

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Art and Design Theses

Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design

Summer 8-11-2011

A Journey towards Healing through Art

Melanie J. Sgrignoli
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation

Sgrignoli, Melanie J., "A Journey towards Healing through Art." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2011.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/2096757>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING THROUGH ART

by

MELANIE SGRIGNOLI

Under the Direction of Melody Milbrandt

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to answer: How may I, as an artist, use art for my own transformation and healing? I am an artist and teacher living with chronic pain and fatigue and wanted to find healing through art and inspire others to do the same. During the three month study, I made artwork, reflected in my journal, and practiced guided imagery. The journal was used to reflect on my health, the creative process, and to record ideas generated through guided imagery. Findings showed that short term relief was provided during the act of creation, but no long-term relief was achieved. The primary conclusion was that I was able to use art for healing and transformation, but only after experimentation and reflection. By adapting the creative process to accommodate for my illness, I was able to include art making as part of a healthy life.

Index Words: Art therapy, Chronic pain, Fatigue, Fibromyalgia, Guided imagery, Meditation

A JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING THROUGH ART

by

MELANIE SGRIGNOLI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of

Master of Art Education

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

Copyright by
Melanie Sgrignoli
2011

A JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING THROUGH ART

by

MELANIE SGRIGNOLI

Committee Chair: Dr. Melody Milbrandt

Committee: Dr. Kevin Hsieh

Dr. Melanie Davenport

Mark Burleson

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2011

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter I. Introduction	1
Purpose of Study	2
Review of Literature.....	2
Chapter II. Methodology.....	8
Method of Study.....	8
Definition of Key Terms.....	8
Art Therapy Techniques.....	9
Journal Reflection.....	10
Art Production as Research Methodology.....	12
Limitations of Study.....	13
Chapter III. Development, Interpretation, and Reflection of Works.....	15
Description of Works.....	15
Masks.....	15
Gifts.....	18
Meditative Drawing Scroll.....	22
Milagros.....	24
Mixed Media Painting.....	27
Photographic Drawings.....	30
Reflections on the Artistic Process.....	33
Meditation and Guided Imagery.....	34
Creativity and Imagination.....	37
Technology.....	38
Physical Health.....	39

Mental Health.....	44
Raising Awareness.....	45
Chapter IV. Implementation and Educational Practice.....	49
Visual Verbal Journal.....	49
Guided Imagery and Imagination.....	52
Art as Therapy in the Classroom.....	54
Classroom Environment and Working Adaptations.....	55
Chapter V. Conclusion and Recommendation.....	59
Summary.....	59
Conclusions.....	59
Recommendations.....	61
References.....	63

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Daily Journal Entry Example.....	11
Figure 2.2 Meditative Drawing Example from Journal.....	13
Figure 3.1 Initial Mask Installation Layout.....	16
Figure 3.2 Untitled (Masks).....	17
Figure 3.3 Untitled (Masks) Detail.....	18
Figure 3.4 Detail of Small Press-Mold Face Offerings.....	20
Figure 3.5 Needle and Thread Offering Sketch.....	21
Figure 3.6 "Gifts".....	22
Figure 3.7 Untitled (Meditative Drawing Scroll).....	23
Figure 3.8 Detail of Drawing Scroll.....	24
Figure 3.9 Detail of Nerve Receptor, Back, and Mantra Drawing.....	25
Figure 3.10 Detail of Punched Tin and Sewn Thread.....	26
Figure 3.11 "Milagros".....	26
Figure 3.12 Detail of Mixed Media Painting.....	28
Figure 3.13 Untitled (Healing Painting)).....	29
Figure 3.14 Photographic Drawing Example.....	30

Figure 3.15 Sewn Photo Strip Example.....	31
Figure 3.16 Untitled (Body Drawings).....	32
Figure 3.17 Journal Reflections.....	34
Figure 3.18 Idea Map on Awareness from Journal.....	47
Figure 4.1 Student Rubric for Final VVJ Project.....	50

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I have been living with pain, fatigue and discomfort as part of my daily life for fourteen years now. After going from doctor to doctor, searching for clues and explanations, I was finally diagnosed with fibromyalgia three years ago. Although having a diagnosis to validate my complaints gave some small relief, every day is a battle to push through the pain and fatigue in order to live a normal life that includes work, relationships, and leisure.

I have also been a highly creative person my entire life, always searching to create something from what's around me and seeking the satisfaction of problem solving through a process to get to the final product. Since I began living with pain and fatigue, I have found that every year it becomes more difficult to find the time, energy, and creativity necessary to create. As of recently, it has been extremely difficult to balance my career as a middle school art teacher, which would probably exhaust any healthy individual, my graduate coursework, and my creative life, not to mention all other aspects of my life. I am typically so exhausted that even the thought of drawing or sculpting makes me more tired!

When I began contemplating my area of thesis research, I knew that I wanted to push myself to create again, to have the satisfaction of working through a process from beginning to end and observing the final product, but I also knew I had to find a way to muster up the time and energy to do so. I decided that my thesis research would be an introspective study, documenting a journey of attempted self-transformation and healing through and with art.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was twofold. The first purpose was self-serving, I wanted to feel better in general, in order to live a more fruitful and satisfying life, with art-making being a large part of my life again. Second, I wanted my research to inspire others to strive for health and healing through art, in hopes that art-making will serve as therapy for the artist, whether professional or student.

My review of relevant literature uncovered very little prior documentation of an artist using art for self-transformation and healing. For this reason, I felt that I was embarking on a journey never before taken, or never before documented, and charting new waters to find the possibilities and limitations of self- art therapy, done on and by a trained artist, but untrained as an art therapist. The study investigates art therapy as self-therapy in order to answer the question: How may I, as an artist, use art for my own transformation and healing?

Review of Literature

As I began my research on art therapy, most case studies I came across focused on the benefits of art therapy for psychotherapy patients dealing with issues such as depression, trauma, and loss. Art therapy has proven to be helpful in psychotherapy, but I wondered if it could be useful in medical therapy? In this study my intent was to research the benefits of art in dealing with chronic pain, defined by Pavlek (2007) as a “complex mind-body phenomenon that simultaneously affects a person’s physical, mental, social, and emotional functioning” (p.1). I hoped to also find documentation on the benefits of art therapy in medical situations to deal with anxiety, pain, fatigue, and stress.

Medical art therapy is defined as “the use of art expression and imagery with individuals who are physically ill, experiencing trauma to the body, or who are undergoing aggressive

medical treatment such as surgery or chemotherapy” (Malchiodi, 1993, p.3). Malchiodi defines the first documented use of medical art therapy to have taken place in 1945 when Adrian Hill conducted art therapy with hospitalized tuberculosis patients and documented improvements in their conditions. Since then, due to increased interest in mind and body connections, medical art therapy has continued to emerge as a tool for diagnosing and treating sick individuals. Medical art therapy does not use art for explicit healing, but explores the mind body connection to determine that if a patient feels better mentally, he will show improvements in physical health and quality of life. According to Graham (1993) in Malchiodi, healing does not mean curing the body, but instead refers to “becoming whole physically and psychologically” (p. 8). As this definition of healing becomes more widely accepted, more medical art therapy programs are being implemented in order to test the benefits of using art therapy, typically considered psychological healing, to promote physical healing.

DeTommaso’s (2008) study on the effects of art on pain in a hospital setting, showed that patients who were asked to contemplate a beautiful painting, as opposed to an ugly painting, or a blank panel, while being administered short pain-inducing laser pulses described their pain levels to be a third lower while viewing the beautiful artwork rather than the ugly one or the blank panel.

Another study involving a clinical trial of art therapy with chemotherapy cancer patients, sought to lower the patients’ anxiety, depression, and fatigue, in order to have a better quality of life during treatment. The program used water-based media with trained art therapists guiding the creative process and asking questions throughout, and patients showed a reduction in depression and fatigue, although not necessarily anxiety (Atid, Bar-Sela, Danos, Epelbaum, and Gabay, 2007).

Barker (2006) quotes McNiff, past president of the American Art Therapy Association, explaining that medical art therapy works because, “Expressing what you can’t or don’t want to talk about through painting or sculpture opens new windows and helps you get to the core of what’s going on.” (p. 98) She also cites a study done by Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia that found that among female cancer patients, those who sculpted and sketched had lower levels of pain, insomnia and stress, and another study by Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago that found that after four months of art therapy, a group of fifty cancer patients experienced less drowsiness, pain, and lack of appetite.

Following the idea of learning to act in a conscious way and exploring the mind/body connection, authors Birnie, Carlson, Hutchins, Labelle, and Marion (2009) researched mindfulness-based interventions in a hospital oncology setting with cancer patients. They provided guided group sessions of mindfulness meditation, which guides the patient towards being more aware of internal and external experience, and also encouraged daily independent mindfulness meditation. The results showed increased restful sleep, lower levels of fatigue and lower levels of distress in patients after the intervention as compared with pre-trial results. More importantly, patients who had participated in the study continued to show improvement in the follow-up study done a year after intervention.

Rockwood Lane (2005) advocates for increased availability of art materials and art therapy programs in hospitals. She believes that creativity leads to healing by changing a person’s physiology and attitude from one of stress to one of relaxation, thus encouraging health. She describes how some nurses keep art materials on their floor for patients to use, and that although nurses are not trained art therapists, that they can learn more about the patient’s thoughts and experiences simply by asking questions about the artwork created. Rockwood Lane

also suggests having hospitals bring in artists to conduct workshops with patients, and to create “views” within the hospital or areas of art where murals are created or patient work is displayed. Florence Nightingale in *Notes on Nursing* is quoted by Rockwood Lane (2005) as being a nurse advocate for creating healing environments by saying that “What nursing has to do is put the patient in the best condition for nature to act upon him,” and according to research, that condition is one of peace, relaxation, and beauty, which can be achieved through and with art (Lane, 2005, p. 123).

Thus far all studies mentioned have focused on the use of art and art therapy for patients who do not necessarily consider themselves artists nor have any formal art training, and the therapy has been conducted by trained art therapists, or has been advocated by medical professionals; therefore, someone outside the patient is providing the resources for the patient to learn to heal him/herself. How does the process change when the artist is the patient seeking to heal him/herself through art?

Kellman (2005), an art therapist herself, describes the story of an HIV patient whom she had worked with in a hospital HIV/AIDS expressive arts group. The patient, although inspired to make art due to the influence of the art therapist and the group, was also a trained artist, having graduated from a well-known art school. This case study differs from others because although the man became reengaged with art through the expressive arts group, he then began making narrative artwork or “healing” artwork on his own that described the journey he had taken up to this point, and his journey forth with HIV. Kellman believes that it was the narrative quality of the work and the meaning-making inherent in the work that allowed the patient to overcome depression and reengage with the world, learning to live with his illness.

Another author chronicled the journey of Dr. K, an art education professor and artist battling chronic pain and fatigue due to CFIDS, Chronic Fatigue and Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and his struggle to learn to adapt his creative life (Wiener, 2000). The author, an art therapist, became interested in Dr. K's case, as there had been little documentation of an artist learning to heal with art. Through interviews, Dr. K described many of the changes that he had to make in order to adapt to art-making with his illness, such as creating a handicap accessible studio, accepting help through studio assistants with his work, and changing his routine to accommodate for tired, foggy, and fuzzy- thinking mornings.

Most interestingly however, Dr. K completely altered his way of thinking about and creating work in order to reap the most beneficial effects of the art-making process. His artistic process before the illness was to conceptualize and intellectualize art pieces before, during, and after creation. However, when creating art with CFIDs, he found it most beneficial to be spontaneous, and create art for art's sake. In fact, the author states that Dr. K thought that spontaneous creativity was healing his spirit, therefore, contributing to health (Wiener, 2000, p. 276).

The artist didn't want to paint his pain, preferring to use art as an escape, changing from his old process of extremely detailed wood cuts, to painting bright, spontaneous floral arrangements. Weiner (2000) references Sandblom (1996) to compare Dr. K's situation to that of the aging Matisse, who said "I can see that playing with color is something that I choose to do because it takes me past the pain" (Wiener, 2000, p. 280). Matisse too, created more colorful and more abstract works as he aged, changing his process from painting to cut paper collage. Dr. K's experience shows that it may be possible for the artist to use art to promote self- healing,

assuming he is willing to adapt his art just as he has had to adapt his life to accommodate for the illness (Wiener, 2000).

CHAPTER II.

METHODOLOGY

Method of Study

My goal in this thesis project was to create a body of work inspired by my journey towards healing, and in the process, learn how to create work that is both uplifting in theme and also beneficial to my mind and body in process. I hoped to answer my primary research question: How can my art be used for transformation and healing of myself as an artist?

Definition of Key Terms

Chronic Pain- a “complex mind-body phenomenon that simultaneously affects a person’s physical, mental, social, and emotional functioning” (Pavlek, 2007, p.1)

Fatigue- “Fatigue is extreme tiredness and an inability to perform everyday tasks with your usual amount of energy”. (WebMd, *Fatigue Directory*)

Fibromyalgia- A complex chronic pain disorder and central nervous system illness that affects people physically, mentally and socially, characterized by chronic widespread pain, multiple tender points, abnormal pain processing, sleep disturbances, fatigue and often psychological distress. (National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association, *About Fibromyalgia*)

Healing- “Becoming Whole physically and psychologically” (Graham in Malchiodi, 1993, p.8)

Guided Imagery- Refers to a wide variety of techniques where elements of the unconscious are invited to appear as images that can communicate with the conscious mind (Academy for Guided Imagery, *What is guided imagery?*)

Medical Art Therapy- “The use of art expression and imagery with individuals who are physically ill, experiencing trauma to the body, or who are undergoing aggressive medical treatment such as surgery or chemotherapy” (Malchiodi, 1993, p.3)

Meditation- the practice of focusing your attention to help you feel calm and give you a clear awareness about your life (Webmd, *Meditation Overview*)

Art Therapy Techniques

When I began planning my thesis research and studio work, I thought that my goal would be to raise awareness about chronic pain through working with a group of people also living with similar illnesses. However, as I continued to plan, I became increasingly more fatigued and ill due to the stress of working full time, commuting, and balancing graduate coursework. My thesis ideas started transforming as I began reading about guided imagery and meditation and became excited about using these methods to create my own journey towards healing.

Guided imagery consists in some forms of envisioning your pain as a concrete object and then envisioning the object or process that would eliminate the pain, in other forms as imagining your healing or peaceful place and focusing on being in that place, and still in other forms, as simply allowing the mind to wander and concentrating on the images produced in order to see what they could reveal (Dachman, 1990; Davenport, 2009). I decided that guided imagery could be a strong force in my own healing, and would lend itself entirely to creating artwork for healing, by drawing, sculpting, or painting the imagery and ideas that arise.

I also desired to find a way of creating daily, even if I lacked the time and energy to devote to working on an art piece. I recalled that as a child I would doodle, or create designs as I called them, for hours on end, typically just drawing spontaneously and intuitively in black and white with pencil or pen, enjoying and relaxing through the process and not allowing myself to be concerned with the final product. I decided that if I made an effort to return to this way of creating, as Dr. K had done in order to work through his illness, that possibly I could use such

doodles as an artistic meditation, allowing myself at least a few minutes daily to create and find peace in the creation.

Journal Reflection

The investigation was a qualitative self- study lasting three months, with daily journaling and art-making; however, the actual body of work began before and continued after the three month period. My process was documented through the body of work created, by daily meditative drawings, and by daily journaling.

Throughout the three months of my thesis research, I began practicing visualization and guided imagery meditations. Through the meditation sessions, I was able to achieve a more peaceful state of mind, a reduction in pain and fatigue, and to uncover my personal healing imagery.

I used my journal as a place to collect and preserve ideas and inspirations brought about by the process of meditation, guided imagery, and daily creation. The daily meditative drawings or doodles served as a working meditation, as I learned to draw for relaxation for at least a few minutes daily. I tried to fill a page during each meditative drawing session with spontaneous imagery and design. The journal was also used to narratively document my thoughts, feelings, and symptoms. I planned to be spontaneous and flexible with my materials, processes, and products, hoping to achieve the most healthful and therapeutic way of working possible, and recording the outcomes of such flexibility.

The consistent format that I used for my daily journal entry was as follows:

- Date of entry
- A few sentences or a paragraph on my health and well-being, both mental and physical, along with a listing of any symptoms throughout the day
- A few sentences or a paragraph reflecting upon visualization and guided imagery, artistic concerns, products or processes, and artistic materials and techniques
- Sketches of ideas and imagery that arose or meditative drawings

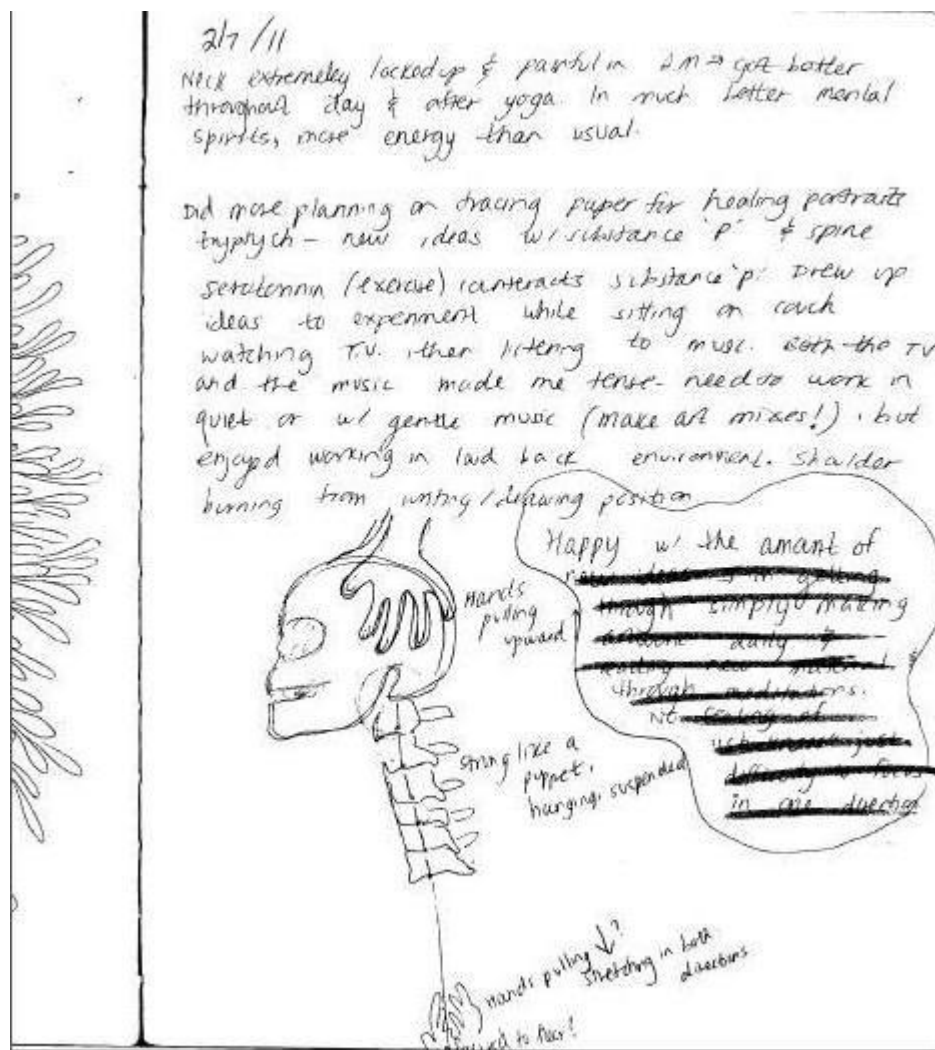


Figure 2.1 Daily Journal Entry Example

After the three month research period of practicing visualization and guided imagery, creating artwork daily, practicing meditative drawing, and recording and reflecting upon the process in my journal, I reviewed the journal for patterns of thoughts and ideas that revealed themselves to be beneficial for healing, as well as those that proved to exacerbate symptoms.

Art Production as Research Methodology

I first planned to sculpt exclusively in clay, as my artistic training and interest has been mainly in ceramics; however, ceramic work can be very taxing on the body and in the past, I had often found myself in more pain during and after sculpting than before. The same is true of painting, at least on large canvasses and panels. As I embarked on this journey, one that could possibly last my lifetime, but at least be documented for the length of my thesis study, I planned to be spontaneous and flexible with my materials, processes, and products, hoping to achieve the most healthful and therapeutic way of working possible. This could have meant that I continued to work in a similar fashion to what I have always done, creating medium to large size sculptures and paintings, as well as smaller doodle drawings, and adapting the process to make it less harmful and more healthful. It could also have meant finding entirely new materials and processes, and ways of thinking about my own work, allowing myself to be content with what I am able to make, rather than always striving to achieve larger quantities, sizes, and more masterful pieces.

As I hoped that the doodle drawings would have a meditative effect, or at least knew that they would cause little harm to my body, I planned to doodle or draw daily in order to achieve my goal of daily creation (see figure 2.2). Depending on the day and restraints due to time and energy, I wanted to allow the flexibility of drawing for only a few minutes or possibly for a more extended period.

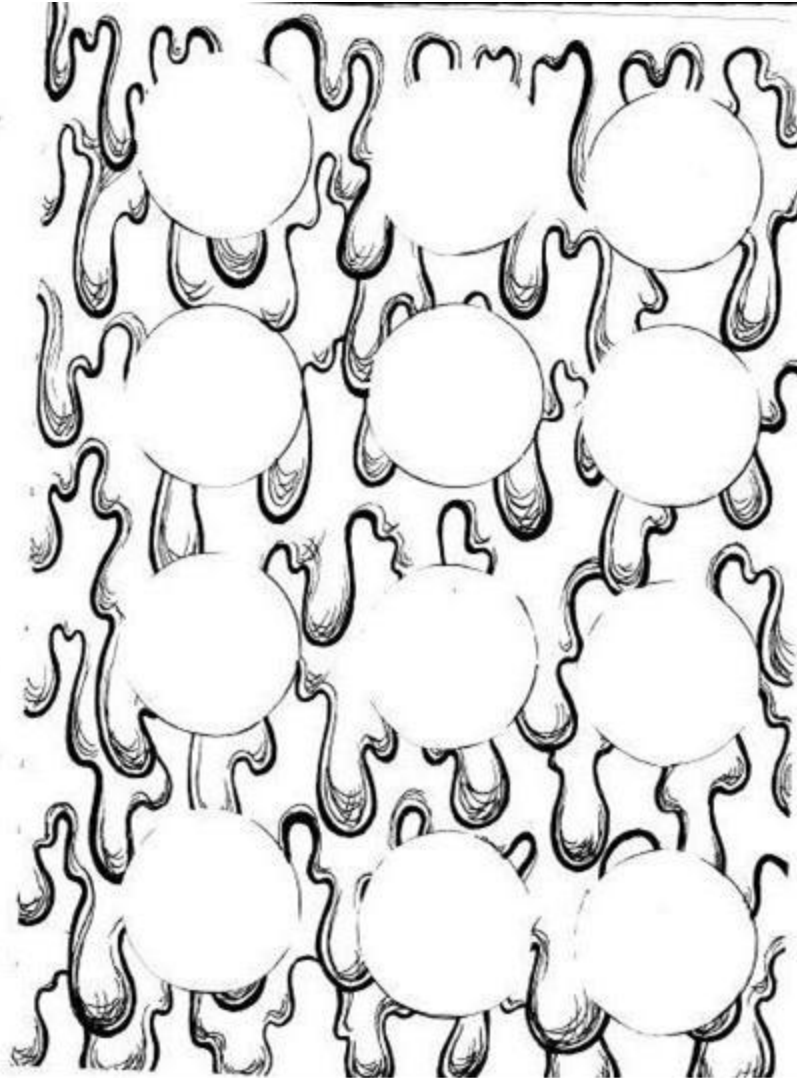


Figure 2.2 Meditative Drawing Example from Journal

I wanted also, to leave open the opportunity to create based on what inspired me during this journey towards healing, to allow my work to shift dramatically in style and content, and to flow in whichever direction led more towards healing than harm.

Limitations of the Study

Because my journey was a self-study, with myself being the only active researcher as well as participant, the findings are not generalizable to the general public or any special population. Although I experienced a reduction in pain and fatigue at least temporarily while

creating, as well as increased enjoyment in the creative process, it proves only that the techniques practiced were beneficial to me, not to any other persons. In order to generalize findings, a more conclusive study would need to be conducted to incorporate a larger number of participants as well as a control group. However, I hope that because the study resulted in a more healthful life for me, others experiencing similar problems or symptoms may be inspired to investigate their own journey towards healing.

CHAPTER III.

DEVELOPMENT, INTERPRETATION, AND REFLECTION OF WORKS

Description of Works

I began my three month study of daily art-making with careful planning and sketching in my journal, wanting to make sure that I had all my ideas in line before commencing. However, my ideas began flowing more freely once I started art production, allowing for flexibility of idea and material. Just as Dr. K had experienced when learning to make artwork while living with a chronic pain and fatigue condition, I found it beneficial to work more spontaneously, allowing for the artwork to be created and to find ideas and connections either mid-creation or post-creation (Wiener, 2000). The result was a body of work created through the layering of images and ideas related to body, mind, and health, using disparate art materials, yet finding aesthetic connections between the various elements. I will explain the resulting works chronologically, although there was a large amount of overlap while working on more than one piece at a time.

Masks.

My mask installation was the first of two ceramic installations that I planned and executed. I sculpted about 50 masks from clay, varied in size from about three to six inches. Each mask differs in emotion and symbolic colors were chosen to treat the surfaces in order to portray the feeling of the faces more deeply.

My goal in creating the masks was to visually represent the various emotions that a person living with chronic pain and fatigue goes through in a day. When living with pain and fatigue, it is often necessary to feign that everything is fine, outwardly projecting a happy, peaceful person, but inwardly feeling that you are being torn apart. The masks represented the struggle for peace and happiness while pushing through the obstacles of pain and fatigue.

I began the piece by planning and sketching the installation arrangement of the masks. I had desired to sculpt one mask that represented the utmost peace and happiness, having it stand out from the rest by its facial expression as well as metallic glaze. This mask would have been placed at the center of the installation, with all the others spiraled outward from it in a circular arrangement. I then planned to connect the masks with either string or a dotted drawing on the wall to create a spider web effect, showing that all the emotions are connected and ever-changing (see Figure 3.1 below).

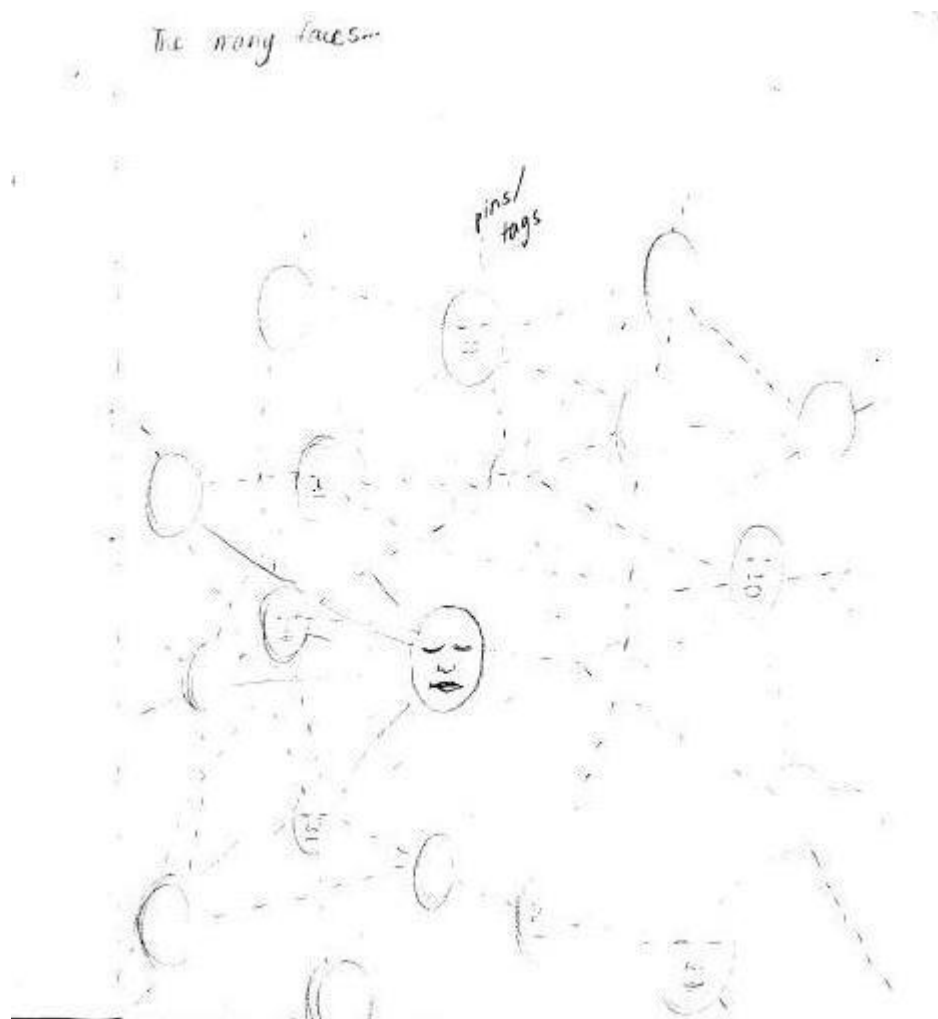


Figure 3.1 Initial Mask Installation Layout

After some experimentation with this installation idea, I felt that arrangement and connections between the masks proved to be distracting from the detailed emotions in the faces. I also felt

that the masks would better connect to my journey towards healing when displayed in a more linear fashion depicting the various emotions one goes through when on a journey. I did not however want the masks to be displayed in a straight line, as every person journeys through life not in a straight line, but with ups, downs, and the occasional veering from the expected path. Towards the end of the creation of the masks, I had also begun working on other pieces involving body imagery such as blood vessels, nerves, and neurons. Many of these body images include interesting lines of movement and paths throughout the body, and I wanted to use these paths as a link to connect the art pieces of my journey. The result is that I plan to exhibit 44 of the 50 masks in an organic line that splits off in different directions, referencing paths of movement within the body and through life.



Figure 3.2 Untitled (Masks) by Melanie Sgrignoli, ceramic, installation 36" x 120"



Figure 3.3.Untitled (Masks) Detail

Gifts.

My “Gifts” was the second piece I began planning and sculpting during my journey, and also the second of the ceramic installation works. Before planning this piece, I had been studying and was able to view in person, Felix Gonzalez Torres’ *Portrait of Ross*, an interactive piece in which the artist used 175 pounds of candy to represent the ideal weight of his deceased partner when he was first diagnosed with AIDS. Viewers were able to take a piece of wrapped candy from a large pile leaning against the wall and floor of the gallery. At the end of each day, the remaining pile was weighed, and the lost weight was restored so that each day the installation began anew with 175 pounds (The Art Institute of Chicago, <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/152961>).

I was fascinated by Gonzalez’s ability to symbolize his partner through the profound idea of his ideal body weight, but with a symbol as simple as a piece of candy. The use of the candy made the piece seem more sweet and intimate, allowing the installation to become more available and less intimidating to viewers,’ therefore, inviting them to participate. Through sharing this candy with the world, Gonzalez was also sharing his love for his partner. I cannot validate this with Gonzalez, but my feeling is that the creation of the piece was probably

cathartic for Gonzalez, allowing for some small healing to take place through sharing Ross with the public.

Gonzalez's *Portrait of Ross* inspired me to create an interactive piece that would stimulate healing in both the artist and the viewer and that installation became my "Gifts." The piece consisted of 10 ceramic arms, slightly smaller than life size, to be attached to a wall upon exhibition. One set of five arms would contain offerings for the viewer to accept, as well as a table below piled high with offerings. The other set of arms, to be displayed just next to the first, would be empty, and the table below would be clear. Viewers would be asked to leave any offering they choose.

Originally, I had planned only the offerings, hoping that I could find catharsis in making others feel good, by offering those things that I find therapeutic in daily life. I struggled to find symbols to represent those things that I could easily reproduce in multiples. Eventually, I settled on the symbol of a face, which both tied in to the masks installation, but also represented the need for human interaction and support in order to heal. I thought about how essential it is for me to spend time with and to be understood and supported by those I love and those I am around. The face symbol came to represent healing as well as the human interactive element of the piece. I sculpted a small face from clay and then created a clay press mold from the original. The press mold allowed me to produce the tiny ceramic faces very quickly, in order to have a few thousand ready for the installation. Because the faces would not fit in the hands, I then created a table on which to pile them which will sit just below the arms.



Figure 3.4 Detail of Small Press-Mold Face Offerings

In addition, I decided to hang red threads from the arms on the walls, providing a link between this piece and others from my journey which incorporated red thread as a symbol of body, blood, and vessels. At the bottom of each thread there is a needle tied on, and hundreds of small drawings, cut out in circles from larger drawings, are threaded onto the string. The circles were cut from my many meditative drawings, doodles done throughout my journey as a meditative art practice. Viewers will be invited to not only take a small face from the table, but also to carefully, without getting pricked on the needle, remove one of the drawings from the thread. The needle represents physical pain, acupressure points used in the relief of fibromyalgia, and also struggles in life. However, if the viewer participates and overcomes the obstacle of the needle, he will leave with a memento of peace in order to share my healing through art.

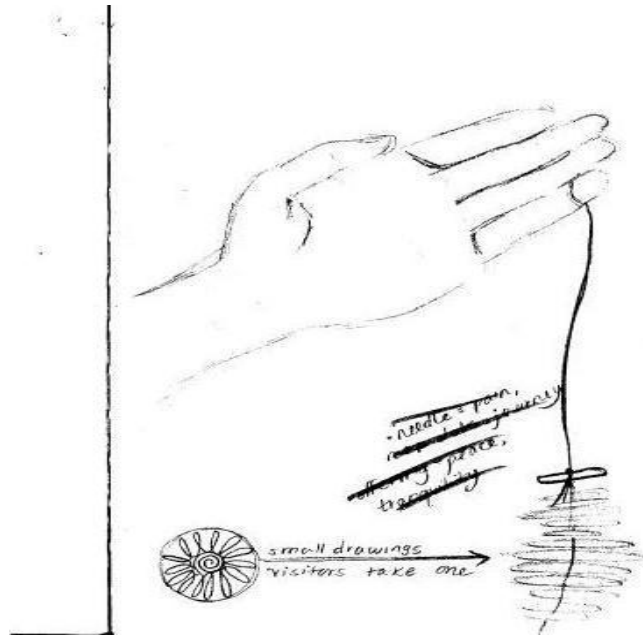


Figure 3.5 Needle and Thread Offering Sketch

I decided to include the receiving portion of the installation because I felt that people are inherently creative and may offer mementos of healing that I would not have imagined. Also, the act of giving can be just as cathartic for the artist as for the viewer. The receiving portion of the installation was a replica of the offerings installation, except that upon exhibition, the table below would be empty, and a bare thread and needle will hang from each arm. Viewers will be invited to string something onto the thread or to leave an item on the table that they feel may contribute to peace and healing.

I wanted this piece to have the look of a shrine, with meaningful colors and ritualistic elements so that it would represent positive human interaction beyond the temporary installation. The arms have been finished with rutile and black stain, and the small faces with black ink. Both appear aged, or even burnt, as if recovered from antiquity. The wooden tables are stained almost black, and the tops covered in rich red fabric, to connect to the body elements of the red hanging

thread. I hope that during exhibition, the installation will appear both sacred but inviting, as the piece will only be successful in healing if viewers choose to participate.



Figure 3.6 "Gifts" by Melanie Sgrignoli, mixed media, installation 84" x 96"

Meditative drawing scroll.

Originally, I had planned to do some daily meditative drawing in my journal for the entire three month study; however, I found it difficult to commit to drawing every day and especially at a specific time of day, when I had so many projects going at once. I did draw in my journal often, and especially before bed. I found the process calming, but had some physical struggles with the process.

After a few weeks of the study, I decided that I might enjoy the drawings more in larger format. I then began creating what I call a meditative drawing scroll, a continuous drawing done in black ink on a ream of large white butcher paper. I worked by laying the paper out on the floor, rolling out enough to work on, sitting on a pillow, and drawing.



Figure 3.7 Untitled (Meditative Drawing Scroll) by Melanie Sgrignoli, ink on paper, 36" x 120"

Due to the desired meditative quality of the drawing, I tried to work spontaneously and avoided analysis of what I had drawn. I would begin with a certain motif, often circular or round, and would allow the drawing to flow from the center out and then eventually across the page as I rolled out more and more paper. Occasionally, I would get stuck and not know how to continue, but rather than brainstorming and sketching as I usually would, I simply looked in my journal at previous meditative drawings and borrowed elements in order to keep the drawing flowing.

Although technically, this drawing could go on until I had used the entire ream of butcher paper, I had to find a stopping point in order to be able to display the work. I found that stopping point about ten feet into the drawing. I then decided to cut around the edges of the motifs in order to free the form from the confines of the rigid, rectangular paper. I also cut out small negative spaces within the scroll to accentuate certain design elements and to create an overall, organic appeal that reflected the natural process of creating the work.

As I finished the drawing scroll, I was also finishing my plans for the installation of the "Gifts", and had decided that I wanted to offer small drawings hung on threads. I then decided to not only cut hundreds of small circles from my journal, but also from the meditative drawing scroll to be displayed and offered. The result of the cuts on the scroll is visually striking. The

negative spaces left by the circles are geometric and contrast with the organic nature of the lines used in the drawing. They provide peek holes through the scroll to the empty space behind, suggesting the struggle between peace and unrest. In addition, if the installations are to be hung as a body of work, viewers who are taking an offering from the hand may then figure that that circle may have been cut from the displayed drawing scroll, and they may feel more a part of the healing ritual used to create it.



Figure 3.8 Detail of Drawing Scroll

Milagros.

My "Milagros" piece consists of five small framed, layered drawings, to be displayed side by side together on a wall so that the five pieces make a whole, but can also be individually investigated. The actual drawings to be displayed are reproductions of pencil and ink drawings on tracing paper. I began this piece by doing some medical research about fibromyalgia, the possible causes, shared symptoms, and healing therapies. I collected imagery pertaining to pain signals, nerve cells, muscles, bones, and eastern medicine ideas such as acupuncture body maps. At the same time, I had a series of photos taken of myself, many focused on the face, but others zoomed in on those parts of my body that experience the most pain.

I then simply started drawing images onto tracing paper, some using drawing pencils and shading, and others using ink pens and nibs. I also filled pages with written mantras that I had practiced in the past and present for healing, with the repetition of writing the mantras becoming a meditation in itself. When I began to see idea links between the drawings, I experimented with layering them on top of each other for visual effects as well as layered meanings. For example, a drawing of my back may be layered with a drawing of the spine and nerve cells to represent the pain experienced in that area. Some of the layered meanings are straightforward, and others are more abstract.



Figure 3.9 Detail of Nerve Receptor, Back, and Mantra Drawing

Although I enjoyed the visual aspects and the creation of meaning in the layered images, I felt that they would be more powerful on a smaller scale in which the viewer could investigate the details of each on a more intimate basis. After some experimentation and failure, I was able to reproduce the images by scanning and shrinking them on the computer and printing. I would have preferred that the finished pieces be original drawings, but would not have been able to capture the same amount of detail working on such a small scale.

I had also been looking into the idea of framing the pieces in tin to look like Mexican Milagros, small religious or spiritual images framed and decorated with sacred imagery. After some experimentation, I was able to create a small tin frame for each layered drawing. The

designs punched into the tin reflect the imagery in the drawings as well as other pieces from my journey; nerve cell patterns, blood vessel lines, hints at bones, spines, and muscle fiber are all included.

Because the tin was so disparate from the other materials in my body of work, I decided to sew red thread through the punched designs in order to link it to the other installation pieces. The result of the small layered drawings, framed in tin and stitched through with red thread is reminiscent of the Mexican Milagros. Although the imagery reflects my journey and body processes, the “Milagros” appear as spiritual relics that could be hung in a place of worship or healing.



Figure 3.10 Detail of Punched Tin and Sewn Thread

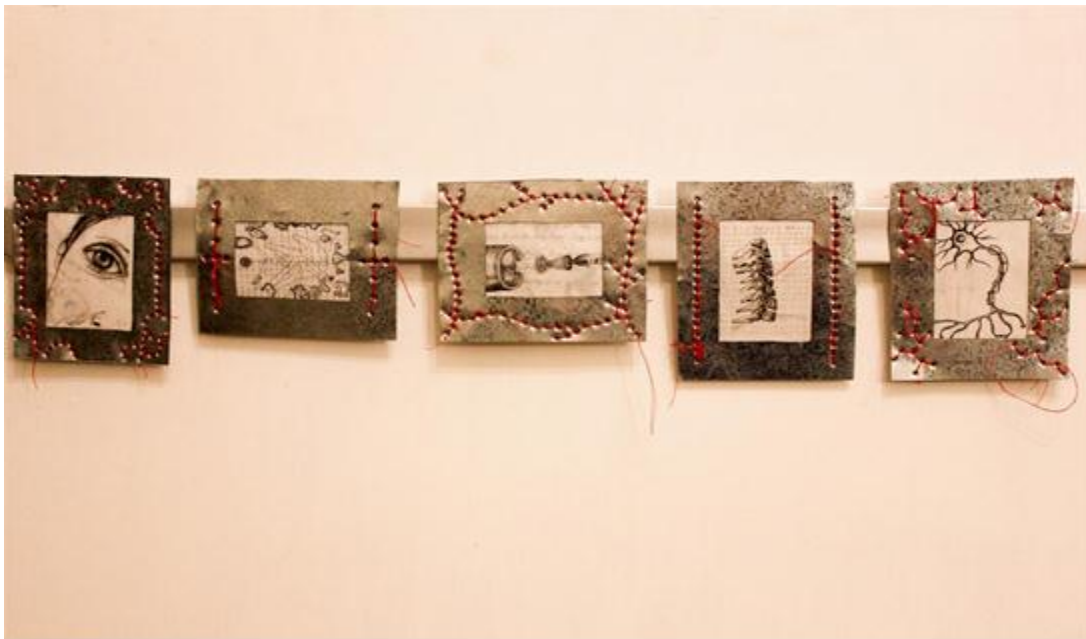


Figure 3.11 "Milagros" by Melanie Sgrignoli, mixed media, 5.5" x 30"

Mixed media painting.

I created only one painting on canvas as part of my journey, almost as an afterthought. I had needed a break from the various other pieces I was working on and decided to make use of a large canvas I had lying around. Surprisingly, the painting allowed me to investigate completely new processes and ideas and provided a link to some of the other pieces in the body of work.

I began by underpainting pastel yellows, violets, and pinks, using similar imagery to the layered drawings, nerve cells and dendrites extremely magnified. Wanting to again experiment with layering, but this time with paint rather than drawings, I then added layers hinting at a person's back and neck, spine, and muscle fibers in the shoulders. At this point, I decided to allow the painting to be a complete experiment and to push the layering technique as far as I could, including mixed media and three dimensional materials.

During a recent guided imagery session for pain relief, I had come up with the symbol of sea urchins to represent my pain and sea stars as the relief symbol, as certain sea stars can digest urchins. I pictured these giant sea stars roaming all over my body, engulfing my pain areas and digesting them, their thousands of little tube feet providing a light relief as they wander. I decided to use the sea star imagery in my painting by drawing large sea star arms with lots of textural detail onto tracing paper with ink, and then adhering these translucent drawings to the painting. I continued layering paint over the drawings to bring wholeness to the piece and began incorporating darker shades of red and violet to create the effect of light shining from within the body through a darker exterior.



Figure 3.12 Detail of Mixed Media Painting

I then experimented with sculpting small representations of human bones out of clay to be sewn onto the canvas. I had little success with the clay due to its fragility and my tendency to work large. I had the same fragility issues when working in paper clay. I finally found success though sculpting paper pulp. The pulp allowed me to use tools to press the bones into shape rather than sculpting them in the round. Once dried, I coated the paper pulp bones in gesso and clear acrylic glaze to make them sturdy. I then stitched the miniature bones onto the canvas to appear as found objects. Again, the red thread echoed body systems and linked to other pieces in my body of work, but this time it also made the bones look like specimens on display.

To further incorporate the thread and the idea of blood vessels carrying life through the body, I continued to stitch organic lines and pathways across the canvas. Finally, I painted on multiple layers of clear acrylic matte medium. The medium helped to adhere the various layers, to embed certain areas of the thread and to allow other areas to hang freely; it also provided a small degree of fuzziness, reminiscent of the translucent layers used for the milagros.



Figure 3.13 Untitled (Healing Painting) by Melanie Sgrignoli, mixed media painting, 24" x 36"

Photographic drawings.

My series of photographic drawings arose from a desire to somehow include actual images of my body in my healing artwork documentation, both for the viewer to associate, and for myself to feel that my actual physical self is becoming a part of the healing process. I had a friend take numerous photos of my body as well as portraits of my face. I wanted most of the images to be slightly ambiguous and abstract, so that the work would hint at the body but not obviously be my own body. I then used digital photographic software to sepia tone the images so they would appear more like relics than snapshots.

I sketched and planned for different uses for the photographs, having trouble figuring how to tie them into my body of work. Eventually I settled on simply using them as meditative drawing canvasses, drawing on each with permanent ink. I allowed the lines and shapes of the photographs to guide the flow of the drawings, which assisted in the meditative quality of the drawings as there was no anxiety about how to begin. Some of the drawings accentuated certain parts of the photographs, leaving the photographic surface untouched in places, and other photographs can be seen only through the drawing that covers its entire surface.



Figure 3.14 Photographic Drawing Example

When I had completed drawings on all photographs, I removed the ones that I felt were not aesthetically successful, and experimented with how to arrange the successful drawings into a single finished piece. I settled on stitching the photos together on the sewing machine using red

thread. I sewed a series of 6 photos together at a time, and ended up with long narrow strips of photographic drawings.

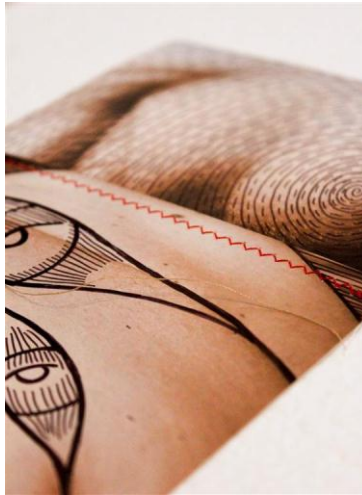


Figure 3.15 Sewn Photo Strip Example

I then attempted to sew these strips together into a singular piece, but experienced major warping of the photographs. Instead, I decided that the photographs could be pinned up as singular pieces adjacent to each other to appear as a whole. The photo strips could be pinned up one above the other to appear as if a painting on rectangular canvas, or could be displayed in various arrangements, including linear ones.



Figure 3.16 Untitled (Body Drawings) by Melanie Sgrignoli, mixed media, 24" x 44"

Reflections on the Artistic Process

As I began and planned for my three month study of journeying towards healing through art, I hoped to find a more healthful way of including art as part of my daily life. I expected that my findings would reveal possible changes in mental and physical health as well as insights into which materials and techniques prove to be the most beneficial or the least harmful to my health. Although I did uncover useful information pertaining to the above topics, I also discovered a wealth of knowledge and insight into my creative process as I created a cohesive body of work based loosely on a related subject, mind/body health and awareness.

I believe that journaling, both visually and verbally was an important aspect of documentation and later reflection upon findings. As I wrote about my journey, my struggles, symptoms, successes, and revelations, as compared with my meditative drawings, and my art pieces, the journey uncovered certain truths about me and certain changes that needed to be made in order to live a healthful life with art (see figure 3.17). The data was wholly qualitative, but after daily journaling for three months, I was able to review my entries in order to come to conclusions. The journal was essential for recording and remembering findings as well as ideas and sketches generated throughout the creative process. It also helped me to connect my ideas and artwork through a framework of images and understandings that may not have been as obvious without the journal as a reference. As I reflect on the study, I will divide my journal findings into sections based on theme in order to present miscellaneous information in an organized way.

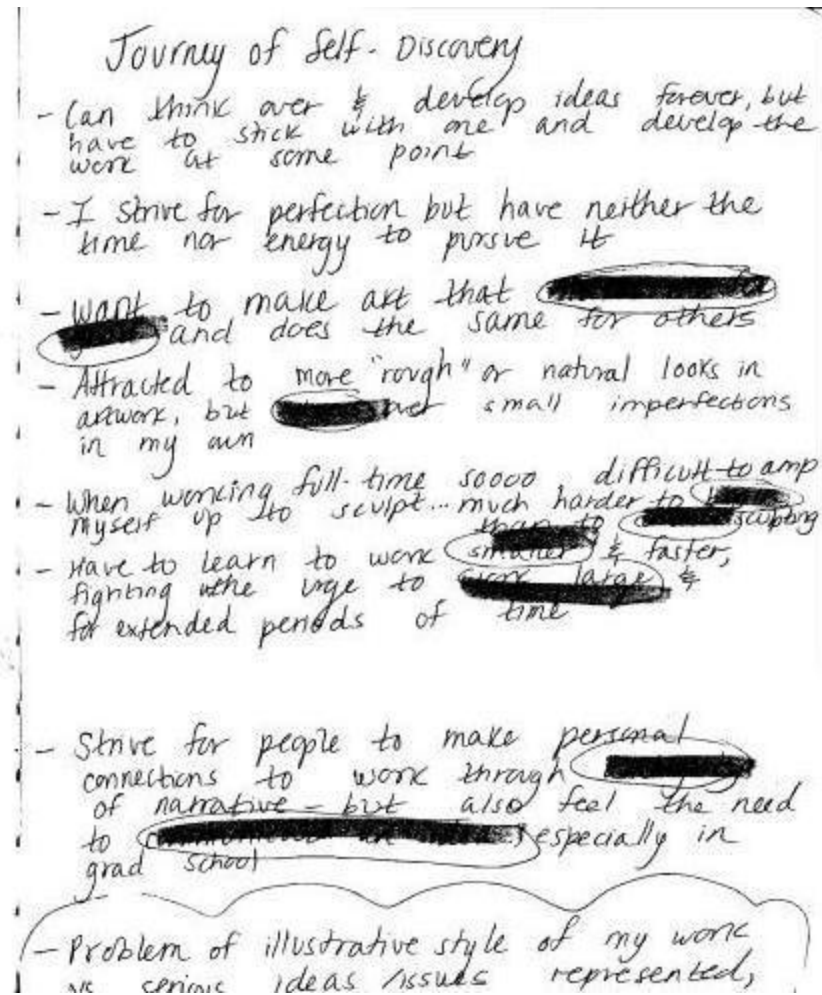


Figure 3.17 Journal Reflections

Meditation and guided Imagery

I began my study by researching medical art therapy, "the use of art expression and imagery with individuals who are physically ill [...]" (Malchiodi, 1993, p.3) as well as reading about the benefits of meditation and guided imagery for sick individuals (Birnie, Carlson, Hutchins, Labelle and Marion, 2009). As I hypothesized that these methods may prove useful in relief of my chronic pain, I decided to include them as part of my three month study. I also hoped that they may provide a creative spring from which ideas may flow.

I began by attending a meditation workshop, reading various texts on meditation and guided imagery, and listening to audio books and guided imagery relaxation CDs. Two of these resources became the guiding manuals for my successful guided imagery sessions.

In the first, *You Can Relieve Pain: How Guided Imagery Can Help You Reduce Pain or Eliminate it Altogether* authors Dachman and Lyons (1990) walked me through how to create personalized pain control imagery. You first learn to create an image or images for your specific pains. For example, I imagined the sharp pains in my upper and lower back as spiny sea urchins, whose sharp points were poking me and creating sharp pains. You then create a prompt to control the pain, something that will lessen the effectiveness of the pain-causing mechanism. I imagined a large starfish crawling all over my body and wherever it encountered an urchin, covering it and digesting, therefore, eliminating the pain.

The goal of this imagery technique is that the pain control prompt becomes autogenic, meaning that eventually, just thinking of the control prompt will control and in some cases eliminate the pain. Wiener (2000) explains this phenomenon by referring to Achterberg's theory that imagery reduces pain in two ways. First, imagery serves as a distraction for the sufferer, therefore increasing pain tolerance, and second, pleasant imagery promotes feelings of control over pain (p. 280). In my case, the starfish imagery was both a distraction and a pleasant image that I could use to control the pain caused by the urchins.

In the second source, *Self-Healing With Guided Imagery: How to Use the Power of Your Mind to Heal Your Body* by Dr. Andrew Weil and Dr. Martin L. Rossman (2003) explore guided imagery in a slightly different way. With specific exercises, you learn to communicate through your mind with your body, imagining a place of relaxation and healing, having a conversation with your inner healer, and asking your body what it needs to be healed.

My struggle was to find the time and a quiet place in order to relax fully into the practice. Without having a specific time or place to do my guided imagery, I would simply do a little bit whenever possible, often times just before bed. Just after, I would record any imagery and ideas that arose during the session, as well as how I felt physically and mentally. I found the sessions to be very relaxing and I experienced a major reduction in pain during and just after the session. If I began a session agitated and in pain, I would end it calm and relatively comfortable. I discovered a few pain prompts that I used again and again, such as the starfish previously mentioned, used to swallow the urchins causing my pain. Another was visualizing the tight muscle fibers causing my pain, and then envisioning hands gently pulling the fibers apart in a sort of massage in order to relax the muscle. These prompts were particularly useful because I could use them whenever and wherever the need arose.

I also however, experienced different imagery and ideas during several different sessions, based on my mood and the physical pain I was experiencing. Through guided imagery, I was able to imagine a place of healing and to explore it with all five senses. One such place was the top of a mountain I used to hike often. I imagined myself lying on the warm rocks in the sun, feeling the heat of the surface relax my body. I could see the hawk flying overhead and the shadows it cast on me as it passed, as well as the trees swaying in the breeze. I could hear the birds calling and the leaves rustling, and could taste the fresh air. On one occasion in this place of healing, I was able to imagine my inner healer and communicate with her about what my body needed for healing.

Through the guided imagery sessions, I found not only a way to relax my mind and control my pain, at least for a short period, but also a great way to unblock creativity. Because I was conjuring images, and very specific ones with lots of detail, it became very exciting to use

these new healing images in my artwork. Some sessions repeated the same images and others brought new ones, but often times the images seemed to fit together not only through the theme of healing, but also aesthetically. I felt that the sessions were a great jumping off point for my body of work and prevented me from ever feeling artistically blocked.

Creativity and Imagination

In the recent past, I have struggled with creativity, feeling too stressed and busy to develop new and interesting ideas, and especially to carry them through to visual fulfillment. I feel that this study has taught me much about developing ideas, using my imagination, and creating meaning. I felt much more creative during my three month study than I had probably since I was an adolescent art student.

Part of the reason I felt creatively successful was due to the fact that I had decided to create artwork daily, which put me in the mindset of an artist. In the past I have always been pulled in different directions, thinking like a teacher primarily, and as an artist secondarily. My journey allowed me to be primarily an artist, at least during the periods that I was working. The simple fact that I was planning, creating, and journaling daily, allowed the ideas to flow much more easily, not leaving time for a stumbling block. The guided imagery was a great starting point for my study, allowing me to sketch out images and begin creating immediately.

I found that my ideas flowed quickly at the beginning of the study, sketching out and planning multiple pieces at once, most of which I followed through to completion. Deciding on the theme of mind/body imagery helped me to plan, as it created a path for my work that would not have been as evident if I were making pieces more varied in theme. I also discovered that if I set aside a portion of time for myself to think and act as an artist, that the creative process worked more efficiently, as it allowed me time to plan, sketch, construct, and revise, all in one

session. When my time felt more divided or I felt rushed, I would not feel successful in my creative efforts, instead feeling pressure to get something done, even if it were not my best work. I struggled more towards the end of the study to bring all the pieces to completion, as it became less exciting to simply complete them than it was to develop ideas and methods during the beginning of the creative process.

I also decided early on to allow my ideas and work to flow, creating a large amount of work without doing much initial analysis. I did a small amount of planning, but allowed myself to be flexible and veer from the plan whenever I felt it creatively necessary. I wasn't sure if any or all of the work would be included in my final body of work, but I simply wanted to jump right into the creation, just as Dr. K had desired to make art for art's sake rather than intellectualizing the creation (Wiener, 2000). This flexible way of working allowed me to create a large amount of work and later create groupings, layers, and meaning, as well as to be accepting of the fact that some work should only be included as part of the process but not as the product. This was a completely new way of working for me, as I am used to doing careful planning and sketching and investigating a technique until I arrive at the desired result. I feel that both ways of working can be beneficial depending on the goal of the work, but that working in a more spontaneous and flexible way allowed me to create with a lower stress level, to be continually excited about the outcomes, and to make meaning from the work produced rather than to force meaning onto the work while planning it.

Technology

Use of technology in my journey towards healing through art was not something I considered until I began analyzing my journal and realized how useful it had been in my creative and artistic processes. First, as I described above, I began my journey by researching and

beginning guided imagery and meditative practices. This is something I had always been interested in, but seemed somewhat daunting to try to study. In addition to books, I found that the materials I utilized for home practice, which included podcasts, downloaded books on tape, and audio CDs were especially useful for having guidance to begin my practice, but to be able to do so on my own time and in my own space.

I also found the computer and internet to be incredibly useful in my studio practice and creative process. As imagery began to arise through guided imagery sessions, I searched the internet for images that related and may be useful in my work. I started a collection of these saved images all loosely related in theme. At first, I simply saved images without knowing how I planned to use them, but the images found their way into a number of my pieces. I used elements of the found images in my layered drawings, my mixed media painting, and even certain textures of the imagery throughout my meditative drawings. I am not an artist who can conjure any desired image in my mind and then draw from the mental image; instead, I need to find an image for reference and then draw from what I see. The ease of finding images on the internet allowed me to create without the stumbling block of not being able to find desired reference materials. The reference images made it easier to create meanings and to layer imagery as I had time to focus on ideas and presentation because I was able to create the visuals more quickly.

Physical Health

As I stated in my proposal, in order for my journey towards healing through art to be truly beneficial, I needed to be not only flexible with my creativity and ideas, but also with my techniques and materials. I had worked in many mediums in the past, but considered myself primarily a ceramicist, having the most experience and enjoyment in working in clay. I did

include some clay processes in my journey, but also experimented with new materials and new ways of working with past materials.

When planning for my journey, but before beginning the studio aspects, I had planned to create a number of ceramic sculptures. Soon after beginning my studio work however; as my ideas developed and I began documenting the results of studio work on my physical and mental health, I veered from my path of large work towards smaller pieces, multiples, and installation work.

As an artist, I tend to feel most comfortable working in a large format. This has always presented a problem however, due to my chronic pain and fatigue, which is aggravated when working large, both because of the physical effects on the body and also the length of time necessary to complete a piece. Working on installation pieces allowed me to feel the accomplishment of completing a large piece, but also to work in a more healthful way with smaller pieces and simpler processes.

Also, having a number of pieces in the works at once, allowed me flexibility for arranging my time and energy to work on what I could when able.

When I had little energy or was experiencing physical pain, I would work on the more simple aspects of my work, either creating small clay faces using a press mold, or doing meditative drawings in my journal, on photographs, or on the scroll. I would reserve work on the larger or more intensive pieces for either weekends or those evenings when I was feeling better than normal. Most clay work was completed on weekends due to the energy and time required to set up, work, and then clean up.

Also, for those pieces that required a large amount of experimentation and investigation, such as the layered drawings with punched tin and sewn frames, I would try to set aside a whole

weekend day in order to be able to investigate, take breaks, and then investigate further. Working in this way allowed me to solve a problem without becoming frustrated and exhausted which in the past, has caused me to fully give up.

I found it physically easier to work on drawings and paintings rather than ceramic sculpture because of the ease of set up and clean up, the lack of weighty materials, and also the relative ease of the process. When working in clay, timing is crucial in order to complete a piece before the clay begins drying; whereas with drawings and paintings, you can begin the work and then continue it whenever is convenient. For this reason, I did a lot of drawing during my journey. The clay work that I included in my journey consisted of small pieces to be displayed together in an installation as a whole, such as the masks, arms, and press-mold faces. In this way I could sculpt pieces one at a time and complete a mask or an arm in a few hours or less or a couple hundred mold faces in the same amount of time and not have to worry about finding the time to finish the piece.

Something I struggled with regardless of material and technique, was finding a comfortable place and position in which to work. As I stated earlier, I tend to work large, but find it very trying on my body. When working on a large painting or sculpture, my shoulders swell and burn from the necessity to lift my arms above chest level to work on the higher end of the piece. It is more comfortable to work on pieces positioned below me so that I do not have to lift my arms. However, I found that even when working on small pieces, and especially on detailed areas, I tend to tense my body, which causes muscles pain and exhaustion. I think that I tense more easily when working small because it does not feel like my natural way of working and feels somewhat forced. I found it beneficial to remind myself every few minutes to relax my

muscles and try to loosen my body. I did find that I was able to work on small pieces longer than larger pieces before the work exacerbated my pain.

I tried working in a number of different locations and positions in order to find the least harmful position for my body. I found that the tables available in my home were either too high or too low for the seating available, therefore causing me to either reach or stoop. Also, my easel and the large canvas I was painting, forced me to reach up in order to paint the top of the canvas. I did not however, want to lay the painting flat because I desired the result of paint running and flowing vertically. Also, my only location to work in clay was my kitchen table, which proved frustrating because I would have to fully set up and clean up from scratch for each work session, which was physically exhausting on its own, without even considering the sculpting time. I hope in the future, to be able to design a studio to accommodate the various physical struggles that present themselves when working as an artist with an illness, just as Dr. K was able to make his studio more accessible (Wiener, 2000).

Without that accessible studio, some solutions I discovered were to sit on the couch or a comfortable seat with the drawing in my lap. This allowed me to draw without tensing as quickly. On days that my shoulder and neck pain were severe, I would work with a heating pad on these areas to prevent further injury. Also, I discovered by accidental necessity, that laying work on the floor and sitting hovered above it allowed me to work for longer periods of time without my shoulders swelling. This discovery came about simply because my meditative drawing scroll was too large to fit anywhere but the floor. Therefore, I laid out the large scroll on the floor, kneeled and sat on pillows and began working.

In all of my work, I found it beneficial to take a break at least every 45 minutes in order to rest my brain, my body, and to stretch my muscles. After resting, I could return to my work

with slightly less pain. The breaks prevented the tension from building to a breaking point which has happened in the past when working on a piece for an extended period of time.

As soon as the weather made it possible, I also began doing a lot of my studio work outside on my porch, especially when working in clay. I did not find it as crucial to clean up thoroughly when working on the porch, so I was able to work in clay and clean up with relative ease, as compared to working inside the house and needing to wipe and mop in order to prevent harmful clay dust from permeating the home.

The best time to work, I found, was in the late morning to early or late afternoon. This of course was not possible on teaching days, but on weekends when I had more flexibility, I would start my day with a good breakfast and some exercise, and then would stay focused on my studio work for the remainder of the day. I had the most energy and focus during these work sessions, and was also able to take breaks as desired due to the flexibility of having the full day to work. I found it very difficult to work in the late evenings, due not only to fatigue, but also to the fact that my eyes become dry and irritated at night. When my eyes get dry, it becomes painful to focus on reading, drawing, or any other activity that requires a large amount of visual focus. I found this to me a major impediment to completing studio work, especially when teaching full time and only having evenings available for studio work. Also, working on Fridays was almost out of the question. Although I had planned to create daily, I found it impossible to stick to such a rigid schedule. I did create almost every day, but skipped a number of Fridays due to absolute exhaustion from the work week.

As far as pain and fatigue go, I did notice a significant reduction in symptoms while highly engaged in studio creation, regardless of material. When my mind was focused on the task of creation, it was less focused on the pain signals that my brain sends and that my body usually

receives. During a few sessions, especially when working on the meditative drawing scroll, I would say there were moments even that I was completely unaware of my pain, which is ever present. Eventually, the creation of the artwork would exacerbate the pain, as explained above, but for periods of creation, I feel that the artwork allowed me to ignore my pain.

Mental Health

I decided to analyze my mental and physical health during my journey as separately as possible because although they are inextricably related, there were so many factors to consider that it became easier to organize the mental and physical aspects of the journey separately. My findings about mental health can be grouped into discussions about the best time, place, and methods for working.

As I discussed already in my physical health findings, I found it essential to try to work in a comfortable setting during optimum times of day. The same was true of my mental state. When I tried to create at times that I was already suffering from fatigue, I would become extremely frustrated, and therefore, the artwork suffered. Occasionally, I would feel so fatigued that even the thought of doing studio work was daunting and I feared the exhaustion that would follow creation. When I was facing a deadline or felt overwhelmed by the amount of work to get done, the same was true. At these times, the creation of artwork has little or no enjoyment, and felt just as stressful as work. Even when I tried to relax into my meditative drawings, it would feel like a chore if I was not in the proper mental state.

Working at those times of day when I was most alert, morning and afternoons was helpful. I also found that often, once I overcame the fear of creating and became involved in the task, I would find a calm mental state that allowed me to enjoy the act of creation. It was also essential to set up a relaxing, but invigorating work environment. When I attempted to work in

the same room as the television or loud music, I would grow agitated and frustrated with the results of my artwork. I was able to relax into the work much more when working outdoors, listening to calm music that I chose based on my mood, and in a space with comfortable lighting. Rainy days became my favorite days for creating because the rain itself and the mood it creates caused me to feel more relaxed and focused.

I tend to obsess over repetitive details in my work, which actually allowed me to find a Zen-like state of creation when working on repetitive tasks; in this state I would be able to lose focus and simply create. In fact, losing focus, or allowing myself to not analyze my work and ideas became a goal. The same personality trait that causes me to obsess over the visual details of my artwork also causes me to over-analyze the meanings in the artwork and to never be happy with the results. In order to make the creation process more healing, I began to simply create work quickly, not allowing myself the time to begin analyzing. Many of the pieces I created hardly resemble the idea from which they originated, and in my opinion, were more successful than past works due to this flexibility.

Raising Awareness

From the beginning of documenting my study and planning artworks based on mind/body awareness, I struggled with deciding how ambiguous or how obvious to be with the artwork and information. I did not want the artwork to be read as painful, or for the viewer to feel sorry for the artist. I had discussed ideas with artists who suggested that my imagery seemed somewhat trite and not befitting of the severity of the ideas behind it due to the illustrative quality of my artwork. It was suggested that perhaps the artwork should reflect the suffering, either in product or process.

I however; always strive to create peaceful artwork; work that will put me at peace during its creation and that will spread peace and serenity to the viewer. I felt the same as Dr. K who didn't want to "paint his pain" and instead created colorful and uplifting works (Wiener, 2000, p. 280). De Tommaso (2008) presented findings that hospital patients described lower levels of pain when contemplating a beautiful painting as compared to an ugly one or a blank canvas. I too, wanted to create work that would stimulate peace and healing. I also however, desired to spread some sort of awareness about living with chronic pain and fatigue, especially due the fact that those suffering appear healthy, making it difficult for peers to have empathy (see Figure 3.18).

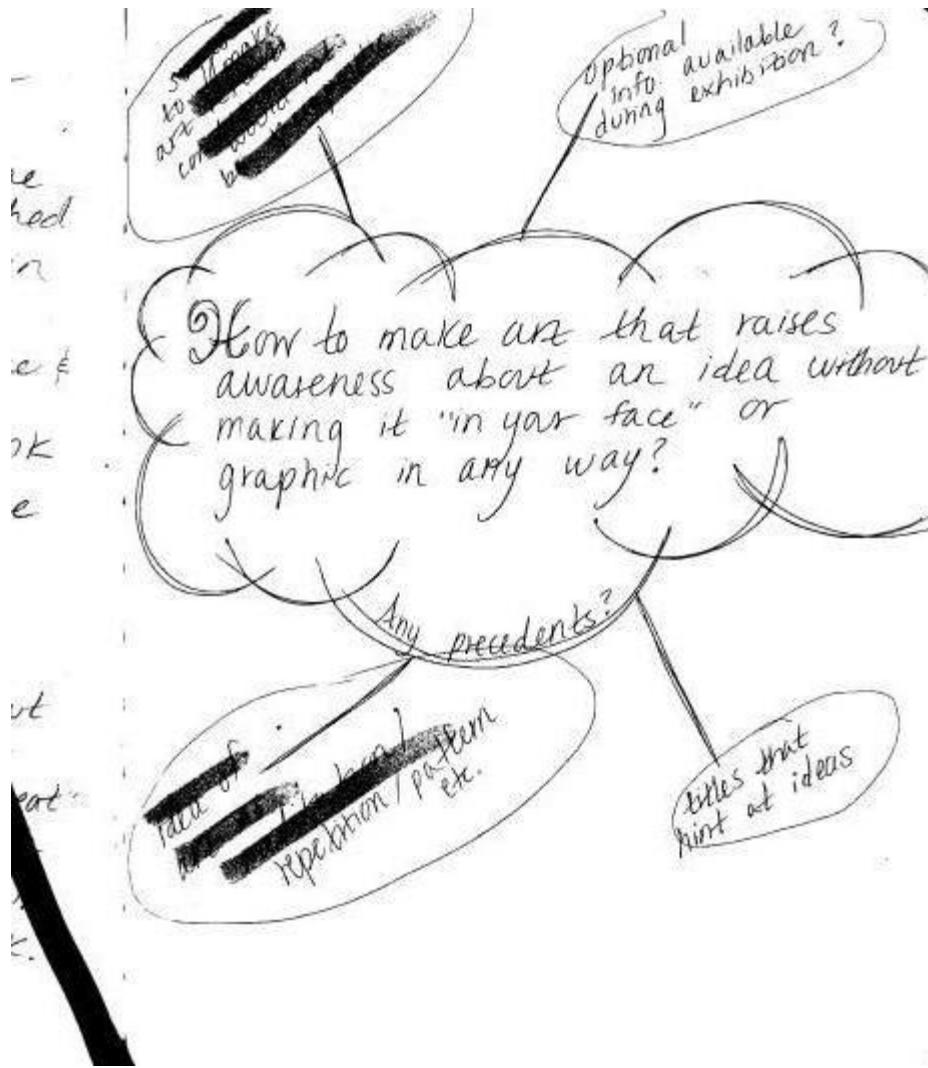


Figure 3.18 Idea Map on Awareness from Journal

My conclusion was to make a body of work that was straightforward in some aspects due to the images included: neurons, bones, acupuncture maps, muscle fibers etc., but to present the work in a more abstract and mysterious way. In some instances I layered these images to create abstraction from realism, in other instances; I used finishing techniques to make the work appear almost as ancient relics.

The interactive piece “Gifts” is about offering healing to the viewer and hoping that the viewer will leave me some offering to encourage the same; however I plan to leave the piece

ambiguous, so that the viewer will not analyze the meaning, but may feel more peaceful after participating.

Two unanticipated results that emerged from the study regarding awareness were that I found myself talking about my work and the meaning behind it often; therefore raising awareness, and also that I found the experience of talking about the work and the study to be cathartic. Interested persons would ask me what my thesis study is about, and I could find no easy way to explain it without providing background information on fibromyalgia, chronic pain, and fatigue in order for the person to understand the need for the study and the desired outcomes. So, although the artwork itself turned out to be more ambiguous than I had previously expected, the process really did raise awareness when considering the numerous conversations that occurred and the possibility that those persons may discuss my study with others.

The communication aspect proved to be cathartic for me because I have always felt uncomfortable discussing my illness with others, choosing to try to act like everything is fine, even when I am in severe pain or extremely fatigued. Because my symptoms are not outwardly visible at most times, many people, including those close to me, know nothing of my illness. The study allowed me to feel comfortable discussing the illness and how it affects my life and the lives of others suffering. Simply sharing my experience allowed me to feel better understood and less aloof than I typically do, so my journey proved to be healing in this unexpected way.

CHAPTER IV.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Visual Verbal Journal

Although my study was introspective in nature, when reviewing my journal for patterns of thought, many of the conclusions I had drawn, I realized, were also relevant to my teaching practice. Just as this study allowed me to alter my way of thinking about, making, and reflecting on my artwork, it also allowed me to see parallels between my own creative process and the creative process of my students.

One such parallel is the use of a journal for idea development and reflection. I require my middle school students to maintain a visual verbal journal (VVJ) throughout the entirety of my class. The journal is used for daily drawing warm-ups, brainstorming sessions, collecting images, reflecting, and sketching. Some students, mainly those interested in art, take the journal home daily and use it for their creative process, while others leave it at school and use it only in the art class room. I have wanted to find a way to engage more students with the creative process both inside and outside of class, using the journal as a tool, and now after keeping my own detailed journal throughout my study, I find it even more essential that students have a place to collect their thoughts and images.

I have tried various ways to motivate students to use their journals, including weekly homework assignments, extra credit opportunities, and having students turn in their journal as a project in itself at the end of the quarter. However, in each case, it was mainly those students already interested in the arts who engaged with their journals, and those who had little interest, either lost their journals, turned in journals with insufficient evidence of the creative process, or completed the perfunctory tasks with obvious apathy.

In order for students to discover the potential of their journals for creativity, I am now considering assigning a checklist of items to be included in the VVJ, such as a certain number of collected images, sketches, and journal reflections. Students would be encouraged to go beyond the required amount of journal entries, and to engage with the VVJ as much as possible, discovering their own creative process as well as what inspires or impassions them. The final class project would be a culmination of the creative process recorded in the journal. Students would create an art piece with the theme of their choosing based on the interests or passions that they discovered and developed in their VVJ. Guidelines would be established, but students would have the freedom to choose the material, format, and theme of their project, finding their own voice through art.

Theme: Theme chosen for artwork based on VVJ images, sketches, and inspirations. Theme chosen is evident in artwork and ideas are developed beyond the simple and obvious	5	4	3	2	1/0
Elements and Principles: Elements and Principles considered throughout artwork; composition is well-organized; work feels unified and harmonious	5	4	3	2	1/0
Craftsmanship: Proper techniques used throughout art piece; materials handled safely and appropriately; pride and effort evident in work	5	4	3	2	1/0
Completion: Artwork appears complete; may be completed in black and white or in color; sufficient amount of details included	5	4	3	2	1/0
Reflection: VVJ analyzed for reflections on creative process, paragraph written that includes your successes, struggles, failures, surprises, and an analysis of your final project	5	4	3	2	1/0
Total Points _____ X 4 = _____/100					

Figure 4.1 Student Rubric for Final VVJ Project

When I have students reflect on class projects and my art class as a whole, something they often request, is more freedom of choice. I hesitate to give students absolute free choice as far as projects and themes go, because due to inexperience in open-ended idea development and problem-solving, as well as insufficient technical knowledge, students will become frustrated and creatively blocked. They need the instructor to guide their idea development and technical growth through art; however, through the use of the VVJ, I believe students will be able to share in this instruction, teaching themselves to brainstorm and develop ideas along the way.

I believe those students who engage with their journals often would be successful in their final project, whereas, those who had done only the minimum may struggle to develop an idea, not having the VVJ as a creative resource. In either case, students will learn the benefits of keeping a creative journal and will gain insight into their own creative processes. After project completion, students would be required to analyze their journal findings as well as their final art piece in order to reflect on their creative process, discovering what successes, struggles, and failures they encountered and why, as well as any unexpected or surprising observations.

Before my study, I had always maintained a sketchbook for ideas and imagery, but not until my journey, had I kept a journal so in depth to include daily reflections. In the future, I plan to maintain a VVJ as I now realize how important it was for my idea development and reflection. These journals will also become my examples for students when presenting them with the information about their own VVJs. In this way, they will see their teacher also as an artist, and be able to track her creative process from the first inception of an idea to the completion of a final art piece or body of work. I hope that by sharing my own experiences with my students, they will be inspired to start their own creative journey.

Guided Imagery and Imagination

My study provided a great opportunity for me to begin practicing guided imagery, which I found to be beneficial not only for my health, but also for my creative process. The images produced during my guided imagery sessions became some of the major elements of my body of work, and I plan to continue using guided imagery in the future, to stimulate ideas and imagery. I believe that guided imagery could also be a useful tool in the classroom to assist students with idea generation.

I have noticed that students struggle with using their imaginations, as well as producing and developing ideas and imagery for use in their artwork. Although I refuse to, they often want me, as their teacher, to give them an idea and tell them how to develop it. I will offer suggestions and advise whenever possible, but I think that it is important for students to learn to produce ideas and imagery on their own, and that the art classroom is one of the only places where they are given such opportunities. Dachman and Lyons (1990) suggest that our society rewards logical, analytical, and articulate thought, but discourages sensory development. They feel that we have learned to focus solely on the outside world, and to ignore our inner thoughts and feelings (Dachman and Lyons, 1990). This makes sense when considering the lack of imagination in students; they are used to being presented with information and visual stimuli through television, videogames, advertising, and various other sources, and therefore lack experience in using their senses to collect information and develop that information into ideas.

In order for students to develop a sense of imagination and to be able to image efficiently, it is necessary that they learn to be observant with all five senses. Dachman and Lyons (1990) state that the imaging process should integrate sound, odor, taste, and touch, in addition to the visual to expand the way we experience. They provide a number of exercises that could be

adapted for use with students, first teaching how to focus on sensory information before leading into guided imagery exercises. For example, in one such exercise, you are asked to put on a blindfold and sit in a familiar place. You are then asked to focus on what information you senses collect without the use of your vision: what does the chair feel like, what sounds surround you, what does the air smell like? Exercises such as this one could be conducted with students in the classroom as warm-ups or as homework assignments, with students recording results in their VVJs. These exercises would benefit art students because, I believe, the more observant a person becomes, the better she is able to imagine and record the world around her.

When students have become adept at imaging using all five senses, they would then be able to practice guided imagery in order to generate creative ideas and imagery. In my personal guided imagery sessions, I focused on healing places, images, and people, with the goal of pain relief, and the resulting creative images served as a bonus. However, with students, imagery sessions would focus on different themes, places, and people depending on the unit of study or the students' interests. Students would not only benefit from using the imagery sessions to generate ideas, but they would also be increasing their visual capacity, in order to be able to look for and see details, and use those details in their works of art. Especially for middle school students, whose constant desire is to create realistic artworks recording the world around them, guided imagery exercises, I hypothesize, may increase their visual focus and therefore, increase their drawing skills.

For example, when starting a unit on landscape, I could lead the students in closing their eyes and imagining a place in nature that they would love to visit, whether real or imaginary. I would ask students to focus on one sense at a time, what the air smells like, how the ground feels beneath them or the plants feel around them, what sounds abounds, and lastly, what they see. I

would ask them to be very observant, noticing things like the temperature in that place and how the warm or the cool air feels touching their skin. In addition, they would be asked to mentally record as much visual detail as possible. After the imagery session, students would record the experience in their VVJs with as much detail and memory as possible, using both words and images. They would later refer back to this entry when brainstorming for the landscape project and would have a starting point for idea generation. My hope is that this guided imagery exercise and others like it would prevent students from feeling creatively blocked or frustrated, allowing them to simply begin creating and to enjoy the act of creation, as they would have already developed ideas through the guided imagery session. They would also have a rich memory of the visual aspects of the place they chose to represent, allowing them to draw from memory, whether that memory was real or imagined.

Art as Therapy in the Classroom

I am not an art therapist, only an artist and art teacher, so my discussion of art therapy techniques in the classroom consists only of my own thoughts and is not the opinion of a trained art therapist. Although my study focused on art for personal healing due to health problems and the emotional struggles that accompany, the idea of creating art for healing could possibly be extended to the general student population by creating art focused on a personal injury, struggle, or problem. Through documenting the process, students could not only learn more about their way of creating, but more about their own way of being. Through reflecting upon the creation process and its results, as well as their feelings and observations along the way, this process of working through a problem could lead to self-transformation or solving of the problem. The journaling process and artistic creation process could be used with students to embark on their own personal journey towards healing by investigating a problem in their lives and seeking

solutions or personal healing through their artwork, constructing for themselves a more healthful way of being in the world through art.

This project could become or be incorporated into the final VVJ project discussed above, with students spending most of the quarter collecting idea, images, and reflections about the problem in their journals, and then using the final artwork to gain new insights into the problem or to find solutions. In addition, just as I was able to become more comfortable talking about my pain and fatigue due to the curiosity that my artwork sparked in others, students may become more comfortable or feel more included after having discussions with myself and classmates throughout their process of journaling and creating artwork.

Although my findings were personal and not generalizable, I do think that the idea of using artwork and journaling as part of a healing process for special populations is deserving of further study. In most teaching situations, such as mine, it would not be possible to isolate special student populations to work with due to time constraints and the inability to teach small classes rather than large classes of the general student population. Also, most art teachers, including myself, are not trained art therapists. However, I believe that it would be beneficial to bring art therapists into the school to work with students, or to train counselors and art teachers in art therapy techniques that could be adapted for use with special student populations. In this way, plans could be implemented through which students suffering from illness, disease, pain, or fatigue, could benefit. I hypothesize that students would undergo at least some small healing through journaling, making artwork, and sharing artwork about their personal experiences.

Classroom Environment and Working Adaptations

Through analyzing my journal after completion of my study, I was able to gain insights into my creative process. I was able to reflect on what benefited my process, as well as what

made the process more difficult. These same findings may also directly relate to the way in which I manage my classroom and my students.

First, the actual working environment strongly influenced my ability to work and feelings about the work I created. I needed a quiet, calm, and inviting space to work, and lacked the proper studio set-up to work in a productive and healthy way. In my teaching environment, I try to maintain a calm working environment, but this proves difficult when adding thirty adolescents, a large space, and high ceilings into the picture. Most of the time, students do not seem to mind working in the noise, although a few students have shared with me that they are much more productive at home. I have experimented with playing quiet instrumental music while the students work, but noticed that usually, the students would simply converse more loudly in order to talk over the music. I wonder how much more productive the students would be and how much the quality would improve if I were to ask them to create silently or to stick to only the quietest whispers.

In addition, the students are often crowded in their work spaces, with four people working at a table and their books and materials lying about. Again, the students do not complain about this set-up, but it is my personal experience that I need a comfortable and clean place to work in order to produce without anxiety. In order to create the best possible creative environment for my students, I plan to allow them, when behavior permits, to work independently in a quiet place in the room or to spread out around the room using counter-tops and drawing boards as work surfaces.

I also found that I enjoyed creating most when I had a large amount of time in which to do so, reserving full weekend days to explore the creative process, and feeling stressed when working towards deadlines and in short windows of time. Unfortunately, I teach my students for

only 9 week periods of time, with about 42 minutes per class period, so the students and I feel constantly rushed. I feel pressured to cover a lot of material quickly and the students feel pressured to produce quickly and on demand, with little time for in depth investigation or reflection.

As I am unable to change the schedule, and have to work within these constraints, a solution that I have considered is allowing for flexible due dates so that students do not feel highly pressured to try to be creative when facing deadlines. Students would still be given due dates for their projects in order to help them organize their time, but could continue improving their projects past the due date, and could turn in their work for reevaluation after completion. Another solution is to have fewer projects throughout the quarter, and spend longer on each so that more time could be used for deeper investigation. In order to teach longer units of study, I would need to break the unit into smaller segments that could be graded along the way, rather than relying solely on the resulting project grade at the end of the unit. In this way, I would still record the requisite number of grades per quarter for each student, but they would have more time to learn and work; therefore, becoming more involved in the process and hopefully enjoying it more.

Lastly, as I and Dr. K discovered (Wiener, 2000) by investigating more healthful ways of being an artist, it can be beneficial to work spontaneously rather than always planning, analyzing, and intellectualizing the artistic process. For my own body of work, although I did some initial planning, my ideas changed drastically as I allowed myself to be flexible with process and product and to learn from each creative experience. I did most of my analysis and reflection after the physical act of creating artwork, and in this way, was able to fully enjoy the creative process and produce a large amount of work.

In my teaching practice, I often require students to brainstorm and sketch before starting an art piece. I feel that the planning process allows them to focus their ideas and find the best way of solving an artistic problem. I often do not allow them to begin work on the final piece until I have approved and we have discussed their planning sketches. Even after my study, I believe that this step is necessary for the students I teach because without careful planning, they will often create using the path of least resistance, creating artwork that is obviously lazy and not well thought-out. They are also apt to get frustrated easily and try to change to an easier idea rather than working through the problem to find a solution, if they are not held to their plan. However, due to how essential it was for the success of my study to be flexible with ideas, materials, and techniques, I feel that I will be more considerate of my students in the future when they request to change their ideas or focus. As long as they desire to veer from their planned creative path due to the desire to create better work rather than the desire to find easier solutions, I will allow them to be flexible with their ideas and process, in hopes that the final work will be more successful due to the process of idea development.

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

My journey towards healing through art was a qualitative and introspective study in which I sought to find healing through the creative process as well as more therapeutic ways of being an artist. The study allowed me to be a full-time artist as well as a teacher, creating artwork and journaling about the process daily for a three month period. My hope was that I would experience a reduction in chronic pain and fatigue, which I struggle with due to living with fibromyalgia, and that healing would occur through the creative and artistic process.

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that I have drawn to answer my guiding question of “How may I, as an artist, use art for my own transformation and healing? I found that using guided imagery not only increased imagination and ideas for the creative process, but led to a reduction in pain and fatigue. Guided imagery allowed me to feel relaxed and calm, with a noticeable reduction in symptoms, while at the same time producing meaningful imagery for use in my artwork.

I also concluded that I although I experienced no long-term reduction in chronic pain or fatigue, I did experience short- term relief when highly engaged in the art-making process. Through creation, I was often able to ignore my symptoms and focus solely on the artistic process. I also found that when creating and reflecting in my journal daily, I felt much more creative than I had in the past and enjoyed the artistic process more.

Another finding was that art can only be used for transformation and healing when the artist is willing to experiment and be flexible with the creative process. Allowing me to work

spontaneously and without analysis removed much of the pressure I typically feel when creating art. Due to the mind body connection, I felt physically better when the mental stress of creating was removed and when I felt at ease to create in my own chosen environment and along my own timeline.

In addition, finding the best times of days, places and positions to work in, and materials and techniques to work with was essential in order to find more therapeutic ways of being an artist. I had to be open to changing my way of thinking about artwork as well as creating artwork since the goal was to be able to incorporate art into my daily life again, but in a healthier way than I had in the past.

Keeping a journal throughout the study was essential for me to find ways of using art for my own transformation and healing. Journal reflections revealed which processes were most therapeutic and which were most taxing on my body, as well as where and when were the best places and times to work. Without the daily journaling, my ideas would have been only reflections in time, rather than patterns of thought revealed to be true.

Although I desire to keep art- making as a part of my daily life, after concluding my study, I feel that I would not be able to do so in a healing way if I were to ever strive to be a production artist. I feel that in order to continue being an artist that uses art for transformation and healing, I will often have to adapt my materials and ideas, and will need to create in a way that allows me to be flexible with my time. I will also need to highly consider plans for building or adapting my personal studio in the future in order to create with the least possible amount of pain and fatigue.

Recommendations

My journey towards healing through art covered a broad range of topics related to art therapy, art, and the creative process, but many of these topics are deserving of further study in order to benefit the field of art education.

First, I feel that further study should be conducted regarding the idea of the artist, who may suffer from any various illnesses, using art as a therapy. Most art therapy is conducted by trained art therapists with non-artist populations, and there has been little study conducted based on the idea of the trained artist using art as a therapy for herself. Studies could include art therapists training artists in their techniques for the artists to use in their own work, as well as further studies such as mine where the artist reflects on her process in order to find her own artistic therapies. I feel that after sufficient investigation, patterns may appear that show certain ways of working through the creative process to be most healing.

Second, I believe that further study should be conducted on the use of guided imagery for ideation, both with trained artists and student populations. Guided imagery became such a strong tool for idea development for me that I feel that it would most likely benefit others when generating ideas and imagery. In my own research on guided imagery, I did not come across any references to the use of guided imagery in artwork, only in relaxation and healing, but I feel that the visual and sensory elements of guided imagery lend themselves strongly to the visual arts.

Third, I feel that medical art therapy for use with student populations is deserving of further research. In my research, most art therapy studies conducted focused solely on mental health, with medical art therapy being a fairly recent phenomenon. I did not find any studies focusing on the use of medical art therapy with students or youth, only with adult hospital and cancer patients.

I have noticed in my teaching capacity, that school counseling also focuses heavily on mental health, while tending to ignore the physical health of students. As I believe mind and body are closely related, I feel that those students living with physical illness, chronic pain, and fatigue need support in order to maintain mental health and to feel whole. Through the use of medical art therapy these students may find an outlet for expression and healing, but further investigation is needed to prove the benefits and to find the best methods of incorporating the therapy in the schools and possibly in the classroom.

References

- Academy for Guided Imagery. (2010). *What is guided imagery?* Retrieved June 27, 2011, from <http://acadgi.com/whatisguidedimagery/index.html>
- Art Institute of Chicago. *Collections*. Retrieved June 23, 2011, from <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/152961>.
- Barker, E. (2006, November). The artist within. *Natural Health*, 36(10), 98-99.
- Bar-Sela, G, Atid, L, Danos, S, Gabay, N, & Epelbaum, R. (2007). Art therapy improved depression and influenced fatigue levels in cancer patients on chemotherapy. *Psycho-Oncology*, 16, 980-984.
- Carlson, L.E., Labelle, L.E., Garland, S.E., Hutchins, M.L., & Birnie, K. (2009). Mindfulness-based interventions in oncology. In F. Didonna (Ed.), *Clinical handbook of mindfulness* (pp. 383-404). New York, NY: Springer.
- Dachman, K. (1990). *You can relieve pain: How guided imagery can help you reduce pain or Eliminate it altogether*. Scranton, PA: Harper Collins.
- Davenport, L. (2009). *Healing and transformation through self-guided imagery*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.
- De Tommaso, M. (2008). Beautiful art numbs physical pain. *New Scientist*, 199(2674), 14.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (1993). Medical art therapy: defining a field. Unpublished manuscript.
- National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association. (2011, May 15). *About Fibromyalgia*. Retrieved June 27, 2011, from <http://www.fmcpaware.org/aboutfibromyalgia>
- Pavlek, M. (2008). Paining out: an integrative pain therapy model. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 36, 385-393.

Rockwood Lane, M. (2005). Creativity and spirituality in nursing: implementing art in healing.

Holistic Nursing Practice, 19(3), 122-125.

WebMd. *Fatigue directory*. Retrieved June 27, 2011, from

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/fatigue-directory>

WebMd. (2009, June 30). *Meditation topic overview*. Retrieved June 27, 2011, from

<http://www.webmd.com/depression/tc/meditation-topic-overview>

Wiener, D. G. (2000). Dr. K's manna machine. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art*

Therapy Association, 17(4), 276-282.

