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Citation	Campbell, John Chase. "Art Making as a Means of Self-care for the Art Teacher." 2019. Thesis, Georgia State University. <a href="https://doi.org/10.57709/14408397">https://doi.org/10.57709/14408397</a>
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.57709/14408397">https://doi.org/10.57709/14408397</a>
Download date	2026-03-08 20:52:19
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/904">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/904</a>

# ART MAKING AS A MEANS OF SELF-CARE FOR THE ART TEACHER

by

JOHN CHASE CAMPBELL

Under the Direction of Melanie Davenport PhD

## ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to research the if maintaining a studio art practice that facilitated the creation of a series of artworks could serve as a means of providing self-care and a contributor to the wellbeing for the secondary art teacher.

INDEX WORDS: A/R/Tography. Positionality, Practitioner, Self-care, Teacher burnout, Art teacher, Teacher resilience • Well-being

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by

JOHN CHASE CAMPBELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art in Education

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2019

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May 2019

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my ancient progenitors who were the originators of knowledge and those more immediate ancestors who desired a formal education but were denied the right to obtain one. I can stand tall only because I stand on their shoulders. I also dedicate this to noble minded art teachers who must learn to not neglect themselves nor their artmaking practice as they empower future generations to exercise their right to contribute to mankind's aesthetic legacy. This thesis also is dedicated to my father, Daniel Campbell, who suggested I become an art teacher, and Kristi Spivey Campbell to my life partner, who personally supported me through this intense professional endeavor.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I recognize my major professor, Melanie Davenport, and my committee members, Tim Flowers and Kevin Hsieh. Your support, encouragement and insight has been the fuel for this educational pursuit.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Early art educators like Irene Weir asserted that teachers of art could only be nourished by creating art themselves (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 28). Maintaining an active artmaking practice is a means of personal development and self-care for the art teacher. The artmaking process allows her to stay connected with her life's purpose, which consequently contributes to her sense of wellbeing. Even in studies of teachers who weren't art educators, doing art-based projects helped them manage the stress of teaching and mitigated teacher burnout. Providing teachers with strategies and time to be reflective may help to support teachers' wellbeing and resilience (McKay & Barton, 2018, p. 364).

For the educator who is as committed to being a practicing artist as he is to being an art teacher, not making art is “non-negotiable to my well-being” (Ruanglertbutr, 2018). Positionality is an issue that art teachers speak of with a heightened sense of concern. Art teachers vacillate between two identities: that of being an art teacher and that of being an artist. Finding a personal framework to pursue both requires commitment and experimentation. Reconciling the two identities requires reflection, too. The conflict is apparent among numerous educators who have expressed regret for neglecting their studio practice of making personal art. They cite the inability to strike a work-life balance between the work they are doing in their classroom with the artwork they feel they should be doing in their studio. While they express pride in their students' artistic achievements, like winning national and state awards, they speak with regret regarding the lack of growth in their own artistic careers. When one's very definition is contingent on doing what he's passionate about, not doing it is a source of stress that may negatively impact his teaching performance.

Maintaining an art making practice while teaching school children is a challenge. Teaching requires giving of oneself, and as a result, at the end of the school day, the art teacher's energy is often spent. For an art teacher with domestic obligations, i.e. a spouse, children, a home, even more energy is siphoned away. Summoning the energy required to work in the art studio can be a difficult proposition. Yet, for the art teacher/artist not producing artwork means not fulfilling her life's purpose. For many a working art teacher, producing art is a self-definition and not an avocation. Doing art, as Ruanglertbutr (2018) espouses, is an integral part of their life, a passion which they cannot ignore as they teach. "In nurturing my student's talent, I had to nurture my own" (Ruanglertbutr, 2018).

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

In this studio-based thesis, I intend to *research if maintaining a consistent personal art studio practice reduces the level of stress for this classroom art teacher and elevates my feeling of wellbeing*. Is it possible that neglecting one's artmaking might create unhealthy stress that undermines one's wellness? My research seeks to address the issue of how the artist-teacher's sense of wellbeing is affected by being engaged in the personal and professional development that result from producing their own art. I hope to learn how art teachers can better balance time for studio practices and their teaching responsibilities.

I was drawn to this topic of maintaining a personal art studio practice as a means of self-care because I have questioned if my own sense of wellbeing could improve with a fulfilled commitment to my art making practice. In this thesis I explore this idea. The purpose of this studio-based research thesis was primarily self-serving. I wanted to make art. Secondly, I also want to see if producing art work could improve my personal sense of wellness and thereby decrease my stress level. The third reason was to engage in the self-reflection process of

learning and art making. I also desire to explore this idea as a professional courtesy to other art teachers for whom this issue is a concern. Also, contributing to the literature about teacher self-care was important to me since writing about teacher wellness, I suspect, is secondary to writing about art students' achievement. I felt the issue of art teachers maintaining an active artmaking practice was worthy of exploration because I am convinced that educators needed to be clear about their positionality as it relates to authenticity, how they self-identify, how they honor their personal obligation to respond to the creative impulse, and how they can be a model for the creative practices they want their students to emulate.

I am also personally invested in this quest because I am a person who tries to maintain an artmaking and art teaching practice. Yet, I was stumped by the positionality question; "When people ask what you do professionally, do you tell them you are an artist, or an art teacher, or both?" I want to study the relationship between the two, and how it *impacts how I self-define*. I want clarity to answer the question. I hope that this thesis will serve as an invitation for others to provide further research, and as an impetus for art teachers to engage in, as Hall (2010) encourages, the critical self-reflection about their teaching and art making practices.

### ***1.1.1 My Story***

Eight years ago, I entered my school's clinic after having felt dizzy all morning. The nurse instructed me to sit down and proceeded to take my blood pressure. She looked at the readout display and informed me that every other day a faculty member comes into her office with elevated blood pressure. She said, "half of them are on medication and the other half needs to be." She told me that my pressure was much too high, and she directed me to go to urgent care immediately. I complied.

The urgent care doctor reported that my blood pressure had dropped but it was still elevated enough for her to issue doctor's orders that I stay home a few days to rest. I rattled off the several school projects I had going on, and a list of things that required my presence. She reminded me that merely leaving campus was enough to lower my blood pressure, that the stress of my work was taxing me, and this episode was evidence that I needed to do a better job taking care of myself. She said, "self-care is a critical need," and in her unqualified opinion, "artists are equipped with the means to address stress – go make art."

Teaching at-risk students at a demanding inner-city school had taken an emotional toll on me and I was paying a physical price for it. My stress would have been less had I only taught the subject that I love, and not been bothered with all the other work demands; accommodating constantly changing school district initiatives, attending meetings, documenting students who refused to engage, tracking down students with chronic absences, going to professional development training, negotiating mine fields of school politics, dealing with administrators' egos, writing grants, fighting for a bigger budget, etc.

Understandably, teaching students anywhere requires tremendous amounts of energy, but teaching impoverished children, as I had been doing with a great deal of emotional investment, drained me. I was depleted by the emotional cheerleading I had to do daily to support children who returned each morning after being torn down in volatile or unstable homes the night before. More times than not these teenagers were in conflict with each other. I had to break up several physical fights. I had become skilled at defusing student's verbal confrontations. To be effective with my students I had to be present but increasingly absent was my life beyond the school building. Dealing with classroom behavior issues that were symptomatic of the overall school's environment left little time during the school day to do anything else. Staying after

school was a common strategy to catch up. I had gotten to know the night custodian personally. I seldom saw my home during the daylight hours. At the end of the day, I was too exhausted to turn my studio doorknob. I didn't have the energy to 'make art.' I wasn't making art.

I have had personal challenges balancing my role as an artist with my role as an educator. I had received an informal education while trying to teach art lessons at that school. What I had failed to learn was how to properly take care of myself. This incident and the doctor's prescription piqued my interest in studio practice as a means of self-care for the art teacher and started me on my journey of reconnecting with my art making practices as a necessity.

## **1.2 Timelines and Outcomes**

Previously, I have participated in studio art practices that allowed me to initially explore the idea I have proposed in my research question. I produced over seven works of art employing mixed media processes. Art pieces involving three-dimensional production processes required time to collaborate with artists and craftspeople who specialize in specific techniques. Some of this work involved gathering found objects and kiln firing ceramics required a schedule. Art production took approximately 97 days or three months to complete. Preliminary sketches of the concepts took one month. Producing the seven pieces required the remaining days. I dedicated 12 hours a week, 2 hours per weekday and a minimum of 4 hours on the weekend to working in my studio. However, my studio schedule allowed for flexibility to accommodate some experimentation with materials and processes.

## **1.3 Expected Results**

I expected the result of my research to show evidence of a positive change in my stress level during and after addressing the issue. In the past, I experienced slight improvement in my

well-being during the occasional staff development session or year-end post planning day wellness group activity that attempted to remedy teacher stress. I assumed with a sustained wellness practice, like art-making, I would obtain more impressive results.

#### **1.4 Plan for Reflection**

I used references from peer reviewed professional journals, presentations, articles and writings from organizations that discussed pros and cons of maintaining personal studio practices as a means of wellbeing for the classroom art teacher. I created art in my studio and maintained sketchbook/journal entries detailing the results/findings/outcomes of my study.

Reflection, an important part of my research, was an intermediate and ongoing process in keeping with the use of A/R/Tography research methodology. Thornton (2005) argues that in order to be an effective artist teacher it is helpful to be a reflective practitioner. The artist practitioner approaches the curriculum with a higher level of confidence. Thornton (2011) writes, “Important individual values formed in dialogue and discourse through processes of creative production, reflection and critical thinking increase confidence” (p. 72).

To stay mindful of that dialogue, I used my visual verbal journal as a means of reviewing notes about my emotional state of being. I used it as a reflection tool for my artistic investigations and artistic processes involved in the conceptualization of my intended art pieces before, during, and after creation. I also documented my process with photographs.

##### ***1.4.1 Definitions of Key Terms***

The artist-teacher, as defined by Hall (2010), is “a person who both makes and teaches art” (p. 167). Hall’s definition implies a commitment to, or belief in, this dual practice. This

paper uses the terms, *Artist-Teacher* and *Teacher as Practitioner*, to identify full time employed visual art teachers who maintain an active studio art practice. The terms, Artist-Teacher and Teacher as Practitioner are used interchangeably. Those terms are in contrast with the titles, Art Teacher and Teacher of Art, which as defined below, refers to individuals who are employed as teachers but may not necessarily produce art. Other terms that are germane to this paper are defined below.

- Artist is an individual who practices making art for personal and or professional motivations.
- A/R/Tgraphy is a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the liminal in-between (Irwin R., 2013, p. 199). This is a methodology of educational research and artistic creation based on the hybridization of artist-researcher-teacher.
- Positionality is based on situating, locating, and positioning the self (Knight & Deng, 2016) in relationship to others and to circumstances like ideas and curriculum. Knight & Deng suggest that positionality is not only applicable to issues of culture, ethnicity, or gender but also self-assigned roles/identities/occupations like being a teacher and an artist.
- Practitioner is a person who is actively engaged in a specialized artform, discipline, or profession. (Ruanglertbutr, 2018)
- Self-care is any activity that an individual does deliberately in order to take care of his mental, emotional, and physical health. Good self-care is critical to improved mood and reduced anxiety. Self-care is also key to a good relationship with oneself and others.

- Teacher Burnout, according to Intrator and Kunzman (2006) can be “characterized ...as the loss of empathy, the increase in cynicism, and the tendency of once caring professionals to blame clients or students for their problem” (p. 18)
- Teacher of Art is an individual dedicated to the artistic development of students and who does not necessarily practice as an artist (Thornton, 2003, p. 120). For the purpose of clarity, I am defining the term *art teacher* as an employed teacher using a formal art curriculum who is working in an organized school setting. As used in this paper this *art teacher* may or may not maintain a continuous artmaking practice. I use both terms interchangeably.
- Well-being is a condition of a person. “Wellness refers to diverse and interconnected dimensions of physical, mental, and social well-being that extend beyond the traditional definition of health. It includes choices and activities aimed at achieving physical vitality, mental alacrity, social satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and personal fulfillment” (Naci & Loannidis, 2015, p. 121).

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Seeking to understand if producing art can contribute to teachers' well-being meant investigating the literature pertaining to teaching art and making art. In this chapter, I shared what the literature stated about the role of art practice in the lives of art teachers. Some art teachers have a dual practice, some view teaching as their dominate role, and others choose being an artist over teaching. Being informed of how art teachers identify was paramount for understanding my research. Overall, the literature suggested that an art teacher's indecision about positionality, or how she identifies or is seen in her role, can be a stress factor.

### 2.1 Artist, Teacher or Both?

The literature regarding this topic presents advantages of the artist teacher concept, but there are limitations to reconciling the two roles and positionality may persist as an issue. Dealing with the flexible and dynamic nature of the artist teacher concept presents challenges for some. The role of the artist-teacher is not always a clearly defined professional identity. *Artist-Teachers* are comfortable with the ambiguity of the dual practice, being on the spectrum between artist and teacher is not perceived as a conflicting paradigm.

For other art teachers, as Hoekstra (2015) suggests, self-defining is further complicated by the interpretation of the term, artist-teacher, being very porous and open to interpretation. Thornton (2005) asserts that one of the ways the artist teacher is enabled to alleviate any sense of identity crisis and to function effectively in a dual role is to affirm the positive relationship between personal art-making and teaching as she self identifies. Of course, doing this is a challenge that maybe uncomfortable. Thornton believes artist teachers who have successfully struck a balance view each professional practice as an important aspect of the other.

Why does finding balance for the artist teacher concept continue to be an issue for some art teachers? Hoekstra (2015) suggests that art teacher training may be a contributing factor. Inconsistencies regarding art education teacher preparation programs, and the various educational pathways individuals travel to become an art teacher, probably contribute to how or why teachers may identify as artist practitioners or not. If art teacher preparation programs address the importance of maintaining an artistic practice perhaps more art education graduates would choose to do so.

Another stressful complication for the teacher as practitioner concept may be how their identity is perceived by others; i.e. educators, artists, and school administrators. In the case of the Dutch art educators Hoekstra studied, she writes; “Artist teachers are often associated with artists with no pedagogical background: outsiders in the classroom” (Hoekstra, 2015, p. 354). Such misconceptions that may inform the idea that there is a separation between the educational and the artistic paradigm [that] inevitably leads to, as Hall (2010), suggested, a problem understanding of the artist teacher.

An example of this misunderstanding may emanate from the cultural differences between the world of art and that of school. Artists, typically preferring flexibility, are used to following their own methods and operating on their own schedule as opposed to following imposed rules by outside systems. Such dynamics may lead to conflict which causes stress. Additional conflicts between the artist-teacher and the school can arise when the school demonstrates a lack of support for the art teacher’s artistic development. This lack of support is a contributor of stress for the art teacher.

Hoekstra advocates mitigating the conflict by suggesting that artist-teachers choose to switch between their professional roles, which underscores the inherent conflict between art and

education (Hoekstra, 2015). According to Hall, the artist-teacher must be understood as a unifying concept that inhabits complementary and oppositional paradigms (Hall, 2010) and the strength of the artist-teacher concept, when mastered, is that it ties together a duality that operates as an artistic practitioner within what could be a rigid educational environment. Negotiating those paradigms can be stressful.

For teachers as practitioners there are definite benefits for their classroom practice. Foley (2014) espouses that such teachers demonstrates four artist's habits that are genuinely teaching for creative growth and are meeting the goal of creating a new model for learning that allows ideas and curiosity to reign. Those habits are:

*Idea Generation.*

Foley says, "artists play, which is a "surefire way to kick start ideation" (Foley, 2014). Using media or the idea as the impetus to bring original ideas into reality, artists are willing to experiment. Teacher as practitioners are in the habit of consistently thinking and reflecting on their artistic practices and may find generating concepts for new projects not as daunting as teachers who do not. Teachers who are actively engaged in art making are more than likely to have up to date information regarding art practices, new media and art processes and can therefore more readily offer students assistance pertaining to working out their concepts. They know how to use play and use their imagination to provoke students to think and experiment like artists because they are artists.

*Comfort with ambiguity.*

Foley (2014) and her mentor, Dr. George Szekely, support the idea that ambiguity is part of the creative process. Artist as practitioners, who are in the habit of engaging in the open-

ended processes and are accustomed to experimenting with art media, are in the ideal position to model this attribute to the children in their charge.

*Transdisciplinary research.*

Artists are consistently doing research that serves their curiosity. Foley (2014) proclaims, “Artists will do anything that furthers their thinking.” Teachers who are artists can foster this same intellectual hunger in their pupils. Art education is inherently interdisciplinary and is in service to ideas. Artist teachers, because of their own investigative and experimental art practices, Hoekstra implies, (2015, p. 353) show great interest in children's creative processes and know how to ask investigative questions.

For other educators like Mónica Castillo, the business of being an art teacher offers a respite to what she describes as the “dark side of the commercial art-world or being attached to the big spheres of money and power” (Vella, 2016, p. 5).” In an interview she states, “For me teaching is a privilege, a field of research, a challenge, but also lots of fun” (Vella, 2016) and she confesses, “I enjoy making art a lot, but I have never enjoyed the art world: shows, curators, galleries, PR, art as commodity, and so on” (p. 5). Educators with Castillo’s position may entirely forego their professional art making practice because they find it unmanageable or too stressful to pair with their role as an art teacher.

The literature suggests there may not be one remedy for confirming the art teacher’s positionality as it relates to being on the spectrum between artist and teacher. Hall (2010) posits that maintaining the connection between an artist practice and teaching is an issue upon which the art teacher must continuously reflect. The art teacher needs to engage in reflective practice to decide if she would operate within one or both roles or neither. I believe that deciding on this

issue may mitigate my stress. While producing art as a means of research, I gave myself the time and space to do so as I reflected on the literature.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

My goal in this thesis process was to monitor changes in my state of wellbeing and my research and aesthetic processes while I engaged in an active studio practice as a form of active research. To accomplish this task, I conducted an introspective and intra-spective study using the A/R/Tography research methodology to produce qualitative data.

A/R/Tography is a form of scholarly inquiry that falls under the umbrella of practice-based research. It incorporates an element of practice in both the research and methodology output, rather than seeing the relationship between research and practice as a contrast, as has sometimes traditionally been the case. A/R/Tography as a practice-based research is situated in the in-between spaces where, as Irwin & Springgay (2008) would proclaim, theory-as-practice-as-process can invite complications that reveal new discoveries through living inquiry.

A/R/Tographers believe there is equality and coexistence between the roles of the artist, the teacher, and the researcher as practices associated with living inquiry. Each role informs the others in a rhizoidal fashion creating interstitial spaces between art making, researching, and teaching. A/R/Tography is more than a mode of scholarly inquiry or a method of representing research through artistic means, it is an embodied query into knowing (theoria), doing (praxis) and making (poesis). It is because of A/R/Tography's examination, via living inquiry and reflective practice, that these three interacting and intertwined roles have in-between spaces that produce new meanings to be grasped.

Bickel (2017) offers an introduction to the practice of A/R/Tography as a post-modern research method that she used in her artistic practice. She proclaims that A/R/Tography offered a welcomed bridge, an intermediary, between her "artist self and the academic academy". According to (Bickel, 2017), the practice of A/R/Tography requires an engagement with the

multiple lenses the artist/researcher/teacher in relationship to/with each other. She expresses, “the relationship between part and whole is always shifting and developing as it reaches towards an ever-evolving understanding of radical relatedness” (Bickel, 2017). This methodology, that so prominently features such relatedness, pairs well with my research topic which is, essentially, a study in positionality. A/R/Tography allowed me to explore the complexities of my different roles and the in-between spaces in which I, as the subject of my research, wanted to discover. A/R/Tography facilitated an opportunity for me to produce art, to research my artmaking process, and to reflect on it and the new possibilities and information that occurred as a result of that radical relatedness.

### **3.1 Methods**

A/R/Tography is a research methodology premised on openness, listening, and being responsive and receptive (Kind, 2006, p. 120). This methodology positioned me to operate from such a premise as I conducted a reflective practice as an artist/teacher/researcher. I was motivated to discover how my research informed my artmaking processes and how my artmaking processes served as teaching tools for my students and the viewers of the image or users of the objects that I produced. The research design for my study had the effect of yielding compelling cause and effect evidence supporting my theory. Due to the rhizoidal nature of A/R/Tography I gained a heightened sense of awareness of the new possibilities my investigation produced. I engaged in my research process I also used that heightened sense of awareness to monitored my sense of well-being. I use the following tools to assess changes:

#### *Research Tool #1 Studio Production*

In keeping with the A/R/T/ography methodology, I maintained an art studio process facilitating the production of a series of art works using mixed media and found and repurposed

objects. Composing the art pieces using various materials and artmaking processes was illustrative of my focus on positionality, a theme in my research. The practice of artmaking provided the opportunity to reflect on my well-being, and to gather data germane to this study.

*Research Tool #2 Sketchbook/Journal*

In keeping with the methodology, I maintained a sketchbook/journal to track my emotional state during this art making process. The journal entries helped to document qualitative data as I attempted to address my research statement. I used the sketchbook/journal at least four times for each project. Along with sketches and notes for projects, I also recorded journal entries reflecting my emotional state, stress level and sense of well-being.

*Research Tool #3 Wellness Survey*

Additionally, I used a self-assessment survey tool to record benchmarks of my stress levels at the beginning, the midpoint, and the end of my research period (<https://www.stress.org/self-assessment/>).

*Research Tool #4 Photo Documentation*

I documented my artistic process with photographs to record stages in the development of the art pieces I produced.

### **3.2 Limitations and Delimitations**

Due to limited time and resources, my study was limited to producing a minimum of seven works of art during a 3-month period. Project management was an obstacle for which I had to strategically plan. Creating mixed media artwork required using specific processes of which I was unfamiliar. This was especially true when producing three dimensional components I needed for some art pieces. In such cases, I sought assistance or instruction from other artists and craftspeople who specialize in those techniques I lacked. I had to schedule studio time to

collaborate with them. I employed a working calendar when scheduling efforts to create art in my personal studio or in the spaces of other artists. Within my timeframe I scheduled sessions to get critical feedback from other professional artists about works in progress.

I identified potential problems in my research endeavor which included my unavoidable bias as the subject of my own research. I am not an art therapist and I anticipated that an aspect of my research would veer into the field of art therapy. My research did serve a therapeutic quality. My research plan and the A/R/Tography research methodology I employed did produce a definitive outcome I will discuss in chapter 4. Allotting myself the studio time required to produce the art work I needed for this study while working as a full-time art educator was important to my research.

## 4 IMPLEMENTATION AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

In this chapter I elaborate on the ideas that originated the series, the process for making the art works, the challenges of producing them, and what I discovered as a result.

### 4.1 Implementation

I had to be strategic about implementing the plan I needed for the art practice component of my research. Surprisingly, I applied the same logistics I used to prepare for my high school students' art classes to my approach for accomplishing my studio production goals; the rigidity of the formal school model became a viable paradigm for my studio practice. The result is the *Message from the Ancestors Series*, the body of work I produced for my research.

#### 4.1.1 Cultural Context for Art Series

My goal was for the series to create a bridge, a sort of cultural conduit, exploring my personal cultural connections and the exchange of ideas between the world of my ancestors and the contemporary world in which I exist. So much of the discussion about the African American's role in America focuses on the transatlantic slave trade and the civil rights movement. The slave trade was predicated on European slavers effectively breaking the cultural ties of captured Africans from their places of origin on the African continent. The civil rights movement is rooted in the courage of people challenging the codified system of racial oppression in the United States of America. The *Message from the Ancestors Series* does not directly seek to address nor to ignore the events of the slave trade or the civil rights movement. Instead of the focusing not the interruptions in the culture the series prefers to focus on the connections.

Aesthetically, I hope the series command visual attention when seen separately or in tandem with each other. In terms of cultural context, the series may be considered highly personal and, even esoteric. The art may not appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of viewers for

whom these works are not immediately culturally relevant. Those viewers may have a more difficult time interpreting the works for themselves. I would rather they not try to decipher what I intended to say as the artist. I preferred that they find a personal meaning. For them, I hope the work elicits a discussion (internal or with others) regarding their positionality.

I made the series of works for me and for those who preceded me; those whose collective memories and cultural DNA I carry within me. Paying homage to my ancestors makes the series my most important. With the work I demonstrate the value of our connection. This is my offering to them.

#### ***4.1.2 Art History and Technical Influences for the Series***

My studio practice was a research tool for my study of teacher self-care. The influences that have informed my studio practice are artists who are my contemporaries, but also my artistic elders. Most are formally trained in the Western art tradition and are from the African diaspora. They worked or are working in the Black aesthetic. Most of them happened to be educators whose artwork is didactic. Because of their similarities to my lived experience, as an artist and an art teacher, I found these artists and their work culturally immediate to my positionality.

Perhaps equally important was the fact these artists' work addressed some of my technical issues I had while producing my work. Their approaches to employing a diversity of art-making processes, that included incorporating found objects, were useful in the making of my work. Their aesthetic concerns mirrored ones I had for this study. Their art used some of the same themes I used in my work.

I, essentially, allowed these aesthetic forbearers and the materials I used to guide my process of bringing my ideas for the series to fruition. I reflected on these influencers before,

during and after this study. Doing so encouraged me, and lessened my sense of anxiety about my art making practice and the work that I produced.



Figure 1 James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly*, ca. 1950-1964, mixed media, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of anonymous donors, 1970.353.1-.116

#### **4.1.2.1 James Hampton**

James Hampton's *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nation's Millennium General Assembly* (figure 1) is the foundational influence for my *Message from the Ancestor Series*. Near the beginning of my teaching career I earned a National Faculty/Smithsonian Institute fellowship that granted me a summer internship in the Smithsonian's office of secondary education in Washington, D.C. Nearly every day, I visited the Smithsonian's American Art Museum to witness Hampton's Throne room.

Formally untrained as an artist, Hampton secretly created his elaborately adorned throne room with mixed media and found objects over a fourteen years period inside a rented garage. This awe-inspiring installation is his epic response to his spiritual vision of faith and hope for salvation. It is considered a seminal work of American outsider art with a spiritual theme. His

work may have only been seen by others after his death. Hampton's work is a testimony to constructing cultural meaning, as a shrine honoring his most important relationship, his connection to the divine.

Hampton's use of nontraditional art media and found objects, like gold foil and light bulbs, does not distract the viewer from the grandeur of overall work. Fascinatingly, the modest low brow materials belie the grandiose presentation and seriousness of the installation's overall message and still, the installation is successful.

The most successful aspect of the work is the sense of self-reflection it fosters. The throne room intrigues the viewer to ask why and the how questions regarding its maker and his intention, the work itself and its meaning. I have only skimmed the literature formally analyzing and codifying Hampton's work in an attempt to avoid tarnishing the God-smacked wonder this throne room evokes. I think of its' mysteries as I ponder the two words Hampton placed conspicuously above the center of his entire fantastic creation, "Fear Not."

The actual scale of his work contributes to its visual interest. The throne room is much larger than anything I created for my series, but I worked to achieve the same sense of stateliness in even the smaller pieces I made.

#### **4.1.2.2 AfriCOBRA**

The art of AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) formed as an artist collective within the African American cultural landscape of 1968. The group's goal was to create the art that could represent a Black aesthetic and would serve the Black liberation movements of the time. The art of AfriCOBRA founding members, Wadsworth Jarrell and James Phillips, was a major influence on the work I produced for this study. In fact, Jarrell had a major impact on me as a student. He was my art professor at the University of Georgia.



*Figure 2 James Carter Trio Wadsworth Jarrell 1999 Acrylic on Canvas*

The AfriCOBRA artists' use of visually pulsating color and patterns evokes the energy and techniques I attempted to adopt in the body of work I produced. Jarrell's paintings (Figure 2) successful compositions representing layered space was what I tried to achieve in my work. The boldness of Phillips' color scheme (Figure 3) is a feature I tried to emulate in my more colorful art pieces. Jarrell, Phillips, and the other AfriCOBRA artists' use of pattern is inspired by Jazz, with its multi-rhythmic chords and improvisation. Their art compelled me to believe that I, too, could create art that visually sounded like music or a voice. I summoned the same idea of visual flux in my work as I sought an exchange between the past and the present. I looked to the work of these artists elders to teach me to how represent the transition of time and place as they had done so effectively.



*Figure 3 Water Spirits Revisited –King Neptune James Phillips 2005 Acrylic on Paper*

#### **4.1.2.3 Pan-Africanism**

The Pan-African concept espouses that all of Africa is culturally relevant to the African American experience. Pan-Africanism is a movement for people in the Africa diaspora to strengthen political, social, economic and cultural ties with each other and Africans on the continent. The movement advocated for Black people to seek artistic inspiration from their ancestral homeland. It is from this idea that AfriCOBRA emerged. The art I made for this study was also aligned to this idea. My artwork sought to reiterate cultural and ancestral connections to Africa by referencing its traditional art objects. The art of New York artist, Valerie Maynard,

and puppet maker, Ashley Bryant, reflect characteristics that are indicative of being influenced by African art and ideas.

African art shows evidence of an innovational use of materials, including found objects. In my artwork, I attempted to evoke the ethereal nature of time and space by including actual found objects and images of objects rendered by my hand. In *Get Me Another Heart, This One's Been Broken Many Times* (Figure 4), New York artist Valerie Maynard, summoned this effect by spraying paint over found objects and nails, using them as stencils to create a layered image on paper beneath. The look she achieved is one that suggests African fetish sculpture. I experimented with her technique on a few pieces in the series.



Figure 4 *Get Me Another Heart, This One's Been Broken Many Times*, from *No Apartheid* series, Valerie Maynard, 1995, Mixed Media, 30" x 25"

As seen in (Figure 5) the puppet maker Ashley Bryant's creative use of found and repurposed objects references the African tradition of using items in innovative ways. Bryant's process of gathering materials, reflecting upon them, and then composing his puppets based on what the materials say to him was my ambition for my own studio practice that dealt so intimately with messaging and manipulated materials. Bryant's mindfulness of the material serving his artistic vision was a goal I definitely tried to emulate as I focused on expressing meaningful context via the objects I had gathered to use for the series. His sense of vibrancy in his art was another set a high bar I really tried to meet in my own work.



*Figure 5 Puppets, Ashley Bryant, Mixed Media with Found Objects*

#### **4.1.3 Process**

Each piece of work that I've create for this series is unique. However, some aspects of the art production were the same for the entire body of the work. The general process for production is as follow:

- Step 1 Preliminary Sketches: I created a series of preliminary sketches in my sketchbook/journal to work out my initial concepts.
- Step 2 Research: I gathered internet sourced reference images to use along with the family photos and sketches I already had. Using my digital devices (iPhone, iPad, and

laptop computer) I housed all relevant reference materials in the respective photo albums for each project. This method made quick work of finding images I needed to create the pieces. In each folder I also included photographs of pieces during the various stage of development. To conserve time, I began using digital software tools to play with various compositions. I consulted with other artists about media, techniques and artistic processes. Several times I used the iPhone facetime feature to video chat with artists providing sculpting advice. On two occasions I traveled to my advising artist's studio to perform processes like creating molds and casting. To provide a more developed picture of the family members for whom I created artwork I had conversations with family elders, keepers of the family narratives.

- Step 3 Refinement: Using my sketchbook/journal I refined my original idea by drawing and sketching.
- Step 4 Sourcing materials: I gathered materials, i.e. art media, found objects, and tools, I deemed necessary for the individual project.
- Step 5 Art Production: I produced each piece in the studio (Figure 6) often in tandem with the production of other pieces. I would manipulate the materials as many times required to achieve the desired effect. This was an integral part of the process.



*Figure 6 Chase Campbell producing art in art studio*

- Step 6 Documentation: I photographed the work during various stages of development. I prepared the work for presentation, i.e. framings or mounting.
- Step 7 Reflection: After completing each piece of art, I wrote my impressions of the work, the process and meaning the work was trying to communicate at least once. If necessary, I revisited one or more of the previous steps.

#### ***4.1.4 Creation of my work***

The catalyst for the *Message from the Ancestors* art series came from a conversation with my friend, Mohammad Kadir, an international exchange student from Niger, Africa. I have never forgotten the words of encouragement he offered,

“When you speak all of your ancestors’ voices are in your words and when you stand all of your ancestors stand with you. You are more than yourself. You are part of all those who came before you. You are never alone.” (Personal conversation, 1988)

His offering was the impetus that began my inquiries of African culture in general and my heredity in particular. For a homesick University of Georgia freshman, in a culturally hostile environment, those words were a lifeline that lifted me from a sea of negative emotions and soothed my feelings of alienation and isolation. Those words challenged the American individualism concept I had been enculturated to believe. Those words began my intellectual journey to embrace the non-western concept that the individual was not more important than the group, the family, and the community.

The journey continued as I participated in The National Faculty/Smithsonian Fellowship program. The focus of my fellowship was material culture and my laboratory for learning was the museums' fine art and artifact collections. It was a very rich experience for me and was a pivotal moment in shaping my approach to teaching and making art. These experiences produced the *Message from the Ancestors* art series.



Figure 7 The Cost of Hating Others is the Price of Loving Yourself Less /The Mandala Series 20" x 20", J. Chase Campbell 1994

My most personal art making is, and has always been, an exploration of identity and cultural connection. My past work consisted mostly of mandalas that were manifestations of deeply rooted personal beliefs like that expressed in *The Cost of Hating Others is the Price of*

*Loving Yourself Less* (Figure 7). The *Message from the Ancestors Series*, in some aspects, are deconstructions of the mandalas, an attempt to represent worldviews as being in flux and not precisely aligned with a tightly balanced compositions the mandalas so prominently featured. The remnants of those mandalas, semicircular motifs and heavy use of symbols, are present within the compositions of my new pieces. However, I expanded upon the focus of my previous work by not concentrating on the mottos as I had done in the Mandala series but by paying reverence to the persons communicating and my relationship to those individuals.

The mandalas, produced in my youth, were didactic announcements of what I generally believed at that moment. I have evolved to believe the messages I have inherited are specifically intended for me. The *Message from the Ancestors Series* communicates that the past is always present. It proves my kind friend, Mohammad, right.

In my artwork I intentionally omitted literal visual information communicating what I inferred from my ancestral spirits. I wanted the art series to suggest an exchange has taken, or can take, place between the messengers and the recipient. The ancestral messages, as I perceived them, were esoteric points of reference between myself and those who have preceded me. They were personal communications. I made these artworks as ‘devices’ that function as the conduits inviting reflection and meditation and as a means of connecting to the past and documenting family narratives as relayed by family elders. I engaged in a sublime aesthetic process allowing me to commune with my ancestral spirits; to hear the voices that speak when I speak.

#### **4.2 Description and Meaning of the Work**

*Message from the Ancestors* is the title for this series of art works I produced as evidence of my research to understand how my artmaking process relates to my well-being.

The titles of the works on the series are listed below:

*Ancestral Headphones*, Mixed media, 2018  
*Call and Response/The Past is Calling*, Mixed Media with found Objects, 2018  
*Homage to Baby Charles: Maternal Uncle, The Artist Charles Allen*, Mixed Media, 2019  
*Homage to Helen Campbell, Paternal Grandmother*, Mixed Media, 2018  
*Kalimba for Uncle Johnny*, Mixed Media, 2018  
*Music, Myth and Memory Fertility Doll*, Mixed Media, 2019  
*Precious Cargo/Homage to The Black Star Shipping Line*, Mixed Media, 2019  
*The Khepri 360 Interactive Construct/ Scarab*, Mixed Media, 2019  
*The Portal/The Door of No Return*, Mixed Media, 2018

Physically, the *Message from the Ancestors Series*, is a body of mixed media low relief assemblages or sculptures in the round that are no larger than 40" x 30" x 5". Every piece in the series includes some form of communication technology objects and/or written correspondences to symbolize messaging from my predecessors which is paired with visual elements of the African aesthetic and/or historical visual reference.

Intellectually, the series is also a study of positionality, as it investigates the relationships between my cultural heroes, my ancestors, my research process, the resulting artworks and myself as an artist, researcher, and art teacher. My intention was to create a series of seven works of art, but I actually completed nine art pieces at the end of this study. It is appropriate that communication is the theme of the series. The ancestors had a lot to say.

#### ***4.2.1 Common characteristics***

The various pieces that compose the series can be considered diverse and unique but, nearly all of them have the following characteristics in common: artist's intent, symbolism, the use of mixed media, evidence of multiple art making processes, intentional use of color schemes, ancestral reverence and mindful presentation. Below, I will discuss these characteristics while describing the art pieces in the process.

### Artist's Intention

My art is a response to noted philosopher, Alan Lock's, call for Black folks to look to their own heritage and culture for artistic inspiration. In the Pan-African tradition, I am a reclamation artist. I purposely create art to achieve the goal of making positive reaffirming Black images. The *Message from the Ancestors Series* is my effort to advance that goal. I wanted the art to be as inspiring to viewers as my research of the Gold Coast, Ancient Egypt and the royal Ashanti tribe had been to me. As I worked on the series, I also kept the awe-inspiring wonder of Hampton's throne room at the forefront of my mind. My intention was to use the splendor of great African civilizations as a palette to conjured a similar sense of awe that Hampton's work exquisitely represents.

### Symbolism

Throughout the series I prominently used African Adinkra symbols (Figure 8). Each symbol represents a character attribute, and all are accessible on the internet for viewers who are industrious to want the know their meanings. I have especially used these symbols because of their strong graphic presence, visual interest and long history of use in African art and objects.



*Figure 8 Examples of Adinkra Symbol*

These ancient symbols are so important that they slyly appear in the wrought ironwork of enslaved African craftsmen in the American South. I felt using Adinkra symbols, as substitutes

for words, was appropriate for representing my African ancestors' message to me. In my sketchbook/journal, I coined a new name for them, Adinkrabets.

The symbols are most effectively used in the piece titled, *The Portal/The Door of No Return* (Figure 9). I refashioned the keys of the typewriter I made with Adinkrabets. I presented the work in an open shadow box almost as an invitation for ancestral spirits to type out a message for the onlooker. In the place of where typewriter paper would normally be, I created the notorious door of no return located at the Gorée island slave port of Senegal. The bronze color of the typewriter assemblage and the darkness of the shadow box contrast with the brilliant blue sky and water the door exposes. The subject matter is the grim, but the theme is one of transition and contemplation. The viewer is correct to see the typewriter, sitting at the ready, as a mechanism to convey a somber message at a critical time in the lives of my ancestors. Even as the creator of this piece, I still at a lost knowing what message would be appropriate to receive or send.



*Figure 9 The Portal/The Door of No Return Mixed Media 2018*

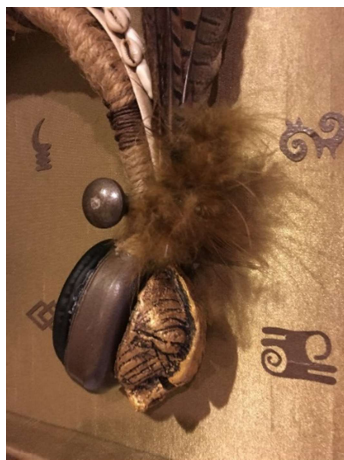
*Mixed Media and Multiple Artmaking Processes*

My relationship to the materials I used served as a means of informing and inspiring my art making process. Using items like cowrie shells and raffia, materials used in ancient African art, referenced ancestral groups from which I am derived. My use of older art materials and current art tools and media, like laser cutters and acrylic resins, became an analogy for an exchange of old and new ideas. I sourced contemporary communication devices, like a computer mouse, which I adorned or refashioned to reflect the aesthetics of objects and imagery from an older time and place. I used repurposed family items, like my deceased father's camera and fountain pen to provide more recent personal points of entry for the research component of my studio practice.

My use of actual objects, like family photographs, and the fabrication or rendering of objects can be compared to possessing physical historical evidence and the representation of the historical account. Some of the objects are real, some are ethereal. I referenced both facts in the art series. Doing so allowed me to explore how artifacts can serve as evidence of the connection between the past and the present and how the rendering serves as documentation of history as I perceive it.

My use of mixed media throughout the series is a nod to the African and African American tradition of improvisation, a characteristic that features prominently in the culture. African Americans, who because of slavery and systemic racial oppression had scant resources, survived by creatively arranging and rearranging what they did possess. Two of the most authentic classic American art forms, Jazz and quilt making, grew out of this adaptation. Improvisation allowed me to create solutions for integrating older and more current art media

and materials as it aligned my creative process to this tradition and my art works' expressive content to the cultural pulse of those who preceded me.



*Figure 10 Detail, Ancestral Headphones, Mixed media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018*

Each art work in the series makes use of more than one artmaking process. In the series, I mindfully worked to achieve a visually rich experience for myself and the viewer. Production of the Ancestral Headphones required refashioning functional wireless headphones and casting small African elder masks (Figure 10) in resin. Another example of work involving multiple art making process is the art piece, *Homage to Helen Campbell, Paternal Grandmother* (Figure 11). Capturing the essential of my multifaceted grandmother required different means of representing imagery associated with her. In the piece the viewer can see evidence of stenciling and collage work. Like other pieces in the series, I included within the composition items that were both real (Figure 12) and rendered. Actual photographs of Helen appear along with drawing of women representing her possible African forbearers. The inclusion of both gives additional context to this piece as well as other works in the series. I thought it to be fitting that the art series

exploring the relationship of the artist to those being honored within the work would likewise benefit from showing a layered use of artmaking processes as an exploration of art materials.

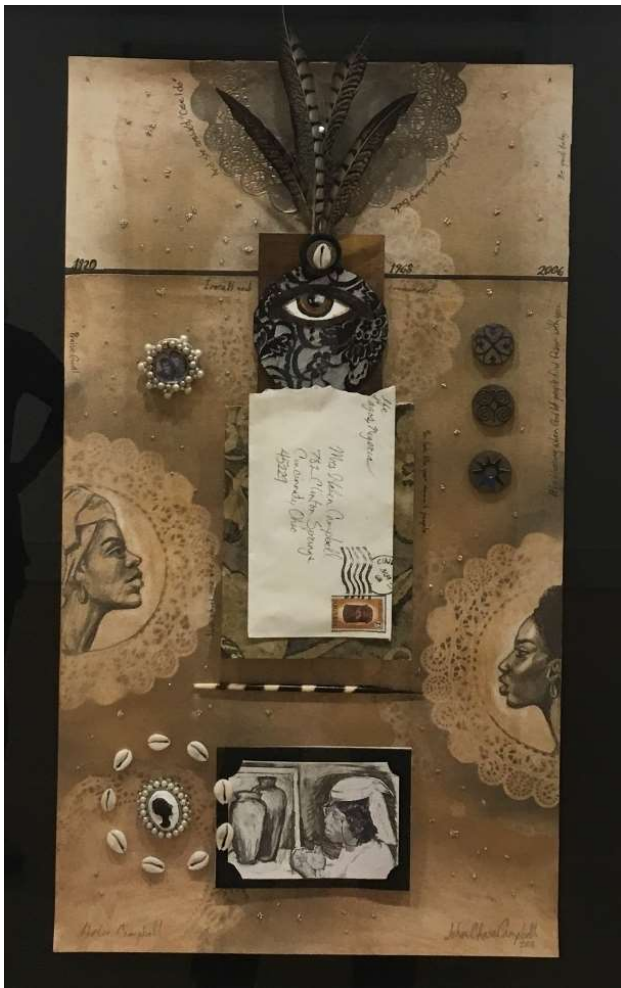


Figure 11 *Homage to Helen Campbell, Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018*



Figure 12 *Detail for Homage to Helen Campbell*

A layered use of art materials, often including repurposed communication items as seen in *Call and Response/ The Past is Calling* (Figure 13). In many of the pieces, the

communication device is obvious and others like the fertility doll, *Music, Myth and Memory* (Figure 14), the inclusion of a device is more subtle. The internet router used for the doll head (Figure 15) gives a surprise to viewer and maybe even a moment of reflection.



Figure 13 *Call and Response*, 18" x 20", Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018



Figure 14 *Music, Myth and Memory Fertility Doll, Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018*



Figure 15 *Fertility Doll Production Image*

### Color Scheme

I was intentional in my use of color for this series. Some pieces have active, bright color schemes to reference my influence of patterned African cloth and borrowing from the active compositions of AfriCOBRA artists' paintings. The color scheme I used in *Call and Response: The Past is Calling* is an attempt to visually capture the cadence of the vernacular spoken by my

rural Southern grandmother, Hattie Daniel. I purpose painted bright hues on the piece, Kalimba for Uncle Johnny (

Figure 16), to convey the joyous music my Uncle would play and represent his humorous personality.

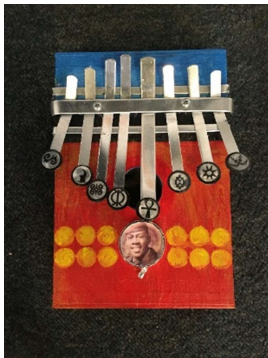


Figure 16 Kalimba for Uncle Johnny, Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018



Figure 17 *Precious Cargo/Homage to The Black Star Shipping Line*, Mixed Media, 24'' x30'', J. Chase Campbell, 2019

The use of golds and metallic color schemes are design choices that appears in several pieces. The metallic color used not only suggest the material wealth of ancient Egypt and the African Gold Coast, it also hints at the shiny technology the works features. In *Precious*

*Cargo/Homage to The Black Star Shipping* (Figure 17) gold is used in contrast with the neutral raffia and wood to give a texturally rich reminder that the African aesthetic embraces both luxurious and humble materials. *Precious Cargo* is a reminder of the value African people possess. I included Adinkra golden coins I had made to further suggest an exchange of one valued item for another.

#### *Honoring ancestors*

Most pieces feature a person, either a deceased family member who positively impacted my life or historical individuals who significantly contributed to African or African American culture. Some of the individual pieces in this series references the legacy of Africans in the diaspora who transcended their immediate geographical boundaries to participate on the world stage. *Precious Cargo* is my thank you card to Pan-Africanists like Marcus Garvey, who inspired Black folks to think globally as he had done with his Back to Africa movement. *Precious Cargo* is a visual reminder of my connection to a larger community of thought leaders.

Other pieces in the series are examples of familial reverie. Such respect is illustrated in *Homage to Baby Charles: Maternal Uncle, The Artist Charles Allen*, (Figure 18). Because my Uncle Charles, the subject matter of the piece, died the same year I was born I have always held a special affinity for him. By all accounts, he was a very good artist. The family's crushing poverty prevented him from pursuing where his talents may have taken him and illness took

away him much too soon. His paintbrush signifies his art practice. I purposely left the graphite portrait of him unfinished to represent the abrupt end to his art practice.

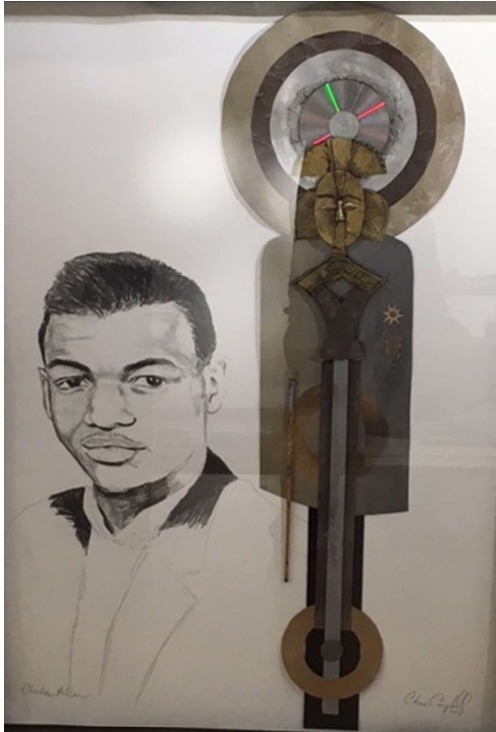


Figure 18 *Homage to Baby Charles: The Artist Charles Allen, Maternal Uncle, Mixed Media 2019*

I chose to pay tribute to him in this piece since I believe my career as an art teacher and an artist pays homage to the life he may have had if he had survived. The use of Kota reliquary figure (Figure 19) in the piece appears to memorialize him. Drawing his portrait was a

reflective practice that insisted that I, not only process his appearance and compare his features with mines but, also honor the relationship that I have with him.



*Figure 19 Kota Reliquary*

Kalimba for Uncle Johnny (

Figure 16) pays respect to deceased elders whose shared traditions, like song and music, are messages that are worthy of still being heard.

### Presentation

The way these pieces are presented for display played an important part in conveying the worthiness of objects imbued with African heritage. The series inclusion of found and repurposed objects attempts to make the experience of art more immediate for the viewer. The items, like the computer mouse that doubles as the scarab body's in *The Khepri 360 Interactive Construct/Scarab* (Figure 20), seems like functional everyday objects, which are tangible for the viewer. However, the way the art objects are presented suggest they have value and are to be

revered. Some art pieces are presented as if they are items in a museum, thus the use of a shadow box that showcases the kalimba (

Figure 16). Other art pieces are presented in a manner that seeks parity with items that can be popularly recognized as luxury brands. An example of



*Figure 20 The Khepri 360 Interactive Construct/Scarab, Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2019*

this is the *Ancestral Headphone* (Figure 21). The wireless headphones are essentially African headdresses displayed in an open shadow box that is layered in fabric adorned with laser cut Adinkra symbols. The presentation suggest displays the item as a Coach accessory item might

be shown against a logo patterned case. The piece uses this trope to get the viewer to consider, or maybe reconsider, how they value this and maybe other African styled objects.



Figure 21 *Ancestral Headphones, Mixed Media, J. Chase Campbell, 2018*

#### 4.2.2 *The Meaning*

The *Message from the Ancestors Series* has multifaceted meanings. For the purpose of this study, the art series serves as a byproduct of my art making research process. The art works are the means of reflecting on my roles as an artist, researcher and teacher investigating if maintaining a studio practice could be a means of self-care. The works are testimonials documenting that an investigation has taken place.

For more personal purposes the series is my investigations of testimonials from my predecessors regarding identity, cultural connection and belonging. The artworks are ‘devices’ for inviting continued conversations between my ancestors and myself. They are intimate offerings of respect to my ancestors. They are reflections of my connection to the rich traditions

and the pageantry of African and African American culture and aesthetics. They are reaffirmations of my self-worth.

The possible meanings the viewer may get from the series may vary. The works can be viewed as contemporary reflections of respect for grand African and African American cultural ideas and aesthetics. The series can be seen as a reclamation of cultural connection to the larger Pan-African community. The series can be interpreted as a counter balance to the Western narrative that has historically maligned Africans and African descended people. To those outside the African American community this series can be a lesson about the rich cultural legacy of African Americans. All of those perceptions, I would welcome.

However, I acknowledge that the viewer's interpretation may differ from my artist's intent. For some viewers, the work may be too culturally specific. For viewers who are open, my work has the ability to transcend heritage. I hope for them this series is universal enough in theme and emotion to elicit a discussion, internal or with others, regarding constructing personal meaning with the people who loved them and with whom they love. I hope it inspires them to think about, and maybe to hear, the voices that also speak to them.

### **4.3 Challenges and Discoveries**

During my art studio practice I faced challenges and made discoveries that hindered and contributed to my research. I experienced stress while dealing with the challenges and a sense of accomplishment when overcoming them. Below I discuss four issues that resonated the most.

#### ***4.3.1 Quality of Materials***

Among the challenges I had creating this series was selecting art materials that didn't make the pieces look as if they were fashioned as craft projects. I placed an emphasis on my selection of art media because I desired art material that would reflect the level of respect given

to people being honored in the pieces. While I was concerned with using good quality materials, I did have the reality of a limited budget. Homages to more well-known ‘cultural ancestors’, like Precious Cargo/Homage to The Black Star Shipping Line (Figure 17 Precious Cargo/Homage to The Black Star Shipping Line, Mixed Media, 24” x30”, J. Chase Campbell, 2019) which honors Marcus Garvey, were reliquaries to people with worldwide reputations and were deserving of more than low brow art media. During one moment of vacillating between choices about materials I wrote in my sketchbook/journal:

“While Hampton’s creative use of humble materials to build his throne room is a testimony to improvisation, he may have chosen better materials had he not made janitor’s wages. In the end, to reflect the grandness of my grandmother Helen I had to purchase these Swarovski crystals.”

Sketchbook/Journal Reflection,  
Chase Campbell, 2018

#### ***4.3.2 Level of Craftsmanship***

I was just as concerned about the craftsmanship as I was about the material. Often, I would rework a piece I feared was not meeting the mark aesthetically. Granted, some of my trepidation was a result of working with low relief sculpture and media with which I was unfamiliar. I wanted the work to capture of regal nature of African culture. This was a point of concern that did cause stress. To mitigate this compromising my research results I would shift my focus away from a difficult project and continue work on a more resolved one. This gave me time to reflect on and, eventually, resolve the conceptual or technical issues obstructing my progress.

### ***4.3.3 Sourcing Found Objects***

I did not want to scour the internet hoping that what I ordered online would be what was delivered. Sourcing hard-to-find objects, like record players and 45 records, presented another opportunity to connect with family members. Several relatives, via social media, responded by shipping requested items to my studio, often donating deceased family members' belongings. One cousin penned a note communicating that the enclosed records were hers and my deceased Uncle Gene's contribution to my art.

These exchanges with my kin allowed me to continue the series' theme of fostering cultural connections. It also invested my family members in my creative artmaking process, in our community. At their request, I began posting images of work in progress on social media for them to follow. Their validation felt wonderful and sincere. Such points of connections provided a sense of fulfillment decreasing my general sense of anxiety. On the note I mailed to my cousin it said, "That box contained more than records. Thanks for the love."

### ***4.3.4 Limiting my artistic production***

The last major challenge was limiting my art production to the seven pieces I needed for this study. At the beginning of this chapter I listed that I had created nine works. I filled my sketchbook/journal with concepts for an additional twenty-two works for this series. I plan to continue to produce the other pieces after the completion of this study.

Prior to this study, I went long periods of time without making art. During this study, I rediscovered the frustration of having to turn on and off the artmaking process. It's difficult to control the flow of the creative output once you get started. After reflecting on this issue, I have a better understanding why this is a reason some art teachers forego their art practice or work in spurts only during the summer or other vacation time. At the beginning of this study, my

struggle with controlling my creative output had me evaluating if it was better to produce consistently or sporadically. I decided it was best, for me, to work on a more consistent basis. I felt less stressed knowing I had a designated schedule to work in my studio. Even better, my students can now see me model and control active art making and how it fuels the creative momentum that builds upon itself.

#### **4.4 Educational Practice**

Dewey (1934) believed to make art, the artist must always be in conversation with the piece and that hand and eye must work together. I would add that the art piece and the art media is also in conversation with the artist. After using A/R/Tography, I can now articulate that my internal conversation regarding the *Message from the Ancestors* series involved three sets of ideas; how I would produce the work, the research for the series, and what the work would teach me. I learned to listen to the internal conversation happening as I operated as an artist, a researcher and a teacher during my artmaking research process.

I also learned that the conversation can be an amiable discussion or a heated debate fraught with distain. For art teachers, who are compelled to produce, it is a conversation that must be had. Not having the conversation leaves this art teacher feeling unresolved which contributes to causing stress.

##### ***4.4.1 Reflection***

Dewey (1934) believed that art making was an active and reflective process. Production of this series is my confirmation of Dewey's belief. In keeping with A/R/Tography methodology I reflected a great deal when I engaged in my artmaking process that was my tool of research. Indeed, the idea for this series incubated in my mind for years prior to its creation. It is only after producing the work I felt a sense of accomplishment for bringing my concepts to reality.

Only then could I feel some success about my art making practice. Only then could I process how what I had done could apply to my teaching practice.

#### ***4.4.2 Benefits for art education***

My art making research, I believe, does have benefits for art education. Maintaining some kind of wellness program, be it studio practice or some other constructive practice, to reduce stress will result in healthier, more personally and professionally fulfilled art teachers. Students will directly benefit from teachers who practice self-care. Additionally, my art series can serve as an aid to help art teachers and the students they teach explore the connections they value. I will discuss implications as part of my conclusions in Chapter 5.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

My journey towards improved self-care through art was a qualitative and introspective studio-based thesis study in which I sought to investigate my research topic: *if maintaining a committed personal art studio practice could decrease the level of stress for this classroom art teacher, thus increasing my sense of well-being.*

### 5.1 Overview of Thesis

To address my research topic, I conducted research over a three-month period, I worked in my studio to create seven works of art which I titled, *The Message from the Ancestors Series*. While doing so, I monitored changes in my level of stress and improvements in my sense of well-being by maintaining a journal/sketchbook, taking an online wellness survey at the beginning and end of study, and documenting my artistic process with photographs. I also informally noted observations from my art students and fellow artists who assisted me with technical information and processes.

I realized that at core of my study was a positionality issue. I needed to resolve how I identify professionally. I discovered that how art teachers adapt their identity to honor their need to make art or not, as Ruanglertbutr (2018) addressed, looks different for different individuals. Having to relinquish one role to choose the other can be a major source of stress. Having to switch back and forth between the role may be too stressful to manage. Others may find the two roles mutually exclusive, even foreign. Not finding a balance between the artist's agenda and teacher's responsibilities can leave the individual unfulfilled and affect her sense of well-being. *I chose to engage in a dual practice of both teaching and producing a series of artwork, expressly to monitor my stress level and to gauge my sense of well-being.*

## 5.2 My Findings: Classroom Instruction

After reflecting on this research, I have drawn several conclusions regarding how this study has affected the classroom instruction and the pedagogical strategies I've use in the classroom. They include an increase in the following; enjoyment of teaching, respect, authenticity, creativity and skill set. Modeling self-care for students is a major one.

### 5.2.1 *Joyful Teaching is Possible*

Teaching is hard work but very meaningful work. Teaching allows me to be of service to an important group of people by sharing something that I enjoy. However, this has not always been enough. At some point, teachers must consider if they are effective the classroom. The most effective teachers enjoy their work. The enjoyment, or lack thereof, affects the relationship teachers have with students. I want to enjoy teaching. This means reconnecting to what I enjoy, being an artist.

I also feel that I am on purpose when I am producing in the studio. Committing to a schedule for producing work aligns me with my purpose, thus diminishing my sense of internal conflict I have when I am not producing art. My study has taught me to put my art making practice at the top of my priority list, to honor what is important to me. Reconnecting with my art making processes, as I have done, has created golden opportunities for me to learn, thus, reinvigorating my role as a teacher.

There is a new excitement I possess now that I am actively producing art. I now bring that palatable excitement, and may I dare say joy, into the classroom. Joy is obtainable while both teaching and making art. I believe there has been a noticeable increase in my sense of fulfillment that is tangible for my students. When a teenager tells you, "It's good to see someone who doesn't hate their job", you have accomplished growth.

### ***5.2.2 Increased Respect***

Hall stated that students being taught by a teacher who is also a practitioner has definite advantages. One advantage has been a noticeable increase in the respect students give to me as teacher now that they know that I am an artist who practices my craft. A student said it best when she said, “you have to respect this man’s hustle.” Another poetically announced, “All this is evidence of your existence.” I believe that my students perceive me more three dimensionally, as an artist and a person and even as a fellow learner. This has been the greatest impact for not only my students, but also for me. With their added respect I can now be more vulnerable when taking risks to create a more conducive learning environment.

Getting respect from the adults in the school building may be a more daunting task. They don’t seem to have a problem imposing their expectations upon the art teacher. For purposes of this study, I communicated to my administrators that I am a working and an exhibiting artist, that I require time to produce work and that meant I could not entertain requests beyond the scope of my signed contract. I was pleased that my proclamation was well received and I am grateful to have understanding school leaders. I believe art teachers should be just as clear about their positionality with their school as they are with themselves. This establishes the correct expectations for all parties involved. I firmly believe that once coworkers know how you operate, they tend to conduct themselves accordingly. I believe they respect your position. I felt less stressed after communicating my position to everyone and I was surprised that I hadn’t done so sooner.

### ***5.2.3 A Sharing Environment***

My students’ perception of me as a teacher has changed since I started this study. This thesis research has reiterated how important I am as a role model of someone who does what he

loves, making art and engaging in the creative impulse. I have been sharing my work, and by extension myself, with them. My willingness to model sharing has given my students agency to be more generous when speaking about their own artwork. They seem to be more engaged than previously.

My ability to focus on my students' creative development, as I cover the formal curriculum, may be a result of my attention not being diverted by questioning my lack of creative output. The metacognition I have done, often centering on the creative process and bringing my ideas to fruition, has also nurtured my interest in helping my students bring their concepts to reality.

I am now better positioned to function, as Thornton postulates artists to be, as a guide in the world of the arts. Such teacher artists, translate the world of art for students in order to help them understand its methods, philosophies, history and language, and also respect students' personal languages, cultures and interests and consider how these connect with the world of art (Thornton, 2005, p. 169). Since sharing my artwork with my students my role as a guide has become more pronounced.

As a result of being as open as possible with my students I have learned that they are more interested in my role as an artist than my artwork. Students are intrigued by what an art teacher represents that personally applies to their lives. It seems that they, too, are constantly questioning their positionality.

#### ***5.2.4 Increased Authenticity***

Teachers who are practitioners of what they preach are a reflection of the desire to be authentic in the world (Thornton, 2005, p. 169). My research supports this idea. My students have benefitted because my art practice has increased my level of authenticity. I have begun to

speak to students about my work and the creative process. They are surprised to learn that I, too, self-reflect, critique, make mistakes and even have to start over on projects.

My renewed focus on process has made me more concerned with the art making experience my students are having. Not only do artists bring authenticity to the classroom in the sense of professional art practice, but they are also supposed to be more open to the children's authenticity (Hoekstra, 2015). This research project has supported this idea.

### ***5.2.5 Increased creativity and risk taking***

Hoekstra writes, “the artists allow themselves to look into the learning process creatively” (p.352). Art teachers who make art more inclined to create “the climate that welcomes the exploration and risk taking and cultivates the disposition play (Eisner, 1979) in their classroom. Art teachers who are actively producing art are in the habit of taking risks, using improvisation, unorthodox working methods and strategies, including play as borrowed from their own artistic practice. As a result of this study, I have become such a teacher. Having a dual practice, I can now better model creative risk-taking skills for my students. I find myself motivating my students to take more risks in their work.

Redirecting my energy into my creative process and art production has increased my level of creativity and further facilitated my artistic growth and development. I am not at a loss for ideas.

### ***5.2.6 Updating Skills***

Producing art is a means of professional development for the career art teacher. The teaching of art requires an intimate knowledge of the art making. Maintaining a professional practice as an artist helps the artist teacher remain relevant in current art practices, techniques, and media. Projects like the Artist Teacher Scheme (ATS), now based in England, are lauded as

successful examples of continuing professional development that satisfies participants needs as artists and art teachers. Participants in such projects are consistently adding to their skill set as they further their own art practices. That growth subsequently benefits their students. I have already created new art lessons incorporating techniques I have learned during this study.

### ***5.2.7 Modeling Self-Care***

The topic of self-care, I learned, was worth including in my classroom activities. My focus on my stress has caused me to notice the high stress levels my students have. At the beginning of new art lessons, I have begun leading students in the practice of conscious breathing. My goal was to reduce the anxiety of learning new art skills and to make them more mindful about the work they will produce. I am investigating this and other wellness practices I can incorporate into their classroom procedures. I have noticed that self-care is simply not a topic of discussion for my students' families. Parents, especially mothers, are not modeling it at all.

## **5.3 Implications for What I have Learned**

My students are impacted by the art series I have produced as I researched my topic. They do present evidence that they are interested. As I have relayed to my art students, art happens three times: when the artist is conceptualizing about the piece and the process, when the artist is in the process of physically producing the piece, and when the viewer experiences the piece. At each point reflection is needed. Based on discussions I've had with them, some understood. Others may require more time to reflect.

Like so many lessons, the impact of sharing my actual artwork for most of my students, especially those who are less interested in art, will not be realized until maybe years later when

something makes it relevant to their lives. The true assessment of learning, for the student and the teacher, happens long after the school bell has rung.

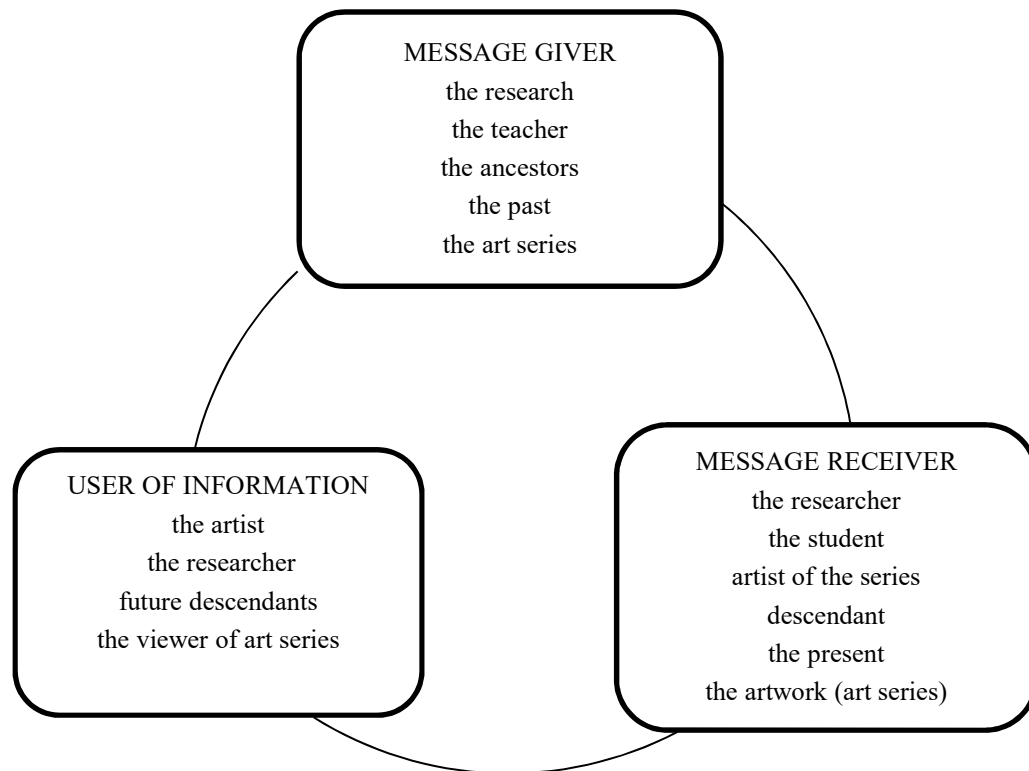
#### 5.4 Insights for Other Art Educators

Based on my research an important insight for art educators is they need to resolve the positionality issue. Art teachers struggle with honoring or not honoring their creative impulse to make their own art. Art teachers must be clear about whatever choice works them. I resolved that it was less stressful to maintain an art making practice and teach, than it was to teach and to fret about neglecting my studio work. I expressed this idea in a sketchbook/journal entry:

“The amount of time I’ve put into griping about what I haven’t been doing has siphoned off more energy than I would had used had I been actively making art. Fighting battles take a lot of energy. I’m taking myself off the battlefield. Positionality is crucial. I, as an art teacher, have the ability and the right to control some aspects of where I land on the positionality chart. Are you going to be an art teacher or an artist, or will you vacillate between the two? Indecision creates conflict. Conflict saps your energy. The lack of energy creates burnout.”

Sketchbook/Journal Reflection,  
Chase Campbell, 2018

I created the diagram below after reflecting on how my teaching, my research and my art making practice all buttressed each other. A/R/Tography enabled me to research the similarities between the various roles. Both the teacher and the ancestor convey information to the student and the descendant, who in turn, can function in the role of those who taught them. They can become transmitters of information to those who follow them.



*Figure 22 Positionality for the Series of Work and Research*

Like the ancestor and teacher, the *Message from the Ancestors Series* can be didactic, giving the viewer information. The concepts; that of the ancestor and descendant, the teacher and student, the art and the viewer, and the research and the artist, all correlate. All involve some form of human contact as information is exchanged from one to the other with the intention of constructing meaning.

When observed through the lens of A/R/Tography the roles, as listed in diagram, are in flux and positionality is dynamic. The relationships are subject to the possibility of misinterpretation. So are the interpretations of the viewers of the series. I have learned that only

after reflection and experimentation I can realize what possibilities emerge in the interstitial places where my various roles and perspectives intersect.

The second most important insight my study can offer art teachers is that their work as an artist, their research for their studio work and their work as an educator can all support and even nurture, each other.

## **5.5 Pedagogical Strategies**

I believe that the research I have done has affected the way I teach students. I have discovered several pedagogical strategies that have emerged as a result of this study. Many of these I have begun using in my art classroom and they are as follows:

### ***5.5.1 Teaching Students to be Researchers***

Effective lesson preparation, like studio art production, requires investigation, research and exploration of a wide variety of technical skills and art media. Those acquired skills become part of this art teacher's repertoire that are transferred to students. I now model these skills for my students and emphasize how integral the discovery process is to artmaking. Doing this required me to reduce my role as a giver of information which has been an adjustment. Discovery has now become my preferred model for student learning.

I have discovered that teaching children is beneficial to my personal art practice. My students have inspired my artmaking and generate creative ideas worthy of artistic exploration. As an art teacher I am also a student, often the most intense learner in the classroom. This dynamic is one that Freire writes of in this passage;

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-  
teaches, but one who is himself (or herself)  
taught in dialogue with the students, who in their

turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1970, p. 53)

### ***5.5.2 Providing Time for Reflection***

Providing teachers with strategies and time to be reflective - such as opportunities for creating collage with colleagues - may help to support teachers' wellbeing and resilience (McKay & Barton, 2018, p. 365). Using the A/R/Tography research methodology, that explores the interstitial spaces between being an artist, a research and a teacher, has given me a renewed respect for the time needed to reflect on each practice and a greater awareness of what ideas may develop where the different roles transverse. This realization has caused me to adjust the pacing and activities of my art lessons. I've learned to respect the time my students need to reflect. My research has begun to inform my pedagogy. Assigning students to self-assess their art projects by using a self-reflection worksheet is evidence of A/R/Tography in action.

### ***5.5.3 Using Visual Thinking Strategies***

To facilitate the discovery progress, I am now purposely using the inquiry-based learning, specifically Philip Yenawine's (2013) *Visual Thinking Strategies*. This has allowed students to discover information for themselves and ask questions that are rooted in their own observations and prior knowledge. This inquiry-based learning process has created an environment of personalized learning; students connect the ideas presented, in this case my art work, with information they already know, their own cultural experiences and backgrounds. Proof of this are the questions students ask as they peruse my sketchbooks. They ask about the media, techniques and concepts that informs my work. Other examples are the observations that they

share about my work that eluded me! These learning strategies has given them the confidence to also make suggestions, many interesting enough to for me to make a note of.

#### ***5.5.4 Encouraging Peer to Peer Learning***

My use of professional peer to peer learning to grasp needed studio techniques reminded me that I do not have to be at the center of student learning. Peer to peer teaching became one of the class management activities I implemented in my classes during this research. Doing so allowed me to focus on quality over quantity, which decreased my workload and stress level.

#### ***5.5.5 Using Digital Sources to Show Artists' Studio Processes***

Sharing my art work with my students has given them a window into my life as an artist. I realized that most of them, and people in general, experience the art and not the artist. As a response, I have started to focus more on how the artists, I cover in class, actually work and on their creative process. Often, I supplement my teaching with internet sourced videos of various artists producing in their studio and assigning them to research artists outside of class. I have also scheduled my peer artist instructors, who had been so helpful, to visit or skype the school to share their work and answer students' inquiries.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

*Has artmaking reduced the level of stress for this classroom art teacher and elevated my feeling of wellbeing?* I have attempted to conduct a study during the course of this research to develop findings that would either deny or support this research question. At the end of this study, as assessed by my research tools, I have concluded that maintaining an active artmaking practice was a means of personal development and self-care for this art teacher. Being engaged in an artmaking practice allowed me to connect with my purpose and to reduce my anxiety about not producing, which consequently contributed to my sense of well-being.

During the time period of this study my overall sense of well-being also improved due in additional subsequent lifestyle adjustments. Focusing on self-care had positively influenced me to examine and to change other areas on my life, i.e. sleep patterns and diet. It seems reasonable to conclude that specifically focusing on self-care in one aspect of my life seem to have had general benefits for my overall well-being. It also seems reasonable to surmise that a little self-care is better than none at all.

### ***5.6.1 Study related assessments for my well-being***

#### ***Artmaking Practice***

I achieved an increase in my sense of well-being by adhering to a strict three-month art production schedule, allowing me to submerge myself in artmaking, the activity I enjoy the most. Resolving the positionality issue reduced a great deal of anxiety that, as I stated in my sketchbook/journal, “was operating like background software deleting joy.” Working in the studio gave me time to reflect on my well-being as I eventually resolve, my positionality issue.

#### ***Wellness Surveys***

Simultaneously to being increasingly involved in art production I was taking the wellness assessments. I took the online Stress 360 Survey found at <https://www.stress.org/self-assessment/> three times; at the beginning, the midpoint and end of this study. My score, at the beginning and end of the study, were significantly different. My starting stress score was 94 of a possible 200 and the site considered ‘moderately stressed’. My mid-point score was 62 out 200. The score at the end of the survey was 55 out of 200 and the website named it a ‘stress master’ result. I believe the only slight decrease in stress level at the midpoint assessment was contributable to having to care for an ill family member and personally being ill at the time I took the assessment.

### Sketchbook/Journal

I journaled almost daily for three months, the length of the investigation of this qualitative self-study. I used the sketchbook/journal as a part of my artmaking process. I also used it to record my emotional state. My use of it became more structured as my studio practice research progressed. I noticed that my writing became more helpful to my research when I made a mindful effort to replace the “I think” statements with “I feel” statements. Also, making written journal entries on the page near the sketches for project helped me maintain an association between what I was doing and what I was feeling.

In the past, I had only used my sketchbook for creating preliminary sketches of future art projects. I would then produce the work, quickly assess the quality of the completed work, and rush on to the next project. During this study I started using it as a reflection tool that helped me process what I was doing. It helped me appreciate the sense of achievement that I hadn't allow myself to enjoy in the past. Doing this has given me an increased feeling of gratitude that is almost cathartic.

I noticed how using the sketchbook/journal reflected the reciprocal relationship of the artist, researcher and teacher so characteristic of A/R/Tography research. In the sketchbook/journal I sketched out ideas I got for future projects while working on current ones. The journal permitted me to pause and reflect on the creative progress and the work before, during and after the production of a piece. The notes I scrawled in it, including those from talks with family elders, acted as a teacher informing the direction of my art production. Using a sketchbook/journal to learn how to pause and do meaningful reflection was a major stress reducer that affected by overall sense of well-being. Posting journal images on social media

helped foster an informal community of friends who offered encouragement as they followed the projects' progress through to completion.

### Photo Documentation

The photographs taken during my research assisted more afterward than during my art production. I could reflect as I reviewed images. Posting photos of works in progress on social media, at my friends request, did solicit admiration. It also resulted in people asking questions that I didn't have time to entertain. Photos were my least useful research tool to decrease stress.

### **5.6.2 Lifestyle strategies that enhanced my well-being**

Reflections written in the sketchbook journal were the sources for me to ponder tactics that I could use to enhance my research goal. I have concluded that the following lifestyle strategies contributed to my increased well-being:

- ***I established boundaries.***

At school and in the studio, I had to create boundaries for my role as a teacher and as an artist. For example, I limited my reflections about the school day to the 30 minutes I spent writing in my day planner. I maintained separate sketchbook/journals for teaching and my studio. I jotted down ideas and notes in my studio sketchbook/journal I brought to work. However, I left my work journal at work to in order to consecrate my art studio time.

- ***I reallocated my time.***

Maintaining a studio schedule allowed me to make art which reduced my stress. I decided at the beginning of the study to not fight the rigid formality of the school day. That would be futile. Instead I chose to embrace it. I needed the rest of day to be just as tightly organized as the imposed schedule detailed in my signed teaching contract. The epiphany

happened when I began to view this studio-based thesis research process as a signed contract committing myself to my own personal art making practice.

Maintaining a studio schedule impacted the rest of my daily schedule. My day planner and iPhone's Siri became excellent tools for staying on track. Multi-tasking, like combining errands, was helpful. Some personal activities I had to eliminate to prioritize art making. Another example of how I restructured my time was using my hour-long after work commute to my studio to have phone conversations with artist friends regarding artistic processes and techniques.

Protecting studio time meant making better use of my time in the classroom so I could contain my school work to school hours. This was the impetus for using class management activities that I had intended to use but hadn't. I had learned to protect my classroom instructional and planning time by not allowing others to impose upon it. I denied requests to do tasks that were beyond the scope of my classroom duties. I didn't entertain technical inquiries by fellow faculty members that consume precious minutes.

- **I joined a community of practice.**

The literature touts the importance of artists working in community with each other. When reflecting on the Artist Teacher Scheme (ATS) program, Hall reports, that teachers creating art in "communities of practice" (p.104) took full advantage of opportunities to validate theirs and other teachers' artistic practice while engaging each other in discussions about artmaking and aesthetics. The Artist Teacher Scheme (ATS) program and classes provided teachers who make art or artists who teach in all sectors of education a sense of identity, practical and theoretical input and accredited acknowledgement of the value of their dual practice (Thornton, 2005, p. 170).

Joining an artist collective was not part of my original research plan. During this graduate program I, serendipitously, joined United Students (US), a mostly African American artist collective comprised of University of Georgia art school alumni. My membership had beneficial results for my research. The support I felt and the sense of belonging were factors contributing to my sense of well-being. Such support was also exemplified during the Saturday morning studio classes Georgia State University art education graduate students and I attended. We were engaged in more than just art production. We were participating in an informal forum to exchange ideas and to buttress each other in our roles as students and art teachers.

My participation in these communities of practice taught me that self-care can be supplemented by mutually caring peers. United Students exhibited, as a group, at the Lyndon House in Athens, GA in fall 2018. Prior to the exhibition we met via social media and occasionally in person. Since the exhibit we have maintained contact via social media and phone calls allowing us to continuously exchanging images and ideas, and to critique and collaborate. I have grown to truly value this exchange and the fellowship. It's worth expressing that most of US's members have taught in some capacity at some point during their artistic career.

- **I asked for help.**

Requesting assistance is a major development for me because art teachers and artists are so used to operating in isolation. In his writings Hall even notes how often teachers of the arts' art room and performance spaces are physically separated from teachers of other subject areas. Getting help freed up time to be more effective in class and prevented my work life from overflowing into my studio life.

I learned to ask administrators, other teachers and my school system support staff to help support me through my thesis and art production processes. I was pleasantly surprised at the

positive responses I received. My principal even offered to mentor me through my thesis process and agreed to give me some time off. My niece agreed to be my studio assistant for nominal wages. Asking for help, essentially, ushered in the community of support I needed. Prior to this study I hadn't realized how desperately I had needed the support nor had I given myself permission to request it. Having more support made me feel less stressed.

In conclusion, I've learned the advantage of being a teacher who is also an art practitioner is honoring one's personal and professional commitment to the dual practice. The study has allowed me to do both and has contributed to my sense of well-being. Although I experienced a reduction in stress while creating art, as well as increased enjoyment of the creative process and teaching, the techniques I practiced may not be applicable to another art teacher. 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 public or any special population. In order to generalize the findings, a more conclusive study would need to be conducted incorporating a larger number of participants as well as a control group.

This study resulted in an improved sense of well-being for me. I hope others confronting self-care and positionality challenges are inspired by this study to investigate their own health practices. I hope that this information offers companionship to future researchers who are seeking answers regarding the role of art production and health of art educators. I hope that those researchers might use this data as a window to observe how art teachers' quality of their personal health and their commitment to art making affects their roles as both practitioners of art and teachers of impressible minds.

I sincerely hope that this study gives affirmation to art teachers that maintaining a studio practice can be a source of reducing stress in their teaching practice and I hope it gives, to those who need it, permission to unapologetically do so.

## **5.7 Recommendations for Self-Care Practices**

As a result of my study, I recommend the following practices to art teachers who wish to maintain a dual professional practice of art making and teaching:

- First acknowledge self-care is crucial and then place it at the top of their agenda.
- Schedule time to practice self-care, exercise, yoga.
- Make a clear decision about their positionality and use both terms, artist and art teacher, when identifying themselves to others.
- Explain their role as an artist to the school administrators and let them know what their expectations for support are.
- Get support for their art making practice by joining a community of artists, especially other art teachers. Makers groups or artist collectives that gather to produce or critique artwork can be a major contributor to your sense of well-being.
- Conserve time and maintain motivation for artmaking by streamlining social media activity to only art related material. Follow only other artists, galleries and museums.
- Make a practice of participating in art exhibitions, even organizing shows for fellow art teachers.
- Put art making at the top of your priority list.
- Take art classes and workshops on techniques that can benefit their art making and teaching practices.
- Apply personal art studio practices, whenever possible, in their art classrooms.

- Maintain a sketchbook/journal to reflect about their life as an artist teacher.

## 5.8 Recommendations of Research Questions for Future Researchers

As the benefit to the field of art education, I recommend the following ideas regarding self-care and wellness as being worthy of further research:

- *Why is there limited literature about teacher self-care?*

I advocate seeing more research regarding art teacher self-care. As I suspected, there is not an abundance of literature about this topic. The lack of literature may be symptomatic of the art teachers not addressing the stress that is such an integral factor in their work. Even worst, it may be evidence suggesting of a lack of concern for the well-being of art teachers. Art teachers, being highly skilled, seem to have an issue owning the stress. I had a problem stating this fact. I recommend that art teachers actively monitor their stress level. To quote my urgent care doctor, “self-care is critical.”

- *What are the advantages of teacher self-care and art making being part of teacher preservice programs?*

Who nurtures the nurturers? During my undergraduate art education program at the University of Georgia, the term self-care was not even used. Art education students would benefit from the inclusion of self-care lessons or workshops in their teacher preservice programs. Students graduating from such programs would value self-care as an essential part of their teaching career. I suspect such inclusion would mitigate teacher burnout.

Art education teacher preparatory program could also place more emphasis on maintaining an active art making practice as being a beneficial part of art teacher efficacy. The research shows that those who manage to sustain a successful teacher and practitioner relationship have an increased desire for longevity as a teacher (Ruanglertbutr, 2018). Studio

practice can stave off teacher burn out. Art education, as a field, would benefit from this and it could possibly serve as a model for other fields of disciplines.

- *How does participation in artist collectives impact teachers' sense of well-being?*

There is strength in numbers. I recommend and advocate that art teachers, who desire to create art, form artist collectives or other supportive communities that meet periodically to produce art. Art teachers should follow the example of quilting bee members who have benefitted from such fellowships for eons. I would like to see more formal studies of what artist collectives may contribute to the well-being of their individual members.

### ***5.8.1 Outcomes beyond this study***

At the end of this study I intend to make this information available to other art teachers who are in need of self-care practices. I plan to write articles detailing how art making has been beneficial to my self-care journey. I will submit them to the professional publication, Teaching Artist Journal. I will also apply to present this research to Fulton County Schools art teachers to conferences such as the Georgia Art Education Association and the National Art Education Association.

The *Message from the Ancestors* art series has inspired a poem of the same name. I am currently illustrating the poem as a series of painted collages featuring inquisitive school children in a museum observing and interacting with art objects which have cultural significant for them. Each collage is rich with witty visual clues that invite the viewer to make connections between the museum's art objects, the children and hopefully, themselves.

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**APPENDIX**

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