

The Vibrancy of Visual Journals

by Gamelle FitzGibbon

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THERE IS A corner in my house with a waist high stack of visual journals. I have lugged them through many cross-country moves; they have survived months of storage in suboptimal conditions, and most recently the spatial confines of an apartment in downtown Vancouver. As much as I read Marie Kondo's *Life-Changing Magic of Cleaning up*, I simply cannot seem to get rid of a single one. I have tried to eliminate just a few yet they bring me joy every time I read them. For me, my visual journals are an illustrated roadmap of the process of evolving ideas and learning I have experienced through the years. They also represent an opportunity to reflect on and refine the ongoing creative process of being an artist, educator, and lifelong learner.

AN ILLUSTRATED JOURNEY IN DOODLES

For me, art journaling is a way to distill and explore further thoughts. In many ways, I see it as the original form of infographic, before they were madly popularized by Pinterest, a website that contains many examples of art. Visual journals can organize or represent

information or data in a way that transcends simple words and meanings. They represent an opportunity to process information and an opportunity for revisiting and reflecting. In an effort to declutter, I have tried many times to get rid of the visual journal from my first year History of Art course but I find the pictures and doodles I made during that time too endearing to 'let go'. This particular visual journal is a visceral reminder of a moment in time when I was learning about the origins of art while at the same time embarking on my own fledgling journey as an artist and educator. The thoughts, revelations, and new ways of thinking I experienced during this time were valuable, and even more worthy during 'revisits'. The option to revisit and reflect is perhaps the greatest reason behind why I have kept my large collection of visual journals intact.

JOURNALS AND THEIR MEANING

Visual journals represent a journey in experimentation with different ways of thinking and problem solving. As with photographs, they provide a snapshot that can't necessarily be captured in words alone. They record important

DAY 2+3 CHALLENGES

looking AT BLANK CANVASES + PAPER
AT LENGTH and NOT KNOWING WHERE TO START.
REALIZING MY BRAIN IS AT SUCH AN ANALYTICAL
POINT THAT I CANT EVEN CONTEMPLATE STARTING
UNTIL I HAVE THE END MORE OR LESS FINELY
REFINED AND THIS KEEPS ME FROM LAUNCHING IN
AND THE CYCLE REPEATS. WHEN AT WHAT POINT
DID I LOSE MY SENSE OF SPONTANEOUS ART-MAKING?
HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE COMMENCEMENT IN MYSELF?
HOW AND IN WHAT WAYS DO MY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE
THE SAME? MOST IMPORTANTLY, WHAT IS AN
EFFECTIVE SOLUTION?

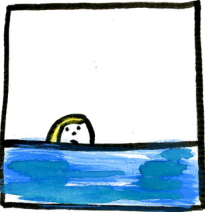

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- laying down paint, flipping it upside down, jumping in and working without a concept or plan of 'what is it / what will it become?'
- having someone challenge me or challenge someone to dive in-- something of an accountability partner "for lack of a better word"
- reviewing old sketchbooks and mining for material that was once inspiring.

idea today storyboard journey of each summer with a different theme.

FRAMES THAT WOULD	ARTICULATE OR	ILLUMINATE
the process of	Discovery	currently being undertaken
		Here At Uvic 2018.

program aim → REINVENTION as a student as a thinker, as a researcher

"The ultimate aim of education is to enable individuals to become the architects of their own education and through that process to continually reinvent themselves." - Will of Warren



Above: Exploring new media and plotting new works

milestones in my thinking as well as patterns of thought. At the end of this summer I carried all my visual journals to the beach and read through each one. In this revisitation, I was fascinated by a pattern that emerged that I had never noticed before. There was a realization that my images always supported text. While the art form of letters remains important, there was also meaning in the letters and words, and in the message I wanted to convey. I used images to attract the eye, to bring attention to the words, to be pleasing. It wasn't until I started painting in my undergraduate program that I realized I could communicate a message through an image alone. Using visual journals helped me uncover a way to communicate a message without relying solely on words to convey meaning.

I often hesitate to classify what I do

with my thoughts and the learning that ensues from a visual journal. The idea of a journal sometimes conjures up thoughts of regular entries, or that a certain kind of content should be included. When I discuss what a visual journal might be with others, there are a myriad of answers: "it's a sketchbook with words, it's a place to explore new media or plot new works". I consider visual journals a 'free-form space' dedicated to recording learning experiences and thinking visually. For instance, I use shapes, different fonts, doodles, drawings, collages, and mixed media to sort, and arrange new information in a way that classifies it for revisiting and reflection at a later date. This is what might be termed 'processing on a deeper level.' For me, the visual journal is something that has evolved naturally. It's the way that I reveal my thinking processes. I feel the majority of my thinking and processing

takes place in the actual creation and illustration of each page.

A FORM OF COMMUNICATION

I started visual journaling in the first year of my Art Education program at the University of Victoria. When I look back to the beginning pages of my very first visual journal, the emphasis was on words, with just a few images, sketches, and exploration of different lettering. As the journal developed, so did a new way of expressing myself. I explored more variations of lettering and fonts. I used elements of shape to organize my thoughts, linking them to other visual elements. I started the first journal in a class with Professor, Dr. Robert Dalton. He was an artist and educator known for investing enormous amounts of time providing feedback to his students with detailed written responses. I valued his

REMEMBER you prepare from soul
 That is where you are coming from
 That is your way
 your studio
 feed the work
 as you are
 who you are and what you are
 and if that is not okay
 you let go
 give up
 and see the new
 coming further down the road.

PROSE BY INGRID.

THOUGHTS THAT came out of the visual interview group discussion:

- Applications for classroom include having students load images of work into a digital place and manipulate from there
- the words trust and vulnerability came up so often. my thoughts are that the more personal the work you contributed was, the deeper your interviewee could go with their visual questions posed to you.
- the experience brought up the subject of collaboration, a skill that needs to be taught in the curriculum as it is used extensively in a work and life environment; perhaps what this assignment brought forward was a question about how we can learn to collaborate
- Art therapy and the principles of art therapy (and its) the very essence of art therapy. The process of creating the piece between you and the therapist is the bridge with which questions are posed and answered

IMAGE BY INGRID.

FURTHERING CONVERSATIONS ON VISUAL INTERVIEWING.....
 Riffing on the idea of not verbalizing and simply using the visual to enter the interview resulted in some coincidences and discoveries. The sensitivity and empathetic nature of a person is more evident in this collaborative process. The process was inspiring in terms of introducing/re-introducing ways of asking what do we draw out from the visual interviews about the other person?
 Ingrid says "The question is in the visual, rather than the answer. It is living in your work." Jofar thinks the moment you receive something is very precious. Alyson approached the interview with a "yes, and..." way of response. Using video to tell the story of the visual interview is a seamless way to tell the story. CONVERSATIONAL SHORTHAND

can'tatics

written explanations and they became fertile ground to lay out the details of my thoughts in a visual journal.

MAKING THE VISUAL JOURNEY AN INDIVIDUAL RESOURCE

The reason I find the format of a visual journal effective is that it gives me a dedicated space to think, while at the same time, it comes with few expectations. I don't work in the visual journal daily as a rule, although there are occasions when I will visit it multiple times in a day. Sometimes I get inspired,

and am compelled to make more than one entry to record my learning. Other times I will rewrite from notes that I took in a hurry in a rushed moment. However, I try to keep the entries as free as possible from rules or limitations. In the past, I would try to use only one pen colour to explore aesthetic appeal, but gave that up in favour of convenience. Some people are very particular about the size and look of their visual journals, whereas I am not. I will happily create a 'FrankenSketchbook' out of a series of old half used sketchbooks and rebind it. The most important quality it must have

REVISED STUDIO PRODUCTION PLAN

REPLETING TIME LINE TO REFLECT THAT I AM WAY OFF OF MY ORIGINAL STUDIO PLAN. WITH 10 WEEKS OF STUDIO DAYS LEFT I HAVE TO RE-ORGANIZE I WANT TO FINISH ALL OF MY GOALS BY THE LAST WEEK.

- reconcile areas of work in blue
- start 2nd charcoal
- finish 2nd charcoal
- start 2nd charcoal do not background
- finish 2nd charcoal
- work on remaining backgrounds
- start 3rd charcoal overlay comp
- finish 3rd charcoal
- write critical statement / essay / synopsis
- hang piece / photograph / CELEBRATE!

all necessary supplies will bring to table in the afternoon
 I will stop the other papers I'm working on the 2nd charcoal
 that I had stopped
 that I had set out to do and that will go away
 I had with collage
 I am very confident feeling in the process of getting it all with the result that is remaining it to be interpreted.

CREATIVITY IS A DECISION

demostration in progress creating a composition

CYANOTYPE DEMONSTRATION WITH AMBER

type of photographic technique - uses watercolor paper (print-making paper is too absorbent) you have to print on the fluid and let it dry you can cut the paper to the size you wish

Tools:

- cardboard
- misocrite
- hard surface
- clear glass
- 4 of these
- bulldogs

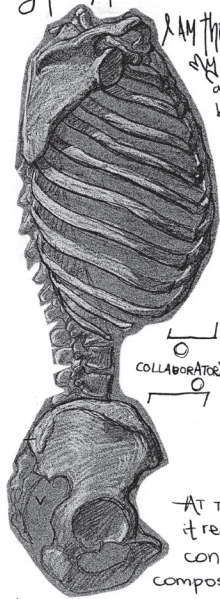
in between the hard surface and the glass you can place the composition... features, propped away, transparency printed with blue ink. Amber says she'd like to see you would leave off the blue ink and just have the cyanotype.

other materials: watercolor paper, brushes to brush on fluid

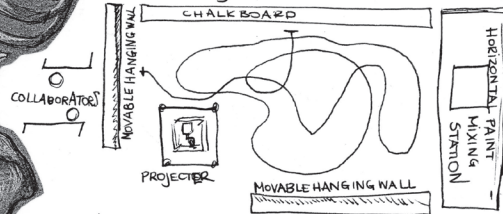
the opportunity to photograph in this short demo used Amber really highlighted others I can get the most of the opportunities in the program. In a short 30 min demonstration from a pool - I was doubly completely set up and inspired with lesson plan ideas for my students and want to get into this medium personally. I also learned about teaching from Amber by observing in an art therapy context how to simplify introduce a medium and yet to be inspired/inspiring for next summer I need to speak out so many new ways of learning and thinking and teaching through shared experiences.

Above: Pages on the journey to experimentation

FURTHERING STUDIO EXPLORATION ... development + PROCESS



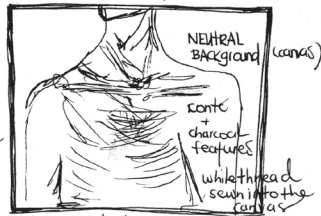
I AM THE THICK OF MY ARTISTIC PROCESS AT THE MOMENT AND MY WORKING STYLE HAS SURPRISED ME. NOT BECAUSE IT'S ANY DIFFERENT THAN BEFORE BUT BECAUSE I HAD NEVER BEFORE REALLY REALIZED HOW IT IS I WORK - QUITE OBVIOUSLY I DID HOWEVER SINCE THE SET-UP OF MY STUDENT IS SO CONDUCTIVE TO MY WORKING STYLE. I HATE SET UP A RATHER CIRCULAR ENVIRONMENT WITH MANY VERTICAL SURFACES THAT ALLOWS ME TO CONCURRENTLY DEVELOP EACH PAINTING A LITTLE AT A TIME - THIS IS IDEAL FOR THE WAY THAT I WORK. HERE'S HOW IT LOOKS:



AT THE MOMENT, I AM CURRENTLY IN THE THRILL (AND IT REALLY IS QUITE THRILLING) OF WORKING ON 7 CANVASES CONCURRENTLY. THEY ARE A STUDY IN COLOUR, IN COMPOSITION (TO SOME EXTENT) AND MOST NOTABLY A

STUDY IN THE AWAKENING OF CREATIVITY FOR ME IN THIS MEDIUM. WHEN I AM CLOSER TO THEIR COMPLETION I WILL BEGIN BUILDING THE NARRATIVE OF WHAT I AM TRYING TO COMMUNICATE. FOR NOW I AM REFERRING TO EACH BY THEIR DOMINANT COLOUR (RED, BLUE, ETC.) THERE IS ONE THAT I HAVE NOT YET

STARTED AND I AM INTRIGUED BY THIS BECAUSE I HAVE THE clearest IDEA OF WHAT I WOULD LIKE THIS TO LOOK LIKE AS WELL AS WHAT IT WILL SAY. I'D LIKE TO DOCUMENT IN VISUAL FORM A VERY STRANGE SENSATION I HAD IN THE SPRING THAT FELT AS IF I HAD 100+ VERY THIN WHITE THREADS ACROSS MY CHEST, ALMOST LIKE A CORSET IN MY BREASTBONE. I INTEND TO KEEP IT VERY SUBTLED + SIMPLE AND ALLOW MY MY COLOUR CANVASES TO BE THE POP CONTRAST REPRESENTING UNBRIDLED CREATIVITY



Above: A page out of my FrankenSketchbook

is durability with sturdy paper that can 'hold up' to any medium. I don't tend to carry my visual journal everywhere with me (I have a Moleskine pocket sized book for observations 'on the fly') and prefer to use my visual journal when I have the time to process my ideas with the energy and time they deserve. I like to use my sketchbook to communicate ideas and concepts rather than experimenting with a medium, although imaginative ideas emerge on the paper. As my thoughts gather on the pages, I find they focus on my reactions to new learning rather than emotional responses. For this reason I don't also consider the visual journal to be a diary or a record of intimate thoughts.



FIRST THOUGHTS, IDEAS, SEEDS

WHERE DO IDEAS COME FROM? WHERE DOES INSPIRATION AND CREATIVITY GO TO IN QUOTIDIAN LIFE?
WHAT IS FOREFRONT IN MY MIDDLE THOUGHTS?

inspiring creativity in others by first inspiring it in oneself
going through old ideas, busting them off, reinvigorating, experimenting, play

interdisciplinary connection promotion and development.
How do I bring Art into a subject like Spanish... maybe create a collection of lessons, works and creative ideas: eBook?

Promoting the expression of cultural diversity or intercultural understanding through art

Reclaimed, nature based, natural materials as a starting point
getting away from blank white paper and canvas... what is available from the natural/reclaimed world... how can I use inspiration I see everyday to create work: Amy Goldworthy

Stops from the past
getting caught up in competition and comparing with others.

DOCUMENT EVERYTHING.
EXPERIMENT MORE.

it doesn't have to be a difficult process for it to be worthwhile so CALM DOWN, SPEAK HONESTLY, AND LOVE THE PROCESS.

NOURISH RELATIONSHIPS BEING BUILT BECAUSE THEY ARE *everything*
UNESCO article: ROAD MAP FOR ARTS EDUCATION
HUMANS ALL HAVE CREATIVE POTENTIAL.

WHAT DO I CRAVE CREATING RIGHT NOW?

possible summer plan process

(1)	(2)	(3)
explore create experiment. fail! reflect	a classroom based project PLAN	a community based project PLAN benefiting

SPOTLIGHT ON PROCESS

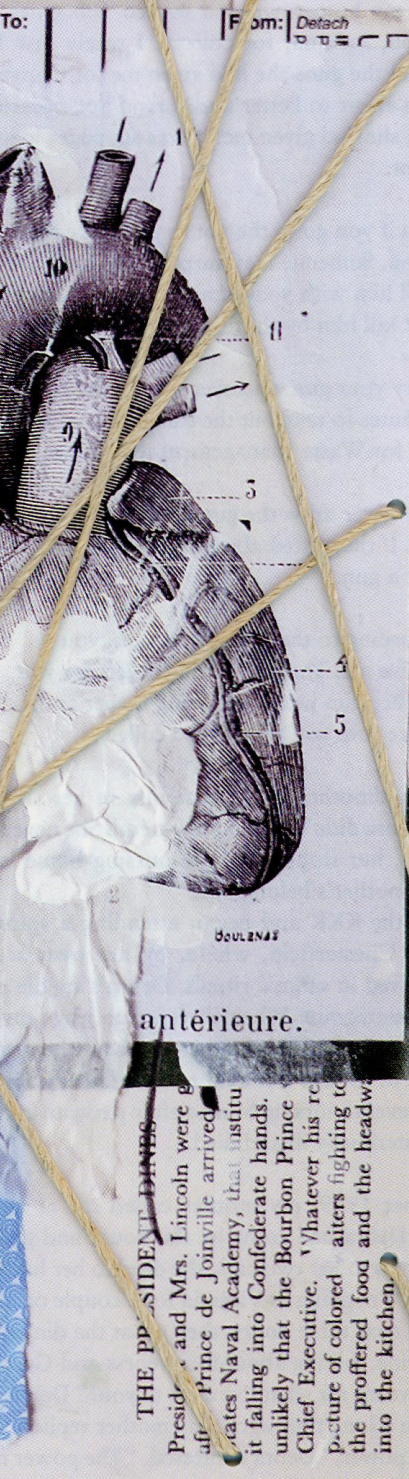
There has been a concerted push in recent years for education and professional development to focus on process as a means of demonstrating learning. There is tremendous value in recording our thoughts, impressions, and reactions as learners yet in the finished product or evaluation, the process of play, experimentation, obstacles and failures that led to the final creation are often minimized or overlooked. This is a shame as it is undeniably fascinating to observe an art idea go from inception to design to production to exhibition. For some strange reason, there is a tendency

to push that process of achievement and success, putting it 'behind the curtains' in favour of a polished piece of final work whether at the elementary or secondary level of education.

Often the back story and the development of a piece of artwork is the most interesting and riveting. For the first time this summer, during an exhibition at the A. Wilfrid Johns Gallery at the University of Victoria, I included my visual journal beside my finished pieces. It was more of an afterthought. It lay on a table beside my finished artworks but the reaction and attention it garnered was astounding and reaffirmed my conviction about the importance of showing how ideas develop.

At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, a recent exhibition displayed scanned images of two of Leonardo da

Left: The cover of my current visual journal



antérieure.

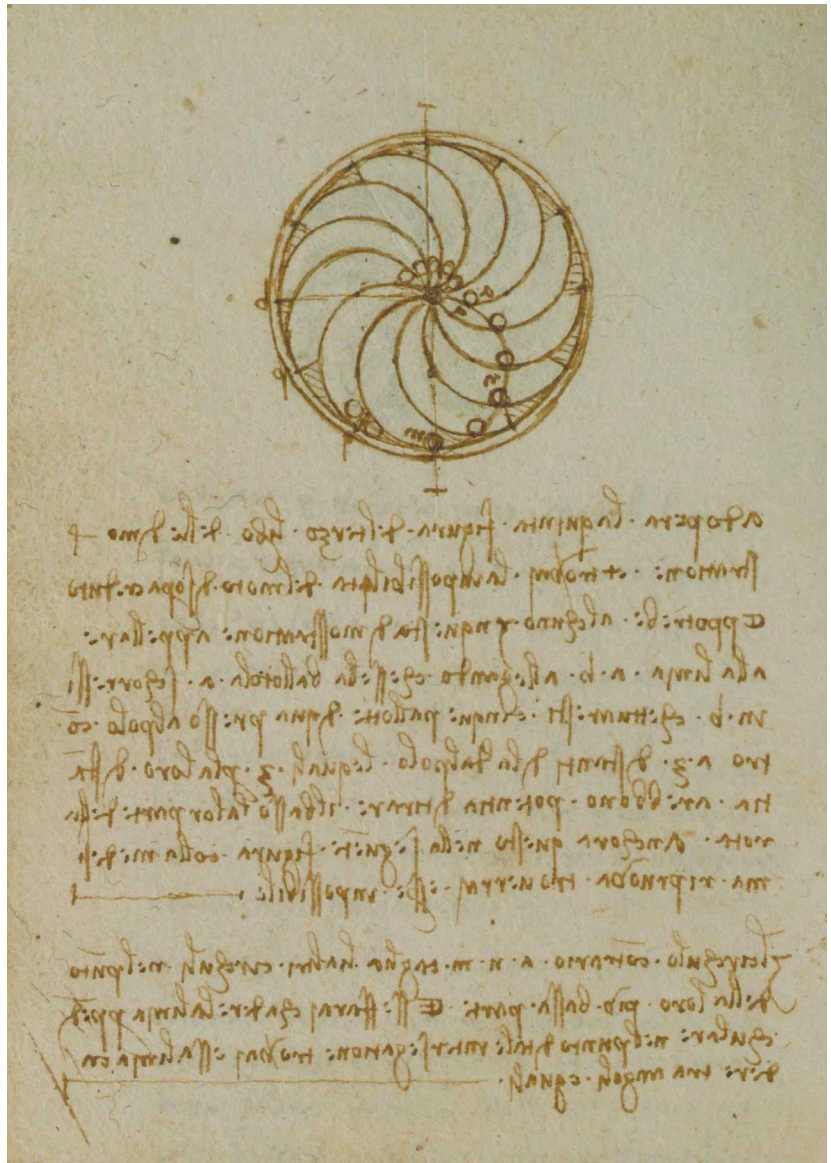
THE PRESIDENT DIMES
President and Mrs. Lincoln were
after Prince de Joinville arrived
ates Naval Academy, that institu
it falling into Confederate hands,
unlikely that the Bourbon Prince
Chief Executive. Whatever his re
picture of colored waiters fighting to
the proffered food and the headw
into the kitchen.

Vinci's visual journals to great acclaim. The display of the evolution of da Vinci's ideas, his curious mirror-writing, as well as his thoughts on Science and Art focused on important elements of play, brainstorming, and experimentation during the creative process, something often excluded from an artist's oeuvre.

THE VISUAL JOURNEY AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOL

After a ten year hiatus from teaching Art to teach Spanish, I returned to teaching Art and my stack of visual journals was my first stop as mentioned previously. I mined the books for lesson ideas, exercises, and moments that made me excited as a young student. In large part, thanks to visual elements of design emphasized in the visual journals, it was easy to recall the lessons that resonated with me, the ones that inspired me to create more art, and the ones that created challenges and roadblocks with respect to new materials and techniques. I firmly believe that reading through a bunch of written notes without visual accompaniment would not have triggered the same response. I also use visual journals as a source of information, a reminder of the quality of feedback from professors and whether it was encouraging, motivating, or frustrating. For this reason that I actively encourage and support my students when they create visual journals.

Studies have shown that visual journals foster engagement and challenge (Hall, 2011) as they actively involve the learner in the learning process. "Visual journals provide opportunities to express internal tension, creativity, personal discovery, and, unexpectedly, happiness" (pp. 175). The visual journal also provides a conduit to build relationships and communication with my students. I will continue to use the visual journal as a vehicle to record my evolving thoughts and processes. It is also my desire to continue to support my students in creating visual journals so that they too, will also have a record of their growth and learning. ✨



Above: a peek inside the process of Leonardo Da Vinci's thinking

Left: Using my visual journal as a place to explore best practice in teaching

References:

Hall C.J. (2011) *The Efficacy of Visual Journals for At-Risk First Nations Students*. In: Gouzouasis P. (eds) *Pedagogy in a New Tonality*. SensePublishers. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-94-6091-669-4_11

Recently digitized journals by Leonardo di Vinci. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2018/09/recently-digitized-journals-by-leonardo-da-vinci/>

Links:

www.studiogamelle.com
www.studiogamellective.com
[@studiogamellective](https://twitter.com/studiogamellective)

Kondo, Marie (2014) *The Life-changing magic of tidying up*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press.



further reflections
on the
artist teacher

teaching as
a safety net for those who cannot find gainful
employment in other fields and professions

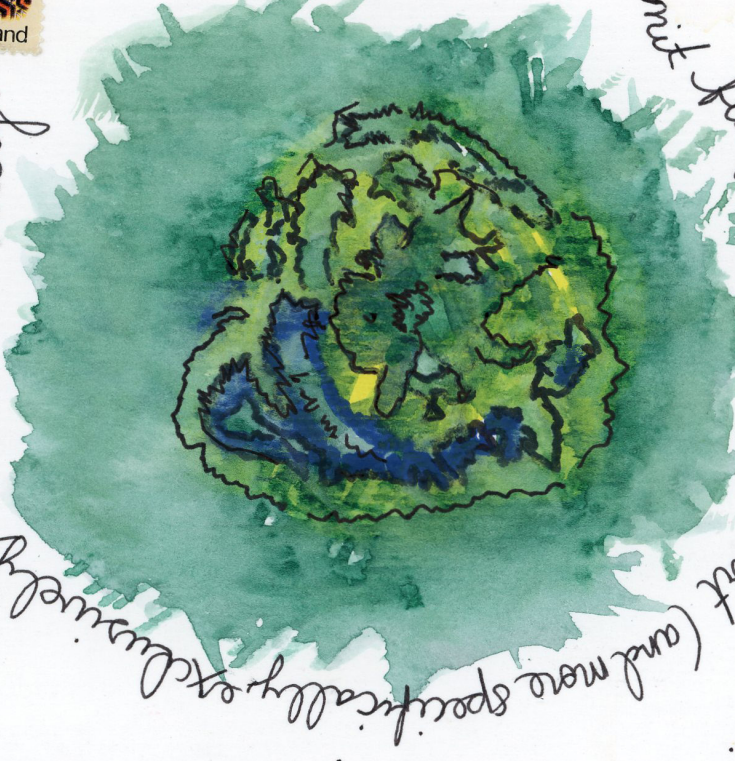


the perception that one must
submit



Practice at all levels of education, but in those not a
reference for media expertise at the tertiary
level?

Empowerment worthy.



fully to the practice of art (and more specifically, or exclusively)

i.e. could not make it as a professional artist
"the weekend artist"