilot project) or by working indoors like artists Therèse Chabot. It is also conceivable that a day could be put aside for working in situ, if organized as a class field trip. This could indeed be an enriching experience for students.

Materials are another practical consideration. Natural and recycled materials are cheap and readily available in every home or school. In addition to reducing the need for other art media in the classroom (saving money and the trees that would have to be cut down to produce them) recycled materials reduce the amount of waste that would have otherwise been sent to a landfill or recycling plant. If and when this artwork is discarded, as is the case with most class work, it will not be joined by new material art which would have been produced in its place. However, as my own studio process revealed even 'green' materials are not without cost. Both natural and recycled materials must be collected and stored for a period of time before you will be certain to have enough to complete a class project. This was a problem I encountered both in the pilot project and in my studio practice. The volume required for storage of accumulating materials as well as the artworks themselves, can take up a lot of space in the classroom. Additional considerations with

recycled materials include potential odors, difficulty in processing, and/or students' allergies. When working with natural materials *in situ* both weather and location are factors that can be unpredictable at times, a challenge I faced both in the pilot project and through my own studio practice. Finally, one of the greatest dangers of using natural materials is not collecting or working with them in a respectful manner, therefore causing more detriment to the environment than positive awareness and defeating the purpose of working in this manner.

Educational Implications

Many of the educational implications I encountered through my work and wish to discuss here are confirmations of the educational values I presented earlier in the rationale. Despite the practical challenges of using natural and recycled materials, there is an inherent educational value. Using unfamiliar materials expands students' knowledge of what art entails. Working with natural materials that already possess their own shades and shapes challenges students in their use of formal qualities like colour, line and texture. Nature-based art production need not prevent students from working with traditional materials. As shown through both my studio practice and the practice of known artists where paint (oil, watercolour and acrylic), printing, pastels (chalk and oil), conte, collage, ink, sculpture, photography, paper-making and installation all came into the art making. Students are able to approach and engage in nature-based art through many different views. As Green (1996) claims, instruction that "values diversity and that is inclusionary in its scope teaches children that education is more than the acquisition of facts and information, that it is also a time for exploration and inquiry" (p.19).

This leads us to the issue of connecting art to real life, making it both the learning and the art itself more meaningful and authentic. By addressing environmental concerns and guiding students to look at their surroundings more critically, the artworks that the students produce can reflect their real-life experiences and therefore, become more meaningful. In Green's (1996) words, teaching art that is environmentally conscious "makes clear that what transpires in the classroom is not experienced in a vacuum but is rather a reflection of human experience and the world at large" (p.19). In a similar vein, art educator Vincenza Caldereri explains that "by introducing very real concerns, [she, as an art educator] facilitates the process by which students engage in meaningful content rather merely manipulating materials" (p.98, 1996). Finally, nature-based art production gives students the opportunity to take deliberate action concerning the world around them. As Blandy, Congdon and Krug (1998) maintain, environmental art is about this action that can be accomplished through diverse artworks. "The interconnectedness of art, art education, and cultural and ecological restoration is a form of stewardship ... direct[ing] people's creative energies to heal fragile places" (p.238).

I feel that nature-based art production can and should be incorporated into art practice in the studio and in the classroom. The key to successful art making with this process is not only in valuing the materials but using them to communicate messages that are important to the art maker, be it of a personal or social nature. It is not enough to use natural and recyclable materials because they are free, they should be used because they draw awareness to the natural environment that surrounds us and how our choices affect that environment. This will ultimately lead to practices that will sustain our environment for further generations.

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