

BORN-AGAIN ARTIST:  
LESSONS, PROPHETS, AND VISIONS ON DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY AS AN ARTIST

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

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Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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## ABSTRACT

### BORN-AGAIN ARTIST:

### LESSONS, PROPHETS, AND VISIONS ON DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY AS AN ARTIST

May 2012

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Being an artist involves the creation and maintenance of an artistic identity. Because there are no specific prerequisites for becoming an artist, like academic degrees or professional licenses, anyone can call him- or herself an artist. Working as an artist differs from working in more typical careers. This paper seeks to examine the ways artists build and maintain artistic identities, and the various actions or modes of thinking needed in order to do so. The author reflects on her own life as an artist, which includes considering how she lost sight of her artistic self, and the steps she is taking to rebuild her identity as a practicing artist. Reflection, research, and self-confrontation all guide her in acknowledging struggles and taking action for future success.

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**Born-Again Artist:  
Lessons, Prophets, and Visions on Developing an Identity as an Artist**

The term *born-again* is often used in connection with a religious experience or commitment. Creating artwork is, for me, similar to a religious experience. I compare it to a religious experience because it involves commitment to a group and to a practice of devoted work. I have discovered others who share my values and struggles as an artist and art educator, and are devoted to their own artistic practice. But two better definitions are: 2.) *reactivated or revitalized*, 3.) *enthusiastically committed* (retrieved from [www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)). "Born-Again Artist" is a fitting title for my work and for me because I have a renewed commitment to my own practice as a visual artist, and a newfound interest in developing my artistic identity. I feel born-again because I have always been an artist, but sort of lost my way for a while. This process has certainly been one of reactivation. I am in the process of reactivating my commitment to a practice and to maintaining awareness about myself as an artist.

In the process of re-dedicating myself to my own practice and development as a visual artist, I have reflected on my success and struggles, as well as the thinking and experiences of other artists. Examining work that has been written about artistic development has unveiled an interest in the area of artistic identity. In the process of reactivating my artistic self, addressing the concept of artistic identity has been helpful in understanding the shifts in my own process. Creating a series of paintings allowed me to demonstrate, through action, the synthesis of my learning as an artist, thinker, and reflective practitioner.

## Birth (Childhood, School, Genes)

At age eleven, I probably did not look like an artsy kind of kid; I was more of a tomboy. I had short, disheveled hair and ridiculously crooked teeth. I liked to play sports with the boys, but when I



was alone, I drew pictures. I could draw for hours and hours on end, and I'd loved art since I was very young. In fifth grade, a young student teacher offered an afterschool drawing class, and I was the first to sign up. It was during this afterschool class that my artistic identity began to develop. At the end of one class, I looked at my finished drawing and just knew. I look at that drawing today and

laugh, because it really isn't very good. But at the time, during that fifth-grade moment, I felt like a real artist. I can still feel the crowd of eleven-year-old girls squished around me and my drawing; I can hear the sound of the all-important "Whoa!!!" from some of the girls. I can see the teacher leaning over the crowd, nodding and smiling at my drawing with approval. It's impossible to know whether I felt validated as an artist because of the approval of the teacher, or the cheers of my friends; maybe it was something internal. But twenty-four years later, I know that was my moment, the beginning.

It wasn't the day I *became* an artist, but it was the day I began to *think of myself* as an artist. The way an artist thinks of oneself is crucial. For every artist, the development of a sense of artistic identity differs. I really haven't thought much about my own identity as an artist until I began to notice it slipping away. The culture in the school district where I currently work has a lot to do with the struggles I have faced as an artist. Prior to joining the workforce, as an adult, I had never truly considered my role as an artist. As a child I was always drawing and creating, and throughout middle school and high school my interest in and love for creating continued to develop. I participated in local art shows, read biographies of famous artists, and locked myself away in my bedroom for hours, practicing to draw and paint. In high school, I gave up advanced coursework in Calculus and other subjects in order



Kindergarten Drawing, 1982

to take as many art classes as I could squeeze into my schedule. But in eighth grade I'd decided I wanted to become an art therapist, so my plan was to study both Art and Psychology in college. And that's exactly what I did. I studied Art because I loved it and Psychology so I could get a job someday. It was never really necessary for me to consider my role in the world as an artist, because I imagined my role in the world would be that of a therapist.

Being artistic was something in my genes, a hereditary trait. Two of my paternal aunts were artists, and their mother had been an artist. An uncle was a poet, and his wife was a musician. I had paternal cousins who were opera singers, ballerinas, musicians, artists, filmmakers, and writers. Despite the fact that I had almost no contact with any of my paternal relatives, I knew that I had the artistic gene. Throughout my youth and young adult life, being an artist was a part of who I was, not something I would *do* for work or for an income.



*The Metaphor*  
by Rita Paradis (aunt), 1998

It also felt like something in my genes because being artistic certainly wasn't something I was exposed to in my environment. My family did not expose me to art or culture, and the artistic talent I demonstrated at an early age was never fueled. Nobody stopped me from drawing or learning about art; it was, though, a solo journey. Once in a while my father bought me art supplies; other than that I received little to no support from my family. My artwork was often entered into local art shows and competitions, and the only way I could attend those events was if a friend's parent would take me. I never attended an exhibit or gallery with my parents; they weren't interested. I was, nevertheless, always driven to create and to push myself. Despite objections from my family, I went on to major in art as an undergraduate. Even throughout college, I never intended to pursue a career as an artist or to do anything with my art. I just wanted to keep creating. It was part of who I was, and I imagined it would always be part of my life.



## **Death (Employment as a Grown-up)**

When I first began teaching art, it fueled my artistic energy. I felt inspired by my young students and found myself painting more often. While instructing students on the basic elements of art, the focus of my own work shifted towards shape and color and became more simplified. During my first few years of teaching, the influence of my job on my artwork was clear. But as my teaching job became more and more demanding, I spent less and less time on my own artwork. I am not sure if it was the demands of the job or the lack of support that had such a negative impact on my artistic development; it could have been both. But the demands on my time and energy were less painful than the obvious lack of support for my role as art teacher.

Slowly, the school district's administrators cut away at the Art Department; over the course of a few years the department lost a full time teacher, a department head, and professional development support. Supply budgets shrunk. Class sizes grew. The school administrators made sure that we six remaining art teachers weren't allowed to meet. We requested department meeting time during district-wide in-service days, but were denied, repeatedly, for years. Principals insisted that we work in our own buildings, on menial tasks. We requested funding for professional development programs in visual art, and were denied. We requested time to visit local art museums and galleries as a department, and were denied. We requested time together to plan for mandatory art exhibits, and were denied. We requested time together to work on curriculum alignment, but were...wait for it...denied.

Then, my job was reduced from full time to part time. My workload was not reduced, but my pay certainly was. I currently teach the same number of students and classes as my colleagues in music, technology, and physical education. Now, I am paid 40% less than they are, and given 40% less time, because my principal feels that my job requires less work than others. I am working in a school district where visual art is not only undervalued, but misunderstood.

Other teachers in my district are provided with relevant professional development opportunities. Elementary school classroom teachers participate in trainings and educational opportunities in many of the fields in which they teach. Reading experts are paid to come to schools and train teachers in new methods of instruction. Elementary classroom teachers are given time and training in using new math software programs or other types of educational software. Classroom teachers and special education teachers are also provided with *weekly* meeting time to collaborate with their colleagues. I have not been granted time to meet with my art department colleagues in almost four years. How can I expect my colleagues or administrators to support my work as a practicing artist, when they don't even support the job I am there to do?

The first year I suggested having an art show for students in the evening (as opposed to during the school day, when many parents are working), a number of teachers in my school complained that they would be expected to show up to an event outside of their contractual schedule. The principal forced me to sit down at a meeting, during which she encouraged the teachers to air their complaints to me. The principal explained that no teacher would be required or expected to attend, but I could move forward with my plan if I chose. None of the teachers came to the art show. The principal arrived late- in time to make an appearance at the chorus concert happening that same evening, but she did not spend any time viewing the artwork or talking with parents about the art show. Nor did she speak to me. This exemplifies the fact that I am working in a school district where visual art is clearly undervalued by both administrators and peers.

There are public schools that do support and encourage their art teachers' practice. Many art educators are given *some* time and funding to visit local art galleries and museums, and to pursue other types of relevant professional development. Some private schools give their visual art teachers professional development time to pursue their own artistic development. In my school district, however, most of my professional development time has been spent on mandatory meetings about standardized math test scores, or school rules, or mindless, never-ending data entry projects. In one recent study of art educators, the author found that "...schools were arid wastelands if one was thirsty for support and encouragement as an artist... teachers maintained that their schools did not care if

they pursued their personal artwork or not. In fact, some voiced the view that it was “safer” not to stand out as a creative artist,” (Zwirn, 2005). In my career as a public school art teacher, I have almost no contact with other art teachers and no time or support for my growth as an art educator or as an artist. ... “art teacher education programs often prioritize the artist/teacher model of practice, when, in reality, the profession, as practiced in public schools, in no way furthers this integration of roles,” (Zwirn, 2005). Each year, our art department puts on a student/teacher art show at a local gallery. It is the biggest annual art event in the district. Out of ten district administrators, we might see one stop by each year. Last year, the superintendent, school committee, and town council, along with many local school principals, were invited to attend a local exhibit of art teacher’s artwork; not one of them made an appearance. My current principal drove for over an hour one Thursday night to attend an art show for one of our school’s parents. My artwork has been on exhibit within five minutes of our school, at least six times, and she has never made an effort to attend. Out of a staff of over 40 other teachers who have all been invited to each art shows- for me as well as students- two or three teachers have visited the exhibits. The local media rarely covers our art events, despite the fact that we ask them repeatedly. Almost every time, the local reporters and photographers cannot make it to art events because they choose to cover athletic events instead.

It is difficult *not* to take all of this personally, when my work as an artist and teacher is so personal, but it is easy to see that I work with people who do not value my role as an artist or art teacher. Working in an environment where my role was undervalued took a toll on me for a while. When I first started teaching art, I looked forward to going to work each day, and when I left I felt good. That changed, slowly.



*Self Portrait, 2010*

## Revelations

### (Gaining Awareness through Self-Confrontation)

Over 40 years ago, artist and teacher Hans Hoffmann wrote about the role of what he called an “artist-teacher,” and stated “As an artist-teacher, engagement in the art world is essential.



*Rising Moon*  
Hans Hoffman, 1964

Contemporary artist-teachers read art journals, visit museums and galleries, and converse with others involved in creative enterprises,” (Hoffmann, 1967). Despite the fact that art educators agree teaching and creating go hand-in-hand (Zwirn, 2004) the practice of teaching art, particularly in public schools, differs greatly from the ideal.

It took a few years for me to realize the connection between my career as an art teacher and my life as an artist. When I started to notice a lack of satisfaction from my teaching job, it took some time and reflection for me to connect the dots. Teaching had become so demanding, and so filled with non-artistic duties, I felt less like an artist and more like robot. “...artists who become art teachers in public schools are usually expected to fit into set curriculum models in schools that often do not expect, encourage, or in any way reward creative, artistic development and art production...” (Zwirn, 2004). At work, I had no support and felt overworked and undervalued. Work was my priority for many years, and I was not involved in many other artistic endeavors. In retrospect, I was depending on my workplace to provide the support necessary for me to develop as an art educator *and* artist; at the time both roles were intertwined in my mind. The demands of my schedule and work responsibilities left me with little energy for my own art, and the lack of support left me feeling jaded. I worked with my teachers’ union to try and get more time and administrative support for the art department, with little success. I worked hard to try and change the schedule, the workload, and the mundane, irrelevant professional development activities. During contract negotiations, I worked tirelessly for months with the teachers’ union to try and change the contract to create equality among teachers’ workloads, class sizes, and professional development opportunities. All of my efforts were fruitless; years later I have *less* support and my job has been

*reduced*. It took me several years, and many failures, to learn that I would not get the support I need through my workplace.

After years of fighting to change the system in which I was working, I decided to change myself instead. My job situation wasn't getting any better whether I fought or not. I applied to other jobs for years without much luck. All I knew was that I wanted my life to be about art, and it dawned on me that I could control the way I spend my time and energy. I did not have to be at the mercy of any job, school district, or contract. And that forced me to consider my own role as an artist and teacher. For the first time in my life, I had to think about what it means to be an artist and what it means for *me* to live life as an artist. For a while, it felt as though teaching was getting in the way of my development as an artist. "A role conflict arises when the performance of one role conflicts with another. These issues are crucial to examine in order to understand why some [art] teachers burnout, others leave the profession, and others resolve conflicts and thrive professionally and personally," (Zwirn, 2005)...Burnout was fast approaching; feeling pessimistic and jaded were clear signs that I was headed in the wrong direction. Luckily, as a graduate student in the Critical & Creative Thinking Program (CCT) at UMass Boston, I had the unique opportunity to address my concerns in a supportive environment *outside* of my workplace. Later, I will describe the many ways that my experiences in the CCT program helped me along my path towards redefining my life as an artist.

I knew that I wanted to work as an art teacher *and* as a practicing artist. I thought I wanted both roles to meld into one, and I knew this couldn't happen organically; it was something I needed to be aware of and work to resolve. I had always thought of myself as both an artist and a teacher, and felt that one role informed and supported the other. But those were merely thoughts and ideas. In reality, working full time as an art teacher was sucking away the breath of my artistic self, and neither role was really being fulfilled as successfully as it could. Having no energy or support for my own artistic pursuits was frustrating, but at least having an awareness of my frustration was a step in the right direction. During one CCT course in 2010, *Action Research for Educational, Professional and Personal Change*, I was given the ideal structure within which to examine my frustrations. I realized that I needed to confront my own lack of consistency between what I believed and how I acted:

*Self-confrontation occurs when people become clear about what they value and gather data to see if they are being true to those values. As discrepancies between values and results of efforts become apparent, there is cognitive dissonance, emotional discomfort, and a wish to change. The sine qua non of action research is clarity of values... Then educators can move from focusing on themselves to focusing on results, (Schmuck, 1997).*

I learned that I was not being true to my values. In my final paper for the course, I reflected on the confrontation: “The situation I began with was the discrepancy. I became aware of the major discrepancy between how I *believe* an art educator should practice, and what I was *actually doing*. The frustration had been brewing for quite some time, but it took some self-reflection and honesty for the real situation to become clear,” (Palmucci, 2010). I have always valued the concept that an art teacher should be practicing artist; I thought of myself as an artist but I was barely practicing my art! One aspect of the course was to consider “how you would facilitate the reflective and/or collaborative



Smiling at the exhibit with my collaborators, Tracy M. and Karen Cass, 2011

process in which a constituency comes to join with you in shaping a change or intervention...” (Taylor, 2010). I used the course as an opportunity to work on an idea I’d had for many years. With the help of two others, I developed an action plan to create an art exhibition opportunity for art teachers. This was a way for me to design my own relevant, professional development opportunity (since my school district provided me with none). The structure and

expectations of the course helped me to find other people who shared my values- people outside of my workplace, where I hadn’t looked before. The action plan became more than a plan; with funding through a local Cultural Council grant, we designed and implemented the plan and the art exhibit became a reality. In August of 2011, 26 South Shore area art teachers participated in *Beyond the Classroom*, an exhibit featuring the original artwork of local art educators. The tools and supportive climate



Opening Reception for the first annual *Beyond the Classroom* exhibit. Over 100 people attended the opening reception in August of 2011.

of the Action Research course allowed me to take what was, for me, a huge risk in making this exhibit a reality. Understanding the value of building a constituency, while surrounded by supportive peers, was crucial in the success of my action plan.

Outside of work I experienced success, but things at my job were not great. When my elementary art position was reduced from full time to part time, I decided to try and turn a very negative situation into something positive. I knew this was the ideal time to try and reclaim myself as an artist. The first step was to do some serious thinking about what I wanted my life to be like- how I wanted to divide my time. I realized, slowly, that I didn't really want both roles- my role as art teacher and my role as artist- to meld into one. Teaching art and practicing as an artist was not the same thing; I wanted to be an artist *and* a teacher, and needed to find a way to redefine and balance both roles.

During another CCT course in 2011, *Creative Thinking*, I spent time considering what types of roadblocks were inhibiting my creative output. For the second time as a CCT student, I had to face my own inconsistencies and re-assess my values. A goal I set for myself during the semester was to work regularly in my sketchbook, which also served as a journal. The following is an excerpt from a reflective piece:



*Not Yet*  
Mixed Media painting created in response to an assignment in the Creative Thinking course, 2011

*Some weeks I write and draw regularly, and some weeks I only note a few ideas or a quick sketch. I am sticking to my objective of using the sketchbook weekly. However, what happens each week varies greatly. I find myself vacillating between drawing and writing, depending on what I need to get out and onto paper. For the past few years, I have spent a great deal of time thinking, but not so much time creating anything concrete or "finished." Spending time sketching- getting some type of image out no matter how crude- is a huge improvement for me and my parched creative self. I am not yet creating the amount of work I'd like (in the forms of finished drawings and/or paintings), but I am moving in the right direction and providing some relief to my creative self (Palmucci, 2011)*

During the *Creative Thinking* course in 2011, I truly focused on myself. In the *Action Research* course in 2010, I had developed my action plan based on my own interests and needs, but the result was an art exhibit that presented an opportunity for many others. The work that I put into the project was all for the exhibit, not necessarily for me, personally. The work I focused on in *Creative Thinking* was different and very important, because it was the first time that I focused solely on my artistic development. It wasn't clear at the time, but the spring of 2011 represents a turning point. Towards the end of the semester, it became clear to me that I would have to investigate what being an artist means for me.



## Lessons (Teachings of the Prophets)

The word *prophet* can be used to describe “somebody considered to be an inspired leader or teacher,” (Encarta World English Dictionary, 1999). I have chosen to read the words of, and listen to the words of other artists because I feel that they are the best resources along my path towards understanding myself and developing my own artistic identity. Those who interpret or deliver the commands or teachings of deities are also considered prophets, and I do feel that each artist has to sort of interpret the meaning of bigger forces, like art and creativity, for themselves and sometimes for others. In my interviews, I am asked artists to explain and interpret meanings, and hoped to learn from them.

In order to develop my own identity as an artist, I spent time examining the way other artists describe themselves, their creative processes, and their views. Through reading about artists, and speaking with artists, I have gained a sense of the numerous ways artists define themselves and others. Knowing that other artists struggle to define themselves is reassuring. Knowing that other artists have to work at building their artistic identities causes me to feel connected.

### First Lesson: Artists Need to Define Themselves

The first step towards defining myself as an artist is to learn about the ways others define what it means to be an artist. There does not seem to be any agreed-upon definition of the term artist. One of the biggest dilemmas, it seems, is that the term ‘artist’ is not always an occupational descriptor. When asked what one does for a living, most artists do not include their efforts as an artist in their responses. Ann Conte, a mixed-media artist working out of Rockland, MA, provides an example:

I do consider myself an artist, first and foremost, but your question was *what do I do for a living*, and I can't live off of that...What I think makes me an artist is... The way I think about and approach the world, it revolves around creating... Throughout my whole day I am thinking about creating, I am constantly thinking about creating. I look for and find inspiration everywhere, and think about how to create from that inspiration. I am driven to constantly make things, (Ann Conte, 2012).



*Ocean Vessel*  
by Ann Conte, 2011

Since it is challenging for artists to earn a living from their art-making, most work at other, more definable jobs in order to make money. Many artists consider their lives divided between what they do to earn a living and pay the bills, and what they do as artists. But it is not only artists who consider their artistic endeavors as separate from what they do for a living; this distinction is also a societal one.

*In industrialized societies most people spend their adult lives at work and that commitment to work can be a central feature of a person's life... I use a detailed examination of one specific occupation as a means of revealing the intricate relationship between self and work. I focus on contemporary visual artists because, in a profession where status is ambiguously defined and has shifted through history and where artistic labour is seldom recognized as 'real' work, professional status... is derived largely from the construction and maintenance of an artistic identity and it's effective communication to others (Bain, 2005).*

Art, at least in Western culture, has not historically or commonly been thought of as a profession or as 'real' work. There may be a few, well-known examples of European masters like Rembrandt or Michelangelo, who worked on commissions and were able to make a living as artists. Generally, however, people who were 'artists' were either part of an elite society in which their work was funded by wealthy patrons, or were considered 'starving artists' because they were exactly that- poor and starving. An artist often sacrificed earning a living in exchange for a life dedicated to their artwork. More often than not, artists are still thought of as sort of upper-crust, people who can afford to spend time making art instead of doing a 'real' job. Because of certain connotations, some people who make art hesitate to refer to themselves as 'artists.'



*History 50*  
by Dean Nimmer, 2010

*Being an artist is not necessarily about being a member of an exclusive club. All too often the urge to create is stifled because of the prestige or privilege associated with the word "artist." The fact is that there are absolutely no prerequisites for making art, or even for thinking of oneself as an artist – including talent, art degrees, gallery shows, or the desire to find fame and fortune in New York City. The only real requirement is that you make art, and then by definition you are an artist, (Dean Nimmer art from intuition p.24).*

Personally, I never intended on working as an artist or an art teacher. Like many artists, I always felt that being an artist was part of who I was , and never thought about whether or not I considered the

work I did as an artist as *work* in terms of an occupation or a way to make a living. I do agree with Nimmer, in that an important aspect in being called an artist is that one creates art. I disagree with his statement that it is the “only real requirement.” There are multiple characteristics that can qualify someone as an artist, but I am not sure which I would refer to as “requirements.”

Anyone who refuses to classify artmaking as *real work* knows nothing about the creative process or artmaking. Artmaking requires time and energy- physical, mental, and emotional output. I differentiate the term ‘work’ from the term ‘job.’ Other artists seem to agree, but it isn’t easy to describe or classify what it means to work as an artist. Many struggle with separating the concept of work from the concept of a job or occupation.

Being an artist is not the best way to make a living; it’s pretty unpredictable! So I just kind of always go with the idea that I *am* that so I just have to find a way to keep *being* that. So if I can use my creativity to also have a way to make some money, while I am able to also paint- then I can kind of identify that as being my career because I’ve found a creative a way to keep doing my art. By being able to teach, and having art be part of my teaching, it’s a way I’ve been able to make a living, (Karen Cass interview, 2012).

All artists work, although it is really up to the individual as to whether or not they consider their work a job. I have sold a few pieces of my own artwork, and hope to sell more, but I don’t consider being an artist as my job. It is something I devote a great deal of time and energy to, like my salaried job as an art teacher. I am lucky to have a teaching job that comes with a regular paycheck, which enables me to live. For some artists, being an artist is what they view as their job. It is what they do to earn a living.

In other professions, people often refer to their occupation as who they are; for example a doctor might state “I am a doctor,” as opposed to “I work in the medical field.” Artists often stumble when asked what they do. When artist Ann Conte was asked to *describe what you do*, this was her response: “...well, I teach art, preschool through adults, I teach ceramics, I also do picture framing, and when I have time I work on my own artwork. I also take classes...” (2012). Instead of labeling herself as a teacher, artist, framer, or student, she described the various things that occupy her time. Michelle Soares, an artist from North Dartmouth, MA, answered the same question:

Um, this is going to be hard, you mean for work and everything? Okay, what I do for a living. I design upholstery fabric during the day. I draw all day long for a job, and design. But when I get home I paint, and weave, and draw, and make jewelry, and just anytime I can I try to make and create something- I like gardening, growing things, I like creating and constantly dealing with color and nature, and combining the two. And I feel this constant urge to create,” (2012).

Michelle, like Ann, didn't have a one-word label to describe what she does. Artist Karen Cass describes putting more into her role as an artist than what she could ever receive in monetary compensation. She also suggests that working for an “establishment” typically feels more like a ‘real’ job.

It's kind of funny; I probably *should* think about it as more of a “job.” But, because someone else doesn't give me check for doing all that work ...certainly people pay to be in my classes, but it's not like it's coming from a sort of established place, saying here's your weekly salary. I don't think of it as a job. Because there's way more output for building that career than there is that big payoff at the end- there just isn't, (Karen Cass interview, 2012).



*Tropics*  
Karen Cass, 2011

To me, an artist is someone who works on art- in whatever form it takes for that person, and regardless of whether or not they consider it to be a job or occupation. But being an artist certainly does include and require work. Defining the term ‘artist’ is not easy for most. Here, artist Karen Cass



Blue Dragon  
Karen Cass, 2011

struggles more with her definition:

I know a lot of people who are extraordinarily talented, but they've had to sacrifice their artmaking in order to have a career. But I still think of them as artists. But I also have a hard time if someone has chosen not to make their artmaking a priority. So I always am very torn about that! It's really hard for me because I would say that to be an artist you have to be making art, but that's not necessarily true for everyone. You can still have that identity but not be able to do it. And that's what happens to, I think, a lot of teachers, because they commit themselves to bringing that out in others, so theirs' get sacrificed... which breaks my heart. A professor I know didn't get tenured because she didn't keep up with her exhibition schedule. Is she not an artist? It's such a hard way to identify somebody. That's a huge dilemma- how can we say someone isn't valid as an artist because they aren't able to make their work? So, it's not an answer. I don't have an answer. It's almost not fair, in a way. I will always identify myself as an artist, but if I go for six months without making my work, does that mean I'm not an artist at that time? You can't say that. Because I always am, (Karen Cass interview, 2012).

Karen began describing an artist as someone who *makes* art, but then challenged her initial thought. Artists suggest a variety of ways to define what an artist is, but all seem to struggle with defining it in simple terms. One common theme is that many artists describe a kind of urge or drive to create. Similar to Ann Conte's description of herself, Michelle Soares tries to explain what drives her work as an artist:



*Palmas Verdas Ocean  
Green Seaweed  
Michelle Soares, 2012*

It's something that I didn't ask to be or do, I just have this urge inside... I feel like true artists, most artists, have some significant thing that urges them to get their emotions out. For me it's a way of getting emotions that I need to get out on the canvas, or with color, or with design; it's just something, like a voice in your head, that's what you're meant to do. I feel like what an artist is, is just a person who wants to share the beauty of life- or ugly- that they feel inside and they want to get it out, and want to share it with people. Other people need to see art. Everyone on this planet is meant to do something, everyone has a job to do, and for some reason I was meant to draw, to paint, to create.

An example of a somewhat more official definition comes from The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's International Art Association. It has produced a broad definition of an artist that includes:

any person who creates, or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art; who considers his/her artistic creation to be an essential part of his/her life; who contributes to the development of art and culture; and who asks to be recognized as an artist, whether she/she is bound by any relations of employments or association, (Daichendt, 2010).

Even this 'official' definition is so vague that it can barely be called a definition at all. After summarizing all of the available definitions, both the formal and the more casual, it seems that anyone can claim to be an artist. In other, more regulated professions, such as medicine or engineering, degrees and licenses are earned by practitioners to authenticate their occupational standing. In the visual arts, there are no official prerequisites or credentials that distinguish artists from non-artists, or professionals from amateurs, (Bain, 2005). The term 'professional artist' is sometimes used, and although there exists no official definition of that term, it does imply something more specific. In my experience, a person who uses the term 'professional artist' when describing self

or others, refers to a person who is able to make money- or actually earn a living- through the sale of their work or skill. Most artists who I read about or interviewed for the purpose of this paper did not use the term ‘professional artist,’ although I might use that term to describe some of them.

“To be a professional artist, then essentially involves successful claim and defense of professional status through the construction and maintenance of an artistic identity,” (Bain, 2005). Most artists do work to build or maintain an artistic identity, although they might not be aware of it. A public school teacher needs to recertify every so many years, and other professions like medicine and construction require practitioners to maintain licenses or certifications; there are clearly defined processes through which professionals maintain their professional status. For artists, it is much less clear.

### Second Lesson: Artists Need Space

It is common for artists to feel pressure around owning or renting a studio. Artists are often asked “Where is your studio?” by other artists or patrons. It seems that working in an art studio authenticates ones standing as a real artist; it affirms allegiance to the artistic profession (Bain 2004). It is similar to any other profession in which having an office is expected; it feels more professional to visit an artist at a studio as opposed to a living room or garage.

Each artist who was interviewed, Ann Conte, Michelle Soares, and Karen Cass, each have studio space that they work in, and agree that having a specific, separate studio space is crucial. I have known for many years that I needed a space to work out of. Before I was married, I’d always had a space of my own; in different homes and apartments I either had a room or entire attic to myself for use as a studio. Since getting married and living with my husband, that has been impossible. We don’t have the extra space and could not afford to rent a studio. As a graduate student in the Critical & Creative Thinking Program (CCT) at Umass Boston, I have spent time during various courses reflecting on my need for artistic development. In 2011, in the *Creative Thinking* course, I realized that one thing blocking my creative output was my lack of



A corner of my new studio space, 2012

proper studio space. Later, in another CCT course called *Reflective Practice*, I set a goal for myself to find a studio space and pay rent if necessary, because I knew the lack of proper space was a hindrance. In May of 2012, I finally established a studio for myself, with some much-needed help from my husband. While he searched for a new office space to rent for his law practice, he looked at rentals with additional space for me to utilize. At the end of April, he moved his law office into a four-room space, allowing me to have one room for my art studio. This room will be set up as a studio for me to work in, and a classroom where I can instruct my private students and small classes.

I knew for many years that the right type of space was necessary for me to thrive as a practicing artist, but it wasn't until the *Reflective Practice* course that I was able to make my need a priority. Knowing how crucial space is for other artists validated my thinking and it made it easier for me to ask for what I needed.

### Third & Fourth Lessons: Artists Need to Share their Work, Artists also Need Feedback

Exhibiting artwork and sharing it with a public audience is a typical part of many artists' lives. For some artists, exhibiting work is necessary to earn the right to call oneself an artist. For others, exhibiting work is crucial; it can lead to sales, gallery representation, and exposure to wider audiences.

It's supposed to be about *doing* the work, that's where you get the satisfaction. But showing reinforces what you're doing, and you need to have feedback. For example, at a show, people will tell me they like something... or sometimes you get rejected.... To have other people see the work is helpful, it reinforces that you are moving in the right direction (Ann Conte, interview, 2012).



*Woven Car*  
by Ann Conte and Jeanne Wiley, 2011

For some artists, an exhibition opportunity is viewed as a way to gain necessary feedback about their work. Many artists admit, however, that they rarely receive critical feedback about their work from viewers or peers. They describe an indirect process through which they get a sense of what work is successful. For example, artist Ann Conte describes the process of applying for juried shows and

being rejected as a way of learning about her work. She explains that when her work gets rejected, it gives her the sense that she needs to move in a different direction. But if artists depend on this type of indirect feedback, it seems that they might never get a legitimate piece of criticism. When artists are rejected from juried shows, they are not given a reason why. And most juried shows are judged by one person, or at most a small panel of a few. It could be that artists like Ann Conte are making major decisions about the direction of their work based on rejection from a handful of judges.

Participating in art shows was a way for me to connect with other artists. I was always nervous about people looking at and judging my work, and had no interest in selling most of the work I created. But the opportunity to meet other artists and talk with them was priceless. Over the past few years, I have participated in more art exhibits, either as an artist or a viewer, in order to connect with other artists. It has been a great way to stay connected with other artists, or to make connections with people I've never met. Other artists also describe the need to connect. Artist Michelle Soares struggles with showing her work in a traditional gallery setting, but has found other ways of getting her work out to the world and making connections:

I have the kind of personality where I get anxiety, so actually showing my work is the most difficult thing out of the whole process. You put yourself out there, it's like real life! I have to be there- every art show has been completely different. You meet people that either love it, or they don't get it... It's a challenge for me to put myself out there. I am kind of shy, and I'm nervous all the time. For me, the online world- Facebook and etsy.com- was the best thing that ever happened. Because now I can sell my work online; I communicate better through email, I don't need to do anything face-to-face. I meet other artists and connect with them; I've sold my work to people in other countries, like Australia- how cool is that? The internet is just perfect for me; I can meet other artists, and I don't have to worry about my anxiety (Soares interview, 2012).



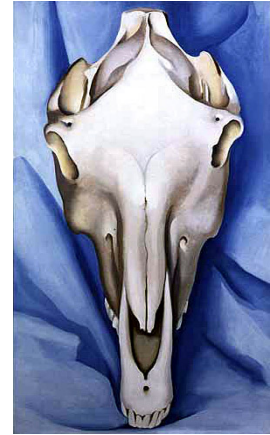
*All at Once*  
Michelle Soares, 2010

Michelle expresses a need to connect with other artists, and has found a way that works for her. For others, exhibiting work can be a loathsome process. There are all sorts of fears associated with the creative process; one of the most intimidating parts of the process is exposure. I certainly have fears around feeling exposed, and Michelle Soares experiences anxiety around this as well. Often, there is a sense of vulnerability when sharing artwork with others. It can be



particularly intimidating to share work with strangers who are unaware of the artist's creative process or background. Some artists only show their work because it is expected of them:

I've spent a great deal of time and energy this year on two exhibitions, packing, shipping, writing letters, supervising. Can you imagine what it's like to pack and ship an exhibition from a tiny remote New Mexican town? I have to do most of it myself. I say to myself that I'm not going to have any more shows; I've had enough. They interrupt my work. For most a show is a joy; for me it's a bore, a headache, and it's the kind of work an artist shouldn't be doing... (Georgia O'Keefe in Kuh, 1998).



*Horse's Skull on Blue*  
Georgia O'Keefe, 1930

Georgia O'Keefe, a very popular American artist, explains that exhibiting is a process that actually gets in the way of her work. But she did participate in shows, which helps to evidence the notion that artists need to share their work. Other important American artists have expressed struggles with sharing their work:



*The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*  
by Ben Shahn, 1931-32

I was so unsure of the reception my...paintings would receive from my contemporaries that during the whole time I worked on them and for half a year afterward I refused to show any of them to a soul. I simply didn't want to be shaken in what I was doing, (Ben Shahn in Kuh, 1998).

For most, showing artwork in some type of public setting seems to be an important factor in their roles as artists. Exhibiting work is

described as an ideal way for artists to market themselves and let others

know that they are working artists. "They see my work, that's how they know I'm an artist, or they ask me... I show my work at a local gallery, and I enter about six shows a year, and we have open studios..." (Ann Conte interview, 2012). Artist Ann Conte feels that exhibiting work is the best way for others to identify her as an artist. Artist Karen Cass agrees:

...getting a website out there has been important, and getting my work out more, having more shows, taking as many opportunities as I can to show my work and get it out there. All of these things



*Purple Passage*  
Karen Cass, 2011

combined together have helped people come to identify me as an artist. I'm involved, and I'm getting my business going in a small grassroots way, and it spreads like crazy. There's a big ripple effect. It's an amazing thing, (Karen Cass interview, 2012).

Artists seem to agree that showing work enables them to market themselves as artists; it is the best way for others to learn that they are working artists. But many artists find it challenging to receive critical feedback about their work. Artists agree that feedback is crucial but hard to come by. "Reflecting with others helps us become more aware of our work, stimulating new ideas... When we listen to the perspectives of others and offer our own perspectives we have the opportunity to broaden the conversation about art... (Silverman, 2008). Some artists describe working in solitude, despite the fact that many seek out communities where they can connect with other artists. Even with peers to bounce ideas off of, it can be challenging to get critical feedback. Here, artist Dean Nimmer shares the perspective of others:



*Secret 11*  
by Dean Nimmer, 1997

As we all know, it is often difficult to see our own work objectively, and there are times when our perspective on our art could benefit from the fresh viewpoints of others. One of the biggest problems for many artists is that they don't have access to people who can offer criticism and advice or act as a sounding board for new ideas, (Nimmer, 2008).

One possible reason that artists struggle to gain critical feedback is that they often work alone. "I think being an artist means being alone with yourself... Artists are kind of loners. That's when you're really doing the work, that's where it comes from- it's just you. I enjoy being alone when I'm working," (Ann Conte, interview, 2012). Artist Michelle Soares describes herself as a hermit, and rarely spends time with other artists (interview, 2012).

As other artists have described, having one's work accepted into a show or sold can be very gratifying. It is an indirect means of receiving positive feedback. For me, though, that type of feedback is too vague and indirect. Many artists discuss the fact that it is difficult to receive critical feedback; it seems to me that rejection from a juried show is not exactly *critical feedback*.

While examining my development as an artist, and working to build my own sense of artistic identity, I chose to create a series of paintings for exhibit at UMass Boston (Appendix D). Taking the



Untitled, mixed-media by  
Ann Conte, 2011

risk of sharing my work with a public audience would not be worth it if there's no opportunity for feedback. Designing a method of gathering feedback from viewers was a simple yet crucial part of the planning of my exhibit, *Lineage*. Other artists describe the process of receiving feedback

about their work as somewhat superficial: "At an open studio, or a show, people will tell you they like something..." but not much else (Ann Conte, 2012). During opening receptions, artists rarely hear negative or critical feedback about their work.

...every art show has been completely different. You meet people that either love it, or they don't get it. You overhear stuff, and see people's reactions... for me I say to myself "I don't *need* to do this." It's hurtful sometimes, because you put yourself out there and you just don't know what people are going to think, (Michelle Soares interview, 2012).

If viewers don't have fantastic things to say to an artist's face, they usually don't say anything. So for my solo show, *Lineage*, I've designed a method through which I hope to receive honest feedback about my work. Selected paintings will have a ballot-type box hung to the right of the painting. [Appendix A] There will be small pencils and feedback slips available for viewers to write in their responses [Appendix B]. Of course this opens up the possibility of people writing obnoxious, sarcastic, or insincere pieces of feedback. The assumption is that the ingenuous feedback will be easily differentiated from the genuine remarks. Any feedback is better than no feedback, and each piece of written feedback will represent a moment during which the viewer (hopefully) paid attention to a piece of my artwork.

### Fifth Lesson: Artists are Expected to Verbalize Their Intentions

Writing artists' statements is often necessary when exhibiting artwork. Although many artists dread writing them, most agree that they are important and helpful to their creative process.

I have had to write artists' statements and I find it very difficult. I try to keep it simple.... focus on the thought process and where an idea comes from, simple and to the point. How I make art, and why. But they can be helpful and important; they have helped me articulate my own thought process for myself, (Ann Conte interview, 2012).

A statement can be written in order to inform the viewer of artistic intentions, thought processes, or background information, among other things. It can be an opportunity for an artist to share information not provided by the artwork. Writing artists statements can also be a source of fear for some artists. The process of writing statements about themselves or their work is secondary to most artists; however, the impact of artists' statements is well understood:

It seems to me, if only from the experience of being an artist myself, that the events that require us to verbally articulate our intentions, methods, processes and possible achievements are often extremely useful to us. As artists we are often called to make a public account of our work in lectures, interviews, written statements etc. and these events are commonly feared and occasionally avoided. I believe this is because artists are aware of the potentially powerful impact they can have on their practice. How we voice what, why and how we do what we do has a fundamental role in formulating what we continue to do. In the narratives we form around our practice and in the stories we make, we make ourselves and begin to map our future production. How artists articulate and present their work or make sense of their process does not only impact directly on the artworks themselves but also affects their continuing sense of artistic identity (Fortnum, 2008).

Most artists agree that writing about their work is important, but some dislike the process because of how it can impact their identities as artists. The way an artist describes his or her work can influence the way a viewer sees the work, and can also influence the way the viewer thinks of the artist.

Typically, artists are expected to provide statements in two different circumstances. When applying for participation in a group show, for example, an artist may be asked to provide a statement about themselves and their work- something general. When an artist creates a body of work, or a series, a statement is expected to supplement the work. It is rare that an artist would write or provide a written statement referencing a single piece of art.

A written statement (Appendix C) was written as a supplement to my solo art exhibit and includes a bit of general information about my work as an artist, as well as specific insights into my motivation to create the series *Lineage* (Appendix D). Like other artists, I feared the idea that the written statement could impact the way viewers experience the artwork, but tried to look at the process of writing the statement as an opportunity to shape the way viewers see the artwork. By provided some context for the viewer, I hoped it would assist them in looking at, appreciating, or understanding the works, while leaving room for a subjective experience.

Many artists scoff at the expectation of written artists' statements. Some develop ways to describe their work or intentions in as few words as possible. Here, artist Stuart Davis (1892-1964) responds to an interviewer's question:

Question: *What do you most want to get across?*

Davis: *You're asking Socrates to answer the riddle of the Sphinx in three minutes. I'll try to answer it in less. What I'm trying to do is resolve my daily intuitive questions into a practical visual logic that will last through the night. And if it lasts through the night it will last forever, (Stuart Davis in Kuh, 1998).*



*Memo*  
by Stuart Davis, 1956



*CUBIVI*  
David Smith, 1963

American sculptor David Smith (1906-1965) suggests that artists have their own language, similar to those of literary giants:

Question: *Do you think of certain works as drawings in the round?*

Smith: *You use your words. I made the work. And about words – I think we artists all understand English grammar, but we have our own language in the very misuse of dictionary forms puts our meaning closer in context. I think we're all closer to Joyce... and Beckett than to Webster (David Smith, in Kuh, 1998).*

Whether artists want to write statements about their work, or enjoy the process, most agree that it is expected and often helpful. Avoiding the process, or scoffing at the process, or rejecting the process are ways that artists still make a statement- no matter how ambiguous or indirect- about themselves, their work, or their thinking. For me, the process of writing my artist's statement for *Lineage* (Appendix C) was challenging, mainly because it took a great deal of effort to say very little. I do see how the process of preparing statements can be informative for the artists themselves; for me, it was a secondary concern and did not add to my experience of creating the series. I hope that it will add something to the experiences of my viewers.

## **Visions (Reflections and Premonitions)**

It has been important for me to change the way I think about myself. For years, I thought of myself primarily as an art teacher; it felt awkward to refer to myself as an artist. I have always considered myself an artist, but never described myself that way to others. 'Art Teacher' is sort of self-explanatory, and I was always most comfortable with saying as little as possible about myself.

But after really examining what it means to be a public school art educator, I found myself rejecting that role, in a way. Recently, I discovered that no official or unofficial job description exists for my teaching position; consequently, I am redefining my role as an art teacher on my own terms. An elementary art teacher needs to expose students to a variety of methods and materials, teach students how to create using their imaginations and their observations, support them in taking risks and expressing themselves. The role of an elementary art teacher does not include supervising standardized testing or assessing the validity of math questions. The role of an art teacher does not include decorating private offices; it includes displaying student work for public view and teaching young artists how to make decisions about exhibiting their work. There are so many tasks I have spent time performing over the years, which are unrelated to my role as an art teacher, but I always said "yes." I was a "yes" person. Now I am a silent "no" person.

Over the past three years at work, I have simply stopped participating in tasks and activities that I feel do not apply to my role as art teacher. It has been a consequence-free experience and I have learned that I *can* define my role as an art teacher because no one else really has. For many years I felt stuck, controlled by my principals' expectations. The principal I'd worked with for seven years reacted in anger if I (or anyone) did not meet her typically absurd expectations; however, there were no disciplinary consequences. I feared her wrath as I had feared the wrath of my parents when I was a child. After some serious self-inspection, I realized there was no reason to try and make her happy. Being responsible for her happiness was never one of my job responsibilities. Now, it is more important for me to do my job well than to fear wrath from a principal. I don't actually work for the principal, anyway. I work for the public, and for my students.

Knowing my constituency fills me with a confidence I didn't have during the majority of my career as a teacher. I understand now that I work for my students, and their best interests are what I have in mind. Their parents are paying my salary, and their futures really are in my hands (among others). What they learn and experience in my class could affect the way they think and view the world, and I am the only art "expert" most of them will have contact with during five very important years of their young lives. So I am not leaving their art educations in the hands of some very unknowledgeable school administrators. I am the expert in my field and I will make the best possible decisions for my students. Parents have been my greatest allies. In my school district, parents' voices are often heard more than teachers' so having them on my side is beneficial.

To be an expert in my field, I need to be a practicing artist. I have always felt this way about teaching art. Most art educators I have known feel the same way; we practice what we preach. We are some of the only K-12 educators who actually work within the field we teach. So my role as an art teacher will forever be connected with my role as a practicing artist. I now see the two roles as connected but separate. It is not crucial for me to teach art in order to be a practicing artist; it *is* necessary that I practice as an artist in order to be a successful art educator. At this point, my role as an artist absolutely needs to be a priority in order for me to fulfill my role as art educator, and to fulfill my potential as a contributing member of society.

For a long time I didn't feel as if my artwork was something important to contribute to society, but now I feel differently. Part of my increasing comfort level is connected to how I see my role as an artist. For me, being an artist means being an active part of a community- a community of artists but also a contributing member of society as a whole. Years ago, when I was so overly focused on my teaching job, I had almost no connection with other artists. Now, knowing other artists who experience fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and rejection provides me with a bit of security. There are people I can relate to and people I can commiserate with. Best of all, there are people with whom I share values and interests. Those people can provide me with critical feedback, honest opinions, and empathy. The more I spend time with and talk with other artists, the more aware I've become of my fear of rejection. But dealing with rejection is something all artists face, like it or not, and is part of the

practice. I have become more aware of my fear but also more comfortable with it, and that is due to my strengthening connections with other artists. During my final elective CCT course in the fall of 2011, *Reflective Practice*, I shared the following revelation as part of an assignment:

And as an artist, I know now that connecting with other artists provides support and opportunities for artistic growth. ...I am much more aware of how my connections with others impact my growth and development, as well as my overall happiness. I really credit the CCT program with enforcing the value in connecting with others. I have learned so much from other students and professors, and my comfort level with others has increased to the point where I almost feel like a different person (2011).

Closely examining my role as an art teacher, and my actions as an art teacher, has also contributed to my increasing comfort level. Through self-confrontation, I realized I do not always practice what I preach. It is important for me to encourage students to share their artwork with others. I help them to develop as unique individuals, and gently push them to take risks. How can I ask my students to put themselves out there if I do not do the same?

Each year, I watch my young students fearlessly display artwork that they feel strongly about. In 2010, I recall exhibiting a piece of artwork that I was slightly uncomfortable with sharing. Thinking about myself as a role model for my students gave me a boost of confidence. I do see myself as a role model. For some of my young students, I am the only 'real' artist they know; I do not want to disappoint them through hypocrisy.



*Peacock*, detail, 2010

'Artist-Teacher' or 'Teaching Artist' are the terms used in much of the literature on the subject, and seem to be better titles than 'art teacher'. I do not only teach others about art, I make art and study art; I am an artist first and a teacher second. There is a strong connection between me and what I teach, because it is a major part of my life, how I think and act. During another assignment for the *Reflective Practice* course, I really began to decipher what it means for me to live life as an artist. Here is an excerpt from a reflective paper written as part of a course assignment:

For years, I have felt a void and I know now that my workplace is missing a sense of community. There are committees, and teams, and departments, but there is no community at all. When Luanne used the phrase "find your tribe" it hit



home for me because that is *exactly* what I have struggled with, and listening to others refer to that as something valuable was reassuring and inspiring. For too long, I sought out that community membership in my workplace; however, it doesn't exist now and never has (2011).

The work I did during Reflective Practice informed my ideas for the current work, my final synthesis project. At the time I wasn't formally addressing the concept of artistic identity, but that is essentially what I was dealing with. I can see now that most of the work I have done in the CCT program has led me to this point. I started the program with very little interest in myself as a subject. As I prepare to leave the program, I look back at more than a year's worth of time and energy that I have spent focused on my own growth and development as a practicing artist.

My series of paintings, *Lineage* (Appendix D), was particularly scary for me to share with an audience. The subject of this series is very personal in nature; consequently I felt exposed and vulnerable at the thought of exhibiting the work. Once the work was actually hung up on the gallery walls, the scariness started to disappear. A little bit of pride crept in. The most valuable type of feedback I have received in regards to my solo show has been a shared feeling of accomplishment. Some very close friends and family have expressed pride and praise- mainly for putting in so much effort and actually having something to show for it. The subject matter of the series had nothing to do with their feelings; they are expressing pride in my overall accomplishment. A close non-artist friend, who is very familiar with the subject matter, stated "I think you're very brave. I could never create something based on such a personal experience, and then put it out there for everyone to look at!" I often expect my students to consider 'bravery' in terms of taking risks as artists, but don't apply the same expectation to myself. Twisting my perspective in a positive direction helps build my confidence. And accepting a shared sense of pride or congratulations from other adults feels unfamiliar yet good. In my job as an art teacher, I rarely if ever experience a shared sense of pride or accomplishment with peers, because I am always working alone. Any accomplishments are small and



*Detail of Ancestry*  
Mixed-media on canvas  
2012

quiet, usually private; I don't have a choice because there is no one to share with. This is public and extensive. This very large sense of accomplishment is something that I can imagine gets addictive. It feels really good to feel really good about what I've done.

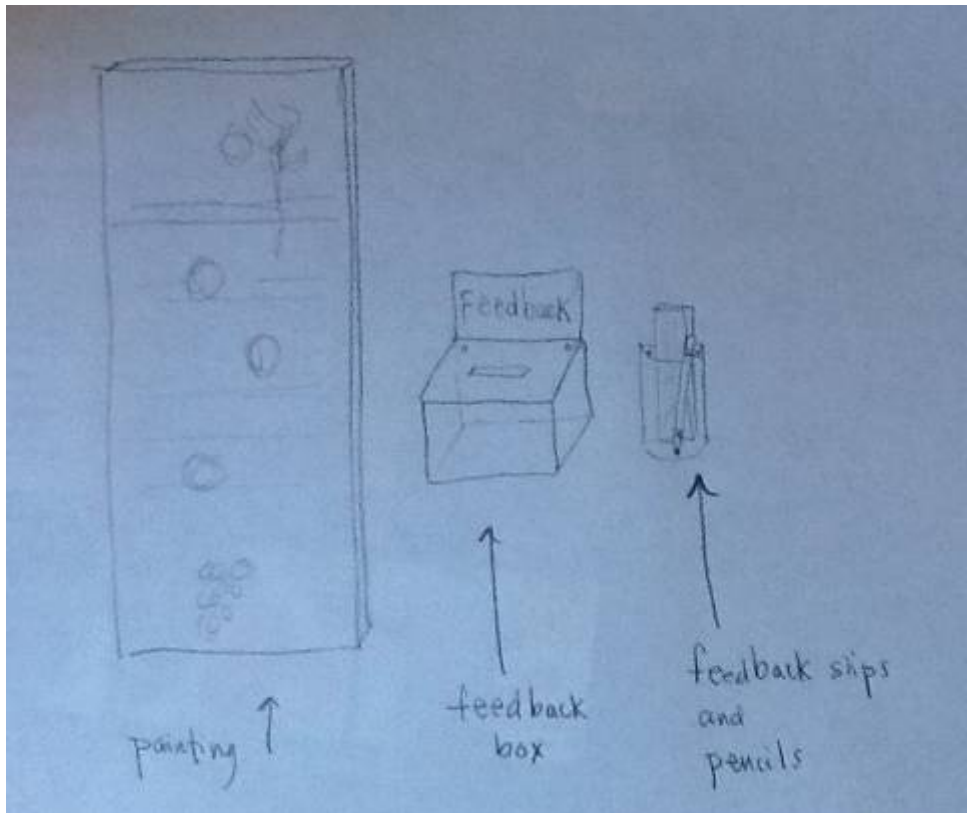
It also helps to take a step back and consider my *process*. I worked very hard on this series for many months, and I can celebrate my risk-taking, personal expression, and development of a cohesive body of work. In order to grow as an artist, I *want* to be able to respond to critical feedback, and to differentiate between constructive feedback and negative opinions. At this point, I think my desire to grow as an artist is overshadowing most of my fears. Personality is something that is hard to grow out of, though, and I believe some of my deep-rooted insecurities will always be present. I predict that I will always need to be connected to other artists. Having a support system in place will always serve me well as a practicing artist. In order to maintain and build connections with other artist, I will have to make a very conscious effort.

Creating artwork, regularly, will not be a difficult practice to maintain. Connecting with other artists will not be hard to do, but will require sustained effort. I have my studio now, which will make it easier to work and to share. It's a lot easier to share work publicly when I have control over the space, the schedule, and the requirements! The biggest challenge, moving forward, will be adjusting the way I think about my role as an art teacher to make room in my life for my increased practice as a working artist. For years, I gave up my development as an artist in order to teach. Now, it is time for me to focus my energy on my practice as an artist, and let my teaching take a bit of a backseat. I have dedicated the past ten years to becoming a skilled, confident, successful teacher. Building my artistic identity and practice deserve at least a fraction of a decade. I am only beginning to know what it means for me to live my life as an artist. Building my artistic identity will take time, but I feel I am off to a running start. I see no reason to slow down.

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Appendix A  
Rendering of the Feedback Box:



Directions attached to the feedback box:

Thank you for viewing the artwork. Please take a moment to provide the artist with your feedback. This will help the artist understand how others respond to her work. Use the comment sheets provided. Fold your slip and leave it in this box.

Your participation is appreciated.

Appendix B  
Sample Feedback Slip

One question I have about this painting is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

additional comments:

# *Lineage*

2012

Painting is a very personal practice that allows me to examine thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the hopes of achieving understanding. Similar to meditation, the process of creating often results in heightened self-awareness and a sense of calm; however, the creative process can also be unpredictable.

I am fascinated with the basic elements of line, shape, and color. Through these elements I strive to create works that are both understandable and mysterious, for my self as well as the viewer. Not all questions can be answered immediately, if ever.

*Lineage* is a series of work concerned with beginnings. I am considering how things are born- people, families, ideas, creatures big and small. Through posing questions about connections, relationships, and heritage, I wonder whether connections to the past should be emphasized less than potential futures.

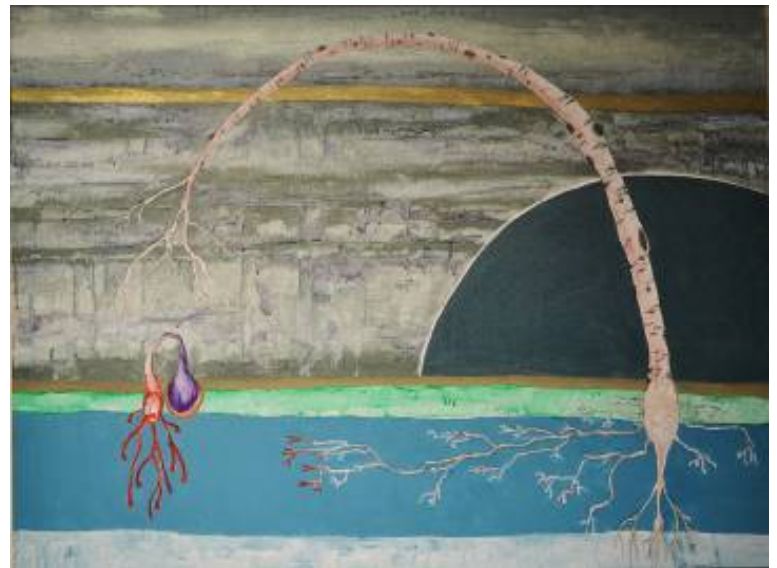
As a graduate degree candidate in the Critical & Creative Thinking Program here at UMass Boston, this series of work is a part of my graduate synthesis project. As I progress in developing my identity as a visual artist, creating the series *Lineage* allowed me to question and improve my practice.

*Alison Palmucci*

Appendix D  
Catalog for *Lineage*, 2012



*Ancestry*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Parent*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Gestation*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Siblings*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Conception*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Oviparous*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Heritage*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012



*Ghosts*  
mixed media on canvas  
2012