DEFINING MOMENTS: OVERCOMING FEAR TO BECOME AN ARTIST

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DEFINING MOMENTS: OVERCOMING FEAR TO BECOME AN ARTIST

A Project

by

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Department of Teacher Education
Abstract

of

DEFINING MOMENTS: OVERCOMING FEAR TO BECOME AN ARTIST

by

Jennifer Bell Wolfe

This Project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows Pathway I: Artist as educator developing knowledge and skills in a particular area of the arts with a disposition toward applying this acquired expertise to arts education. This project is Defining Moments: Overcoming Fear to Become an Artist. The author looked at the defining moment in her life that helped her commit to being an artist. She gathered information through personal interviews and readings about other artists and how they had overcome their fears. In order to explore this on a personal level, the author studied encaustic painting techniques to gain a level of expertise in the media. Numerous works of art were produced and shown in galleries. The process of becoming an artist and overcoming the fears that are associated with art making and showing art in a gallery were studied.

Lorie Hammond, Ph. D.

Date
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my cousin, Johanna Haverstock. It is also dedicated to my husband, David, and my children, Jonah and Emma. Without their love, support and understanding, I would not have been able to complete this project.
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I would like to acknowledge my professors: Lorie Hammond, Ph.D., Karen Benson, Ph.D., and Crystal Olson, M. A. Without their knowledge and support, this project would not have been possible. Thank you for all that you do to nurture and support the arts in our community. I would especially like to acknowledge my artistic mentor, Charlotte Cooper. Without her exciting introduction to encaustic painting and continued support this project and my own personal growth would not have happened. I thank you.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This Project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows Pathway I: Artist as Educator.

What is the defining moment that pushes someone to commit to being an artist? How does one push past any fear and become an artist? These are questions that this narrative project has explored.

This project shows the emotional and psychological aspects of becoming an artist. The artist’s commitment to making art is due to her cousin, Johanna. In 2006, Johanna, was diagnosed with malignant brain cancer. She died six months later. She was an artist. The artist stayed with her cousin in Portland, saw her paintings, and realized that she had no excuse for not making art. Art was something the artist had done intermittently, but she had never fully committed. After seeing Johanna and knowing that her cousin would die soon, the artist started thinking about why she was not making art. She had many excuses built right in: two young children, working full time, no designated studio space, and so on. At Johanna’s funeral, the artist got up to speak, even though the cousins’ connection was recent and she did not feel comfortable speaking. She made herself get up and let everyone in the church know that she would commit herself to making art, because Johanna would not be able to make art anymore. This moment was the turning point in the artist’s art making and the beginning of her commitment to being an artist.
This project also documents the artist’s transformation from previous art student and intermittent art maker to full time artist. Included is both the story behind this transformation and also her process of art making. The process of art making involved her development as a full-time artist by researching the encaustic painting process. This is a 2000 year-old painting process that involves colored pigment suspended in melted beeswax and resin, which is then applied in layers to a wooden surface. The artist researched this process in books, studied with other encaustic artists, and made a series of mixed media artwork incorporating photography and encaustics that culminated in her display of original works in two shows at the VOX gallery in the Urban Hive building.

The artist developed her encaustic techniques in several ways. First, through the study of books about encaustics, she became familiar with a variety of techniques to be used when working with encaustics. To learn more on encaustic painting processes and techniques, *The Art of Encaustic Painting* by Joanne Mattera and *Embracing Encaustic* by Linda Womack were referenced. On the theory and practice of arts in education, the author gathered information from numerous sources, for example, *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and *The Kind of Schools We Need* by Elliot Eisner. In exploring the difficulties of being an artist, she delved into *The Artist’s Way* by Anne Cameron, *Art and Fear* by David Bayles and Ted Orland, and *The Creative Way* by Twyla Tharp.

In addition to the literature research, she also worked with encaustic artists in person. She was involved in two encaustic classes with local Sacramento artist, Charlotte Cooper. The author learned how to properly incorporate photography into her encaustic pieces, by working with Janet Bartlett Goodman, an Oakland based encaustic artist who
uses photography in her work. The artist’s goal with this project was to learn numerous techniques used in making encaustic paintings, especially incorporating photography into encaustic works. She used a journal to record responses to artwork, the process of making the artwork, and emotional responses to the process of art making for the gallery shows. The artist photographed her pieces.

There were inherent limitations when working with encaustics in a studio space located in an unfinished garage. There was no heating or air conditioning. The wax may be altered by exposure to extreme temperatures, therefore the artist was forced to abandon art making, when the weather was too hot or too cold. There was also the need for ventilation, due to the fumes that come off the heated wax. The garage door was required to remain open during studio time. Therefore, if it was raining hard and windy, the artist could not work.

Over a period of 12 months, she planned and executed a variety of paintings using mixed media, focusing on encaustics and photography. The paintings incorporated actual photos, copies on rice paper, and the use of ink drawn lines inspired by photos of cracked asphalt. Throughout this process, she kept a journal of the techniques that were used and ideas for artwork, as well as, reflections on art making and the difficulties of being an artist. Finally, as a way to learn the process for showing artwork in a gallery and also as a culmination of the artist’s project, pieces that best demonstrated the artist’s encaustic skills were exhibited at the VOX Gallery in the Urban Hive Building.

This project that began as a promise to the author’s deceased cousin Johanna, helped guide the artist down the life-long process of developing as artist. In the past, she
made choices to not pursue art because she was afraid. She realized that the fear of failure and humiliation was nothing compared to dying. What about the fear of an unlived life? As an artist and art teacher, she will use the knowledge gained from this experience to inspire and to encourage her students, and those around her, to fulfill their creative dreams, regardless of fear or any limitations.

Definition of Terms

Bloom: “A film of whitish dust that appears on the surface of an encaustic painting as the result of a chemical reaction within the wax” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140).

Encaustic: “From the ancient Greek *enkaustikos*, which means “to heat” or “to burn”. Encaustic is the name for both a medium, pigmented wax, and the process, involving heat, by which the medium is applied and secured” (Mattera, p. 140).

Encaustic medium: “Refers to beeswax in which a small amount of damar resin has been added for strength. The usual ratio is one part damar to eight or nine parts wax” (Mattera, p. 140).

Damar resin: “The hardened sap of a fir tree native to the East Indies. This resin is used to make encaustic medium, typically one part damar to eight or nine parts wax” (Mattera, p. 140).

Dispersion pigment: “A creamy, viscous substance composed of a large number of particles held in suspension by a small amount of oil (usually linseed). The advantage of dispersion pigments over ground pigments is that there is not pigment dust to contaminate the studio” (Mattera, p. 140).
Fusing or Burning in: “An essential element of the encaustic process, in which each newly applied layer of wax paint must be melted to the one beneath it” (Mattera, p. 140).

Flash Point: “The high temperature at which wax combusts. To prevent this dangerous condition from occurring, encaustic painters are encouraged to maintain working temperatures not much higher that the melting point of wax” (Mattera, p. 140).

Ground: “The surface on which an artist paints. For encaustic this might be traditional gesso, waxed canvas or paper on panel, waxed panel or unprimed wood panel. The ground must adhere well to the substrate while accepting paint with the right degree of absorbency” (Mattera, p. 140).

Intaglio: “A printmaking term used to describe the incising of a surface” (Mattera, p. 141).

Luminosity: “The distinguishing feature of paintings made with transparent layers of wax. As light passes through those layers and is reflected up to the surface, the painting is actually illuminated from within” (Mattera, p. 141).

Refined Beeswax: “Beeswax that has been cleaned of pollen, propolis and other impurities by mechanical filtering” (Mattera, p. 141).

Scrafari: “A term from plaster or clay work that describes the scraping or incising of a surface to reveal the color of an underlying layer” (Mattera, p. 141).

Substrate: “The underlying layer on which a ground is applied. In encaustic, the substrate should be rigid so that the wax painting experiences a minimum of vibration during its lifetime. Substrates for encaustic include wood laminates,
pressed wood such as Masonite, and hollow-core surfaces such as lauan doors” (Mattera, p. 141).

Wax: “A natural material form animal, vegetable, and mineral sources composed of acids, alcohols, esters and hydrocarbons whose characteristics include luminosity, resistance to moisture, and extreme plasticity in the presence of heat” (Mattera, p. 141).
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review summarizes the following research: theories and practices in art education, fear and the art making process, and the nature and history of the encaustic painting process. This body of work creates a context for my own encaustic painting project.

Theories and Practices in Art Education

American education professor Herbert Kliebard’s research into education in the 1890’s shows our educational system has changed through the years. In the 19th century, the teacher was at the heart of the educational system, as there was a stronger social connection within the society. According to Kliebard (1982), “It was the teacher who was expected to embody the standard virtues and community values” (p. 16). Then there was a shift away from teacher-centered to curriculum-centered education. Kliebard discussed that with the shift to a new industrial society, the school became a “mediating institution between the family and an increasingly distant and impersonal social order” (1982, p. 16). As the different groups of reformers battled for control of the nation’s educational curriculum, there was no universal agreement of what should be taught to everyone; or what knowledge had the most worth.

Numerous groups were concerned with education reform at the turn of the century from the 19th to the 20th centuries. The humanists had an ideal view of education. “The right selection of subjects along with the right way of teaching them could develop citizens of all classes endowed in accordance with the humanist ideal - with the power to
reason, sensitivity to beauty and high moral character” (Kleibard, 1982, p. 19). Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard in the early 1890’s was one of the first proponents of the elective principle. He believed that all students, even elementary aged ones, should be allowed to study what they were interested in (Kleibard, 1982, p. 20). “Social meliorists” from the early 19th century were interested in the improvement of society or a new social order. Lester Frank Ward, a self-taught botanist, geologist, and social meliorist, believed that education was a “direct and potent instrument of social progress” (Kleibard, 1982, p. 27). The social efficiency theorists believed that an industrialized, standardized educational system was necessary to keep people under control, thus eliminating any waste. None of these groups dominated the educational reform movement, but the nation’s attitudes towards educational issues, local and national trends, as well as individuals that were invested in the various interest groups, strengthened each.

American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey took many of the ideas from some theorists of the 1890’s and remade them. “All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it…Relate the school to life and all studies are of necessity correlated” stated Dewey in his book, The School and Society (1900, p. 52). Dewey believed that real experiences directly related to the society in which students live are a vital part of the school curriculum. Educational philosopher and professor, Donald Arnstine, agreed with Dewey when he stated, “The school classroom is a miniature social institution” (1967, p. 355). He thought that schools must prepare students to live and function in accordance with the society in which they live (Arnstine, 1967, p. 354). “The
obligation to be scholarly is not so universal as the obligation to understand and deal intelligently with the institutions within which one lives” (p. 354). For students to manage their role in a democratic, free society, students need to be able to think independently, to have an awareness of the world, to become adept at social interactions, and to be good decision makers. All of these things need to be a conscious part of any school curriculum.

According to Dewey (1934), there are many aspects that contribute to the educational experience, but, for him, “Emotion is the moving and cementing force” (p. 44). Emotions provide a sense of unity and connect the self to the experience. A student’s emotional response to what is being taught affects how he or she responds to the information presented. When there is an “interpenetration of self and the world of objects” (p. 16), then a student can see how he is connected to what is being studied. As Dewey stated (1900), “A subject becomes a subject when it becomes relevant to a student’s life” (p. 65). When educational experiences are connected to a student’s real life, a deeper emotional connection leads to more relevance and better understanding.

Arnstine believed that a student’s own purpose must become a large part of the educational process (1967, p. 345). “A student who is learning to learn is, among other things, developing his own aims and purposes” (p. 345). The student is the one who must determine if the knowledge has value and if it fits his or her purpose for learning. If students are to be transformed by the knowledge that they seek, they must find their own meanings and connections to the curriculum. Both Dewey and Arnstine believed that in order for students to truly learn, they must be emotionally involved in subjects in which
they have an inherent interest. Through this thorough engagement with their education, students gain an understanding of their society and their place in the world.

At John Dewey’s Laboratory School, it was the teachers who initiated the engagement in the educational process. Dewey described the school’s principles:

The principles of the school’s plan were not intended as definite rules for what was to be done in the school. They pointed out the general directions in which it was to move...the principles formed a kind of working hypotheses rather than a fixed program and schedule. Their application was in the hands of the teachers, and this application was in fact equivalent to their development and modification by teachers.

(Tanner, 1997, p. 52)

Teachers were given control over their curriculum, and they were viewed as investigators into the educational process, which connected them to the teaching process.

Arnstine also was interested in the role of the teacher in education. He believed that when teachers are not allowed to choose their own curriculum, students notice this and emulate this subservient role. “The only other person in the classroom who suffers the immediate consequences of what is taught, and can alter activities accordingly, is the teacher” (Arnstine, 1967, p. 362). If students are expected to be responsible, independent learners, then this behavior must be modeled for them. Teachers must also create an environment in which children can enjoy whatever subject is being taught (Arnstine, 1997, p. 366). Arnstine believed that teachers must be given the opportunity to teach what they know, what they themselves enjoy (1967, p. 364). When all of these conditions exist, then schools will see a higher level of success. As he stated, when
students, “...grow in the power to learn and treat other people in humane ways” (1997, p. 366), then society knows that the educational process is a success.

Dewey and Arnstine held very similar ideas about what the school classroom aims should be. They both agreed that when students and teachers are emotionally involved in what is being taught, more success occurs in the classroom. Through this emotional engagement with the subject matter, students can become an integral part of society.

Elliot Eisner, a Professor of Education and Art at Stanford University and strong believer in education reform, felt that our society benefits from a varied approach to educating our young, not the one size fits all approach that is so often used in our schools. With this approach, “There would be less effort to put all children through the narrow eye of the same needle” (Eisner, 1998, p. 107). He felt that students should be given the opportunity to develop multiple forms of literacy, or knowledge and competency in a variety of subjects. Eisner (1998) wrote:

What we ought to be developing in our schools is not simply a narrow array of literacy skills limited to a restrictive range of meaning systems, but a spectrum of literacies that will engage students to participate in, enjoy, and find meaning in the major forms through which meanings have been constituted. We need a conception of multiple literacies to serve as a vision of what our schools should seek to achieve. (p. 12)

Eisner’s own experience in school, as an unsuccessful student, led him to see the power of the arts. He found a place where he could be successful, in the art room, through painting and drawing. Eisner believed that a quality art education program
teaches unique and necessary skills. The arts show that there can be multiple solutions to a problem, which is generally the opposite of what is being taught in spelling, reading and math. Problems in life are more like the challenges encountered in the arts, than they are like textbook problems. If an art education program is to teach the skills of divergent thinking, several things need to occur. He wrote that art education, ”should enable students to understand that there is a connection between content and form that the arts take and the culture and time in which the work was created” (Eisner, 1998, p. 97).

Students should be able to see art as part of the world and society in which they live, which gives students a connection to their own history. This gives them a clear view of their place in society.

The 20th century, Brazilian educational theorist, activist, and politician, Paolo Freire also believed that education could better society. In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he brought to light the inequalities inherent in Brazilian education. Freire was defiantly against the “banking system” in education that requires teachers to deposit knowledge into the students. In this system, “The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students” (Friere, 1974, p. 196). Like Dewey and Arnstine, Freire believed that education should connect to each individual’s reality. It should not be something that is prescribed by those in power. He felt that without an education of their own choosing, students are denied their full rights as intelligent human beings. He stated:
The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes, which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the method of evaluating “knowledge”, the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking. (1974, p. 197)

Friere’s distance or disconnect between society and education is similar to John Berger’s views on art education and the ruling classes. Berger, an English art critic, author and painter, produced a BBC series and a companion book called, *Ways of Seeing*. He believed that art historians foster a remote, mystical viewing of art, through their analysis of paintings, which disallows any individual response to art. This is an attempt to maintain the social order and justify the role of the ruling class. He stated, “In the end, the art of the past is being mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes and such a justification can no longer make sense in modern terms. And so, inevitably, it mystifies” (1972, p. 11). Berger addressed the importance of art and history in affecting the social order. He believed, “A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and act as a people or a class than one that has been able to situate itself in history” (1972, p. 33). The connection between Freire and Berger is based on their similar views on the need for social equity in education, which includes exposure to one’s own history and the relevance that is inherent within that history. When one is prevented
from seeing art of the past, as Berger stated, one is “deprived of the history which belongs to us” (1972, p. 11).

Freire proposed a different type of educational system, called problem-posing education. With problem-posing education, students are given a problem that they then need to solve, using their own intelligence and problem solving skills. Students are no longer just fed information that is picked for them. They are the creators of the knowledge and are therefore connected to their place in society. “In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (1974, p. 198).

Freire saw the teacher as a partner to the students. He stated, “Teachers efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization…His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in men and their creative power. To achieve this, he must be a partner of the students” (1974, p.196). Freire’s work was the direct inspiration for Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre director, politician, and author of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal expanded Freire’s theories of social change through education and took it into the area of drama. He incorporated theater into the movement for social justice. He stated:

I, Augusto Boal, want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own Space and offer solutions. By taking possession of the stage, the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the
Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality. By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theater he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality. By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself. (1974, p. XXI)

Theater was a way to transform one’s view of oneself, as well as society. Boal believed that theater could change the world.

The German music education program, Orff Schulwerk, developed by Carl Orff in the 1930’s with Gunild Keetman, teaches skills that are needed to be successful in society. “The learning activities take place in a group context; ideally each individual learns to cooperate in group activity as well as contribute to it, with confidence in his or her own abilities as well as appreciation for those of others” (American Orff Schulwerk association website). Like Dewey and Arnstine, Carl Orff understood that enjoyment and engagement are key aspects of music education. In an Orff lesson, students learn because they are enjoying themselves and doing that which comes naturally to all humans, music. “Learning is meaningful only if it brings satisfaction to the students and…arises from the ability to use acquired knowledge for the purpose of creating” (website).

In Orff Schulwerk, the teacher is seen as a facilitator rather than a director. Orff believed that teachers are only helping to bring out what already exists inside of all students. He stated, “It is difficult to teach rhythm. One can only release it. Rhythm is no abstract concept, it is life itself. Rhythm is active and produces effects, it is the unifying power of language, music and movement” (1978, p.17). Students learn a song, accompany the song with xylophones or glockenspiels; they then do some movement or a
dance. Students are encouraged to improvise and try new things out with their instruments, voices and bodies.

All of these theorists and educators held very similar ideas about what the aims of an educational system should be. They agreed that when students and teachers are emotionally involved in what is being taught, more success occurs in the classroom. Through this emotional engagement with the subject matter, students can be transformed as they become prepared for life in a democratic society. When a variety of meanings can be derived using multiple literacies and intelligences, then all students will reach their full potential. It is through the inclusion of the arts, which uses these various literacies and intelligences, into our educational system, that society has a better chance of truly educating our students. Elliot Eisner believed in the need to face the future and:

To do this will require us to give up old habits and traditional expectations, but in the end it might open up new vistas before us. It might give us some new seas on which to sail. Isn’t that what education is about, not arriving at a destination but traveling with a new view? (p. 217)

Art and Fear

By including the arts in education, educators must understand what every artist faces. To be an artist, one must face fear. Fear seems to be a constant companion for established artists and novices alike. Whether it is the fear of having nothing to say in one’s art, concern about one’s lack of talent, or fear about whether anyone will understand what one is trying to say, artists must get past this ever present fear, in order to create. According to artists and authors David Bayles and Ted Orland, “There is
probably no clearer waste of psychic energy than worrying about how much talent you have - and probably no worry more common. This is true even among artists of considerable accomplishment” (1993, p. 26). Georgia O’Keeffe, the most well known American female artist, described her own doubts about her artwork in a letter to a friend:

It seems to express in a way what I want it to but - it also seems rather effeminate - it is essentially a womans (sic) feeling - satisfies me in a way - I don’t know whether the fault is with the execution or with what I tried to say - I’ve (sic) doubted over it - and wondered over it till I had just about decided it wasn’t any use to keep on amusing myself ruining perfectly good paper trying to express myself - I wasn’t even sure I had anything worth expressing. (1988, p. 121)

As the American choreographer, Twyla Tharp, stated in her book, The Creative Habit, “No one starts a creative project without a certain amount of fear; the key is to learn how to keep free-floating fears from paralyzing you before you’ve begun” (2003, p. 22).

Encaustic artist Brandy Eiger wrote, “I think the fears don’t have the same weight they use to, now that I know that most artists feel the same at some point. The fears are so familiar that it’s as if I can say to myself, ‘Oh, yeah, there’s that silly fear again,’ and it just doesn’t paralyze me anymore” (B. Eiger, personal communication, July 13, 2009). It can be reassuring to understand that all artists feel fear. It is what one does with the fear that encourages or stifles the art making.

Where does fear come from? Rush W. Dozier, Jr., undertook the study of fear in his book, Fear Itself. He answered the question by writing, “From an evolutionary perspective the answer is straight forward: so we can survive, preferably injury free or as
long as possible, or at least long enough to reproduce and rear our children” (1998, p. 80). He discussed the three fear systems: primitive, rational, and consciousness. The primitive fear system, located in the limbic system of the brain, is the most ancient and is found in mammals, reptiles, fish, birds, and most other animals. It governs our primary emotional reaction to external stimulus. If one feels an intense enough dislike to this stimulus, the primitive fear system will trigger a massive fear response (1998, p. 10). “When in danger, the behavioral repertoire of most animals is simple, fight or flight. This primal reaction to threats, which evolved over hundreds of millions of years ago, is the foundation of all our reactions to fear” (1998, p. 10). But humans have emotions that complicate our response to fear. As Dozier wrote:

In humans, fear has evolved beyond the traditional animal role of anticipating and avoiding physical pain. In us, it has become the brain’s way of anticipating and avoiding mental pain as well – the injuries to our psyche that we call by such names as humiliation, sorrow, regret, guilt, despair. (1998, p. 7)

Humans have the unique capability to plan, consider and worry about possible threats and employ strategies to avoid them next time. If the last paintings were not well received, then an artist would remember the feelings of humiliation and despair. Her heart would race, she would break out into a cold sweat, and panic would set in. This is the same reaction she would have if she saw a bear. This physical reaction could prevent the artist from working or showing her paintings ever again. This is all done out of fear: fear that is elicited by the memory of the emotional pain that was experienced. There was no physical threat that needed to be avoided to ensure the artist’s survival, yet, “fear
of mental pain produces exactly the same physical symptoms as fear of physical pain” (Dozier, 1998, p. 8).

Humans have evolved past this simple reaction. Dozier stated that the rational fear system, located in the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex, “applies an extremely sophisticated analysis to the information it monitors from the primitive system and the cerebral cortex” (p. 11). This allows humans to analyze the nature of the specific fear and ponder the variety of possible responses to the fear. One can then move past the initial fight or flight response and rationally decide how to react.

The last fear system is consciousness. It is, “our perception of a unique self flowing through time, space, and possibility” (Dozier, 1998, p. 11). It decides and reflects. Consciousness uses all the power of the cerebral cortex and its interconnections with the rest of the brain as it deals with the conflict between the primitive and the rational systems (1998, p. 12). Humans have the unique capability to use consciousness to overcome fears. As Dozier wrote:

Over hours, days, weeks, even years, we can consciously employ all our brain’s elaborate learning and memory systems to study a threat, learn more about it, share information with others, use our imagination and creativity, and come up with a strategy to avoid or neutralize it next time. (1998, p. 120)

An artist must always remember that fear will never go away as long as one continues to grow, but the successful use of one’s consciousness can help one continue making art even in the face of fear.
For all artists one of the keys for success is facing and accepting ones fears, for only then will the fears recede and the art making will continue. Tharp believed, “If you examine your concerns closely, your should be able to identify and break down the ones that are holding you back. There’s nothing wrong with fear; the only mistake is to let it stop you in your tracks” (2003, p. 32). Psychologist Susan Jeffers proposed that it is not the fears themselves that cause problems, “but rather how we hold the fear. For some the fear is totally irrelevant. For others it creates a state of paralysis” (1987, p. 25).

The fear of failure is ever-present and a key component of the art making process. Accepting and becoming comfortable with failing helps the art making process move forward. Tywla Tharp had numerous successful ballets, but she understood that, “Failing, and learning from it, is necessary. Until you’ve done it, you’re missing an important piece of the creative arsenal” (2003, p. 226). Tharp knew that there is always an element of failure in her latest dance piece, thus she was open to guidance from her friends. She stated, “By building failure, or at least the prospect of failure, into the process, I gave myself a second chance” (2003, p. 228). In Five Minds For the Future, Harvard Professor Howard Gardner suggested that a creative mind embraces failure, “…even when an achievement has been endorsed by the field, the pro-typical creator rarely rests on her laurels; instead, she proceeds along a new, untested path, fully ready to risk failure time and time again, in return for the opportunity to make another, different mark” (2007, p. 83).

Artists who continue to make art have come to terms with the fact that failure is a part of life, not just art. Artists or creators have a certain quality that allows them to face
their fears and fail, over and over again. Howard Gardner stated that, “All of us fail and because they are bold and ambitious – creators fail the most frequently and often, the most dramatically” (2007, p. 83). Bayles and Orland believed that, “The function of the overwhelming majority of your art work is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars. One of the basic and difficult lessons that every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential” (1993, p. 5). The more art that is made the more opportunities there are for failure. Yet, this is how artists discover their authentic art. As Tharp wrote, “Even Mozart, with all his innate gifts, his passion for music, and his father’s devoted tutelage, needed to get twenty-four youthful symphonies under his belt before he composed something enduring with number twenty-five” (2003, p. 9). As an artist, one does not know if the latest failure will lead to one’s most successful piece, therefore one must keep making art, regardless of the fear of failure.

For many artists, connecting to an artistic community is one element of overcoming fear and continuing to make art. Bayles and Orland wrote that, “…survival means finding an environment where art is valued and art making encouraged” (1993, p. 46). Brandy Eiger addressed the importance of an artistic community. “I still have the same fears as an artist. My fears have not actually changed; it’s just that I mostly ignore them now and/or have strategies for dealing with them. My most important strategy to combat fear is that I basically…make friends with others who make art and we share our in-progress work with each other” (Eiger, personal communication, July 13, 2009). As artists connect to one another, they gain an understanding that they are not alone; there are others who are struggling, as well. “What artists learn from other artists is not so
much history or technique; what we really gain from the art making of others is courage - by association” (Bayles and Orland, 1993, p. 90).

Many artists understand that accepting a certain level of discomfort is vital to the art making process. Twyla Tharp wrote, “Venturing out of your comfort zone may be dangerous, yet you do it anyway because our ability to grow is directly proportional to an ability to entertain the uncomfortable” (2003, p. 47). Facing fears and moving past them are key components to being a working artist. Bayles and Orland stated, “Simply put, making art is chancy - it doesn’t mix well with predictability. Uncertainty is essential, inevitable and an all-pervasive companion to your desire to make art. And tolerance for uncertainty is a prerequisite to succeeding” (1993, p. 21). Sometimes the state of flux or discomfort actually helps the process. Eiger believed that she needed to push boundaries. “I think that feeling slightly out of my comfort zone emotionally might be useful for me creatively, because I never feel stagnant” (Eiger, personal communication, July 13, 2009). The American modern artist Kiki Smith stated that when she is making art, “…there’s always the feeling of things half in and half out, in a dangerous or vulnerable position – the precariousness of being in the world” (1998, p. 36). Once an artist has accepted a level of discomfort and does make art, there is a sense of relief and surge of pride, as the artist has made something. As Susan Jeffers stated, “When you make something happen, not only does the fear of the situation go away, but also you get a big bonus; you do a lot toward building your self-confidence” (1987, p. 17).

If one is determined to be a working artist, one must accept fear and discomfort as important parts of the process, as well as find support in an artistic community, and most
importantly, just make art. As Jeffers wrote, “The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it” (1987, p. 15). As an artist, one must come to terms with the fact that art making is challenging, difficult and hard, at best. But, if art makes one happy, then there really is no other choice, but to fully commit and do it. Bayles and Orland stated:

   In the end it all comes down to this: you have a choice (or more accurately a rolling tangle of choices) between giving your work your best shot and risking that it will not make you happy, or not giving it your best shot - and thereby, ‘guaranteeing’ that it will not make you happy. It becomes a choice between certainty and uncertainty. And curiously, uncertainty is the comforting choice. (1993, p. 118)

As artists continue to create, there will always be an element of fear in the process, yet it is how one manages this fear that will either help or hinder the art making. As Bayles and Orland stated, “Art work is ordinary work, but it takes courage to embrace that work and wisdom to mediate the interplay of art and fear” (1993, p. 11).

The Nature of Encaustic Painting

   Encaustic painting is a 2000 year-old technique involving wax and heat. The term encaustic comes from the Greek enkaustikos, which means “to heat” or “to burn”. The encaustic painting technique has changed very little over the past 2000 years, except for the application of heat. Ralph Mayer, internationally acclaimed artist and professor wrote the seminal book on the technical side of painting, The Artist’s Handbook of Materials and Techniques. Mayer stated “The ancient Greeks used a barrel-shaped container of
glowing charcoal upon which rested a flat metal palette; the colors were manipulated with a bronze spatulate instrument. This tool, which was referred to in Roman manuscripts as a cestrum, was generally kept heated in the charcoal” (1940, p. 312-313). With the invention of electricity, the heating technique became less laborious. Knowledge of the encaustic process has been gleaned through the study of ancient Greek manuscripts, notably *The Natural History* by Pliny the Elder (A.D. 1).

To begin the encaustic painting process, an artist must have the necessary materials and tools. The foundation for this process is the encaustic medium, which is beeswax with a small amount of damar resin, added for strength. Damar resin is “the hardened tree sap of a fir tree native to the East Indies” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140). It adds durability and luminosity to the finished encaustic painting (Seggebruch, 2009, p. 9). Luminosity is, “The distinguishing feature of paintings made with transparent layers of wax. As light passes through those layers and is reflected up to the surface, the painting is actually illuminated from within” (Mattera, p. 140).

The standard wax used in encaustic paintings is refined beeswax. Natural beeswax can be used, but it has a natural yellow color that will show up in the artwork. “Refined is a better choice than bleached as the bleached wax can yellow over time due to the chemical processing it’s gone through” (Seggebruch, p. 8). The wax and resin are melted and mixed together to compose the encaustic medium.

Next, color is added to the medium. There are four main types of color that are added to the encaustic medium: pre-made pigmented medium or dispersion pigments, dry pigment, or oil paint and oil sticks additive (Seggebruch, 2009, p. 15). Encaustic artists
will often use tins, which contain a variety of colors of wax arranged on a palette, where the wax is melted and kept in a liquid state. Many artists use griddles or specially made palettes. “The temperature of the palette needs to be around 220 F (104 C) to maintain an optimal melted wax temperature of 180-220 F (82-104 C)” (Seggebruch, p. 9). If the wax is allowed to go beyond the highest temperature, then one risks reaching the flash point, or the high temperature when the wax will catch on fire. Since heat is used in the encaustic process, synthetic brushes will melt in the wax. Therefore, natural-hair brushes are used.

When the encaustic medium is made, then a properly prepared surface is required to paint upon. The surface or substrate needs to be rigid so that there is no movement in the wax, which may cause cracking. Any unfinished and untreated wood would be sufficient (2009, p. 11). An artist may choose to paint directly on the unprimed wood, or a ground may be adhered to the wood. The ground is, “The surface on which an artist paints.” (Mattera, 2001) Proper grounds include encaustic gesso, waxed canvas, or encaustic medium applied to the substrate. After the encaustic medium is applied to the wooden substrate, then the wax must be fused to the wood, which is called fusing or burning in. This can be accomplished with a variety of tools including a heat gun, propane torches or different types of irons. “Fusing is the reheating of each applied layer of wax, so that it bonds with the preceding layer, thus ensuring a cohesive surface to your encaustic painting” (Seggebruch, 2009, p. 10). When the painting surface is prepared, the encaustic paint is then applied. The most important aspect of encaustic painting is to fuse between all layers of applied encaustic medium or encaustic paint.
Safety is an important aspect of the encaustic process. A fire extinguisher should be readily available at all times. Ventilation is key to maintaining a safe studio space, but an open window would not be enough. An exhaust fan facing away from the workspace is needed to remove wax vapors and pigment dust. As Mattera wrote, “Your work area must be between you and the fan so the toxins do not pass your nose on their way out” (2001, p. 106).

The History of Encaustic Painting

The history of the ancient encaustic technique has come from a variety of sources. The most antiquated source is Gais Plinius Secundus, Pliny the Elder. He was a Roman historian writing in the first century A. D., who, “consulted some two thousand works by 147 Latin and 327 foreign authors in the preparation of this encyclopedic treatise”, called *The Natural History* (Downs, 1956, p. 158). This book was an encyclopedia of all known information of the physical universe. Pliny made reference to descriptions of the use of encaustic during the fifth and fourth centuries B. C.:

In ancient times there were but two methods of encaustic painting in wax and on ivory, with the cestrum or pointed graver. When, however this art came to be applied to the painting of ships of war, a third method was adopted, that of melting the wax colours and laying them on with a brush while hot. Painting of this nature, applied to vessels, will never spoil from the action of the sun, winds or salt water. (1893, p. 282)

There were numerous archaeological finds that supported Pliny’s information on encaustics. The discovery of a krater, a vessel for mixing water and wine, used in the
fourth century, depicted “a sculptor applying wax to a marble figure” (2001, p. 15) showed that encaustic painting dated back to ancient times. Further knowledge was gained about the encaustic process when, in 1847 at St. Medard des Pres in France, a tomb was found that contained the remains of a woman encaustic painter surrounded by her materials and equipment (Mayer, 1940, p. 315).

The largest collection of encaustic work from ancient times (c. 25 – 200) was discovered in Egypt, from a region called the Fayum, in the Nile Valley. These beautiful and mysterious portraits began arriving in the United States and Western Europe in the late 1880’s (Doxiadis, 1995, p. 12). They were amazingly preserved due to the fact that they were painted in wax, a most resilient material. As Euphrosyne Doxiadis, an artist and author of The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt wrote, “They were initially dogged by the reputation that they might not be real – partly because the late 19th-century dealer Theodor Graf thought them to be fakes because those in his collection were so perfectly preserved or so over-restored that all seemed to good to be true” (1995, p. 12).

The paintings are mummy portraits that were affixed to the embalmed bodies of the wealthy Egyptians of the time (Figure 1). They embody a juxtaposition of the times. They are Greek art with their roots in the Alexandrian school, maintaining the Greek passion for realism, but placed on Egyptian mummies with Roman hairstyles, clothing and jewelry (1995, p.12). These works were often painted directly from the deceased, truly giving the viewer a sense of the person when they were alive (1995, p. 12). The decoration of the mummy was not just to show respect for the dead, but also to give
pleasure and solace to the living. As Doxiadis wrote, “The realistic likeness provided by the Fayum portraits compensated greatly for the loss of the dead person, as the family could see their relatives whenever they wanted.” (1995, p. 45).

During the medieval and Renaissance periods, encaustics was a lost art. The use of encaustics “…was displaced by other mediums (tempera, oil painting, etc.), with the developing and changing requirements of European art and also because of the cumbersome nature of its equipment” (Mayer, 1940, p. 311). During the ninth and tenth centuries, use of encaustics on walls, fell out of favor due to the cheapness and durability of fresco (Taylor, 1843, p. 29).

With the discovery of the Fayum Portraits in the late 1880’s, interest in encaustics was revived. In the late 1800’s, professor and author, William Taylor was the first to document the encaustic process in English, in his book, *A Manual of Fresco and Encaustic Painting*. It was during this time that “mural painters sought a new material that would give permanent results under drastic conditions, especially dampness; wax
seemed to fill these requirements and reputed excellence of the ancient Greek process
offered a goal to artists and scholars; and so by means of literary research, laboratory
investigations, and reconstructions, a revival of encaustics began” (Mayer, 1940, p. 311).

The encaustic revival continued into the 1920’s and 30’s with painter, Hans
Schmid, who experimented and researched the manufacture of encaustic colors and
electrically heated palettes for purchase, over a period of thirty years (Stavitsky, 1999,
p.2). In Mexico, in the twenties, Diego Rivera used encaustic for easel painting and
murals. Rivera wrote about his mural painted in the auditorium of the National
Preparatory School, part of the University of Mexico:

This work has been executed in encaustic, using the same pure elements and the
same process employed in antiquity in Greece and Italy. This procedure, which
the author restored by his own efforts, thanks to researches made during some ten
years, is the most solid of the painting processes (in unalterability (sic), resistance,
and duration) except for fired enamel. (1963, p. 138)

Karl Zerbe, a German-born American painter and professor is credited with
almost single-handedly reviving the use of encaustics through exhibitions of his work and
his teaching at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from 1937 to 1955.
(Stavitsky, 1999, p. 1) Curator Gail Stavitsky wrote in Waxing Poetic: Encaustic Art in
America:

In 1936, Zerbe came across some incidental references to Fayum portraits and
became excited at the possibility of updating the ancient encaustic technique.
Finding that there was little published on the subject; he began his own
experiments, beginning with a pie pan on a kitchen stove. He proceeded to experiment with various types of waxes, resins, and oils in many combinations and temperatures, even enduring the cracking of some early examples. Zerbe eventually found the right mixture: ninety percent beeswax and ten percent of sun-thickened linseed oil, heated to 225 degrees Fahrenheit on a thermostatically controlled electric palette. For the burning in process, he employed electric heaters, such as diathermic hand-lamps and blowtorches. (1999, p. 1)

In 1941, the prominent art historian H. W. Janson praised Zerbe for his rediscovery of encaustics and his “most lasting contribution to modern art” (1999, p. 1).

Another important person in the resurgence of encaustics in the 1940’s was Ralph Mayer, internationally acclaimed artist and professor. He wrote the seminal book on the technical side of painting, The Artist’s Handbook of Materials and Techniques. As he stated, encaustics, its “effects, its visual and physical properties, and its range of textural and color possibilities make it eminently suitable for use in several different contemporary styles of painting that are not adequately served by our traditional oil-painting process” (1940, p. 312).

Frances Pratt and Becca Fizell published the first comprehensive book on encaustic history and techniques in 1949, Encaustic: Materials and Methods. This book gave the history of the medium, working methods and recipes for making encaustic medium, a list of supply sources, and a bibliography (1999, p. 2).
The most famous encaustic practitioner was Jasper Johns. One of his most famous paintings, *Flag* was also his first major painting in encaustic. Stavitsky discussed with Johns his encaustic work. She wrote:

Johns has recalled how his first major painting in encaustic, *Flag* (1954-55, The Museum of Modern Art), was actually begun with house enamel paints, which frustrated him because they wouldn't dry quickly enough. In the middle of working on the painting, he switched to working with encaustic, which he had read about in an unidentified source while working at Marboro Books. (1999, p. 2)


The 1980’s were a turning point in the history of encaustics. Painter Richard Frumess began to develop milling methods, formulas, and new encaustic colors in the early 1980’s. He started R & F Encaustics in his Brooklyn studio in 1987. R & F Handmade Paints is currently regarded as the leading manufacturer of encaustic paints in the world. The factory has become a center for encaustic art, with a website, an annual newsletter, workshops and a gallery space with regular exhibitions of encaustic art (Stavitsky, 1999, p. 5).

At the end of the 20th into the 21st century, there are a growing number of artists who have discovered encaustic’s unique properties. There were two important exhibitions of encaustic work in the 1990’s – *Contemporary Uses of Wax and Encaustic* in 1992 and 1999’s *Waxing Poetic: Encaustic Art in America*. (2008, p. 5) Over 200
works were submitted for inclusion in the 1999 encaustic art show, *Waxing Poetic: Encaustic Art in America*. Due to greater availability of information and supplies, encaustic art has been seen worldwide (Stavitsky, 1999, p. 5). As the curator for *Waxing Poetic: Encaustic Art in America*, Gail Stravitsky wrote:

As the twenty-first century approaches, many artists are turning to the ancient encaustic medium as a poetic vehicle for conveying their spiritual, philosophical, and environmental *fin-de-siècle* concerns. Appreciating encaustic's unique luminosity, malleability, varied textures, richness and saturation of color, they have extended the medium into varied metaphorical realms. As a transparent medium bearing skin-like properties, encaustic has often been employed as a membrane/surrogate for the human body, evoking its vulnerability and resilience. Transformed through fire/heat, encaustic is regarded as a mystical alchemical material suggesting the metamorphosis of all matter. The embedding of images and memories is associated with the build up of layers and equated with geology, archaeology, the ritual accumulation and sealing of memories, and artistic impulses. Bearing the history of its creative process, encaustic is also prized as among the most permanent of mediums that simultaneously evokes and defies the vicissitudes of existence. Encaustic's contradictory aspects - opaque/translucent, hot/cold, liquid/solid, thick/thin, immediate/enduring - attest to its unique potential to embody many phenomena at once. This unusual versatility constitutes its lasting appeal. (1999, p. 8)
This literature review summarized research in theories and practices in art education, fear and the art making process, and the nature and history of the encaustic painting process. The information has created a context for the encaustic painting project that is to follow.
Chapter 3

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

This Project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows pathway I: Artist as educator developing knowledge and skills in a particular area of the arts with a disposition toward applying this acquired expertise to arts education. This project is Defining Moments: Overcoming Fear to Become an Artist.

This researcher’s project, which entailed learning the encaustic painting technique and researching how fear affects the art making process, was conducted as a narrative inquiry approach. “Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding, organizing and communicating experience” (Heo, 2004, p. 230).

This approach is appropriate for this project because the researcher is telling the story of her artistic process. It is through storytelling that human beings have learned throughout the ages. For the educator, artist and researcher, the narrative inquiry approach is essential to pass on and share important stories and information for others to learn from. The narrative process, or story telling, “… is an ancient and altogether human method. The human being alone among the creatures of the earth is a storytelling animal: sees the present rising out of the past, heading into a future; perceives reality in narrative form” (Novak, 1975, p. 175). With storytelling, there is also an emotional component, which aids the assimilation of the lesson or knowledge to be learned. As Dewey stated (1934), “Emotion is the moving and cementing force” (p. 44).
As a method of educational research in experience, narrative inquiry has become more widely used in the past few decades. It developed from the portfolio process used to assess student and teacher knowledge into a legitimate research method. Educational researchers, LaBoskey and Lyons wrote:

As inquiry, narrative involved an intentional reflective process, the actions of a group of learners interrogating their learning, constructing and telling the story of its meaning, and predicting how this knowledge might be used in the future. We came to see that narrative was fundamentally an activity of mind, a way of gathering up knowledge of practice, simply, a way of knowing, and of knowing that one knew. (LaBoskey & Lyons, 2002, p. 3)

As an educator, one is constantly working to improve classroom practice. When using the narrative inquiry approach, educators examine their own experiences and then apply this knowledge to the classroom. Researchers, Coles and Knowles (1999) stated that, “these narrative beginnings or livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings help us to deal with questions of who we are” (p. 70). When we have greater knowledge of ourselves as teachers and human beings, we become better equipped to share our stories and knowledge with our students so that they can gain a better understanding of themselves.

The previously stated research on narrative inquiry supports this chapter, which consists of a historical narrative of the researcher’s artistic life, documentation of the researcher’s artistic process, and the researcher’s journal writings. This project also documents the artist’s transformation from previous art student and intermittent art maker to full time artist, as well as telling the story behind this transformation. This is a
narrative inquiry into the researcher’s artistic process and life. Therefore, this chapter is written from the artist and teacher’s perspective, the first person.

The Childhood Years (1970 - 1988)

As a child, I was always making art. Paper after paper was drawn upon, painted, scribbled and colored. I was confident enough in my abilities that I entered a few art contests. When I was six, I was a runner up in a Christmas art contest held by the local after school cartoon show Captain Mitch. I was on television and was able to share my art with the world. I was brave enough to enter the contest, but I was nervous to go on television and meet Captain Mitch.

Through elementary school, junior high and high school, I took art classes, made art at home, but never truly excelled at art. I was involved in theater during this time as well. I was always a little scared, but it did not stop me from going after the parts that I wanted in numerous plays. I remember being so focused on getting the part of Zaneeta, in The Music Man, with Sacramento Children’s Theater that I practiced the lines hundreds of times a day until the audition. I did get the part. This was my first experience of wanting something, being brave enough to work towards it, and achieving it. I sang, danced and acted my way through my childhood. I found success in drama in high school as well. I competed in the San Juan Unified School District Drama Championships with a monologue from the diary of Anne Frank, I Never Saw Another Butterfly. I placed 3rd out of the district. Yet as a creative person, my energies were torn between art making and theater. I had planned on doing theater and art in college, but my
close elementary school friend, Kirsten Jones, was killed a month after high school graduation. It was a very difficult time. I headed off to college and a new stage of life.

When in college, I was registered for intermediate theater. The first day of class, we began with some warm up exercises. I was unusually afraid of performing anything in front of my class. The next class, I was feeling sick to my stomach and left early. I decided to drop the class because, as I told myself, “I just do not like theater anymore.” Years later, I made the connection between my friend’s death and my inability to face the fear of being vulnerable on stage. It was impossible for me to handle. I have not done any theater since high school. Instead, I turned all of my creative energies toward art.

The College Years (1988 - 1993)

When I went to college, it was not as an art major, but as a communications major. Over the course of five years, I changed my major three times from child development to psychology and, finally, to art. I remember my mom telling me, “Follow your bliss.” I did not know what I would do with an art degree, but art was all that I wanted to study. In college, the critiques were always the most difficult for me. I was afraid that someone would find out that I was not a real artist. My classmates were more interested in realism, whereas my interest was in the conceptual artist, Judy Chicago, the surrealist artist, Leonora Carrington, and the Mexican artist, Frida Khalo. I had always been more interested in the concepts behind art making than the skills of drawing realistically. This was unusual at my college. I enjoyed the classes and the art students, but I was making art for class, not for me.
I had one art show in college of my art works at Perche No Café, where I worked during college. The art show experience was terrifying. I almost canceled the show numerous times. I was afraid that people would think that I was not a real artist. The only painting that I liked was a watercolor of a nude figure (Figure 2).

When graduation loomed, people kept asking me, “What will you do with an art degree?” I had no idea, but nothing else held my interest. As I had been there for five years, it was time to graduate. I considered getting a BFA, but fear of rejection took hold. I would be required to compile a portfolio, and I did not feel that I was a traditional art major. I was not brave enough to face that hurdle or that level of rejection. I decided to move to Arizona and be with my boyfriend, who was attending graduate school. It was easier to deal with a huge move to Arizona than to attempt getting into the BFA program.
The Lost Years (1993 – 1999)

When I graduated from college, I continued to make some art, out of obligation, since I had an art degree, not out of joy. I always felt that I was a fake artist, that I had no talent. Over the course of five years, I made 10 works of art. I did not tell anyone that I made art, because they might want to see it, and I was afraid of what they might say. I made one watercolor that I appreciated enough to frame and give to my mother (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Abstract watercolor painting by the author (1997)

The Teaching Years (1999-2005)

I had always worked with children, beginning as a babysitter, then a camp counselor and finally directing art camps for children. It was this past work experience that pushed me towards education. Six years after graduation, I decided to get a multiple subject teaching credential, with a supplementary authorization in art. My husband convinced me to get the art authorization to broaden my job prospects. I did not want to
teach art. I did not feel qualified. I taught fifth grade for four years at a Title 1 school, Spinelli Elementary in Antelope, California.

In 2002, my school district received a grant to start an art program at the elementary level. When the opportunity came to teach art, I was interested because there would be no paper grading and no parent conferences. I could teach and come home and be with my two-year-old son. Time with family was more important than any fear I had about teaching art. I believe that I was able to be brave at this time because the difficulties of teaching and having a young child outweighed the risks of teaching art. I taught art for two years, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I also began working on some of my own art. Because I was now teaching art, it was easier to justifying my time spent working on my art. I was still uncomfortable with my art making and viewed it as a hobby. I never completed any paintings or drawings, and I threw most of them away. I was able to teach elementary art for two years before the school district ended the program. I was asked to return to teaching fifth grade, which I declined. This was the beginning of my time as a stay-at-home mom.

The Defining Moment (2005-2007)

At the end of June 2005, my cousin Johanna was visiting Sacramento due to the passing of our Grandmother, Rita Bell. Johanna and I got along well, although we had not spent more than 15 days together in our entire life. We decided that I would come visit her in Portland, so that she could teach me how to snowboard. Six months later, Johanna was diagnosed with malignant brain cancer. Now a visit became imperative, not for snowboarding, but to say goodbye. I bought my plane ticket with trepidation, as I
was to leave my young children for three days and travel by myself. I had not been on a plane by myself since I was twelve years old when I traveled to visit my grandparents in Los Angeles. It was a revelation to be brave and travel alone. I felt so alive and excited, knowing that I was being brave, seemingly for the first time in years.

I arrived in Portland and was met at the airport by her husband, Gray. We drove to their house, which was located in a very bad neighborhood that was becoming gentrified. The house was old, but it was located across from a beautiful park with a huge rose garden. Johanna was resting when we arrived, but when she awakened, she gave me a huge smile as she came out to see me. When I first saw her, I was shocked, as her hair had fallen out due to the chemotherapy, she was limping, and the left side of her face was slack. The tumor was in the right side of her brain, so her left side was affected. I felt very humbled by her grace, humor, and bravery as she faced her imminent death.

My feelings of my own bravery were put in perspective, as I spent time with my lovely cousin, Johanna.

Johanna was an artist. In their house, they had turned the living room into a studio. She painted with acrylics and had just finished an especially interesting portrait (Figure 4).
Johanna was also a special education teacher at a school for mentally ill children. She worked full time, but still made the commitment to painting. I loved the idea of having my own studio. Seeing her studio forced me to think about my lack of commitment to my art and myself.

Johanna and I walked around the park every morning of my visit, even though she needed me to steady her, due to dizziness. Johanna would say, “Just one more time around the park, then we can go home.” She was determined to enjoy her life, pushing herself, even though she knew that she was going to die soon. I returned home to my own life forever changed, determined to live my life more fully and to become more aware of who I wanted to be. As Stephen Pressfield wrote, “Most of us have two lives. The life we live, and the life within us” (2001, preface).

After seeing my cousin and knowing that she would die soon, I started questioning my life choices. Was I living my life to the fullest? Was I spending time doing what I wanted to do? Why was I not making art? I had many excuses built right in: two young children, a full time job, no designated studio space, and so on. When I
returned home, I told myself that I deserved to have the life I wanted and that life included making art. I carved out some space in my single car garage and made a studio. I had studio space, now I just needed to start making some art.

One fall day, a week later, I began a walk in my neighborhood. Half way down my block, I was looking up and appreciating the fall color. As I began to think about Johanna, I looked down. My eyes rested on a beautiful leaf. It was amazingly colorful. I found it ironic that within this dying leaf, there was such beauty. I had a strong sense that this leaf was from Johanna. I picked it up, turned around and walked home. I took several photos of the leaf, because I wanted to have a copy of it forever (Figure 5).

I also began a pastel painting of it immediately. This was the first work of art that I completed and felt good about in years (Figure 6).
My cousin Johanna Haverstock died in 2006 (Figure 7). She was 34 years old. Although my connection to Johanna was recent and I did not feel comfortable speaking about her to her close friends, I forced myself to get up and speak at Johanna’s funeral. I tearfully stated that I would commit myself to making art, because Johanna would not be able to make art anymore. This moment was the turning point in my art making and the beginning of my commitment to being an artist. The fear of failure was still present, but I was able to move past it. I chose to be brave and make art. This was the defining moment in my life as an artist.
The Art Making Years (2007-present)

In the fall of 2007, I was looking at the *Learning Exchange* catalog that came in the mail. I was looking for something arts-related that would challenge me and help me on my path to being an artist. There was an encaustic painting class offered on an upcoming Saturday. The word Encaustic comes from the ancient Greek word, enkaustikos, which means “to heat” or “to burn” (Mattera, 2001, p. 9). According to Joanne Mattera (2001), “Encaustic is the name for both a medium, pigmented wax, and the process, involving heat, by which the medium is applied and secured” (p 140).

Encaustic painting is a technique that I had heard about at an art show in Nevada City two years earlier. At the gallery, there were beautiful ethereal white paintings made of wax with numerous circles covering the surface. I loved them and wanted to make art like that. I signed up for the class that day, even though my stomach was tight and my palms were sweaty with the thought of trying something new. In the past I would not have signed up. I would have found an excuse: “I need to work on my lesson plans,” or “The kids need me,” or “I don’t have time for that anymore”. Now, I was on a new path, the artist’s path; the path that I had always avoided and not fully embraced. As author Stephen Pressfield stated in *The War of Art*, “Our job in this lifetime is not to shape ourselves into some ideal we imagine we ought to be, but to find out who we already are and become it” (2002, p. 146)

When I drove to the class, I was nervous. When I parked the car, I was nervous. I had to remind myself to take deep breaths and relax. As I walked into the class, I was nervous. Then I met the teacher, Charlotte Cooper. She was warm and enthusiastic
about her medium of choice. My nervousness dissipated and was replaced with excitement. I had never used encaustics, and I was ready to get started. The encaustic medium, which is beeswax with a small amount of damar resin, was melting on the griddle, the brushes were in the metal pans of wax, and the canvases or substrates were blank and waiting to be warmed up with wax. I completed one painting in this class (Figure 8).

The class was a revelation. I had tried something new. I had been brave, and I loved it. This was how I wanted to feel all the time: brave, free, and full of life. I left the class with a passion for wax. The next day, I went to the bee keeping supply store, purchasing 20 pounds of refined beeswax. Refined Beeswax is, “Beeswax that has been cleaned of pollen, propolis and other impurities by mechanical filtering” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140). I took my children supply shopping at the closest thrift store for large measuring cups and muffin tins for the melted wax. I asked my husband if he would be willing to give up some more room in the garage, for I was determined to have an
encaustic studio immediately. The next weekend we rearranged the garage, making sure that I could open the garage door and the back door to get the proper ventilation. I commandeered the electric griddle we received as a wedding present twelve years earlier. I visited University Art and purchased the natural bristle brushes that were needed for painting with hot wax, the pigments needed to mix with the wax and resin, and the cradleboard needed for a painting surface. I also ordered the Damar resin from Daniel Smith Artists’ Supply Catalogue. Damar resin is, “The hardened sap of a fir tree native to the East Indies. This resin is used to make encaustic medium, typically one part damar to eight or nine parts wax” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140). I borrowed a paint-stripping gun from a neighbor to use for fusing the wax. Fusing or Burning in is, “An essential element of the encaustic process, in which each newly applied layer of wax paint must be melted to the one beneath it” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140).

Within two weeks, I had a full working encaustic studio. I proceeded to paint twenty paintings over the course of a month (Figure 9). I was learning and experimenting with my new medium.

Figure 9: Abstract encaustic painting, one of the twenty painted by the author (2007)
Encaustics had become my medium of choice because I had to be flexible when using it and not have a certain set of expectations. This is a part of the encaustic process, as well as part of learning a new medium. Because I was new to the process, I had to embrace my lack of control over the medium. I loved the spontaneity of it and the need to go with the flow. It was also something completely new and different. The different ways to use the medium were also appealing, for example: carving the wax, collage, and using oil sticks. I was constantly thinking about new ways to try encaustics and new things to paint. I was thinking like an artist for the first time in my life.

In February 2008, I went online to look into graduate school. I was interested in getting a Master’s in Art Education. I had looked into it twelve years earlier, but there was nothing like that at Sacramento State University. I discovered that there was a program now in existence. I sent an email to Crystal Olson, and we set up a date and time to meet and discuss the program. I met Crystal at a Starbucks around the corner from my house. Again, I was nervous that I would not be a good fit for their program. I was nervous to return to school after such a long absence. I was nervous that I would not be able to write a thesis. After talking with Crystal and learning about the Teacher-as-Artist Pathway, I felt that I could enter this program. I was facing another fear and choosing to be brave to meet a new goal, graduate school. It seemed that facing the fear head on and moving past it had brought another positive experience into my life. As Choreographer Twyla Tharp believed, “There’s nothing wrong with fear; the only mistake is to let it stop you in your tracks” (2003, p. 32). At this point, I was not going to
stop. I had been brave and I was proud of myself. I felt that I could even more fully embrace my artistic nature.

Summer 2008

I was painting regularly and producing some paintings that I liked and some that I did not like. I was aware of how my fear of making art had subsided, but I was still deathly afraid of showing my art. Because I had made a commitment to be brave, I decided that I wanted to have an art show before my fortieth birthday on January 8th, 2010. I started mentioning my goal to my friends and family. My friend Jessica Hedges mentioned that her friend was a realtor and wanted to have a Second Saturday show at the lofts he was selling in downtown Sacramento. He needed an artist, and I was willing and able. Because my wish had come true so easily, I had to trust that my artistic journey was the correct one for me. I had three shows in the H Street Lofts during the summer of 2008. The first show was terrifying and exciting. I was desperately afraid of having an art show, but I survived the experience and actually sold several paintings to family and friends. I was yet again proving that by trusting myself and facing my fears, I was able to be the artist that I had always wanted to become.

This was the first time in my life when I had the opportunity to be a working artist. This was a distinct moment in my life, when I had the time, the energy, the money, and the desire to make art. I was a stay at home mom. I was attending graduate school. I was making art. These things were my focus. I had the opportunity to work intensely on my art for a full year, from December 2008 through December 2009. Although this was something that I had always wanted to do, I had always been afraid to commit to this
path. Fear had always played a large role in my relationship to art, but now I was willing to face this fear, and embrace it as a part of my new artistic path. I was overcoming fear to become an artist.

Fall 2008

I was a graduate student. This was something that I never thought would be possible. I needed to concentrate on reading books on educational theory and writing papers. I was facing a lot of fear during this time. I was afraid that I would not be able to write with enough educational acumen, to pass the class, especially having been out of school for twelve years. Every time I completed a paper and grasped the concept that I had read in an article on educational pedagogy, I had a strong sense of pride. I was, yet again, doing something that I was afraid of doing and having success. I did not have time or energy for much artwork, but I did find satisfaction in creating a well-turned sentence.

As has been described, I have experienced an artistic journey that began with my history as an artist. Like me, each of the paintings in this project has a history. This history includes the thought processes that occurred while each piece was being made. It also involves fear and what role it played during the artistic process of each work, as well as the events that occurred in my life at the same time. I will be sharing these histories, making comparisons and drawing conclusions regarding how fear affected my artistic process and the process of learning the encaustic technique.

Winter 2008

During this period of time, I was journaling daily, as well as working 5-10 hours a week on my paintings. Oftentimes, I would work on several paintings at once. This was
due to the fact the encaustic color palette is limited, as it takes considerable effort to make the medium and mix the pigment. It was a challenge to work between my two different minds: one for making art and one for writing about making art. I was afraid that I would not be able to do both. I discovered that journaling about my artistic process actually helped me to clarify my thoughts about the art pieces. I was able to look back at my journal and more clearly discern what was the theme of my artwork. I stayed focused on what I was really trying to do with my art and moved forward with my art making.

During the third semester of graduate school, we began discussing what would be the focus of our projects. Because I was making art regularly, I decided to use my own artwork as my project, even though I was still not comfortable calling myself an artist. As I wrote in my journal on December 10, 2008:

I have decided to do the “Teacher as Artist” pathway for my project. I have been trying to avoid it, but it really is a good fit for me. Why am I trying to avoid doing art? Fear. Here it comes again: fear of making art. Maybe it is the embracing and connecting to my fear that is the key. It is always the fear of not being good enough to be an artist and make art. I am excited about the prospect, but I still hear the quiet voice saying, “You are not a real artist. You are not good enough. You only do abstract art, not even realistic art. You can’t even draw that well. Who do you think you are?” I think the project will be cathartic in many ways. My tummy rumbles with excitement and fear. (Personal journal entry)

This meant that I would be focusing on my own art. In order to make this happen, I needed to do independent study with Charlotte Cooper, since she was the only encaustic
teacher that I knew of in Sacramento. I was nervous to ask her if she would be my mentor for independent study. I was actually scared that she would say,” Yes” and scared that she would say “No.” On January 28th, I met with Charlotte, and she agreed to be my mentor. As I wrote in my journal on that day:

This means that I can focus on making my art with my medium of choice. I feel like a real artist. I was so nervous about asking her, but excited, as well. I feel so relieved and scared that I get to do what I really want, but it is something that I have always been afraid to do. I feel like I have been afraid forever. (Personal journal entry)

I had begun reading Art and Fear. In this book, the authors discussed how important it is for artists to focus on the amount of work they are producing instead of the quality of their work. This was something that I had always struggled with. I had always been so afraid that my art was not good enough, that it was often easier to not make any art at all. I decided to focus on making a large quantity of art and to trust that some of it would fulfill my vision. I decided to let go of the fear of failure and just work.

As an artist, one must be open to see things differently. I was now allowing myself to see things as I always had, but now I felt that I could make art to match how I saw the world. Over the past 13 years, I had walked regularly in my neighborhood. For the past several years I had noticed that the cracked asphalt absorbs the water after it rains. I always noticed it and appreciated how beautiful it was. After deciding to apply for graduate school, I felt very brave. I decided to finally take action and photograph the cracks after a rain.
It was interesting to actually take the pictures. I went for a walk the morning after it had rained. As I was taking photos on Lasuen Street, a woman came out and said, “Thanks for taking pictures. I have been meaning to call the county about these cracks. They can be such a problem.” I had to explain then, rather sheepishly, that I was an artist and that I was photographing the cracks because I liked the way they looked after a rain. She gave me a funny look as I said, “Have a great day.” Here was yet another experience of being the odd artist, so very different from others. It had always been a challenge to embrace this otherness. But, finally for me, I could embrace it, revel in it, and congratulate myself on being an authentic artist and being my authentic self. I finally followed through on my artistic vision.

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 10

I began looking at the eighty-three asphalt photos and working with them in IPhoto. I enjoyed manipulating the tones of the photos, cropping and changing the values. I found that about thirty of the photographs were especially pleasing, so I narrowed my focus to those. I felt that the sepia tones seemed to work well with the cracks in the photos. I enjoyed the idea of aging the photos to match the broken theme of the photos. I printed the photos on my computer printer to see how they looked. I
wanted to either use the images as a starting point for encaustic paintings or use the photographs themselves in the artwork.

This was the first time that I had begun a series of artwork. This was my own unique vision of art. Few people looked at cracked asphalt and saw something interesting and beautiful. I was interested in looking and finding the beauty in these flaws. I was afraid of doing something so different. But, I was ready to begin. As Julia Cameron stated in her book, *The Artist’s Way*, “The grace to begin is always the best prayer for an artist. The beginner’s humility and openness lead to exploration. Exploration leads to accomplishment. All of it begins at the beginning, with the first small and scary step” (1992, p. 140).

Fear

Since I began working with the broken asphalt photographs, I had been thinking about shadows and cracks. I was interested in the idea of accepting and welcoming my shadow, the cracks in my psyche, and the parts of me that I felt were broken. I felt that my fears were cracks that needed to be acknowledged and accepted. When I faced my fears and accepted that they were part of being alive, it became easier to choose to be brave. I remembered a saying or a quote that included the idea that where there is much shadow there is much light. I decided to embrace this idea and try to incorporate it into my artwork. I was afraid of moving forward with my unusual vision of art, but I knew that it was an authentic choice for me, as an artist and as a person. I was intent on using art to shine light into the dark recess of my life.
As I began, I was not sure how to use the encaustics with the photos. I was willing to try different techniques and discover what worked best. That was the benefit of being a beginner. There was more forgiveness for mistakes. As I began work on my asphalt series, I continuously struggled with how to use the photographs and the encaustic in tandem. As stated in my journal on January 30, 2009,

I am really excited to work on the asphalt series. I am concerned about how to use the photographs with the encaustic. Shall I carve it off the ink lines or paint over the lines? What does the concrete represent? I find it so interesting to make art out of something that you drive and walk on everyday. My idea is to find the beauty in something that is not deemed important enough for a second look.

(Personal journal entry)

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 11

I began experimenting with ink on the cradleboard wooden panels and then applying wax on top. I wanted to depict the cracks that I had captured in the photographs. For this painting, I wanted to just use the unprimed wood as my ground. A
ground is, “The surface on which an artist paints. For encaustic this might be traditional gesso, waxed canvas or paper on panel, waxed panel or unprimed wood panel. The ground must adhere well to the substrate while accepting paint with the right degree of absorbency” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140). I brushed the red-pigmented wax over the inked lines and adhered the wax with the heat gun. I found that if I left the heat gun in one area for a period of time, that the wax would melt in a circular shape. It subtly added texture to the image.

Fear

As I worked on this piece, I was concerned that I was not using enough wax for it to be considered an encaustic painting. This painting was more about the lines underneath, rather than the wax itself.

Figure 12: Abstract encaustic painting with ink by the author (2008)

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 12

I wanted to try the encaustic gesso that is applied to the wood before using the encaustic. It gives the surface a white layer to begin with. I painted several coats of this gesso on the wood. I then applied lines with black ink. A layer of yellow-pigmented
encaustic medium was then applied over the entire surface and adhered with a heat gun. The heat gun was used to melt the wax and the air from the gun also blew some of the wax in a circular shape. Enough of the wax was moved that the wood and encaustic gesso could now be seen. The gesso bubbled up a bit due to the heat from the heat gun. This might have been a problem, but I appreciated the interesting way the wood now showed through the encaustic paint.

Fear

I was working confidently on this painting; moving forward, and I was able to appreciate what was occurring with the heat and the wax.

![Figure 13 and 14: Asphalt photographs with encaustic medium by author (2008)](image)

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 13 and 14

With these two pieces, I was still embracing the idea of finding the beauty in the cracked asphalt. I was interested in adding a subtle layer of wax to add interest, but not distract from the images themselves. I began by enlarging the photos in IPhoto, so there would be an edge around them and they would be centered on the wood. I used sepia tinted photos for an aged effect. I printed out the photographs on copy paper on the
computer printer and adhered them to the panels with wax. I had sanded the photos to help the wax adhere, but I found that the sanding also added a sense of age. I tried pouring the un-pigmented wax or encaustic medium onto the cradleboard, instead of brushing it on. The wax oozed around and over the edge of the wood. I found it interesting that the wax clouded up the image, but it did not cover it up completely. This is similar to being comfortable with the shadows in life, as everything is not always crystal clear. The un-pigmented wax also imparted a peaceful quality, and a subtlety that I appreciated. Pouring also gave the wax a smooth finish to the top layer. I still adhered the poured wax with the heat gun. I was able to blow the wax to mimic the lines in the photos. After a critique with Charlotte, she suggested that I include a clear area of focus, thus I scraped part of the wax from the center of Figure 14, and reheated the area.

Fear

As I worked on these pieces, I was afraid that I would not be able to make anything that I liked. I was worried that I took interesting photographs, but that using the encaustics was not going to add anything to the overall image.

Figure 15: Abstract encaustic painting with oil stick by author (2008)
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 15

I began this painting by adhering handmade paper with clear encaustic medium to the wood. I layered white, then green pigmented encaustic medium. I wanted to depict the broken lines of the asphalt by carving into the wax with ceramics tools. This scrafitto technique revealed the first layer of clear wax that was used to adhere the paper to the wood. Mattera describes scrafitto as, “A term from plaster or clay work that describes the scraping or incising of a surface to reveal the color of an underlying layer” (2001, p. 140). This technique gave the painting the cracked quality that I wanted to portray. I used silver oil stick and rubbed it into the carved lines. It was very effective and definitely added elegance to the concrete lines.

When I tried carving into the wax with ceramics carving tools, the wax seemed too soft. The wax was warm, so I realized that must have been the reason. I decided to wait a bit longer before carving into the wax, to allow it to harden. This did make a difference, as I was no longer carving away more wax than I wanted.

Fear

Beginning a new process and using a new media was exciting but challenging. Often times, I felt lost, unsure of where to look for information or even what information I needed to find. I did notice that I was not afraid of doing something wrong, as I was a beginner. I gave myself permission to make mistakes. This was a new response to art making for me. There was a sense of relief and openness to my art making and myself. In February, I began reading *The Artist’s Way*, by Julia Cameron (1998). In it she wrote about how many artists become “Artists” by sheer audacity. I appreciated this idea. I did
feel audacious in my desire to become an artist. There was a sense of fearlessness in this audacity, as well.

On February 2, 2009, I met with Charlotte Cooper to critique my paintings and to get some guidance in refining my encaustic process. One of her suggestions was something that she had heard from another artist, “Collect your No’s.” I appreciated the idea that I should embrace the possibility of rejection, because it is inherent to the artistic life. When one expects the rejection, it is easier to accept it and move forward, instead of being blindsided and giving up.

I realized that I was becoming more comfortable letting go of my fears. I knew that I needed to try what I wanted to do, regardless of any fear that I felt. As I wrote in my journal on February 2, 2009:

I am aware of how my fears have kept me from doing so much and that is not going to happen anymore. The layers of wax are also a part of this. It is interesting that I can carve away at the fears and the wax. With every attempt at art making, showing my art, or being brave, my sense of fear is diminished.

(Personal journal entry)

During this time, I began an Internet search and found several artists that made encaustic art that I admired. I wanted to send some emails and discover if any artists gave encaustic classes. Brandy Eiger and Janet Bartlette Goodman were two female artists that I really appreciated. It took me two weeks to overcome my fear and send them an email. The fear seemed so real and important, yet ridiculous at the same time. I finally realized that I was afraid of moving forward with my art. Any networking or
connecting with artists put me in a position to be rejected or they might discover that I was not a real artist. I finally sent the emails and did hear back from both of them. Janet had just moved to Oakland and was willing to have me visit. The fear returned again. I was to meet a real encaustic painter. All of my doubts about my ability and my vision of art were called up again. The fear was not going away, it continued to rear its ugly head, even when I thought I had moved past feeling insecure. I had to accept that it would not go away, but I imagined and hoped that it would get easier to ignore with more practice. I just needed to flex the bravery muscle more often, which would help me get better at ignoring the ever-present fear response.

![Figure 16: Asphalt photograph with encaustic medium by author (2008)](image)

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 16

I began to work with graphite, adding it around the existing wax and pouring another layer. I was having difficulty deciding on colors, as they seem so secondary, because my focus had been on the lines and the existing textures within the photos. I wanted to keep the paintings simple and clean, which was in keeping with elevating the ugly and unimportant, since I was working with photos of dirty asphalt.
On February 12th, I met with Charlotte Cooper to discuss my independent study. I found out from her that I could use India ink with encaustics. It was not water based so the wax would stick to it. I had been using the wrong ink. She also mentioned using oil sticks. Oil paint was compatible with encaustics. She also suggested heating the wood before applying any wax, which helps the wax adhere smoother. I was overwhelmed by what I did not know about encaustics. She also mentioned that wax did not adhere well to regular copy paper due to the sizing in the paper. I became concerned that the paintings that I had been working on would not be stable due to the fact that the wax would eventually crack off the paper.

Fear

As with most new experiences, more was learned when mistakes were made. I was finally allowing myself to make those mistakes. I realized how afraid I had been in the past about making mistakes. This fear kept me from even trying something new. I became very aware of how my fears were shifting and becoming less daunting and less powerful.

Spring 2009

Figure 17: Asphalt photo printed on rice paper with encaustic medium by the author (2009)
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 17

On April 4th, 2009, I drove to Oakland to meet with Janet Bartlette Goodman. She was an encaustic artist that I connected with through a web search on the International Encaustic Artists website. She mentioned on the website that she uses photography and paper. I emailed her to see if she taught any classes. She emailed me back that I could come and visit her studio, and she would teach me how to use photos and encaustic.

I was nervous to meet a real artist with a real studio. I went looking for help and some feedback on the encaustic work that I was doing. I had to ponder a question before our meeting. What do I struggle with when using encaustics? I was just getting comfortable with the medium. I wanted to use it to my best advantage, so that it added to a work of art, not detract from it. Or the question was: Why use encaustics and not just paint?

I learned which rice paper to use, how to cut it to fit on an 8 ½ x 11 inch piece of paper, fold it around the edges, and tape it so that it did not get caught in the printer. She explained that I could print directly from my computer onto the rice paper. She also suggested that it looked better without the edges of the paper showing, so I needed to cut the paper to fit the size of the wood. I also needed to apply a layer of wax to the wood, fuse it with the heat gun, dip the rice paper in clear wax medium and let it dry a bit. Then, I needed to heat up the wax on the wood, set the paper on the heated wax and rub it with my hand. I would then, fuse again and add another layer of wax on top. She also
turned the wood board over and put books or heavy items on top to help push the paper into the wax so that it would adhere to the wood.

Fear

In the beginning of this process, I was afraid. I was always fearful of doing something wrong and that my art was never good enough. I was also concerned if a piece came together easily and quickly, that it had less value. The more that I worked, the less concerned I became with the product and whether or not it was correct or good. I began to give myself more freedom, which led to more creativity. As I wrote in my journal on March 25, 2009:

I have a real sense of how one painting begets another, how they each have to be allowed to be made in order for the next one to come. I may make fifteen paintings, but only like two of them. It may only take me fifteen minutes to complete a piece, but the seeds of that painting may have been in the works for weeks. (Personal journal entry)

I really understood what Stephen Pressfield wrote in Art and Fear, “One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential. The best that you can do is make art that you care about and lots of it” (2002, p. 6).

On March 23rd, Charlotte came for another critique. The fear entered yet again. But this time, there was a level of excitement. I liked these asphalt pieces, and I was excited to show them and say, like a little kid, “I made this.” But, the fear-inducing question ran through my head, “What if she does not like them?” The fear of rejection seemed so innate to my art process. We, as humans, have such a need for closeness and a
sense of community. I was reminded of how banishment was the worst punishment in “the long time ago.” The question I asked myself was, “How does one get past the fear of rejection?” Especially now that I felt I had a body of work all leading somewhere?

Fear for my health began to become a concern. I used powdered pigments that were mixed into the encaustic medium. I wore plastic gloves and a ventilator when I opened the containers and carefully added the pigments to the wax. Once it became encapsulated into the wax, it was no longer a hazard, but as I was working in my garage, and I have small children, I decided to shift to dispersion pigments to alleviate this concern. I was familiar with these pigments because I had read about them in Joanne Mattera’s book, *Encaustic Painting*. Dispersion pigment is, “A creamy, viscous substance composed of a large number of particles held in suspension by a small amount of oil (usually linseed). The advantage of dispersion pigments over ground pigments is that there is not pigment dust to contaminate the studio” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140).

![Figure 18](image-url)

*Figure 18:* India ink applied on photographs printed on rice paper by the author (2009)
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 18

I decided to try using India ink on the rice paper printed with asphalt photos. I applied it directly with a small paintbrush to the lines on 3 x 5 photos printed on rice paper. It bled very interestingly. I really liked how it looked. It had a green tinge to it, as the ink reacted to the printing ink. As I wrote on April 24th, “It is funny how experimentation without fear works wonders sometimes. These images really fit my idea of elevating the lowly, cracked and dirty asphalt, into something quite lovely” (Personal journal entry, 2009).

Fear

In April, my kids started something new, swim team. Emma wanted to do it with her friend, Brooke. I convinced Jonah, her older brother, to try it as well. Jonah was very nervous. There were several boys in his group that had done swim team for five years, since they were four years old. This was his first experience of trying something that he was not the best at. On the first day, he got in the water, swam a lap and got out. “I am too tired”, he said with tears in his eyes. He had also overheard two boys say that they were going to be the fastest on the team. Those two boys ended up in his lane, and they were passing him. I realized that Jonah was afraid. He was afraid of failure and of being humiliated. These were the exact emotions that I was feeling about making art. I adjusted Jonah’s goggles, and I told him he could do it and sent him back into the pool. He swam for an hour. He got out of the pool, tired, cold and exhausted physically and emotionally, but he did it. He conquered his fear.
It was at this same swim practice that I met a swim team mom, Lizette. We started talking about which schools our kids attended. She mentioned the challenges of having a child in junior high. I mentioned that I was attending graduate school on Monday evenings. She asked, “What are you in grad school for?” It was an interesting question. I answered that I was an artist, and I was studying art education. She said, “Well, we have a gallery for emerging artists. You should have a show!” I had been talking about wanting to have a show at a gallery before I turned 40 years old. Regarding this new turn of events, on April 28th, I wrote:

Excitement is running through my body. I cannot believe it. I am having a gallery show. Now, what is my thesis going to be about? I was going to write about the process of trying to have a show in a gallery, the process of selling myself, and my art. I have discovered, yet again, if you figure out what you want, put it out there and tell people about it, and then it will come to you when you are ready. (Personal journal entry, 2009)

I came home after practice and went on the website for the Vox Gallery. That was when the fear came roaring back inside my head. I was completely intimidated. These were real artists. I felt that I had no business even considering having a show at a gallery. I was worried that they would find out that I was a fake. On April 29th, I wrote, “I do make art, that is what I do. So, I am an artist because I do the work” (Personal journal entry, 2009). As Bayles and Orland stated, “While you may feel that you are just pretending that you are an artist, there’s no way to pretend you’re making art” (1993, p. 26).
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 19

I met with the owners of the Vox Gallery and it was decided that I would participate in a women’s art show in June. I began working on getting my pieces ready for the show. I adhered the small rice paper to small cradleboards and added layers of clear encaustic medium. I wanted a clean edge, so I painted India ink around the edges of the wood.

Fear

I was sick at the end of March and did not work on any paintings for a week. When I returned to the studio, I discovered that I was yet again filled with doubts. I wrote in my journal on March 31st, “I am back to the studio, but all I can think about is why do I bother making art at all” (Personal journal entry, 2009). Once I did get to work, I did not want to stop. I worked for eight hours that day.
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 20

I enlarged one asphalt photo, so that I could print out four different sections, each one a separate piece of rice paper. My goal with this piece was to make a larger version of the rice paper with India ink. After printing out the photos, I used the India ink on the lines. The ink reacted to the printer ink, producing a light shade of green that then bled into the surrounding paper. I measured the paper to discover how the four different sheets of rice paper would fit on the cradleboard and how much overlap would occur. This was important to ensure that the paper would adhere to the wood and the overlapping paper would not become a distraction from the lines in the image.

Fear

This work on a larger piece, made me nervous, for it could become a bigger mistake. I really liked the small rice paper and India ink pieces, so I was worried that the new one would not work as well. Smaller paintings seemed easier and less important.
As I wrote on March 5th:

I am still struggling with the idea of living large, let alone working large. I like the idea of having enough space or freedom to be me, all of me, the large me. I am not content to be the tamped down version of me. Is that why I like the solitude of art making, there is more room to breathe? Is that why I like quiet, spacious art, as well? (Personal journal entry, 2009)

My fears disappeared when I was making art. Then a day went by and another, without art making, and I could feel the fear creep back in. I would say to myself, “What if my art is terrible? I have nothing important to say, so why do I even bother.” I was most concerned about my choice of nonrepresentational art; that it had less value to mainstream America. But, I was making art that I was interested in making, regardless of any fears that I had. I had to very consciously hear those fears and then dismiss them, move past them, and work through them. It was the only way for me to stay on my path as an artist. It was at this time, I realized that my project should be about fear and art making.

Summer 2009

Figure 21: Pigmented encaustic medium under photographs printed on rice paper with India ink by the author (2009)
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 21

I had been thinking about making larger paintings, since I had consistently been working on small cradleboard. One evening I was reading my childhood copy of Peter Cottontail to my daughter, Emma. This was a three-inch by six-inch book that I had loved since my childhood. As I read the book, I noticed the story was not as interesting to me as I had remembered. My emotional response was to the small size of the book. I had kept the book for almost 35 years, because of its size. That was when I realized that I had a strong affinity for small things. I went to my room and looked at several small, delicate Limoges porcelain boxes from France that my grandmother, Rita, had given me when I was young. Again, my loving response was to their petite size. That is what got me thinking about the meaning behind the size of the artwork. I did treasure small items, so it was an authentic choice that I make small paintings. I decided to continue using the smaller size wood.

During this time, I began using pigmented wax underneath the adhered rice paper. I wanted to add some color to a few of the paintings. I decided to use colors that were soothing and elegant: pink, peach, and purple. I worked on several at one time, as there is a limited color palette when working with encaustics. It is laborious to make the encaustic medium and to add the pigments; therefore, a few colors are made in larger quantities.
Fear
During this time, I was afraid that I would not be able to write enough about my artistic process for my thesis, as I was working so much more on my art. As I wrote on June 4th:

I am finding it difficult to document what I am doing when I am making art, since I especially enjoy that I am not thinking in words, but in images. I am working intuitively. But, as I look back on what I have written, I am aware of how the thoughts and ideas are in my head, but as I work, I am not aware of them, they just emerge in the art. (Personal journal entry, 2009)

Authors Bayles and Orland wrote in *Art and Fear* (1993), "Most of the myriad of steps that go into a piece (or a year’s worth of pieces) go on below the level of thought, engaging unarticulated beliefs and assumptions about what art making is” (p. 59).

This painting began with an asphalt photograph printed on rice paper. I attached it to the wood with clear encaustic medium. I brushed pigmented encaustic over the rice paper in layers. I carved away some of the wax to better see the lines beneath.
I began the process of preparing my work for the upcoming art show. I cleaned up the edges of the paintings, by using an iron and melting and smoothing the bumpy drips that accumulated on the edges of the encaustic paintings. I attempted to choose the artwork that was an important part of my body of work, for a cohesive show. Then, the process of deciding upon titles for the artwork began. I liked the idea of a series of work. I decided to number the paintings in the order that they were painted. I would then choose the paintings that were the best representation for the series. I wanted there to be a clear sense of the sheer number of paintings that were made to get to these fifteen works of art. This harkened back to an idea from *Art and Fear*:

The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars. One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 5).

I did have a title for my show, *Precious Pieces*. This clearly described my thoughts about elevating my photographs of asphalt to something valuable and precious.

Fear

My paintings were ready. I had typed up an artist’s statement. I even made business cards. I was a real artist. Now, I had to actually go hang up my paintings, but I was so afraid that I changed my mind. I did not want to be involved in an art show. As I wrote on May 29th, “I do not want to do it. It is too scary to think that my art will be hanging next to other real art in a real art gallery. I don’t think that I can handle this. What if people laugh? What if they ignore it? What if they do not understand what I am
trying to say? I do not think that I am really ready for this. I am really afraid of being humiliated” (Personal journal entry, 2009). Fear came to visit, yet again. But this time, it was stronger. I knew that I had to do the art show even if it was the scariest thing I had ever done. As author, Stephen Pressfield wrote in *The War of Art*:

> Resistance is experienced as fear; the degree of fear equates to the strength of Resistance. Therefore the more fear we feel about a specific enterprise the more certain we can be that the enterprise is important to us and to the growth of our soul.” (2002, p. 40)

I went, and I hung up my art at the Vox Gallery. Everyone was very nice. They were all artists, and I fit right in. I felt comfortable and realized that I could put my art in a gallery. I could be a real artist. It was my choice. I could choose to overcome my fear and my resistance and be the artist that I wanted to be.

The night of the Second Saturday art show was a blur of people and music. My husband and I walked around the busy streets of downtown Sacramento, glancing in other galleries and listening to the music being played on every street corner. After we had dinner, we headed back to the Vox Gallery, to wait for the friends and family that would be arriving. It was a great experience to stand by my wall of art, so carefully crafted and assembled to make a cohesive body of work. This was my first experience of truly feeling like an artist. People passed by my art, looked at it, smiled and nodded their heads. One man in particular, seemed to enjoy my show. His name was Randy, and he worked at Green Sacramento Building Supply, which was housed in the back of the gallery. He told me that he really appreciated my artist’s statement and how it tied all the
artwork together. I had one person that understood the purpose of my work. That one person was enough. I now felt that I had a successful art show. When I returned a month later to pick up the art that had not sold, I gave Randy one of the pieces and thanked him for making my art show a success. He was surprised and very grateful, as he said, “You have just made my day” (Personal communication, July 7, 2009). The feeling was mutual.

![Abstract encaustic painting on cradleboard with oil stick by the author (2009)](image)

**Figure 23: Abstract encaustic painting on cradleboard with oil stick by the author (2009)**

Fall 2009

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 23

Having had my art show, I was still interested in using the ideas of elevating the lowly asphalt, but I wanted to use more encaustic medium. With this painting, I tried heating the wax and scraping it off and reapplying it with a scraper. It changed the texture of the wax, from smooth to a much rougher texture. I felt that I was doing something different, but I was not convinced that it had any value. I had not seen any encaustic work with this texture. I was also using many more layers of wax. This painting had ten layers of wax, as I kept heating and scraping and reapplying wax. This
was a very sculptural process, very different from my focus on the photos and applying wax on top. I used my ceramic tools to carve into the wax. I smoothed silver oil stick on top and rubbed it in and on the surface of the wax with a gloved hand. The oil stick stayed in the carved lines and added shine and interest to the work. I felt that I was back to doing real encaustic painting. There was luminosity in this painting that the others lacked, because of the multiple layers of encaustic medium. Luminosity is, “The distinguishing feature of paintings made with transparent layers of wax. As light passes through those layers and is reflected up to the surface, the painting is actually illuminated from within” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140).

Fear

“Now what?” I wrote in my journal on September 2, 2009. I began having a difficult time working on my art. I had done the art show. I felt that I had actually survived the art show, and it really was not that difficult. I should have felt relieved that I have moved past the fear of having an art show, but now all I felt was depression. Perhaps it was my embarrassment that I had not been brave enough to be involved in an art show before this. Maybe it was disappointment that the art show was not a life altering experience. It was just an art show. As I wrote on September 15th, “Now that the fear is not there, what do I do now? How do I manage? Am I having a hard time because I have released a fear, and I have nothing to replace it with? Do we hold on to fears due to familiarity? I just do not know” (Personal journal entry, 2009). I was also concerned about school starting again and whether or not I would be able to finish my thesis. I had strong doubts.
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 24

I became even more interested in carving into the encaustic surface. With this painting, I started using a larger carving tool, so that I could really gouge the wax. I wanted the layers of wax beneath to show. Encaustic is a process-oriented medium. I wanted viewers to see the actual layers of wax and become aware of how they were applied. The thoughts of damaged surfaces and finding beauty within the broken, were still of interest to me.

Fear

Through the journaling process, I was becoming more aware of how difficult it was to be an artist. It seemed like my life would be easier if I did not make art. I would not have to wade through the continuous stream of fears that so easily knocked me down. But, I realized that these emotions only occurred when I was not making art. When I was thinking about art and taking the time to work on my paintings, the fears were still
present, but they did not seem so daunting. I felt stronger, like I could stand firmly in stream without fear of being knocked to the ground.

Winter 2009

Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 25

I was continuing to work with many layers of wax. But, I wanted to show the light coming through the cracks, instead of having the dark lines, as in the asphalt photographs. It was time to try a new technique. I decided to use intaglio. Intaglio is, “A printmaking term used to describe the incising of a surface” (Mattera, 2001, p. 140). I carved into the wax with a small ceramics tool, which left 1/8\textsuperscript{th} of an inch lines. I then brushed a light yellow wax over the incised lines. The wax filled the lines with yellow. Before fusing the wax, I scraped off the extra yellow wax that did not go into the crevasse. It came off cleanly, leaving only the yellow wax in the incised lines. It was then fused to ensure it adhered to the surface. This was a very effective technique to make clearly defined lines, which was something that I had not been able to do with encaustics before. I was progressing in my study of encaustics.
Fear

I met with Charlotte again and she suggested that I enter some paintings in the next KVIE art auction. She had entered several times and enjoyed the process. I did not hesitate to say that I was interested, but it would have to wait until I was finished with graduate school. I was aware that this was a new response to something that I would have shied away from in the past. In my journal, on December 3rd, I wrote:

This is the next step, entering my art in juried shows. I am open to the possibility of rejection. At this point my fear response has gone down considerably. I guess continuing to work and knowing that quantity may lead to quality gives me more confidence. The more I work, the more chance there is for success as well as failure. I think I used to be afraid of failure and success. But I am now open to either outcome. I am thankful for this shift in perspective. I am grateful to have traversed this road, having come out with a sense of possibility. I am now aware of what I can do, not just what I cannot. (Personal journal entry, 2009)

Figure 26: Abstract encaustic painting on ½ a hollow core door by the author (2009)
Thought process and artistic process regarding figure 26

This was the final work in this series on finding beauty in the broken. Now I was ready to make a large work of art. This painting began with numerous layers of bright yellow and green-pigmented encaustic medium or wax. I added very dark blue and scraped away at the layers to reach the yellow underneath. For me, this was symbolic of continuously carving into my fears, knowing that they would not go away completely, but wanting to get to the clear insights that lay beneath. I saw the central peach colored layers of wax as a path between the darkness; the broken pieces of me that I had finally embraced to become the artist I had always wanted to be.

Fear

Due to its size, this painting took the longest to complete. When working for a month on a painting, it was easy for me to become concerned that it would never be done. My fears were present as I worked so large and so long, but they became easier to ignore. The more I worked, the more confident I became that, regardless of the outcome of the painting, the process of art making was vital to my well being as a healthy and confident woman. Despite the difficulties of art making, I knew that I would continue on this path. This painting was a perfect capstone to this journey that began with the ending of one life and led to the authentic beginning of the life within me.

With the completion of this painting, I was ready to participate in another art show at the Vox Gallery in the Urban Hive Building. All the artists that had been involved in shows during the year were asked to participate in a December art show. This time, I had no fear. My paintings were ready. I felt comfortable hanging them.
They were consistent with my theme of elevating the broken, cracked and damaged.

My paintings were chosen to hang in the front window of the gallery. I was very proud of all that I had accomplished, and this show was perfect finale to my year spent making art. I knew that I had come to terms with the fears that were a part of being an artist. These fears had not been truly overcome. They had just become faithful companions on this journey to becoming an artist.
Chapter 4

REFLECTIONS

I am now an artist. It is not only who I am, but also what I do. I make art. I make art because it makes me happy and because it is an important part of my life. It is a difficult process to override the constant fears, but I have made a commitment to be my authentic self. Through this yearlong process, I have discovered that I can ignore my fears and make art.

As I continue to make art, I will stay connected to my theme of elevating the broken and damaged. I will take this to a personal level and begin connecting this to my own levels of self-acceptance. I recently turned forty, and I am very aware of how the culture in which I live views the aging of women. I would like to accept my body and all of its perceived imperfections. I have a scar from having a caesarian section with my second child. I have spider veins on my legs, also from being pregnant, as well as being fair skinned. My friends also have reminders of childbirth and nursing. Yet, these things are not embraced in this culture of perfection. Perfection leads nowhere, for without mistakes there is no growth. My artistic mentor, Charlotte Cooper, has a lovely, radiant, and smiling face. Due to her continuous smiles, she has a crinkling of wrinkles that surround her eyes. These are wrinkles from laughing and smiling, yet in our culture, they are deemed a flaw to be “botoxed” away. My friend, Allison, a breast cancer survivor, has scars from having her cancerous breasts removed. The scars saved her life.

My next series of work will focus on these scars, wrinkles, and veins of lovely women, who may or may not be accepting of these signs of a life well lived. My intent is
to incorporate these images and make them lovely and elegant. I would like to show the effort, labor and pain that were dealt with to earn these “flaws,” so that these imperfections can be honored and cherished. I will take these ideas of embracing flaws into future art work. I am interested in the concept that we are all imperfect, as human beings. The cracks and wounds and damages that have been done inside to our souls and outside to our bodies create who we are. It is only when we accept these wounds and cracks that we can love and accept ourselves, as we are. As Leonard Cohen wrote in his song, *Anthem*, “There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in” (1992).

My paintings will become a part of the new and emerging field of encaustic painting. I intend to become more invested in the community that surrounds encaustics by joining the International Encaustic Artists Association. I plan on entering the juried encaustic shows held by this organization.

Donald Arnstine believed that teachers must be given the opportunity to teach what they know, what they themselves enjoy (1967, p. 364). I am fortunate to be in an ideal job situation, as I do teach what I love. I just began teaching art at Dyer Kelly Elementary School. It is a Title-1 school with predominantly Hispanic and African American students. There has not been an art teacher at Dyer Kelly in five years.

I have also become much more aware of my own fears in making art. I have learned how important it is to be aware of any fears that occur during the process of making art. I also know now that one must ignore these fears and just make art. This awareness has instilled in me even more empathy for my students and all that they are
facing as children living in poverty. I will now consider how fear affects their daily life and how I can ease their fears of making art. I understand that the perceived risk of making art is a very real fear for my students. To be teased or to fail can be too great a risk. As Dozier stated, “Fear of mental pain produces exactly the same physical symptoms as fear of physical pain” (1998, p. 8).

I will help my students become more aware of their own fears and aid them in moving past them. I will educate my students on the common fears that all artists face, to help them understand that they are not alone in these fears. I believe that having these conversations will allow my students to free themselves from some of the fears that undermine their success in the art room and at school. In order to learn, a student must be free from fear. I hope to encourage my students to come to the art room with a joyful and positive attitude. As American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey stated (1934), “Emotion is the moving and cementing force” (p. 44).

Completing this project has focused my attention on the difficulties of learning something new. As I studied the encaustic painting technique, I would try something new and I would make a mistake. Every time I failed at this new process, I learned that I could handle failing and keep making art. So often students would rather not try something new than risk making a mistake. By going through the process of learning something new, I better understand my students’ own resistance and difficulties in art. I believe that teachers become disconnected from the challenges of learning something new, especially if they never put themselves in that vulnerable position. This project has given me more empathy and understanding toward my students and all that they face.
At Dyer Kelly Elementary School there is a pervasive sense of helplessness and fear. The students hesitate to begin a new project. They say, “I can’t”. I will help them understand that they can do something that is difficult and that they can handle making mistakes. As Bayles and Orland believed, “The function of the overwhelming majority of your art work is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars. One of the basic and difficult lessons that every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential” (1993, p. 5). From my experience with this project, I know that growth only comes when one is brave enough to risk making mistakes.

My students struggle with showing creativity. They spend all day answering questions that have only one answer that is correct. As Elliot Eisner wrote (1998):

What we ought to be developing in our schools is not simply a narrow array of literacy skills limited to a restrictive range of meaning systems, but a spectrum of literacies that will engage students to participate in, enjoy, and find meaning in the major forms through which meanings have been constituted. We need a conception of multiple literacies to serve as a vision of what our schools should seek to achieve. (p. 12)

In the art room, there is not just one correct answer. I feel that if I can help them envision their own creative paintings, drawings, and sculptures that they may have a better chance of envisioning a brighter future for themselves. Even if they cannot see it directly in front of their faces, they can imagine something more for themselves and for their world. I believe this is the purpose of art education. Elliot Eisner agreed, as he
stated, “Isn’t that what education is about, not arriving at a destination but traveling with a new view” (1998, p. 217)?
REFERENCES


