The Promise of Intra-actions: Classroom Provocations Through a New Materialist Lens

by

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Abstract

With this paper, I propose that materials and objects play a more significant role in shaping learning experiences in art than is widely understood. I assert that many art education curriculums have yet to consider the ways in which objects have agency in art making processes and that intentionally cultivating an awareness of the materiality of art mediums should have a larger place in curriculum design for students beyond the primary years.

I begin by establishing the ways in which a 21st context demands approaches to art education that decenter hierarchical perspectives and considers the agency of all things. I then provide a critical context through key scholars who provide insight into the nature of our dense interconnections and interdependencies. I follow with a personal narrative of insights gained through my own experiences in art education, using significant omissions and disconnects to establish the necessity of new approaches. Through these contexts I provide a set of orientations that may account for a more complex interaction of human and non-human things in the act of creating. Through the work of contemporary artists, my own studio experiences and a new materialist lens, I propose some open-ended questions and provocations to guide classroom experiences that can promote the attitudes, concepts and behaviours of a new materialist approach.

Keywords: art education, new materialism, material exploration, emergent learning, intra-actions

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Acknowledgments

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The Call of Things

Each object, has a presence – a being…

--James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*

My interest in the energetic presence of things began with growing up in a wild and remote place. My memories of that time are still rich and palpable; my brothers and I hunted tadpoles, laboured over elaborate mud villages and played softball in an abandoned orchard until the sun went down and the coyotes called us home. Our summer days were spent up cherry trees and in tents pitched out in the yard. The berry foraging, fiddlehead harvesting and trout fishing of my early life asked me to attend to an animated world that was generous with secrets if one knew how to look. An outcropping of boulders, a rusted car reclaimed by the earth, a shallow pool of cold creek water were places transformed by our purposes of play. The story of my life is there, tangled in the bushes, sitting in the trees and wandering the orchard. I have never drawn, photographed or painted these places, but my artistic interest began there, intently paying attention to the quiet beauty of passing things, absorbed with a preoccupation of what it feels like to look at the slippery tapestry of things happening underneath a given moment. My art practice has taken many turns since then, but an interchange with the material world has always driven my impulse to create. I'm still compelled to try and distill those sensory experiences into more than a slipping glimpse. [1]

[1] From abstract painter Willem de Kooning, who called himself a "slipping glimpser."

In my time as a teacher, disconnects in my own education have had a nagging presence. Like many adults, I remember the creative yearnings of my younger self suppressed in a dutiful effort to conform to expectations, both overt and implied. When I had the opportunity to work as an art specialist at an inquiry-based international school, I seized the chance to address the gaps and inadequacies of my own traditional education and develop my teaching practice in ways that would honour my students' interests and ideas. Through my successes and failures, I made some discoveries that prompted the investigations of this paper and initiated my interest in the complex ways in which young people make meaning through art. With this work, I hope to find a language for what I recognized as meaningful learning but could not explain and find ways to value thinking that is not easily captured by traditional means.

As a secondary teacher thrust into a K- 7, primary teaching role, I gained insight into the ways in which young students embrace the materiality of the world and themselves as makers only to become immune to "more-than human mystery" (Abram, 1996, p. x). It prompts me to think about what the value of learning through art is and what is lost when an enthusiasm for exploration gives way to expectation and self-doubt. In my own life, art has provided a powerful lens through which to see the world; it has refined my senses, cultivated my imaginative abilities and encouraged ways of being that invite other perspectives and ways of knowing. To me, it seems that nurturing these less tangible aspects of education for young people is more important than ever.

The more I come to understand my role in helping my students experience themselves through art, the more compelled I am by my own art interests. What emerges is a calling to investigate a relationship between materials and making, driven by open-ended explorations of studio media that lead to discoveries about physical forms, visual effects and the ways in which

materials are transformed into suggestions of meaning. As the goals and purposes of education shift to keep pace with an increasingly complex 21st century context, I wonder: What role does engaging with the sensory and physical properties of materials have in enabling artistic inquiry? What place does the exploration of the materiality of art mediums have in curriculum design beyond the primary years? What set of concepts and dispositions can produce a new materialist orientation to making? These questions guide this paper and the ideas that have unfolded through its making.

Significance to Art Education

The proliferation of information and communication through technology, an accelerating climate crisis and the increasing complexity of social responsibility in a globally interdependent world has redefined the goals and purposes of education. Educators look to learner-centered and inquiry-based learning to help students respond to the complex and dynamic challenges of a rapidly changing, 21st century context, however, understandings around these approaches are still emerging. Art educators are challenged with developing an approach to art making and teaching that embraces exploration and experimentation while in tension with the standardized and objective driven practices of an earlier century. As human existence grows increasingly unsustainable with current paradigms of hierarchical thinking, there is need for perspectives and approaches that better reflect the interdependency and agency of all things and offer up new ways of representing ideas and knowledge (Barrett, 2007). Traditional, prescriptive and overly teacher-directed methods in art education fail to account for the complexity of lived experience brought about by the changes in technology, climate change and globalization, or prepare students for the dynamic creativity the unprecedented challenges of their future will demand.

I propose that new materialism has much to offer art education, not only for the ways in which it embraces less understood ways of knowing and in doing so, presents a fuller accounting of learning as emergent and entangled but also in how it counters dualist thinking and human-centric perspectives. It not only captures the dynamic presence of material objects in the creation of art (Hood and Kraehe, 2017), it can promote a shift in hierarchical Western thinking through a recognition of the vibrancy of the world.

For many people, digital photography and virtual experiences have replaced active engagement with the environment through the senses. Maslen and Southern (2011) point out: "It is more important than ever that, in this world of 'perfect reproduction', our children do not literally get 'out of touch' with their senses" (p. 20). Philosopher, David Abram (1996) poetically affirms the need for aesthetic experiences:

> Direct sensuous reality, in all its more-than-human mystery, remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us. (p. x)

As an educator, I often feel uneasy with the ways in which "engineered pleasures" have supplanted "direct sensuous reality" for my students (Abram, 1996, p. x). Through my work with them in art, I have learned that my students are uneasy too; they crave tactile experiences in the physical world. My students want to feel their hands in a material and shape it; they enjoy figuring out what something wants to be. They want permission to think through doing.

This paper proposes that broadening our perspective of learning in art asks that we focus on learners and what they gain from the less understood *intra-actions* (Barad, 2007) of making. Through my research, I hope to articulate and value the often messy, uncertain and nonlinear

aspects of a studio practice that are not explicitly taught, but inherent in making things of one's own invention and meaning. My intention is to provide opportunities for my students to work as contemporary artists do, without resorting to prescriptive or overly teacher directed outcomes. Rather, my research focuses on the ways in which engaging with the sensory properties of materials enables artistic inquiry and I propose that a cultivation of an awareness of the materiality of art mediums should be embraced in curriculum design across grade levels.

Summary of Project

With this project, I develop a pedagogical approach to classroom practices that are grounded in theories of new materialism and material thinking, especially in respect to the expressive potential available to artists who consider the agency of materials. Firstly, I present a critical contextualization of new materialist themes in art education, establishing the entanglement of all things through intra-action (Barad, 2007) and the urgent appropriateness of working with materials for adolescents. Next, I provide a narrative account of my own experiences in art education and reflect on significant disconnects and omissions as generative sites of inquiry. Then, I discuss key moments in my studio practice throughout the MEd program that helped me to better understand the complexity of art making. Finally, I present a set of orientations that try to account for the interaction of human and non-human things in the act of creating. Through the work of contemporary artists, my own studio experiences and a new materialist lens, I propose some questions and prompts for the classroom that can promote the attitudes and ideas of a new materialist approach. Together, I hope to establish the validity of less considered ways of knowing and provide an approach to curriculum that sees objects and materials as dynamic players that reverberate in our experience of making meaning.

Critical Contextualization: Tracing the Research Context

Knowledge Through Aesthetic Experience

Cultural ecologist and philosopher David Abram (1996) writes: "The sensing body is not a programmed machine but an active and open form, continually improvising its relation to things and the world" (p. 49). Educators who work with pre-school children know this to be true. Young children are constantly experimenting with their bodies in space and their powers of perception through all of their senses in order to know themselves in relation to the world. These sensory experiences are in fact, significant cognitive events (Heid, 2005, Eisner, 2002) that prompt us to make sense through feeling and responding. Elliot Eisner (2002) points out: "The senses are our first avenues to consciousness. Without an intact sensory system, we would be unaware of the qualities in the environment to which we now respond" (p. 2). Many art educators believe that attending to our physical and emotional experiences elevates our cognition (Heid, 2005) and have an interest in what students gain cognitively from making art.

The relationship between cognition and the senses has been taken up by several scholars in recent years. Significant to this discussion, material culture scholars Bolin and Blandy (2003) have explored the ways in which sensory experiences contribute to an understanding of cultural practices. In his book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, Elliot Eisner (2002) compellingly argues that the arts can transform consciousness through engaging with the senses and enable forms of thinking that embrace complexity. Hetland, Winner, Veneema and Sheridan (2013) have offered research on the interdisciplinary value of the arts in *Studio Thinking 2* and promote

the cultivation of artistic dispositions and ways of seeing. These works have made significant contributions to an understanding of objects in art education and the ways that art can inform ways of thinking. However, they do not necessarily account for the lesser understood relationships between materials and making. New materialist theories suggest that we have much to learn from the complex interactions of art making if we consider a different understanding of our role in shaping materials

The Inseparability of People, Objects and Actions.

> We are not alone in believing that engaging with materials is urgent today; environmentalists, philosophers, feminists, and others are calling for changes to the capitalist story of materials-- a story that includes the rampant accumulation of materials as well as massive amounts of trashed materials that are poisoning the planet. These critics argue for the need to develop sustainable, caring relationships with the world, including with materials. Materials, they argue can be more than a commodity for humans to use and discard. (Kind, 2020, p. 2)

New materialist ideas challenge a human-centred perspective of the world in which human beings exist in a hierarchical relationship with all other things. Since all things are composed of matter, the division between human and non-human things is seen as a human construction. Feminist theorist, Karen Barad (2007) has cogently argued that objects, people and interactions have an "agential realism" (p. 132 – 185) that does not privilege the human. For Barad, objects are not inert and experiences between materials and people are entangled through *intra-action* (Barad, 2007). The term *'intra*-action' disrupts the individual causality implied in 'interaction' and the idea that individual agents act upon each other as separate entities (Barad,

2012). Rather, through intra-action and agential realism, individuals do not exist distinctly and separately from other matter, they are constantly materializing through particular relations. Through this understanding, the materials and circumstances of artmaking are repositioned as significant agents in the relational and dynamic entanglements of making. Accounting for these intra-actions can enable us to think about what materials and objects do, not only what they might mean.

Materials as Co- Creators

Philosopher, Jane Bennett (2010) explains that objects and humans have elusive qualities that are not easily defined. She describes this as "thing-power," (p. 2) a term that applies to all material bodies and tangles us in "a knotted world of vibrant matter" (p. 13). Understanding our shared vibrant materiality challenges the perceived division between human and non-human entities and recognizes the interdependency of all things. Bennett suggests that material bodies are always in the process of acting interdependently even though humans view themselves as having power over all. In fact, agency is shared through all material bodies through a complex weave of relationships that Bennett (2010) calls "distributive agency" (p. 31). In considering the thing-power and distributive agency of creative processes we understand how artmaking is a complex co-creation between human and non-human collaborators. Further, these concepts provide insight into the ways in which thinking happens in and through materials.

Thinking in Materials

The role of materials in shaping thinking is often overlooked in art making experiences for students. Many art educators see making art in the dualistic terms we understand much of our

culture: the animate acts upon the inanimate; the active has agency over the passive and in this way, inert materials are shaped by the activity and preconceived ideas of the artist. Barbara Bolt (2007) calls this a "means to ends" approach and suggests that "in harnessing means to ends, the artist justifiably can sign her/his name as the one who has made or caused a work of art to come into being" (p. 1). But this perspective fails to account for what Hood and Kraehe (2017) consider to be "the energetic contributions that material objects make in the creation of art" (p. 33) and the ways that interactions between humans and nonhuman things are relational. The artwork comes into being through the shared conviviality of the materials and the artist, with non- human entities very much at play.

The scholarship of early childhood educator, Sylvia Kind (2018) offers up many insights into what material thinking is and can do for students across grade levels. Kind et al., (2014) ensure that discoveries through materials are more than incidental in pre-kindergarten studio experiences. She considers materials as "joint participants" (p. 2) in the classroom that contribute to the children's ideas and sense making. Kind et al., (2014) embrace the potential of these experiences by considering the role of materials in children's artmaking and repositioning them:

> But what if the human role in shaping materials is not as central as we believe? What if materials shape us as much as we shape them? How might we experience materials differently if we acknowledge them as joint participants in our interactions with them? What happens when we choose to see materials, not as lifeless objects, but as events? (p.2)

In Kind's "material events" (2014, p. 2) art supplies become more than inert materials to be used and discarded. They allow for ways of making meaning not afforded in traditional classrooms by providing a place for objects, narratives, and meaning to converge. The photographic exhibition catalogue, *Material Encounters* (2014) captures the spirit of her work,

showing children rapturously absorbed and zealously covered in charcoal, clay and paper. The accompanying text poetically points out the latent complexity of these moments; words like "grind, crush, excavate, heal, barter, draw together, undo, redo" (Kind, et al., 2014, p. 19) speak to the multi-dimensionality of a basic material in the children's hands. We witness how a material exploration of charcoal is generating rich intra-actions (Barad, 2007) because of the way Kind and her colleagues have posed the classroom environment as the third teacher (Cutcher, 2013).

Material Encounters and Adolescents

Early childhood encounters with materiality make developmental sense in the scope of art education; the children's scribbles, propositions, narratives and re-purposings are seen as the normative play of immature adult artists not yet capable of representing ideas and objects (Heid, 2015). As children mature, sensory experiences become more indirect. Materials and aesthetics separate as students become focused on controlling media to achieve a preconceived outcome over responding to the possibilities the medium presents. A secondary art class might lead to very different discoveries about painting if it were predicated on material explorations that provoked questions about the nature of paint itself: What is paint made from? How does it interact with other materials and substrates? What instincts about it prompt action? How can paint be relational or interactive? To appreciate the interplay between form and meaning, students need to experience the tactile, sensory qualities of their art materials before they can exploit those qualities to enhance meaning in complex ways. A sensitivity to form is fundamental to expressive marks that are felt, and succeed at "a searching attempt to realize in visual language what an object feels like to look at" (Southern, 2014, p. 138). Cultivating

sensory awareness and understanding the full range of expressive potential in our materials are essential elements of art making, yet for older students, these are often incidental discoveries that are not explicitly nurtured.

Kind's work is framed by Reggio Emilia curriculum, a pioneering early childhood program in which students learn across disciplines through aesthetic engagement. Although Reggio Emilia approaches have been developed for early childhood education contexts, author and art educator Alexandra Cutcher (2013) supports that "the Reggio Emilia approach can be used as a prototype for secondary education, even though the contexts of early childhood and adolescence are so different" (p. 324).

Several aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach are especially appropriate in contexts with older students. Firstly, repositioning the art teacher as 'atelierista' or art specialist who cultivates the studio to promote intra-actions between the students, the materials and the physical space is a way of decentering teacher-directed learning and provides opportunities to reflect the interests and concerns of students as they emerge. Kind's approach allows for an inquiry-based design and implementation of curriculum; while teachers come with certain questions and big ideas in mind, experiences can be guided by the interests of the students and can embrace different possible directions as they emerge. In this way, educators have flexible opportunities to go where the work leads. Kind explains the challenging, but generative way that she uses the engagements of the children to drive her instruction:

> And so in drawing together we try *to move with* children's emerging imagery and experimentations, aware that this will be full of difficulty. Our drawing together is always held in this tension, yet we have found intense generativity in dwelling in these tension-filled spaces. (Kind, 2018, p. 8)

I propose that moving with students and their emerging interests and expressions is not only possible with students of all ages, it is a necessary approach to curriculum despite the challenges and uncertainties it presents.

In many contemporary secondary art classrooms, prescriptive art activities have given way to more 'open-ended' projects in pursuit of student-centered approaches. Certainly, projects that allow for more choices can better accommodate students' own interests and ways of learning, yet even these activities in a secondary classroom fail to generate the kinds of emergent experiences that Kind is able to, because they fail to account for what art education scholar, Donal O'Donoghue calls the "potentiality of experience" (2015, p. 104). What distinguishes a 'material event' from even an 'open-ended' art lesson in which students are asked to represent an experience? O'Donoghue (2015) explains how making a representation of an experience is different than the experience of making itself:

> Many students in art education classes have been invited to represent an experience already had, which is an act that occurs independently of that experience and, for the most part, demands representational capacities that have little to do with it? The act of representing an experience experienced at another time is, of course, the living of an entirely new experience. (p. 104)

For O'Donoghue (2015) the potentiality of experience accounts for "what experience does and how it is and can be agentic in itself" (p. 104) Through the ways she uses the materiality of the studio to provoke intra-actions and then reflects back to her students their own questions, and engagements, Kind recognizes the agentic materiality of experiences in ways that secondary classrooms do not traditionally make known. I suggest that these adaptable approaches have less of a presence in secondary art classrooms because educators are less versed

in seeing themselves as artists who create experiences by putting in place the conditions for those experiences.

Growth of a Studio Practice: Tracing the Emergence of a New Materialist Orientation

Disconnects and Omissions

How was I taught and why? What are the disconnects and omissions in my own art education? How might I be unconsciously recreating these for my students through a "hidden curriculum" (Gude, 2000, p. 78). Through examining these questions, I hope to disrupt the limiting beliefs around who and what defines a creative practice.

A Material Encounter

Many times in my art education, I have felt at odds with my inclination to respond through materials. Often, I suppressed my impulses and curiosities because the way I was being asked to learn did not allow for it. Ideas visited me, but I ignored them. Or I indulged them, but kept them private and outside of school. Instead, I looked to exemplars that I could try and emulate so that I could know the outcome in advance. I understood art processes in the most limiting ways. It wasn't until my second year of drawing classes in post-secondary that I started to experience an alignment between what the materials prompted me to do and what was emerging on the paper.

My instructor Lesley, embodied the best of an instructor to me. She practiced her own craft at a high level and had great instincts about teaching. Lesley cultivated our studio as a

living extension of her curriculum and our work together. For four hours every morning we practiced life drawing in this inviolable space. In the dimly lit studio we would take our places at the drawing desks around the stage. Music was always playing: sometimes it was Blues, often, Van Morrison. The model would enter, Lesley would set the lights and we would launch into the routines of warm ups and gesture drawings that we were coming to know, working furiously to capture the essence of the model's pose in a fluid, expressive motion. We learned to look at our model and not at our paper, and that to capture the feeling of pose, you had to imagine holding it in your own body. These were transformative realizations for me. She pushed us to explore our materials and work large. Pencils were forbidden. Found sticks dipped in ink were encouraged.

The entire experience excited and terrified me. I was painfully tentative. I made soft, faltering, insecure marks. I was dreading the inevitable class critique before my marks even hit the page. Lesley would maneuver around the studio during the warm ups and give us guidance based on what she noticed in our work. When we moved into longer, more sustained drawings, she would stand with each of us at our drawing table, consider our unique vantage point and help us weigh our options to explore the form. A revelatory moment happened for me during one of these sessions when she encouraged me to grind the charcoal and graphite on scrap paper, then rub my finger, wrapped in a rag into the powdered pigment. I discovered that I could feel my way around the substrate, making soft smudges to map out the relationship of things before making bold, committed marks [see Figure 1].I came to understand how crucial observation and patient looking is and that if I took the time to feel my way around the scene with my eyes and my smudges, it would set the 'bones' of the drawings. Lesley showed me that I could draw reductively, smudging graphite over an entire page to tone it a soft grey, then draw back into it with an eraser, carving out light areas to tease out the form [see Figure 2]. I could dip my rag into

the pigment and make big, gestural smears to block out shapes and rework them. Drawing began to feel more sculptural and abstract to me. I felt less intent on what I was drawing and lost myself in the carving and smudging, the push and pull of coaxing it to life. At some point, I would feel a syncing of my hand, the charcoal dust, the play of light and *Brown Eyed Girl* (1967)[2]. I became completely absorbed in the interchange of these things. For the first time, I stopped trying to anxiously contrive a copy of what I could literally see and started to chase that synchronous moment where I would experience a slippage of time.

Figure 1: Learning to draw by feeling around the page (2006). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

[2] Van Morrison. (1967). Brown Eyed Girl [Song]. On *Blowin' Your Mind!* [Album]. Bang Records.

Figure 2: Drawing with dirty rags and erasers (2006). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Lesley was the first instructor I encountered who understood and validated my interest in the materials and helped me to understand that I could grasp at what the materials offered and capture energy in marks. I believe that art educators need not wait until post-secondary for students to encounter these experiences. How differently would students understand their artworks and themselves if they could follow the ideas that visited them? What new culture of art

classrooms could come of articulating and valuing the interchange between materials and artists? Would students continue to measure themselves against a looming idea of what they are supposed make and how they are supposed to make it or would they value the idiosyncratic expressions that come through a sincere call and response through art ?

In my painting classes, my need to represent things procedurally continued to be at war with my impulse to explore the material. My attempts to create representational images were often derailed by my interest in more volatile materials and the searching, sculptural marks I was learning to do in drawing. Charcoal and pastels with water or gesso offered more surprises to me than tidy applications of accurately mixed paint [see Figure 3]. Indulging in these explorations often happened outside of classes and were rarely shared.

Figure 3: An exploration of pigments and water on handmade panels (2007). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane

What if I tried something and it didn't work? How could I control the outcome of something I had never done before? How would my peers understand what I was trying to do? These anxieties followed me through photography class, too.

Hidden Discoveries

My first experiences in photography were fraught. I was struggling through my initial failures with seemingly everything. I had been developing rolls of carefully shot negatives that came out blank because I had loaded the film wrong. I spent hours in the darkroom making blurry, under and over-exposed prints. I could not seem to make the technical aspects of the medium work and the finality of the finished print bothered me. I always had this urge to cut, move around and change the composition after the fact. I kept trying to make the work I felt would satisfy the requirements of the class, but I felt alienated and removed from it. I suffered through my critiques while I started to think about how I could make photographs that were more painterly.

I also happened to be reading Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theories in one of my art history classes. I became interested in his idea of the simulacra—that there are copies in the world depicting things that no longer have an original. The metaphor that my instructor used to explain this was a photocopy. He said that in our consumer driven, ersatz culture we create photocopies of photocopies—with each iteration we lose a little information and the image degrades. It made me wonder: If I took a digital image and took photos of that image, over and over, would it

degrade the image with each picture? Could I take enough photos to degrade it completely? How would that change the meaning of the image? I decided to try taking some photos in the car while my husband and I were driving through an empty landscape. I found the images immediately appealing because of the soft blur from the movement of the car. When I took my camera home, I started to take photos of the photos, observing how each image was gradually losing pixels with every copy. As the images degraded, other elements came into play, such as reflections in the window. The process started to take on philosophical dimensions as I thought about how to compress time and decompose something digital through my direct manipulation.

Figure 4: A material exploration of a digital photo (2007). Photograph, by Nadine Bouliane.

The above Figure 4, shows the painterly dissolution that became so interesting to me. I felt like I had asked a question through this process and received something in return. Yet, I never showed these images to anyone, least of all my photography class. I didn't think what I was doing was 'real' photography, even though it was more sincere and interesting to me than the work I was producing for my class. I felt that my ideas were not as important as demonstrating technical facility. What I was seeking in my art classes in the first place—an evocative, visual language that recognizes my painterly instincts and provokes them—had little to do with it.

Creative Yearnings

Perhaps it is because many artistic explorations happened for me outside of my formal instruction that I have also seen my art practice as so separate from my teaching practice. However, my studio work in support of this project has deeply informed and helped to formulate my questions and interests in art and teaching. I began to see these intersections during our first summer residency when I realized that I didn't have to try to prove my belonging as an artist; I could surrender to the questions and creative yearnings that I felt but could not yet name. I started by making small non-referential studies on paper that explored mark making and materials without a clear reason or plan. I discovered the fluidity of working in a series and responding to the problems presented by each mark. I began to crave a repertoire of 'moves' as started working them out in the studies shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Small studies from year 1 studio (2018). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane

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These studies prompted a desire for a sense of the gesture and energy of the poured paint and marks in a way that the small studies could not capture. I created a series of large 36” x 36” paintings that invited a more tactile interaction with the materials. I felt interested in abstraction, not as a hermetic experience in which I directly communicate meaning to a viewer, but in what can be generated and communicated through creating the forms. The paintings felt like a move towards a raw alphabet that could respond to my visual problems as shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7. I explored cutting and rearranging some of these as reflected in the explorative collage in Figure 8.

Figure 6: Exploration of possibilities presented by materials (2018). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

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Figure 7: Explorative painting series, year 1(2018). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Figure 8 Experimental collage, year 1 (2018). Art and photo. Nadine Bouliane

Through my explorations, I was striving for a sensitivity to the interaction of materials and to learn their expressive potential. I thought that if I became versed enough I would be able to balance the dominant elements that came out of the work, without having to paint over them. I used a limited palette and explored some non-traditional materials: coffee granules, spray paint, ink-dipped botanicals. I discovered square canvases would allow me to change the painting by turning the orientation throughout. I came to appreciate how difficult it is to translate the freshness and intimacy of little sketches into large format and so the canvases became

themselves large improvisational studies that I was willing to take risks on without a plan. In this way, I felt more like a calligrapher, trying to strike the right gesture in a fluid movement.

I left the studio that summer emboldened that I could begin from a place of unknowing, and that the studio and materials contained a world that could be drawn out.

Studio Matrix

My studio work in year two provided key revelations in how to situate my practice as both an artist and teacher. My professor encouraged me to think about what 'intuition' means and what does this work *do*? We were asked to reflect on our art practices and try to create a visual matrix that could trace our lines of thinking through the multiple dimensions of our work. I thought of the way I make paintings as a series of non-linear stages that each produce a different set of experiences and emotions. I produced words and associations that relate to each of those stages and began to see patterns that defined the character of each [see Figure 9]. Through painting and collaging the words I was able to populate a map that situated key aspects and ideas of my painting process.

Each 'location' is populated by a in invented persona who represents the qualities of these non-linear stages. These included Gatherer, Monk, Translator, Jerk, Negotiator and Diver. The assembled words are associated with the dominant figure in that quadrant, but are intended to invite overlap and new relationships to other words and images a seen in Figure 10.

Through the mapping of my process and ideas, I realized that what I thought of as 'intuition' was in fact, a traceable way of thinking. I saw that my work was neither the product of

a preconceived plan or completely random. It has a kind of sense that is generated through our playful exchange.

Figure 9 Mapping my artistic process (201.. Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

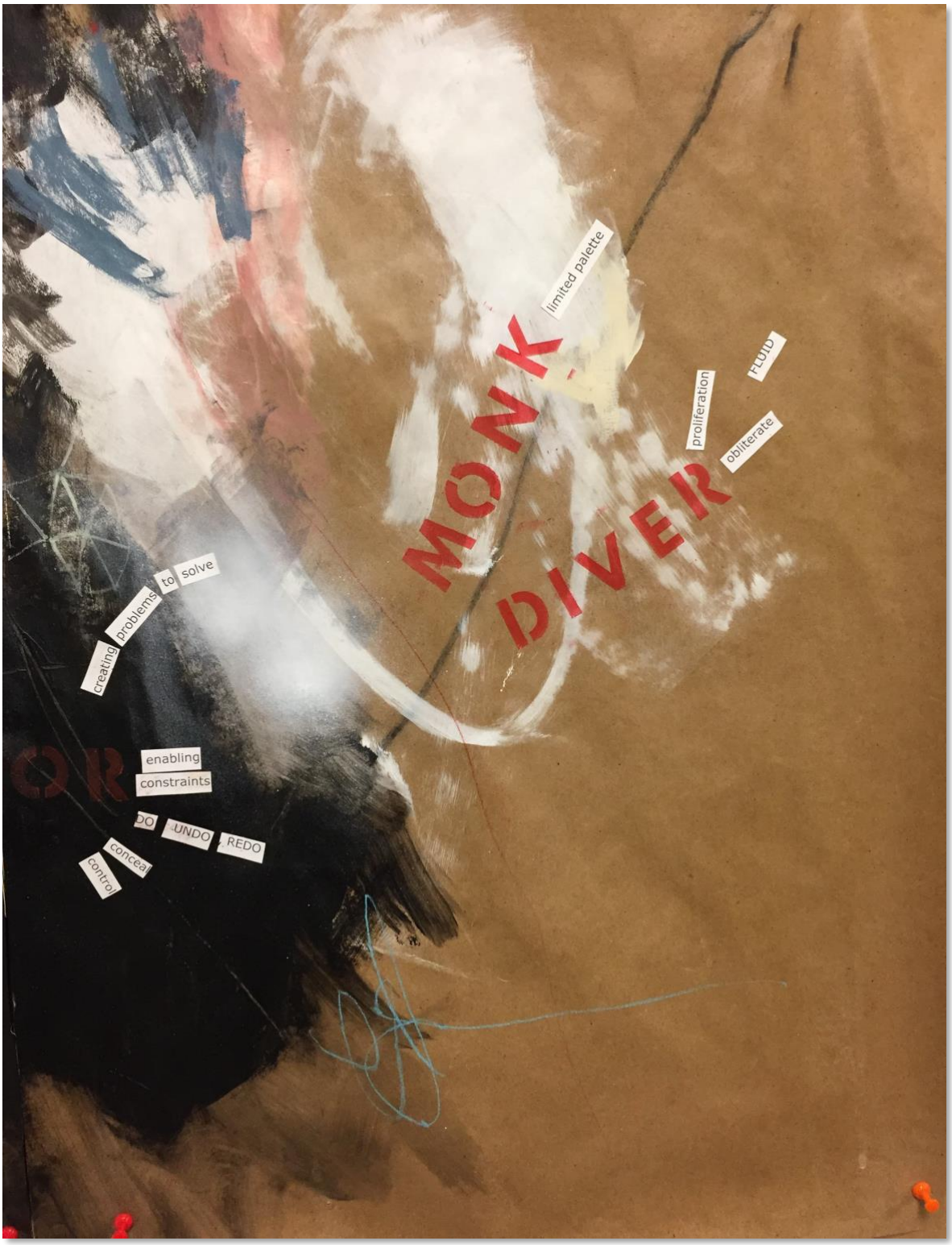

Figure 10 Close up of Studio Matrix (2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

The mapping process helped me to see how the loose and meandering parts of my practice fit together in the sum of all its parts. I carried out the rest of my summer residency focused on the series of large canvases shown in Figure 11, using gesso as a way to create layers on the canvas and edit the forms. I continued to use the rotation of the square canvases to invite a new orientation of marks, present new possibilities and prompting new forms.

Figure 11 Painting series, year 2. (2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Small Gestures

In my final works, I've reflected on why art is so compelling to me, the value of aesthetic experience and how that translates into the aims of art education. A pivotal insight has been the ways in which my practice is entangled and generated by small, cumulative acts. For me, a space for meaning is made in the small fragments and moments of pause that become gathered and bound in my work over time. I feel that my practice is better defined by these small acts of

gathering, noticing, and experimentation than the resulting series of works that might emerge from them. Figures 12 – 15 show several digital collages I created to speak to these non-linear and process driven aspects of my studio practice. I experimented with including short video clips that could create sensory pauses in the presentation, and mirror the kinds of aesthetic gathering I find myself responding to in my work. Animated examples of these exist on my website in which some photographs move with the subtle shifts of passing moments. [3]

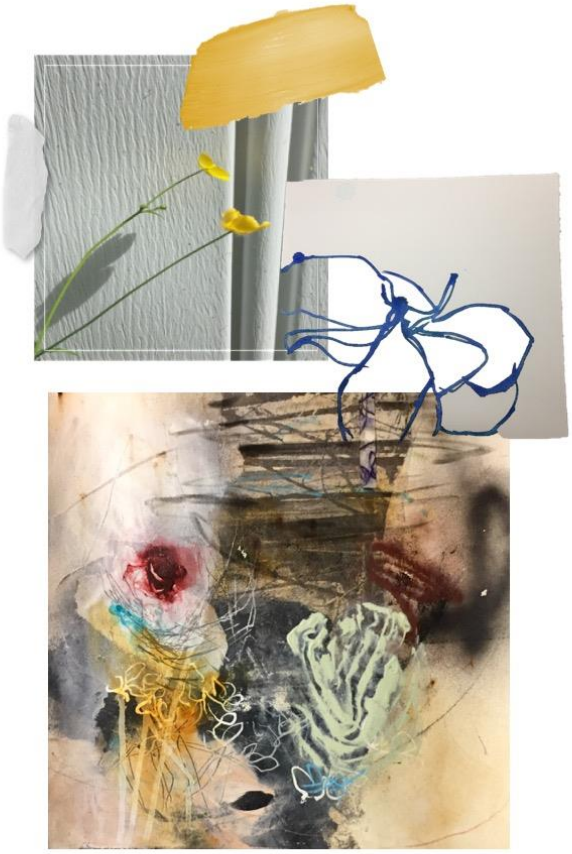

Figure 12: Still image of video collage, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

[3] To play video collages, see https://nadineboulianeart.wixsite.com/slippingglimpse

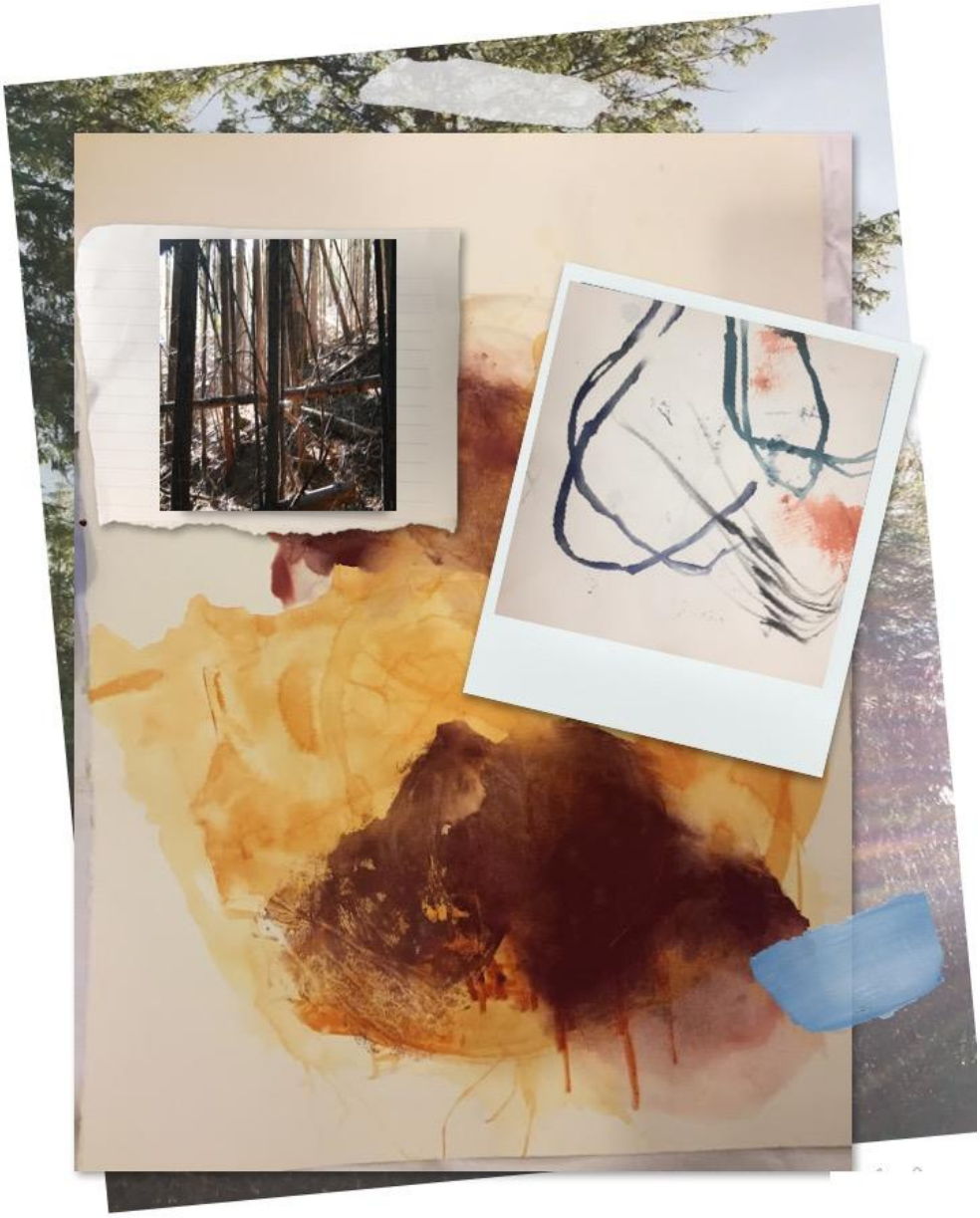

Figure 13 Still image of digital process college, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Figure 14 Digital process collage, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Figure 15 Digital process collage, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

I leave this work invigorated. I continue to interrogate the varied physical forms that emerge from open ended explorations and the suggestions of meaning they might lead to. I work towards an improvisational state that responds to deeply felt sensory impressions and the possibilities they present. I confidently situate my interests conceptually and pursue it boldly.

Teaching for a New Materialist Orientation

What are some approaches that lead to thinking in a material? This section explores an approach to teaching and making that emphasizes the role of materials in the development of an art practice through open-ended explorations of media. I consider the concepts, attitudes and orientations of studio processes that lead to discoveries about the nature of physical forms, the range of visual effects brought about by the agency of materials and the ways in which materials become entangled with meaning.

What follows is a series of orientations that I propose are essential to cultivating a disposition for artistic inquiry, but are not explicitly taught. My discussion includes key stages in the development of my own practice that have led to these understandings, the work of contemporary artists and scholars who embrace a new materialist perspective. Through the work of these artists, my own studio experiences and a new materialist lens, I propose some guiding questions and open ended prompts for the classroom that can promote the attitudes, concepts and behaviours of a new materialist approach.

The following section proposes four orientations that may be taken up in art making and teaching: 1. See materials as events; 2. Cultivate a wonder engine. 3. Make the familiar strange. 4. Expose the impulse. Each orientation is first situated within theory and artistic practices, followed by a discussion of how each orientation is explored in my own art practice. I then provide a set of guiding questions and provocations for material explorations that might be taken up by artists or teachers in their studios and classrooms.

See Materials as Events (*Becoming aware of the exchange with materials)*.

Thinking about materials differently enables Sylvia Kind et al. (2020) to pay more attention to artistic ways of being than producing 'make and take' projects: "I'm much more interested in seeing the arts as ways of being and ways of knowing rather than the arts as a process of creating something even though lots of things do get made" (p. 77). In this way, Kind's approach is more responsive than prescriptive. She reflects back to the children their questions, imaginings and propositions as she witnesses and coaxes their unfolding, arranging the studio to continually adapt to their interests and problems. She insists that her approach is not 'anything goes,' as a given encounter is intended to provoke the ideas that then are explored with certain questions in mind.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Kind (2014) creates these encounters through her role as an 'atelierista' that is, an artist teacher who facilitates learning through the careful curation and organization of the studio space for children to "think with materials" (p. 1). The children's experiences with the studio are designed to prompt exploration and the results are not known from the outset. Rather, she tries to move with the children's experimentations and images through capturing and accounting for "the emergence of the studio and what it (and we) might become" (Kind, 2018, p. 19). From there, Kind decides how to go forward with their investigations. A material event might begin by:

> … putting things into play such as paper, seed pods and other natural materials, magnifying glass, stethoscope, charcoal, graphite, and so on. Not deciding ahead of time what something is or should be, what it should mean or be for, but putting things into play as a question: What happens if? What will this do? What do you think about this? (Kind, 2018, p. 8)

In my own artistic process, I see the ritual of ‘gathering’ as way of emerging with the studio and what it might become. In Figure 16, I show how a painting begins through the arrangement of the space and a collection of images or objects that have a visual charge. I curate my materials, selecting the pigments and tools that might explore my impulses prompted by the space. These determine how I will smudge, pour, drag, streak, wipe, blend and reorient the canvas until a rationale for the work appears.

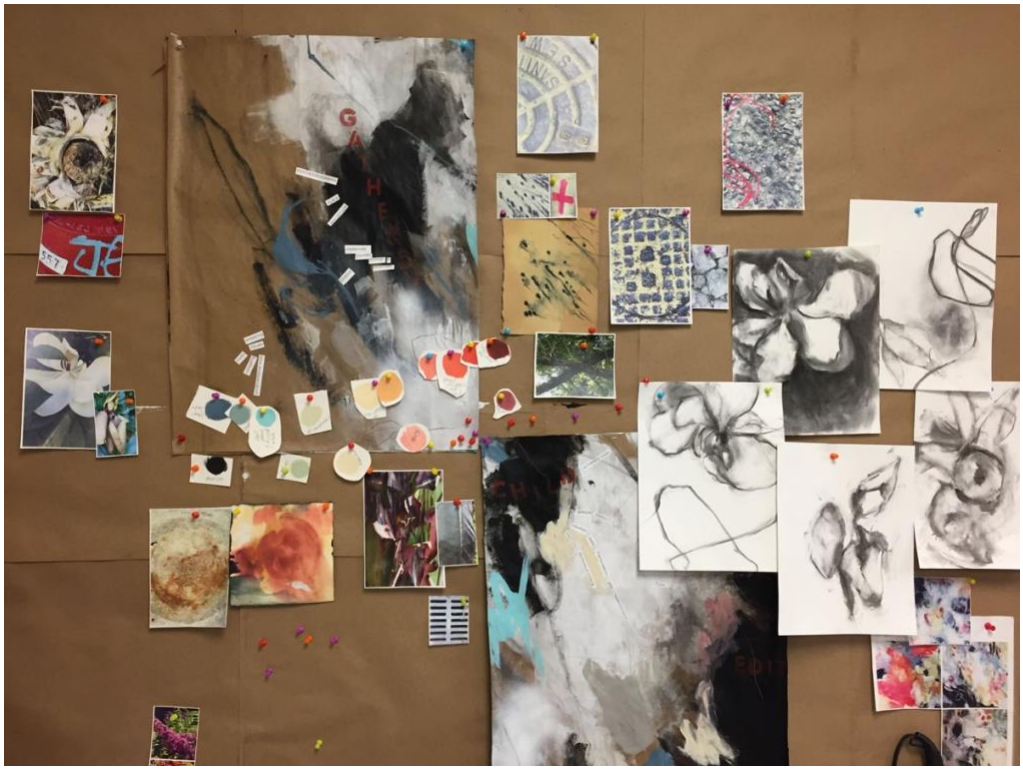

Figure 16 ‘Gathering’ in my studio space to prompt a material exploration.(2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

See Materials as Events: Provocations for the Classroom

- Robert Rauschenberg describes the role of materials in his working process: “I put my trust in the materials that confront me, because they put me in touch with the unknown.

It's then that I begin to work … when I don't have the comfort of sureness and certainty" (as cited in Hafeli, 2015, p. 5)

"Put some things into play" (Kind, 2018, p.8) by laying out a collection of objects that are visually interesting alongside a selection of studio materials. Ask students to generate a 'what would happen if…?' question in their mind and then act on it. Document the responses and questions the students generate. Decide how to proceed based on this input.

- Artist, Jillian Conrad describes how an attentiveness to materials informs her work as a sculptor:

> The cycle of my process as a sculptor begins with a love of raw materials and textures. I spend a great deal of time learning how different materials respond to each other and how I can coax them to speak for me. I experiment with materials right in my hands. I stab, pile, organize, sew, and glue things together until something arises. I keep arranging and rearranging until the accumulation of materials come together in a way that makes the whole more than the sum of the parts. (as cited in West, 2018, p. 102)

Create a list of verbs such as fold, blend, scratch, stain, rip, turn, smear, trace and act ` them out upon a material or substrate. What interests emerge?

- Make several copies of a single image in various sizes or reproduce by tracing the outline multiple times.

  Use paint, collage, and drawing materials to vary the treatment of each one and perform the following actions:

  - Treat only the negative space

- Extend something.
- Fragment something.
- Transform something.
- Think of a ‘what if…?’question to ask of the materials and your image. Answer it.

Cultivate a Wonder Engine *(Creating a window of irrelevance)*

> I feel like there has to be some sense of curiosity or wonder at the core of it, right? And how do you teach that? You can teach the craft stuff and the rhetorical stuff and the structural scaffolding. But I think if there is anything about poetry that might be truly unteachable, it might have to do with that sustainable internal wonder engine. (Kaveh Akbar, 2016, para 37)

In the above quote, poet, Kaveh Akbar describes how inquisitiveness and a sense of astonishment about the world are central to poetic practice but suspects that curiosity and a predisposition for amazement may be one thing that is ‘truly unteachable.’ I propose that promoting a ‘sustainable internal wonder engine’ is in fact, an achievable goal for art educators if we examine the less understood aspects of artistic practices and consider how we can engender responsive attitudes towards art making. I suggest that the activities artists engage in outside of and parallel to art making provide insight into how a ‘wonder engine’ is intentionally cultivated and sustained over time. Further, I assert that curiosities and creative yearnings are phenomena that are actively provoked though the gathering of impressions and experiential data. In the following discussion, I suggest how walking and observation serve as parallel practices in the work of artist researcher, Gemma Anderson and inform my own creative practice.

> For me, drawing facilitates thinking… I have noticed that the activities in life which I prioritize and repeat outside of drawing allow a similar kind of thought process to take place, for example, spending time walking is really important to me. (Gemma Anderson, 2011, as cited in Maslen and Southern, 2011, p. 120)

The intricate patterns of artist researcher Gemma Anderson's drawings are so visually engrossing and observationally detailed, it would be easy to assume that producing a scientific representation is the artist's singular goal. But Anderson is deeply interested in how drawings can at once serve as empirical, observational recordings and at the same time prompt an emergent process through which insights unfold. For Anderson, the act of observing and recording is generative, prompting other thoughts and realizations to be processed. In this way, drawing is a powerful way of knowing that is facilitated by other practices, such as walking. She explains how the motion of walking facilitates thinking not unlike the way the motion of drawing " is particularly conducive to contemplation" (Anderson, 2011, as cited in Maslen and Southern, 2011, p. 120). The artist considers walking as a way to intentionally create space for observation and rumination that not only generates artistic thinking, it amplifies it: "Through walking, I consciously create time to think, observe and explore. But I also see walking as a linear journey or path through a thought process, similar to that of making a drawing" (Anderson, 2011, as cited in Maslen and Southern, 2011, p. 120). Walking also facilitates a practice of intentional observation that is key to Anderson's drawings. She goes on to explain how "the continued and consistent observation of the world around me is where a lot of the ideas for the work take place, which feeds directly into my drawing practice" (Anderson, 2011, as cited in Maslen and Southern, 2011, p. 120).These efforts do not always directly result in physical drawings, rather, they enhance the artist's repository of forms and ideas, allowing them to mingle.

I propose that this simple dedication to the interaction of time, motion and observations can generate creative interests and concerns through a recognition of how amazing things are. Gemma Anderson's process has offered many insights into my own ways of working. I consider how the rituals I have around creating space to think generate similar kinds of thought processes. I notice that an important part of my painting practice happens through walking. Both walking and painting facilitate thinking through movement and both rituals inform the other.

Through walking, I create intentional time to observe and become immersed in wild spaces with presence and clarity. I notice my thinking and how the forward motion of my journey propels a line of thought. Inevitably, paying attention to the sensory details of the world around me quiets the chatter of my mind. I notice how natural objects are formed by the violent physics of the earth. Striations of rock carved out by hulking glaciers, a lacy fracture in the ice of an abandoned tailings pond. I collect these in my memory. I return to the canvas with the souvenirs of my journey, the details of my introspection reemerge as marks and relationships, During my artist-teacher residency, I spent many hours in the forested ravine of the Mystic Vale. Prompted by a craving for a connection to my surroundings, I sought out the earthy solitude of that nearby forest. A journal entry from that time reads:

> *I study the sounds and smells of this place; my temples pulse with the rhythm of it. The forest trees respire. My own rib cage rises and falls. I feel expansive and aware; greedy to see more and feel more. I want to amplify the rich textures quietly living here and hold them up to the sun, one by one. I sit here and gather them, this collection of sensory memories I can never possess, only absorb. I strain to be present for them, to imprint*

them in my mind. They leave ghost images behind my eyes and on my skin before slipping away.

Figure 17 Visual journal process reflection (2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

For me, paintings act as an artifact of these processes. The experiential data gathered from walking provides impressions to explore and informs the visual language I use to respond the possibilities presented by the materials.

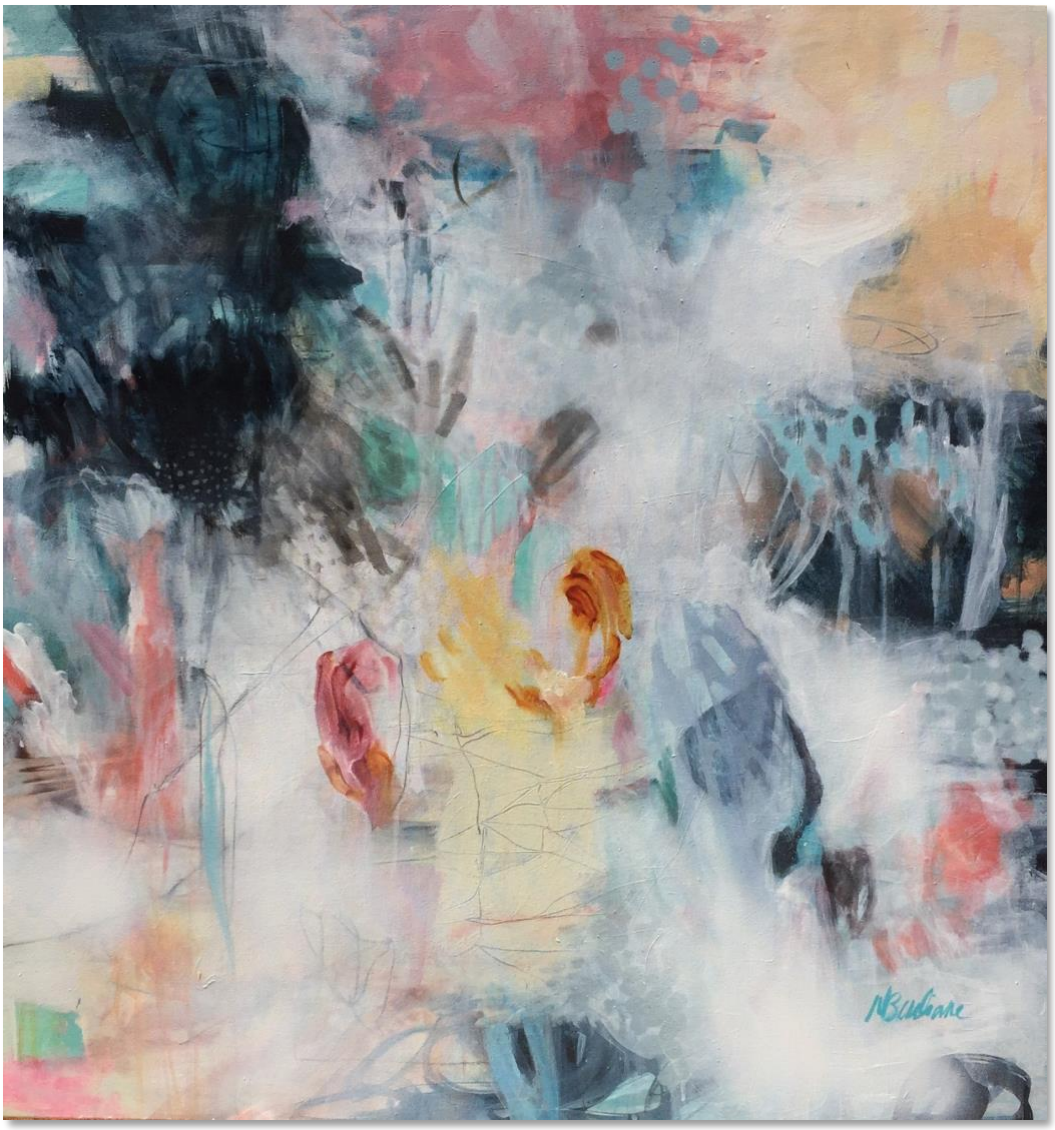

Figure 18 Painting as artifact of experience (2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Figure 18 shows how my paintings are intensely layered, and evolve through an active, gestural process; I begin with generous colour and bold mark making, seeking to capture raw energy and personal reflections in a free and intuitive way. The resulting marks create the design problems that are resolved in subsequent layers, both opaque and transparent, allowing some elements to come into play while others are suppressed. I work on large canvases to incorporate gestural marks and movement and the work is improvisational in nature; I don't begin with a preconceived plan, rather, I gather elements to respond with through constant collection and

regular practice, striving to respond to the possibilities the materials present. Figure 19 provides an example of this culminating experience through paint.

Figure 19 The culmination of an improvisational process (2019). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Cultivate a Wonder Engine: Provocations for the Classroom

Poetry often enters through the window of irrelevance. (Richards, 1989, p. 37)

How does one cultivate a wonder engine? What set of circumstances can produce creative interests and concerns? I borrow again from poetic practice in proposing that intentionally exploring the parallel practices of artmaking is a "window of irrelevance" (Richards, 1989, p. 37) through which meaning and ideas can enter. In helping students take disparate parts of their lives and bring them to touch, new understandings are created and relationships are revealed. The goal is to design experiences that make explicit how the rituals and other practices of our lives offer up interesting questions, surprise us with beauty, or make space for art concerns to emerge. In creating opportunities for students to notice and gather these artifacts and observe them over time, 'irrelevant' images present new possibilities for meaning as themes and connections emerge. Through cultivating a practice of noticing and gathering, students may come to see their own lived experience as a well of artistic data to be mined and explored.

What opportunities exist to cultivate intentional observation? Walking in nature, riding a train, and kneading bread all have potential to become sensory events if approached with a sense of mystery. Students may be invited to regularly take photos, write, sketch, video, and collect objects from these everyday events to generate an archive of observations. Connections and interests may emerge from the editing of these artifacts as certain elements come into play. What themes are prompted by these items? What do these images feel like to look at? What 'irrelevant' imagery has now surfaced by being brought into proximity with others? These questions and the prioritizing of an artistic inventory may help to expose the impulses of young artists and the

possibilities for thinking in and through images of their own invention. The following prompts include examples from my own visual explorations.

- Go for a walk and take photos of lines, shapes and textures to create a collection of sensory data (see Figure 20). Choose a few of these and create a stack of painted papers and loose drawings prompted by what interests you about the photos (see Figure 21). Set a timer and work quickly. Materials could include ink with brushes and twigs, charcoal or pastels, and paint with mark making tools. Select from these to create an archive or consider the extension below.
- Extension: Tear the drawings and painted papers into smaller and different sized pieces. Create a series of quick collages by combining contrasting marks and colours and glue them down to combine. Choose an element from one section that can be repeated or extended over all (see Figure 22).
- Create a palette based on images or memories gathered from a walk. Consider sounds, smells and touch in selecting colours.

Figure 20 Gathering sensory data through a photo walk. Photos by Nadine Bouliane

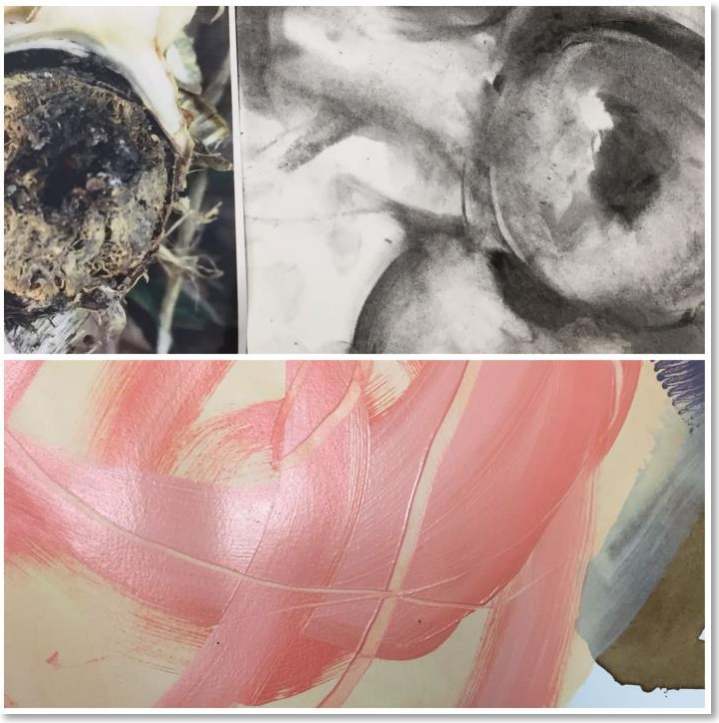

Figure 21 Translating sensory data into loose drawings and painted papers. Art and photos by Nadine Bouliane.

Figure 22 Creating collages with painted paper and drawings. Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Make the Familiar Strange (*Asking disorienting questions and pursuing double-takes).*

> Art makes the familiar strange so that it can be freshly perceived. To do this it presents its material in unexpected, even outlandish ways: the shock of the new. (Shlovsky, 1925, as cited in Dirda, 1990, para 6).

'Making strange' is a way of repositioning the familiar to produce new relationships that are visually loaded. By decontextualizing and re-contextualizing familiar things, discarded and taken for granted objects take on new suggestions of meaning. Literary theorist, Viktor Shlovsky believed that the purpose of art is to provoke an experience of the world through our senses and that people have grown immune to their surroundings: "And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art" (Shlovsky, 1925, as cited in Dirda, 1990, para5). He felt that artworks that promote a sense of defamiliarization could reinvigorate our powers of perception and "lift the scales from our eyes" (Dirda 1990, para 6).

Contemporary artist, Brian Jungen uses defamiliarization to great effect with his disarming sculptures. Jungen transforms consumer goods into evocative artworks by reframing the ways in which we encounter them, exposing unsettling relationships that speak to unexamined attitudes towards consumerism and cultural appropriation. One example of this is *Prototype for New Understanding #18* (2004), an arresting sculpture that at first glance resembles the ceremonial masks of British Columbian coastal tribes. In fact, the sculptures are made of collectible Nike Air Jordan shoes that Jungen has disassembled and refigured in the form of an important cultural artifact. The realization that a mass-produced commodity has been

rearranged to resemble a precious cultural object jars our expectations and changes our experience. Through this disorientation, certain analogies and contrasts come into focus: the hand-made and the mass-produced, the sacred and the mundane. Jungen speaks to this shift in perception, commenting: "[There is a] kind of switch that happens, that's the spark, right, that gets people interested" (Jungen, 2016, 30:23). One might recognize the surprising graphic similarities between this commercial object and the west coast indigenous artworks, reflecting on the ubiquity of both. This charged relationship between an iconic consumer object and the prevalence of appropriated First Nations imagery now provoke ethical questions about how these objects are made and for whom they benefit.

Sculptor, Liz Magor thinks of this switch in recognition as a "flip": "You think one thing—so simple, so dismissible, then you realize another thing; you think, how remarkable?" (Liz Magor, 2016, 3:12). This shift in perception is a key interest for the artist who uses the materiality of objects to create eye-catching double-takes. Her large public sculpture, *Lightshed,* (2005) is an example of the way she defamiliarizes objects through materials; a stilted wooden shack from another time seems real in every detail, but a closer inspection reveals its hefty aluminum structure. Through this twist in perception, the object undergoes a poetic transformation, suspending in time the lives of vulnerable people who once lived there in the alloy of modernism that froze them out.

In my own work, I explore defamaliarizing experiences through digital collage. Figure 22 and Figure 23 show how I work from fragments, photographs and material explorations that emerge through my painting process and play with still and moving images to create an intimacy with the vibrant materiality that exists just beneath our attention.

Figure 23: Still image from digital collage, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane

Figure 24: Still image from digital collage, year 3 (2020). Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Make the Familiar Strange: Provocations for the Classroom

> Getting lost is to be curious, caught up and entangled, not with the idea of art but with the material work of art. (Hood and Kraehe, 2017, p. 37)

How can we gain insights through a material? What circumstances promote a sensitivity to the vibrancy of things? Our tendencies toward reductive and human centered thinking can limit us from deeper entanglements with artworks (Hood and Kraehe, 2017). Art educators, Emily Hood and Amelia Kraehe (2017) suggest that asking "speculative questions grounded in the materiality of artworks can facilitate getting lost with things" (p. 37) and this dislocation is a productive site for artistic investigation. I propose that the following material explorations could respond to "the activity of matter impressing on the body" (Barrett & Bolt, 2012, p. 7) and prompt disorienting questions through artistic inquiry.

- Interview a taken-for-granted thing. What is it like to be this object? Create a dialogue between you and the object. What questions could you ask of a grain of sand? What would it reply?
- Take something apart and put it back together in an entirely new way. What does this object or artwork *do*? What does it want to become? (Adapted from, McReynolds, 2017, p. 13.)
- Mona Hatoum (2004) explains that: "when you work with ideas… the form the work takes also depends on the material that is available to me. Sometimes it's the other

way around, I have an idea first and then search for the material with which it can be best realized" (as cited in Steiner & Herzog, 2004, para 26). Choose an everyday object that has symbolic potential and interpret it through several different media (ex. Clay, photography, drawing). How does the difference in material change the way we read and experience the object? In which instances did you choose the material? At what times did the materials choose you?

- "I'm not an animist, but I do feel the objects, that have been in the world for a while, they've got all this stuff in them that comes out" (Magor, 2016, 4:56). Seek out materials for drawing and painting surfaces that have "been in the world for a while" (Magor, 2016, 4:56). How can the support become part of the conceptual and aesthetic process of making this artwork? What kinds of drawings and paintings does this non-traditional surface provoke?

Expose the Impulse: *(Considering what kinds of ideas happen in paint.)*

> From the raw canvas to the finished piece, the making of an abstract painting is unpredictable, but not random. The first drop of paint influences the second; setting off a journey that can spiral in any direction, seemingly out of control. Yet each reaction foreshadows the end. Over time, a sense of order begins to take shape. An abstract painting obeys its own internally-generated rules. A delicate system finds its conclusion as art. (Ackerman, 2016, para 1)

What kinds of ideas happen in paint? For many students, the exhilaration of an impulse for making art can create a rush to capture and resolve an artwork without consideration of the

entirety of the impulse or the emotion that led them to create. This can result in a disconnect between the intentions and outcomes of an artwork or a 'make and take' approach to art activities that leave many fruitful avenues for creativity unexplored. I propose that an important part of an artistic investigation is to live with the impulse for creativity and explore it for what it might do or become. This entails that the artist does not know the outcome from the outset and through multiple modes of expression allows understandings to emerge through doing.

For many contemporary artists, artworks result from insights that materialize through the making of the work and not the execution of ideas they already have. Contemporary art critic, Jan Verwoert (2005) explains how paintings tend to be understood in dualistic and reductive terms that do not account for the complex differences between "result, reason and process" (p. 41). Artworks are seen as produced from either intention or intuition; a preconceived plan or an irrational, "mythical inspiration" (p. 41). But the nature of painting is in fact, relational, entangled and "not susceptible to reduction to definite principles" (Verwoert, 2005, p. 41). Artworks are a product of complex intra-actions (Barad, 2007) that emerge through their own making.

An understanding of art processes as emergent affords us insight into the ways in which a painting *"*obeys its own internally-generated rules" (Ackerman, 2016, para 1). Artists often begin without knowing how something will turn out, and revel in working out creative problems by thinking in and through their materials. This necessitates a state of unknowing and a willingness to embrace understandings as they unfold. In their work examining the nature of contemporary art practices, contemporary curator, Elizabeth Fisher and artist, Rebecca Fortnum (2013) uncover the role of 'not knowing' in a creative practice. Through examples of contemporary art practices, they show that uncertainties, ambiguities and states of unknowing

tend to be seen negatively, but are in fact, productive liminal spaces that are "not only overcome, but sought, explored and savoured (p. 7). They go on to say that "failure, boredom, frustration and getting lost are constructively deployed alongside wonder, secrets and play" (p. 7). In this way, an unknown outcome can be a desirable and productive site of artistic inquiry. For many artists, thinking in a material necessitates approaches that are less understood including surrendering control, exploiting chance, and attending to the senses (Fisher and Fortnam, 2013).

How do artists relinquish control of the artwork and respond to the possibilities the materials present? Artist, Fiona Ackerman (2015) tells us *"*the making of an abstract painting is unpredictable, but not random. The first drop of paint influences the second; setting off a journey that can spiral in any direction" (para 1). Ackerman deliberately avoids a predetermined outcome in her work, approaching painting as a "playground" through which the painting is "the complete story of its own composition" (para 3). Her abstract paintings playfully bind loose, improvisational audacity with the compositional dexterity of a skilled painter pivoting between surrender and control. Ackerman explains: "Often, the painting's narrative is internal, found in the back and forth act of composing an abstract world on canvas, making and then breaking a painting's own internal logic" (para 3). Ackerman's paintings do not simply represent objects in the world, she paints her relationship with the materials, the possibilities entertained through the agency of those materials and the reflections that emerge through the experience of constructing the work itself.

Art historian, James Elkins asks: "What kinds of problems, and what kinds of meanings, happen in the paint?... What is thinking in a painting as opposed to thinking about a painting?" (2019, p. 3-4). Understandings that are activated through the agency of materials are instrumental to students becoming attentive to the details of their perceptions and ideas in more

complex and embodied ways. Engaging in ways of working that can seem counterintuitive to producing artworks are central to these practices, yet many art education curricula allow few opportunities for exploring other ways of knowing. Fisher and Fortnum (2013) point out "...current structures do not seem to allow for these spaces. Within education (at all levels) the prevailing culture requires one to be able to articulate, at the point of experience, what one 'knows...'" (p. 77). Often, prescriptive activities are promoted in classrooms because of how they simplify an accounting of learning for educational stakeholders.

As I develop understandings around my own practice, I strive to cultivate an emergent approach to artmaking that embraces places of not knowing and exposes the impulse of my explorations. The malleable nature of mixed media processes facilitate exploring the stimuli of my urges to create through multiple modes of expression. For me, generous colour and bold mark making invite possibilities for interaction and produce the problems responded to in subsequent layers of the painting. Layering allows some elements to come into play while others are concealed, creating the 'logic' of the composition. I don't begin with a preconceived plan, rather, my goal is to develop a "repertoire of increasing possibility" (Burton, 2000, p. 338). Figure 23 shows the call and response nature of the beginning stages of a painting.

Figure 25 The beginning stages of a painting; a call and response. Art and photo by Nadine Bouliane.

Expose the Impulse: Provocations for the Classroom

Artist Elliot Hundley (2013) says that: "Relinquishing some control allows me some distance. I start to feel like the artwork is responding to me—giving me something back or becoming something I never expected. I really enjoy that moment of not recognizing my own hand" (8:45). How can we "relinquish control" of the artwork and respond to the possibilities the materials present? The following questions can guide a material exploration of surrendering to an artwork: How do the different material forms that emerge from open-ended explorations generate suggestions of meaning? What role does "not knowing" have in artistic inquiry? What do art materials *do* and what kinds of ideas happen in paint?

- "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. [Repeat]." (Jasper Johns, 1964, as cited in Tate, n.d., para 4).

Gather 5 different mark-making tools/materials with different sensory qualities. Make a bold, energetic gesture. Let those marks prompt your next move. What wants to be there? Repeat several times. Conceal some parts with gesso and let others be emphasized. Overlap with more marks, extend existing shapes into other areas. Use the marks of the painting to create its own "internally generated rules" (Ackerman, 2016, para 1).

- Let a drawing form by accumulation. Create a drawing that has no edge. Build it from the center with small drawings and ephemera and connect them over time. Do not begin with a preconceived plan, but allow each piece to determine the next. Repeat imagery that emerges by enlarging over the whole surface.
- "Collage is about juxtaposing similar and dissonant elements together in a composition that invents its own logic /order or creates ambiguity just by the proximity of one element to another" (Hafeli, 2015, p. 160).

  Gather an inventory of collage materials that have enough variety in imagery that they could create unexpected combinations. Create a collage that relies on a "necessary accident" to come into being (Hafeli, 2015, p. 169).

Concluding Reflection

The materials of art speak to us in ways that are more than visual: bright pots of creamy, jewel-toned paint and earth-scented blocks of smooth, pliable clay engage our senses in multiple ways, calling us to interact. For many artists, it is the things of art that provide the attraction to create, yet opportunities for playful material explorations are often left behind in early childhood.

Our current models for art education, including inquiry-based and choice-based approaches address decentralizing learning structures that better honor the agency of students but do not adequately speak to the agency of things in those experiences, or the complexity and nature of engaging in art practices. What is lost, is an opportunity to disrupt the hierarchical construction that humans perceive in their relations with all matter and a means to embrace the agentic ways that humans and non-humans co-create each other. A new materialist approach does not simply provide another method for carrying out art lessons, it promotes a way of seeing and experiencing our own "vibrant matter" (Bennet, 2010) through playful exploration.

In this paper, I establish a theoretical context for the role of new materialist theories in curriculum design. I present a justification for reframing experiences in art education to perceive and include the dynamic contributions of material things. Through my personal narratives and reflections, I show some of the ways material explorations can foster artistic attitudes and the productive inclinations that may be suppressed by their exclusion. Finally, through the work of contemporary artists, art education scholars and my own experiences, I offer some provocations for the classroom that can produce meaningful reverberations with art materials and consider how as students shape materials, the materials shape them.

While scholarship on the potential for new materialism in art education is in its early stages, educators who embrace this approach have the opportunity to direct and influence its advancement. Future research is needed to provide understandings about the ways in which educators can promote a way of encountering materials that decentre human dominance and shift perceptions around art making that more fully capture what artmaking experiences do for our learners.

I have also discussed the success of early childhood programs in approaching new materialist themes and the lack of understandings about engaging in material explorations with adolescents. My research shows how open ended explorations can be designed that are conceptually and developmentally appropriate, reflect the practices of contemporary artists and foster key dispositions for artistic inquiry. Although my research does not include assessment of these practices, I propose that things made in an effort to embrace more complex ways of knowing look different than things made to satisfy a preconceived plan. The capturing of that knowledge should look differently, too.

Finally, reflecting on my life as an artist has asked me to think about why art is so compelling to me, the value of aesthetic experience and how that translates into the aims of art education. Through this work, my thinking about who and what counts as beings has shifted and I have come to acknowledge the creative potentialities of all matter. I come away appreciating how my favourite things are messy: muddy trails, big simmering pots of aromatic food, my studio floor strewn with paint and paper. I think making things asks us to attend to the sights, sounds and textures of the present moment and by being attentive to the sensory qualities of the world, we are better able to connect with it. If, as David Abram (1996) puts it, "only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us," (p. x) then I feel honored to be able to help people find their messy thing and hope it always brings them ground and sky.

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