The Visual Journal as A/r/tographic Inquiry: The Learning Processes Among Art Education Graduate Students Through Artmaking and Discussion Workshops

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates the visual journaling experiences of four art education graduate students: Lara, Nancy, Sha, and myself. The multicultural backgrounds of this group have brought unique perspectives on living, artmaking, and art education. I intended to conduct this study in person at the university. Unfortunately, as I prepared my research proposal, the COVID-19 pandemic began to force all academic activities to the online mode. This research illustrates our lives during the pandemic, an unprecedented event, and how we adjusted our daily routines and transformed into new creative beings during this recent phenomenon. The research data consists of six weekly meetings on Zoom. Each session offered an abundance of life stories and art-making experiences based on a creative prompt that served to illustrate our lives as artists, teachers, and researchers. By making art in visual journals independently and collectively, we connected our lives' visual and textual aspects and addressed the importance of community as an active learning sphere.

In summary, my research informs how art educators have lived, created, and connected during the pandemic as a group. Two questions emerged that guided this study: How do we engage with each other virtually? What are the benefits and limitations of online learning?

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all artists and educators who are looking for purposes in their life journeys. I hope to bring you creative energy, peace, and prosperity.

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In loving memory of my aunt Li Cao (1972–2021), gone but never forgotten.

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Chapter 1: Life is a Journey of Continuous Inquiries

> The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed.
>
> - Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*

This quote resonates with my sensations and views of life, and it also reflects the central theme of this thesis. If everything in life and learning is predictable and leads to ideal results, then living would become monotonous and limited. Learning is life long and can happen at any moment, and it is the seeking of the unknown that leads me to find the purpose of being an artist and art educator. I am aware that there are endless possibilities in the world in which we live, act, and interact with the self and others, and these potentials are always inclusive of human nature such as emotions, knowledge and skills, behaviours, and communications. To understand this phenomenon better, I started this research, joined by Nancy, Shaghayegh (Sha), and Lara.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of my research is to investigate the visual journaling experiences of four art education graduate students: Lara, Nancy, Sha, and myself. We came from different cultural backgrounds and have lived and travelled to different countries around the world, thus bringing unique perspectives on living, artmaking, and art education. In this research, our visual

journaling experiences were conducted through six weekly meetings on the virtual platform Zoom and on our own time during the six-week period.

I had planned to do this research as in-person workshops in the graduate students' classroom at Concordia University. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic began to take effect as I prepared my research proposal, so I had to adjust my plan to the online realm. This research illustrates our lives during the unprecedent event of the COVID-19 pandemic and of how we were living and adjusting our daily routines for this new phenomenon. The workshops were conducted every Monday from November 16 to December 21, 2020, with the final group interview conducted on January 25, 2021. Each meeting offered an abundance of life stories of how we came to be artists, teachers, and researchers. In summary, my research is to inform how art educators have lived, created, and connected with each other during the pandemic as a community. My questions are: How do we engage with each other virtually? What are the benefits and limitations of online learning?

Three questions that initiated this research also frame this study: 1) What is the pedagogic role of visual journals in identity development as an a/r/tographer? 2) Are visual journals transformative for artists and teachers? 3) How do my participants, my fellow art educators, take up a/r/tographic renderings in their visual journals?

As an individual who has been working in visual journals for ten years, I am bringing strong background knowledge to my research. Since I am both the researcher and participant in this research, I am aware of researcher bias. I always asked open-ended questions and stayed neutral toward the responses and avoided subjective interventions. My knowledge and skills in

art journaling were motivational for the participants, who wished to build a more consistent creative habit, yet I appreciated the participants' variety of artistic styles and procedures.

Nancy, Shaghayegh (Sha), Lara, and I are current graduate students in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University. Nancy, 50 years old during this research, was born and grew up in eastern Canada and has travelled to many countries. She was a second-year PhD student at the time of this study. Sha was 36 years old, born and raised in Iran. Lara was 25 years old, born and raised in Lebanon. Both Sha and Lara came to Canada in 2019 to attend the Art Education Graduate program.

Our stories and life experiences were shared through conversations and art journaling activities during the workshops. Chapter 4 illustrates how we sustained ourselves in artistic ways during the COVID-19 pandemic by incorporating the prompts into our daily living and art-journaling. The workshops lasted for about 90 minutes each week; a month after the last workshop, a 2-hour group interview was conducted. In the first session, we began by learning more about each other with talks and discussions about our life stories of how we became art educators. The first three sessions were laden with conversations questioning our creative being, influenced by life circumstances. We spent more time making art together in the last three sessions as we felt more comfortable doing so. A month after the workshop period, we re-connected for a focus-group interview, sharing our feelings about our personal and group creative experiences during the time.

Overall, this research is significant as it will inform the art education field on how graduate students work in visual journals and learn together in the virtual realm during the age of COVID-19, pushing us to re-consider the possibilities of lifelong learning and adult education

in physically long-distant connections and intimate virtual collaborations. More specifically, it will illuminate the concepts of a/r/tography, and how the renderings and other conceptual perspectives are applied during this challenging era.

Background: My Visual Journal Practice

Since I was a child, I have always enjoyed drawing and painting and reading picture books. I still remember the days in primary school when I designed my own newspapers and brochures with handmade illustrations and writings—including comics, historic stories, and fun facts that attracted attention from many of my classmates and teachers. This continued through my high school years with creative class assignments. The pleasure of creating and sharing my artworks with others has kept me going forward with my artistic practice, and so I decided to pursue a BFA degree.

I discovered the concept of visual/art journals in my undergraduate years, when I started following some artists' sketchbook work on social media. Then in my third-year drawing class, my instructor gave us an assignment of filling a sketchbook in any art medium and approach as we preferred. So I started my first visual journal in a small sketchbook, drawing my daily surroundings such as food and drinks and the scenery around my neighbourhood. I wasn't very consistent in the beginning as I journaled only a few times a week. As time went by, I began to pick up momentum and journal more regularly each day when I felt the need to slow down and contemplate in the middle or at the end of a busy day. I also gathered with like-minded people, finding interesting spots in the city to sit down together to sketch in our sketchbooks. I have also been sharing my work on social media over the years to make connections with others virtually.

This thesis research is inspired by my ongoing practice of visual journaling. In the past nine years, I have been drawing and writing in my visual journals as a way to engage with the world using all my senses; at the same time, this practice revitalizes my role as a teacher, artist, and now a researcher as well. In my experience, a visual journal is a mobile way of being creative and engaging in living inquiry; it is a practice I apply where I could be sitting down in the corner of a street to contemplate the sunset and buildings, and then back to my living room to meditate over some fruits, creating more images in the process. By creating in both public and private spaces and then sharing on social media (specifically on my Instagram account, 'caobecky' and YouTube channel, 'Becky Cao'), I am creating new interpretations for my practice. I extend this experience to this study by creating visual journals with a group of participants to find meanings beyond the self.

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of My Practice

After teaching in the community for a few years upon completing my BFA degree, I decided to come back to school to explore issues and topics that inform my teaching practice. As I progressed in the program, I began to identify shifts in my understandings as an artist, teacher, and researcher. I also started inquiring autobiographically to assess what pedagogic values are evident in my visual journaling practice, how that speaks about my attitude to art education, and how I share my passion for visual journals with peers in the process. In a paper for the first semester of my MA program, I did a self-study of my creative being through narrative inquiry. In another paper, I discussed art journaling as arts-based research and its role in a/r/tography. Both papers have built a strong base for me to connect my creative practice and identity with academic theories and values in art education, and now I am going further

with those concepts in this thesis research. Blair (2016) inspired me with this research as she expresses how "[t]he arts can bring pleasure and a sense of wonder to research. This does not make the research less rigorous, but it can make research more fun and meaningful for the researcher and participants" (p. 71).

Over the years, the practice of visual journaling has become a meditative space for creative expression and an outlet for creating a positive rhythm that disturbs the blank moments and dissolves negativities in my days. During the months of the pandemic, my world changed to a confined space, with limited in-person connections with others beyond my immediate family. It was, and remains, challenging to find meaning as a teacher and artist. I have a willingness to break out of the monotonous moments by staying attuned to the scenes inside and outside the home, using senses such as seeing, hearing, and touch (Irwin, 2003, pp. 65–68). I began to pay more attention to nature outside the windows—how the clouds unfold in the sky, the sounds of animals, and how the foliage change colours over the seasons. Over the months, I have done many sketches of the window views in my home (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1

Cao, Y. W. (2020). Winter Home Window Views and Other Domestic Objects

Figure 2

Cao, Y. W. (2021). Spring Home Window Views and Kitchen Items

These journal entries display the flow of time and bring to awareness that while the view may be the same, no two days can be the same. Each sketch was done in an average of 15 minutes to capture the fast-fleeting phenomena. I was able to use the different languages of the medium to express my sensations, allowing me to improvise and create a spontaneous process.

Many people have wondered why I journal from real-life. My feelings are similar to the way Irwin (2006) responded to a stranger who asked a similar question while she was photographing on her walk:

> I need to stop and notice the extraordinary in the ordinary. I need to notice the opportunities in my day for aesthetic revelation. I need to embrace those in-between spatial and temporal occasions when I can create or feel creative. (p. 76)

My visual journaling practice is a research methodology that involves "spiritual, sensory, and perceptual awareness to everyday experiences" (de Cosson, 2003, as cited in Irwin, 2006, p. 77). The drawings and watercolours in my visual journals are not "literal copying of objects" but reflecting emotions and ideas associated with my personal identity and social life (Dewey, 2005, p. 6). In this research, I shared these concepts with the participants to help them sense the qualities behind their visual journal experiences.

While our lives are often full of difficult circumstances, I have found visual journaling an effective way to search for harmony, order, and peace in the chaos. As time went by, I found the neglected aspects of life and my inner world, similar to Irwin (2006)'s walking pedagogy, "[becoming] attentive to personal, spiritual, and aesthetic learning needs" (p. 75). In addition, I feel that staying calm and still can generate "wise and worthwhile actions" (Leggo, 2005, p. 188). This experience is precious for an art educator to have; as Leggo (2005) has stated, "[our] world is a frantic world, frenetic and frenzied with false hopes and facile solutions," and we need teachers that can "rise out of stillness," who have "imagination, spirit, and humanness by being sensually receptive and perceptive" (pp. 187–188).

In a similar way, Sameshima (2008) suggested that we are able to generate new knowledge in our ordinary everyday living by being reflective: as she explained, "[every] living moment is a possible moment for realization, contemplation, or action" (p. 32). As COVID-19 persists, we tend to become anxious and insecure about life. While self-isolating at home as an artist, teacher, and researcher, I have been engaged in "heartful living" as defined by Sameshima (2008) through living and learning through the continuous practice of visual journaling (p. 32). When I sketch in visual journals, I am able to trace my thoughts, feelings, and sensations, much as Scott-Shield (2016) recognized "understanding knowledge as fleeting, experience as temporal and thinking as rhythmic" (p. 8).

In this study, I tried to incorporate my sensitivity and positive attitude to play an influencing role in the group's learning and visual journaling experiences. Nancy, Sha, and Lara already had visual journal and collaborative experiences before the start of this project, and they decided to join in because they wanted to explore this practice further along with academic methodologies. Apparently, our little community was formed many months before my research started, as all participants had joined my visual journal workshop in March 2020. During our times together as colleagues and friends, we have studied and created art together and have known each other personally. We think these aspects formed a strong base for extending our relationships through this research and generating research results that cannot be easily found in other community situations.

The Layout of This Research

In Chapter 2, I look at several theoretical perspectives that support the process of this research. In particular, I examine how individuals work in visual journals as a consistent habit,

and how they influence one another through sharing journal entries and communicating artistic concepts. This study contains both individual and collective experiences of how we understand and work in visual journals using our personal art styles. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological approaches that construct these experiences and outcomes: case study, a/r/tography, phenomenology, and life writing. These methodologies help to generate the stories of the workshops, while Chapter 4 describes the individual life vignettes that illustrate our identity development and how visual journaling is a transformative experience. Next, I analyze and interpret the information emerged from the collected data in Chapter 5, then discuss the educational significance and limitations of this study in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

After reflecting on my visual journal practice and how it relates to my perspective of living and being an artist and teacher, I began to search for works of literature that support my thoughts and guide me through this research. In this chapter, I investigate theories from literature that suggest concepts and methods to contemplate, reflect on, and express our ways of being as artist and teachers. My research extends these ideas to the current context and how online learning offers a means to advance discourses meaningfully and holistically.

A/r/tography

As Springgay et al. (2005) has explained, a/r/tography is an established practice in the education field as a type of arts-based research; it can be a methodology moving beyond existing qualitative research criteria and an interdisciplinary practice based on living inquiry, to create openings and "create presence in absence in loss, shift, and rupture" (p. 897). The practitioners of a/r/tography are pushing for new ways to understand phenomena beyond the surface and to uncover multi-layered meanings through performative, provocative, and poetic practices (Springgay et al., 2005; Irwin, 2003, 2006; Lee et al., 2019; Cutcher & Irwin, 2017; Triggs et al., 2014).

As an a/r/tographer, I am adapting to the current teaching and learning context in new ways, to create meaning using my senses, body, mind, and emotions, embodied in my visual journals (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). For this study, I know that the research process is always uncertain, as knowledge is created in unconscious ways during the visual journal process, more so than cognitive; with time and continuous practice, new meanings appear through retrospection (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). After all, the experience of being an

a/r/tographer is to “produce knowledge that is not already categorized” (Lee et al., 2019, p. 682).

A/r/tography as a research method is “attentive to the sensual, tactile, and unsaid aspects of artist/research/teacher’s lives” based on six renderings (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). My participants were aware that the six renderings are not separated practices or phenomenon, but they are in intrinsic relationships with one another in the form of aesthetic inquiry (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). The renderings helped us to ponder our identities as art educators in the COVID-19 pandemic and break out of our past conceptions about what living and learning can be. When almost every kind of communications suddenly shifted to the online realm, we had to re-imagine a learning space and transform our identities. As suggested by Irwin and Leggo (2013), we incorporated living inquiry into our art journaling process and everyday life by observing, questioning, analyzing, and interpreting our personal and social contexts (p. 4). By allowing time for conversations in the workshops, the participants were able to acknowledge their perspectives, life stories, and hopes, forming a holistic understanding of our group context along with the visual journal processes (Irwin & Leggo, 2013, p. 6).

The a/r/tographic renderings are lively, suggesting “theoretical spaces for exploring artistic ways of knowing and being,” not strict methods with pre-determined rules and results (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). The learning time and space are never-ending and focus not only on the processes of artmaking and teaching but, as Triggs et al (2014) described, “a practice of sensitizing methods and bodies to feelings of affecting and being affected: continuous events of perception” (p. 23). By taking this idea into my research, I view the process of visual journaling as not passively looking at our surroundings and making a copy of

reality, but rather connectiong and combinating all of the body's senses: responding, shifting, and renewing in the fleeing moments of the everyday (Triggs, 2014, pp. 24–25). After which we encounter what may be described as real "conscious awareness" of what we have experienced, and thus reaching to new territories of knowledge never imagined (Triggs, 2014, p. 30). On the other hand, Ramsden (2016) proposes that a/r/tographic research place more emphasis on seeking knowledge in the "mundane and boring" everyday encounters, and in so doing, break out of the usual daily routines by changing the course of actions (p. 62). This informs my research as the weekly creative prompts are unusual art-making approaches that hold potential, and possibly generate "change in perceptions, habits, and assumptions" (Ramsden, 2016, p. 62).

Our lives became busier than usual during the pandemic due to personal and academic reasons. Therefore, it was crucial to address a "slow scholarship" as suggested by Cutcher and Irwin (2017), by finding time in the week to sit down or take a walk in the neighbourhood to sketch or photograph for the weekly prompt. We temporarily left the chaos of life and entered a space to "deeply and gently engage with our wonderings and wanderings experimentally" (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017, p. 118). A number of a/r/tographic studies are suggesting the value of slowing down and being attuned to the qualities of time and space (Irwin, 2006; Lee et al., 2019). Irwin (2006) described her a/r/tographic experience of having an excursion in the forest using the methods of walking and photographing her sensory experiences (pp. 75–80). She accentuated the importance of "perceiving and receiving" the everyday surroundings with the attitude of "wonder, surrender, and attunement" to embrace unexpected occurrences that may lead us to "transformative spaces of possibilities" (Irwin, 2006, p. 78). On the other hand,

Lee et al. (2019) explored three propositions by walking to search for "personally meaningful, fragmentary, situated, and embodied understandings," as the same proposition generated different outcomes for each participant (p. 682). They stated that "[movement] can be immediate and tangible, slow and gestured, or theoretical and abstract" (Lee et al., 2019, p. 682), which means that drawing, painting, and writing in visual journals can be a way of a/r/tographic inquiry through hand gestures connected with our spiritual and conceptual evocations.

Visual journaling as an a/r/tographic process intersects the personal and professional because living, learning, and teaching are always "inextricably connected" (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, p. 9). As the facilitator of the workshops, I showed my care and appreciation for the participants' lives and artwork while sharing my experiences and passion. I have done the same for my other art classes online during the pandemic as I truly value "the connection between individuals that encompass a strong personal relationship based on trust" (Kalin et al., 2009, p. 12). In addition, I empowered students by encouraging them to share their past life and creative experiences, including successes and challenges; to generate connections and reverberations; and eventually build up a learning space that "encompass[es] collaborative, transformational relationships that emphasize fluidity and reciprocal learning while challenging the hierarchical assumptions" (Kalin et al., pp. 18–19). Gouzouasis et al. (2013) displayed stories of pre-service teachers engaged in a/r/tographic inquiries by exploring ways to "becoming pedagogical," including self-study and creating artworks while learning about a/r/tography (pp. 10–18). In a similar way, for my research I asked appropriate questions to engage the participants to inquire about their own lives in their journal entries because our experiences

and feelings are the root of artistic expression. This leads to the realm of phenomenology, which I discuss in the next section.

Phenomenology

The domain of phenomenology is expansive, requiring many years of study to decipher the philosophical topics within it. Over the course of this research, I have read a number of related books and articles, yet I am aware that my understanding of phenomenology is still limited. For this thesis paper, I am focusing more on contemporary studies that I found relevant to my research.

Creswell (2013) remarked that phenomenology originates from the writings of a German mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), whose views were expanded by modern philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (p. 77). In recent times, many more scholars have been discussing areas of phenomenology by echoing, questioning, and expanding on past assumptions (van Manen, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Breuer, 2020; Gugutzer, 2020). In other recent research, Strom et al. (2018) has put phenomenological perspectives into practice through self-study research.

During our Zoom workshops, through seeing each other's portraits in the form of video on our own computer screens and audios, we generated the "felt-bodily communication" in "solidary" ways (Gugutzer, 2020, p. 6). We communicated in a solitary way because we were kilometres apart in our own homes, yet the Zoom platform was temporarily joining us together using video and audio, making it possible for us to "affect each other and thus making an impact on [our] respective actions" (Gugutzer, 2020, p. 6). In fact, we were unable to have real eye contact with each other as we just stared at our own computer screen. In an interesting

way, we also spent a lot of time looking at our own faces on the computer screen. Moreover, each participant and I have our own *personal situation*, which is made up of our "personal character" and "personal felt bodily disposition" (Gugutzer, 2020, p. 10). As we came together as colleagues and then formed a creative group in this research, we constructed *joint situations* (p. 10). All these phenomena above can be summarized as posthuman, as Strom et al. (2018) suggested:

> Posthumanism offers ways to conceptualize our collective as multiplicity, account for the relational and material aspects of our work, address the agency of non-human actors (such as technology) in our collaboration, and investigate our self-study practices as dynamic, complex, contextualized, situated phenomena. (p. 3)

This research project consisting of six weekly workshops is an institution that embodied our "felt bodily-based rules, norms, judgements, expectations, fears, hopes, etc. linked to it" (Gugutzer, 2020, p. 12). For example, not finishing a visual journal entry for the week or being late to the workshop could have had a detrimental effect on a successful research procedure. Since the participants are my academic colleagues, they cared a lot about establishing order and stability as art educators and as contributors to my research, and they consistently demonstrated a deep and ongoing commitment to the weekly journal prompts and conversations.

In this research, the participants and I felt and continue to feel that our virtual interactions on Zoom were an extension of our real beings; we were able to feel each other with more sensation compared to others we had never met in person because we had engaged with each other in real-life settings many months before. Our previous in-person interactions

were so important in triggering high engagement and deep conversations in the Zoom meetings because we had built trust and knowledge about one another before, despite the *loss of corporeality* such as breathing the same air, touching one another, observing the same view or objects (Breuer, 2020, p. 5). Yet we were able to resonate with each other through strong emotions and narratives, and through video and audio that gave us a new perception of one another's bodies, merging with empirical experiences we learned about each other in real life many months before (p. 6). For instance, in some moments during the Zoom meetings, we felt that the virtual world disappeared and the distance between us dissolved while in deep engagement, and we sensed an illusion of facing each other just as we did in the classroom many months prior. This is the phenomenon described by Breuer (2020), where "both real and virtual worlds and bodies merge into each other by way of sensation, so that the world resonates with its virtual pair to the extreme of collapsing into one another" (p. 9). Overall, we truly valued our times together before the pandemic. As Breuer notes, "our lifeworld is endowed with a surplus of vital significance that no virtual reality may ever match" (p. 9).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) discussed the ideas of rhizomes and nomadology in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, and they discussed key concepts that apply to my study: territorization, deterritorization, and re-territorization (pp. 351–423). In terms of nomadology, the participants and I have always been moving around different parts of the world; we prefer exploring and living in new territories rather than staying in one space all the time. For example, Sha, Lara, and I had moved all the way from the other side of the world to Canada; Nancy had travelled all over the continents including Europe and Africa. Moving made us connect with new situations; thus today, we see ourselves with new possibilities and we are

releasing our potentials. This is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's discussions about the games of 'Chess and Go,' that each new move of the player is "coding and decoding" and "territorializing and de-territorializing" spaces in the virtual space and time (p. 353).

After all, phenomenology is not just theory and definitions but can be put into practice as van Manen (2007) pointed out: "[in] some sense all phenomenology is oriented to practice—the practice of living" (p. 13), and it is "challenged to free itself of calculative rationality" (p. 20). This point echoes the central concept of a/r/tography; as van Manen further stated, we need to move out of our comfortable "routines, habituations, and kinesthetic memories" to evoke and reflect on emerging meanings that are "corporeal, relational, temporal, situational, and actional" (p. 22).

Visual Journals

There is a wide range of styles and approaches to doing visual journals, and this artistic practice has been in the world for hundreds of years. Leonardo da Vinci used sketchbooks to record his observations and sensations about natural phenomena and from imagination, with sketches and writings (Richter & Wells, 2008). J.M.W. Turner recorded landscapes, cityscapes, and human figures from real-life observations in sketchbooks (Hamlyn, 1985, pp. 2–23). In recent decades, the use of sketchbooks has evolved in the academic realm with new meanings identified (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Sanders-Bustle, 2008; Sinner, 2011; Scott-Shields, 2016; Williams & Debban, 2020). Other researchers show that journals with artistic processes can be used in interdisciplinary ways with and beyond visual arts, such as language arts, engineering, and education, indicating that sketchbooks are not for visual artists only (Chancer & Rester-Zodrow, 1997; Leigh, 2012; Hobart, 2005).

Sanders-Bustle (2015) addressed that the artmaking and reflective writing in sketchbooks is not new in the art education field, as she recognized that many art educators approach visual journals as a tool to brainstorm creative ideas and hone drawing skills (p. 9) Grauer and Naths (1998) defined visual journals as "visual thinking in a variety of forms: drawings, sketches, collages, photographs, graphics, and personally meaningful symbols," an open-ended space for creative inquiry (p. 14). Scott and Modler (2010) adopted a playful and casual approach toward visual journaling, such that it can be used to "explore feelings, issues, ideas, materials, techniques, and images" (pp. 32–35). Both authors are scholars, yet they turn visual journals into a fun and inviting learning tool that all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels can access. They explained the purpose of visual journaling in a clear manner:

> [The] melding of written vocabulary and visual vocabulary makes the visual journal truly special and powerful. Often when words fail, we can best express ourselves through color, line, shape, and images, and when we cannot find the right images, words can take over and express our thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The visual journal is a record of our lives with all the experiences and memories thrown into one ever-expanding document. (Scott and Modler, 2010, p. 32)

Scott-Shields (2016) discussed the visual journal as a vehicle for recording experience, studying self, and developing researcher identity, and as a result, inspire creative inquiry of "research as a creative practice" (p. 6). The goal of working in visual journals is to generate "tangible evidence of understanding as a process not a product" through freedom of expression such as writing, doodling, and different types of collaging (p. 4). Hobart (2005), journaling in nature, expressed that "the act of sketching forces the observer to become more intimately

aware of the subject matter, paying close attention to details that may not have been noticed otherwise" (p. 31). Scott-Shields (2016) further stated that this practice connects with Irwin (2005), suggesting a/r/tographic concepts as the product can create reverberations with both the self and others, recognizing it as arts-based research (p. 5). Scott-Shields (2016) indicated that creating in visual journals can create a ripple effect which generates "analytic and reflective thoughts (p. 6)," moving the researcher to new pathways in feelings, actions, and viewpoints through "the cycle of observing, thinking, writing and recording" (p. 8). Furthermore, the journals have the energy to engage both the self and audiences, constructing new meanings and knowledge through the rippling effect, by "moving beyond the page and gives the opportunity for meaningful contextualization of the image" (Scott-Shields, 2016, p. 6).

A growing body of literature in art education addresses the pedagogic values of visual journals. Scott-Shields (2016) discussed how visual journals are platforms for organizing thoughts and plans on teaching and observations; she pointed out that the pages are valuable data for research and teacher development and allow new ideas to emerge by freely doodling and writing (p. 16). On the other hand, Williams and Debban (2020) displayed a number of individuals' visual journals as a form of exchange between high school students and their pre-service teacher, with the intention of generating "aesthetic interaction in the pages of sketchbooks across the boundaries of age and locations" (p. 16). This point informs my research as, given the large age gaps between the participants as well as our separate locations, we are able to understand the same issues from different perspectives and aesthetic possibilities. Overall, the pedagogic values of visual journaling have a strong connection with lifelong

learning, adult education, and even online learning nowadays. In the following sections, I will discuss these topics in detail.

Visual Methodologies

A/r/tography informs my study as it allows me as the researcher to "potently consider how data is apprehended, comprehended, and generated in, with, and through images, objects, reflections, interpretations, and actions, and further, how such experiences are rendered" (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017, p. 116). Each workshop session had a prompt to help the participants start "documenting experiences with place and displacement, through sensory and aesthetic engagement," in this case, using visual journals to practice "noticing, lingering, reflecting, and trusting ourselves to see qualities in our experiences that would not be apparent otherwise" (p. 118). I sketched in my visual journal alongside participants as an artist, researcher, and teacher as part of the integrity of my a/r/tographic practice. The visual qualities of my journals and my process illustrates this theory (see Figure 3).

Looking at the participants' visual journal entries elicited strong sensational connections within me. The art and words present the unspoken aspects of our lives during the stressful days of the pandemic, mixed with optimism. To understand the qualities of our visual journal entries, I examined the contents, colours, and spatial organization of the images and words, as suggested by Rose (2016, pp. 63–76). Doing this, it was easier to code the images and move the analyzing process to the next level by labelling the component parts of the images that connect with the "broader cultural context" (Rose, 2016, p. 92). In my research, I attempted to find connections between the visual journal images and the workshop conversations: specifically, how the participants were expressing their thoughts and feelings into visual expressions.

Figure 3

The Visual Qualities of My Visual Journals

In addition to a/r/tography, I also draw on the practices of visual ethnography. Pink's (2011) research on visual ethnography offered views of how the meanings of visual artifacts can evolve over time. In a review of my visual journals from years ago, I identified that images contain memories, experiences, and artifacts that are part of my personal narrative (pp. 117–140). In this study, the participants' visual journal images were given new cultural meanings through sharing and offering thoughts to one another, forming a collective exhibition of the lives of artists, teachers, and researchers during the pandemic. In this way, the journals are moving from personal expressions to cultural artifacts with ambiguous interpretations (pp. 117–140). A viewer on YouTube, possibly an artist too, commented on one of my videos: "I think you really come to understand the soul of your subjects through repetition." Another viewer commented: "What is wonderful is how you are inspired with day-to-day life, it has shown me how to look right under my nose for subjects to paint." These anonymous comments indicated that there is a growing number of people recognizing visual journaling beyond creating surface visual effects, and that this practice relates to the process of living inquiry.

Lifelong Learning

A wide range of literature discusses the importance of lifelong learning, and it can be embraced by the practice of a/r/tography and visual journaling because learning may take place anytime and anywhere. Leggo (2005) encouraged his students to live creatively and poetically in their daily living moments and teaching experiences by "attending sensually and inquisitively and meditatively to the world" (pp. 175–195). This idea supports my study as the participants pay attention to the qualities of their life through actions of slowing down and finding opportunity for visual journaling.

Holmes (2017) argued that storytelling is an important component in teaching and lifelong learning, as we connect with others through different perspectives about the world, we can develop a wider horizon of our own world views more than our own personal perceptions (pp. 25–27). In my research, I always encouraged the participants to share and listen to one another's life stories and feelings about certain issues because I am aware that different life experiences lead to different understandings about the world, and one possesses personal knowledge that others do not have. Each of us is a strand, and we interconnect with each other to form a large braid of common understandings (Sameshima, 2008, p. 26). We all come from different cultural backgrounds and have had different life experiences, and yet we are able to weave together in harmony.

A number of scholars are suggesting that the teacher is also a researcher and learner (Sameshima, 2008; Kalin et al., 2009; Holmes, 2017; Irwin, 2003). Sameshima (2008) informed my role as the facilitator of the research, suggesting that teachers should "[focus] on the learning moments, limit the key concepts planned per lesson, and be cognizant of seeing and feeling responses from students" (p. 34). Moreover, she stated that learning can only be meaningful when both the teacher and students are allowed to make relational connections by being open to others' ideas and feelings (p. 34). In the workshop sessions of my research, the atmosphere was calm and reflective, similar to Sameshima's description of "pure mood," which is "a sense of openness where the mind can freely make connections," as we felt joy, surprise, and revelation (p. 37). In this research, I did not let my personal opinions dominate during the six-week period; rather, I asked questions, showed my interest in learning, and allowed participants to reflect and let the stories unfold. Sameshima echoed that the teacher should

“integrate self as a learner in the teaching process” to give life and sensations in the curriculum, rather than as a giving-teacher (pp. 31–33).

From the perspective of a/r/tography, Irwin (2013) has suggested that it is a lifelong journey to cultivate our insights of how we perceive the world, as we “actively create knowledge through sensing, feeling, and thinking” simultaneously (p. 64). Kalin et al. (2009) further hinted that knowledge is not stable as it may be redefined through the change of time and space, so we need to embrace “uncertainty and unknowing” (p. 17).

Irwin (2003) proposed that the curriculum is in the everyday through the course of our lives, and that we are able to create knowledge by having aesthetic awareness, which is opening up our perceptual sensitivities in an active space of curiosity, wonder, and surrender while “suspending belief and trusting uncertainty” (pp. 64–65). By being attuned to our surroundings and inner selves, we can keep the cycle of learning going forward by sensing possibilities and limitations (p. 65). The weekly creative prompts and discussions in my research moved us out of our comfort zones or creative habits; we surrendered to uncertain procedures and allowed new possibilities to emerge (p. 67).

Play can be a way of informal learning and it should be life long; however, it is mostly emphasized in children’s learning experiences and very limited in higher education (Koener & Frances, 2020; Andrade-Guirguis, 2020). Koener and Frances (2020) argued that play can be used to create both “joy and authentic co-creation of knowledge” in higher education (p. 151). To support this idea, Andrade-Guirguis (2020) indicated that incorporating play in adult learning can be beneficial in cognitive, social, and emotional development compared to traditional teaching that focuses on teaching solid contents (p. 177). Andrade-Guirguis warned that “the

lack of play and playfulness as a teaching tool can lead to a deficit in student engagement" in higher education (2020, p. 178). Koeners and Francis (2020) stated that "[although] play often appears to have no end or purpose, it does have profound biological effects on the normal function of living" such as survival, problem solving capabilities, joy, cognitive flexibility, social competence, intellectual dexterity, individual resilience, and adaptability (p. 144). These ideas inform my study as the prompts in the workshop were playful: for example, freely blending colours on a surface as a starting point to reflect on our inner selves during COVID, and then tracing our hands in journals to ponder the new meanings of our hand.

Both Freire (2005) and Leggo and Irwin (2013) explored the idea of "learning to learn," offering epistemological views on learning as a lifelong process. Freire (2005) addressed that even though we can build our *knowing* by "being sensitized by the world, by objects, by their presence, by the speech of others," we still "lack the filter of critical thinking," and "rigorous methods of approaching subject matters" (pp. 164–167). Leggo and Irwin (2013) emphasized that we need to be in "a state of embodied, living inquiry whereby the learner is committed to learning in and through times" (p. 4). In my study, the participants are also researchers in the lens of a/r/tography, and they "learn skills of observation, questioning, analysis, and interpretation" through discussions and artmaking, which is a form of living inquiry (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, p. 4). Freire (2005)'s concept of studying, which fits with lifelong learning, is reading both the word (text) and the world (context) in a critical way; this mirrors concepts of a/r/tography, for example, paying attention to our everyday sensory experiences with our surroundings. Freire (2005) further accentuated that studying is a very demanding job that

requires rigorous self-discipline, and in the journey we may "encounter pain, pleasure, victory, defeat, doubt, and happiness," yet we should not feel it is as a burden (p. 52).

Adult Education

Many scholars in education are challenging traditional ways of teaching predicated on learning as a transfer of information from teachers to students, declaring that information is often mistaken as knowledge (Freire, 2005; Brookfield, 2016). Yet, it is often a challenge for us educators to break out of the constraints of the education system and traditional ideology. Freire (2005) recognized that "authoritarian administrations, even those who call themselves progressives, try through various means to instill in teachers a fear of freedom" (p. 16). The participants in my research had experiences teaching in public schools and community centres, and they expressed their frustration about how they could not effectively implement their own teaching philosophy due to various factors, including influences and pressures from administration. On the other hand, many education systems and learners nowadays are still imitating and following a teacher's personal approach as the only way to learning (Freire, 2005, p. 40). This is a strong indication that we need to gain a higher understanding of what learning can be—that is, the ontology of knowledge.

Lawrence (2008) indicated that "in a milieu where logic rules and reason prevails, emotional and embodied ways of knowing are often dismissed and ignored" (p. 65–66). This point supports my research in terms of how we have acquired knowledge both as a group and individually. The participants and I felt that we have taken so much from this research that cannot be explained with words. Burnard (1988) suggested that there are three domains of knowledge: propositional, practical, and experiential (p. 127). While the first two domains are

acquisition of dry information and hands-on skills that are most commonly acknowledged in education, experiential knowledge is often overlooked, yet it can be the most powerful way of learning (Burnard, 1988, p. 129). In this study, the participants and I were physically separated from one another, and we spent much more time pondering about and creating based on the weekly prompts individually rather than as a group. As we reflected on our creative processes as a group, I sensed that we have had many personal encounters with our own environments such as objects; by pondering them based on the weekly prompts, we developed new understandings and feelings. It is noteworthy that online interactions between the participants and I are also a creation of experiential knowledge, or as Burnard (1988) suggested, when people "become very involved with each other in conversation and encounter" (p. 129). During our Zoom meetings, we continually learned experientially by reflecting on our past experiences, making connections with the present, and discovering new ideas. This learning cycle is endless as I can offer the workshops many more weeks. Burnard (1988) warned that it is not ideal to over-emphasize either experiential learning or propositional and practical learning, as we may "get lost in a solipsistic view of the world" when focusing too much on experiential learning, and personal experiences and perceptions are lost if only propositional and practical learnings are emphasized (p. 132). Therefore, it is ideal to have a combination of all three approaches in learning opportunities (Burnard, 1988, p. 132).

After each weekly workshop session, the participants and I pondered the prompt on our own time. Brookfield (2016) emphasized the importance of such self-directed learning as it empowers learner by "building self-confidence," to "understand personal instinctive preferences and habits" and "develop information literacy" (pp. 102–117). In my research, the

participants explored aspects of visual journals in the workshops under my guidance and in relation to one another's thoughts, and they had the freedom to follow their own personal interests and art mediums. Since each weekly meeting lasted only about an hour, the participants spent most of the time working in visual journals on their own. They decided what was important to them and how they wanted to explore. As a result, the products truly represented themselves; they had full control over their own learning (p. 117). As Brookfield described,

> [Self-directed learning] views each individual learner as self-contained and internally driven, working to achieve her learning goals in splendid isolation. The self is seen as a free-floating, autonomous, volitional agent able to make rational, authentic, and internally coherent choices about learning while detached from social, cultural, and political forces. (p. 100)

Self-directed learning points to the concept of democracy in adult education. Brookfield (2016) described it as "subverting and destroying elements of dominant ideology" for the benefit of both learners and teachers (p. 123). In the workshop sessions, I as the facilitator did not intend to impose any personal ideologies such as asking the participants to follow my style of art journaling or asking them to follow my way of thinking. Throughout the workshops, I was humble about my art practice and welcomed divergent ways of doing art journals by taking risks and moving out of our comfort zones. As a teacher, I am learning as well during the teaching process; as Freire (2005) suggested, "[the teacher's] learning lies in their seeking to become involved in their students' curiosity and in the paths and streams it takes them through" (p. 32). Kalin et al. (2009) echoed this: "mentoring within a/r/tography invites us to

sustain humility by continually searching for new questions, not the answer" (p. 17). This leads to Freire's (2005) assertion that "no one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything. We all know something; we are all ignorant of something" (p. 72). Upon understanding this, we can get un-stuck from our own personal biases (Freire, 2005, p. 73). From the angle of a/r/tography, humility is "holding back certainty" to see students as capable beings generating knowledge on their own, and that knowledge exists in numerous forms and can be reformed through openings (Friere, 2005, p. 17).

Both Freire (2005) and Brookfield (2016) asserted that a good teacher does not necessarily need to be a charismatic individual with energy and abundance of knowledge. In some ways, such teachers may intimidate students as they impose personal views and do not allow risk-taking and imperfections (Brookfield, 2016, p. 14). On the other hand, Freire (2005) agreed that teachers do not need to know everything, and that teaching does not only mean merely speaking and giving instructions (p. 15). In the visual journal workshops, I encouraged the participants to explore freely using any art mediums; I am an introverted teacher, so I do not speak too much and prefer to be a listener, and I think this may actually be a good quality.

The six workshops are not intended to develop drawing and painting skills like community art classes, but to find new possibilities of how we learn in a holistic way as suggested by Lawrence (2008), creating learning opportunities that engage the "cognitive, affective, somatic, and spiritual dimensions" (p. 75). Freire (2005) hinted that "we must remember that there is dynamic movement between thought, language, and reality that, if well understood, results in a greater creative capacity" (p. 3).

Both Freire (2005) and Brookfield (2016) have discussed that learning to be a teacher is an ongoing journey; there is always something new to be done day-to-day, and we should always seek a more democratic classroom. Brookfield (2016) declared that a classroom becomes undemocratic when teachers push for agendas and purposes not of interest to the students (p. 130).

Education in the Virtual Realm

Online learning has been around for about two decades since the start of the Internet era, but it did not reach a much wider population until the COVID-19 pandemic made face-to-face learning impossible, and most education facilitations were forced to become virtual. However, this sudden movement in learning and teaching has been challenging for both teachers and students as they tried to adapt to an unfamiliar virtual space (Rapanta et al., 2020; Syahputri et al., 2020).

I designed my workshop series with a fluid and narrative quality while encouraging open-ended discussions and multi-modal interactions as suggested by Ke (2010). Even though the participants and I are known to each other, learning and interacting virtually do not provide "close proximity" as in real life: breathing the same air, touching, and hugging (Strom et al., 2018, p. 8). Since these mind-body connections are missing in the virtual realm, some embodied meanings such as our *becoming* and emotions may not be fully generated in the online meetings (p. 10). Despite these barriers, I am grateful that our graduate student community has strong relationships. Through our past academic and personal gatherings, we seem to have built a sense of safety, belonging, and acceptance as a group; we have shared values and purposes in our lives, all of which I think gives my project power.

To promote a higher level of learning through online platforms, Wei et al. (2012) suggested that we need effective interactions that help learners "translate new information into engraved concepts and relate it to their life experiences" (p. 530). This advice helps me to think about how I can illuminate the six renderings of a/r/tography in the Zoom sessions to make them accessible for the participants, especially those who may not be familiar with the concepts. Wieland and Kollias (2020) argued that the online mode had changed nothing, that if the teacher is enthusiastic and creative in real life, they could incorporate "quirky experiences" and "surprise elements" to keep students engaged online, and the key is to think about how to translate those qualities into online space (p. 86). Similarly, Leggo (2005) suggested that we are able to create "intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic possibilities" when language becomes performative as we play with it and use it to have thoughtful conversations about our truths (p. 178). This idea inspires me to think about how I communicate and learn with the participants and use language as a vehicle to promote being and learning as a group. For instance, one of the weekly prompts in my study was creating a haiku as a group, and from there, creating visual art. In the methodology section of this paper, I will discuss in detail how I facilitated active learning in my visual journal workshop.

Some researchers have shown that even though virtual learning environments are flexible without time and distance constraints, learners may experience isolation and alienation (Wei et al., 2012; Syahputri et al., 2020). This can be true in online environments when learners have very minimal human engagements such as when turning off their cameras and audio, and when instructors do not implement effective instructional designs and organization suitable for online learning and student autonomy (Rapanta et al., 2020, pp. 925–928). Since there is a very

small number of participants in my research, we did not struggle with issues experienced by larger learning groups. I kept the workshop structure simple yet engaging by initiating dialogues, sharing of visuals, and sketching together.

Another factor influencing my study is that a virtual environment lacks real-life qualities such as breathing the same air, seeing the same phenomenon. In my research, the participants and I have discussed that our visual journal workshop sessions are completely different compared to other classes and meetings in which we had taken part: when the students' cameras were off and only the instructor was talking, we felt disconnected and sometimes experienced information overload. We felt more connected in our workshops because we were open to each other, and our home environments in the background added another layer of proximity—an interesting phenomenon that cannot be experienced when we meet in person. In addition, there is relationality between our in-person interactions and the Zoom workshops in this research. We think that the days we spent together as colleagues and friends before the pandemic helped us to maintain a strong mind-body connection and interpret each other's behavioural cues; thus, we were still able to generate energy in communication virtually and continue to build our relationships (Strom et al., 2018, p. 8; Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 930).

Yet, we still called for the need to meet in person, as there are limitations of not being physically together in the same space. As Strom et al. (2018) pointed out, we are taking advantage of technology, but it also "acted on us by structuring our interactions in particular ways and even, at times, constrained our ability to work" (p. 9), such as frozen screens when some one's internet was weak, someone muted by accident, and the cameras always showing the same views of ourselves unless we move them manually. We imagined that if we were able

to meet in person, we could have done our workshops in the university classroom, inquired together in close proximity: taking a walk in the city, then having coffee in a café and journaling together. In the online realm, we had to be more autonomous; yet working on the prompts on our own time is "self-paced learning and reflection" (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 929), and we think this is a positive factor because as artists and researchers, we also need time alone to ponder deeply.

The learning experience was similar in an art class I taught on Zoom recently with five participants who had known me through social media platforms. It was easy to start a conversation including bits of life stories and art-making experiences. The rest of the class was simply having my phone pointing at my painting surface as I explained each step of my process. This indicates that clear communication plays a large role in online teaching, and that creative tactics may not be necessary for students who are self-motivated in learning. I have also been making visual journal tutorial videos on my personal YouTube channel, and the comments from viewers indicate that they are benefiting from the contents. Wieland and Kollias (2020) remarked that many YouTube videos are short, informative, and entertaining in content (p. 89). This also connects with lifelong learning and adult education, as it promotes self-directed learning with contents easily accessible at any time with the learner's search and choice.

This study displayed strong evidence that the participants were teaching one another, learning, and creating as a group (more details will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). Kalin et al. (2009) argued, "we co-exist and are immersed in the communalization of meaning. Therefore, we cannot be reduced to our singularities—we are single while at the same time plural in relation simultaneously" (p. 19). Rapanta et al. (2020) echoed this: "successful online learning

means not feeling alone and not forgetting that learning is social: we learn from others and with others, even if at a distance" (p. 931).

Chapter 3: Methodology

I adopt a qualitative research approach to investigate art education graduate students creating visual journals during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world … consisting [of] a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 43). Qualitative research is inspiring me to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of the intricate lives and creative processes of art education graduate students in the natural settings of their homes and at the same time, virtually on the Zoom platform.

Following the ontological assumption as the researcher, I asked open-ended questions to "embrace different realities," knowing that every participant has a different perspective about the same experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Because we interacted and created through Zoom, my observations and interpretations came from this virtual field. With an epistemological purpose, I tried to get as close to the participants as possible by initiating conversations to gather subjective experiences. Since each of our six meetings lasted for about an hour, I stayed for prolonged periods with the participants (p. 20). Being aware of the axiological assumption, I admit that the nature of the information I gathered in this study is laden with my values and biases in the interpretations and presentations (p. 20). Throughout this study, my methodology was inductive and emerging as I engaged with the data collected (p. 22).

The methodological approaches in this research comprise case study and life writing, combined with a/r/tography as an arts-based method. A combination of these approaches generated a unique lens for reading our life paths and creative processes, and for

understanding how our past life experiences influence who we are today and how we create in visual journals. In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss these approaches in detail.

Case Study

This is a single case study of three participants' diverse reactions to the workshop prompts based on the six renderings of a/r/tography, which include aspects of their lived experiences, life stories, and feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many life stories were shared in the workshops; they do not just stand alone as narratives but also as lively illustrations of our identities, informing why and how we created in our visual journals in certain ways. In other words, each visual journal entry has a story beyond the surface imageries. This research is also supported by the six renderings of a/r/tography, embodied in the form of six creative prompts guiding the weekly workshops. As Creswell (2013) stated, a case study is

> [a] qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (eg. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

Over the six-week period, I collected different types of data every week. More details will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Life Writing

Life writing is tied with the concepts of phenomenology. As Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2010) remarked, educators "meaningfully and powerfully articulate and reflect on the dynamics of

change happening in these spaces and places" (p. 22). At the same time, the participants in my research were engaged in conversations about their daily lives and past experiences in relation to "global and local influences," which is a key characteristic of life writing (p. 22).

Similar to Hasebe-Ludt et al.'s (2010) research, my study contains visual and textual expressions in the form of visual journals about our lives during the pandemic (p. 23). Our virtual experiences on Zoom—sharing our journal pages, creative experiences, and emotions—are unique times of human connection taking advantage of the online video and audio functions. It is a form of artful inquiry. I continually looked back at our meeting recordings and reviewed the key moments with the participants after the six-week period, and much like Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2010) found that

> [l]ife writing thus becomes a way of attending to the heart, to the emotional literacy that connects us with others, to what really matters in our life/work. Life writing moves us toward creating strong sustainable relationships in times of educational and social-political alienation. (p. 25)

Using life writing as a methodology in my research, I am creating a heart-warming narrative illustrating the pedagogical practice of how the participants created and shared their visual journals and life stories during the pandemic crisis, and how our relationships and influences extend beyond the research period. I have included the participants' stories as research in the form of life writing with first-hand information, of how our lives unfolded in similar and different pathways in past and present situations.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography as an arts-based research methodology allowed me to render the data by accentuating visual and textual representations (Springggay et al., 2005). We conducted a weekly workshop for each rendering, resulting in '6x6,' or six weeks and six renderings of inquiry. I have incorporated numerous images of the participants' visual journal entries and used life writing as textual presentation of the workshop experiences (see Chapter 4).

The life writing in my research helps to define the lives of the participants, who are shifting among three roles—artist, teacher, and researcher—and engaging in "dynamic spaces of inquiry," allowing uncertainty and ambiguity to be part of the process (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 901). In other words, the concepts of a/r/tography empowered the participants to learn together receptively using nonverbal and expressive hints, and this allowed meanings and transformations to shift through the flow of time and space (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 77).

Throughout the six-week period, I encouraged the participants to engage in relational inquiry, with their own selves and one another, by allowing time to reflect on past and present life experiences that illustrated their perceptions of the world, artmaking, and teaching (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 79). The participants' unique qualities were expressed through interactions and reverberations during and after the meetings; by creating lived experiences together in the six-week period, they have influenced one another's possibilities of living and acting (p. 70). By learning about the differences between each of our cultures and life journeys, the participants have gained new understandings of what artmaking, teaching, and inquiry can be, moving beyond their personal conceptions.

A/r/tography as a methodology in my research also encouraged participants to attend to the "qualities of their experiences, perceptions, and ideas" (Irwin, 2003, p. 71). It also guided me to work with the participants "through an affirmative engagement, trusting the process and expertise of [my] colleagues" (p. 71). As both the participant and researcher, I discussed the weekly prompts in relation to the a/r/tographic renderings and trusted my colleagues' interpretations and how they expressed their understandings in visual journals. And most importantly, the mentoring relationship in a/r/tography led me to see the "interpersonal closeness" among the participants and how we inspired one another to create in visual journals (Kalin et al., 2009, p.12). As the researcher, I was also sensitive to the new emerging directions in our conversations and guided our inquiries.

Phenomenology

Since this study was conducted virtually through Zoom, it is necessary to discuss phenomenology as a methodology, along with life writing and living inquiry. As Breuer (2020) noted, "media links participants and bridges physical distances, but also cognitively detaches the participants from their respective place-bound social contexts, those contexts to which they belong bodily" (p. 5). When the participants and I were engaging with each other in the Zoom workshops, our computer screens moved us into a new reality or an "artificial world" (Breuer, 2020, p. 5), yet we were frequently joining and leaving this realm by attending to our respective home environments while making our own art.

Breuer (2020) further suggested that the body has "the capacity to anchor in different spatial levels, provided that it detaches itself from one in order to dive into the other" according to the concepts of Merleau-Ponty as summarized by Breuer (p. 5). This means that

we were separated from each other when working on our own journals in the ongoing Zoom meeting; this is evident as we were not speaking or muted, and not able to see one another's work in progress due to the limited angle of the cameras.

Merleau-Ponty defined the body as virtual as it is more "determined by its projection toward a horizon of possibilities" than how it is situated in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, as cited in Breuer, 2020, p. 3). He further suggested that "the realm of virtuality contains an infinity variety of possibilities, out of which only some of them can be actualized," and thus our perceptions are so limited (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, as cited in Breuer, p. 3). This concept can be felt in my research, as the participants and I could have worked on the same creative prompt continuously for months and years. This is evident when Sha produced many more pieces of blind-contour drawings of human figures after our drawing activity together on Zoom. I could see that an energetic flow of gestures, sensations, and interpretations kept evolving as time went on. In addition, our window views changed through the seasons along with our changes in sensations and life situations, and therefore we could keep creating many more observations of the views and reflections in our visual journals based on the same prompt.

Data Collection

The data collected through observations during the Zoom sessions were inclusive of many sources and dimensions, such as reviewing video recordings, participant dialogues, and discussions as well as sharing our visual journal entries on our private Facebook group and memos written after each workshop. Overall, the data contains visuals and audio materials. I followed the data collection approaches as suggested by Creswell (2013) on how to conduct

observations and interviews for a case study and collect and examine documents and audiovisual materials (p. 160) as sources of information.

Observations

I gathered field notes by spending time with the participants. Specifically, this was done during each weekly workshop: initiated by creative prompts and informed by our shared dialogue and making art in visual journals. I observed the process and listened to discussion topics as both an observer and researcher. I took notes of my observations and emerging key points. In addition, I took some screenshots of our interactive mode and art products. Because I was also a participant in the workshops, it was challenging for me to take notes sometimes as I was deeply engaged with the others; deciding the best timing to move from participant to researcher was a fluid and responsive process (Creswell, 2013, p. 172). I tried to solve these issues by going over the meeting recordings after and making additional notes, and during the workshops I made sure that I had done enough interaction as participant (e.g., using facial expressions) before switching to the researcher role.

The Group Interview

A group interview, conducted on Zoom one month after the last workshop, lasted approximately two hours. The interview was based on a set of open-ended interview questions regarding the experiences of the participants during the six-week workshop period (see Appendix C). The participants were encouraged to share their reflections and thoughts, including interesting aspects and challenges they had encountered. As in the workshops, time passed by quickly as we talked with enthusiasm, and I kept the discussion within the scope of prompt questions and topics to ensure we were not going over the two-hour time frame.

Following Creswell's (2013) suggestions about the positionality of the interviewer, I approached the interview questions openly along with the participants, and we reflected together as learners (p. 173). The group interview was recorded and transcribed, and then member-checked with the participants to let them confirm the parts being included in this thesis.

Researcher Journal

During the workshop sessions, I wrote personal observations and impressions on a notepad. After each workshop ended and throughout the week, I kept writing down more thoughts and interpretations of the participants' visual journal images and our conversation topics as I reviewed the recordings of our session. The audio part of the Zoom sessions was transcribed by an online transcribing engine, *Ottor.ai*. I asked participants to share their finished visual journal entries on our private Facebook group, so I could download the high-quality images and examine the details. I also selected some screenshots from our Zoom sessions, and along with all the documents, observations, and workshop transcripts, I developed stories of the participants' life experiences and our collective experiences.

Video and Audio Documents

The recording function of Zoom results in a video recording of the meeting and a separate audio recording. After each workshop meeting, I uploaded the audio recording to Ottor.ai to generate a transcript in the form of a PDF file, and then downloaded it to my personal computer. Each meeting transcript is about 120 to 180 pages long; as I read through each, I highlighted key phrases that are possible codes and annotated my thoughts and questions on the margins. I used the video recordings as references for my research journal,

and by reviewing the bodily actions and facial expressions, I was able to analyze the flow of sensations effectively.

Ethical Issues

All participants have agreed to have their first names identified in this research after knowing they had the option of using an alias or numbers for confidentiality. Even though the participants and I are colleagues, it was still necessary for me to explain the purpose of my study in the first workshop and tell them they have the right to decline to respond to sensitive topics that may emerge during the group conversations (p. 174). I was also aware of the personal stories shared during our conversations, and with member checks, I made sure not to include the confidential parts in my research.

Analysis of the Research

For this research, I have an abundance of both textual and visual data to analyze. As directed by Creswell (2013), the data analysis procedure includes "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them" (p. 179). Creswell noted that "these steps are interconnected and form a spiral of activities all related to the to the analysis and representation of the data" (p. 179). The visual spiral (p. 182) was helpful in my data analysis procedure as it illustrates the specific steps.

Data Organization

As Creswell (2013) suggested, the first loop in the data analysis spiral is data management, so materials must be easily accessible such as in computer files (p. 182). In the early stage of the research, the data were collected in digital files, including the member-

checked workshop and interview transcripts, visual journal JPG images, and other related visual documents. All of these data were downloaded from the private Facebook group or my email to my personal computer with a secure passcode.

Reading and Memoing

The next loop in the spiral is reflecting, writing notes, and jotting down questions while reading (Creswell, p. 183). Following Agar's (1980) suggestion, I "read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse in the details, try to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 183). When reading the details of the workshops and final interview, I was re-experiencing those times, which helps to generate key concepts for interpretation (p. 183). In addition, by examining the visual journal images, screenshots, and my field notes, I was "reflecting on the larger thoughts presented in the data and formed initial categories" (p. 184).

Interpreting the Data

The workshop and final interview transcripts generated numerous threads of information on various topics, and as I went through them, I identified different codes based on my intuitions, impressions, and insights as recommended by Creswell (2013, p. 182). In this loop, Creswell suggests that "the researcher build detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature" (p. 184). Following Creswell's technique for coding, I merged the large text and visual data into smaller categories of information to "seek evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, then assign a label to the code" (p. 184). The emergence of codes represented two kinds of information pointed out by Creswell: 1) information that I

expected to find before the study; 2) “surprising information” that I did not expect to find; 3) information that is “conceptually interesting or unusual to researchers” (p. 186). Next, I merged the codes into themes that represent topics I discuss in my interpretation and findings. Creswell defined themes as “broad units of information that consists of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186).

Representing the Data

The data are represented in the form of chapters in this thesis, including personal experiences and group experiences from the workshops and interview. I have also inserted a number of images to illustrate and support the written component, including our visual journal entries and screenshots from our Zoom workshops. Appendix B includes visual journal images submitted by the participants, showing the scope of the participants’ creative processes during the six-week period. Appendix A contains all the codes formed after reading the data many times, to give a sense of the participants’ thoughts, interests, and experiences, along with an example of a thematic matrix for reference purposes.

Research Design and Process

In each weekly workshop, the participants created visual journal entries based on a creative prompt connected with a rendering of a/r/tography. As the researcher, I was also an active participant in this study. The a/r/tographic renderings are all interconnected and presented as a whole: as Springgay et al. (2005) explained, “[renderings] are theoretical spaces to explore artistic ways of knowing and being research” (p. 899). Instead of focusing on one single rendering at a time, the participants and I engaged in conversations regarding our identities as artists and art educators, and inquired about our lives before and during the

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Somehow, we thought that we needed time to ponder some of the prompts on our own through the weeks, rather than start working on them immediately in the Zoom sessions.

Because one of the objectives of my research was to have participants make art together and work through our inquiry as a collective, I encouraged the others to suggest artmaking activities that we could work on together during the Zoom sessions. Two new creative activities emerged naturally from our conversations: drawing with the non-dominant hand and blind-contour drawing. These two activities are related to our past life experiences being artists and teachers, and we wanted to explore these approaches through a/r/tographic means and in our present life states. Through aesthetic inquiry, we attempted to generate "embodied understandings and exchanges between and among the roles of artist/researcher/teacher" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900).

In each Zoom session, we shared our visual journal entry based on the prompt from the previous week by telling how the images connected with the a/r/tographic rendering(s). I was interested in the stories and feelings behind the images, influenced by Sinner's (2011) point of "adopting a lateral perspective when viewing the visual journal held the potential to unveil what might not be apparent on the surface of artmaking" (p. 187). There are layers of meanings represented in our visual journals, including "implicit and explicit renderings" (p. 188). To further generate complex meaning-making and living inquiry, I asked questions to build up conversations with the participants around the goal of searching for deeper understandings about our lives and perspectives as art educators. By using a variety of mediums from iPad to

watercolours, we were using idiosyncratic symbols to establish our personal and professional identities (p. 189).

In this study, I bring forward experiences and insights on visual journaling and art education. I also encouraged the participants to share their own personal experiences by asking respectful questions, so we could compare and contrast our personal preferences and thoughts. I inquired about their use of art mediums and creative approaches they preferred, instead of following my personal preferences or directions from more traditional art education instruction, such as technical drawing. By being open to a variety of ideas and creative approaches, I am building a strong and diverse community of practice with art educators open to new possibilities.

The participants' life stories appeared as vignettes during the workshop sessions, and along with the visual journal creations, unfolded fluidly through the six-week period. It is evident that our past personal and professional experiences, which contain understandings of the self and contexts, have formed a solid base for this study, similar to Strom et al.'s (2018) research on the posthuman perspective. Strom et al. (2018) acknowledged that "[posthumanism] offers ways to conceptualize our collective as a multiplicity, account for the relational and material aspects of our work, address the agency of non-human actors (such as technology) in our collaboration" (p. 3). During each workshop, we were using our computers to enter an "experiential field" in that we temporarily "live in a perceptual fantasy and the world of everyday experience is suspended" (Breuer, 2020, p.7). This phenomenon challenged our a/r/tographic performances as we constantly shifted between our own life reality and the virtual world.

To minimalize researcher bias, I write about how “my past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) in Chapter 5. In the workshops, I followed all the creative prompts in my visual journal and responded to the emerging questions like all the participants. This ensures more transparency, and in my view, accuracy, in research results.

Chapter 4: Our Workshops as Life Stories

This chapter focuses on the lived experiences of the participants and me—four women of different age ranges and cultural backgrounds, sharing how our paths have converged in the academic field and forming a community of art educators in the process. Our life stories were shared through six workshops and a final focus group interview rich with conversations about our education backgrounds, career choices, feelings toward different topics in art education, and our visual journal activities in the workshops.

The order of the participants sharing artworks and comments was different in each workshop, and there was no obligation that everyone must respond to the conversations or answer the questions. As the facilitator, I always said "Does anyone wants to share" whenever I asked a question, and the participants spoke in random order each time. My decision was informed by a/r/tographic understandings that the inquiry process is non-linear and always in a "process of not-knowing, of searching that is difficult and in tension" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). I was aware that it takes time for the participants to ponder and arrive at the moment ready to share.

I use the artful form of life writing to present our stories shared during the Zoom sessions. As Sinner (2012) expressed, life writing is to live with passion and authenticity, and "to listen and not necessarily speak when entering the world openly, trustingly, and some may say naively" (p. 286). I found it mesmerizing and inspiring to listen to the participants' life stories in this research, and since we have an intimate relationship with one another, the conversations were casual yet contained knowledge expressed by chance without pre-planned speech, resulting in sensations that are close to real-life moments (p. 286). Leggo (2000) asserted that

life writing is not just a “factual record” but involves the interactions of spirits, emotions, wisdoms, and aesthetics (p. 7). Each of our lives is a unique pathway questioning our identities and creativity, and we were “calling to one another, echoing one another” (p. 12).

The three participants and I met once every Monday on Zoom. The workshops interlaced our stories along with the art-making activities in our visual journals. We felt that the Zoom platform had limited function for us to engage actively, such as physical proximity and seeing each other’s work in progress. Therefore, we spent most of our time sharing our life stories and how we worked individually with the weekly prompts in the form of group conversations. Our life stories illuminate our visual journal entries and add another layer of meaning to interpret the visuals. From workshop 2 to 6, we began each session by sharing our visual journals based on the previous week’s creative prompt and continued our discussions on the prior a/r/tographic rendering. In the rest of each session, I introduced the creative prompt and rendering of the week, making sure the conversations took place with a clear focus. From workshop 2 on, we journaled together based on the week’s creative prompt, and two new prompts emerged from our talks.

Workshop #1: Introduction to the Workshops

The beginning of the session was a warm reunion of the participants. Since I was both the participant and researcher in this study, I had to clarify my position. I explained that this is not a traditional teaching workshop that focuses on specific materials and processes following the instructions of the facilitator. I also clarified that within the practice of a/r/tography, we are learning from one another in reverberation through conversations and sharing of artworks. The

participants were encouraged to create their own visual journals using any media they prefer, such as sketchbooks, iPads, pens, pencils, watercolours, markers, and collage materials.

All the participants have at least a basic knowledge of a/r/tography and the six renderings, and they felt that they were guided by the concepts when pondering the weekly prompts. Since the practice of a/r/tography has a curriculum that encourages emergent knowledge and learning through sensory awareness in a world of complexity and ambiguity (Irwin, 2003), I did not plan the workshops in a traditional way where the participants follow a predictable routine. I also reminded them that in these six workshops, we would inquire about our lives in the past and the current COVID-19 situation through the process of group discussions and artmaking.

The three participants and I are all graduate students in art education at Concordia, and we have also spent time together outside of school. Therefore, we had no barriers in communication, and we were comfortable sharing some of our life stories and thinking. Moreover, we are familiar with each other's art styles through our past interactions and social media. The participants decided to join my workshop because they appreciated my visual journal style, the effort, and the consistency of a creative habit. These qualities allowed us to dive into the first workshop without feeling any constraints.

In the beginning, I introduced the creative prompt for this week: contiguity. I allowed open conversations to explore how we move in between the roles of artist, teachers, and researchers in life using visual and textual inquiry (Springgay et al., pp. 900–902). This workshop was a great opportunity for us to know more about each other, such as our backgrounds and how we came together in the academic realm.

From this first workshop and the ones after, I always attempted to search for deeper understandings and challenge my assumptions by asking appropriate questions. In this workshop, I began by asking the participants to share their backgrounds.

Shaghayegh's Story

I came from Iran. I studied fashion design for my BA degree, then another three years in animation in a private institute in Iran. While working in animation, I tried hard to find a job in other countries in the field of animation and concept design. I have worked as a concept artist in several companies. After I got married, I moved to Malaysia with my husband, and found a job in a VFX company as a concept artist and matte paint artist. I worked there for fifteen months, and then we moved to Montreal as permanent residents in 2019, and I started my Master's studies in art education at Concordia. Since then, I have begun to create personal artworks for myself, not for companies. I have a very little bit of teaching experience, mostly at kindergartens.

Because I studied mathematics in high school, it was hard for me to move from mathematics to art. In my first year of undergraduate studies in art, I didn't know the rules about art classes, confused about assignments, and didn't create many artworks because of absences from classes. I was very unmotivated to be in university in the first year. The education system is very different in Iran, and doing research was completely new to me when I arrived at Concordia.

Lara's Story

I always loved art. Since I was eleven to twelve years old, I started taking art classes because I loved it. I had some private painting classes.

My mom was in fine art for one semester when in university, then she transferred to biology, and then accounting. I followed my mom's path: I always wanted to be in the medical field and become a doctor since I was little. In Lebanon, the education system assigned people to different fields based on school grades. I got into Humanities and was wondering, "what can I do now?" So, I applied to nursing school at Lebanese American University. The first semester in nursing was a terrible mess, so I said to myself, "I need to change." I switched to Fine Arts.

I always did art as a hobby, not a profession. My dad was not happy, but my mom was because she always dreamt about being an artist. My dad did not want me to continue with art, so I had to choose architecture or something related. I spent two years studying architecture, and during that time, I decided to pursue a master's degree.

After arriving in Montreal to pursue my master's degree in art education, I also applied to work with autistic children where they wanted someone with an education background. After working there for one month, I got transferred to nursing because of COVID. I worked at senior's care centres for many months. You never know where life is going to take you!

Nancy's Story

Like Lara, I always knew art was part of me. I loved it from the very beginning, and I wanted something to do with art after high school. My guidance counsellor in high school wanted me to go into mathematics and didn't support me to go to a fine arts university. She told me, "You have to go into math, we need more women in math, and you are good at math." But I replied that I don't like it, and went into art. So, I studied art history and studio at Concordia. After this, I started a master's studies [*sic*] at UBC but only stayed there for a month. I did not like the program because I was told what I should do, not what I really wanted to do. I

came back to Montreal and started the art education undergraduate program at Concordia, then transferred to get a teacher's degree at [Teacher's College]. I started teaching around twenty years ago at Villa Maria High School. In 2005, I came back to Concordia for a Master's in Art Education, finished it two years later and kept on teaching.

In 2018, I went away with my husband and daughter to travel in Europe for a year. I was thinking that it is time for a change. I was stagnating as a teacher as I wasn't as good as I used to be, particularly because the implications put on me from a management point of view. As an art teacher in high school, I have to teach a million different things, and I found my teaching practice was fading. So, I decided to go back to academia, find out, and understand what's going on in art education from a theoretical view. I want to become a better teacher again.

I currently want to focus on my PhD studies and my daughter. I decided to come back for a PhD because I felt that my teaching career is not going well. I really love teaching art! But in the education system, it is rare for a teacher to teach art only. I was getting more and more other subjects and less and less art. I was stretched in so many different directions, and I found that my teaching was not effective anymore. And so, I just decided to take the time off and concentrate what is going on theoretically, and see if I could apply it in my teaching to become a better teacher again.

I got all my degrees from Concordia, two undergraduate degrees, one Master's, and now a PhD. Some people argue that this is not good as it's giving the same perspective on everything. I have been teaching for a long time, about 25 years, at camps, museums, and high schools.

Becky's Story

I was born in China. My parents decided to immigrate to Canada when I was in primary school because they wanted a better education for me; they could not stand the education system in China. Learning was mostly conducted by memorization, and there are lots of tests from beginning to end of each semester. The education system in China is very competitive and full of pressure. My mom discovered my interest and skills in drawing, so she sent me to art classes on the weekends to learn old academic drawing skills from university/college art teachers. In China, we value art with a lot of refinement of technical skills, such the works of da Vinci and other old masters.

I immigrated to Canada with my parents when I was thirteen years old. Just like Lara, my parents wanted me to pursue a career by taking a useful undergraduate degree, like engineering and forestry. But I did not have any interest in those fields. Somehow, my parents did not force me to make choices I don't like, so they actually supported me to apply to fine arts for my bachelor's degree. After finishing my BFA degree, I studied Early Childhood Education for one year in a local college because I love children and wanted to be a teacher. After that, I worked as a part-time teacher in preschools for about four years.

I enjoyed those years working part-time and I had lot of time to work in my art journals. Every day before and after work, I liked to walk around my workplace and sketch in my journal. I found it a nice way to relax and balance my day. I started teaching art in my home studio in early 2018, and also in my local community centres. I was teaching mostly children's art classes. I have taught one adult art journal class for two weeks. In late 2018, I applied for a MA at Concordia because I wanted change in my life, like how Nancy was feeling. I could not stand

repeating the same life routines every week. I arrived in Montreal in September 2019 and really enjoyed my time at Concordia and meeting so many new friends!

Responsive Conversations While Making Art: Key Themes

We enjoyed listening to each other's stories, and we continued to share more. I have organized this section thematically by weaving the conversations as they happened in our workshops.

Our Life Stories: Becoming Artists and Teachers

Sha shared:

> *As a child, I loved to do art and create something. When someone asked me what I want to be when I grow up, I answered that I want to be a painter or vet. In Iran, schools paid lots of attention on mathematics. In primary school, we had art classes but the teachers focused on mathematics instead. I remember that I used to have a notebook under my desk that I made drawings. I hated math. I did not like math and had to study it because of pressures from my parents. Now I still have nightmares having math and physics exams.*

Lara continued with adding more information about her education in Lebanon:

> *In Lebanon, we have different school systems. The American system focused more on art than the French system. I used to have one art class every week and enjoyed so much. For the extracurricular activities at school, my mom put me in the piano group, and I loved it too. But art and piano were at the same time slot, so I did 30 minutes of piano and then went to art. The art classes were more about technical drawing skills: bad skills mean bad grade. In high school, I was forced by the school*

to take theatre classes because I had taken too many art classes. I didn't enjoy acting. I always invited my family to the art exhibitions but not to acting events. I tried to be an actress but didn't really like it.

Sha responded that she applied to the theatre department for university:

I applied for theatre for university and got accepted because my entrance test grades were very high. Because I was not interested in religion and didn't pass the Islamic test, they did not admit me eventually. In Iran, we need to be religious to be accepted by the public universities. So, I went to a private university. When studying in Iranian public universities, we need to study many other subjects unrelated to your major, for example, a revolution 40 years ago. Because I was studying in a private institute, the tuition expenses were much lower compare to public universities. My institute was a small house, and the teachers were more knowledgeable with studio skills.

I was curious about how Nancy developed her watercolour skills. She responded and shared this with us:

I had zero interest in watercolors. I had taken drawing class in undergrad, but the teacher changed focus to watercolors, and I was so upset. So, I decided to explore watercolors in an abstract way, not realistic as I used to do with drawings. And I fell in love with watercolors! I was saying, "this is really cool". I ended up in a show in Vermont, and I was very proud of myself conquering the fear of watercolors. I like that watercolor is so portable. I always bring a tiny kit when travelling. I'm not afraid of watercolors, I just let it happen. I've never tried a large watercolor painting. I took a watercolor painting workshop in France with a botanical artist,

and he was so precise at botanical watercolor illustrations with perfect washes and gradients. I still haven't finished my flower painting, it's bigger than what I normally do, and it's been a year.

This exchange moved the conversation to the theme of art mediums: we were in a "contiguous interaction and the movement between art and graphy that research becomes a lived endeavor" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). Contiguity was also embodied in our stories of becoming artists, teachers, and researchers.

The Art Mediums We Use

Sha shared what art mediums she likes to use. She mainly works with digital tools:

Since I joined the animation industry, I began to put the paper away as I learn more about Photoshop and other applications and software. I don't like to use paper anymore because an iPad has all the functions of taking notes easily, and I use Procreate to control the results of my artworks. I like to have a control of everything because I can go back and make corrections on my iPad, but I can't help when making a mistake on paper. It's funny that now when I use paper sometimes, I do hand gestures over it like swiping and clicking.

Lara also shared the art mediums she prefers:

I like acrylics and watercolors. I've also been experimenting with ink, oil pastels and digital painting on iPad. I don't really have a medium I love the most, I just love everything. They didn't teach oil painting in university, so I never tried oil. I also love fabric paint. I try to have one style, but I don't really have a style. Everyone keeps telling me, "You need to have your own style". I don't even know what my

style is. I also love illustration. I'm doing a comic book now for my thesis. Let me show you… I am doing stories of my life before and during COVID from March until September 2020.

Nancy and I stepped back as listeners as we assumed that Lara and Sha were familiar with the art mediums we use.

From Conversations to the A/r/tographic Rendering of Contiguity

After our conversations, I introduced the creative prompt for this week: to make a visual map of what a day in your life looks like since the start of the pandemic. None of us had done a visual map before, and Nancy asked me to show some examples. I shared screen and showed some images I found on Google and Instagram: works from illustrators and comic artists. I also found an interesting example of visual mapping focused on divergent thinking and mind-mapping using words and simple flow charts. We found that some examples have more writing than images.

Instead of moving into the visual journaling process immediately, I invited participants to share their daily routines as a way to reflect and think about how they can express them visually and textually. Through our dialogues, we found many similarities in our daily routines and emotions from the effect of the pandemic. Nancy started to do some sketches about her typical daily routine while the rest of us talked. She mapped her day on a 24-hour clock but expressing that "I always need more time in a day," she created a grid of 25 squares wishing for an extra hour at the end of the day. Then all of us shared more details of our typical day, and Nancy, Sha, and I accentuated how much time we have been on the computer doing all kinds of work and leisure as well. Lara spent most of her days working in a day job. Sha said, "sometimes

I feel nervous, oh my, I don't know what I am doing! I am doing so many things together but I don't know what I am doing."

Overall, this workshop was rich with conversations of life stories. We did not make art together in this session because we felt we needed the time to be with one another, and the only way to achieve this through Zoom is to have conversations. Making art together on Zoom seemed like a socially isolating experience as we would withdraw from the group experience. This workshop embodied contiguity as our stories illustrated the temporal connections and disconnections between our identities, embedded with a sense of uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901). Contiguity as an a/r/tographic rendering continued across the following weeks of artmaking and conversations.

Workshop #2: Living Inquiry

Living inquiry is a key topic in a/r/tography as it guides us to "re-examine assumptions and destabilize forms of identification" in our daily lives, and it informs us to use art as a transformative tool (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 903). From this operating definition, living inquiry strongly connects with phenomenology, lifelong learning, life writing, and visual journaling. This study is cumulative as the a/r/tographic rendering from the previous week continued to inform our inquiry.

The prompt for this session was—What do you see outside a window or several windows? It could be a window in your home and/or workplace, or anywhere that is meaningful to you. As Castro (2019) suggested, "how we see the world and what we choose to look at define who we are" (p. 14), which means we are creating more than mere objective illustrations of sceneries. This prompt was also an extension of contiguity, as we kept inquiring

about our daily lives along with our a/r/tographic identities. I introduced this prompt after we finished sharing our visual journals from last week.

Sharing Our Visual Journal Entries for Contiguity: Maps of Our Days

We started the workshop with sharing our visual journal entries from last week, the maps of our daily routines. There is an abundance of visual metaphors in our entries representing the different activities in our daily routines, which suggests our busy lifestyle. Nancy, Lara, and I used ink and watercolours to illustrate, while Sha used Procreate on her iPad. In the previous week, we had spent a lot of time and effort pondering our current lives and composing and designing on the journal surfaces (defined as paper and digital tablets). Our drawing processes were times when we slowed down and thought about the different things that take over our time and how we moved through a typical day. Lara, Sha, and I created in a similar way: we all selected circular forms, displaying the cycle of daily hours and activities in a playful manner.

As Nancy shared her visual map, she said, “my daughter and husband are nowhere in this, it’s all the material things,” and “this is how I depict spending time with my two favourite people” (see Figure 4). The multiple images of computer screens show that the computer is taking a lot of her time: emailing, Zoom meetings, and social media. She kept herself well by eating healthy, drinking water, and doing yoga. There is juxtaposition: the giant pencil in the middle of the page is a strong identification of Nancy’s artist’s identity, and the watch on the right-hand side hints that she kept track of time for both herself and family. While Lara, Sha, and I journaled from our imaginations with cartooning styles, Nancy’s journal was based on her observations of objects around her. From Nancy’s journal entry, I could sense how she

connected and disconnected with her roles as artist, teacher, and researcher in her daily activities, in relation to the a/r/tographic rendering contiguity (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901).

Figure 4

Nancy's Visual Map of Her Day

I depicted my typical day on a wheel shape, dividing the activities into slices. I sub-consciously used a lot of blues and purples to give a sense of melancholy, and I feel that the soft blending of colours illustrates my emotions during the pandemic well. There are some warm colours used, such as yellow and red, and those represent hope and happiness found through some relaxing activities such as reading classic novels, playing the piano, and having a cup of tea while journaling. I decided to illustrate my day on a wheel because I felt that every day is the same cycle (see Figure 5). My journal entry echoes with contiguity as I experience life as a process of continuous inquiries, engagement, and learning from discomfort (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). The images display the movements and tensions with the self and the outside world during the pandemic.

Sha contemplated her self-isolation days at home. She has an image of herself in the middle, floating over the happenings in her day (see Figure 6). The moments are divided yet still merged together as a whole. There are strong metaphors in her journal: the eyes represent the outside world peeking at her home environment virtually; the sun and moon give the transition of one day to another, and the same cycle keeps repeating. As Sha expressed it, “I feel that the days are spinning so fast.” There are many frames in her artwork, drawing us to other spaces. It is evident that Sha had been inquiring through windows that take many forms such as house windows, digital screens, photo frames, and the life moments framed within this journal entry. This process can be living inquiry because Sha was trying to make sense of her life during the pandemic by “engaging emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing” (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 902).

Figure 5

Becky's Visual Map of Her Typical Day

Figure 6

Sha's Visual Map of Her Day

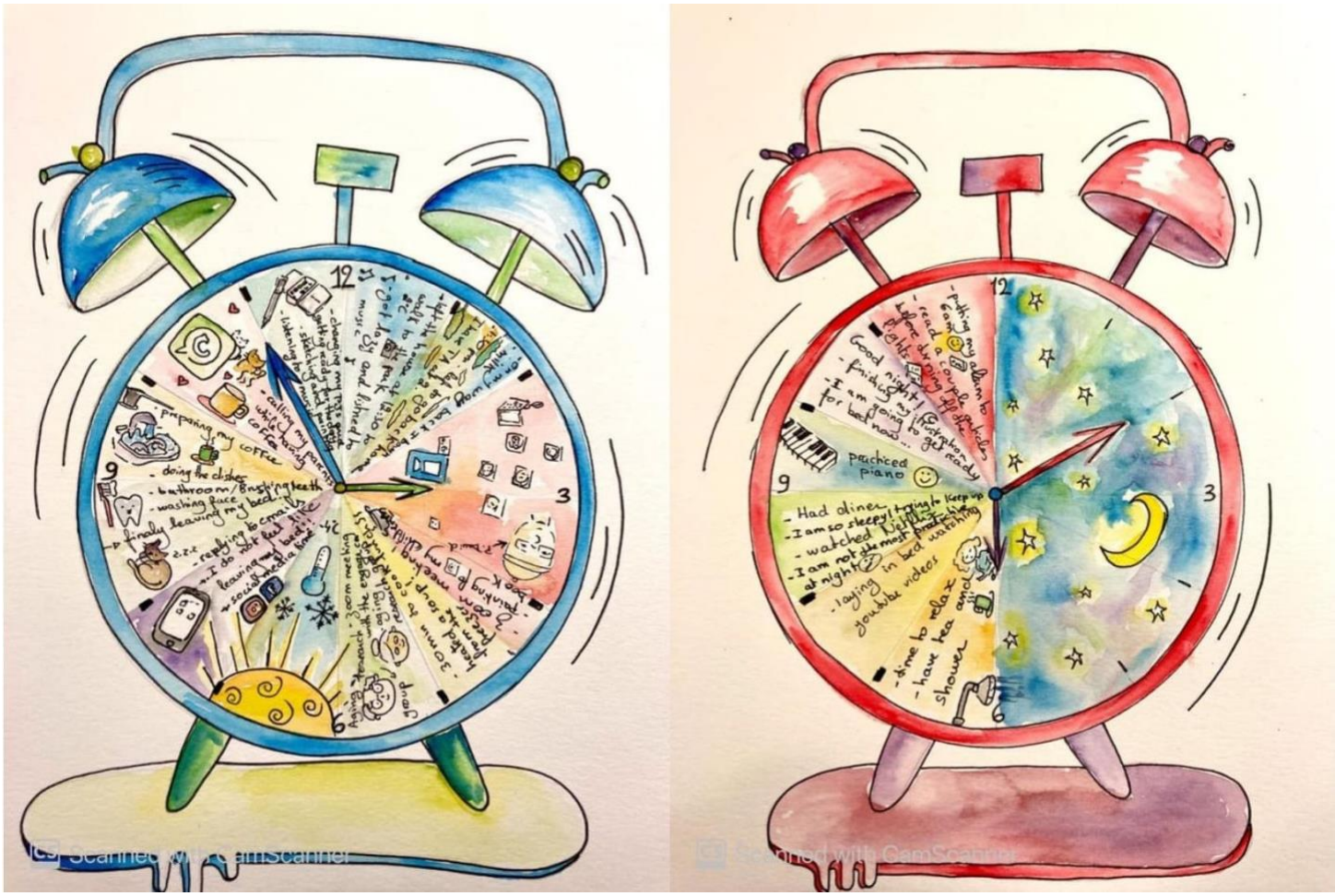
Lara's life was very different from the rest of us, as she worked five days a week in a seniors' care home. For this prompt, she selected one non-working day from her current life and sketched two alarm clocks representing day and night (see Figure 7). She used many iconic

images representing her daily events and included an abundance of writings to help us read her day in detail. From Lara's journal entries, where she kept a clear record of her daily activities in sequential order, I sense that she was trying to find order within her complex lifestyle during the pandemic, yet with the a/r/tographic concept of contiguity, all the activities in her day lived through one another and not as separate events.

As the workshop unfolded, we discussed the six renderings of a/r/tography and agreed that it is difficult to categorize each separately, as they tend to overlap when we relate our creative and living experiences with them. We oscillate between, across, and within all at different points, and sometime the renderings overlap and become multiple dispositions in the process.

Figure 7

Lara's Two Visual Maps of Her Typical Day



Sketching Together: Our Home Window Views

Since we felt ready to sketch together, we decided to do the second creative prompt during the Zoom session. During the days of self-isolation, I had been doing many sketches in my visual journals recording the window views from my home. For this research, I decided to do this together with my colleagues. I expressed that what we see outside the window also mirrors our spirituality and identity, more than just images of what we see. We spent about 30

minutes drawing together. Most of the time, we were quiet as we had to focus on observations and drawing. Because we could not point our cameras at our work in progress, we felt disconnected and had to check in with one another once in a while by looking at the faces on the screens. Finally, we shared our sketches by holding up our sketchbooks or iPad in front of the camera (see Figures 8 and 9). Nancy, Lara, and Sha's sketches were similar to architectures outside different windows in Montreal. Looking at their sketches made me miss Montreal even more.

Sha's drawing of her window view contained organic and human-made elements: a tree with bare branches and electrical poles with wires (see Figure 10). She used a brush pen tool in Procreate on her iPad, as she liked the effect of line width variations by controlling her hand pressure. We liked the look of how similar it is to traditional drawing media such as dip pens and sign pens, and that it contains more life and energy compared to solid and uniform lines seen in many digital drawings. Sha is engaged in living inquiry because she created a reconfiguration of reality through the process of seeing and simplifying her seeing.

Figure 8 *Lara Shares Her Drawing Done with Procreate on iPad*

Figure 9 (below) *Nancy Shares Her Drawing on Paper*

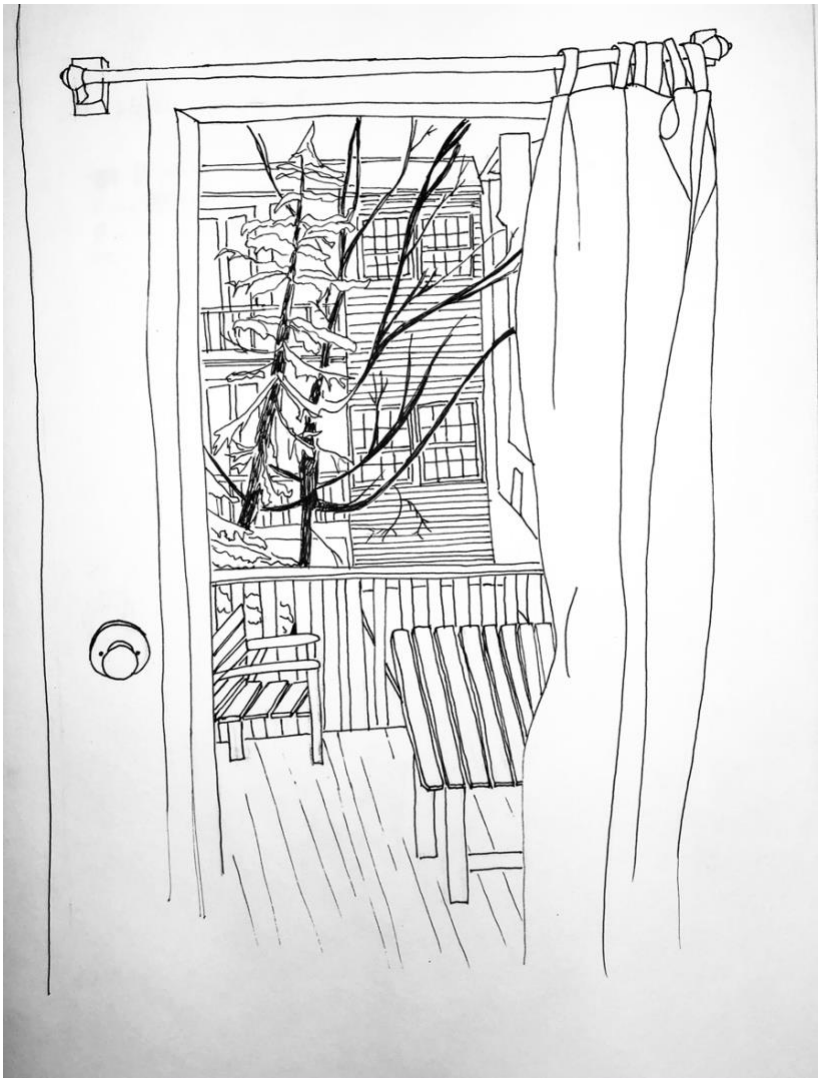
Figure 10

Sha's Drawing of Her Window View

Nancy's drawing experience was seeing through the different layers of subject matters from inside her home all the way to the neighbour's house (see Figure 11). We liked the different vertical and horizontal lines which create unity and juxtaposition at the same time. Through living inquiry, Nancy was trying to make sense of her experience at home by organizing her thoughts and feelings in a meditative drawing process.

Figure 11

Nancy's Drawing of Her Balcony View



Lara also drew on her iPad. She used a brush pen tool to draw as well, with black and brown for the line colours. She rendered the sky and clouds using a specific cloud effect tool on Procreate and by moving the pen on the coloured sky area, and she expressed that this was much easier and quicker to do compared to using traditional art media (see Figure 12). By trying a new creative medium, Lara engaged in living inquiry as she continued to experiment and discover new functions of the art mediums she uses.

Figure 12

Lara's Window View Drawing with Procreate

In my case, I sketched in my journal with my usual medium: pen and watercolours. The sky in Vancouver was also overcast, and I tried to be more precise with the colour for the sky (see Figure 13). I mixed my own grey using ultramarine blue and purple instead of mixing water into black, as I wanted to give more life for the seemingly dull sky. Nancy suggested I try Payne's Grey, which has a bluish tone similar to the colour I mixed. We agreed that colours are important to establish the atmosphere and mood in a painting. In this process, I incorporated living inquiry as I pushed for a deeper way to express my sensations. Nancy's feedback is living inquiry in action as she used her roles as artist, teacher, and researcher to help me reflect and find new possibilities for my painting process.

Figure 13

Becky's Window View Sketch

How We Felt Living Inquiry During the Pandemic

Moving with living inquiry to guide us, we expressed our sensations of how we feel about staying indoors and making connections with the outside world. I conveyed that many ordinary things have become precious now, commenting, “I think we are taking a lot of things for granted before the pandemic.”

As part of our living inquiry in action, Nancy and I expressed that it has been challenging to stay motivated in this pandemic as we are often stuck at home and everything is online. It seemed that being not able to move around and being online all the time had given us a false illusion of unproductivity. Sha said, “I learnt many small things like quilting, crocheting, and gardening.” Lara admitted, “I sometimes can be extremely productive one day and then the other days like horrible.” Lara’s comments suggested how she had been enduring the effects of the pandemic living alone and also working as a frontline worker, as she oscilliated between productivity and hopelessness in her roles.

Based on our previous conversations and the first creative prompt, we were actually doing many things in a day, but why were we still feeling unproductive? The reason is that we were doing too many things virtually in the same space and the same way, and everything overlaps into the same sensation through the computer screens.

Our Sensations Generate Movements and Learning

Near the end of this workshop, I showed my recent art journal page of a sensorial sketch I did at Yaletown, Vancouver when I finally ventured out. I told my colleagues how much I have missed this place since I often walked around the area while working there as a preschool

teacher. Nancy responded, “do you know that I was in Vancouver for a few months many years ago?” We were surprised, and she continued sharing her story:

> *When I was finishing my undergraduate degree in art history (at Concordia), I didn’t know what to do with the degree. People were just saying, “Well, the next step is grad school.” Once I was at grad school at UBC, I was super unhappy. I couldn’t find a place to live right away, so I lived with my aunt at Port Coquitlam which is very far from UBC. Sometimes, I slept on the couches of my friends who lives in downtown Vancouver. The big part was that I didn’t like the program. I wasn’t making art anymore, because art history is a hundred percent research all the time. At that point, I was so unhappy, and I said, I need to go back home and figure out what I really want to do. So, I was in Vancouver for just two months. After coming back to Montreal, I did another undergraduate degree in art education at Concordia.*

Nancy’s story makes me think that we might have walked past each other at some point before we met in Montreal. We never know how our trajectories could intersect in life!

I recalled that Lara has more than one undergraduate degree as well. Lara responded:

> *I studied for two years in interior design back in Lebanon, but I didn’t continue to finish the degree. I could do one more year and graduate. I was questioning: is it worth it? Maybe I don’t like it. For this program, hand drawing is in the first year only. We use AutoCAD, do buildings, and take measurements of stairs… I hated it. I*

just memorized, and after I came to Canada, I forgot all about them. I still have a lot of models at home.

Lara's story embodies living inquiry as the process of learning can be experimental and with a mindset of taking risks, rather than pushing for completion. Living inquiry is always active throughout the stages of our lives as we are always reflecting on our experiences and inner self and moving beyond familiar spaces.

I pursued another diploma in Early Childhood Education after my BFA, and Sha got a diploma in animation after her undergraduate education in Fashion Design. It is clear that we are lifelong learners, always moving and searching for new possibilities. Walking into the unknown make us feel unsecure, but the experiences always enrich our lives.

We Carry on With Living Inquiry

At the end of the workshop, I encouraged the participants to finish their window view sketches or create more work in their visual journals. We agreed that looking out of our home windows is an effective way to reflect on our surroundings and inner self—thus, an active implementation of living inquiry that can happen every day.

Workshop #3: Metaphor and Metonymy

The protocol of this study was cumulative, such that the previous weeks inform our current inquiries and discussions. In this week, metaphor and metonymy as a rendering was added to our a/r/tographic process and practice.

As always, we began the workshop with our current life updates and some life stories. Since Nancy mentioned that she had travelled in Europe for a year with her family in 2018, I was curious to know more details of her experience.

Nancy spoke with great enthusiasm:

2018 was the best year of my life. I travelled all over Europe with my husband and daughter. We left Montreal for a year, we took our daughter out of school, and we just travelled all over Europe for a year. We visited ten countries, and stayed in different cities as little as two days and as long as a month. No agenda unless we had to meet with some friends, otherwise we were just hopping around, like "where should we go today?"

I was amazed. "That's such a long time. So exciting!"

Nancy continued, "It was so impactful when looking back, maybe it's because of the effect of the COVID time. When a photo comes up, I got very sad and nostalgic, even though it wasn't that long ago. It's more nostalgia than memory. The longing is so intense that we don't know when we are going to travel again. My husband is talking about retiring to Ireland. I kept track of the museums and galleries in a visual journal. We went to 210 museums and galleries! We walked a lot, about seven hours a day. We visited so many public monuments and churches with abundance of decors."

"Did you draw and paint?" I was excited to know more.

"A little bit. Because we were moving around so much that I was just using my small journal and I have a portable watercolor set. And I mostly collected a lot of things. Again, we need to spend seven hours a day just walking, so it was hard to sit down and sketch. So instead, I would collect things from the places I go, cut them up, stick them in my journal with written notes. I did do a little bit of drawing, but not as much as I would want."

"That's okay, I'm sure that there were a lot of souvenirs to collect along the way, and you must have a lot of photographs too," I said.

"I took twenty-five thousand photos, collected things and collage in my visual journal, and wrote notes... I made my daughter make a visual journal as well to collect things that were important to her," Nancy answered with a big smile.

"It's nice to have a mother who is an art educator. You are such a great influence to your daughter." I spoke with admiration.

"Yes, she gets a bit frustrated though because by nature, she is not technically good as I am as I'm much older, but she compares herself and gets upset that she doesn't get it as quickly... but she is getting better. She started taking art at school, and I'm so excited to see what they are doing in her class without judging the teacher. She could have an amazing teacher, she could have a terrible teacher," Nancy responded.

I thanked Nancy for sharing her stories with us (also see Figure 14). I remarked that my family played a great role in shaping my identity, including becoming an artist. The participants responded with their own feelings about their families, and at this point, we were having dialogues like friends, and some of the stories were personal. We expressed that having supportive parents and/or spouses is an important factor that kept our dreams as artists, and that it is not necessary that we came from families with artistic backgrounds, as we did not have family members who worked as artists.

Figure 14

Nancy's Visual Journals from Her Travels in France (above) and Ireland (below)

Sharing Our Visual Journal Entries for Living Inquiry: The Views Outside Our Windows

Then we moved on to sharing our visual journal entries based on last week's prompt. We shared screens and talked about our images. For example, I made four journal entries on four different days, sketching from the same window using different art mediums (see Figure 15). The first response was done during our previous workshop using pen and watercolours, and in my usual style. For the next three entries, I used blue coloured pencils, dark brown wax crayon, and watercolour pencils. Even though I used different drawing mediums, it was challenging for me to break through my comfort zone of drawing in a different style—as I said, "it is hard for me to change or adapt to a new medium." I expressed that I enjoy using hatching lines created using coloured pencils because they bring out the invisible energy from the rather flat surfaces we see. When I see an overcast sky, I don't just see grey; I can also feel the moving clouds and the vibrating air, and the mild sunshine colour pushing behind the clouds. This served as the conversational launching point for our workshop on metaphor/metonym.

Then Nancy shared her journal entries (see Figure 16). She made three drawings in her sketchbook over the week, looking from the different windows in her home.

"Wow, there are so many layers to see." I examined Nancy's work and felt mesmerized by the richness of details.

Nancy explained about the view from her front door, of the diamond shapes and frosted glass: "this diamond shape with bending edge is creating a really neat distortion. I really liked drawing that." In our perspective, the distorted view from the diamond shape glass is a metaphor of how we see the world during the pandemic.

Nancy said, “I find that I like the branches. There is so many in real life, that if I draw all of them, it’s just a mess. So, we got to pull back and capture the essence.”

I agreed with Nancy. “I draw trees quite often these days. When I draw, I focus on the trunk first, then the main branches. Then I just draw some more twigs that pops, and leave the messy ones out.”

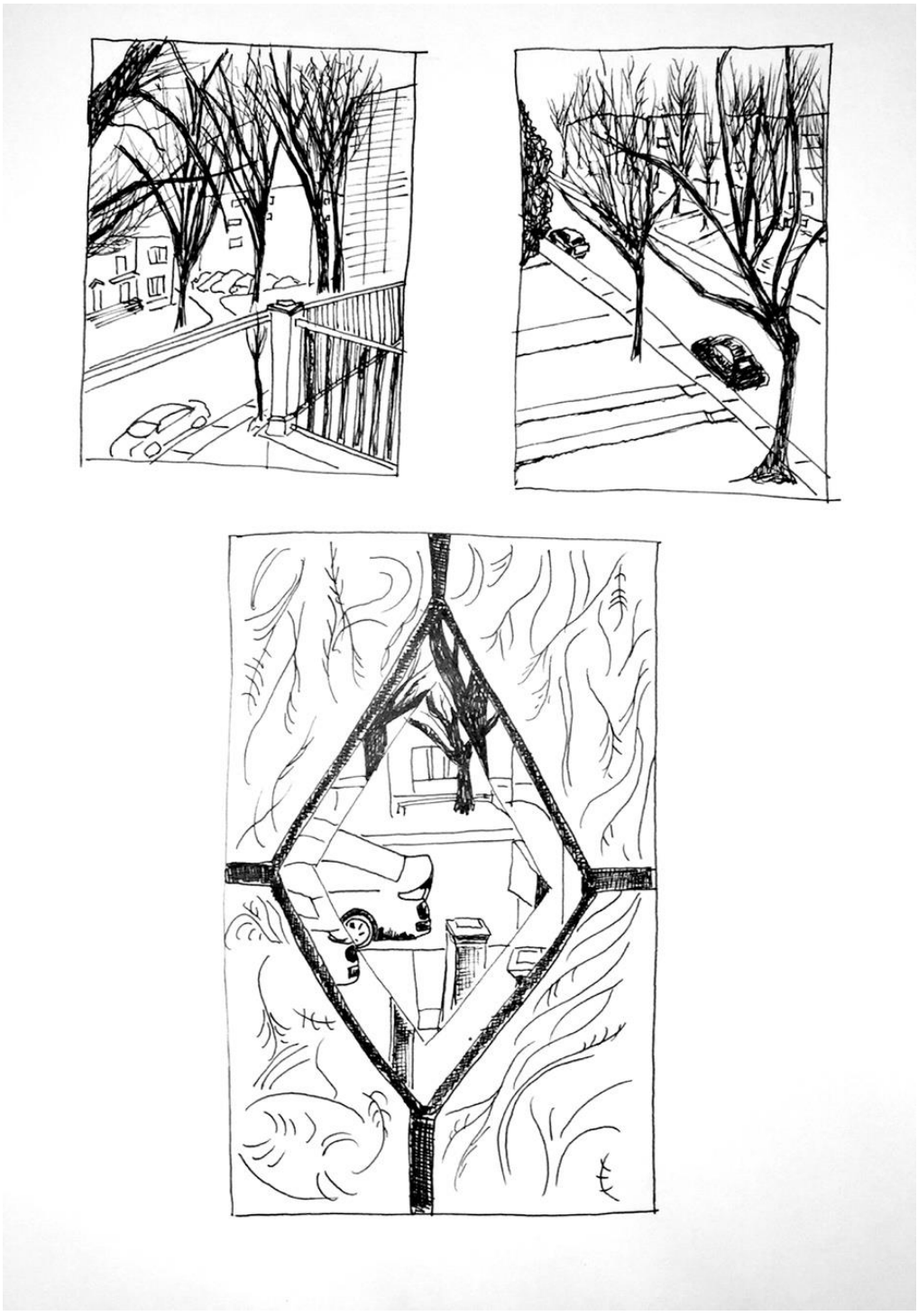
Nancy and I incorporated both living inquiry and metaphor in our drawing process of trees as we simplify reality into symbolic interpretations that suggest deeper meanings. At this point, we are shifting our conversation to the discussion of metaphor and metonymy.

Figure 15

Becky’s Visual Journal Page Spread

Figure 16

Nancy's Drawings of Her Home Window Views



Sha took two photographs from two different windows in her home, and she modified them into black and white (see Figures 17 and 18). We found that this image conveys a timeless sentiment in the street view, and that the historical building on the upper part is in juxtaposition with the modern cars and bicycle on the lower part. The composition of this narrow view between the curtains gives us an illusion of seeing the past and present the same time in a dramatic way, thus giving a strong sense of metaphor and metonymy of a life state during the pandemic, of how we were enduring the present while feeling nostalgic.

Figure 17

Sha's Photograph of Her Window View (1)

Figure 18

Sha's Photograph of Her Window View (2)

The second photograph is an angled view from another window. Sha said, "I wanted to take pictures because I want to see the outside. I feel that the things I have inside confuses me... I want to pay more attention to the things inside, I don't want to lose them." The window glass is fuzzy with spray from plant watering, and we see many things entangled together outside: the electrical poles, trees, and the road signs. Those entanglements, a typical modern world view, are in contrast with the organic houseplants full of natural and primitive life. Sha

expressed that she did not want to wipe the window clean because she likes the water spray effect: “most of the spray marks are lines. I like lines.”

I commented, “You know, I think you are doing an inquiry using black and white.”

Sha responded, “Whenever I take pictures these days, I would change them to black and white, I don’t know why.”

From our conversation above, I could sense Sha has been engaging with living inquiry in her life at home as she represented her “emergent understandings” within aesthetic experiences using these photographs (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 903).

Lara created a four-second animation of the same window view in her home on four different days (see Figure 19). She combined them into a larger window composition and added some playful lines with continuous wriggling movements on top of the photographs. Overall, this short animation gave us a sensation of childhood and of seeing the world in simplistic yet playful ways.

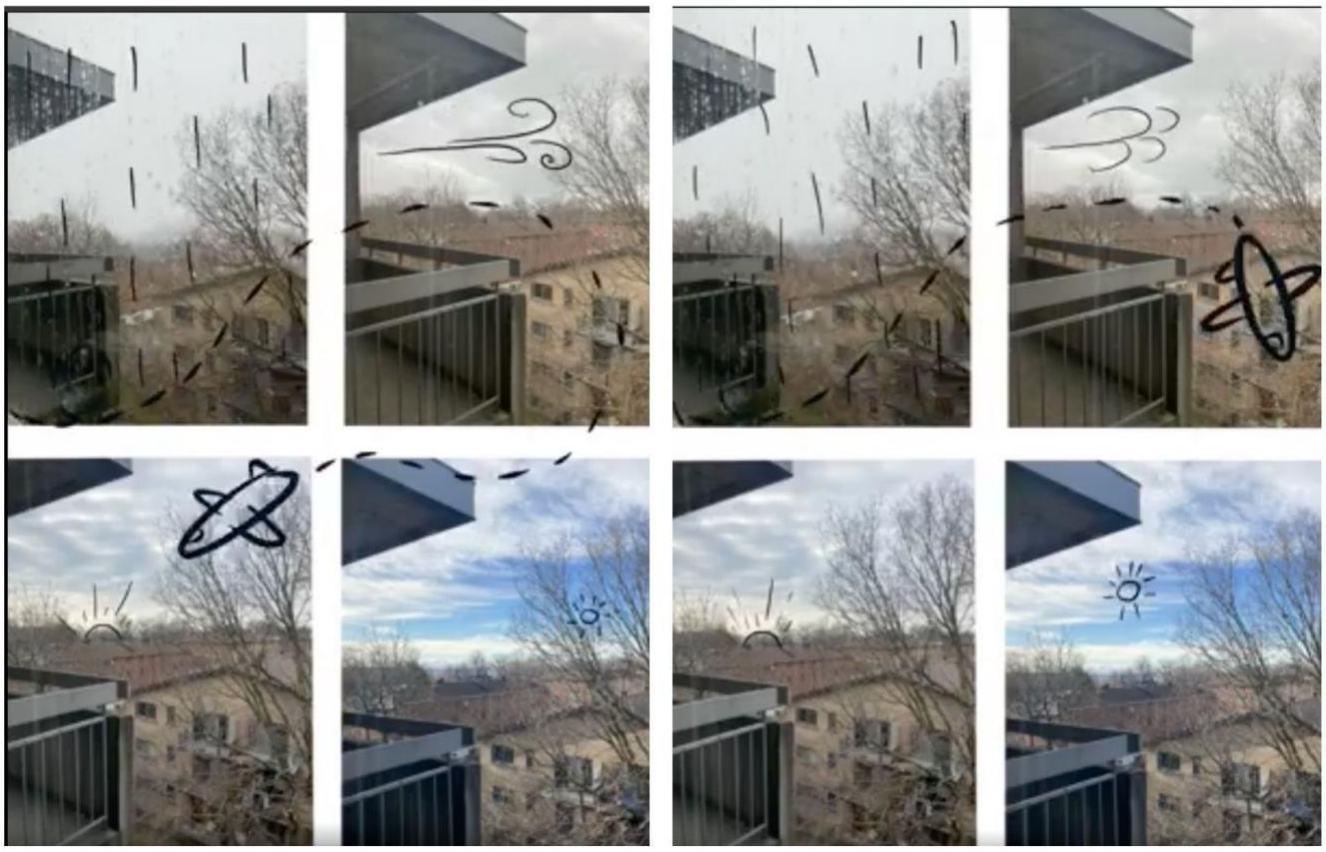
I asked Lara, “How did you decide to draw the things over the photographs? What does the moving airplane mean?”

Lara answered, “I just did them for fun. I want to use the moving airplane to create a flow from image one to four. I drew rain, wind, and sun to emphasize the weather.”

There is a strong sense of metaphor and metonymy in Lara’s animation because it has a provocative quality with “metonymical meaning” embedded in the moving images, suggesting the fleeting and temporal moments in the days.

Figure 19

Two Time Frames from Lara's Four-Second Animation



Transiting From Living Inquiry to Metaphor and Metonymy

Near the end of the workshop, I introduced the creative prompt for this week. Based on the a/r/tographic rendering of metaphor and metonymy as defined by Spinggay et al. (2005), it is "[through] metaphors and metonymic relationships, we make things sensible" or "accessible to the senses" (p. 904). Since we had already talked for over an hour in this Zoom session, we felt fatigued and decided to do this prompt on our own time during the week. For the creative prompt, I suggested that the participants take walks in their home or neighbourhood or anywhere they prefer in the city, and sketch or/and photograph scenes and/or objects they see

and/or never noticed before along the way. I also encouraged the participants to record sensory aspects such as smell, tactile, and sounds. This prompt is informed by the a/r/tographic walking propositions: being present to possibilities, being present in-between place and relationality, and being present to interiority (Lee et al, 2019, pp. 684–688).

Workshop #4: Openings

The conversations at the beginning of this workshop contain thematic examples of how we developed our art styles over the years: futher embodying contiguity, the practice of living inquiry, and how different meanings emerged through the change of artistic expressions (metaphor and metonymy). Our shared thoughts were also transiting to the a/r/tographic rendering of the week: openings, by being "active and responsive to what is seen and known and to what lies beneath the surface" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905).

Our Evolving Art Styles, and Our Thoughts on Art Styles

Sha took out a sketchbook and shared some of the pages with us (see Figure 20). She spoke with enthusiasm:

> *I used to draw with a fountain pen on paper when I was a teenager, by making small illustrations using abstract lines. Then I stopped and moved on to drawing anatomy and painting. When I joined the animation industry, I began drawing digitally and now using my iPad. The drawing experience became very different compare to my early years, it is more narrative now.*

Figure 20

One of Sha's Fountain Pen Artworks in Sketchbook

"I love it. It's your style," exclaimed Lara.

"Wow, the style is so cool and different from what you do now as an illustrator." I was very surprised.

"So, I used markers to color. I designed emojis, the cartoon apples, for Telegram [an online messaging app] in 2014," Sha explained.

"Sha, I think you really should continue creating on paper," I suggested. "It's amazing that you were able to create those illustrations with just a fountain pen and markers. I think we don't need a room of art supplies to be creative."

Sha said, "It depends on what makes you feel better to work with. I only had these things. I had watercolors but I didn't enjoy using them."

"I think when having too much art supplies, it can be distractions and not helping us to focus on being productive and creative," I commented.

"Yes, I agree," said Sha.

I moved on to ask Nancy, "How did your art style changed [*sic*] over the past twenty to thirty years?"

Nancy shared:

I've always loved drawing more than anything else. When I was in my teens, I used to draw realistically, you know, the goal of the teenager is to make it look real. When I went to art school, I realized, oh my god, this is not the only way to make art. When I met all those people in art school and saw their styles so different from mine, and how art school is accepting styles other than realism, I was like, oh this is interesting. So, it gave me a chance to experiment more without always being realistic, but I was still drawn to it. Even in my 20s, I was still doing realism. A bit like who likes everything, I had tried all kinds of things too, and I got so excited when I learn about a new technique, and I really wanted to try it. So, if you look at my body of work, it's so different. But I would say that one thing I always deal with in my art is the theme of memory and nostalgia no matter what the style is.

Figure 21

Nancy's Artworks on Her Living Room Walls

Nancy stood up and moved her camera around her living room to show us her paintings on the walls (see Figure 21). “I’m not tied to one thing only, and in the art world that may not be desirable. People often ask, so what style do you have?”

Lara related to experimenting with different art styles. “I can remember once I went to the workshop at my university in Lebanon, I dealt with wood and plexiglass. I used to spend my whole life at the university, literally I didn’t go home, I was in the studio or at the workshop doing something. My art style is all different.”

Sha added, “how lovely art is. I don’t like to stay in one point. I like to explore new things, not the things I know right now or I do.”

Nancy responded, “What’s hard about this is that if you want to get a show, especially a solo show, you have to justify your pieces and give a proposal to a gallery. They see all this… like who are you? What is your style? This doesn’t make sense together. Most art spaces are looking for a body of work that is clearly from one person.”

Sha asserted, “Maybe as art educators, we should change it.”

“We want to keep learning all the time, so we try new things,” said Nancy.

“I think schools should teach students that they don’t have to stay the same. Even though you used different styles and medium, the body of work still speaks about you,” Sha expanded.

Nancy added, “I think there is also something very admirable in artists who work in the same manner for years and years. I think there is something interesting as well to that, like Becky. But I can’t imagine doing it myself.”

I responded to Nancy's point: "I always see something new within the familiar. For example, an orange. Every orange has a different organic shape and colors, that's why I'm always interested in drawing the same things again, each time I see with fresh new eyes."

Nancy asked, "Have you found the differences in the oranges you draw over time?"

"Yes, I used different mediums. For example, different pens create different line qualities, same for the watercolor palettes. I used to focus more on bringing out the vibrancy of objects, now I like the organic colors better. I can see many kinds of tints and shades."

"How many sketchbooks have you filled now?" Nancy asked.

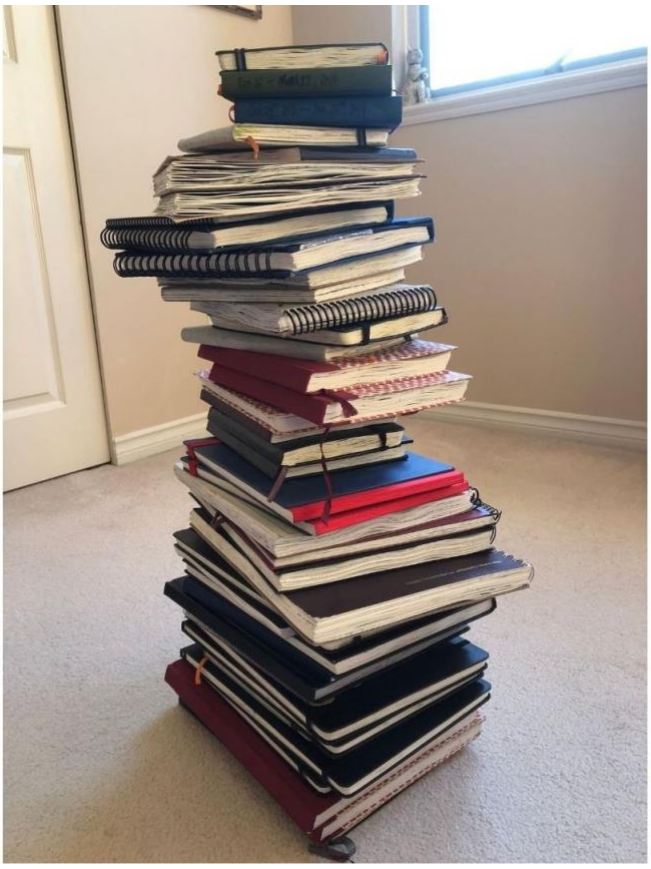
"About fifty," I answered (see Figure 22).

"It's part of you, right? They are extensions of you quite literally, because you do it every single day, and like you said, you need to." Nancy seemed delighted.

In terms of contiguity, our past and present art styles were interrelated and developed from changes in life experiences and sensations, which is also living inquiry. Through the experimentation with different art mediums and styles, we incorporated metaphor and metonymy in artworks by representing ambiguous meanings and moving between the familiar and the unknown (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 904). We sense new learning opportunities by trying new mediums that give us new aesthetic meanings at the same time, thus allowing spaces for openings. By recording the same subject matters in repetition in my visual journals, I am seeking the unknown in the familiar, and therefore the process is different each time (p. 905).

Figure 22

My Art Journals Created Over the Past 9 Years (2012–2021)



"I find that it is a way for me to calm down that I don't have to focus on life's demands while I do it. If I don't journal for some days, I feel that something is lost," I said.

Lara suggested that "if you could find every single orange from every sketchbook and put them together chronologically, it would be fun."

"Oh yeah, I can try to do that and share them next week," I smiled.

Lara replied, "I like watching YouTube videos of art tutorials and tend to copy what those vloggers do, for example, an oil pastel painting... that's the problem. I copy stuff."

"It's okay, you learn something from it," said Sha.

From our conversation above, it is evident that we have a mentoring relationship as we teach one another; in relation to the a/r/tographic rendering opening, this process is "active and responsive" (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 905).

Enduring Humility as Space for Openings

I sensed something from our conversations, so I asked, "Have you ever felt being judged by others in the way you create? How do you feel?"

Nancy shared her experience:

I'm sure I have. I think it's interesting. As I get older, I care less and less. I don't care if you like it or not. I love it. But when I was younger, because I was very good at realism, I was the art star at my high school. I was not afraid of judgement because my style was realism. And people, my teenage peers, were always like, wow, that's so good. No one really judged me badly because they saw that as the ultimate way of doing art and I had achieved it. But coming to art school, when I saw all those different things going on, that's when I got afraid. I was really scared of being judged. Because first of all, I'm not going to be a star of any kind because there were people whose skill levels way beyond mine even in terms of realism. And secondly, everyone was confident and it gave me less confidence. But again, I was pretty young, and you know, it's with life experience that you get to know yourself more and accept what you can and cannot do. And you accept that there is going to be people who don't like your stuff, and that is oaky. But it's always hard because it's like a piece of you that you are putting out there, right? There is always that moment of vulnerability when you present it to the world, because it's

part of you, so you might feel that they don't like you when they don't like your art… I can understand these feelings. But it doesn't impact me as much anymore. I'm going to do it and I'm going to be my own worst judge, probably.

Lara shared:

When I was young, I recreated paintings in my art classes. I was the fastest in doing this, and I was not judged at that time. Then when I went to art school, it was hard for me to create my own art because I had done so many re-creations. I hated every single painting I did, and I think it's self-judgement. In the first year of architecture, I learned to draw more realistically, and I had a horrible professor who was so judging. She made me cry. It broke me when I finished my fine arts degree and went to architecture, seeing those seventeen-year-olds who could draw better than me. I had friends saying, 'you finished fine arts and you still draw like this?' And because I don't have a style, I was always struggling to find a style. My professor told me not to do an exhibition if I don't have my own style. Until now, I still don't have a style. I don't know what I'm doing.

I asked Lara, "So why didn't you finish the architecture degree?"

Lara replied, "I hated architecture. I didn't like being sitting down on a computer and doing everything with AutoCAD, but at the same time, I was getting good grades, so I couldn't say that I was not good at it. I was getting it, but I just didn't like it. That's why I decided to go with a master's and dropped the two years."

Sha began to speak about her thoughts on judgement:

I think everyone has this self-judgement. I think it sometimes helps when you see the things you want to improve, but at the same time, it can stop you from creating for a while because it happened to me before. I criticized myself a lot that I couldn't create anymore. I was comparing my work with others', and I felt so humiliated that I will never be as good as them.

I frowned and agreed that this happened to me as well. "I compare myself with others on social media."

Sha commented, "Yes, because there are a lot of things that you can see on social media, and instead of being inspired, you would stop."

Lara giggled. "Whenever I say I'm an artist, someone would ask, can you draw me?"

Sha responded, "Most of the time, people have no idea about what art can be. They only think that realistic paintings are art."

I agreed. "Realism is just one of the many art styles. If everyone is pursuing this style, then we would all be creating the same stuff. We need to find unique ways to create from our heart instead of following an idealism."

Sha nodded. "We should feel proud of ourselves being artists because we can see, feel, and express what common people can't."

Our conversation above conveys a sense of the a/r/tographic rendering openings as we "refuse comfort, predictability, and and safety" (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 905). The idealism in this world can affect our unique creative process by pushing us to do socially acceptable actions such as staying with one single art style to enter exhibitions. From our conversations, it is

evident that we did not yield to the rules and just kept on exploring the unknown to find our true potentials as artists, teachers, and researchers.

Sharing Visual Journal Entries for Metaphor/Metonymy: Our Encounters

Then we moved on to share our visual journal work from last week's prompt. Nancy took photographs on her walk (see Figure 23). She shared her work and thoughts before leaving the workshop: "I was short on time so I just took photos. I didn't like it. I want to draw. I think I'm going to draw the pictures I took in my sketchbook, or I'm going to print the pictures and cut them into a collage. I like the tangible things of the visual journal."

Sha took a photograph during her walk at night (see Figure 24). She was very excited to share her picture with us. "Look, the branches and twigs look like a tunnel spinning in the moonlight. It was amazing and I had to take a picture of it. I was mesmerized by the sight".

Lara also took a photograph on her walk to work (see Figure 25). "I stopped to see this tiny snowflake on the gap of the sidewalk. It's so pretty and I had to take a picture. Some people around were wondering why I was taking a photograph, they thought that I had a problem," she laughed.

Figure 23

Nancy's Photographs from Her Walk

Figure 24

Sha's Photograph of Her Sight

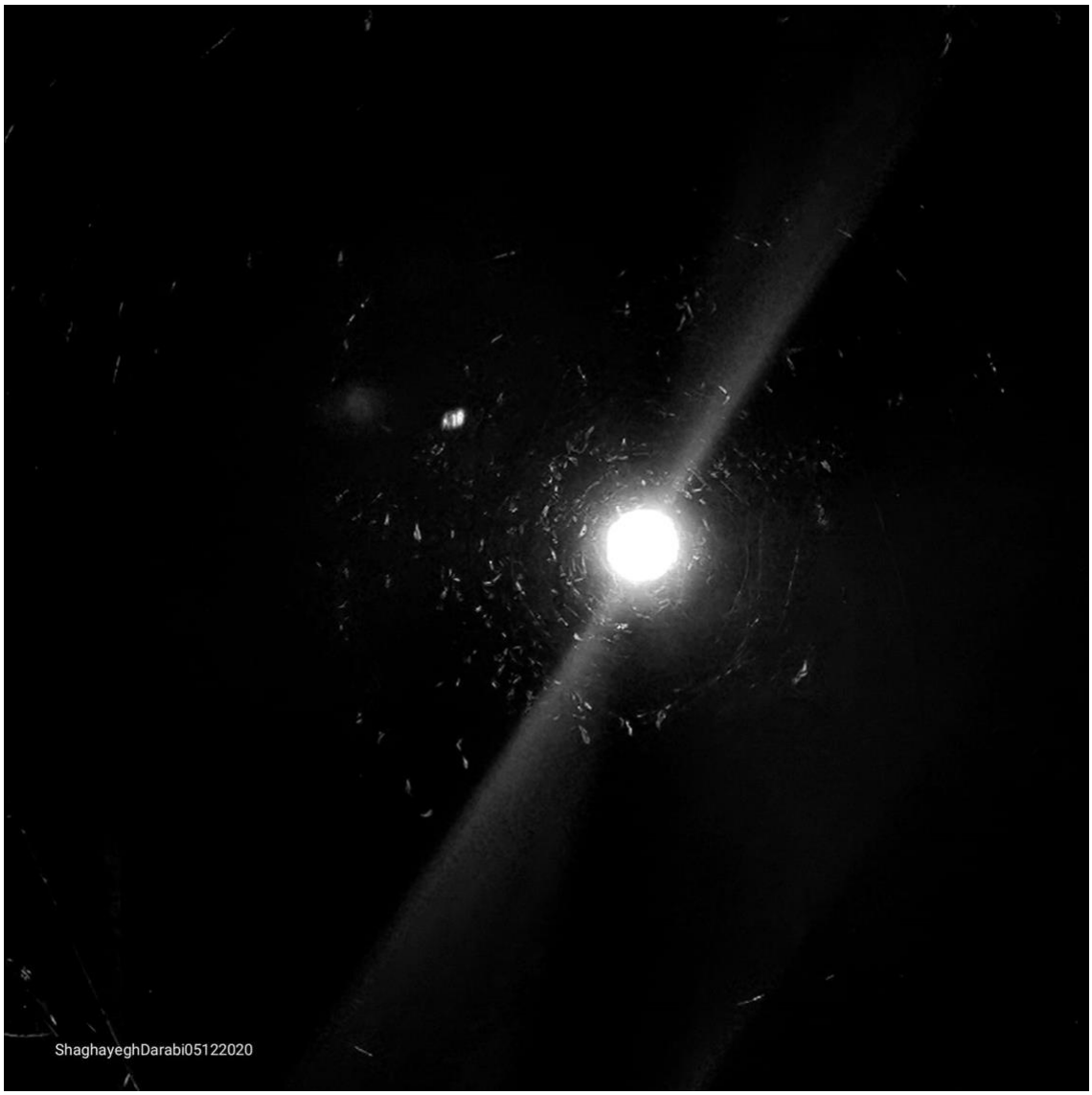


Figure 25

Lara's Photograph of the Snowflake

I shared that I didn't think too much on the prompt, that I just sketched in my visual journal the way I always did (see Figure 26). I found that this prompt has always been part of me because I'm always paying attention to my environment and sensing something new every day.

Figure 26

Becky's Visual Journal Spread for Prompt #3

There is a richness of metaphors in our visual journal entries, in relation to the moment, the object, and the sense of body-object-space. The images are everyday moments that

demonstrate how we are learning, teaching, and researching as art educators, as we made the mundane subject matters that are often overlooked "accessible to the senses" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 904).

Transiting From Metaphor and Metonymy to Openings

I introduced the creative prompt for this week before Nancy had to leave the workshop early. The prompt was based on the a/r/tographic rendering "openings": pre-colour a page in the journal with any art medium you prefer, such as watercolours, colour markers, collage, or otherwise. Then draw on top with a black marker or pen of what the colour schemes trigger about your experiences during COVID. Participants are encouraged to draw in any style and approach they feel comfortable with. By colouring a blank space freely without any pre-planning of subject matters, I strove to make the art-making process less predictable and to work with a stream of consciousness approach to open up a new way to construct knowledge. Much as Springgay et al. (2005) suggested, this activity "requires attentiveness to what is seen and known and to what lies beneath the surface" (p. 905).

The rest of the meeting time unfolded with more conversations with Lara and Sha, laden with the concept of openings.

Sha brought up something she saw on TV: "Do you know that some people can draw with their undominant hands?"

I got so excited hearing this. "You know I had done some drawings with my foot for an art project in my undergraduate years, that's about seven years ago."

Sha kept on connecting with me. "I was born during the war, and in the news, I saw many people who lost their hands, or legs, or even their eyes. I think I was eight years old, and I

was trying to draw with my toes, then I tried drawing and writing with my non-dominant left hand."

I found this idea of drawing with our non-dominant hand interesting and suggested that we could do this activity next week with the notion of openings to guide us.

Workshop #5: Reverberations

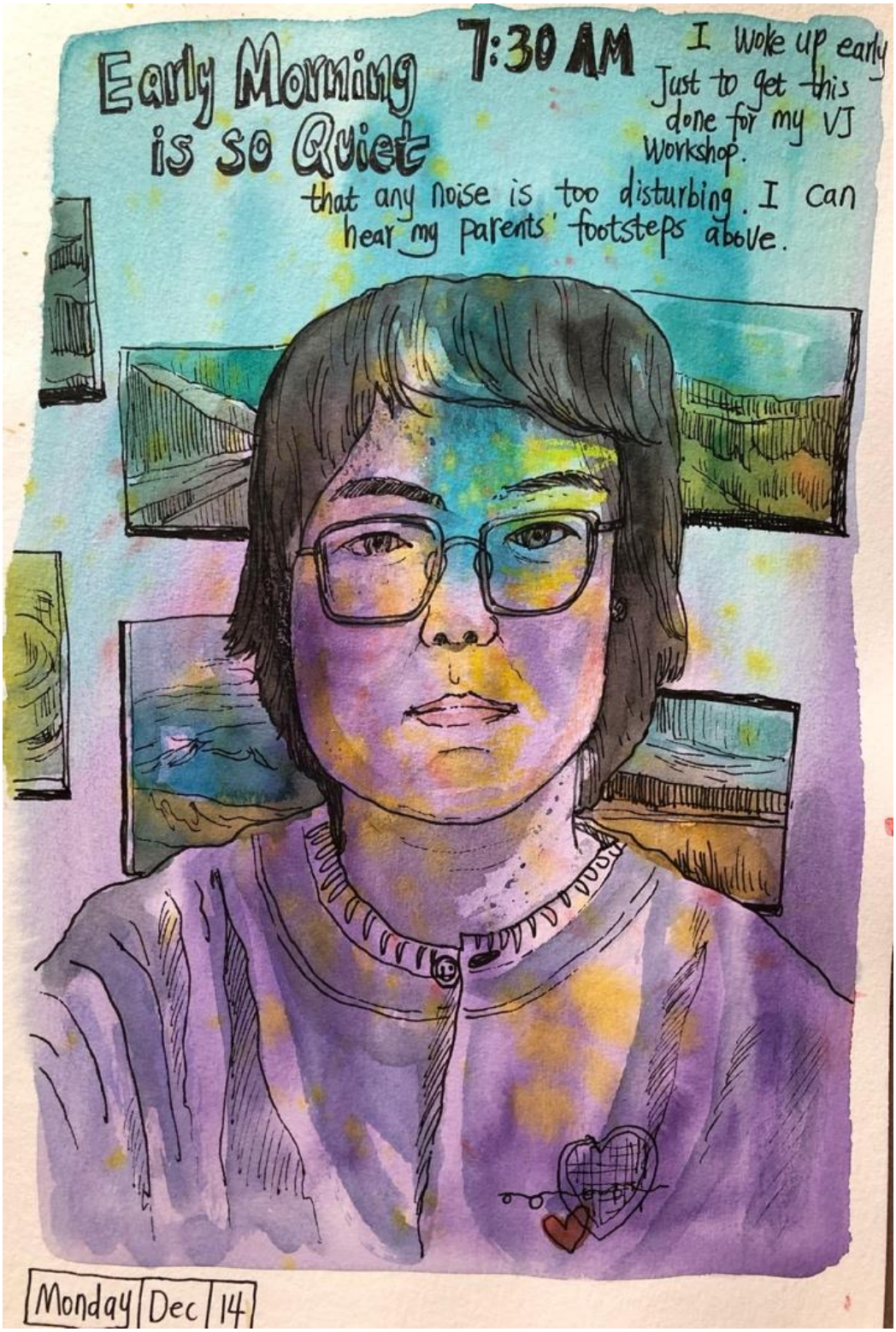
Sharing Visual Journal Entries for Openings: Our Self Images

As was our protocol, we began this workshop by sharing our visual journal entries based on the rendering of openings from the previous week.

I talked about my page. "I pre-painted the page with watercolors using just two colors, purple and cerulean blue blending together. I think these two colors really express my mood during this pandemic. Before the colors dried, I splattered yellow and red on top to create these small blooming dots, which means the positive energy growing in the depressing days. There's always light, and there's always hope. Then, I drew a self-portrait on top using a black pen. I really like the end result. I rarely journal in this style but I love it, the random watercolor wash is just giving so much sensations. And I loved doing this in the early morning when the house was so quiet and my mind feels so fresh" (see Figure 27).

Figure 27

Becky's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #4



Lara shared her journal entry (see Figure 28): “I painted the background with watercolor on paper, then liquefied it on my iPad’s Procreate. Here I have the human immune system fighting the virus with laser guns.” This image has a strong sense of metaphor/metonymy: the human immune system can be Lara’s self image. It made me think how she had been combating the challenges during the pandemic as she worked as a frontline worker and dealt with many personal issues at the same time. This points to the concept of openings, that Lara was working through “the difficult, the unknown, the ambiguous, and the unpredictable” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905).

Sha also used the liquefy tool in Procreate, and then drew on top (see Figure 29). She said, “I enjoyed playing with the colors. In almost all my illustrations, there is a woman. In other words, I am the woman who would like to enter that two-dimensional space and live in it. Maybe because connecting with the two-dimensional world is so much easier and more relaxing than the real world with infinite dimensions. I enjoy being a woman with all the hardships that a woman suffers during her life. If I were to be born a thousand more times, I would still want to be a woman.” From Sha’s expressive words, I could sense how she had been incorporating living inquiry and experiencing openings all her life, and she expressed her understandings using words and images.

Figure 28

Lara's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #4

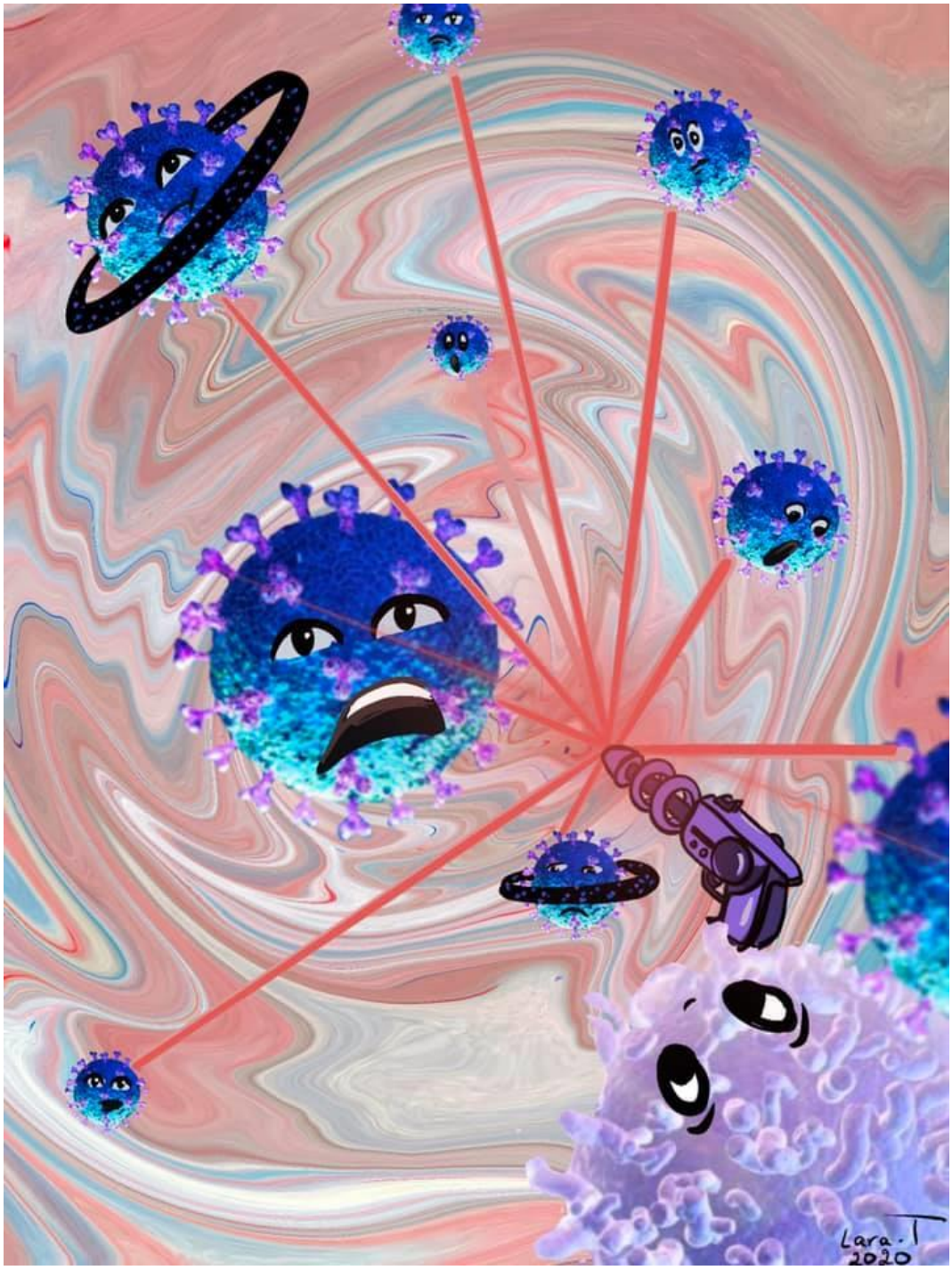


Figure 29

Sha's Journal Entry for Prompt #4

While Sha and Lara and Sha used a similar approach, Nancy and I did as well. This may, however, also reflect the cumulative thinking-making-doing that our weekly workshops prompted, and how the notion of renderings was impacting our modes of expression as a result.

Nancy spoke about her visual journal entry: “My life is kind of consumed by this dog now (a new puppy recently joined her family)... I went to the basement for some old stuffed animals that belong to my daughter that she doesn’t want anymore. Then I came across my stuffed bunny from when I was a child. I’m not giving it to the dog, but it made me find them again. It made me think about how this dog is very much like having another baby. I’m getting up in the middle of the night and making sure that she’s safe and taking her to the bathroom, and speaking in a very soothing voice. With the stuffed animals I found, it made me feel how much I missed my daughter as a baby, she’s a delight, she was such a good baby. I’m so nostalgic” (see Figure 30).

Figure 30

Nancy's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #4

Nancy continued speaking: "I really like the experience of these workshops. I started to tell stories, and I like this way of journaling and the process."

I was delighted to hear this, and I added, "Compare to doing a large piece of art for people to look at, I enjoy this process of journaling from our heart, for ourselves."

Activating Reverberation: Drawing Together with Non-Dominant Hand

Next, we initiated drawing with our non-dominant hand activity. While in progress, we kept on checking with one another and speaking about how we felt.

Lara said, “It’s very hard to keep a straight line.”

“You are doing so well. Maybe it’s because you play the piano so well that both of your hands are strong,” I told her.

Sha said, “I’m drawing my face by looking at myself in the mirror.”

Nancy showed us her drawing of a cup and coaster. “It is very meditative.”

I looked at her drawing for a long time with eyes wide. “Wow, I love the organic lines and the way you captured the curves of the glass surface and highlights.”

“I will try and shade with cross-hatching, that might be very tricky.”

“I think it’s very hard to make close parallel lines with our non-dominant hands.” I thought for a moment.

Sha looked at Lara’s hand gestures and said, “Lara, you work so fast.”

It took us about twenty minutes to finish our drawings. Then we shared.

Nancy sighed, “I was trying to darken the drawing... it’s just really taking a long time. it’s all scribbles. I am usually more meticulous in the cross-hatching, and now I can’t do it now, so I’m just scribbling.”

“But I really like this kind of exaggeration you created,” said Sha.

“I feel like I’m being a kid because my left hand feels like a kid, and I was like, go this way and be careful,” I said. Sha agreed that she felt the same too.

“But I don’t feel stressed, it’s a fun process,” I added.

Sha showed her self-portrait drawing and laughed. “I captured my own facial expression like a child trying hard.”

I ended up scribbling in the dark areas too for the same reason. “This activity helps me to concentrate better,” said Sha.

Our reflections of our drawing process were reverberations in play, as we “called attention to the movement, the quaking, shaking, measure, and rhythm that shifts other meanings to the surface” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 906). This group experience also shaped private and social reverberations, and the unusual shifts allowed us to reflect and reconsider our identities as artists, teachers, and reseachers (p. 907). (See Figures 31 and 32.)

Figure 31

Nancy’s Drawing (left) and Sha’s Drawing (right) with Non-Dominant Hand

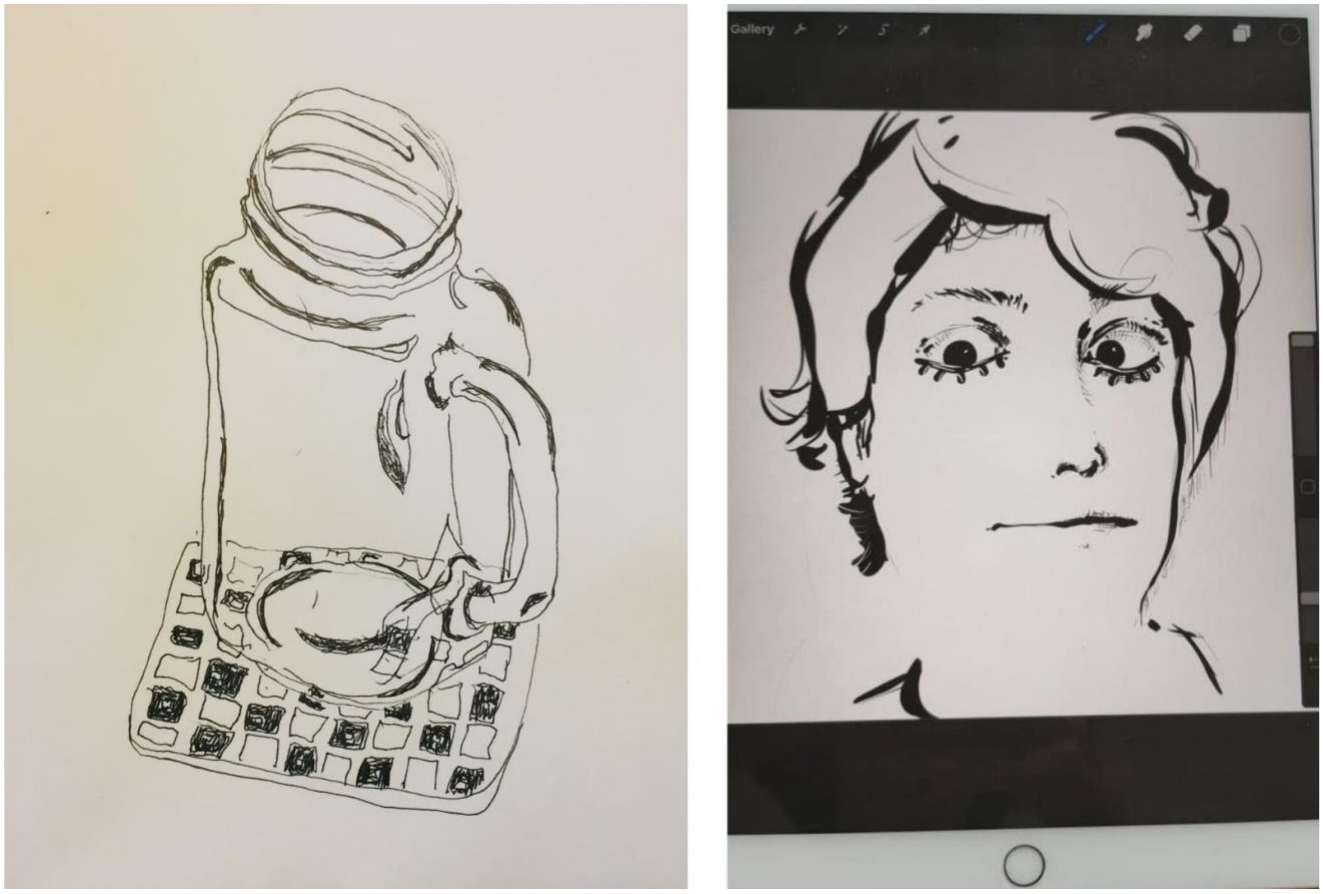


Figure 32

Lara's Drawing (left) and Becky's Drawing (right) with Non-Dominant Hand

Nancy reflected on her high school teaching experience:

> *It's really good to show students of how you do this drawing. A lot of them have this view of the teacher, at least in my experience, whenever I show them a technique, a lot of them were like, oh Miss, I'm never going to be able to do that, you're so good at it. And I would introduce a drawing activity like this and say, this isn't going to be a perfect, realistic drawing, but you know what it is because I captured the essence. It gives them a chance to not be so constricted in their own drawing abilities. I like the blind-contour drawing activity, I find that it's a really good tool for students to not be so hung up on realism*.

Sha, Lara, and I reverberated with Nancy's story that we should embrace both the known and unknown in our creative process. When we let go of a habitual routine and ability, we can gain new understandings through the loss and ruptures which lead to openings of possibilities. We decided that we could do the blind-contour drawing activity together in the next session to keep exploring this rendering.

Expressing Ourselves with Textual Representations: Writing Haiku Together

In the last part of this workshop, I introduced the prompt of this week to further map our reverberations, together and apart. The prompt for this session was premised on writing four haiku together as a group during our Zoom session to express our observations of life in

the days of COVID. Then we were to make our own illustrations in visual journals based on the poems on our own time.

Since Lara and Sha were not familiar with haiku poetry, I introduced a webpage that outlined the rules and context. Then I suggested we think about the phenomena we were experiencing day-to-day, and we each write our own haiku. We spent about five minutes writing the poems, then we shared with one another.

Lara's haiku was based on the sight she saw outside her window:

A new day today

Branches dancing on a tree

One squirrel, I see

Nancy's haiku has a strong sense of metaphor of emotions related to home life and the effect of the pandemic, harkening to our previous workshop:

Drips on frosted glass

Drag grey skies into our homes

We wait for the sun

Sha was washing her feet in a basin the night before, and the ordinary experience inspired her to write this haiku, aligning to living inquiry:

Toes playing in water

Bubbles in the water

Breath my toes are taken

My haiku was inspired by a sketch of the moon seen outside my kitchen window a few days ago. The phenomena left a deep impression in my mind, and it has metaphoric meanings along with living inquiry:

I see a full moon

In a stream of clouds outside

It shines. Like white jade.

Many activations in this workshop are different than previous ones. Our discussions and artmaking suggest that we have taken hold of the a/r/tographic process, and it is in full movement. From our sharing of the creative prompt for openings, drawing with non-dominant hand, to writing haikus together, we have embodied contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor and metonymy, openings, and reverberations through our conversations and artworks. It is evident that we have been inquiring deeply into everyday life and our identities using our "senses, bodies, minds, and emotions," leading us to the space of excess (Springgay et al., p. 908).

Workshop #6: Excess

Sharing Visual Journal Entries for Reverberation: Self-Reverberations

To begin the final workshop, we shared our visual journal entries based on the haikus we wrote last week and the rendering of reverberations, following our protocol. This generated

much dynamic conversation. Then, for our last workshop in this a/r/tographic series, we introduced the rendering of excess.

Lara shared her illustration in reverberation to her own haiku (see Figure 33).

I liked how she rendered the intrinsic intertwining limbs of the tree. I asked, “that seems like a lot of work. How long did it take you?”

“It could take forever to draw from scratch, so I just took a photo of the tree and traced over it on Procreate. Then I drew the squirrel and other things,” Lara answered.

Nancy took up this reverberation and shared her journal entry: “I was staring at the window while writing my haiku. The inspiration came from the windowpanes covered in frost. The drips of frost are symbolic of how we feel about COVID-19, the way they enter the windows and houses” (see Figure 34).

Sha shared her illustration in reverberation to her haiku, and she remarked about how she has been paying attention to many small details in her life such as the bubbles in the basin made by the movement of her feet (see Figure 35).

Sha also expressed that she had been ‘hooked’ on sketching self-portraits, and she showed us a number of sketches done both digitally and on paper (see Figure 36 and Appendix B). “I’m seeing and learning about myself by doing these self-portraits in different ways, seeing from different angles and to exaggerate my feelings in this way, and sometimes the drawing may turn out scary,” she explained.

“This is really cool and you should keep doing this as an inquiry,” I said with excitement.

Sha continued, “I created an Instagram account just posting pictures of myself. I think it can be called selfie-journaling.”

Figure 33

Lara's Visual Journal for Her Haiku

Figure 34

Nancy's Journal Entry of Her Haiku

Figure 35

Sha's Visual Journal for Her Haiku

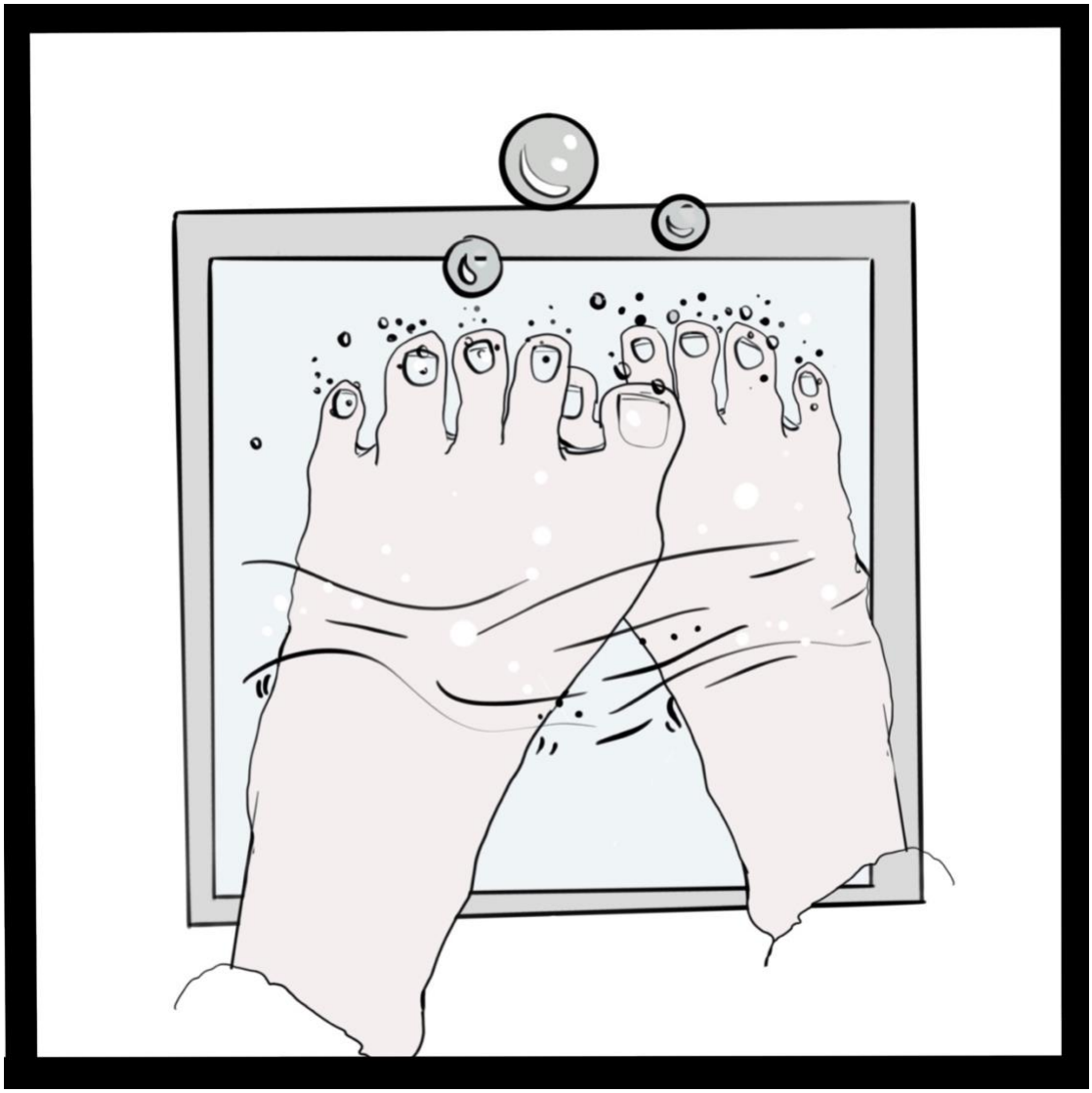


Figure 36

Sha's Self Portrait Drawings

We were quick to move to making in this workshop, and I introduced the creative prompt for this week: To make a print (with water-soluble ink of any colour) or trace your hand(s) on a page of your journal, and/or another part of your body in any way you prefer. Then draw, or paint, or collage, and write over, based on your experiences during the COVID pandemic. Agreeing to do this on our own time, we elected to follow the movement of the conversation and continue with our renderings based on the previous week: reverberations.

We Create Together: The Blind-Contour Drawing

We decided to do the blind-contour drawing prompt together, initiated from last week's conversations. I suggested that we could grab some objects around our home to do the drawings.

"I'm scared to start," said Lara.

"We are losing control of our hand as we can't see it, and we can't see the paper, and we have to use a continuous line," I noted.

Nancy added, "Try not to lift up your pen."

Sha found it difficult to do this on her iPad, so she switched to her sketchbook.

"It's horrible, I know," murmured Lara.

"It's okay. It is part of the artistic process," I said (see Figure 37).

I finished my drawing of still-life objects in my studio, and said, "it looks so abstract" (see Figure 39).

Figure 37

Lara's Blind Contour Drawings

Nancy showed us her large drawing of a headphone. "It's better to go big," she said (see Figure 38).

I asked Nancy how her high school students reacted to this drawing activity after our last meeting. She shared with us:

> *They hated it! I can't say all of them, but a lot of them don't like it because it's just ugly, it doesn't look like the thing especially when you ask them to do a face. Sometimes I asked them to do their own faces with a mirror or draw the person*

across from them, then they get a bit insulted. So, I stopped doing that and just have them to do objects. They try to cheat, and I told them, if it looks too much like the thing that you are drawing, I know you cheated". She continued, "and not lifting up the pen too, that's hard for them because they tend to go with sketchy lines not a continuous line. It's just a matter of doing it often, and then they got it. At first, no.

Figure 38

Nancy's Blind Contour Drawing

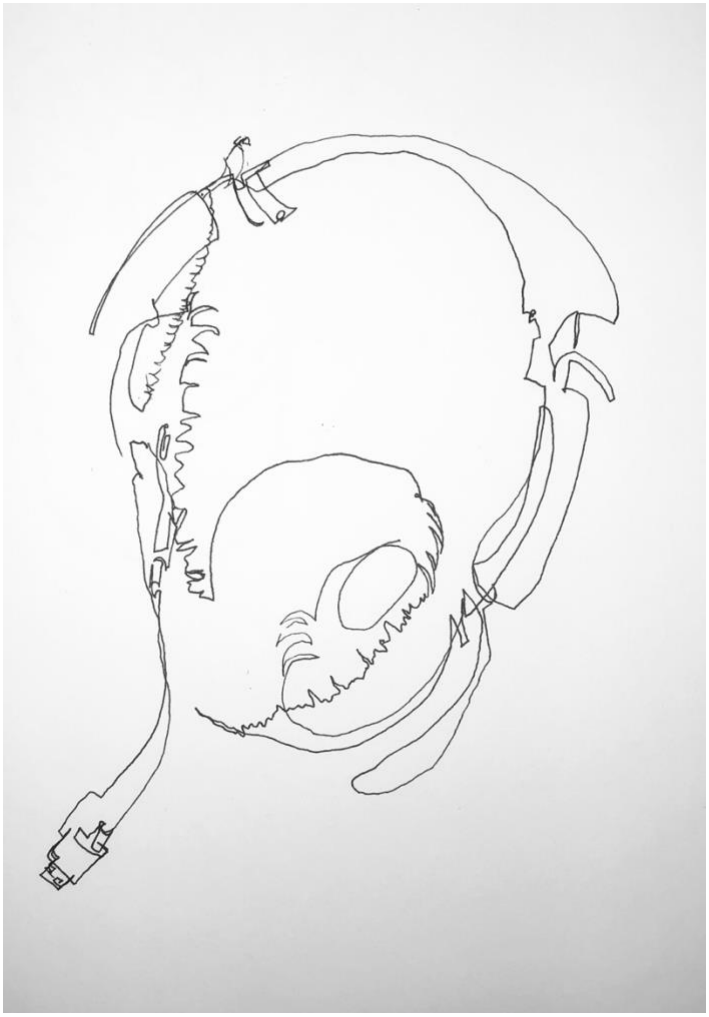
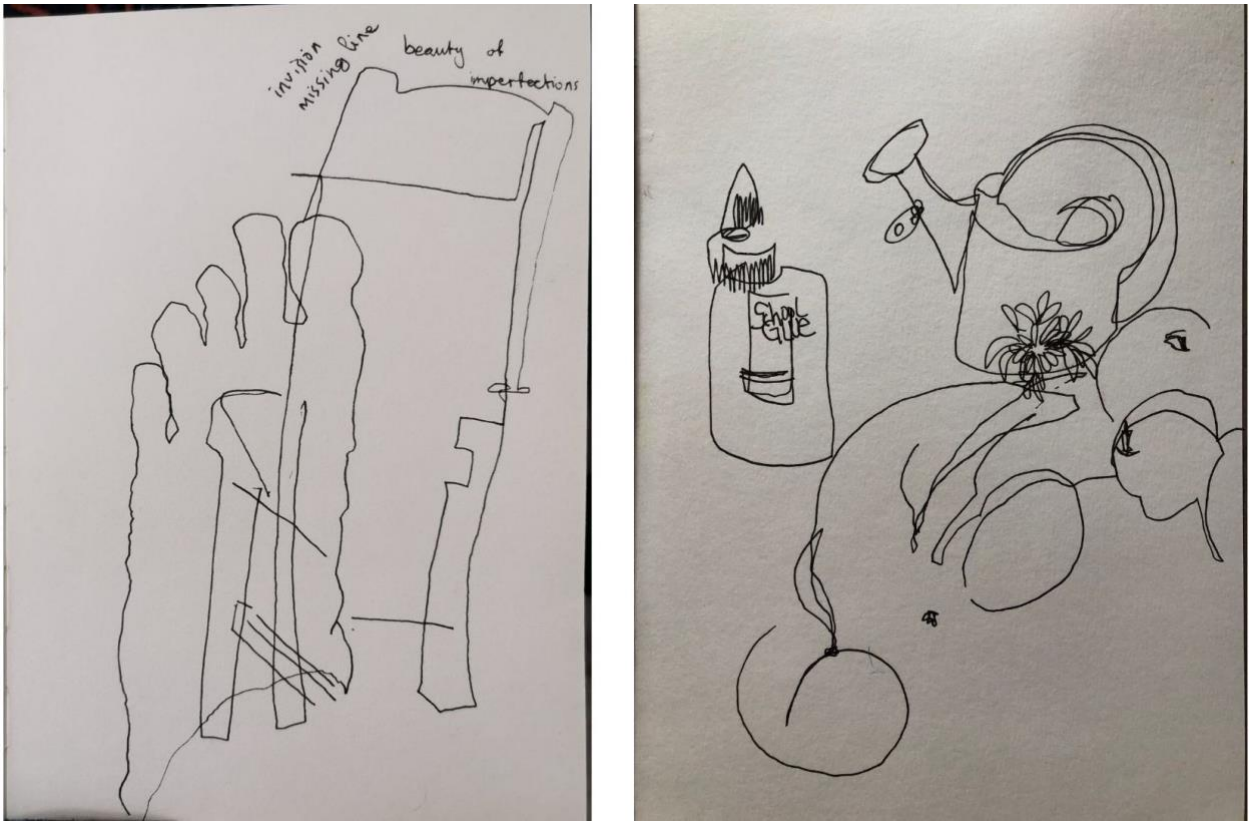


Figure 39

Sha's Blind Contour Drawing (left) and Becky's Blind Contour Drawing (right)



I added, "you know, I think all of our drawings have some missing parts, like the gaps, and this is the beauty of imperfection. Remember those ancient statues with missing arms?"

"Yes, I think we captured the essence. We traced the parts that are the most important," said Sha. "I haven't drawn on paper for a long time. Now I think I miss it," Sha smiled. Then she took out the notebook she had in Malaysia. "I drew figures and other things on the first few pages but didn't continue. Oh, I miss notebooks."

"I think you really should continue drawing on paper, Sha," I suggested.

"Yes, I will," Sha confirmed.

The line qualities of our drawings are so strong and fluid, like a non-stop free-flowing line. When we draw in the ways we usually do, it is much more time-consuming and our mindset is to make it precise, and there is self-criticism along the way. Now we had no time and no chance to judge, we just go with the flow of our seeing. This drawing experience connected us with the a/r/tographic rendering excess because within our process, “control and regulation disappears” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907).

Our workshops ended with this blind-contour drawing activity that we found meaningful to experience as artists and art educators. The restriction of not seeing the paper while drawing was forcing us to let go of predicted and ideal results with “perfect” line placements, yet the imperfect line qualities generated more expression than our other visual journal entries. We were forming a new kind of schema in our head while the drawing surface was invisible, and knowing without seeing. This made us question: what is a perfect drawing? What is the purpose of drawing? I think we have gained a new inquiry base for future research.

Our drawing process reflects excess as we moved beyond expressing ourselves to “negotiating knowledge as intimate and sensuous” (Springgay et al. 2005, p. 907). In other words, without the option of seeing our papers while drawing, we displayed freedom and desire by re-examining and re-assembling reality (p. 907). This process of excess connects us with the other five renderings simultaneously as uncertainty and ambiguity emerged with a new way of aesthetic encounter, generating abstract expressions with hidden meanings that are metaphoric.

Afterword

Our personal conversations in the workshops also suggested that lifelong learning is enriching our lives as all of us had learned something new during the pandemic, such as new languages, crocheting, gardening, and having a dog.

There are layers of virtuality within the experience of the workshops. According to the philosophy of Deleuze, the artworks are semiotics that actualize our beings; while together during the six weeks, our interactive experiences were not real but actualized by Zoom (Zepke & O'Sullivan, 2010, p. 200). Thinking-with, Deleuze as Zepke and O'Sullivan (2010) note, the world around us and our beings contain "superabundant" qualities, and we access only a fraction of them (p. 201). Our visual journal pages embodied the potentials we captured during those particular points in time and space. In addition, our computer screens during the Zoom meetings "actualises [*sic*] different spatiality and different temporalities" and mingle them together using visual and audio mechanisms (p. 201). This chapter was extracted from over 500 pages of transcripts. The parts unrelated to the research purpose were not included, and therefore, while it may not represent reality as a whole, it attends closely to the flow of a/r/tographic inquiry by mapping the process and practice that generated our production of visual journals (p. 203).

Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretations

Analyzing the Life Stories

Through the six workshops, the participants and I had the opportunity to know one another more through life stories and dialogues. I discussed the a/r/tographic renderings with the participants prior to each workshop so we could build our conversations around them. I wrote the stories based on the workshop transcripts and written journals, and then member-checked with the participants as part of my arts-based inquiry. Before this research, all the participants had the experience of working in a sketchbook using traditional drawing and painting media. Also, they were exposed to the concepts of a/r/tography and valued the qualities of this arts-based research methodology.

As the researcher, I was aware of my positionality as addressed by Creswell (2016), and acknowledge that I bring biases, values, and experiences to this study (p. 216). It is true that biases always exist as long as there are descriptions of phenomena, and I tried to reduce bias by doing member checks, including asking questions for clarification. As suggested by Creswell, I was also reflective of my own personal life experiences and feelings by looking back at my shared stories and how these relate to the participants', and eventually how these shaped my interpretation of the phenomena explored and discussed in the workshops (2016, p. 216). I am knowledgeable in art and teaching, and my life experiences have given me personal values about art education and how I examine the different styles of art. Yet, I invited the participants to share their own life stories and thoughts as I know each of us is a unique individual with similarities and differences to identify and compare. By sharing with each other and creating

together based on the same prompts, we formed a (virtual) community of art educators with diversity in artistic styles and life experiences.

Our life stories matter because the details contain indicators of our personalities, sensations about life, and the relationships with others—all of which are pedagogic. It is evident that these qualities have guided us to make life choices. As Hodkinson (1995) described, decision-making is always based on life contexts such as feelings and emotions embedded within experiences, interactions with others and cultural backgrounds, and personal perceptions about life and self (pp. 3–8). In more recent research, Woods et al. (2016) indicated that certain personality traits tend to gravitate individuals toward making choices in a particular career (p. 264). In addition, if the life environment is in harmony with the individual's choice of career, they would most likely develop further and be less likely to quit (Woods et al., 2016, p. 263). Since our childhood years, we have felt that art has been part of us, and we just kept on practising and developing our skills with enthusiasm. We were able to hold on for many years because our families understood and supported our artistic passions. During the course of this research, we shared feelings about our past and present life situations and creative processes, indicating that we have similar personality traits such as sensitivity, vulnerability, and passion for growth. It is possible that these similarities made us gravitate toward each other as artists and teachers. Even though we all came from different cultural backgrounds, our life experiences and related feelings are comparable in many ways.

As I read the transcripts of the workshops, I highlighted and noted the words that appeared frequently (see Appendix A). After this, I organized the words into codes, then merged them into themes (see Table 1). My process of coding followed Creswell's approach

(2016, p. 184), as for every single code I sought evidence from the databases (transcripts, field notes, visual journals, and other visuals) before assigning a label for the code. For example, the large code “emotions” came from the sharing of life stories containing emotional key words such as “unmotivated,” “confused,” and “nostalgia” in the transcripts and also from my field observations of the participants’ facial expressions and body gestures. In addition, the visual journal entries such as Nancy’s and my pages for prompt #4 (see Figures 27 and 30) displayed strong senses of sensations related to the key words. After the process of coding, I found the three themes by merging several large codes that can come together to form a common idea (Creswell, 2016, p. 186).

My process of making interpretations was guided by Creswell (2016): reading and understanding the data based on “hunches, insights, and intuition” and then connecting my interpretations to the existing literature in art education (p. 187). There is an evolution of thinking-making-doing based on my interpretation of the participants’ artworks and our feelings expressed in the conversations. The setting of this study was the online communication platform Zoom, but in reality we were in our own home environments and separated from one another, so our interactions were entirely virtual. I was also able to find connections between the larger codes and themes, as each phenomenon does not stand alone but corresponds with another (Creswell, 2016, p.199).

Table 1

Themes and Codes Derived from the Six Workshops

Themes	Codes	Details
Living and Being	Emotions	The sensations we had about our past and present life, and creative experiences.
	Past Life Experiences	Stories about how we came to be art educators, and our relationships with others.
	Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Our daily routines and the related feelings: how we lived through this challenging and unprecedented life situation.
Moving and Transiting	Travelling	All of us had travelled across the continents.
	Moving	We moved to different countries/cities to study or work. We also moved between different art mediums and creative approaches.
	Changes in Studies/Careers	We made changes in our careers due to inner and exterior factors.
Artful Expressions	Artistic Styles	Our different art styles; finding similarities in the differences.
	The Unconventional Ways	Our creative processes and thoughts about drawings using the undominant hand and blind-contour.
	Creative Processes in Visual Journals	Our personal understandings and practices of what visual journals can be.

Workshop 1: Contiguity

The first workshop was rich in conversations focusing on our backgrounds. The themes "living and being" and "moving and transiting" emerged as primary topics throughout the six-week period. We shared our "past life experiences," including the countries and cultures we came from, our educational backgrounds, and careers. As codes for these themes reveal, we shared our "emotions" of "life during the COVID-19 pandemic." All of us had been "moving" and "travelling" in life and made "changes in studies and careers." These codes suggest the commonalities we have as artists and art educators, and our detailed dialogues display our diverse life experiences, making choices and decisions leading us to the same point in life: the art education graduate program at Concordia University. According to Sinner et al. (2006), a/r/tography is not only about the experiences of an individual artist/researcher/teacher, but also a community of art educators that "come together to engage in shared inquiries," and our process demonstrates this in action over six weeks (p. 1224). Moreover, the codes and resulting themes all interrelate with one another, indicating strong a/r/tographic relationships between the participants and how they had adapted and evolved individually.

Both the participants and I had the understanding that the six workshops were for emergent and evolutionary learning, reflecting on our past and present life experiences as a group. By combining our visual journal entries done individually and collectively, we wove both visual and textual forms of research into a dynamic learning process guided by moments of uncertainty and ambiguity (Detlefsen, 2012; Springgay et al., 2005). It is evident that many points in our lives contain ruptures that offer different possibilities (Zepke & O'Sullivan, 2010, p. 198); on a macro scale, it can be making a life choice and on a micro scale, it can be how we

choose to use our art mediums in different ways. These phenomena speak to the concept of contiguity as we continue moving in life through living inquiry.

Workshop 2: Living Inquiry

From the second workshop and on, the theme "artful expression" emerged, and two codes stand out: "artistic styles" and "creative processes in visual journals." Our journal entries are arguably more than simple illustrations of daily activities; they contain "rhizomatic sequences" (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 85) with play of "nonlinear arrangement," metaphors, and intersubjectivities (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). Even though Nancy did not include any images of herself and family members in her visual journal entry, like the rest of us, the objects that defined her activities reflect living inquiry. We could feel the human spirit within the flow of images, and this relates to what Deleuze and Guattari (1994) remarked about paintings: "men are absent from landscapes but they are entirely within" (p. 169).

In the beginning of the workshop, we shared our visual journals based on the a/r/tographic rendering "contiguity." By looking at our visual maps, I see "the continuous interaction and the movement between art and graphy" (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 900), and how we had reflected on our complicated lives full of entangled feelings and moments in a day (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, pp. 84–85).

As we spent about twenty minutes drawing the views from our home windows, we were reflecting on the a/r/tographic rendering "living inquiry" through an "aesthetic encounter" within a familiar space by paying attention to the details of organic and humanmade structures, the layers of visions, and the sensations of colours (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). The results are images of the same moments in our lives yet in different private spaces. By looking at each

other's home environments and the visual journal entries, we seemed to be engaged emotionally, intuitively, and spiritually in "embodied ways of knowing" of each other's beings, at least in a partial way (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). This phenomenon stands out from our collective experience as it could not be felt if we were drawing a window view together in the same space. From our individual point of view, drawing from observation was a process of preserving our sensations and perceptions using the sketching tools (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 166); these qualities can be very personal and cannot be expressed with words. On the other hand, Eisner (2002) suggested that the tools we choose to use also influence the way we "think and represent meanings in particular ways," shown in the qualities of our sketches (p. 9). Overall, this workshop powerfully depicted the code "life during COVID-19."

I recalled and connected our similar experiences together when Nancy shared with us that she pursued more than one undergraduate degree. All of us have studied for more than one post-secondary degree or diploma, and this is one of the similarities we have that accentuates the code "changes in studies/careers." It is through our encounters and interactions with "human relations and social structures," gaining or losing power within the systems, that we moved about in life and make choices (La Jervic & Springgay, 2008, pp. 68–71). As a researcher, I have learned more about living inquiry in this study as I adduced evidence of knowledge and creative powers with the participants.

Workshop 3: Metaphor and Metonymy

This workshop contains the codes "travelling" and "moving" as part of the theme, "Moving and Transiting" and revealed how metaphor and metonymy operated in our conversations and artworks: Nancy's travel story of how she moved around the countries of

Europe gives a sense of nomadology, and Lara's 4-second animation an awareness of trajectory within a fixed place. We also discovered instances of metaphors and metonymy in our visual journal entries from the previous week, showing that each a/r/tographic rendering is always interrelated and co-existing with one another in agreement with Springgay et al. (2005) that "each rendering is not an isolated event but rather, formed in relation with each other through aesthetic inquiry" (p. 899). For example, Nancy's drawing of what she observed from the diamond-shaped frosted window is a metonymy of the pandemic situation we were experiencing, of how the outside world was felt during self-isolation. Following the definition of living inquiry, all of us were trying to make sense of the chaotic and confusing life state by sensing, seeing, and recording our daily surroundings by "engaging emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902).

Rather than merely recording what we visually see, our journal entries contain temporal meanings, as we contemplated in the limited spaces of our homes, that each day the same subject matters reflected different sensations. This harkens back to Heidegger, who asked, "How can the temporal constitution of attunement become visible?" (2010, p. 325). From this workshop, the practice of visual journaling offers a way to make the short-lived insights of living and being relevant to the self and others. The act of only looking at our surroundings without any actions cannot generate powerful understandings of our existence, yet through visual journaling in the a/r/tographic method, and with attunement and ongoing inquiry, we can strengthen our sensory perceptions, allowing aesthetic and philosophical *knowings* to emerge (Irwin, 2003). Eisner (2002) further noted that "[art] is a way of creating our lives by expanding

our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture" (p. 3).

Overall, the weekly prompt helped us to let go of assumptions and instead seek knowledge in ordinary encounters and form collective meanings (Lee et al., 2019, p. 684). On the other hand, Eisner (2002) suggested that the artist can express their ideas and emotions better when they are familiar with the materials and equally open to new possibilities (p. 7). Knowing these functions and limitations thus enables immersion in the creative process. In this research, all the participants have strong artistic skills in drawing, painting, and designing, allowing them to explore the creative process more deeply through the emerging visual effects in response to their attunements. The visual journal entries speak about our life experiences and sensations in metaphors and metonymys, as new meanings could surface as we re-examine them after different lengths in time and reverberate with ourselves and each other.

Workshop 4: Openings

The fourth workshop was based on the a/r/tographic rendering "opening." Being mindful of Springgay et al. (2005), I opened up conversations to inquire about our past creative processes and evolutions of styles, defining the codes "emotions" and "past life experiences" as part of the theme "living and being." Since this rendering encourages "attentiveness to what is seen and known and to what lies beneath the surface" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905), the participants explored their ambiguous life experiences and how those encounters had influenced their artistic styles and values. Our conversations eventually led us to "ah-ha" moments, as we re-considered the nature of our body parts such as arms and legs when Sha

spoke about how she witnessed people becoming disabled during the war in her country. This led to drawing with non-dominant hand activity for the following week.

The creative prompt I initiated was making the creative process less predictable by working with stream of consciousness, opening up new ways for knowledge creation to unfold. The way that we pre-paint a surface before drawing offered an invitation to this mode of freedom; it was an opportunity to ponder our sensations as we interacted with colours and the abstract qualities that triggered us to engage with the unseen aspects of our lives and inner selves. This approach also allowed us to break our usual creative procedures and explore an unknown space; similar to a curriculum that Irwin (2006) suggested, this "focuses on the aesthetic, spiritual, imaginative, narrative, and non-linear by being open to unexpected directions and unpredictable turns within transformative spaces of possibilities" (p. 78). As a result, this experience "[directed] our attention inward to what we believe and feel" (Eisner, 2002, p. 10).

In our conversations, we expressed how judgement and humility had always been part of our lives. It is true that humility always exists no matter where we are situated, even within our workshops. Freire (2005) helps to sustain our identities as educators, that "humility helps us avoid being entrenched in the circuit of our own truths" because everyone is knowledgeable in something and ignorant of some other things (p. 72). The a/r/tographic mentorship is building up this idea that "it is through uncertainty and unknowing that one learns something new," suggesting the qualities of knowing are always shifting through time and space, and therefore our knowledge needs to be continually contradicted and redefined (Kalin et al., 2009, p. 17).

Workshop #5: Reverberations

This workshop was supported by the a/r/tographic rendering "reverberation." We worked on the creative prompt together as a group by writing a haiku individually, based on phenomena we sensed during our self-isolation life. This activity reflected our responses to the vibrancy in our seemingly dull lifestyle and opened up an opportunity for living inquiry that eventually served as "transforming static moments into momentum" that keeps on evolving through time and space (Springggay et al., 2005, p. 907). By incorporating the use of language in our artmaking experience, we were "questioning, playing with, savouring, and ruminating on the notions of truth" and listening to one another's life experiences poetically (Leggo, 2005, p. 178).

By drawing with the non-dominant hand, we inquired about how our bodies and mind coordinate in an unusual way, and this activity characterized reverberations as artists, aligning with the code "the unconventional ways (of artful expression)." During the drawing process, we experienced both individual and shared reverberations while responding to our own hand gestures and signs that collectively emerged on the drawing surfaces (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907). This activity was also an experience of improvisation that gave us the chance to "tolerate errors" as we were losing full control of the pen we held, walking out of our comfort zones to a space of risk-taking, which was an important way of knowledge construction for us as teachers (Holdhus et al., 2016, p. 11). From a phenomenological perspective, our intentions and bodily performances did not act in harmony during this drawing process; however, we were forced to have more self-awareness by breaking out from our usual "motor and perceptual schemas" (Breuer, 2020, p. 8). Consequently, we were able to "renegotiate perceptions of self in

conceptions of context and researching, recreating and creating new ways of understanding, appreciation, and representing" (Sameshima, 2008, p. 32).

Workshop #6: Excess

This workshop was supported by the a/r/tographic rendering "excess." Through our sharing of visual journal entries and other artworks, it is evident that we had been adapting to the habit of sketching consistently and vigorously as a way to 'more than' express ourselves, in an effort to embrace excess.

The blind-contour drawing activity opened a space for the participants to lose "control and regulation" and pushed themselves to re-consider the drawing experience, of how lines are formed in connection with other lines, and how we perceived this reality in a new way (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907). This drawing activity was not pre-planned before the start of this research but emerged naturally as the participants inquired about unconventional creative experiences. The defining code "the unconventional ways (of artful expressions)" reflects how this activity gave us an uncertain space and discomfort, challenging the conventional method of bringing a drawing into existence. This connects with Merleau-Ponty's (1991) idea that it "teaches us to stop distinguishing between signs and their significance, between what is sensed and what is judged" (as cited in Breuer, 2020, p. 7). The clean, flowing line work displayed the essence of the objects without idealistic embellishments caused by judgement, while at the same time revealing the work in process, and how new meanings generated by ambiguity surfaced through the imperfect lines, gaps, and entanglements. Hobart (2005) also encouraged students to take up the exercise of *blind-contour drawing,* and even though the sketch product looks distorted, students may create some "incredibly accurate lines" when they were tracing

the outlines of objects without letting the hand polish the forms (p. 32). While Nancy's students did not like this activity, it was still a valuable learning experience for them because discomfort is excess in action. From Deleuze and Guattari's perspective, there is a "rupturing quality" in this drawing activity; it has the power to "break our habitual ways of being and acting in the world (our reactive selves)" and generate a "genuine encounter" with our subject matters (Zepke & O'Sullivan, 2010, p. 196).

The Final Group Interview

A group interview took place one month after the sixth workshop. The 1-month gap allowed participants to finish creating in their visual journals for prompt #6 (see Appendix B), ponder the individual and group learning experiences during the 6-week period, and consider again the value of visual journals and learning online. The 90-minute meeting contains important meanings that emerged in the group conversations that further illuminated the themes "living and being," "moving and transiting," and "artful expressions." I list all responses together in this case to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the process, practice, and production of visual journals, recognizing that in this way, the renderings of a/r/tography are concurrent and entwined together:

1) *The pedagogic values of visual journals in an adult art education context.*

Nancy and I, as active and long-time art teachers and artists, filled a number of visual journals over the years, and we responded:

I think there is a lot of value in just stopping, and really focusing on whatever it is you are doing, and to your inner thoughts at the same time, into that dialogue.

And also looking back at what you did, I find it is also really interesting to see an

evolution of your process, to see how you solve problems, and how you interpret things. It is a great way to pass on these techniques to the students, pass knowledge to the students so that they are aware that being an artist or making art is not a divine intervention. It is not a lightning bolt of like wow that is amazing. It takes time and it takes concentration, and it takes efforts, sometimes drawing stuff that you don't like or not happy with, or didn't quite work out, and that's okay… I think visual journaling is a way to get to know yourself. Even as adults, I don't know if we are fully formed. We need to learn from the process, where to go next, and learn how to negotiate with ourselves.

(Nancy, 2021, final group interview transcript)

I see the value of community in both real life and online, a community of different styles and artists from different backgrounds. We can explore the possibilities of visual journaling, and our philosophies and spiritual beings, and share our work as a community.

(Becky, 2021, final group interview transcript)

2) *The importance of seeing an artist's creative process*.

All the participants addressed the point that we cannot see one another's work in progress easily in the online realm. The participants also came to agreement that seeing an artist's process is rare even in real-life situations, such as the fact of seeing art displayed in a gallery as a final result only.

The camera is on us but not on what we are doing. Even when Becky says show us what you did, it was still not the same, it is not immediate.

(Nancy, 2021, final group interview transcript)

3) *The participants' thoughts about the six renderings of a/r/tography*.

Each of us had different understandings about how we engaged with the combination of the renderings in an open discussion initiated by my interview question: How do you relate your visual journal or art practice to the six renderings of a/r/tography? Are there one or more specific renderings that resonate with you?

We expressed our feelings:

I feel that I see openings as a moment of uncertainty where you are unsure of something, and it's okay to be in that space. I don't know if I can connect my current visual journal to a/r/tography, but I can connect my travel doing visual journal for sure, that's a living inquiry 100% among other things… but right now it's so sporadic and random, and it doesn't have much meaning for me drawing in visual journals other than oh yeah, I love drawing… I don't know if it has any kind of connection to any of the renderings.

(Nancy, 2021, final interview transcript)

When you start looking at something and you remember something else, and then something else. Your artwork usually starts at some point, and then you start adding more and more elements to create the whole work, so I think that is reverberation… Even your art is not related to everyday life directly, and it comes at random, I think it is still living inquiry, because your art reflects what you are going through… I find excess in every art I do, I'm always seeing and sensing below the surface.

(Lara, 2021, final interview transcript)

I feel like I'm always doing living inquiry even when I am not visual journaling. Living inquiry for me is a way to slow down in life and attend to the details often overlooked. By doing visual journaling, I think all of us are pushing through the barrier of procrastination and indifference. Every day looks like the same these days, and subject matters are so limited, I had to push through the limit to find wonder in the familiar.

(Becky, 2021, final interview transcript)

I feel that all the six renderings are connected and I feel good with all of them. When I create art works I can connect with all of them.

(Sha, 2021, final interview transcript)

Analyzing the A/r/tographic Approach to Visual Journaling

Even though each workshop was initiated by a creative prompt, the learning space was open-ended and allowed new inquiries to emerge as the participants pondered the a/r/tographic rendering in their daily living. Throughout the 6-week period, we effectively engaged in the practice of a/r/tography, as we focused on "memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, story-telling, interpretation, and representation" within the conversations and individual and collective artmaking activities (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 903). The participants were relaxed and open to sharing and expressing our stories and sensations rigorously in a continuous flow in the virtual space, and this exchange allowed new meanings to emerge over time through deep engagement (Springgay et al., 2005, pp. 903–904). According to the phenomenological concepts of Merleau-Ponty, as summarized by La Jevic and Springgay

(2008), the participants have enriched one another's learning and creative experiences through imbrications and reciprocity (p. 69). When they shared life stories about how art had been part of their lives and created in visual journals, they "transformed perceptions into experience and experience into perceptions" (Detlefsen, 2012, p. 73).

The weekly creative prompts were necessary for the participants to be more motivated to journal. As Nancy and Sha expressed several times, they had been more productive in artmaking during the 6-week period. However, as a prolific art journaling person, I did not enjoy working with prompts because I like improvising on random moments and inspirations instead of following a suggested idea.

Throughout the six weeks, the concept of visual journaling was merging with artmaking in general, as Lara and Sha did not work with a single sketchbook all the time. They worked both on iPads and single sheets of paper. Nancy worked in a sketchbook, and she made one page every week. I was the only one that worked in a single visual journal on a daily basis. This phenomenon challenged my past conception about visual journals, in that the artist has to work vigorously on an almost daily basis in the limited space of a sketchbook. Some results of this research suggest that visual journals can take any format, and we each have different conditions in life and feelings that influence our creativity and productivity:

> *I will create when there is emotional pressure on me. For example, three days ago it was my grandmother's death anniversary and I was able to create something related to her, like the memory of her house when I was a child… it is not like mathematics that there is a question in front of you and you solve it. We as artists cannot create like machines.*

(Sha, 2021, final interview transcript)

Emotions are important in creativity. When I sketch in my art journal, the things I select are not just mere physical, but because my love of life and everything in it.

(Becky, 2021, final interview transcript)

I have filled two art journals back in 2020, following Becky's style, sketching every day, and then I stopped. I like doing art in more random ways, and doing it every single day is not possible. One day I might be really interested in making a painting on canvas, and another day I'm into doing digital art, or maybe some crafts.

(Lara, 2021, final interview transcript)

It is really sporadic, like Lara, I'm not disciplined. I really admire the fact that Becky does this every single day. It's amazing and I'm envious. I did my visual journals mostly on travels, many trips in one journal. I like filling a journal all the way until the end. I drew not every day, just what inspires me, whatever I felt like, whenever I had the time. I started journaling again during this pandemic because I had several studio classes and this workshop that pushed me to create. It was a nice way to get back into it. Then when I'm doing it, I remember every single time how much I really love drawing. I really love it. But I just don't do it often because lack of time, honestly, with all my responsibilities…to find that time and to just focus on one thing and do something you really love for yourself, I find it really difficult to find the time.

(Nancy, 2021, final interview transcript)

Unlike some of the artists and students I have met in life who put a lot of attention on technical art skills, the participants and I focused more on our sensations and life experiences

during the workshop period. Nancy mentioned that she started a botanical illustration some years ago following another artist's instructions, but she never finished it. This shows that staying with certain technical rules and predictable results may stifle creative energy (Lawrence, 2008, p. 66). As Lawrence (2008) acknowledged, "[letting] go of technical rationality frees us to make space for sensory imagery in a world dominated by cognitive processes," leading to a relaxed mind-state free from pre-planned results and worries of not making it perfect (p. 66). Therefore, rather than complaining about how certain techniques did not work out as expected as in most community centre learning environments, we need to push for a higher level of understanding in art education while keeping in mind that technical skills are still important. For example, by introducing the *somatic knowledge* suggested by Eisner (2002) and by working with images "on the basis of what is felt emotionally" (p.76), we create more opportunities for responsive artmaking.

Another phenomenon that stood out from our visual journals in the 6-week period is that we barely incorporated writing in our visual journal entries. Many of the pieces we created do not contain reflective writings on the pages, which is in contradiction with existing research literature. When we shared our journal entries with one another in the workshops, we were constructing textual understanding verbally, and along with our life stories, our visual journals became negotiated reflections of our lives full of sensations (La Jervic & Springgay, 2008, p. 87).

Conceptualizing the Data Interpretation

My data interpretations were based on a combination of personal views connected with the larger research literature from art education (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). Through the process of organizing and analyzing the data, I found indicators that answer my research questions:

What is the pedagogic role of visual journals in identity development as an a/r/tographer? Are visual journals transformative for artists and teachers? How do my participants, my fellow art educators, take up a/r/tographic renderings in their visual journals?

Overall, this research incorporated two kinds of research methodologies: qualitative approaches and arts-based inquiry. Then life writing was used for data representation to give a realistic view of how the participants acted and expressed their feelings during the research period. Using the case study approach, I analyzed the multiple forms of data to "determine evidence for each step or phase in the evolution of the case" (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). I also analyzed this case to understand how visual journaling as a community of practice fits into the online realm for art education graduate students (p. 199). In addition, I used instances and direct quotations from the workshops to support the themes that emerged from codes. On the other hand, a/r/tography was embodied throughout the course of the workshops as it supported the participants with a mindset and guided them to see many possibilities of creating in visual journals, or artmaking in general. The combination of these two approaches offered understanding of how four female art education graduate students communicated and created in visual journals during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also accentuated how a community of artists and teachers can support one another and learn together in an informal setting. Technology played a definitive role in sustaining our collective experiences as it allowed us to virtually see and hear one another and interact in basic ways, even though the experiences were not as enriching as in real life. We recognized the differences between our real-life and virtual interactions, echoing Strom et al. (2018):

> Depending on the ways we designed our collaborative endeavor, technology could be both an enabling and constraining force. We had learned that a virtual meeting constituted a different assemblage that produced different things, and we are learning to put that critical knowledge to work. (p. 9)

Our creative process in visual journals and communication mode would have been different if we had done the workshops in the graduate student's classroom, where a more holistic view of the participants' *beings* and *becomings* in real-life proximity would be possible. This is an area of inquiry for future research on visual journals.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Educational Significance

In this final chapter, I discuss the limitations and educational significance of this study within the research results. There are a number of issues to ponder as this study had to be conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Limitations of This Study

My goal in this research was to investigate how art education graduate students take on the practice of visual journaling and how they translate their daily lives into visual and textual expressions. My experience of sketching in visual journals was a strong base for the context of this research as I inspired the participants to pick up the regular habit of artmaking as living inquiry, and how they take on this practice to transform their identities as artists, teachers, and researchers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this study had to take place through the virtual platform Zoom, and so the most apparent limitation is the lack of physical proximity between the participants. Apparently, the mode of this research is not online learning, but emergency remote teaching (ERT) as defined by Hodges et al. (2020). Despite the advantages of learning virtually, discussed by recent research, there are still a great number of contradicting voices. Hodges et al. (2020) argued that most faculty members were not trained to take advantage of online tools for effective lesson delivery and that the sudden shift to ERT “may diminish the quality of the courses being delivered” (Emergency, para.4). Prior to this research, I did not have extensive experience in online teaching although I have had a YouTube channel for some time to disseminate projects and demonstrate techniques for visual journaling. Even so, my knowledge was limited to incorporating media and online delivery methods for quality learning

experiences. In this research and in my other recent online art classes, I became more focused on the language and communication methods to generate dialogue and active listening. I was also more sensitive to the needs and feelings of participants as I displayed enthusiasm and gratitude, and that is something I will continue to bring forward in my teaching practice. The responses from participants in this study suggested that these human factors played a crucial role in online learning for adults.

On the other hand, many of my colleagues have observed that Zoom is not an ideal tool for art education classes. Because the computer cameras were pointing only at our faces, the participants could not see each other's work in progress, and it was not convenient to make the cameras point at our work surfaces. This posed a great barrier for me to record observations of work in process during the workshops, and it also hindered the participants from connecting with and inspiring one another. In this research, we hesitated to start creating together during the first workshop because we knew we would be disconnected once we focused on our own creative processes without talking and seeing each other's working surfaces. In the final group interview, the participants discussed the importance of seeing work in progress for future studies. Such access would also require each participant to have another digital tablet or smartphone to log onto Zoom and attach that to a special tripod to point straight down at the work surface. However, the participants thought that this procedure would be unnatural and may become a hassle, and that some participants in future studies might not want to commit to this effort or potential cost.

Having three participants allowed deep engagement and detailed stories to unfold. While this study gathered information only from three females during a short period of time,

this allowed possible topics and focuses for future studies to unfold as follows: 1) a larger group of participants, including both male and female participants of various cultural backgrounds and age groups; 2) the combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning in visual journaling and other art-making experiences; and 3) the use of virtual engagements tools, such as virtual exhibition platforms and social media.

There were other limitations during the times of these workshops. Because the participants are colleagues, they spent some time discussing personal life stories unrelated to this research, which steered the conversations away from the main discussion topics and creative prompts. As the researcher, I was clear about my research questions and directed the conversations to the main objectives. This did not cause tension in me as the researcher because it is possible to recognize openings in seemingly unrelated topic. Also, the participants share similar styles of visual journaling, as all of them incorporated mostly visual explorations in the entries. More participants in this study might make it is possible to explore other styles with textual expressions, and other art mediums may also emerge.

Further limitations include the participants' shortage of time during the workshop period. Since the workshops started around the mid-term of the semester and continued until the end, the participants sometimes found it challenging to have time for the weekly journal prompts as they had to juggle this with their academic tasks. It is also important to note that if the participants could meet several times a week in person on campus and/or in a casual setting without the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely they would produce more frequent entries in visual journals. Overall, the constraint of not being able to join together in real life affected the outcome of this study in many ways.

This study is still valid despite the limitations mentioned above. In accordance with Creswell (2013), I have incorporated the following validation strategies during the course of the research:

1) *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* in the field by having trustful relationships with the participants, learning about the group culture, and paying attention to the purpose and focus of this study.

2) *Triangulation*, by providing evidence using multiple sources and methods to support the themes. I used multiple sources of data (workshop transcripts, visual images, field notes), as well as methods and and theoretical schemes (a/r/tography, case study, lifelong learning, etc.) to further validate my findings.

3) *Clarifying research bias*. In Chapter 5, I commented on how my past experiences, prejudices, and orientations may shape the approach and interpretation of this research.

4) *Member checking*, by communicating with the participants about the findings and interpretation so they can check the accuracy and credibility of the information.

5) *Rich, thick description*, by using detailed writing about the participants and the setting of the study (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Furthermore, the practice of a/r/tography accentuates a non-linear and mentoring relationship among participants, where art, research, and teaching are woven together to embody knowledge in complex forms not always represented in textual forms (Kalin et al, 2009, pp. 11–23). In the workshops, we spent adequate amounts of time sharing stories, engaging in conversations, and making art. With their knowledge of a/r/tography, participants have generated a rich amount of validated data.

Educational Significance

By adapting my study within these guiding methodologies and frameworks, the results generated insights into and awareness of the art education research field. This study demonstrates how the practice of visual journaling benefited adult learners by inspiring them to reflect on their lived and academic experiences, and to express their sensations visually and textually on a consistent basis. The workshops also generated a/r/tographic understandings through the process of working in visual journals both individually and collectively. Instead of focusing heavily on material processes, this study revealed the importance of raising our cognitive level by "creating knowledge through sensing, feeling, and thinking," that learning always embraces wonder, uncertainty, and surrender (Irwin, 2003, pp. 64–65). The dialogues and creative processes in the workshops provide epistemological insights into how the practice of visual journaling helps individuals to think and act "critically, questioningly, methodically, rigorously, to the world or to the objects they are inclined" (Freire, 2005, p. 166).

This study presents a single case study of art education graduate students of various ages and cultural backgrounds at Concordia University, of how they were living and adapting to the unprecedented COVID-19 global pandemic, and of how they were expressing their feelings and understandings of their situations through visual journaling. Throughout this research, the participants were encouraged to share their feelings and life stories, including the past and present, which is a comprehensive way of understanding their identities as artist, teachers, and researchers. This sheds light on future arts-based and community art education research that explores how the creative process becomes more effective and lively when participants engage in dialogues and with everyday encounters. This research mirrors Freire (2005)'s point that "a

greater creative capacity" originates from the "active movements of thoughts, language, and reality" (p.3).

This study also supports important philosophical thinking in adult education about lifelong learning, particularly the roles of teachers and learners. Chapter 4 of this thesis illustrates that as the research and facilitator of the workshops, I was also a learner among the group of participants. Without imposing a dominating role, I was aware that I needed to build collaborative and transformative relationships with a natural flow and reverberations while challenging "hierarchical assumptions" about art and learning (Kalin et al., 2009, pp. 18–19). As a teacher, I always express enthusiasm for the subject matters that I teach and care for the needs of the students; at the same time, I seek more ways of "living the dialectical tensions between theory and practice" (Freire, 2005, p. 12). Instead of pushing myself to a certain degree of professionalism, I am moving between my identities as artist and teacher as an inquirer, while being aware of my "artistic and pedagogical sensibilities and capabilities" (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, pp. 3–4).

This study also suggests that the practice of visual journaling, and artmaking in general, encourage lifelong and informal learning as seen through the participants' journey and how they incorporated their life stories and related emotions in their artworks. A great amount of data in this research revealed that "emotions as an irrational human experience, combined with rational thinking such as intellectual and logical, are forming a holistic way of understanding and embodying the world including human and non-human relationships" (Lawrence, 2008, pp. 66–67). It does not take very long to master the functions of art materials, but it takes a lifetime

to learn how to adapt the techniques with our temporal sensations and life events to create meaningful art.

Visual journaling is pedagogic and can be combined with a/r/tography as one of many opportunities this process offers for daily life: in particular, being attuned to the qualities of our surroundings and tracing our sensations with art materials. This study suggests that we do not have to go on a special quest to generate knowledge; we can see—in the familiar surroundings of our homes and in day-to-day moments—how new learning can be generated through repetition. Living inquiry was actively expressed through the participants' visual journal entries in that they were looking at the phenomena around them beyond conventional concepts and labels (Wiebe et al., 2007, pp. 264–265). Throughout the research period, the participants were able to echo one another in discussions and sharing of visual journals, insights about living, and creative experiences that are both subjective and objective, mirroring Kalin et al. (2009) that "[we] co-exist and are immersed in the communalization of meaning" (p. 19). Learning was creatively represented in visual forms in the journals, and the sharing time during the workshops generated collective learning and new knowledge. The participants' visual journal entries can be compiled as a rhizomatic whole, embodying the everyday and the spiritual qualities of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 270).

In conclusion, I believe art education is lifelong, a continuous flow of individual and collective meaning-makings. In this way, even though the six workshops are over, the participants are still learning, creating, and in contact with one another, so their stories actually never end. In both obvious and subconscious ways, the participants have taken away many meanings from this experience, and they are continuing to expand their thinking and actions in

the rest of their lives, like ripples on water. As a teacher, I strive to inspire students with "courage and hope and resolve to live in the now, to live each day with purpose" (Leggo, 2005, p. 180) with a gentle, patient, and compassionate personality. I often observe that everyday moments contain endless opportunities for obtaining new knowledge, and I try to express this idea in my teaching. In the words of Sameshima (2008), "there is no way to separate living and learning" (p.38).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been relying heavily on technology to stay connected with others and generate virtual learning environments. I am grateful that technology exists and supports our lives and learning in this era, for this project would not have been possible decades ago. I think we should keep exploring the many possibilities of the virtual world to prepare for future emergency events and lifestyles. With the options of homeschooling, distant learning, and international art education, it is very likely that online learning and communication will be sustained and will prosper after the end of this pandemic.

The experiences of being a graduate student in art education and writing this thesis have changed my perceptions of the art educator I want to be in the future. The goal of teaching is not just to transfer my technical skills and world view to students, but to empower them to explore the unknown and not be afraid of uncertainties, to see the world with their own senses, and eventually develop strong authentic voices and expressions as lively human beings, always in relation with each other. I advocate that we should maintain a personal creative practice consistently because it nourishes our roles as teachers and researchers. We need to take good care of our own creative and spiritual needs before we can effectively empower other individuals, for "the pedagogy of self is often neglected" (Irwin, 2006, p. 75).

We need to sometimes withdraw from the demands of our jobs and responsibilities and just wander into a space of “freedom, transformation, and flow” (Irwin, 2006, p. 75). This may not be easy to achieve, but we should always push for it.

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Appendix A: Codes and Themes

Part One: The six workshops and final interview

1. Education
2. Job
3. Animation
4. Design
5. Moved (moving)
6. Create
7. Kid (s)
8. Mathematics
9. Love
10. Art
11. Concordia
12. High school
13. Teaching
14. Transfer
15. Medical
16. Education system
17. Teaching
18. Architecture
19. Decide (decision)
20. Montreal
21. Career
22. Perspective
23. Parental pressure
24. Sketch
25. Art journal
26. Enjoy
27. Piano
28. Lebanon
29. Drawing skills
30. University
31. Watercolors
32. Explore
33. Abstract
34. Realistic
35. Me
36. Fear
37. Paper
38. Digital
39. Control
40. Experiment
41. Style
42. Everyone
43. Illustration
44. Comics
45. Daily routine
46. Social media
47. Family
48. Play
49. Challenge
50. Connect (ion)
51. Online
52. Confused
53. Pets
54. Need
55. Life
56. Computer
57. iPad
58. Clock
59. Frustration
60. Read
61. Window view
62. Unmotivated
63. Unproductive
64. Time
65. Guilty
66. Walking
67. Growing (plants)
68. Art history
69. Figure out
70. Perspective (in drawing technique)
71. Childhood drawings
72. COVID
73. Private schools
74. Entrance exam
75. Travel

76. Nostalgia
77. IT (career)
78. Freedom
79. Teacher
80. Financial support
81. Hobby
82. Adapt
83. Black and white
84. Time-consuming
85. Trees
86. Pay attention
87. Lines
88. Photos
89. Age
90. Married
91. Single
92. Family
93. Support
94. Share (responsibilities and interests)
95. Busy
96. Different
97. Pressure
98. Distractions
99. Show/ exhibition
100. Same (style)
101. Copy
102. Judgement/judged
103. Care
104. Confidence
105. Mind-set
106. Undominant hand
107. Improvement
108. Commission paintings
109. Self-esteem
110. Hurt
111. Ruin
112. Snow flake
113. Moon
114. New way
115. Blending (colors)
116. Soothing
117. Process
118. Story-telling
119. Portraits
120. Hatching/crosshatching (drawing techniques)
121. Hand
122. Haiku
123. Oranges
124. Blind contour drawing
125. Acceptance
126. Decorative
127. Vulnerable
128. Sell/marketing
129. Post (on social media)
130. Compare
131. I don't care
132. Limitations
133. Public
134. Private
135. Motivated
136. Emotional
137. Sensation
138. Intimidating
139. Going out
140. Time and space
141. Lack of time
142. Consistency
143. Dilemma
144. Value
145. Evolution
146. Interpretation
147. Knowledge
148. Self
149. Collage
150. Students
151. Writing
152. Relax
153. Make mistakes

154. Effort
155. Camera
156. Immediate
157. Virtual
158. Mind
159. Isolated
160. Self-conscious
161. Encounters
162. Worry
163. Passive
164. Interaction
165. Studio class
166. Zoom
167. Interaction
168. Inspire
169. Presentation
170. Reverberation
171. Uncertainty
172. Living inquiry
173. Opening
174. Procrastination
175. Excess (a/r/tography)
176. Trust
177. Goal
178. Sympathetic understanding
179. Precious
180. Imitating

1. Clock/watch
2. Time
3. Division
4. Texts
5. Watercolors
6. Blending
7. Leisure
8. Work
9. Connections
10. Collage
11. Juxtaposition
12. Food
13. Computer
14. Colorful
15. Cartoon
16. Black and white
17. Outside
18. Mood
19. Trees
20. Buildings
21. Sequential
22. Photography
23. Walk
24. Manmade
25. Nature
26. Mysterious
27. Repetition
28. Distortion
29. Overlapping
30. Framing
31. Self
32. Memory
33. Geometric
34. Organic
35. Surreal
36. Intense
37. Hand
38. Control

39. Extension
40. Movement
41. Identity
42. Tracing
43. Trust
44. Gaps
45. Opening
46. Trajectory
47. Change
48. Signs
49. Symbols
50. Moon
51. Day and Night
52. Fluidity
53. Playful
54. Digital lines/colors
55. Hand drawing

Thematic Matrix

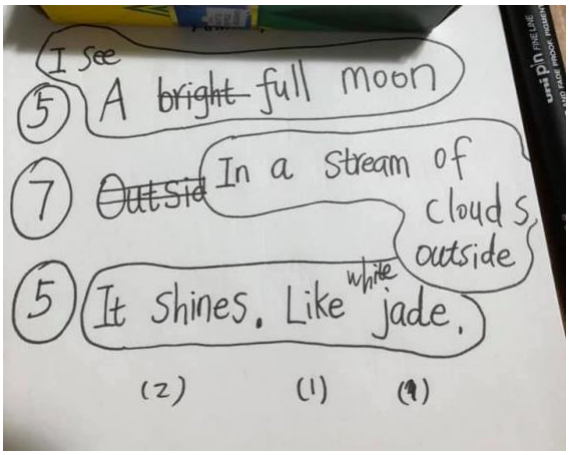
Themes	Codes	Quotes
Living and Being	Emotions	Sometimes I feel nervous. Oh my god, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm doing so many things together but I don't know what I'm doing. (Sha, 2020, workshop 1 transcript) I had taken drawing class in undergrad, but the teacher changed focus to watercolors, and I was so upset. So, I decided to explore watercolors in an abstract way, not realistic as I used to do with drawings. And I fell in love with watercolors! I was saying, "this is really cool". I ended up in a show in Vermont, and I was very proud of myself conquering the fear of watercolors. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 1 transcript)
	Past Life Experiences	I wasn't just teaching art but other subjects too, also the administration and management work, answering emails for hours. These are all the things that are not so part of what you were trained to do. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 4 transcript) To be honest, my husband was the first person in my life who helped me to get my self-confidence about my art. (Sha, 2020, workshop 4 transcript)

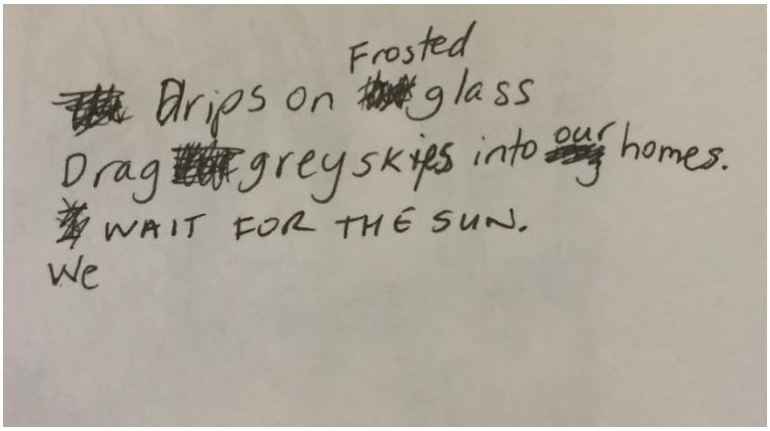
		My life was always busy. I was always a busy person. I was in the swimming varsity, in gym training, working at the library, working with kids. (Lara, 2020, workshop 4 transcript) I worked as a casual teacher at daycare, and during those years, I had a lot of time to art journal. I filled so many art journals, that's the best years of my art journaling. (Becky, 2020, workshop 4 transcript)
	Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Time is not the same (as before the pandemic). Time is shrinking. (Becky, 2020, workshop 2 transcript) Sometimes I feel like oh my god, I am doing nothing… The days are passing and I'm doing nothing. I feel guilty. (Sha, 2020, workshop 2 transcript) I sometimes can be extremely productive one day and then the other days like horrible. (Lara, 2020, workshop 2 transcript) I prefer to pay more attention to the things inside my home. I even like the plant spray stains on the window. (Sha, 2020, workshop 3 transcript) It took me a long time to get out of the rut of being unmotivated, and there is some guilt associated with it. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 2 transcript)
Moving and Transiting	Travelling	I travelled to many countries with my family when I was a kid. I have lots of photos of my travels and they are such great memories. (Lara, 2020, workshop 1 transcript) 2018 was the best year of my life. I travelled all over Europe with my husband and daughter. We visited ten different countries, and with no agenda, just hopping around. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 3 transcript) I have always enjoyed travelling, having weekend trips since I was a kid. It just makes me so happy and excited to go to new places and see new things. (Becky, 2020, workshop 3 transcript)
	Moving	After I got married, I moved to Malaysia with my husband and worked there for 15 months, and then I moved to Canada for a PR. (Sha, 2020, workshop 1 transcript)

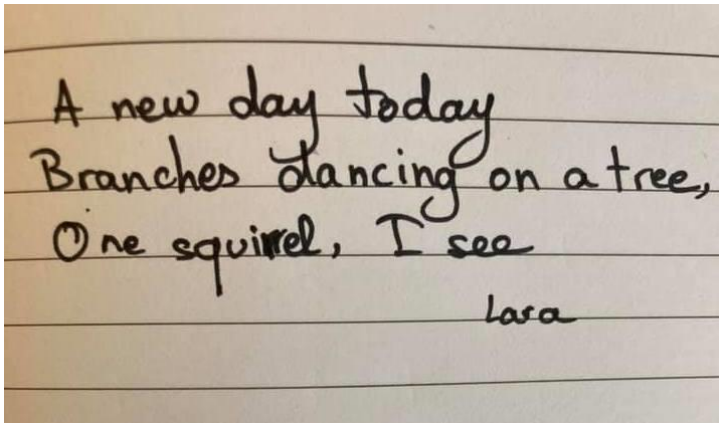
		I was born in China. My parents decided to immigrate to Canada for a better future and education for me when I was in elementary school. We moved to Canada when I was in grade eight. (Becky, 2020, workshop 1 transcript)
	Changes in Studies/Careers	In Iran, I studied fashion design for my BA degree. After this, another three years in animation in a private institute. I couldn't find a job in fashion design in Iran, and while working on animation, I tried hard to find a job in other countries, on animation and concept design. (Sha, 2020, workshop 1 transcript) At that point, I was so unhappy, I said, I got to go back home and figure out what I really want to do. I was only in UBC for two months. I went back to Montreal and did another undergrad degree in art education. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 2 transcript) I had language barrier at Lebanese American University during nursing school, so I decided to switch to Fine Arts. After graduation, my dad suggested me to get another degree, so I did architecture (interior design) for two years, then I applied for Concordia's Master program and dropped architecture. (Lara, 2020, workshop 3 transcript)
Artful Expressions	Artistic Styles	I used to draw with a fountain pen on papers when I was about 15 years old, making small illustrations using lines. Then I stopped and moved on to drawing anatomy and painting. After joining the animation field, when I start drawing with iPad, the drawing experience is different, my style became more narrative. (Sha, 2020, workshop transcript 4) A bit like Lara who likes everything, I try all kinds of things, and I'm really excited when I learn about a new technique, and I really want to try it. (Nancy, 2020, workshop transcript 4) I used to focus more on accentuating the vibrancy of objects' colors, and now I'm more focused on the organic forms and colors. There are so many shades of orange. (Becky, 2020, workshop transcript 4)
	The Unconventional Ways	I was born during the war. And in the news, I saw many people who lost their hands, legs, or even their eyes… I think I was eight that I can remember, I was trying to draw with

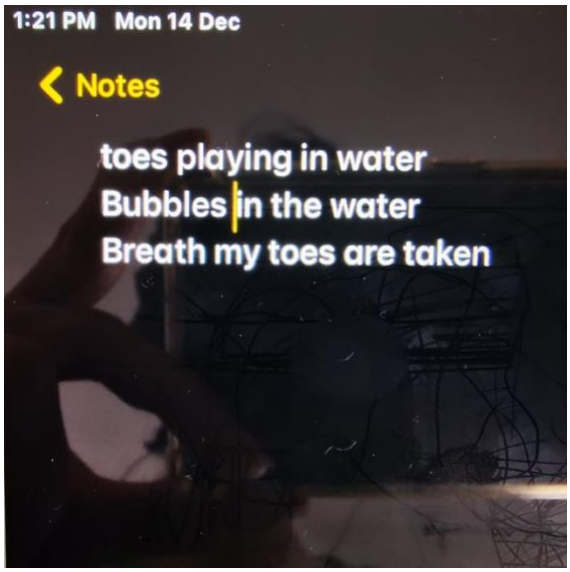
		toes, then trying my left hand to write. (Sha, 2020, workshop transcript 4) I'm usually more meticulous in the cross-hatching (a way of shading), and I can't cross-hatch now, so I'm just scribbling. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 5 transcript) I feel like I'm a kid using my non-dominant hand. I was like, go this way, be careful. (Becky, 2020, workshop transcript 5) This is like a messy page. (Lara, 2020, workshop transcript 6)
	Creative Processes in Visual Journals	I like this workshop experience. I start to tell stories and I like the journaling process (Sha, 2020, workshop 5 transcript) I always see something familiar with fresh new eyes. Every orange has a different organic shape and colors, that's why I always have an interest sketching the same things. (Becky, 2020, workshop 4 transcript) I took pictures instead of drawing for the prompt because I was short on time. But I didn't like it… I want to draw. I think I'm going to draw the pictures in my sketchbook, or print the pictures and cut them into a collage and put them in my sketchbook. I like the tangible thing of the visual journal. (Nancy, 2020, workshop 4 transcript) People were wondering what I was taking a picture of. They were like, is she crazy? I took a picture of nothing, the ground, it was this tiny snow flake. (Lara, 2020, workshop transcript 4)

Appendix B: Other Images Shared During the Workshops and Interview







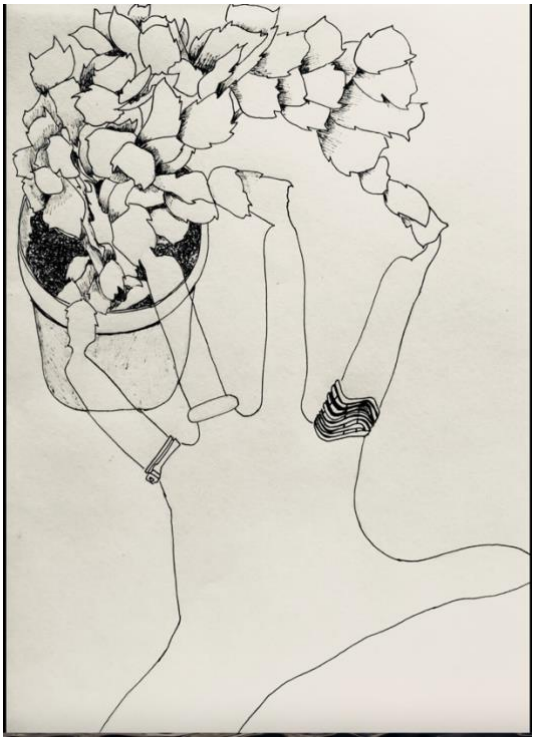


Our Haiku Poems Created Together During Workshop 5

Nancy's Other Artworks of Various Styles

Sha created more hand drawings of people, using the blind-contour approach.

Sha's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #6



Nancy's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #6

Lara's Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #6

Becky’s Visual Journal Entry for Prompt #6

Appendix C: Final Interview Questions

1. What is your artistic process of when working in a visual journal?
2. How did your artistic process develop over 6 weeks? Can you show me examples in your journal?
3. Did this online workshop series help you to develop your identity as an artist, teacher, and researcher? If yes, how so? If not, what would you recommend for future workshops?
4. Based on your experience, what do you think is the pedagogic value of visual journals in an adult art education classroom online?
5. Based on your experience, how would you describe learning online as a visual art graduate student, versus learning in the studio classroom?
6. What were some of the benefits of learning online?
7. What were some of the limitations of learning online?
8. What would you recommend to improve teaching visual arts online?
9. How do you relate your visual journal practice to the six renderings of a/r/tography? Is there one or more specific renderings that resonate with you?
10. How did this workshop series help us create a community of practice?
11. Has this workshop series changed your view about visual journals? If yes, explain. If not, can you elaborate?
12. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix D: Ethics Certificate

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Becky Yi Wen Cao
Department:	Faculty of Fine Arts\Art Education
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	Incorporating the Concepts of A/r/tography in the Practice of Visual Journaling
Certification Number:	30013219

Valid From: June 10, 2021 To: June 09, 2022

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee