

**PORTRAITS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR  
PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING IN VISUAL ARTS:  
EXAMINING GAPS AND CONGRUENCY IN ART  
EDUCATION ADVOCACY LITERATURE**

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## Dedication

**“I have never taught only techniques of how to paint. All my doing is to help people to see and learn *not* to apply rules or mechanical ways to their seeing.”**  
~ *Josef Albers*

This dissertation is dedicated to all students who desire to contribute their point of view to the research and policy conversations concerning their art education; to those who simply want a say in what their art education should include, who want to help shape how it is delivered, and who want to envision what it should look like for future generations.

Additionally, this is dedicated to all the “art kids” out there who, like me, are intrinsically driven to pursue learning the arts and making art because it is essential to who we are, fundamental to how we communicate and learn, and requisite for interpreting and reflecting on our life experiences.

## Abstract

This dissertation examines high school students' perceptions about what they have learned in school-based visual arts education programs as compared to views most prominently articulated in field advocacy literature about what students are believed to be learning. The purposes of this study were to identify congruencies or gaps in advocacy theory, and to offer any students' perceptions of their learning in visual arts that were found to lie outside current advocacy literature rhetoric as means for expanding conversations about the benefits and purposes of school-based art education. Through the use of arts-based educational research and reporting methods that encompass the artistic, creative process the primary research question examined was: *What do students perceive they have learned from studying visual arts in school?*

In interviews conducted with high school students from the class of 2009 at the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School (AHS) in Golden Valley, Minnesota students discussed their experiences in school as pursuants of visual arts education. Analyzing this data along with student-submitted artist statements, and student-submitted self-portrait artwork has illuminated that students' perceptions of their learning in school-based art education programs are varied. Through creating individual artistic and narrative portraits of the students and their perceptions, I was able to analyze and synthesize students' responses to the research question into thematic strains. Then, by comparing these themes with those found most frequently used in field advocacy literature, it was discovered that some of what students perceive they have learned, such as how to create relationships and make connections between seemingly disparate ideas, how to use a variety of materials to satisfy inspiration and imagination

in order to tell an original story using visual representation, and how to express very personal ideas and individuality, easily aligns with field literature. However, it was also discovered that some of the students' perceived learning, such as how to make and use images as a means for reflection to compile a record of experiences, and how to use the creative process as a method of discovery, lie outside theories most commonly addressed in field advocacy literature.

After conducting this inquiry, I concluded that although the majority of art education advocacy literature accurately describes students' learning, the new ideas students posed in this study about what they perceive they have learned could provoke and influence expanded discussions in field advocacy literature and initiatives about the purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education. Furthermore, to share the results of this study with a broad audience beyond higher education and to expand and perpetuate advocacy discussions to include a greater constituency who may not normally be exposed to such conversations, the artistic portraits I created as a means of analysis and data reporting along with the student-submitted self-portraits and artist statements were formally exhibited in the gallery at the Perpich Arts High School in Golden Valley, Minnesota from January 5, 2012 through March 15, 2012. This event was a unique means for sharing the results of this study, and proved to be both an effective means for bringing attention to this issue and for eliciting participation in this conversation from a broad audience.

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## Introduction

For a long time the arts<sup>1</sup> have struggled for a secure place in the curriculum of American schools in light of frequent budget crises, education reform movements, testing mandates and graduation requirements. “Although many would agree that the arts are at the heart of human experience in terms of school curricula, the arts are most often on the outside looking for ways to get in.” (Hoffmann Davis, 1999, p. 23). As a result of this struggle, there are many arts education advocacy efforts happening currently in schools, communities, universities, the media and various political arenas. In addition to these efforts, the arts education research community has been extremely prolific in crafting arguments through articles and books advocating for keeping the arts in schools. According to researcher and advocate Jessica Hoffman Davis, “Research-based reports abound on the value of arts learning from cognitive, developmental, therapeutic, and philosophical perspectives.” (2008, p. 3) Student participation in arts learning is popularly touted in education literature as beneficial because it helps students raise SAT and ACT scores; improve reading skills, learn math and spatial skills; build better minds and workplace skills; engage in enriched interdisciplinary learning endeavors; strengthen and reinforce learning in other academic disciplines, increase their overall academic performance; help them make connections between learning disciplines; build self-esteem, promote self-discipline; improve creativity; prompt their intra-personal development; strengthen community cohesion; promote

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<sup>1</sup> In educational discourse, I have found that the art disciplines of dance, media arts, music, theater, visual arts and, sometimes, literary arts are frequently referred to as “the arts,” and often the delineation is not made as to which specific discipline is being referred to. Thus, some references cited here may discuss the arts generally, and some of my discussion of the literature may also make general references to “the arts,” “arts learning,” and “arts experiences,” due to the nature of this phenomenon. However, for the purposes of this study, I am framing my examination of students’ perceptions as they relate specifically to their learning in the visual arts.

their multicultural understanding; learn to develop tolerance for diversity and appreciation of human difference in the world; and the list goes on. The arts are even seen as important for strengthening our democracy. (Hoffman-Davis, 2008, p. 3)

Additionally, in their 1997 *Report to the President*, The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities discussed evidence that, "participation in the arts and the humanities unlocks the human potential for creativity and lifts us beyond our isolated individualism to shared understanding... To remain a robust civil society, our democratic system needs the arts and the humanities" (p. 1).

As an artist and visual arts educator, I do not disagree that arts learning has the potential to offer all of these benefits to some extent to students in their educational and personal lives. But, at the same time, I cannot help but notice that the claims about the benefits of art education in advocacy literature have become increasingly more diverse and far-reaching recently. Thus, many in the field believe this portrays the arts as existing within a perpetual identity crisis of sorts, stating:

The made-for-public-consumption rewards of arts education that headline arts advocacy campaigns are quite beside the point of why art teachers teach and why students take their courses.

Nevertheless, the energy spent jumping from one bandwagon to another in the arts education advocacy parade is an unfortunate waste of resources; the dust clouds of confusion kicked up by this unceasing procession take their toll on our intellectual environment. (Gee, 2004, p. 126)

However, I also believe that there is a fairly logical connection between this supposed identity crisis, the advocacy phenomenon, and the onslaught of educational reform initiatives that have been developed nationally during this same time period. When *A Nation at Risk* was released to the public in 1983, America learned that, “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7). I believe this report marked the beginning of a flurry of educational reform initiatives nationally such as Goals 2000, Outcome-Based Education (a precursor to Standards-Based Education), and, most recently, No Child Left Behind (2001).

It is also interesting to note that these reform initiatives each position the arts in school curriculum in different ways. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act became law in 1994. Goals 2000 was created to support state efforts to develop clear and rigorous standards for what every child should know and be able to do, and the act legislatively and monetarily supported comprehensive State- and district-wide planning and implementation of school improvement efforts focused on improving student achievement to those standards. The Goals 2000 act focused on helping states create standards only for “the four core academic areas—English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies” (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, retrieved on March 22, 2009). Along with world languages and physical education, the arts were marginalized from the scene and positioned as outside the core.

Outcome-based Education (OBE) or performance-based education as it was also called, was an outgrowth of the Goals 2000 Act. OBE was designed as an approach to education in which decisions about the curriculum were driven by outcomes a student should display by the end of their K-12 compulsory education career. The emphasis of OBE was on “the outcomes students should be able to demonstrate upon leaving the educational system, outcomes that are structured around a community vision of the skills and knowledge necessary for students to become effective adults” (McNeir, 1993, p. 1). This approach, though short-lived, was perhaps less restrictive in identifying specific “core” disciplines in the curriculum. Thus, while the arts were not overlooked as they were with the Goals 2000 Act, OBE was too quickly replaced by standards-based educational reform to have left behind any legacy for the arts.

Then, in 1989, President George H. W. Bush brought the nation’s governors together to develop a bipartisan, national strategy for improving American education. The result of this meeting was the establishment of national education goals that included targets for all students to demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter. “Nearly every state has its own approach to standards-based reform, but they share three key components: high standards for what all students should know and do, tests aligned to the standards that gauge student progress, and accountability for schools based on the results” (Barth, 2006, p. 1). With this movement, although the arts were considered and articulated as important to student learning, they were still marginalized as there were no high-stakes, standardized tests developed to align to any standards gauging students’ progress.

Which leads us to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that aims to promote educational excellence for all Americans. Working from a standards-based educational reform foundation, NCLB legislation mandates “improving the performance of primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools while promoting an increased focus on reading and allowing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, retrieved on November 1, 2011). Similar to the Goals 2000 Act, NCLB specifically mandates eleven core academic subjects be included in school curriculum: English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography. One would think this legislation was a breath of fresh air for the arts education community as the arts are very plainly included in this act and seemingly on-par with other subjects, they are indeed considered core subjects essential to student learning.

Yet according to many art educators, almost the opposite has proven to be true and the arts are continually discussed as operating at a deficit in comparison to other subjects. “Because No Child Left Behind emphasizes accountability in literacy and numeracy and not the arts, even though the arts are included in the Act as a mandated subject area, the result is even less support now for the arts in many of our schools than there had been in the past” (Hetland, et al., 2008, p. 1). With mandated standardized tests in math, reading and language arts (English) being administered each year, many schools have begun to focus on raising test scores to avoid negative consequences for failing results. “Under NCLB, the pressure on schools to produce high scores on tests is

great. It is not uncommon for 3 weeks to be devoted exclusively to test prep activities... The proliferation of mandated tests in the next several years can only mean that time for art instruction is reduced. In elementary schools, test prep and test taking may well exceed the 26 hours typically devoted to once-a-week visual arts instruction in a year” (Chapman, 2005, p. 132-133).

In reaction to this latest decline of support for the arts in the school curriculum many educators, policy makers, and researchers have resurrected advocacy views on what students achieve or different ways in which students are successful as a result of participating in the arts during their compulsory education in an attempt to keep programs intact. But through witnessing this advocacy phenomenon during the seven years I spent as a high school visual and media arts instructor I began to wonder if the views articulated by the art education community about what students learn from participating in school-based art education programs purported in advocacy literature actually align with what students are experiencing in schools and what students perceive they are learning and gaining from their visual arts education.

Thus, in this study I set out to examine students’ perspectives on what they are learning in visual arts education as compared to views currently articulated in field advocacy literature about what students are believed to be learning. The purposes of this study were to identify congruencies or gaps in advocacy theory, and to offer any students’ perceptions of their learning in visual arts that were found to lie outside current advocacy literature rhetoric as means for expanding conversations about the benefits and purposes of school-based art education. Through the use of arts-based research and narrative reporting methods that encompass the artistic, creative process,

the primary research question examined was: *What do students perceive they are learning from studying visual arts in school?*

To meet this objective I interviewed 17 high school senior students from the class of 2009 to discuss their experiences in school as pursuants of visual arts education. The students I worked with attended the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School (AHS) in Golden Valley, Minnesota, a small, state magnet school for the arts for 11th and 12th grade Minnesota residents that boasts an arts integrated and infused curriculum. The tuition-free program is the only one of it's kind and includes a dorm residential option that hosts students from the entire state of Minnesota. As an institution legislated by the State of Minnesota, the school enrolls up to 310 students per year. With a competitive admissions process students enter the program, typically as 11<sup>th</sup> graders, with a pronounced interest in learning about, in and through the arts. Students choose one arts discipline to focus their studies, choosing amongst dance, literary arts, media arts, music, theater and visual arts. Students also participate in a comprehensive, arts integrated academic curriculum including courses in English, mathematics, science, social studies and world languages along with a diverse range of elective options that differ from year to year depending on students' needs and demands. Courses in these disciplines boast a highly interdisciplinary curriculum with many opportunities for students to learn in and through the arts and to demonstrate their learning in aesthetic and artistically expressive ways.

Analyzing the data I collected from these students in the form of interviews, student-submitted artist statements, and student-submitted self-portrait artwork has illuminated that students' perceptions of their learning in school-based art education is

varied. Through comparative analysis I discovered that some of what students perceive they have learned aligns well with prominent advocacy themes identified in field literature (Appendix B). I have also discovered that some of the students' perceived learning touches on ideas outside those commonly addressed in the literature, and I believe the new ideas students posed could provoke and influence expanded discussions in the field about the benefits and purposes of school-based art education for advocacy purposes.

Following is my presentation of the data I collected and the analysis I conducted. First, through narrative and artistic portraiture, you will learn about the research site and each of the students I worked with. Then I will discuss my research methodology, the themes I identified in the data I gathered as compared to field advocacy literature, and my conclusions about the results of this inquiry.

## **Review of Arts Advocacy Literature**

According to Arthur Efland (1984) “The arts have played a number of roles in education: support for industry, moral education, social cohesion, and therapy” (p. 271). Through studying the academic literature surrounding art education, I have come to better understand the truth behind this statement, and I have learned that the arts are often positioned as a “jack of all trades” so to speak when it comes to affecting student learning, influencing students’ experience in school, or affecting students’ level of success in school. However, in order to comprehensively illustrate how the arts are positioned in arts advocacy and education literature since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 as affecting student learning I will structure this review of the literature around eight key themes or trends that I have found are most common in the field. Each of these themes discuss the benefits of art education in relation to the many different things students are said to learn and take away from participating in art classes.

### ***Art Education as Integration: Students learn to make connections between disciplines***

“In the arts-infused model, the arts are invited from the outside into the general education setting in order to enrich student learning. Music of a period, for example, may be played in the history class. Students create collage maps in geography or tribal masks in social studies” (Hoffmann Davis, 2005, p. 102). This argument touting the benefits of arts learning is perhaps the most popular in general education circles. There are a number of phrases associated with this interest: integrated curriculum, interdisciplinary study, cross-disciplinary study, arts-centered curriculum, and integrated learning. Bringing the arts into every student’s everyday learning as a means

to stimulate interest in other disciplines and make school learning meaningful, often with the assistance of a visiting artist, positions the arts a resource for the “more serious subjects” taught in school. “Here, students are said to learn how to make connections between disciplines thus enriching all learning in school. This injection of the arts into other disciplines is thought to improve student motivation for learning and engagement in school, and is most often referred to as an argument supporting art education for the sake of learning (Hoffmann Davis, 2005).

This strain of advocacy for art education grew out of a series of empirical studies conducted by researchers and arts education advocacy entities such as the Arts Education Partnership and the Annenberg Foundation in the late 1990’s. This focused effort on the exploration of an expanded role of the arts in education sought to disaggregate arts integration from conventional arts education in order to break art out of the confines of a purely aesthetic realm. “If the arts are to help define our path to the future, they need to become curriculum partners with other subject disciplines in ways that will allow them to contribute their own distinctive richness and complexity to the learning process as a whole” (Fiske, 1999, p. 45).

The arts-integrated approach, often heralded as a path for school change and educational revitalization, was designed to promote transfer of learning between the arts and other subjects, between the arts and the capacities students need to become successful adults, thus rendering the arts as an interdisciplinary resource and at times as a means to enhance learning experiences in other subject areas. “It is designed to use the emotional, social, and sensory dimensions of the arts to engage students, and leverage development and learning across the curriculum” (Rabkin, 2004, p. 9). After arts

integration programs in Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston and New York were studied and deemed successful, the integrated approach was adopted by several school programs throughout the country. Changes and improvements were documented in:

teacher attitudes, expectations and behaviors, improvements in student engagement and performance, and increasing parent support and involvement. These positive developments were recognized and then adopted slowly across entire schools, eventually leading to changes in budget allocations, the norms of school culture, and policies designed to sustain them. Over time, whole schools have come to embrace arts integration as a strategy for improvement. (Rabkin, 2004, p. 145)

Furthermore, in focus groups conducted in Baltimore, Northern California, Dallas and Washington, DC, parents viewed arts-integration as an extremely positive direction for schools to entertain. “Parents, teachers and administrators believe integrating the arts into other subjects as a teaching tool will have a number of benefits for students, including: providing students with a well-rounded education; giving more students a chance to succeed; and helping students think, analyze and exercise different parts of their brains” (Belden, Russonello & Stewart, 2005, p. 3). Focus group participants also agreed that, “students exposed to an integrated arts curriculum will be better prepared for college and the job market” (Belden, Russonello & Stewart, 2005, p. 3).

In this same survey, arts-integrated curriculum was discussed as the only true means available to potentially educate the “whole child.” While calling for the radical

re-organization and rethinking of the entire public school structure, which surveyed principals and superintendents were in full support of, the arts-integration concept discussed the contribution of art education as giving students genuine opportunities to demonstrate creativity, help them become well-rounded and assist them in learning how to express themselves.

Lastly, the arts-integrated approach was said to successfully address issues of educational equity and access that have plagued schools for decades. In 1995, Ambassador Walter Annenberg gave \$500 million to improving the quality of public education through arts-integration initiatives. The three *Challenge Arts* projects, funded between 1996 and 2002, were designed to promote whole-school change and to ensure the presence and quality of the arts in public education. Through studying these projects, several benefits of arts integration came to light including implementing arts integration as a means to help all students succeed in school. “Part of the genius of the arts as a school improvement strategy is that the arts offer a way for making excellence available, creating equity, and addressing the false tension between those two goals... Arts [-integrated] education frequently offers a different approach: all students are given the same chance to succeed. And, the results show, the students seize these opportunities and demonstrate that achievement is not inexorably tied to income or ethnicity” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2003, p. 23).

However, benefits aside, the arts-integrated approach, when off-balance, has a tendency to position the arts and art education almost as a carrot held out for students to entice them to regard other disciplines with the same enthusiasm as they often do their arts classes. And, while seemingly complementary to art education, this theme faces

much opposition and scrutiny in the art education community.

First, implementing an arts-integrated curriculum brings up several issues related to inadequacies in teacher preparation in all disciplines as currently implemented. Interdisciplinary instruction requires that teachers break out of their disciplinary silos to embark on learning deeply about many disciplines and their interconnectivity in addition to focusing even more deeply on only one or two disciplines in their quest for certification or licensure renewal. Teachers need to understand how to organize curriculum to show the true connectedness of subjects in order to practice art-integrated pedagogy capable of making true conceptual connections. “Collaboration, curriculum development, and interdisciplinary work are not normative behaviors in most public schools. They need to be learned” (Rabkin, 2004, p. 143). So, serious investigation of implementing an arts-integrated curriculum calls for serious attention to professional development for in-service teachers and new and expanded modes of instruction and training for pre-service teachers. All of this is, of course possible, but it requires examination if arts-integration is to become a wide-spread, successful reality.

Next, according to Michael Parsons, art educator at Ohio State University, this movement represents, “a significant shift of emphasis in art education, away from the preoccupation with the integrity of disciplines and the differences between the arts and other subjects toward making connections between them” (1998, p. 103). Many agree with Parsons that breaking down subject-matter barriers in education is a positive evolutionary concept towards school improvement. However, in addition to creating genuine opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration there must also be a place for

disciplines, including each of the arts, to maintain their integrity and focus. Samuel Hope from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design maintains that:

Interdisciplinarity is an important goal for education. An individual's ability to integrate the knowledge, skills, modes of thoughts, points of view, and content of two or more disciplines is a tremendous achievement. But too often, interdisciplinarity is used to obscure or obviate the need for knowledge or skill development in specific disciplines sufficient to enable their combination in an interdisciplinary effort or project." (2004, p. 108)

Elliot Eisner further supports this notion of advocating for the arts as independent disciplines stating that, "It strikes me that we do the arts no service when we try to make their case by touting their contributions to other fields. When such contributions become priorities the arts become hand-maidens to ends that are not distinctively artistic and in the process undermine the values of art's unique contributions to the education of the young" (1998, p. 59). He advocates that art educators need to interpret what arts education can independently contribute to the young and help parents understand what the arts can really mean as a part of their children's education independent of claimed outcomes that the arts offer in terms of student achievement and academic success.

So, while most support the idea that arts infusion can help revitalize general education, most do not wish to see integration as the only existence of the arts in schools. Critics contend that if the arts are not taught with rigorous attention to learning

objectives intrinsic and unique to each of the art disciplines by arts specialists, they will be diluted and possibly abandoned if educators or school districts start to see arts-integration as a more powerful or less expensive instruments for art instruction. This argument, while positioning art education as beneficial for numerous reasons, clearly articulates the need for maintaining separate instruction in individual art disciplines in addition to integrating the arts throughout the curriculum.

***Art Education as Visual Culture and Visual Literacy: Students learn about and question their everyday world through examining and creating images***

The next theme I have identified in the literature positions art education as beneficial to student learning because of its ability to increase one's awareness of everyday aesthetic and interpretive experiences through the study of visual culture and the development of visual literacy. Rooted in post-modernism, this theme also opens up a realm for educators to promote critical literacy through critical discourse questioning and discussion towards social justice objectives. "When students engage in critical discourse they develop aesthetic sensitivity and become perceptive, discriminate consumers in a social and political democracy" (Heise, 2004, p. 45). This movement was born out of the prominence of visual imagery in our everyday lives from the aesthetic styling of products, to the increased presence of advertising, graphic design, movies, television, and digital (instant) photography that we are exposed to daily through high-speed distribution mechanisms. Because of its organic origins, the literature surrounding art education as visual culture study and as a visual literacy tool is abundant, but one message remains constant; this mode of art education offers students

unique opportunities to learn and communicate about their world with images. “In today’s world, meanings circulate visually, in addition to orally and textually. Images convey information, afford pleasure and displeasure, influence style, determine consumption and mediate power relations” (Rogoff, 1998, p. 15). In this realm, the visual image becomes a text that students must learn to de-code, decipher or read through developing practices of looking. “Visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meaning and of subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, art works, buildings or urban environments” (Rogoff, 1998, p. 14). Students who hone this skill to become visually literate are able to interpret the messages and meanings portrayed by these mechanisms in their everyday environment and make use of these images to communicate.

Art education as visual culture study also affords students opportunities to learn how to ask new and alternative questions, rather than reproducing old knowledge by asking old questions. Under this auspice, art education is beneficial because it becomes more relevant to student learning when boundaries are questioned and traditions are investigated. “The emergence of a relatively new arena such as visual culture provides the possibility of framing some of the discussions we have been engaged in regarding presences and absences, invisibility and stereotypes, desires, reifications, and objectifications” (Rogoff, 1998, p. 17). This positions art education as beneficial because it not only extends students’ experiences and interactions with art outside the confining institutions of schooling, art classes and museums, but it also highlights art

education as social practice subject to the elements of context, time and interpretation. “A single image can serve a multitude of purposes, appear in a range of settings, and mean different things to different people. The roles played by images are multiple, diverse and complex” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 10). Here the students get to engage in larger discussions about images and their meanings. Educating students about these elements of the art world have been argued to promote critical thinking abilities and cultural/social sensitivities. Within this realm, students develop the abilities question why female or African American artists were left out of art history for such a long period of time or to ask how an image created today might have been interpreted 50 years ago. The permission to question like this is unique to the arts and helps students become problem finders as well as problem solvers.

Lastly, this theme addresses art education as a beneficial means to help students navigate their everyday environments, participate in global cultural discussions as aesthetic beings, and to make meaning of their daily experiences. “Every day, we are in the practice of looking to make sense of the world. To see is a process of observing and recognizing the world around us. To look is to actively make meaning of that world” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 10). Art education as visual culture study places prime importance on students’ abilities to observe, look, interpret, judge and make meaning of images as they exist across different societies at different times. Considering that we live in a global, technology-laden culture that is increasingly reliant on visual images to convey messages about ourselves and others, this view of art education can be seen as beneficial for it’s presentation of arts learning as very relevant to students’ daily lives now and in the future.

Paul Duncum, a prominent advocate of visual culture studies, discusses the incorporation of everyday aesthetic experiences as being more significant than experiences of high art in informing one's identity and view of the world. He says, "The focus of the aesthetics of the everyday are objects, events, places, and experiences that for most of us, children and adults alike, form part of ordinary, daily life. They are neither especially refined, nor are they exotic in the sense that they belong to someone else's culture" (Duncum, 1999, p. 295). This view positions art and art education as beneficial because of its relevance and accessibility to everyone, every day. In this view, art exists within everyone's reach to experience and create, and is brought out of the "untouchable" or "high" status favored in past Eurocentric, museum guarded epistemologies, and brought into the momentary experiences of everyone at any time and in any place. Others support this view saying, "By encouraging students to interpret, evaluate, and 'rewrite' the shared symbols and meanings of their everyday visual experiences, visual culture educators can begin to move young people beyond modes of passive spectatorship and towards more active and expressive forms of communication with and in the world around them" (Darts, 2004, p. 325). These ideas pose excellent opportunities for students who are often marginalized by failures in other educational disciplines to succeed thus, art education in this theme are positioned as beneficial because they belong to everyone and are inclusive towards all who wish to explore, create and succeed.

However, visual culture concepts have perhaps been one of the most hotly contested topics in the field. Michelle Marder Kamhi, scholar and critic, argues that post-modernism is littered with fallacies that art educators have uncritically accepted;

fallacies such as, “the acceptance of equal value of anything put forward as art,” and “an ever-broadening definition of art” (Marder Kamhi, 2003, p. 10). She attacks this movement as having a fundamental lack of understanding or appreciation regarding the distinctive nature of the value of art citing that it only appeals to art teachers who are over-eager to present socially relevant curriculum. Kamhi, although she agrees visual literacy may deserve a place in the school curriculum, staunchly warns against confusing visual literacy and the visual culture approach with art education as it “waters down the arts” as too ordinary and overly subject to social and political whims.

Still others contend that emphasizing visual culture in the curriculum takes the emphasis away from vital parts of the visual arts that are more traditional and more typically defining to the field, thus perhaps blurring the lines too much between art education and social studies. Along these lines, Kamhi states that, “The tendency to make art a handmaiden to social studies is glaringly evident in the visual-culture art education movement” (Marder Kamhi, 2003, p. 10).

Even some educators who are seemingly in favor of including visual culture ideas in the visual arts curriculum discuss that this movement, if allowed to be implemented without thought to balance in the curriculum, poses threats to the integrity of the field stating, “the recent advance of visual cultural studies seemingly stands poised to displace the fine arts.” (Efland, 2005, p. 35). Those that join this chorus discuss the importance of keeping distinctions in the field and maintain that balance can be achieved when including visual culture in the art curriculum. They state:

a visual culture curriculum should represent the arts on both ends  
of the genre continuum and to do otherwise is to constrain the

freedom of cultural life. The same might be said of a curriculum that deals only and exclusively with the fine arts and that presents such works as exceptional moments of human achievement-as the only legitimate content. No valid educational purpose is served by limiting the range of visual culture either to the realm of the everyday or to arts that transcend the everyday, but if each has the other to serve as a basis for comparison, then the special attributes of each genre can become clear. (Efland, 2005, p. 39)

Thus, most supporters maintain an undeniable support for art education as visual culture study citing that:

In the art class we can effectively model democratic concepts, processes, and behaviors, and help our students make sense of their world. The arts can heighten perception and critical thinking and help students develop skills necessary to interpret images and engage in civil discourse. Visual culture is a valuable and necessary part of the art curriculum. Visual culture education need not replace traditional arts education. The intersection of visual culture in arts education can create meaningful, cross-cultural learning experiences that prepare students to participate fully in a democratic society. (Heise, 2004, p. 46)

Thus, I believe that this view of the benefits of art education offers a unique opportunity in the field to connect art in more meaningful ways with students' real experiences, thus increasing the relevance of studying art. Within this theme, studying

and creating art is beneficial because it has a unique position to help students connect to the curriculum in ways that are meaningful to them; students learn about how to interpret socially relevant themes into expressive art works that are meaningful to them beyond the simple fact that they created something, and here this phenomenon is discussed as something that might stand by the wayside in other disciplines in school.

***Art Education as Essential to Cognitive and Imaginative Development and Growth of Mind: Students learn to use their imagination, communicate using symbol and metaphor to make meaning, and to create original expressions of ideas, practice flexibility, and take risks***

In this theme, art education is positioned as beneficial because it is an essential catalyst for students' cognitive and imaginative development and growth of mind because it provides a place in the typical school curriculum for helping students develop unique thinking skills and problem solving abilities that other disciplines may not attend to as acutely. Although this view has been advanced since the first quarter of the twentieth century, it gained renewed popularity in art education advocacy circles in the 1980's with the reporting from Harvard's Project Zero, Arts PROPEL and Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory gaining notoriety.

In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, Elliot Eisner states that, "the tasks the arts put forward—such as noticing subtleties among qualitative relationships, conceiving of imaginative possibilities, interpreting the metaphorical meanings the work displays, exploiting unanticipated opportunities in the course of one's work—require complex cognitive models of thought" (2002, p. 35). He goes on to point out that the arts are

often thought of as somehow intellectually undemanding, emotive rather than reflective and as operations done with the hand but disconnected from the head. Throughout this book, Eisner discusses perceptions in the education community that art has very little to do with complex forms of thought, that it is sometimes seen as “soft learning” in comparison to other “hard” subjects such as math or science. But in light of these attitudes, Eisner maintains that, “the presence of an art program that fosters flexibility, promotes a tolerance for ambiguity, encourages risktaking, and depends upon the exercise of judgment outside the sphere of rules is an especially valuable resource” (2002, p. 35). Art educators along with Eisner purport that these abilities, nurtured uniquely in the art classroom, are particularly important at a time when schools are charged with preparing people to be inventive thinkers and to work in more than one occupation throughout their lives.

When discussing the benefits of art education from this cognitive, imaginative perspective, Arthur Efland contends that, “the arts are places where the constructions of the imagination can and should become the principle object of study...It is only in the arts where the imagination is encountered and explored in full consciousness—where it becomes the object of inquiry” (2004, p. 769). Here, art education is positioned as a champion for fostering thinking and reasoning skills not necessarily exercised as rigorously in other learning arenas.

Although Efland, like Eisner, argues that all subjects can offer students opportunities to develop or expand these same abilities, he goes on to state that, “schooling for most students occurs within a curriculum where knowledge is experienced as a series of isolated, random facts” (2004, p. 770). Participating in visual

arts learning experiences, both producing and responding, provides the kind of experiences that require and develop thinking skills and understanding knowledge through the use of many unique thought processes. Sharon McCoubrey, art educator, agrees with this stating that, “Where other school subjects may also be handled in a way that would also develop thinking skills, art is particularly suited for this goal because, by its nature it requires, in addition to the transfer of knowledge, originality and creation” (1994, p. 37).

Throughout this theme in the literature, art education is discussed as a place in the curriculum where learners are consistently asked to use their imagination in addition to developing problem solving skills and critical thinking skills. So this theme positions art education as beneficial for students because the activities set forth in the art classroom or studio require them learn to use their imagination to create an original expression of ideas using metaphor, to not only learn and memorize content, but to react to it, interpret it and do something new with it.

***Art Education as Human Experience, Expression of Self and Identity: Students learn to construct their identity and express themselves visually***

This next theme positions art education as beneficial to student learning because of its unique qualities that allow students to participate in the continuum of human experience through creating something original from the spirit as a means to express the self and subsequently shape identity. Edmund Feldman, in his book *Becoming Human Through Art*, discusses the expression of self and the formation of identity as existing in a continuous state of life-long change. Feldman’s views articulate that the need for self-

exploration and genuine expression is continually satisfied through art experiences. He states, “The unanswered expression of a self denies communion to that self and prevents it from becoming complete” (Feldman, 1970, p. 41). But he goes on to say that through engaging in the artistic process, the self becomes completed and successful by participating in a unique, creative act of communication with the self and others simultaneously. Here art is positioned as a natural means for engaging in an ongoing dialog with the self.

Additionally, the practice of expressing the self and shaping identity through engagement in the process of art making is often highlighted as inherently embedded in art learning experiences in ways not commonly touched upon in the study of other disciplines in school. Art education naturally lends itself to this phenomenon because, “The art studio lends itself to experiment with ideas and self-discovery with its more relaxed and open atmosphere. In the studio, students and teachers tend to work collaboratively and in less competitive and less judgmental ways” (Emerson, 1994, p. 10). This positions art education as a beneficial venue for open-ended exploration and experimentation, where right and wrong answers are not usually the focus as they are often in other school subjects, and where students are not pitted against each other in order for success to occur. Here, all students can engage and potentially be successful, so art education also becomes valued for its abilities to be inclusive.

Lastly, in *Against the Flow*, Peter Abbs states, “The arts, when they are significant, are invariably engaged with... the question of human meaning and human transformation, with the kinds of redemption and forms of affirmation which may be open to us” (2003, p. 30). Here art is discussed as a means through which students can

actively engage with and explore their inner world, their place in the world, their daily and extraordinary experiences, their perceptions, their reality, their prejudices, their hopes and aspirations, their fears, and their stories, with the objective of communicating their ever-changing vision, point of view or voice. In Abbs's argument, this is unique to arts learning in school because, "So much learning these days eschews any connection with individual life or creativity. In our schools and universities we have become pathologically obsessed with quantitative measurement rather than qualitative flow of meaning, with a brute collective standardization rather than with more subtle modes of individuation" (Abbs, 2003, p. 2). This is not the case in art classes where personal experience and voice as they are communicated through the artistic product are more often the focus of art curriculum than any sort of quantitative measurement. Thus art education is beneficial as a respite for students from some of these pressures, as a place where they can explore more subtle modes of individuation and being.

John Dewey, in *Art as Experience*, argues this position of art education as unique to human experience and exploration of being by eloquently stating:

Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, and impulse and action characteristic of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection, and redispotion. Thus it varies the arts in ways without end. But its intervention also leads in time to the idea of art as a conscious idea—the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity. (1934, p. 26)

This view, in holding with the others in this theme, conceives of art as a form of experience having special and valuable characteristics. For Dewey, and others who advocate for art education in this tradition, art is an experience that animates life and helps a person simply recognize that they are alive. Constance Gee echoes this sentiment by saying, “Art is a part of our lives because it brings us pleasure, not simply casual pleasure but the pleasure of engagement. Art makes us feel; it makes us feel alive sensuously, emotionally, and intellectually” (2004, p. 126). These statements clearly illustrate that this theme in the literature positions art education as beneficial because of its unique capacity to help students learn to explore essences of the common human experience and their identity in unique and potentially profound ways.

***Art Education as Career Preparation: Students learn skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, effective communication and working collaboratively, that are transferrable to a variety of contexts***

This theme in art education advocacy literature is by no means new. I have gleaned from the literature in this area that since the advent of public schooling the arts have been seen as trades preparation due to their hands-on nature. Although this theme has seen several revivals throughout history I will focus here on a few prominent resurgences in more recent times. In 1996, the Getty Education Institute released a popular report in *Business Week* that discussed education in the arts as preparation for the workplace. This article compared the skills typical of a worker in 1966 with those a worker in 1996 must possess. It states, “Today’s — and tomorrow’s — workers [in contrast to those entering the workforce 30 years earlier] have to be multi-skilled and

multi-dimensional, flexible and intellectually supple. Even the physical office is being relocated to accommodate new work styles as cell-phones, faxes, and telecommunications software stimulate the growing edge of the workforce as it migrates down the information highway to homes, cars, airport lounges and telework centers” (Getty Education Institute for the Arts, 1996, p. 5). The article goes on to discuss arts education’s capacity to help students learn to:

build such thinking skills as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and critical judgment. It nourishes imagination and creativity; While recognizing the importance of process, it focuses deliberately on content and end-product. It develops collaborative and teamwork skills, technological competencies, flexible thinking, and an appreciation for diversity.

An arts education also fosters such valued personal attitudes as self-discipline. (Getty Education Institute for the Arts, 1996, p. 6)

Around this same time, the Alliance for the Arts reported the economic impact of the arts on New York City and New York State. Here the arts represented a \$13.4 billion economic industry and 174,000 jobs statewide with unreported connections to the economic success of industries such as fashion, publishing, advertising and new media. The report discussed not only the impact of the arts on the economy, but of the impact of these findings on the public attitude towards the arts. It’s stated that, “This increasing understanding of the arts’ role in the economy has helped the public to see them not as a luxury or still less as a charity but as an industry” (Bourscheidt & Lanier, 1997, p. 1).

These reports represented an important new way of discussing the arts; as beneficial because the skills learned could be generalized beyond compulsory schooling and academic success to improve people's economic and professional lives. And because these benefits could be communicated in hard numbers and concrete figures, these reports made a large splash in the art education community, thus several similar studies and reports followed rapidly.

This theme reemerged again in 2001 when the Center for Arts and Culture released their issue paper on *Creativity, Culture, Education, and the Workforce*. This paper discussed the arts and humanities as vitally important to America's competitiveness in a global economy and argued that a complete education in the arts and humanities is critical to, "preserve, sustain, and augment America's cultural capital and to keep America's workers competitive in a global Knowledge Economy" (Galligan, 2001, p. 3). The report went on to state that, "The abilities to think creatively, to communicate effectively, and to work collaboratively are increasingly identified as necessary skills, along with the fundamental abilities to read, write and use numbers" (Galligan, 2001, p. 7). Therefore, this theme positions the arts on par with other academic disciplines and, once again, attempts to highlight the natural and intrinsic benefits of art education.

Following this trend, Daniel Pink captured the education community's attention most recently with *A Whole New Mind*. This book outlined a timely discussion about the skills of our future workforce. Pink states that, "The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind—creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers. These people—artists, inventors, designers,

storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers—will now reap society’s richest rewards and share its greatest joys” (Pink, 2005, p. 1). This popular book touted the M.F.A. as the new M.B.A. and discussed the notion that Americans are renowned worldwide for being fiercely independent, imaginative, inventive, creative and visionary by cultural definition. In the face of a nation-wide outsourcing trend in industries such as software engineering, manufacturing and even customer service, Pink pointed out that, “More Americans today work in arts, entertainment, and design than work as lawyers, accountants and auditors” (Pink, 2005, p. 55). He terms this new economic movement “The Conceptual Age,” a post-information age where abilities to think conceptually and flexibly are the hottest international workforce commodity that America is positioned to dominate. He describes the unique creative vision and ingenuity of Americans as being borne from our altruistic, democratic ideals, nurtured throughout our education opportunities and honed into an unsurpassed creative drive that is often underemphasized in many other cultures. Pink goes on to state that through mastering the six essential aptitudes of design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning, anyone can evolve from worker to artist and become perfectly prepared for reaping the rewards of this new age. Needless to say, *A Whole New Mind* was very well-received by arts educators as it celebrated the benefits of art education as cutting-edge and future-oriented for the first time in a long time, discussing these soon-to-be-valued ways of thinking and working as inherent and naturally embedded in arts learning experiences.

*Art Education as a Rigorous Academic Subject: Students learn unique academic knowledge*

According to some of the literature I surveyed, in the early 1980's, the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) movement was designed to promote and help educators understand the legitimacy of art as a rigorous academic discipline. This approach generated the idea that "art should be taught by means of a formal, continuous curriculum in the same way as other academic subjects" (Greer, 1984, p. 215). The curricular implementation of this movement was supported nationally by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and emphasized structuring the visual art curriculum at all levels around four parent disciplines inherent in the study and practice of art: aesthetics, studio art (making), art history and art criticism.

This movement gave art teachers in schools nationwide concrete language and tools (curriculum outlines, organized lesson approaches, assessment tools, etc.) to help promote the study of art as a real, academic subject in an attempt to put art on par with other subjects in the curriculum traditionally thought of as "harder" or more rigorous. One of DBAE's principal theorists Dwayne Greer, states:

In teaching art according to discipline-based principles, everything done is referenced to art. There is content (information, concepts, and techniques) that can be assessed and for which teachers can be accountable...it is easy to point to the knowledge and skills that students are acquiring. When justifications for art education are made in terms of increasing competency rather than enjoyment, school people and parents

look at art as a legitimate subject of instruction. (Greer, 1984, p. 217)

The aim of this approach was to put arts learning on a life-long continuum towards an education end-in-view of “educated adults with a sophisticated understanding of the arts” (Greer, 1984, p. 231). Although the true purpose of the DBAE movement was to improve art curriculum rather than to serve solely as another means of advocacy for the field, it ultimately helped to reframe art education for teachers, students and administrators as a rigorous field of study rooted in a knowledge base relevant to life-long learning objectives where competency can legitimately be demonstrated. This movement, as intended, discussed the benefits of arts learning beyond notions of engagement for the purposes of enjoyment, and newly positioned art education as beneficial because it offers students the opportunity to learn the unique, academic knowledge and content the field demonstrated to hold.

***Art Education as Support for Student Achievement and Academic Success: Students experience increased success in school as a result of their art education***

In the post-Sputnik era and in the shadow of *A Nation at Risk*, as science and math gained more attention socially and became more emphasized in the school curriculum to bolster America’s standing in the international race for scientific discovery, the arts seemingly struggled for credibility in comparison. In response to this, a report came from the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities in 1995 that emphasized the arts as “serious and rigorous academic subjects” (Murfee, p. 6). Within this report the arts are discussed as holding a place at the core of learning as an essential

aspect of human knowing, and are touted to meet many educational goals to help students learn to succeed in school. First, it is highlighted that the arts are unique, yet the study of art is akin to the study of math and science in several ways:

The arts convey knowledge and meaning not learned through the study of other subjects. They represent a form of thinking and a way of knowing that is based in human imagination and judgment. The arts delight students, but they are also intellectual disciplines of substance. Like language or mathematics, the arts involve the use of complex symbols to communicate. To attain competence in the arts, it is necessary to gain literacy with these symbol systems. Some, like music and painting use non-verbal symbols; others, like poetry and song use language in particular ways. (Murfee, 1995, p. 6)

So while the first aim of this oft-quoted report was seemingly to help the arts gain a foothold in the curriculum during this slippery time, to put the arts on par with other subjects more traditionally thought of by students, parents, teachers and administrators as truly academic, a secondary goal was to outline ways in which the arts have far-reaching potential to help students achieve several education goals including improved SAT scores. In addition to proving to be truly rigorous, thus beneficial to students, the author states that, “In 1995, SAT scores for students who studied the arts more than four years were 59 points higher on the verbal and 44 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts” (Murfee, 1995, p. 7). This statement clearly places the arts in a supporting role to students’ and society’s loftier education goals.

More recently a study published in 2000 by Kathryn Vaughn and Ellen Winner linked student arts learning and increased SAT scores. Their analysis revealed that, “students who take any kind of art course in high school have higher SAT scores (both math and verbal) than students who take no art course at all. Moreover, those who take four years of arts courses have higher scores than those who take some art but less than four years’ worth” (Vaughn and Winner, 2000, p. 86). And although the findings from this research are purely correlational and allow no causal inference, the study once again gained attention for the possible link between arts learning and improved academic achievement.

In another study published in 1998 by James Catterall and cited in *Critical Links* published in 2002 by the Arts Education Partnership, data collected from 25,000 students who participated in the *National Educational Longitudinal Study* of 1988 was examined with the objective of finding out if students in middle and high school who have high involvement in the arts (high arts students) perform better in school than those with low arts involvement. The results stated that, “High arts students earned better grades and performed better on standardized tests. High arts students also performed more community service, watched fewer hours of television, and reported less boredom in school” (Catterall, 1998, p. 68).

And, interestingly, the *Critical Links* publication, a compendium compilation of 62 studies of the academic and social effects of learning in the arts, identifies six major types of benefits associated with the study of the arts and student achievement including improved reading and language skills, mathematics skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn and perception of a positive school environment. *Critical Links*

purports that, “The evidence is clear: study of the arts contributes to student achievement and success. Its multiple benefits are academic, basic and comprehensive” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 17)

This is just a small sampling of the publications that abound in educational research, arts advocacy circles and popular culture that claim students who participate in arts learning gain the advantage of improved performance in school and increased academic success. Many arts advocacy organizations and researchers also call for continued evidence-based research to communicate the benefits of art education towards these goals.

Yet there is some resistance in the literature to this arts advocacy approach. In the resistance camp, Project Zero’s REAP (Reviewing Education and the Arts Project) is perhaps the most well-publicized argument against linking art education to academic achievement. Authors Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner state, “There is danger in such reasoning. If the arts are given a role in our schools because people believe the arts cause academic improvement, then the arts will quickly lose their position if academic improvement does not result, or if the arts are shown to be less effective than the 3Rs in promoting literacy and numeracy” (Hetland & Winner, 2000, retrieved on Nov. 1, 2011). REAP conducted a comprehensive search for all empirical studies from 1950-1999 that claim that studying the arts leads to some form of academic improvement. Through the meta-analysis of 188 reports it was discovered that there are only three areas in which clear causal links between the arts and academic achievement could be demonstrated and seven other areas where no reliable causal link was found. Thus, considering the mixed findings yielded, it was concluded that, “it is dangerous to justify

arts education by secondary, non-arts effects. Doing so puts the arts in a weakened and vulnerable position. Arts educators must build justifications based on what is inherently valuable about the arts themselves” (Hetland & Winner, 2000, retrieved on Nov. 1, 2011).

Furthermore, this project calls for a stop to justifying the arts instrumentally and states this is a peculiar and very American practice. The authors call for advocacy surrounding the concept that the arts are simply good for kids in the same way that sports are inherently good for kids and claim that, “Just as a well-rounded education requires education of the body through physical education, a balanced education requires study of the arts” (Hetland & Winner, 2000, retrieved on Nov. 1, 2011). This study calls into question what it means for students to be “successful” in school. Are test scores and the meeting of standards the only means through which we understand students’ academic success? What about a student’s ability to think creatively and not only solve problems in a rote manner, but to find problems as well?

This resistance to basing arguments about the benefits of art education solely on how they contribute to students’ academic success apart from the arts successes students can experience leads to the next prominent theme I have identified within the literature; a presentation of art education as fostering unique ways of thinking and learning that can not be accomplished in other disciplines.

*Art Education as Artistic Ways of Thinking, Knowing, Experimenting,  
Communicating and Learning: Students learn unique ways of thinking,  
reasoning knowing, discovering and communicating knowledge  
by learning to act and think like artists*

This final theme identified in my review of the literature positions the arts as beneficial to students simply because they offer students learning experiences that other disciplines do not. While this theme has appeared periodically underlying, or couched within, some of the various themes I have previously discussed, and is most often identified as the “arts for arts sake” argument, the discussions I will focus on here are solely based on the premise that art education is beneficial to student learning because it offers students opportunities to develop artistic ways of thinking, knowing and learning simply for the sake of experiencing and knowing them. Here, art education is beneficial because students learn new ways of thinking and knowing and, and unique ways of discovering knowledge.

Jessica Hoffmann Davis states, “The value of the arts in education is clear and non-negotiable and must withstand rather than respond to differing tides and winds. We need to include the arts in education not because they serve other kinds of learning (and of course they do), but because they offer students opportunities for learning that other subjects do not” (2008, p. 3). This positions art education as intrinsically beneficial to students in and of itself, independent from all other claims of what it can do or offer to other disciplines or education objectives. Under this umbrella, the call is for everyone to begin taking art education seriously simply because it is a legitimate academic discipline that offers much to a student’s education.

Similarly, in *Strong Arts Strong Schools*, Charles Fowler says:

If there is a fourth R that needs to be added to the traditional three, it is reasoning. Many Americans cannot think straight, and American business is suffering for it. Here the arts can make another unique contribution. Particularly in their creative aspects, the arts require abstract reasoning. Among all the subjects in the curriculum, the arts are unique in that there are fewer absolutely right or wrong answers. It is precisely the ambiguities of these forms of symbolic expression that require us to exercise a higher order of thought processes. (1996, p. 11)

Throughout this book, Fowler positions art as an invitation for students to exercise the same intellectual skills as the artist does, “to envision, to set goals, to determine technique and exercise it, to figure out, to evaluate, to revise, to continue to imagine and solve problems—to create.” (1996, p. 11). He says that we do not need more arts education to develop more artists any more than we need math at the core of our school curriculum to develop mathematicians, and maintains that we need more and better arts education simply to produce better-educated human beings and citizens who will, “value and evolve a worthy American civilization” (Fowler, 1996, p. 13).

Along these lines, in *Third Space*, authors Lauren Stevenson and Richard Deasy describe art education as helping to make learning matter to students because of the unique ways of knowing students engage in. In the schools they examined in this study, the arts, “put students in active and meaningful roles in their classrooms and connected schools to student’s lives and cultures. They opened possibilities for students to

contribute to their communities and made learning an authentic project in which students explored not only the content of academic subjects, but their own lives and identities” (2005, p. 17). Here, art education is positioned as beneficial because it possesses such authentic opportunities for learning and self-direction that students become excited and naturally or easily able to make connections to other academic subjects, their communities and within themselves.

And recently, arts advocacy and policy groups have conducted additional research studies with the objective of discussing the unique knowledge gained through arts learning. In *Gifts of the Muse*, a report on a research study conducted by the RAND Corporation, the call is to reframe the debate about the benefits of the arts. This report highlights that the phenomenon of emphasizing the potential of the arts for serving broad social and economic goals is a recent trend. Here, the history of art advocacy is reframed through the arts advocacy and policy perspective:

As late as the 1960s and 1970s, the value of the arts was still a given for the American public. By the early 1990s, however, the social and political pressures that culminated in what became known as the “culture wars” put pressure on arts advocates to articulate the public value of the arts. Their response was to emphasize the instrumental benefits of the arts: They said the arts promote important, measurable benefits, such as economic growth and student learning, and thus are of value to all Americans, not just those involved in the arts. Such benefits are instrumental in that the arts are viewed as a means of achieving

broad social and economic goals that have nothing to do with art  
per se. (McCarthy, et al., 2004, p. xi)

Because understanding the benefits of the arts is central to the discussion and design of policies affecting the arts, this study called for a reframing of the debates in order to improve the current understanding of the full range of benefits of arts learning. The findings articulate several ways in which learning in the arts is intrinsically beneficial including, captivation, pleasure, expanded capacity for empathy, cognitive growth, creation of social bonds, and expression of communal meanings. This report highlights that, “People are drawn to the arts not for their instrumental effects, but because the arts can provide them with meaning and with a distinctive type of pleasure and emotional stimulation” (McCarthy, et al., 2004, xvii). This study’s key policy implication is that policy should be directed toward spreading the benefits of the arts by introducing more Americans to engaging arts experiences citing that efforts along these lines have so far been hampered by a lack of guiding principles. In the end, the report outlines several steps for the arts community to take in order to redirect its emphasis, including developing language for discussing intrinsic benefits, addressing the limitations of the research on instrumental benefits, promoting early exposure to the arts, and creating circumstances for rewarding arts experiences.

It is clear that these newer trends in the literature surrounding the benefit of art education have been influenced by a renewed interest in examining why and how artists make art and discussing why doing so is an important part of the human experience. Some art educators and advocates believe that, “At the root of it, we make art to make sense of things, to give meaning to our existence. When we express ourselves through

making art, we create something tangible to look at, hold, reflect on, feel, and try to understand in our minds and bodies” (Anderson, 2004, p. 31). The influence of this renewed interest is particularly evident in studies such as *Studio Thinking*, where the authors sought to discover whether or not experience in the arts change students’ minds so that they can approach the world as an artist would. They state:

Students must be given the opportunity to think like artists, just as they should be given the opportunity to approach the world mathematically, scientifically, historically, and linguistically. The arts are another way of knowing the world—as important as the other disciplines to our societal health. (Hetland, et al., 2008, p. 4)

Hoffmann Davis agrees with this rhetoric and even goes further to discuss how learning in other academic subjects can improve learning in the arts; “in experiencing works of art, students have the chance to see different school subjects interrelating, and making a unified or cohesive statement” (2008, p. 5). Furthermore, to expand this idea, she says:

in making their own works of art, students have the opportunity to integrate the learning they are doing in various subjects and to express the interrelationship of ideas and feelings that they are discovering in and out of school. Because of the scope of their imaginative nature, the arts open many doors to students and offer unique and important encounters with making sense of learning and putting it to use. (Hoffmann Davis, 2008, p. 5)

These points of view further demonstrate a recent, marked shift in the literature discourse surrounding the benefits of art education. Granted, I also found in my literature survey that the “art for art’s sake” discussion has been going on for quite some time sporadically, but this shift expands the conversation by discussing how learning in other academic disciplines can contribute to arts objectives when, more typically, discussions about the arts are about ways in which arts learning supports students’ learning in other disciplines or towards success in other academic arenas.

Furthermore, in *Studio Thinking*, researchers conducted an empirical inquiry using case study, interview and observational methods to examine art teaching practices in five visual arts classrooms with the objective of discovering what is really taught in visual arts. Amongst their findings, the researchers concluded that, “Non-arts teachers have much to learn from how excellent art teachers personalize instruction, engage in just-in-time interventions as they circle the room while students work, and stimulate students’ critical and self-reflective skills during regular critique sessions” (Hetland, et al., 2008, p. 8). This statement further amplifies the shift toward valuing art education for its unique capacity to foster specific ways of thinking, knowing and learning in the classroom, and advances the discussion towards recommending that more classrooms employ art studio structures and more teachers make use of studio habits and artistic pedagogical practices in instruction.

All of these contributions to the literature have been made with the express objective of framing and reframing how art education is beneficial towards a more stabilized point of view for the field as to what unique things learning in the arts can offer students that they cannot get anywhere else in the curriculum. This discussion

about intrinsic benefits of art education, for some, seems a long time coming for the field, and has advanced the discussion in education and policy arenas nationwide. And while other themes I have addressed here discuss what students are learning based on the inherent benefits of art education, none, in my opinion, do so with quite as much focus as this trend has.

**Methodology: The Artistic Creative Process as an Arts-Based Research Method**

Graeme Sullivan (2006) proposes that art practice can be conceptualized as a form of research that can be directed towards a range of personal and public ends. Sullivan states that, “Oftentimes what is known can limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view. An inquiry process involving interpretive and critical acts is then possible as new insights confirm, challenge or change our understanding” (p. 20). As the purpose of this study was to try to uncover new insights about what students perceive they are learning from their art education, I felt it was only appropriate to adopt these epistemologies in my methodology.

Arts-based researchers seek to use artistic forms as the basis for educational inquiry. Various terms are often used surrounding this research paradigm including arts-based research, arts-informed research, A/r/tography and practice-based research. For my purposes, I adopted the term arts-based educational research (ABER). Liora Bresler, educational researcher, states that this tradition of inquiry arose from the qualitative paradigm, aimed at empathic understanding that began to assume prominence in the 1960’s and 1970’s in educational research. “Qualitative research has aimed to portray multiple voices, representing with caring and insight voices that have not been part of the scholarly literature” (Bresler, 2006, p. 52). According to Bresler, several researchers working in visual arts careers at universities adopted the qualitative paradigm but eventually started to discuss whether visual arts practice could also be argued to be a form of research given the nature of artistic inquiry. As Sullivan puts it, “Realizing that educational research that merely adopts methods from the sciences cannot fully address

the complexity of human learning in all its artistic richness, arts-based researchers seek to extend the methodological landscape opened up by qualitative researchers” (2006, p. 24). Thus, ABER utilizes artistic practices and processes rooted in qualitative epistemologies.

Sullivan illustrates that, “Arts-based research, with its emphasis on constructivism, interpretation, and contextualism, is adaptive and lends itself to interdisciplinary approaches where the emphasis is to offer new perspectives on educational issues” (2006, p. 24). Considering the kinds of inquiries I set out to focus on in this study and the interdisciplinary means through which I collected, analyzed, synthesized and reported data, this approach seemed to most clearly fit the objectives of this study. In *Arts-Based Educational Research* (2006), researchers Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner argue that what distinguishes this kind of research from that in the positivist tradition and even from some other widely-used methods such as case-study or ethnography in the interpretive tradition, is the multiplicity of ways of encountering and representing experience, and the use of artistic forms of expression that can effectively communicate educational phenomena to an audience. They also state:

“Educational research has traditionally been constructed for the purpose of arriving at knowledge that is highly valid and reliable, as truthful and trustworthy as possible. Honoring an epistemology that strives toward certainty, traditional research “findings” are meant to explain, predict, and sometimes control the outcomes of similar future events. They enable consumers of research to argue confidently about how to act. But ABER [Arts-

Based Educational Research] is not aimed toward a quest for certainty. Its purpose may instead be described as the enhancement of perspectives.” (2006, p. 96)

Considering these differences, and if positivist researchers are understood as generally seeking to secure explanations and confident predictions, arts-based educational researchers, in contrast, strive to, “suggest new ways of viewing educational phenomena.” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 96). And, as Sullivan discusses, arts-based researchers favor features of qualitative research that incorporate the use of reflective and responsive approaches where data collection involves creating descriptive documentation that reflect the intense focus of the observer and insights of the insider. “Arts-based educational inquiry describes and interprets phenomena through “seeing” and “sensing,” which is the basis for compiling thematic patterns of evidence from which meaning is made vivid” (2006, p. 23).

ABER also moves to broaden ongoing conversation about educational policy and practice by calling attention to common phenomenon or perspectives rather than closing off discussions. Other forms of educational research may also strive towards these purposes but, as Barone and Eisner discuss further, “These contributions often exemplify what is called post-modernist scientific inquiry... [and] these research texts often lack certain aesthetic design elements that work toward a powerful transmutation of feelings, thoughts, and images into an aesthetic form... ABER at its best is capable of persuading the percipient to see educational phenomena in new ways, and to entertain questions about them that might have otherwise been left unasked” (2006, p.

96). Thus, this method of inquiry has the potential to open up the realm of educational research in order to construct theories of possibilities rather than fixed answers.

Sullivan, when discussing using the artistic creative process as a basis for inquiry states that, “the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research... The critical and creative investigations that occur in studios, galleries, on the Internet, in community spaces and in other places where artists work, are forms of research grounded in art practice” (2005, p. xi). He goes on to discuss the ABER approach as an exercise in knowledge construction and a process of coming to know that acknowledges the theoretical depth and breadth that artists draw upon in their art making as they assume multiple, interdependent and simultaneous roles during the artistic process as visionary, creator, meaning-maker, critic, audience, teacher and learner.

Also, according to ABER literature, two criteria apply when deciding that a methodological approach is arts-based: the research must be engaged in for a purpose often associated with artistic activity, and it must be defined by aesthetic qualities, design elements and outcomes that infuse the inquiry process and the research text. “Although these elements are, to some degree, evident in all educational research activity, the more pronounced they are, the more the research may be characterized as arts-based” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 95).

In this vein, using the artistic creative process as an arts-based educational research method has been a mode of inquiry and discovery that has yielded rich results in this study. Although there are many, diverse existing theories about the different

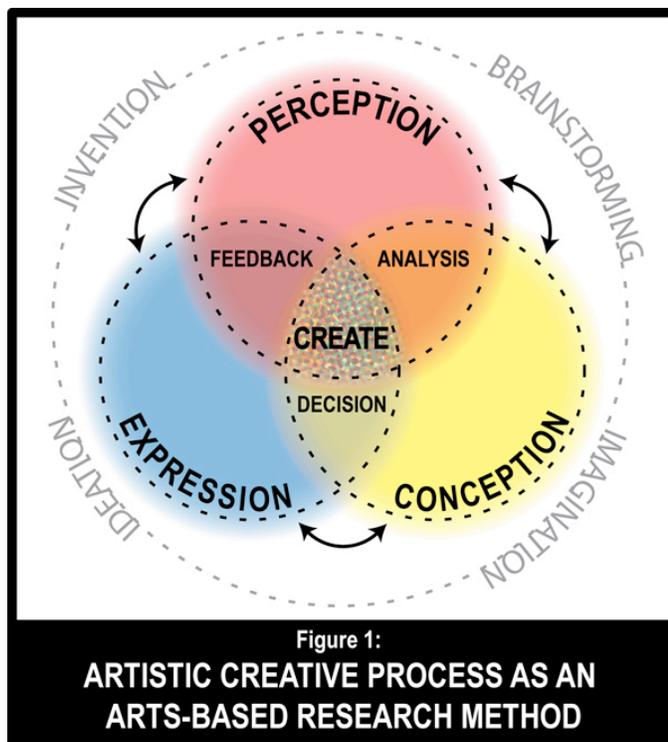
phases or stages of the artistic creative process and many different models available to represent it, my artistic creative process tends to follow the graph here.

Two sources along with my own life-long artistic development have influenced my creation of this model and graph; *Design Drawing* by William Kirby Lockhard (1979, 2001) and *The Universal Traveler: A Soft-Systems Guide to Creativity, Problem-Solving, and the Process of Reaching Goals* by Don Koberg and Jim Bagnall (1973). In *Design Drawing*, Lockhard theorizes that the artistic creative process has three major phases: Perception, Conception, and Representation. In *The Universal Traveler*, the authors suggest there are seven major phases in the artistic creative process: Acceptance, Analysis, Definition, Ideation, Selection, Implementation, and Evaluation. And both of these sources define the artistic creative process as a fluid series of events the artist engages in to create new information and generate new ideas. They both also discuss that this series of events can potentially unfold in any number of ways; cyclically, looped, inter-looping, branched and/or linear depending on the artist's preferences and habits, and the nature of the project at hand.

However, while I completely agree with this definition of the artistic creative process and with the idea that the process unfolds differently for each artist, I do not think the phase definitions or delineations presented by either of these sources, although they come closer than others I studied, accurately portray the process I have engaged in during this study. For instance, I believe Lockhard's model is very simple and there are important parts of the artistic creative process such as analysis and decision-making that I feel are not represented clearly. But I also think that in Koberg and Bagnall's model, while it has some well-conceptualized phases, is clumsily worded, and I think parts of

this model, such as acceptance, analysis, and definition, could be grouped under the much more encompassing umbrella term perception as Lockhard defines it.

So based on these and other such shortcomings I identified in both models, I decided to create my own hybrid model of the creative artistic process as I participated in it during this study both as an artist and researcher. This creative process and ABER method blends the theories outlined in *Design Drawing* and



*The Universal Traveler* with what I have come to know about the artistic creative process through my working experience. Like Lockhard, I consider Perception, Conception, and Expression (Representation) to be the primary phases of the creative process, while the intermittent phases I devised are inspired by Koberg and Bagnall and entail Analysis, Decision, and Feedback. I define each of the phases in my model as follows:

- **Perception:** the artist/researcher identifies the aesthetic problem/objective or research question and gathers data from many sources and through several modalities with the aim of addressing the problem and/or research question at hand.

- **Analysis:** the artist/researcher dissects, interprets and compares facets of the gathered data with all past experiences and other knowledge gained throughout time from many sources to decipher which parts of the gathered data best addresses the aesthetic problem/objective and/or research question perceived.
- **Conception:** the artist/researcher experiments with many possible solutions to the aesthetic problem and/or research question. The artist/researcher synthesizes all of the information gathered in the Perception phase and interpreted in the Analysis phase then brainstorms, experiments with, tests and modifies various visual and narrative and solutions.
- **Decision:** the artist/researcher decides which possible solutions experimented with in the Conception phase are most viable. Some are kept, some are tabled, some are discarded, and some are combined with others before moving forward. The artist/researcher also devises a plan for representing and reporting the solutions for an audience.
- **Expression:** the artist/researcher, using various media, produces (externalizes) and/or creates interpretive, contextually relevant means to communicate the ideas resulting from the Conception phase.
- **Feedback:** the artist/researcher discusses/presents the results of the Expression phase with an audience and possibly makes modifications before more research (perception) is accomplished and the process starts over again either towards revised results or a new project all together. Here the artist/researcher can also reflect on the results of the artistic/academic exploration and the experience of engaging in it.

This model not only defines the phases of the creative artistic process and ABER method I engaged in during this project to create my portraits and analyze the data I gathered, but it also illustrates a very fluid and open process where throughout, within and between all of the phases the artist/researcher is continually creating something new from the information gathered. Additionally, regardless of where the artist/researcher plugs into this process, or where and how they move between and among the phases as they are defined here, the goal of creating something new is at the heart of the endeavor. Literally, in the middle of this entire process, creation happens continually. This model also depicts that the whole process is not operating inside a vacuum, but, rather, is situated inside larger influencing spheres of common creative practices such as invention, brainstorming, imagination and ideation. Overall, I believe that the process modeled here, whether engaged in for the purpose of creating art or conducting research, is a powerful tool that the artist/researcher can use to synthesize information gathered over time into an interpretive, contextually relevant response to a problem or question just as Sullivan, Bresler, Barone and Eisner describe.

My goal in devising this model was not to carve out my own ABER pathway for in order to simplify my pursuit. Rather, my goal was to represent and articulate the process I gravitated towards naturally (as influenced by my artistic background) and engaged in as I pursued answers to my research question and sought to portray a context for what I found. Thus, following is a description of how I proceeded through each of the phases in my ABER process as this project progressed.

**Perception:** Once I decided upon my core research question, I began randomly selecting students to participate in this study. I printed and cut apart a list of all 62

students in the AHS Visual Arts and Media Arts classes of 2009. I placed the slips of paper containing each student's name in a box and blindly selected a total of 30. I then asked a colleague who was not a teacher to approach to each student, describe the study and my methods for randomly choosing them as a potential participant, and ask for voluntary participation. Initially, 6 students opted out of participating for a variety of reasons, but after receiving the appropriate IRB paperwork from each of the remaining 24 intended participants I began conducting video interviews (Appendix C) that aimed to both gather contextual data about each student and to discover each students' direct answer to my research question: *What do students perceive they are learning from studying visual arts in school?*

Additionally, at the time of interview, I collected an original self-portrait artwork and an artist statement from each student with the objective of compiling additional contextual information that would influence the visual and narrative portrait representations I planned to make of each of them. The students were given free reign over what type of artwork to create and submit as their self-portrait. In the artist statement I asked students to describe: 1) why/how the work they chose to submit portrayed them as an artist, and 2) why/how the work represents their perceptions of their learning in art.

It was my hope that these student-submitted materials would enhance the information gathered during the interviews and that it would offer insights about how the students view and describe themselves as artists. Also, by making these things the students were allowed to think more deeply and come to conclusions on their own time

(outside of the pressures of an interview setting) about their perceptions of their learning and the progression of their artistic development to date.

Throughout May and early June 2009 interviews were conducted, and an additional 7 students opted out of participating in this study for various reasons. Considering that the timing of my data collection coincided with the end of the school year, many of the 13 students who opted not to participate in this study cited a heavy academic and arts workload commitment that took precedence and usurped their desire to participate. So, in the end, each of the remaining 17 student participants comprised one case that I examined here and each student's perceptions about their learning in their visual arts education were captured during the video interview I conducted and in the self-portrait and statement materials they each submitted to me.

Then, since visually capturing the likeness and essence of my subjects was one of the aims of this study, I decided to create artistic portrait objects and narrative portraits that would serve several purposes throughout this project as outlined earlier. I also began to research different definitions of portraiture as defined by the visual arts and social science fields.

**Analysis:** Next, as this process continued, I watched and transcribed each of the student interviews and took notes about unique characteristics in each of the students that were to conceptually and aesthetically influence the narrative and artistic portraits I sought to create of each of them. I also reviewed each student's submitted artist statement for further insights. However, at this point I refrained from viewing and analyzing the self-portrait artwork the students submitted because I wanted to refrain

from becoming aesthetically influenced by their artwork before I began creating my artistic renderings of each of them.

To continue, I simplified and compiled students' responses to my research question and traced themes, points of convergence and patterns in this data. Through this analysis I discovered there were some themes in the students' answers that aligned with current field advocacy literature about what students learn when engaging in the arts in school and some themes that fell outside of this paradigm.

**Conception:** Then I began experimenting with different ways to outline the narrative portraits I intended to create, and I started to conceptualize, contemplate, formulate, and render the symbolic content of each of the intended artistic portraits. Through sketching, brainstorming, and making mock-ups and prototypes, I began testing different mediums (paint, drawing, fabric and fibers, etc.), mechanisms and formats for the artistic portraits I intended to create of the students as a means for reporting the data I gathered, telling stories about who these students are, visually portraying the students' perceptions about their visual arts learning, and synthesizing all that I learned about each student for later reporting out in the Expression phase of this process.

**Decision:** After testing various formats and expressive means for rendering the artistic portraits I finally decided that I would create useable or wearable symbolic portrait representations of each student because this would allow me to use the familiar mediums I have always eagerly chosen to express my passion, reflections, ideas, and stories. I landed on the parameter of useable or wearable portraits because I felt it would most effectively hold my body of artistic portrait work together as a cohesive visual and

conceptual statement. Additionally, in this phase I decided to incorporate a few keywords or a phrase into each student's artistic portrait visually as a means to highlight the students' perceptions of their learning and connect the data I gathered with the interpretive portraits was I aiming to create. Here I also proceeded to create detailed plans for engaging in the varied processes of creating each portrait through compiling lists, gathering supplies, finding supply vendors, etc. It is also during this phase that I decided that these symbolic portraits could become something the students could use or wear frequently to remind them of their perceptions of their visual arts learning.

**Expression:** Then I began synthesizing all I learned about each student into writing the narrative portraits of each student, writing about the themes identified in the students' responses to my research question and comparing the students' themes to those identified in field advocacy literature. At this time, I also began crafting the artistic portraits of each student and their perceptions of their visual arts learning that were intended for exhibition in a formal gallery setting alongside the student-submitted portrait materials and artist statements.

The exhibition, made available to the public from January 5, 2012 through March 15, 2012 at the Perpich Center for Arts Education AHS gallery, was intended to express the results of this inquiry as a potential catalyst for expanding and influencing art advocacy discussions with a diverse audience. Furthermore, with the aim of continuing and amplifying the conversations about this issue and my findings in the public realm even further, attendees' reactions to the artworks exhibited, ideas about the themes of this study, and personal responses to the central research question were gathered.

Overall, this event was intended to be a unique means for expressing the results of this study, for bringing attention to this issue, and for eliciting participation in this conversation from an audience who might not otherwise engage in such an academically- or research-oriented discussion.

**Feedback:** Through the formal gallery exhibition (described in detail above) of portraits, and through sharing this project with various audiences via possible publication opportunities, presentations and discussions, I intend to be continually engaged in this phase. Furthermore, by gathering public feedback about the content of this project, my research question, and my execution of this project throughout the gallery exhibition I have an exciting opportunity to gather a diverse range of feedback from a wide variety of people that could influence and inspire future, related projects.

### **Reflection on Using this Process**

In my thesis proposal I outlined an intention to use discourse analysis (DA) to examine the video and student-submitted materials I gathered so as to identify the discourses and identities students adopt to inform and help them develop their perceptions of their learning in visual arts as influenced by their peer, family, school, community and societal interactions. However, due to the incredibly large volume of data I gathered, when I attempted to incorporate the DA process into my analysis I found that because it yielded such compelling results it became increasingly difficult to stay true to the original goals of this study: (1) finding out what students perceive they have learned from studying visual arts in school, and (2) comparing themes found in the students' articulated perceptions to themes found in field advocacy literature about what

K-12 students purportedly gain or learn from studying art in school. Although DA is a very effective method of analysis, after testing it with one of my cases I decided that, rather than trying to use it with all 17 cases in the context of this dissertation, it would better lend itself to an endeavor of examining a few, select cases from my data set when conducting a stand-alone study planned for the very near future that is focused on how students' perceptions of their learning in visual arts develop and what informs and influences their development.

Other than this deviation, conducting this study has largely gone according plan. It has also been a tremendously rewarding experience to engage in art making and the artistic creative process as a method of conducting educational research. As an artist, interpreting and communicating visually is a passion, and it has been exciting to bring this passion into this project. I feel that through creating the portraits I was able to explore my data freely, and I wonder if I could have arrived at the same results and conclusions without having made them. Creating the portraits also helped me to stay focused on the purposes of this study and to constantly strive for accurate portrayal, reporting and representation so as to make products that maintained the integrity of my subjects. So, in many ways, the portraits, once created, served not only as a means for providing a rich context for the results of my study, but also for creating transparency in my representation and reporting of the data at hand.

## Definitions of Portraiture

**por • trait**, *noun* (www.merriam-webster.com)

1: a picture; especially : a pictorial representation of a person usually showing the face

2 : a sculptured figure : bust

3 : a graphic portrayal in words

Throughout art history portraits have been made from every medium imaginable and evidence of humans making portraits goes back to prehistoric times. Yet regardless of the medium an artist chooses to use for expression the first definition of this art form listed above states that portraits are pictures, especially pictorial representations, usually showing the face of the subject. And I agree that pictorial representations of the face are a very common form of portraiture, yet in truth I have found there is not one, consistent definition of a portrait that all artists subscribe to when creating or even classifying art as portrait. It seems that ultimately a portrait can be anything an artist says it is, and definitions I found in my research are as broad and diverse as examples of portraits available in any art history canon. Everything from film, robotics, architecture, musical compositions, clothing, shoes, hairstyles, cars, and even pets can be considered a stand-alone portrait of a person if they are so intentioned. Thus, the possibilities of what a portrait can be made of and what one can visually depict are literally endless. But considering that making art encompasses such a diverse range of human activities, creations, and modes of expression, this lack of consensus is understandable. After all, art making is defined and executed differently by each artist. Even finding a consistent definition of what “art making” means is not an easy feat. Encyclopedia.com defines art making as “the use of skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects,

environments, or experiences that can be shared with others.” While my desk copy of the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines art making as “intentionally depicting and arranging items with symbolic significance in a way that influences and affects one or more of the viewers’ senses, emotions and intellect.” Art making can also be defined as the experience of participating in, “a realm of feeling, sensory concepts, and exquisitely varied forms of human representation that give us insight into what it means to be in, relate to, and comprehend, or, even more succinctly, to have knowledge of the world,” (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 212) Arguably the focus of each of these definitions differs a bit yet they are trying to define the same thing. Similarly, the divergent definitions of artistic portraiture I found offer several different possible ideas for what portraiture could be, but I did not find one definitive explanation.

Yet, interestingly I found that artists can and do usually agree that a well-executed portrait is expected to show the inner essence of the subject from the artist's point of view rather than just a literal likeness. As Aristotle stated, “The aim of art is to present not the outward appearance of things, but their inner significance; for this, not the external manner and detail, constitutes true reality.” (Aymar, 1967, p. 119) I believe this refers to the interpretive and symbolic nature of works of art and the communication of visual metaphors that is usually the aim of an artist. As Michael Parsons explains, “Visual metaphors are found at several levels in artworks: at the pictorial level, in representation itself, in working styles, and in purely visual elements of the media. Visual metaphors can be different from linguistic ones, in that they can often be read backwards and forwards and in that several metaphors can co-exist in the same work without creating confusion. For these reasons, visual metaphors can often be

more suggestive and ambiguous than linguistic ones.” (2010, p. 234) With language, the power of a metaphor lies in its potential to further understanding of meaning and help one make associations to construct meaning, and here Parsons extends these possibilities to the visual realm. Hermine Feinstein also discusses visual and linguistic metaphors as urging us to, “look beyond the literal, to generate associations and to tap new, different or deeper levels of meaning. The metaphoric process reorganizes and vivifies; it paradoxically condenses and expands; it synthesizes often disparate meanings. In this process, attributes of one entity are transferred to another by comparison, by substitution, or as a consequence of interaction.” (1982, p. 45)

It was after considering these things that I decided to create my artistic portraits for the purpose of representing the inner essence of the subjects and their perceptions of their learning using visual symbol and metaphor. Rather than focus on rendering physical depictions of the students and their perceptions in my work, my aim became to synthesize and interpret their statements, their inner essence and our interactions into visual, symbolic representations because this seemed to offer many more imaginative and expressive opportunities.

And to support this visual process while aiming to further contextualize my study, I also decided to explore using social science narrative portraiture. In contrast to the rather open definitions of artistic portraiture, the definition of social science narrative portraiture was much more clearly delineated in the literature, and I discovered that the aim of social science portraiture is to also to communicate with metaphor and symbol. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis describe social science portraiture as:

a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialog between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. xv)

Furthermore, according to these educational researchers and authors, portraiture can be narrative and used as a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences. Portraiture is a research method, “framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography. But it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 14) In writing portraiture, a researcher can create, “a narrative that can merge the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 4)

Social science portraitists usually also insist that the only way for an audience to interpret people's characteristics, actions, perceptions, and perspectives is to see them in context. Philosophically, social science portraitists see context as a resource for influencing understanding and assisting in the construction of meaning. The social science portraitist is, "interested in developing a narrative that is both convincing and authentic. S/he is also interested in recording the subtle details of the human experience. S/he wants to capture the specifics, the nuance, the detailed description of a thing, a gesture, a voice, an attitude as a way of illuminating more universal patterns."

(Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 14) And this process requires,

careful, systematic, and detailed description developed through watching, listening to, and interacting with the actors over a sustained period of time, the tracing and interpretation of emergent themes, and the piecing together of these themes into an aesthetic whole. The process of creating a whole often feels like weaving a tapestry or piecing together a quilt. Looking for points of thematic convergence is like searching for the patterns of texture and color in a weaving. In creating the text, the portraitist is alert to the aesthetic principles of composition and form, rhythm, sequence and metaphor. The portraitist's standard, then, is one of authenticity, capturing the essence and resonance of the actors' experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context. (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 12)

“With its focus on narrative and use of metaphor and symbol, portraiture in the social sciences, intends to address wider, more eclectic audiences. The attempt is to move beyond academy’s inner circle, to speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them. Portraitists write to inform and inspire readers, and to draw them in.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 10)

These compelling definitions of portraiture that both offer possibilities for imaginative, expressive, symbolic and interpretive modes of examination and communication have allowed me to portray the likeness and essence of each of the 17 students I worked with in this study using both visual arts and social science portraiture. These portraiture modes each offer rich means for contextualizing my study and seducing an audience’s interest. Also, operating in these paradigms allowed for each piece of data I gathered (interviews, student self-portraits and student artists statements) to provide a different lens through which to examine my research question which, I believe, aided in my visual synthesis of information because I had an abundance of content to work with and a plethora of representations to move between.

Therefore, for me, as the artist/researcher, the visual and narrative portraits I created served five distinct purposes throughout this project: 1) as a means to organize the data gathered, 2) as a tool to analyze the data gathered, 3) as a plethora of lenses through which to triangulate the data I gathered, 4) as a means to synthesize and interpret the data gathered, and 5) as exciting mechanisms through which to express, communicate, or report the data out to a broad audience and increase awareness of students’ perceptions for arts advocacy purposes. This required that I use the creative

process to deconstruct everything I gathered and learned, rearrange and re-imagine it, then re-connect all the pieces and parts together to create a new whole. In order to do this I simplified all the information gathered through multiple modalities about each student and their perceptions into a visual, symbolic art object. This circular process of translating everything I learned and gathered into my own images, symbols, words and tactile objects then expressing my interpretations using the mediums of fabric, beads, fibers, ink, paper, and photography was incredibly valuable. It was through this process that I was able to examine and organize the students' responses to my research question into themes. It was also through this process that the useable or wearable portrait objects I made became a new entity through which I could simultaneously create and decipher more meaning. Furthermore, in each portrait I included a quote from the student's answer to my primary research question given during their interview. This was another mechanism of synthesis for me, a way for me to boil each student's response down to its essence. It was also another means through which I attempted to create meaning in the work for an audience as well as for the students as the portraits are intended for each to take and use or wear so they can experience (and share with those they encounter) a personalized, aesthetic and functional reminder of all they perceive they have learned from studying visual arts in school.

Overall, this processes of creating portraiture felt very natural to me since through my study of art I have learned how to pay attention to details, to watch, to listen carefully, to observe sensorially, and to actively trace themes, points of convergence and patterns that can be analyzed and pieced together to create an aesthetic whole as suggested is especially necessary in social science, arts-based portraiture. I have learned

to make and use images and objects to tell a story, to illustrate context and to capture and portray nuance. I have learned to communicate symbolically and metaphorically, and I have learned to articulate my artistic intent visually and linguistically. I have also learned to coalesce divergent ideas, to make connections amongst complex ideas, to analyze, interpret and synthesize concepts in order to create something new, to satisfy inspiration, pursue imagination, and to make new meanings from knowledge I learn in other ways. No matter the medium, through my study of art I ultimately have learned to communicate ideas in a multitude of satisfying, effective, persuasive, thought-provoking, inspiring, and seductive ways.

So this body of artistic and narrative portraits that follow symbolically and metaphorically represents the Perpich Arts High School environment and the 17 students from the Visual and Media Arts classes of 2009.

### **The Research Site: A Portrait of The Arts High School**

The Arts High School, more affectionately known to the students, parents and the public by various names like Arts High, AHS, P-Kay and Perpich is housed on an old Lutheran college campus about ten miles west of downtown Minneapolis in Minnesota. At first glance it doesn't look like the arts should be associated with the place at all, and generally it appears fairly stiff and institutional with the exception of the bright, copper orange colored panels running from roof to ground along the north east side of the building. As you turn off of Highway 55 onto the Douglas Drive frontage road, you are greeted by a clunky, black, box sign indicating you have arrived at the Perpich Center for Arts Education. The sign states that housed on campus is the Arts High School, a Library and the Professional Development and Research Center. A dull white banner with stark, blue type, a contentious object amongst the faculty and staff, is plastered to the very top of the taller portion of the building facing Highway 55 and reads "Perpich Center for Arts Education "Statewide, Innovative, Public Education Centered in the Arts." Besides a few scattered, large, metal sculptures on the grassy patches between parking lots, this is the only insignia on the outside of the main building indicating that the arts is the focus inside the building.

As you go through the doors facing the parking lot, you are entering the Arts High School (AHS) portion of The Center. The heavy, glass doors are plastered with signs warning visitors to check in at the front desk along with posters for various school events, performances and student exhibitions. The split-level entry allows guests to proceed downstairs into the student lounge that is always bustling with music and activity, or upstairs to what everyone refers to as the atrium. In the large, two-story,

airy, atrium you will find the school's front desk, the main hub of AHS. This is an obvious gathering place for students, staff and visitors, so an entrance into AHS is rarely a quiet event.

Behind the AHS building and across a small pond you'll find Delta Dorm. The dorm houses residential students from towns large and small all across Minnesota. Just east of the dorm is GAIA, home to the Professional Development and Research Group. This part of the Perpich Center provides professional development opportunities for teachers in K-12 schools throughout the State. Outside of the unimaginative, red brick façade of the AHS building, the campus is cheery, green and spacious, complete with residential geese, and is rarely quiet even on weekends. The beloved geese are notorious on campus and have been elected as the unofficial mascots of AHS. They are very much considered part of the Perpich family and everyone learns quickly to watch where you walk and sit to avoid the messes they leave behind. The campus area is surrounded by woods, and many different kinds of trees dot the landscape along with many aging, public art project remnants from graduated visual arts classes. The back view of the AHS building is architecturally vastly more interesting than the front with many windows and a large, curved section to the west. This view of the building feels much less institutional and cold than the front.

Most of the buildings on campus were built in the 1960's and this is very evident when scanning the dorm, GAIA and the last remaining, unused, storage building called Alpha. But the main building does not fit this profile since it underwent renovation and was given an addition in the early 1990's. Before this all the classes, academic and arts, were held in less than half the space the school occupies now, and

everyone who attended and worked here became experts at transforming and sharing space. The Perpich Center was founded in 1989 by Rudy Perpich, a former Governor of the State of Minnesota, and his wife Lola, after they toured the LaGuardia Arts High School in New York (the infamous “Fame” school captured in a popular 1980’s movie, a television series, and now on Broadway). The alpha class graduated from AHS in 1991, and the center is currently in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of operation.

Inside the AHS building there is a west and an east wing. The west wing is the “new” addition and houses mostly general, all-purpose classrooms with standard desks and learning equipment on the second and third levels, and the Music department, the Literary Arts classrooms, the Tony Basta Media Arts Gallery, the performance hall, and portions of the Theater department on the lower level. The east wing, called the old building by the students, contains the student services offices, a sprinkling of small teacher and administration offices, and more common meeting spaces. The visual arts department commands the entire upper level and parts of the lower level of the east wing complete with a spacious, newly renovated gallery. The cafeteria, Dance studio, Black Box Theater, Library, Media Arts dark room, and Theater department rehearsal rooms occupy the lower level of this wing. And, finally, the Media Arts department computer lab and classroom are tacked on to the far eastern side of the gallery. When first entering or touring the main building, it is easy to get turned around or confused between wings, and there are still some departments making very creative use of some tight spaces, but there is no mistaking this building for anything but a high school where art is welcome, practiced and openly shared.

Students can typically be found in all areas of the building and campus at any given time and the building is almost deafly quiet when school is not in session. The AHS is a public, tuition-free school of choice for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students with a competitive admissions program including a formal application process, portfolio or performance review and interview. The school is legislated to enroll 310 students each year and, as it is only a two-year program, has about 155 spaces each year to fill with an incoming junior class and new seniors. Once accepted, students choose one of six arts areas to “major” in while attending. The programs include Dance, Literary Arts, Media Arts, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts. Regardless of what area a student chooses to focus in, the program is designed to offer breadth in the junior year and depth in the senior year. Some students find it difficult to pick one focus at such a young age with sometimes limited experience, and each year there are a few students who decide to switch their focus to another arts area after their junior year.

On campus, students are given many freedoms but there is a strict attendance policy that is closely monitored by staff and parents. The dorm closes at 7:30 a.m. each day and does not re-open until 3:00 p.m. to make sure residential students get across the pond for breakfast and join their commuter friends for an entire day of classes. If students have a first block class, they begin class at 8:00 a.m., and sessions for most students extend to 4:15 p.m., sometimes later depending upon after school offerings, mandatory performance rehearsals, and student exhibition schedules. The studios and computer labs are also open every day of the working week from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. to allow for extended use by both residential and commuter students. Unlike some schools, the after school hours are more energetic and lively than most other times of

the day seem to be. Students make good use of the open building, especially during finals and performance and exhibition preparations and, although students might take a dinner break on or off campus, many return to work intently in the studio, classroom and lab spaces until security announces closing time.

Classes are organized on a semester block schedule with blocks 1 and 2 running for 90 minutes each. These blocks are designated for one-credit academic courses. Blocks 3A and 3B run for 50 minutes each and overlap lunch for what are called “Point 5” (.5) elective courses, and block four at 210 minutes is for arts area courses. AHS also boasts of an open campus and students can come and go as their schedule allows them for lunch or free blocks. About half of the students opt to have a full schedule, especially in their junior year, as they work to earn enough credits to graduate under Minnesota State graduation standards. Point 5 courses are semester-long classes offering each student a half-credit towards graduation, and are structured to foster exploration of various subjects from Guitar Playing, Drawing, and Art History to Yearbook, Science Seminar, and Debate. Offerings change each semester and each year depending on student demand and faculty interest with some high-demand stalwarts like Photography and Yoga making yearly appearances on the registration roster. Since students who are accepted and enroll at AHS choose one arts area to focus their studies in, these .5 courses allow students with multiple interests to explore new areas of study and interdisciplinary possibilities.

Academic course offerings include college preparatory, upper level and Advanced Placement (AP) classes in English, Math, Science, Social Studies and World Languages. Academic courses are consistently offered each year but are subject to

revision in consideration of changes in school policy and graduation standards on the state level. The academic programs focus on students gaining knowledge and critical thinking skills that are fundamental to success in college and life. The range of courses offered in most academic disciplines extends from beginner/intermediate level through AP and Post-Secondary Education Options (PSEO). Students are placed in classes according to their credit needs, preferences, parent desires and, in some cases, placement test results. A mix of juniors and seniors are placed in each of the academic courses which makes for a unique learning environment, and all students, even those who arrive on campus on academic probation (each year there are quite a few for various personal reasons), are offered the same opportunities to succeed and excel through learning and demonstrating learning according to their learning style strengths as those who normally excel in these types of courses. The teaching philosophy of the academic programs centers on teaching students from where they are, on fostering curiosity, on helping students relate academic instruction to the arts and their lives, and on pointing students in a healthy direction towards their next step post-high school.

Students who graduate from AHS earn a general high school diploma and need to meet state academic as well as arts credit requirements. Students are prepared equally well for two-year college, 4-year liberal arts college, and 4-year conservatory arts school experiences. Graduates from the program have gone on to pursue very diverse post-secondary lives; participating in military service, apprentice experiences, internships, traveling, volunteering, service learning experiences and Peace Corps initiatives, and attending many colleges and universities throughout the world. About 40% of the students who graduate from the program each year decide to study the arts

further as a major, while others decide to minor or not pursue this study at all. Students and their parents decide together what the student's post-high school career should entail, and many faculty are eager to lend their expertise in this area to assist students and their parent(s) in decision-making, school comparison, scholarship application, financial aid advising, and proper application procedures.

While attending AHS, students are required to earn twelve credits including two English credits, four arts credits and six credits in the necessary academic and elective subject areas during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years in order to meet graduation requirements in compliance with the State of Minnesota Graduation Standards. By the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade, students are also required to pass the Minnesota Basic Skills tests in Math, Reading and Writing, and students who earn 14 or more credits and maintain a cumulative GPA (grades 9–12) of 3.3/4.0 or higher are awarded diplomas with honors designation. Students entering as seniors who have passed all of the classes attempted in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in their previous schools are required to earn 6 additional credits at AHS to graduate, and those who earn 7 or more credits in 12<sup>th</sup> and maintain a cumulative GPA (grades 9–12) of 3.3/4.0 or higher are awarded diplomas with honors designation.

Admission requirements for entering juniors dictate that students must have earned a minimum of 5 credits per year in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Students are expected to arrive at AHS having minimally earned 2 credits in English, 1 credit in Math (Algebra 1), 1 credit in Science (Biology), and 2 credits in Social Studies. One half credit each in Health and Physical Education is also required for admission because AHS does not offer any organized sports activities or physical education courses on campus. Students

seeking admission submit transcripts for review during application to be sure requirements have been met and admissions materials state repeatedly that students who have not earned these minimum credits needed for graduation are not qualified for admission and are not allowed to enroll at AHS. Credits for students coming from different kinds of credit systems are converted into 1-year credits for evaluation purposes, and if a student is “passed” from one grade level to the next by the home district, the student must still meet the AHS definition of “normal progress.”

The guiding learning philosophy at AHS recognizes that people use many routes to learn. The arts are infused throughout academic classes and lessons are structured to engage students in hands-on, experiential learning that offers many more avenues to success for students with varied learning styles and approaches. Academic classes are taught largely using interdisciplinary methods helping students make connections between their arts and academic interests.

The day at Arts High as organized by the block schedule is designed to take students from their academic interests in the full morning blocks to interdisciplinary interests in their “Point 5” block and into their art area focus in block four. This design has been instituted with the aim of helping students make unique and personal connections amongst their varied interests to strengthen their learning in all areas.

Arts area courses offered in the afternoon vary by department, as does how the 210 minutes are used each day. Some departments work with junior and senior students intermingled together, and in other departments the time is divided evenly between senior and junior instruction time with seniors attending classes first leaving an open block for juniors to have access to academic remediation work or open studio work

time. The latter is the case in the Visual Arts Department. Senior students attend studio courses from 12:50 p.m. to 2:20 p.m. then are required to attend their Art History class every day for one of two 45 minute blocks until the end of the day. Juniors attend Art History in the same manner while seniors are in studio classes then, during a chaotic five-minute switch, juniors take over the studio spaces and send seniors on their way.

Upon entering the east wing, it is easy to tell you have entered the realm of the visual and media artists. The infamous painted lockers instantly give it away. These lockers run along the south side of the hallway, and are painted both inside and out with small, thematic murals. The lockers on the upper level near the drawing/painting and graphic design studios depict various myths and legends, and those on the lower level near the cafeteria depict the roots of where we come from to form community.

Although the locker painting was conceptualized as a class project some time ago, they remain intact and undefiled. They are a very distinct characteristic of the school. A small smattering of lockers still go unpainted, and each year that number lessens as brave students who chose to inhabit a blank locker propose mural ideas to the Visual Arts Department. This long-standing collective monument celebrates the publicity of art and expression and is a daily reminder to the students, staff and faculty that this is a place for art.

Along the opposite wall of this colorful, lively hallway, in almost complete, stark contrast, are clean, crisp, white, gallery flats signifying that, in addition to entering the realm of the artist, you have entered formal gallery space. Rarely are the gallery walls empty as the students plan, hang, host and run eight professional, exhibitions each year complete with opening celebrations boasting of theme, food and (sometimes live)

music entertainment. The gallery flats extend to the end of the hall opening into the larger main gallery space, and the juxtaposition of them as opposed to the lively lockers is interesting as it seems to envelop the formal and informal components of the Visual Arts program as experienced by students.

The philosophy of the Visual Arts and Media Arts programs is to foster student exploration and investigation of many aspects of the art forms working in a wide range of media and skills both familiar and new. Department talk is rife with language aimed at helping students explore and expand their personal voices through various media and critical thinking and decision-making. Cornerstones of these programs include fostering students as they expand their creativity, knowledge and discipline through production of artwork, discussion, critique, and observation. The programs are designed with the aim that students become thinking artists, and that they learn to use a variety of media and communications — written, visual and verbal — to express their views about themselves and the world. The curriculum is designed to encourage community building and give access to arts careers and higher education in Visual and Media Arts. According to the school's website and admissions materials, both the Visual Arts and Media Arts Departments are well respected both by arts colleges and liberal arts programs across the country.

In both programs, the junior year curriculum is designed to give students a common language to assist in building a supportive atmosphere. In Visual Arts, all juniors share the communal experience of core learning, studying painting, drawing, graphic design, printmaking, documentation, portfolio development and art history. Media Arts juniors study traditional and still photography, animation and the basics of

documentary filmmaking. The Visual Arts senior year is a year of exploration, expansion of ideas, experimentation and electives. Choices for students are rotated through the year on a quarter-based schedule and include papermaking, oil painting, advanced drawing, stop-motion animation, ceramics sculpture, advanced digital imaging and design, grant writing, public art, sculpture, jewelry, monotype printmaking, screen printing, and portfolio development. The Media Arts senior year also fosters exploration and expansion of ideas while students study experimental photography, photographic editing, screen writing, and advanced filmmaking. Senior classes in both departments are designed to hone skills, develop independence, and explore post-secondary options. Both years are grounded in critique, making connections and discovering a broader and deeper understanding of how the visual and media arts relate to a variety of disciplines.

In 2009, the year I worked with senior students for this project, the Visual Arts Department held 88 students, the largest department in the school. There were 43 juniors and 45 seniors taught by four core faculty members and a host of visiting artist contract instructors. The Media Arts Department held 40 students, 20 in each grade, who were taught by two core faculty members. In both departments the faculty possessed a wide range of experiences in visual and media arts and different levels of formal and informal arts education. I was one of the core instructors in both departments and my colleagues comprised the remainder of the well oiled, smooth running but sometimes harried Visual Arts and Media Arts Departments. In Visual Arts, two of my colleagues were full-time studio instructors and one was the full-time Art History instructor. In Media Arts my colleague was the only full-time, studio instructor.

I served as a half-time faculty member at AHS and taught part-time in the Visual Arts Department and part-time in the Media Arts department each year. There were 30 employed faculty members at AHS, 20 full-time and 7 in varying part-time degrees. Although there was a smaller teacher to student ratio than at some public schools, because of the time and labor-intensive nature of teaching the in and through the arts following the school philosophies, there was always a lot to do in very short amounts of time.

In my experience working within this school context the faculty and staff at Arts High were very diversely educated, dedicated and student-centered. Like any other school organization, there were issues and problems to constantly work on, but, generally, it was a congenial and welcoming environment where curricular freedom was honored and people felt comfortable speaking their minds. Some instructors had been with the school since the days of the alpha class and had played witness to many changes throughout the years, which they were happy to share at any given moment to offer context for current issues or for entertainment value. While working at AHS, I found that the veteran staff was happy to mentor new faculty and usually sought these “newbies” (as they are affectionately called) out to share ideas and tips about the latest technology, classroom practices, and school issues. Despite any disagreements the faculty may have had from time to time, the common bond was always a sense of purpose and mission in working with the students, and on ultimately preparing them for the next step in their lives after high school graduation.

While working at AHS I also found myself continually focused on the students and their goals. Then, when I started to deepen my learning about current issues in the

art education field, and as I familiarized myself with current themes in field literature through my doctoral studies, it only seemed natural that the focus of this study be on the students as well. So, in June of 2009, just as graduation and that big threshold between high school and post-high school loomed before us, I interviewed 17 students from the Visual and Media Arts programs who were seniors in the class of 2009. The students were randomly selected to participate in this study, and during our interviews they eagerly reflected on their educational experiences as pursuants of an arts education both at AHS and at other schools they attended before admission. The individual portraits that follow will illustrate who these students are as well as what they perceived they learned from studying art throughout their schooling.

**Narrative and Visual Portraits, Student Self-Portraits, and Artist Statements****Allyssa**

***“Art is freedom, individuality, purpose, happiness, and success.”***

When you first encounter Allyssa it’s easy to learn quickly that she is very articulate and outgoing. Chances are, if it was your first meeting, she would enthusiastically introduce herself to you before you’d have the opportunity to get in the door. She talks a mile a minute and, is naturally, extremely animated when she talks, and, in a genuine way, exudes excitement for life out of every pore.

Allyssa grew up in Zimmerman, Minnesota, just north of the Twin Cities metro area. Her Dad works in construction and is an Independent Contractor and her Mom is, as Allyssa puts it, “a Domestic Goddess.” She has two, younger, twin brothers who constantly play practical jokes on her when she’s home and a little Pekingese dog that she is completely devoted to.

At the school she attended before Perpich, Allyssa had many friends and was very driven. She was extremely active, participating in AP classes, choir, dance team, French club, and theater, but at the same time she says she didn’t feel challenged after her Freshman year, especially by the few arts opportunities that were available. “I got interested in art through performing arts like dance and theater first, these were the things that attracted me,” she states matter-of-factly. But Allyssa has been interested in commercial art, filmmaking and video arts ever since she attended a summer workshop at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and opportunities to learn about making these kinds of art weren’t available at her school. So in her Sophomore year while

searching for other video and film workshop sorts of experiences, she and her Mom came across AHS. “It was like someone tailor-made a school just for what I wanted,” she said, “I couldn’t wait to apply.”

It was the very end of her senior year at AHS when I interviewed Allyssa, and at the time she was planning to attend Syracuse University in New York to triple major in advertising, management and psychology. She also had plans to start classes in July so she could get her foundations courses finished early. “I’ve known for a long time that I wanted to pursue a career in commercial art and now I’m excited to get started towards that goal in a real way by studying at Syracuse.”

Allyssa talks candidly about how a career in the arts is the right fit for her because she likes the balance of structure and freedom that the arts afford. “I love to explore things like experimental video where you can juxtapose text and image with a message,” she says. “I don’t want to just make nice pictures. My inspiration, even though it doesn’t always hit me like lightening, comes from my daily interactions with people and trying to recreate them or convey them for others. I want to capture my emotions and those of my subjects in order to get other people to be empathetic with what’s going on in a scene. I think empathy is one of our most powerful tools as humans and that’s what I’m really interested in portraying and pursuing in my work right now.”

Through photography and video Allyssa is empowered to share her messages with audiences. “I want people to see what I see. In my art I get to explore things visually that I’m passionate about and with my work I want to inspire an audience, to induce conversations and raise awareness about different perspectives,” she says.

“Through studying art I've learned to put into imagery the other things I've learned and experiences I've had. I've found my own path and means of communication,” she states.

This is evident in the self-portrait piece Allyssa submitted for exhibition. In her film, *Perceptions of the Human Eye*, Allyssa experiments with visually portraying the phenomenon that different people can perceive the same object in completely different ways based on the movements of their eyes as the object comes into their field of vision. She employs the surrealist style methods of weaving and overlapping images, light, color, text, and sound together in different stages of focus as a means to communicate about and capture different perceptions of a set of lighted objects.

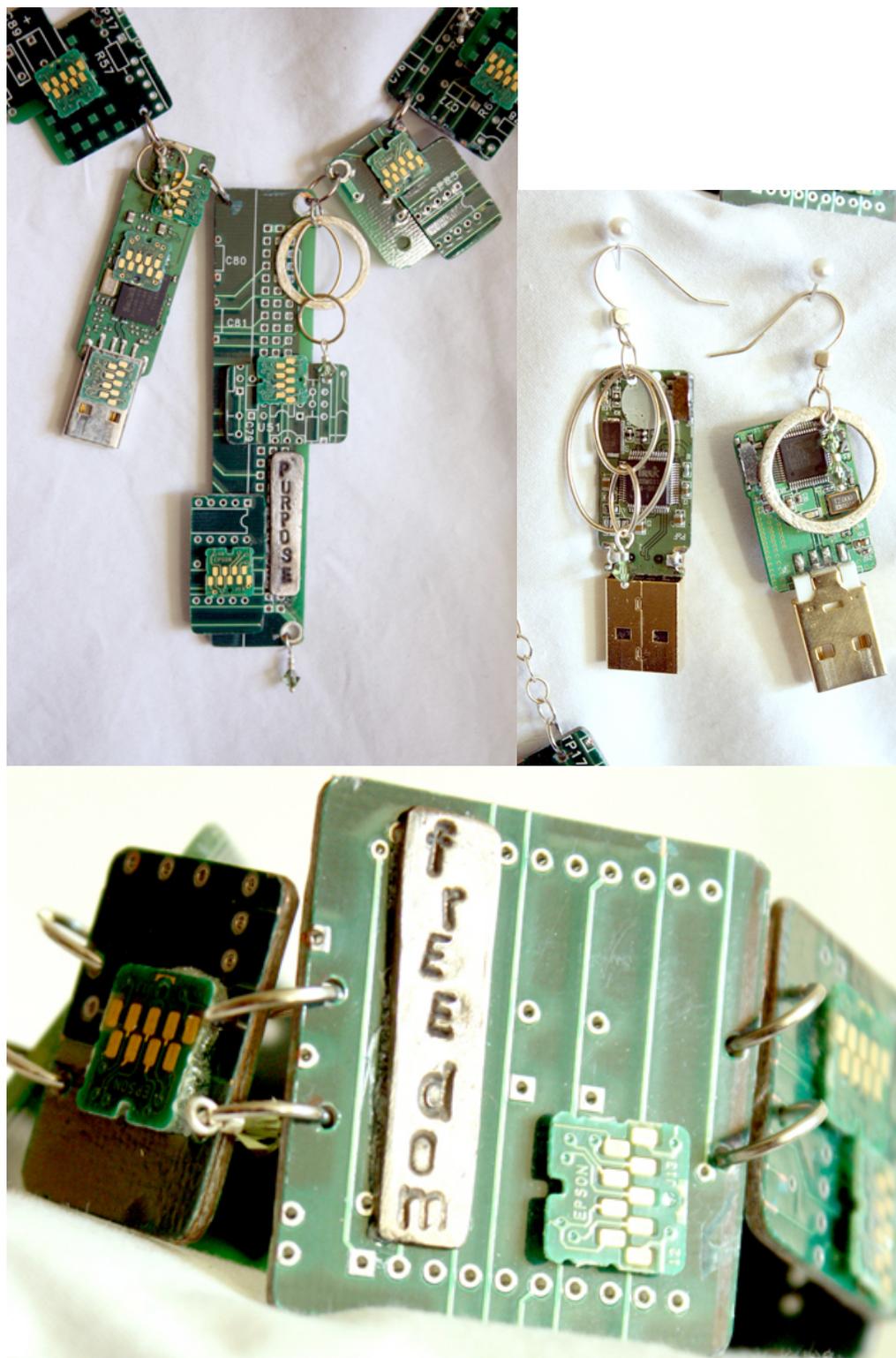
Studying art, Allyssa states, “has allowed me to experiment with different ways to explore the differences between people and to try on different points of view myself, but I also like finding and portraying the things that bind us together as humans and art is about that too.”

It is clear that through learning to make films, Allyssa has found a means to manipulate and slow time down in order to pick apart her experiences and portray the nuances of them for an audience in an attempt to create a commonality of experience. She seeks to connect with an audience, to have her viewers identify with her and her with them through creating a shared visual experience. Making films is a purposeful and meaningful way for Allyssa to communicate with and entice or inspire an audience to examine their ideas, feelings and perceptions about life experiences as she does. She says, “I see things differently now that I've studied art. I feel like I'm more aware and conscious of the world around me. And I feel like in my art I have the freedom to

express all of these things because I'm communicating in the language of images that is so basic and universally perceivable. So I want my audiences to see what I do when they view my work and to experience a heightened sense of awareness and consciousness of their experiences like I have.”

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### **Allyssa**

*necklace, earrings, bracelet*

mediums: motherboard pieces, jump drive motherboard pieces, Swarovski crystals, handmade silver beads, jewelry findings

This portrait is inspired by Allyssa's dynamic, ambitious, charismatic and driven personality. When interviewing Allyssa, my first impression was of someone who is detail focused, can quickly identify what she wants, and can outline and evaluate several plans simultaneously to successfully reach her goals. Yet while Allyssa keeps herself on a fairly rigorous path, through studying art she has learned to slow things down and make visual experiences that help her examine and freely express her ideas in a purposeful, meaningful way.

In a computer, the motherboard acts like the brain and memory center that runs on electrical impulses much like the human brain. So I chose to use this material in my portrait to symbolize how I envision Allyssa's organized mind is perpetually at work formulating her next big plans at lightening speeds. For me, the dichotomy Allyssa embodies of structure, ambition, drive, organization, and purpose balanced by a relaxed charisma and desire for free personal expression was intriguing and helped me to further conceptualize this portrait. Thus, to portray these contrasts, I used the structured, gridded and rigid motherboard pieces as grounding base on to which I juxtaposed the organically shaped, kinetic, asymmetrical, silver and crystal accents that catch the light and attract the viewer's attention much like Allyssa tries to do with her film work. Additionally, on the handmade silver components included on the necklace and

bracelet, I have imprinted the words “Purpose” and “Freedom” to convey in Allyssa’s words what she perceives she has learned from studying art in school. The result is a set of statement jewelry pieces I hope Allyssa will wear and be reminded of all she’s learned through studying and learning to make art.

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### **Perception of the Human Eye**

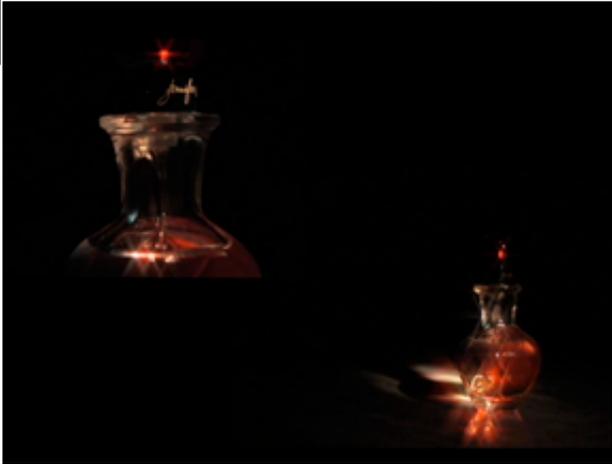
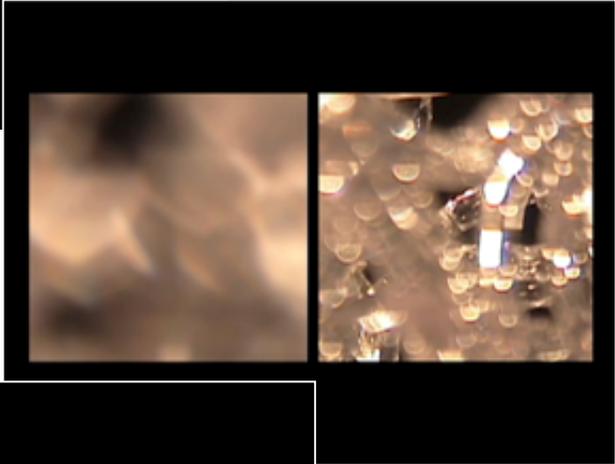
*experimental video, 5:28 minutes*

mediums: digital video

Allyssa Kaiser

*Perception of the Human Eye* is an experimental video about human vision, which was inspired by the themes of time and space. The diptych images represent a set of eyes that deal with focus, color perception, and light. Together, they create the surreal concept of perception. This piece also illustrates me as an artist. My artistic style heavily relies on lighting and color, often paired with inspirational music. This video also utilizes some images of me and my friend, Kelsey, as a component. Overall, I consider *Perception of the Human Eye* both a conceptual art piece and a visual artist statement.

Perception of the Human Eye



## Becky

*“For me, art is rooted in tradition, it’s craft, skill, diligence,  
and experimentation fueled by inspiration.”*

Becky’s calm demeanor, understated confidence, and grounded nature makes it easy to talk with her, yet she considers herself sort of an anomaly in her family. “No one really knows or understands where my interest in sewing and knitting and art comes from. It’s just there and I’ve been interested in art since I was in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade,” she says. Becky’s parents and brother have never been particularly engaged in art or interested in arts activities and access to these types of things was a little limited in the small town where she grew up in southern Minnesota near Mankato.

However, Becky talks affectionately about her former art teacher from middle and high school, and fondly remembers her involvement in choir. “I took every art class I could get my hands on in school and just kept experimenting with sewing and eventually knitting after taking a workshop at JoAnn Fabrics in town,” she says. “When I was really young, I used to make very intricate paper clothes for my dolls. I still have some of them actually, we came across them when I was cleaning out my bedroom a few years ago.”

After graduation from AHS Becky is interested in studying massage therapy, herbology, wild crafting and alternative medicine. Her interest in these things developed gradually after exploring and entertaining many other education and career options. “I was going to go into fashion design,” she states, “but after exploring it and looking into programs and learning about the career path of a fashion designer during an internship experience I had last summer, I decided not to because I really don’t like the media’s

idea of beauty and I don't want to perpetuate that or work in those constructs. I also know I don't want to forge a career in the corporate world, so I decided that I'd rather keep my work on a smaller scale for a smaller audience, so I decided to seek training in other ways that aren't based on an expensive, four-year structured sort of program that I could never afford to pay back. So I'm looking for shorter term, more affordable learning options for the fashion stuff I want to do and in the meantime I'm going to explore these other things.”

Becky is a self-professed “granola cruncher with a hippie twist.” Her artistic inspiration is derived from nature and ideas of sustainability. “Materials can instantly inspire me to make something. I like taking raw materials and making them into things that are practical but can be aesthetically enjoyed every day too,” she states confidently. She goes on to discuss how she thinks clothing and textiles can become sentimentally meaningful to us, “almost like a member of the family. When you put on a favorite sweater or scarf there are memories and feelings attached to it that make you associate emotions with it, that then give that garment personal meaning for you.” She explains that she thinks this happens because when a garment touches you, the feelings and memories you have associated with it from your experiences with it are conjured up much like when you smell something or hear music that prompts a memory in the brain. “This phenomenon can be heightened by what the garment is made of, who made it for you, or because it evokes memories of experiences you’ve had while wearing it. And people are going to have different perspectives about what a garment comes to mean to them according to their preferences and diversity of experiences.” Becky goes on to

say, “When I make something, I like to play with this diversity of perception, so I want to be the type of artist that makes those treasured things for people.”

The self-portrait piece Becky submitted for exhibition, *Untitled Mini Sweater*, clearly portrays her learned skills and artistic passion for crafting raw materials into functional objects that can become sentimental. With wool yarn she hand-dyed with plant-based pigments, Becky uses the elements of pattern, color and texture to provoke viewers to touch what she makes, to engage with it tactilely. Becky states, “By learning how to knit and by studying art and aesthetics, I’ve learned to make practical and wearable things that are also beautiful. I like to explore the convergence of indulgence, personal meaning, and beauty so that the people who wear what I make can experience a sort of freedom to express their personality, preferences, perceptions and desires.”

Becky’s artistic explorations, although they haven’t been very structured, have helped her learn to experiment and just jump in and try things. For her, art is practical self-expression. “I’ve also learned a lot of practical skills and ways of studio practice and thinking, and artistic and analytical thinking that I think can be considered universal to lots of different areas of life for my whole lifetime. I also think I’ve learned not only how to solve problems but how to find them, examine them, and do or say something about them to call attention to them.”

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## Becky

### *belt*

mediums: vintage and new fabric, re-purposed vintage leather belt, vintage buttons, handmade silver buttons

Becky's original artistic love was painting

before she found fiber arts. Through studying art Becky

has learned skills that allow her to take raw materials and make them into functional, beautiful objects. Becky has also learned to craft practical and wearable things that converge with indulgence, personal meaning, and beauty to become a daily aesthetic experience and freedom of expression for the wearer. When she makes a garment, she tries to appeal to different people's perspectives and diversity of experiences through using different elements and principles of art and design to make a garment visually appealing so the wearer will want to engage with it and maybe find meaning in it through touch.

The concept of wearable beauty appealing to diverse perspectives was my inspiration for this portrait of Becky. The yoyos in the body of the belt are made from several different kinds of fabrics and present an abundance of luxe, exotic textures both visually and tactilely, while the vintage buttons adorning the yoyos signify the dully common yet extravagant nature of wearable beauty we can experience every day. Lastly, the handmade, silver buttons throughout the belt are each imprinted with the words "Perspectives" and "Diversity" to denote what inspires and drives Becky to make her art, and it is my hope that when Becky puts this belt on she is simply reminded of and inspired to continue to pursue and develop her artistic passion.

**Untitled Mini Sweater**

*cable knit sweater*

medium: hand dyed wool yarn

Becky Montgomery

This sweater symbolizes me as an artist because it contains all of the elements of my hand knit work: natural fibers, natural colors, and it's been designed by me. My current design tastes includes cables and split necks, so I included them on this sweater. Untitled Mini Sweater is a miniature representation of my whole body of work as a fiber artist.



## Carson

***“Art for me is just how I think and prefer to communicate. It’s what drives me.”***

- Carson is the ultimate “quiet man.” At first he comes off as fairly timid, and definitely laid-back but with affection for the unexpected as is demonstrated by the bright, fluorescent yellow, Doc Martin boots he usually wears. Carson is the ever-observer, always quietly watching what's going on around him and as we start to talk I notice that he is sitting on his hands at first until he warms up to the interview a little.

Carson grew up in Prior Lake, Minnesota just outside of the southern metro suburbs. He is the youngest child in his family and has both a sister and a brother. He confesses, “Art wasn't a big part of life growing up. I just sort of stumbled onto it, started out drawing, but mostly just doodling about things I learned about in school when I was supposed to be taking notes... kind of like illustrating a story.”

In his former schools he was able to take a few pottery and graphic design classes along with welding and wood working workshops, but now, “I sort of live in the printmaking studio,” he says with a big grin on his face. “It’s where I’d rather be above anything else and it’s something I didn’t even know existed before last year.” In our conversation this is where Carson lights up and gets a little animated. He tells me, “It [printmaking] really spoke to me when I first tried it, and now it’s all I want to do. I’ve done an internship in printmaking, I took special classes at HighPoint [Center for Printmaking] too. I really like being able to simplify images and add messages.”

Through studying art, Carson has learned that he can map his thought processes and make them graphic. In describing what he thinks he’s learned by studying art, he says, “I’ve learned to make connections between my thoughts and emotions and to

communicate visually and symbolically about ideas that are or become important to me. I've learned to connect the concepts and subjects I've learned about more traditionally by making symbols and images that bring concepts together into the same visual space where the lines between them can start to blur and combine. This is how I make it come alive for me."

For Carson, the other classes and types of learning he does in school are all potential subjects he can use for inspiration. "In my math, English and social studies classes, I'm required to take a lot in, but in art you get to put a lot out, you get to just make things with your hands and you don't have to put them to words all the time. You can just explore your ideas, take time and do something with all that's swirling around in your head that you don't necessarily want to put only into words," he says. The self-portrait, *The Final Frontier*, Carson submitted for exhibition exemplifies his abilities to boil complex, intellectual ideas down into powerful graphic representations that connect and convey personal ideas. Carson came up with his idea for this print during a conversation about the death penalty that he participated in during his Sociology class. The screen print he created silhouettes the iconic image of the smoke trail left by the Challenger explosion in 1986. He appropriated this imagery as a means to connect his ideas about the death penalty and to portray the conclusion he reached after the discussion that death is really much more of an unexplored territory for humanity than even space. This print demonstrates Carson's learned ability to create his own visual texts using image and metaphor. He says, "Art for me is just how I think and prefer to communicate. It's what drives me. I just really like making art too. I guess

some people don't, so they should maybe study other things, but art is what drives me.

By studying art I've learned to make sense of everything I'm experiencing.”

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## Carson

### *messenger bag*

mediums: screen printed vinyl and canvas fabric,  
flannel fabric, reflective ribbons

In creating this portrait I was inspired by

Carson's ability to take complex concepts and boil them down to simple, graphic images. When interviewing Carson I learned that while he is sometimes a man of few words, he is someone who thinks deeply and often prefers to communicate through images, color and textures before using words. Through studying art Carson has learned how to make and use images to communicate visually and symbolically; this is simply how he prefers to approach communication. He is interested in creating and experiencing a visual feast before resorting to words as a means to share his point of view. For Carson, studying and making art is a driving force in his life that he feels he needs in order to make sense of his experiences.

In this messenger bag I created as Carson's portrait, I sought to create both a visual and textural feast to graphically and symbolically represent him. The black, white and green vinyl fabrics on the outside of the bag are intended to symbolize the electric, energy and quick wit Carson possesses that run just beneath the surface of his quiet, unassuming outward nature. The bright yellow fabric and reflective components in particular pay homage to the iconic fluorescent yellow shoes and clothes Carson can often be seen wearing. They are also intended to be a visual magnet that draw viewers' attention and entice people to get closer, to examine other details in the piece such as the subtle, color-on-color graphics and messages screen printed all over the bag. For

instance, I imprinted the bright green strip of vinyl fabric running down the middle of the bag with “Art drives me;” which is Carson’s description for what making art has come to mean to him through his study of it. Then, in contrast to the vibrant, busy outside, the inside of the bag is simply lined with calm, warm, comfortable, black and white plaid flannel; a soft yet strong fabric symbolizing Carson’s inviting, warm core personality that fuels and grounds his perspective. This messenger bag is ultimately Carson “in a nutshell” and I hope it will serve him both practically to carry everything he needs on a daily basis as well as metaphorically to remind him that making and learning about art is an essential driving force in his life that he can count on to help him make sense of his experiences.

**The Final Frontier**

*wood cut relief print*

mediums: ink, paper

Carson Lafond

I took a sociology class during my senior year of high school. One of the most interesting things that I witnessed in the class was my fellow classmates' reactions when we were asked where we stood on the subject of the death penalty in America. Most people automatically went to one side or the other and held their ground. People started getting very upset with one another while trying to explain themselves. It got to the point where people were basically yelling at one another, and this almost never happened at the high school I used to attend before AHS. I never chose a side, and chose not to comment on anything that anyone said. Some good points were brought up, but they didn't lead us anywhere.

During the entire class, I simply felt as if people weren't looking at the situation from all sides, and thinking about the consequences of their decisions. For instance, I don't think that the people that were strongly against the death penalty realize that they are saving their enemies. They argue that taking another person's life is unforgivable and should never be done, and they, with that statement, save a killer's life. Also, if the prisoner is allowed to live, what sort of life will they be living? Is not killing a person the same as giving them life? Would you feel compelled to live if every day was the same, if you knew your life would never amount to anything, if you knew every step of every day of the rest of your life? I suppose it is literally a life, but only because of the fact that the prisoner's heart would still be beating. Another thing to think about is who

is supporting them. When you truly think about everything, taking this side doesn't make a lot of sense.

Then there is the other side. This side thinks that the death penalty should be enforced and we should rid the world of all of the murderous people. A common argument against this side is that the criminal system does make mistakes, and an innocent person could be sentenced to death. Also, most people who disagree with this side say that by killing the killers, you become a killer. It seemed that everyone in the class was very one sided and refused to realize that both sides were deeply flawed.

One of the main things that kept going through my head was the fact that nobody knows what exactly death is. Only a dead person knows what happens after they have died and by then it is my personal belief that they cannot communicate with the living anymore. Everybody in the class regarded death as such a horrible thing, but what if it's not? I'm not saying that I know the afterlife is amazing, I simply want to make it a point that I don't know what the afterlife is like, and I don't believe that you do either. It could be nonexistent for all we know.

So after this experience, I decided to make this print because ultimately I came to the conclusion that death is more worthy of being regarded as the final frontier than space. In my brainstorming, the famous event of the Challenger explosion came to my mind, and it popped out as a perfect representation of my thoughts surrounding this issue because it married the ideas of the final frontier and death. So it became my inspiration for creating this print of the abstracted image of the smoke trail the Challenger made after it exploded.



**Danica**

***“ Art is about connecting relationships, reflection, and communicating about your findings.”***

When talking with Danica, it became clear to me that she has thought a lot about why she makes art and about her artistic identity. I learned that Danica has had a lot of exposure throughout her life to art making and that she has and has always had lots of support from both sides of her family for pursuing artistic endeavors. Danica grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota with her younger brothers. Her parents divorced when she was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but now, according to her, they relate to each other like friends. Her Dad is a Graphic Designer who works for 3M and her Mom is a producer for Reel Works Animation Studio in Minneapolis.

Danica first became interested in art in elementary school when she was exposed to a lot of very different kinds of art and art mediums during school art classes that she attended 3-4 times per week. However, in middle and high school, “I got totally turned off to art for a while. At my middle school creativity wasn’t valued and art classes didn’t promote any self-exploration. Everything was assignment and template derived and there wasn’t any room for experimentation. I felt like we were just expected to copy the teacher all the time and he placed a lot of emphasis on grading our projects according to how well or how closely we followed his examples,” she states. During this time, instead of pursuing art, she turned her focus to studying math, especially algebra and trigonometry. “But in my 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade years, I signed up for an after school program, and the art teacher there was great. She let us experiment with lots of different mediums and I got interested in ceramics and painting,” she remembers. “And

when I noticed myself improve, no matter what medium I was working with, it was very motivating and made me curious about learning to use more art mediums and about studying art beyond high school.”

Danica first heard about Perpich from one of her step-Mom's coworkers. “After I learned about the school online, I got a tour and I was hooked,” she says. Now Danica’s post-graduation plans include studying painting and drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). She decided on SAIC after they offered her a very comprehensive scholarship package based on the painting portfolio that she developed during the end of her junior year and beginning of her senior year at AHS. Ultimately Danica aspires to be a University art professor and maybe even pursue K-12 art education and art teacher education.

Danica is inspired in her work by experiences she has every day, and she is drawn to being able to communicate and express herself in whatever medium strikes her as desirable in the moment. She enjoys the challenge of trying to develop new skills and proficiencies and to see and portray things, even herself, in new ways. She states, “for me, art is a reflection, a way for me to communicate with myself. I feel like I have a hard time articulating myself a lot of times with words alone, so I feel like art or painting, or whatever I may be doing, helps to relieve the pressure society puts on everyone to use words all the time to share ideas.”

The self-portrait painting, *Self-Portrait*, Danica submitted for exhibition is an abstracted depiction of her physical appearance but it also portrays her recent growth as an artist. “When I started painting, I was trying so hard to paint tightly and realistically, to make it look like Titian’s or even Michaelangelo’s style because that’s what I thought

I had to do. Then throughout the process I realized that I have to paint how I need to in order to say what I want, in my style, not someone else's." She goes on to say, "So I had to work at it for a while and develop my own skills and techniques with the paint and tools until I was happy with the end portrait. As I worked at it, I was constantly reflecting on what I was trying to say, and I realized that my paintings also don't have to be serious. They can reflect my sense of humor and whimsy. So that's what I'm exploring in my painting work now; my style and what I want to say with it."

Through studying art, painting in particular, Danica has learned to experiment and explore the limits and possibilities of a medium. Making art is also a way for her to connect with what she believes is the fundamental human experience of creating and communicating. She states, "I think there is a Carl Jung quote... I'm not going to remember the exact quote, but it's about the phenomenon that the human mind is incapable of knowing everything so people constantly make up symbols for things they can't define or fully comprehend. This is also what I think it means to be an artist, and I think it's what I've learned how to do through studying art. I can communicate symbolically in an effort to understand something." She goes on to say that, "I've learned to use images to create relationships between unrelated ideas to satisfy my curiosity and synthesize ideas into something new."







### **Danica**

*scarf / shawl*

mediums: hand spun yarn made from wool and recycled saris, hand imprinted brass inclusions, brass beads, vintage buttons, brass ribbon, designed glass buttons

In talking with Danica, it became apparent to me quickly that she is a purveyor of ideas. She is also a strong conversationalist who is deeply thoughtful and through studying art Danica has learned to make and use images to create relationships and make connections between seemingly disparate ideas to satisfy her almost insatiable curiosity. She has also learned to make art as a form of reflection and to create something new from knowledge learned in other ways.

The connections, relationships and reflexivity Danica weaves together in her artistic explorations is the inspiration for this portrait. This convertible scarf/shawl is made from three different kinds of yarn that I wove together to portray Danica. This woven yarn creates a flexible web symbolizing the interrelated concepts that ebb and flow in and out of a conversation. The glimmering brass pennants imprinted with small, leafy branches and the small, shimmering brass beads are meant to symbolize seeds and seedlings of new concepts that grow naturally out of rich, dynamic conversations. The designed glass buttons in the shawl pin are printed with the words “Reflection,” “Connection,” and “Relationship” to capture the essence of what Danica has learned from studying art. And the pin, when used, not only physically secures the scarf/shawl in place, but it symbolically connects the end of the conversation web with the

beginning, thus creating a circle of interwoven and interrelated concepts that has no decipherable beginning or end.

Through creating this portrait I wanted to visually represent what Danica has learned from studying and making art and portray the way a great conversation with her flows back into itself full-circle. Ultimately, I hope this piece will serve as inspiration for Danica to keep exploring and weaving new ideas together, and to continue reflecting on herself and her experiences through art making in order to form new perceptions and influence her artistic practice.

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### **Self-Portrait (1)**

*painting*

mediums: oil paint, canvas

Danica Favorito

The psychologist Carl Jung theorized: “Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend” I believe this is what it means to be an artist. As a painter, I strive to better understand painting as a vehicle of communication. I explore the limits and possibilities of the medium by experimentation and abstraction.



**Hanna S**

*“Art is just what I’m passionate about. It’s internal and external perception all rolled into images. I love it!”*

Hanna is an only child who grew up in Saint Louis Park, Minnesota. Both of her parents are artists and have influenced her a lot. Her Dad paints and Mom her works in publishing but dabbles in a lot of different art mediums in her spare time, and as a family they go to art galleries and museums frequently. This past summer Hanna attended a pre-college program for darkroom photography, art history, and digital photography in San Francisco, and she found this experience incredibly motivating.

Hanna has been interested in art since 5th grade but says, “I didn't find something I was really good at until I started taking pictures in a photo intro class in middle school. Then I heard about Perpich in 8th grade and I was originally going to be applying in Lit, but then I found the camera and that changed my life and so I decided to come here and study photo instead.”

At the time we interviewed, Hanna was really looking forward to attending Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) for photography for college. She laughs and says, “If I could live in the darkroom, I would, but every once in a while I like to explore opportunities to learn other mediums, so I’m looking forward to the comprehensive program at MCAD. She is also looking forward to further developing her conceptual base with the general academic program there. “My inspiration comes from all over the place, so I like to feed my mind by studying lots of things,” she says.

Hanna has a very confident demeanor and is very articulate. She has considered herself an artist ever since she would draw 6-legged cats as a Kindergartener. She

recalls, “It's always been something I've been drawn to. School hasn't really meant anything to me when art isn't involved.”

Through studying art Hanna has learned how to explore her interests. “I get to open doors and check things out and decide if I'm going to go in or not. I've learned how to show what I think to the world and to push myself, direct myself. I've also learned how to explain and portray my thought processes,” she states. “I feel like my life with art is metaphor in action. I can dream up ideas and metaphorical relationships and then I can not only explore inspiration through the creative process and act on it, but I can explain it too. It's really empowering.”

Through studying art Hanna has also learned how to make narrative images that highlight details of a scene for the viewer that might otherwise get overlooked. The self-portrait, *Waiting*, that Hanna submitted for exhibition exemplifies this in particular. The photo depicts the back view of a woman's neck and shoulders framed elegantly by the draping scoop neck of her white t-shirt and her loosely upswept hair. In creating this portrait using lighting, focus, contrast and framing, Hanna captured part of her subject's body that would likely not be given much attention normally. Thus, as a portrait it is slightly unconventional, but it is also engaging as we, the audience, can't see the woman's face. Therefore we are left to question what her face physically looks like. Yet by capturing this image on film instead of creating a facial shot, one can see and come to appreciate that there is quiet, simple beauty from this point of view that is worth examining that perhaps is very unique to this woman. Thus, Hanna has highlighted details of the scene and her subject for the audience that are unique but might normally be ignored.

Lastly, Hanna finds a certain freedom when making art, and goes on to state, “When I'm creating, there's no time, no pressure, no worries, it's just about me and the process and the project and the message. Art is just what I'm most passionate about. It's internal and external perception all rolled into images. I love it and when I'm in the flow everything else just fades away, and that's really freeing and even inspiring in it's own rite.”

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## Hanna S

### *neck cuff*

mediums: wool yarn, handmade silver button

This portrait of Hanna was inspired by her reflective personality. She communicates her perceptions about all she encounters primarily through

photography. When working, she organically and intuitively captures many, close-up images of a chance or constructed scene in addition to capturing the whole of it. Then, in the darkroom, she reflects on the whole scene and what she wishes to share about it with her audience and she chooses specific, detailed images to develop that highlight nuances of the scene and/or her subject that are unique but might normally be overlooked.

Thus, in creating this scrumble crocheted neck cuff I wanted to play with the idea of conveying perceptions of a whole through assembly of smaller parts. I created the small, organically-shaped, detailed and intricate crochet pieces then assembled them to create one larger, functional garment. Many of the crocheted shapes and forms are hyperbolic, meaning that they were created by allowing the yarn to curl or fold in on itself in a circular pattern at a high rate of turn. These crochet forms in particular are symbolic of Hanna's reflective and introspective nature. The handmade silver button with the word "Perception" metaphorically connects the beginning and end of my symbolic bigger narrative and signifies the place where Hanna's new perceptions can emerge through this process of reflection. I hope that when wearing this piece Hanna will be reminded that her way of collecting sets of images from a whole scene, and of

taking scenes apart and re-assembling them as a form of reflective, artistic inquiry is a powerful way to create new pathways of seeing.

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## **Waiting**

*photograph*

medium: silver gelatin print

Hanna K. Stoehr

The film for *Waiting* was shot, processed and printed by hand. Hand processing is a huge part of my photographic practice, and what personalizes my art. I spend hours in the darkroom perfecting the development time of each print, balancing the contrast to fit the image or image series.

I like to shoot portraiture that does not include facial detail, leaving the subject ambiguous, without definite identity. *Waiting* allows the viewers to create their own ideas about the subject, while also considering a photo that has been completely crafted and composed by me. This photo was also taken to point out and focus on aspects of the body that are not traditionally mentioned or thought of as beautiful, but can become so when given proper light.

This photo captures who I am as an artist because it captures who I am as a person. Hand processing is the closest form of meditation I know. It relaxes me, it awes me, and excites me each time I step into the darkroom. I feel as though I am more of a person when I am creating photos like this in the darkroom.



**Hannah T**

***“In my art I can explore things and capture my experiences in a multi-dimensional way that helps me slow it all down some so I won’t forget how I felt in that moment.”***

Hannah was heavily involved in sports like basketball and softball more than in the arts growing up in Rockford, Minnesota even though her Mom is a watercolor painter. For a long time Hannah felt she took after her Dad who is an Engineer and she affectionately describes as being very linear. And it was actually very difficult Hannah to leave her old school, but she wanted to explore the opportunity at AHS.

“I only took one art class before applying to Perpich. I was involved in band off and on in middle school and I learned a little bit about how to paint from my Mom, but it wasn’t until I took that art class my Freshman year that I knew I wanted to explore art,” she says. However, at the time when we interviewed, Hannah was planning to attend the University of Minnesota in the College of Liberal Arts with a Visual Arts minor. She tells me, “I love Art. It’s my way of getting away, escaping. And I’ve really enjoyed the experimenting I get to do in art, trying to find and portray every day beauty in unexpected places, but I’ve developed more of an interest in nutrition and sustainable growing practices lately that I want to pursue. I’m not sure if the University of Minnesota is the right place to do that, but it’s where I’m going to start.”

Through studying art Hannah has learned that when she’s in a really serious situation is when she feels she can be the most creative. “I’ve also learned to communicate what’s in my imagination and I’ve learned how to focus my intentions and energy towards meeting my goals.

Hannah is also an observant artist who seeks to capture what is going on around her. She says, “I’m interested in how my art affects the people around me and in exploring it as an expression of myself, of who I am. Through studying art and learning different techniques I’ve learned that my work can also be a creative record of my experiences and observations, almost a documentary of everything I’ve done and seen.” The self-portrait piece, *The Chocolate Shop*, that Hannah submitted for exhibition highlights this idea well as it depicts the façade of a shop she encountered when she traveled abroad to Paris. It portrays a fleeting impression and a representation of a set of powerful actual and visual experiences Hannah had while abroad traveling and learning another language. She seems to have made this image into a symbolic record of her experiences as a means to capture their memory. Hannah says, “In my art I can explore things and capture my experiences in a multi-dimensional way that helps me slow it all down some so I won’t forget how I felt in that moment.”

Additionally, through studying art Hannah has developed an appreciation for art as a historical record. She says, “I’ve also learned that there’s a whole big history to communicating with images and to telling stories with images. It’s a really big history that goes back in time to prehistoric ages and I’ve come to know that that drive to make things is just in us naturally and it can come out if we let it.” For Hannah, making art and taking art classes has also helped her learn to see with an open mind and to look at things from many different angles, “because in art there isn’t one right answer very often,” she says, “there are a lot of possibilities and it’s really amazing to explore lots of them until you find what’s right for what you’re trying to say. It’s satisfying on a deep and natural level.”





**Hannah T**

*Mary Jane slippers*

mediums: vintage and new fabric, vintage buttons,  
designed glass button

When talking with Hannah, I was initially intrigued by her cheerful optimism and by how comfortable she seemed when talking about all that she's learned from studying art. Through our conversation, I learned that Hannah is someone who enjoys creating and finding beauty in unexpected places. I also discovered that through studying art Hannah feels she has learned how to creatively record her experiences so she won't forget how she felt in the moment.

When creating this portrait of Hannah I wanted to explore the concepts of comfort, everyday beauty in unexpected places and recording experiences. When one thinks of a portrait, slippers might not generally be among the first things that come to mind, but to me they are the ultimate symbol of comfort and relaxation. Yet, while slippers are normally worn frequently and are often treasured, they are usually fairly utilitarian. This isn't a place one might expect to find much beauty, design and style. So, in making these slippers to portray Hannah I wanted to create beauty in this unexpected place. I used brightly colored fabric with whimsical patterns to symbolize Hannah's cheerful, optimistic personality. The Mary Jane shoe styling of the slippers is intended to symbolize the journey Hannah is on. When one travels, even just out of the house on a simple errand, your shoes are always with you both carrying you on your journey and, in a way, quietly recording all the places you've been and things you've

experienced. These symbolic, comfortable shoes I've created for Hannah pay homage to how she has learned to create art as a means of recording her experiences. And the designed glass button uses spiraled lines of text restating Hannah's words, "In my art I can explore things and capture my experiences in a multi-dimensional way." I hope these slippers will remind Hannah that there are always infinite possibilities to create beauty everywhere she travels, even when she is close to home.

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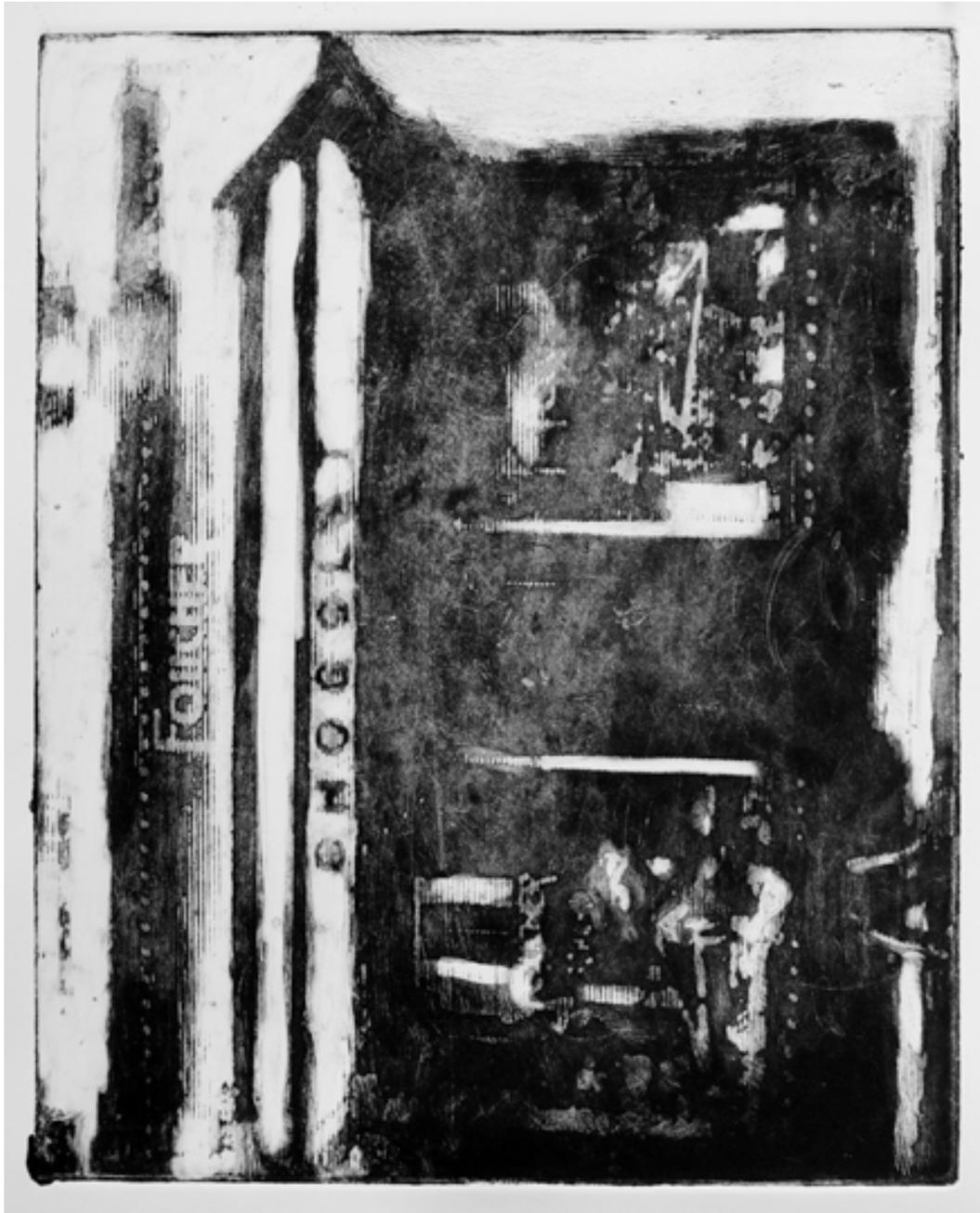
### **The Chocolate Shop**

*lithographic print*

mediums: ink, paper

Hannah Tollefson

This is a print I created from a photograph I took last spring in Paris. As an artist, I am always looking at what is going on around me, and how it affects the people around me including myself. So after traveling over seas and learning another language, I am moved by how others view art as an important balance that adds to their fulfillment in life. As for me, art is an expression of something I've learned, or am still discovering.



**Ian**

***“By studying art I think I’ve learned to visually explore ways to reflect on my experiences and philosophical ideas.”***

Ian has lived in the same house all his life in Little Falls, Minnesota. It’s a yellow brick house, one of the first that was built in town, that’s 118 years old and made out of a special kind of bricks named for the town. Ian is also the oldest of three children; he has a younger sister and brother. He is very thoughtful in conversation and is the type of kid who spends lots of time in the library and bookstores. He likes to discuss philosophy and the meaning of life with his friends and lately he has developed a fascination with cemeteries. “It’s not a morbid obsession or anything, my friend and I just like to look at the headstone art. It’s a kind of gallery, really,” he says.

For Ian, art has always been in the background at home but developed into an interest for him after learning his grandfather was a pretty prolific oil painter a few years ago. This prompted Ian to start drawing on his own and he is now interested in studying architecture. “I’ve always loved building and designing and examining buildings. I used to build fantastical structures, but now I want to learn how to build real ones,” he states.

In coming to Perpich for his senior year, Ian was seeking more access to art and more concentrated focus on studying art to help him get prepared to study architecture in college when he feels he’s ready for that step. He was also seeking a change from the small environment he was in where there weren’t as many artistic opportunities. He recalls, “Before I came to AHS I took every art course available and even did two

independent studies, but I really just couldn't get enough where I was and wanted to branch out from the people I have known all my life.”

Ian has also been keenly interested in academic courses like mathematics and physics. He says he likes the challenge of these studies, “but art is where my real passion is and I like that I can explore ways to grow my skills and abilities in a more individually meaningful and free way.” Throughout our conversation, Ian shared that, “By studying art I think I've learned to visually explore ways to reflect on my experiences and philosophical ideas.” The self-portrait Ian submitted, *Elemental Self*, depicts the nature of this statement. Although the piece is unfinished, it includes some completed, overt religious symbolism in the crown of thorns and necklace. It is clear that in this drawing Ian is visually exploring and reflecting on his feelings about what making art means for him as well as portraying the religious ideas and philosophies that he was entertaining at the moment. This drawing, done in his characteristically precise, realistic, and technically advanced style, is evidence of the visual, reflective practice Ian engages in when making art and how it is normally a deeply personal and often private practice.

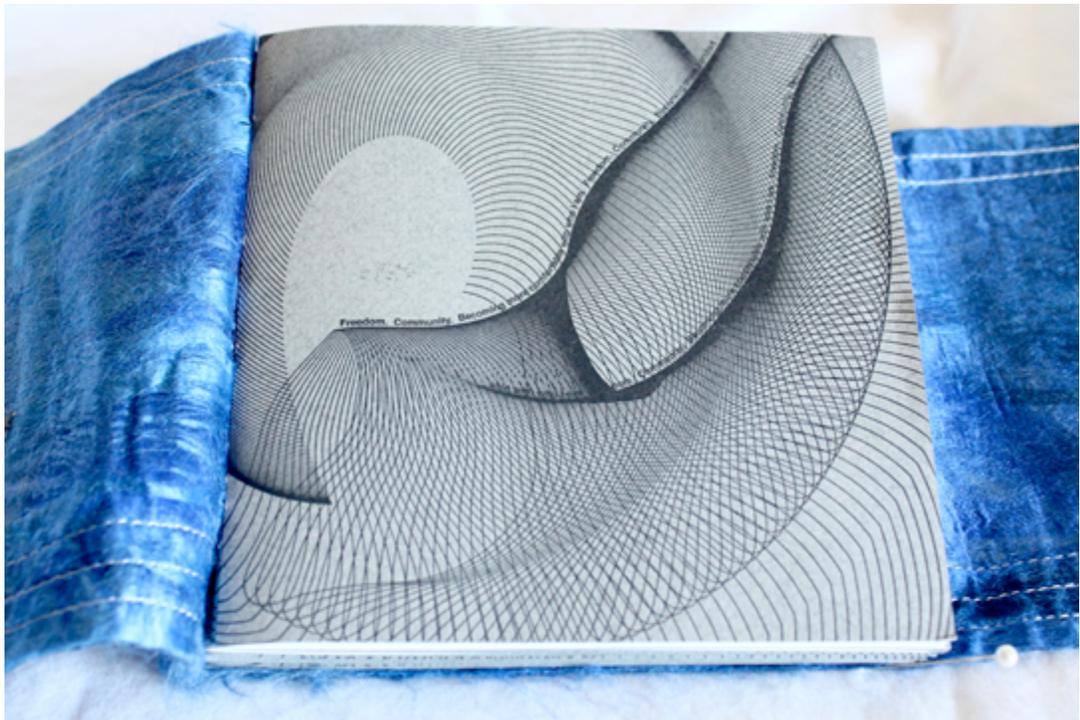
Yet, at the same time, participating in making art and learning about art has really helped Ian come out of his shell. He says, “I've learned to develop my personal voice which is helping me develop my confidence and my ability to connect with the world.” He also states, “Art is also the only things that seems to help me connect to what I'm learning. I can take things I learn other ways and combine the ideas there into something visual or map out my thoughts and learning in my sketchbook in images so

that I don't just "know" something, I really can explore the ins and outs of the ideas visually and reflect on where I stand in relation to them.”

Ian also likes the critique aspect of the arts, saying, “There are always ways that I can seek feedback and give feedback to myself towards improvement. In art I've learned that sometimes the process is equally as important as the product, and I've also learned that when showing something vs. telling about something I can see things with the eye instead of with my mind trying to label everything. Learning to just see what's there without having to categorize and name things all the time is freeing for me.”

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**Ian**  
*sketchbook*

mediums: silk roving, vintage button, hand letter

pressed pages, waxed linen thread

Something that becomes quickly apparent when talking with Ian is that there are deep pools of thought

underneath his quiet surface. Through studying art Ian has learned to make and use images that record his experiences in self-examination and inner searching for the truths of life. In the same way a philosopher or writer might jot down notes as he ponders the nature of life, Ian embarks on this same path of inquiry but his notes take the form of sketches, drawings and doodles.

In creating this sketchbook as a portrait of Ian I wanted to give him a unique place to record his ponderings. I wanted to create a private place where he could examine and reflect on his thoughts visually before presenting them to the world in a more public forum. The wrap cover of this sketchbook is made from woven silk roving. Silk roving is a fairly wispy and unstable material when standing independently, but when woven together as it is here it creates a durable fabric of infinite strength. As this strong fabric wraps around the book it is meant to contain and bind the private reflections inside, concealing them from prying or curious eyes. I chose the deep blue color to signify the infinite depths of thought and image Ian can explore on these pages. Inside, the letter pressed signature pages are filled with linear, flowing, abstract designs and imprinted with the phrase, "Inner reflections on thoughts of my philosophic mind to become more comfortable with who I am." The line drawings are meant to symbolize

the visual stream of consciousness and interior philosophic monologues that Ian seeks to capture in his drawings. The phrase summarizes what Ian has learned from studying art and what art has come to mean for him as a result. And the blank, gridded paper comprising the book is significant of Ian's precise, technical, structured style of drawing. When using this sketchbook it is my hope that Ian will fill every inch with drawings to record his mind's wanderings as he seeks to make sense of it all.

**Elemental Self***drawing*

mediums: graphite, paper

Ian Warner

Hello. I really don't know where I'm at. I have trouble explaining who I am as an artist. So, maybe the best way is for me to just ramble and hope something sticks. I tend to be very laid back about my art. I feel that if something is lost or damaged that, while it may suck, I can make something else. I also tend to leave pieces unfinished. I don't know, maybe I get bored or just come to a point where I feel I'm done examining and reflecting on what I set out to examine and reflect on. The piece might not be done but I am. On some rare occasions I come back to a piece and finish it, but usually it just sits. I have this drawing that started as a self-portrait sitting in my room right now. There is a ton of work that could be done on it but I just don't feel like doing it because I feel like right now it's actually a fairly decent representation of myself as an artist already, just as it is. It's unfinished, has some religious symbolism and is done in graphite. I've always loved religion as an object. I'm not religious or anything but find the symbols and philosophy fascinating. And I love graphite plain and simple. So, it, in theory, could be my statement and this could technically be the artist statement that goes with it.



**Laura**

***“There are no boundaries and anything is possible! I’ve also learned to develop concepts visually, things like social commentary and bigger, personal ideas that are now behind my pieces that I want to communicate to an audience.”***

Growing up in Ortonville, Minnesota, a small town near the border of South Dakota in the southwest corner of the state, Laura has spent a lot of time pursuing the arts at her Mother’s encouragement. “My Mom was always getting me little art kits and signing me up for classes and activities outside of school,” she says. “So it’s just sort of always been there for me.”

Before deciding to attend AHS, Laura was one of the students who was heavily involved in extracurricular activities. She played volleyball, was captain of the gymnastics team, played flute, and was also involved in the Business Professionals of America, the Family Career and Community Leaders of America and served on the Community Arts Council. “I really like being involved in my community and in doing community advocacy projects like park restoration and public art projects. You can actually see the difference you’re making when you do stuff like this. It’s really empowering,” she says.

But Laura also tells me that before choosing AHS, she only got to take one art class first semester of her freshman year. She recalls, “Access was limited to taking a general Art Introduction class that lots of kids took to meet graduation requirements, so the classes were really full. But beyond that, Laura says, “there weren't other offerings in art very frequently because the teacher was only part-time and there was so much

demand for the Intro class that that's all she taught, so I just continued to seek out other, community based options for art classes.”

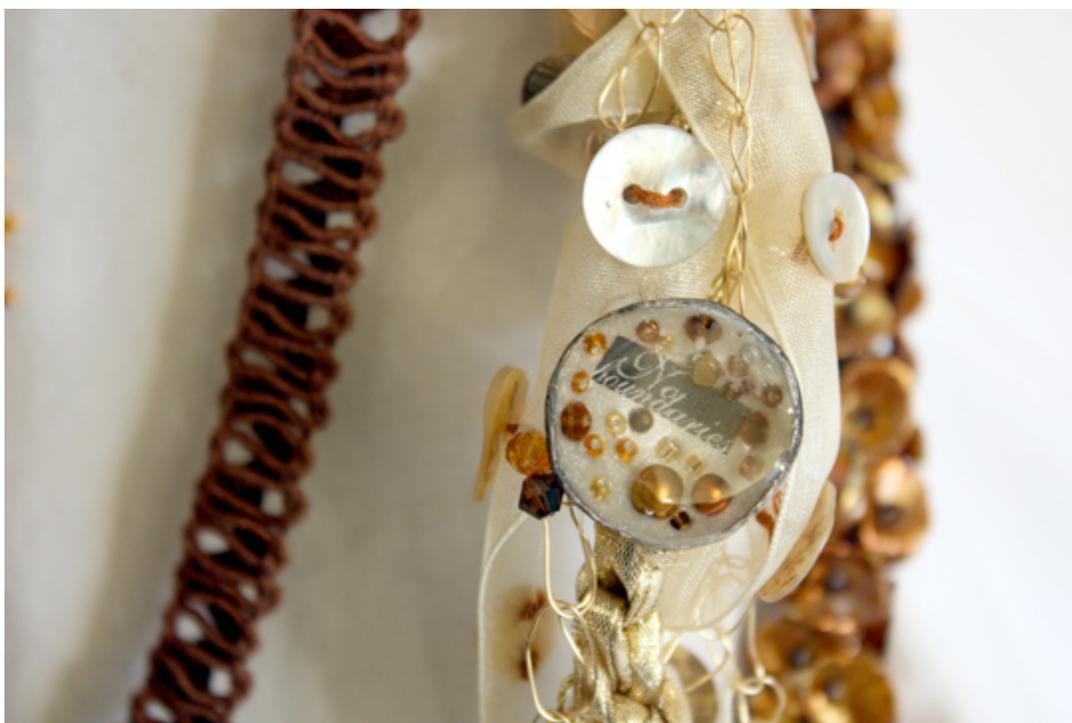
Laura first started making jewelry in 6th grade, and started out by working with simple memory wire pieces then she would go to craft fairs with her Grandma and sell what she made. “I made my own display unit and sold my necklaces for \$7.00 each. It really built my confidence because I experienced some good success early on with people really liking my work. I would sell out of everything each time I went and I even had people commission me to make specific things for them,” she states.

Now, as graduation approaches, Laura has decided to pursue jewelry design professionally along with studying museum curation and business communications. But Laura expresses sadness at having to leave AHS because she has really enjoyed the independent nature of the program. And through studying art, Laura has learned, “there are no boundaries and anything is possible. I’ve also learned to develop concepts visually, things like social commentary and bigger, personal ideas that are now behind my pieces that I want to communicate to an audience.”

The self-portrait, *Self-Portrait, Japanese Memories*, that Laura submitted for exhibition was one of the first pieces where she explored making jewelry with a personal, conceptual basis. She made the piece to portray and commemorate an experience she had during a trip to Japan, but for Laura it was also a way for her to explore pushing the boundaries and possibilities of what her art could communicate. Up until then she had made pieces simply because she enjoyed the act of making beautiful, functional and wearable jewelry. She says, “I would make my jewelry because I would get inspired by some materials I would see in the store and then I would get this drive to

see what it would look like when it was done. I wasn't satisfied until I finished something and the whole process was just about designing visually appealing products, but it wasn't really about making meaningful or personal artistic statements and even my designs were fairly conventional... pretty, but not that unusual really." She continues, "Until I started exploring and learning about art in a more focused way. By studying art more intensely I've learned that for me concept is everything. It's not just about making something that looks nice anymore. Creativity and creative, artistic thinking can be applied everywhere and studying art is how I learned this." In Laura's new schema, art can still be anything, "An object, a sculpture, a drawing, a jewelry piece, an idea, a piece of writing, a dance, a movement, a thought. There really aren't any boundaries." But now she also says, "By studying art I've learned to take the creative process and use it to explore new ideas and discover new things about the world and myself that I didn't know were possible before."







## **Laura**

### *necklaces*

mediums: Swarovski crystals, vintage buttons and ribbon, keshi pearls, brass wire, glass and precious metal beads, handmade silver beads, resin, jewelry findings

During my interview with Laura it was easy to see that she is incredibly bright, outgoing, ambitious, gracious and driven from within to reach her goals. Yet, art for Laura is a place where she can be more relaxed. Through studying art she has learned that when making things she has a unique opportunity to express her very personal ideas. So when making her jewelry, Laura pairs the precious with the non-precious to make intimate statements and tell stories about her personal values and experiences.

In creating this portrait of Laura I wanted to create a set of sophisticated necklaces that can be worn together or separately as a means to convey my impressions of Laura. The woven and knotted golden ribbons and brass wire form the base of the main necklace that is embellished with golden, sparkling crystal sunbursts symbolizing Laura's contagious, abundant energy, cheery personality and gracious nature. The small, handmade silver cups filled with beads and resin contain embedded signets that state, "No boundaries," and "Anything is possible." depicting Laura's thoughts about why she treasures making art and what making art means to her as she has come to learn more about it by studying it intensely. More golden sunbursts are repeated in the simple choker necklace, but here they are not permanently fastened to the ribbon. These sunbursts can be rearranged on the choker or removed completely and clipped to the

other necklaces or to other accessories and clothing as Laura desires. This rearrangeable or “wearer’s choice” aspect of my portrait represents Laura’s ability to revel in the rich lands of possibility and artistic choices when deciding how to best convey her stories. The third necklace, encrusted with keshi pearls and literally dripping with many different kinds of glass, pearl and crystal beads, is an homage to Laura’s meticulously detailed and complex approach to creating art that drips with personal meaning. So, when wearing these pieces, it is my hope that Laura will be reminded to linger as much as she can in possibilities and artistic choices because it is in these places that she shines the brightest.

**Self-Portrait, Japanese Memories***necklace*

mediums: beads, found objects

Laura Marsolek

My favorite medium of artistic expression is jewelry. Jewelry appeals to me because of its tiny, meticulous, and detail-oriented process. It's ability to act as sculpture is also very attractive to me now. I enjoy pushing the bounds, often standing between the lines of wearable accessories and sculptural jewelry. Found objects, googly eyes, and starbursts mixed with sterling silver and gemstones provide for an interesting mix of precious and non-precious materials. I am a collector of miniscule objects. Small items resonate with me. Tiny objects no bigger than your palm carry a sense of intimacy that large items don't. Many objects that I incorporate into my jewelry have personal significance. For example, upon cleaning my room one day, I had gathered a small pile of colorful junk. Inspired by the varying shapes and colors, I incorporated the objects into a necklace. I called it "Junkworks." It always reminds me of the day I cleaned my room. Similarly, after a memorable night of trick-or-treating with friends, I incorporated my favorite Starburst candy into a necklace. To me, found objects carry stories. What better way to highlight such special articles than in a piece of jewelry? I can wear events and memories on me everyday.

As an artist, my ultimate goal is to be a jewelry designer. I plan to attend college and major in jewelry design. I'm always trying to incorporate new techniques and materials into my work. I am not only a jewelry artist, but an artist in the sense that I incorporate art and creativity into everyday life. The act of cleaning one's room or trick-

or-treating with friends wouldn't be viewed as "art" by the average person, but

I turn it into art. It's the events that take place in my life that inspire me to create. I look at the world in a different way and I think, "How can I make art about this?"



**Lizzy**

***“Studying art is how I learned to see and experience life more richly.***

***It expanded my awareness and I learned how to pay closer  
attention to everything visually.”***

Lizzy is a networker and highly values community connections. She has searched for a long time for a community of peers where she could feel like she fits in, and it seems that AHS has finally fit this bill. “I get to be part of a community, a community of thinkers who bridge boundaries,” she tells me enthusiastically. In our conversation about her pursuit of an arts education, Lizzy divulges, “I was diagnosed with ADD in middle school, which triggered a struggle with depression. I was medicated but I resented the fact that the medication had to be used because I’ve never believed that pills can “fix” the fact that I just perceive and need to learn differently. Now I don’t take any medication and I’m doing really well in school for the first time—all A’s and one B last semester—and I never thought that was possible. But at AHS I’m allowed to try things in ways that work for me and kids here see that as valuable instead of as a freaky thing for them to pick on. I can express my learning creatively, I can explore even very difficult and complex learning using the creative process. This just works for me and I’m so glad I found it!”

Also during our discussion, Lizzy talks about a deep-seated need to create, “I just think there are more ways to learn than I was allowed to explore before coming to Perpich. But also I just need to make things. If I can’t make things and pursue my inspiration or proceed with artistically exploring concepts and techniques, I feel like I’m

gonna explode. When I make art, I get to be in control of what happens when I'm working on a project and I've learned I need that.”

For Lizzy, making art is a way to get to the "whys" behind facts learned in other disciplines. She thinks, “There’s a big, diverse world out there and there are many, many ways to explore it and think about it, not just through tests and learning facts. Art is just another way to explore.”

For Lizzy, making art is a good way to think through and process all the stuff that she wrestles with in her head. She states, “I've also learned that I can assert my individuality while simultaneously examining ways in which we are all connected and I like the duality of that.” Art class and studying art is also where Lizzy feels she learned how to, “see and experience life more richly. It expanded my awareness and I learned how to pay closer attention to everything visually.”

The self-portrait, *Self-Portrait*, Lizzy submitted for exhibition speaks to this. The painting depicts a fairly realistically styled facial rendering of how Lizzy appears to herself, and seems to be a visual exercise she did in paying attention to conveying how her features really look. During our interview, Lizzy says that for her, there is, “nothing else like art where I can get lost for hours and hours.” When making this large piece, Lizzy clearly spent focused time concentrating on painting the details she felt were unique to her, such as the flower in her hair and the colored beads on her necklace, so it’s easy to see she put a lot of effort and time into this piece.

Furthermore, Lizzy explains that, “Making art is fun, it just gives me joy. I just enjoy making things. I do it because it's a very comfortable place for me to be mentally and physically. I like to engage in artistic ways of thinking by taking diverse concepts

and internalizing them then putting them back out in the world in a new form for discussion and examination.”

In our conversation we also discussed that artistic exploration for Lizzy is a way for her to play with metaphor and entertain ideas that aren't just black and white. “A piece of art is like a person. It has a meaning, a reason for existence, it's meant to sprout ideas and evoke response. Lizzy goes on to describe her artistic learning ultimately as a journey towards coming to know herself and who she wants to be. “I get to let go of pressures to be accepted and just try to understand and reflect on what I'm doing here and on my experiences in this life.”





**Lizzy***earrings*

mediums: handmade paper and plastic beads, Swarovski crystals, silver beads, glass and plastic beads, handmade silver and resin beads, jewelry findings, ribbon, wood frame

During my interview with Lizzy I learned that before attending the Arts High School (AHS) she had a difficult time in school because she felt pressured to conform to conventional dictations about how to learn, think and act that felt unnatural to her. She felt she just didn't excel in the traditional learning environment. But through studying art during her time at AHS she learned that making images can be a different way of learning, thinking about, studying and coming to know something. She feels she learned how to visually map and rearrange concepts and facts learned through other modalities in order to create personal meaning and develop her perspective. And that by studying art she learned to see and experience her life more richly with expanded awareness.

This type of learning became highly enjoyable for Lizzy because it satisfied her learning style, it gave her a means for learning to focus her attention visually, and it gave her an exciting means to enjoy and excel in school. So when creating this portrait, I wanted to portray the excitement Lizzy felt when she could finally enjoy learning as she began to excel in school, and I wanted to play with the concept of rearranging ideas with the aim of forming a personal, visual point of view. Thus, the various pairs of earrings that comprise this portrait emerge from a stark, white space that represents pure

potential. The hodge podge of brightly colored, cheerful beads in a variety of shapes and styles, some manufactured, some handmade, symbolize small kernels of excitement and joy that Lizzy says she finds when making art. The handmade, silver beads found in a few of the earrings are imprinted with the word, “See” to communicate in Lizzy’s words what she feels she has primarily learned to do by studying art.

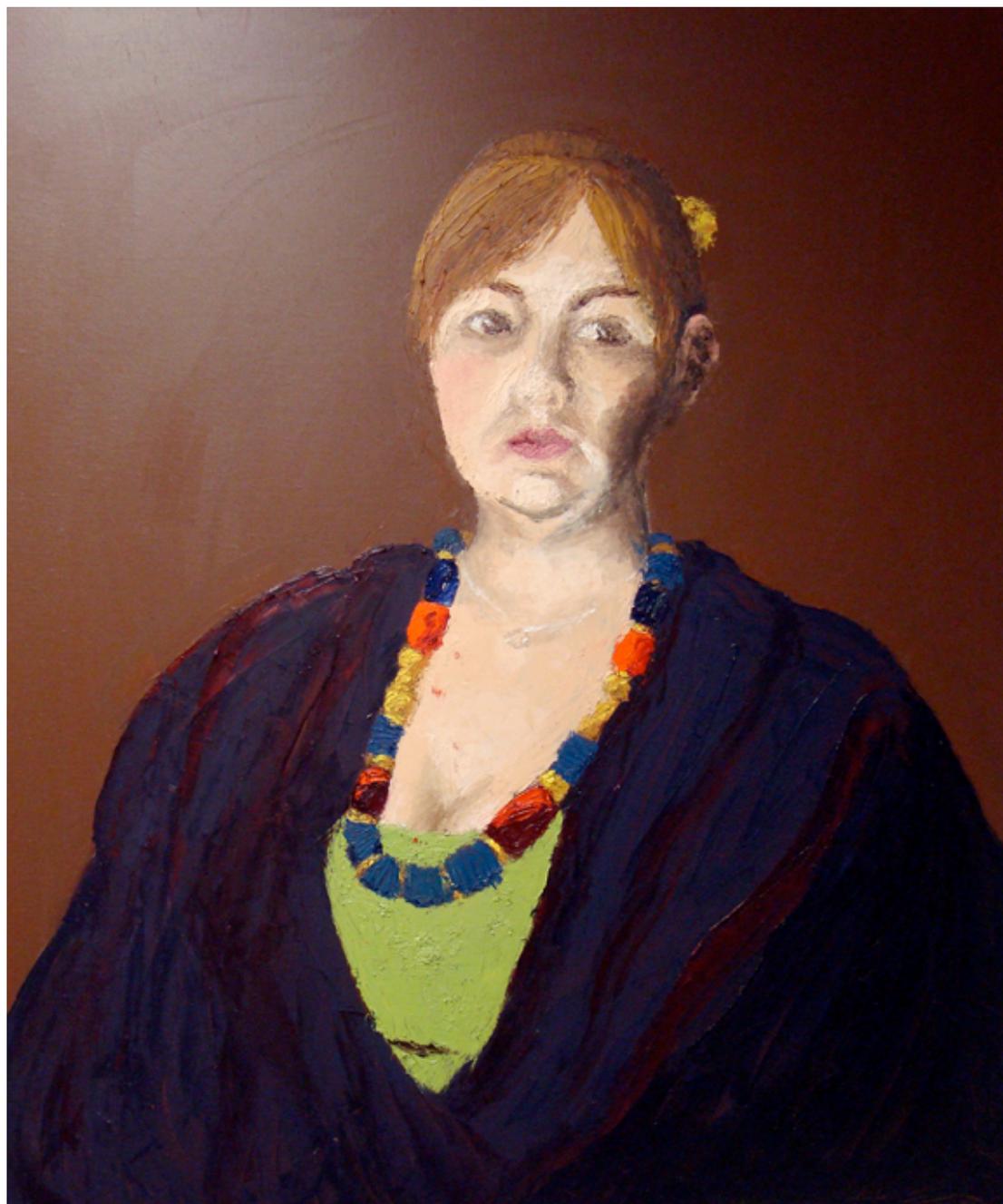
Lastly, the earrings, although they were designed as matching pairs, represent different pieces of knowledge that can be rearranged into infinite combinations. So Lizzy has complete creative control and can wear whichever composition suits her in the moment. It is my hope that wearing these earrings will remind Lizzy to pay attention to visual details, play, experiment, and create her own perspective and experience no matter what conventions might dictate.

**Self-Portrait (2)***painting*

mediums: oil paint, canvas

Liz Olson

As an artist I am concerned with the idea of labor as a function of the artwork. The brain only propels the hand; the power of the artist is in their ability to work with an idea even after they have begun working with it in the physical. The work will evolve as the hands take the original prompt from the brain and manipulate the idea and the physical and run into their own issues of material or tool. These small hitches and mistakes make the work unique, make the idea change the hands are the enablers of the artist. The hands let the brain know what is possible and what is not, sometimes the brain disagrees and that is when art is made.



## Maggie

*“[Through studying art, I’ve] learned that I can use my creative process to build my personal, artistic voice in my work and share my point of view with people.”*

Maggie grew up in and loves Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her parents and older sister who she is very close with make up the core of her family, and according to her, she’s lead a pretty uneventful life except for the crazy, hair-brained ideas she cooks up to explore artistically.

Before attending AHS, Maggie pursued lots of classes, but never really latched on to any mediums like drawing or painting. She recalls, “I always got frustrated because the more traditional mediums like pencils and paint didn’t let me work fast or accurately enough. I could never make it look real enough.” But then she got interested in photography in 9th grade after a workshop experience and when she returned home she remembers fondly, “I begged and badgered my parents for a camera of my own, even a crummy one. They finally gave in when they realized I wasn’t going to let up on it and bought me a used 35mm camera and some black and white film for Christmas that year. I was so excited, I was on cloud nine! And I even remember taking it outside that very day and walking around the neighborhood to take pictures. I was such an art geek already!”

Maggie has had a very positive experience at AHS pursuing her love of photography. She tells me, “I really like the way we’re treated like adults with our own identities, ideas and interests here at Perpich. And we have lots of time to work on our art.” But Maggie’s newest interest is in exploring the artistic process as a method of inquiry and discovery. She states, “I’ve learned to make the most of those spontaneous,

found moments and sudden happenings whether they occur when I'm shooting or in the darkroom." She goes on to say, "Through studying art, I think I have learned that I can ask questions and find and solve problems and develop concepts to work with [visually]. I've also learned that I can use my creative process to build my personal, artistic voice in my work and share my point of view with people."

The self-portrait, *Slumlord*, that Maggie submitted for exhibition speaks to this and portrays her point of view about the subject of the piece. It is a portrait of Maggie in that it serves as a representation of how she typically approaches making art and it gives us insights into how she employs her unique artistic process. The reticulated photograph she made is of a well-known Minneapolis street musician who regularly stakes his claim on a particular downtown piece of sidewalk to try and earn his living. The *Slumlord* title Maggie chose to assign the image seems to communicate her ideas about this performer who is known for acting like he "owns" this specific, grimy, corner spot. By creating this image/title pairing, it seems as though Maggie is comparing this musician with a slumlord because he charges his listeners to "rent" his musical talents as they walk by in exchange for him establishing himself on the corner. Or perhaps it's a commentary on some other aspect of the image entirely; Maggie leaves the image/title relationship up for audience interpretation as she often does by not explaining it in her statement.

However, regardless of the intention of her titling, Maggie has used her photographic eye and the developing and printing techniques she's learned through studying art to give the image a dinginess and a darkness so as to illicit an almost somber and sober examination of the situation. Additionally, she has also captured and

drawn attention to a situation others might be uncomfortable looking at when they encounter it on the street, one they may choose to ignore when confronted with it in reality. So by taking and developing this photo, Maggie freezes this scene and removes it from context so we can appreciate and examine the subtleties of it and the character involved more deeply. Maggie states that her aim as an artist is for her work to provoke emotion and thought. Thus, this piece portrays her artistic identity and her ability to meet this goal very adeptly.

And as our discussion progresses, Maggie and I talk about the important place art has come to have in her life since starting to study it more intensely at AHS. She says, “Now I’m really intrigued by trying to infuse a conceptual base into my artwork that resonates with other people, and I get inspired by my interactions with people and the complexities of my relationship with them. I haven’t found another way besides taking photos that lets me explore these things.” She goes on to say, “Studying art has also helped me to become more engaged in my education. I’ve discovered that it’s just how I think and how I learn best.”







**Maggie**

*scarf necklace*

mediums: hand cut yarn made from recycled t-shirts,  
glass beads, vintage buttons, designed glass beads

During my conversation with Maggie I learned that she enjoys taking an unplanned, flexible, light-hearted approach to her artwork. Through studying art, Maggie has learned to use the artistic creative process as a method of inquiry and discovery and she has learned to make the most of found moments and spontaneous happenings whether they occur when she is behind the camera or in the darkroom. Maggie has also learned to use the creative process to share her point of view and build her artistic voice.

Maggie's grounded, easy-going approach to the creative process and the development of her artistic voice were my inspiration for this portrait. The bright, boldly colored scarf necklace I created to portray Maggie is constructed from hand-cut yarn made from recycled t-shirts that I found at various second-hand thrift stores. When creating yarn from t-shirts, the composition of the finished yarn can be unpredictable depending on where the seams of the shirt naturally fall. T-shirt fabric also acts and stretches differently when cut into thin strips. This unpredictable material serves as the base of this piece. The glass beads dispersed over the surface of the scarf necklace represent the found moments and spontaneous happenings Maggie seeks out when making artwork. And the embellished shawl pin symbolizes Maggie as the constant in this seeming chaos; she is the pin that holds the layers of her endeavors together as she seeks to develop and share her voice. Lastly, the large designed glass button is inscribed

with the word, “Voice,” to communicate what Maggie feels she has most prominently learned to develop through studying art in school. So, when Maggie wears this piece I hope she is reminded to keep taking chances with her art, to keep developing her artistic point of view and voice, and to let spontaneity remain a driving force in her unique creative process.

**Slumlord***photograph*

mediums: reticulated photograph printed on paper

Maggie Smith

My art is not meant to mean any one particular thing. I don't go out thinking "I'm going to take this photo and use this color scheme to provoke this emotion and place item here to represent this." I know how to do that, but I don't think that that is the purpose of my art. I want my art to provoke emotion and thought, but I think that thoughts and emotions are so individual, that I, as an artist, have no control over what different people think of my art.

This piece depicts who I am as an artist because it represents how I typically approach making my art and using my artistic process. My work is generally playful, and I pay attention to how appealing the composition of my work is to the eye. I work mostly with black and white film and experimental photography. I use these processes because of the lack of control. You have to give up control to the camera, the developer, and the printing process, and for me to feel like an artist, I have to roll with the mistakes I make, and turn them into good things. If I can just click "undo" all the time because I don't like what I just did, I don't feel like I am putting any real work into my art. I have to embrace the mistakes, and realize that they are just part of my art and my process.



**Matt**

***“I’ve learned how to make objects that make the invisible things living  
in my mind and my morbid world come to life in 3D form.”***

Matt is a very candidly funny guy and as we interview in the ceramics studio he picks up various scrap pieces of metal mesh and paper and just starts sculpting them as he talks, his hands are perpetually in motion it seems. Growing up just blocks from AHS, and having a sister who graduated in the class of 1992, he’s known for a long time that he wanted to be a “Perpie” as he terms it.

In our ensuing discussion Matt says his interest in being an artist developed almost at birth. He insists, “I’ve been drawing and doing art since I was really little. Drawing was the only thing that could settle me down, still is. And I know tons of people say that all the time, like “Oh, I’m so great because I’ve been playing football since I could walk.” But for me it's actually true. My Mom still has drawings from when I was that young hanging on the wall that proves it. I don't know, art has just always been a big part of my life.”

At the time we interviewed, Matt was looking forward to studying animatronics at Ringling in Florida, but had just decided with his parents to postpone attendance for a year to prepare for the commitment financially. He professes, “I’m much more passionate about 3D art than 2D. I love to build and sculpt things and I want to make movie monsters.” He's also interested in learning to create special effects, costumes, and making 3D models for digital animators. Matt’s interest in theatrical art such as building and painting sets, doing costume makeup and making prop sculptures was fostered by

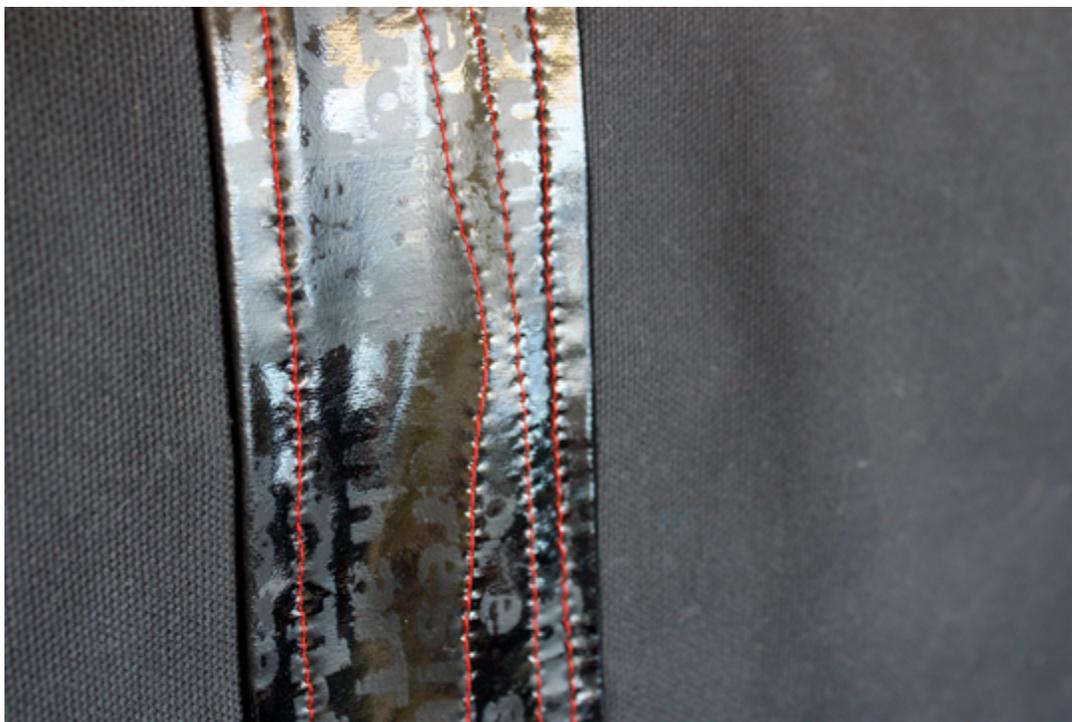
volunteer experiences he participates in with his Mom. Every year they volunteer at their church during the big theater festival.

However, Matt is experiencing a little inner turmoil now because he is sad to be leaving AHS. He's felt really at home in the program and says, "I wish I had another year here because I just love it here. At my old school I took commercial art and pottery in the second semester of my sophomore year, but art classes were for upper classmen. So I feel like I just got her and really got started and now we have to leave."

But in the short time Matt has been studying art, he recognizes that he's learned to "make objects that catch people off guard, that make them stop and think or even maybe jump and step back because they're grossed out a little." He continues, "I have fun seeing what kinds of reactions I can illicit in people with my art, like living all the time in a haunted house. I also love that I've learned how to make objects that make the invisible things living in my mind and my morbid world come to life in 3D form."

The self-portrait, *Trolin'*, that Matt submitted for exhibition exemplifies his learning. It also portrays monsters and other-worldly creatures which are Matt's passion. The gory, hairy, dirty droll that crawls out of the muddy ground next to a bleeding, severed gnome head posted for all to see on a large steak is grinning giddily leaving us no choice but to only imagine what is going through it's mind. Overall, the sculpture depicts a shocking, almost disturbing image that brings Matt's fantasy world to life for his viewers. I believe Matt chose this work as a self-portrait because it is typical of what he likes to make, of the artistic processes and mediums he most often explores, and it highlights the technical sculpting and painting skills he has honed for communicating his morbid imaginings in these mediums.

And it becomes clear from the rest of our conversation that in addition to finding joy in seeing people react to his art, Matt thrives on the freedom he finds in the studio environment to explore his ideas and new mediums. He says, “I just love to make things that matter to me, things that express my ideas. The art studio is where I feel most at home to do this.” Matt goes on to explain, “Besides, everything is just more interesting because of art. I’m not one who really cares for abstract art. I’ve enjoyed learning about it and artists like Jackson Pollock and what inspired them, but the more realistic the better for me. I like to make the imaginary feel as if it could be real in order to make this reality even more interesting than it already is... and if it’s little gory too, even better!”







**Matt**

*messenger bag*

mediums: screen printed vinyl and canvas fabric,  
computer generated fabric

Matt is the type of person who will continually surprise you. When I interviewed him I learned that attending AHS was a long-time aspiration for him. I also learned that he began experimenting with sculpting creatures at a very young age. Through studying art, Matt has learned to make images that satisfy his very vivid imagination and has learned how to create objects that make the invisible things living in his mind come to life in 3D form. This is not so very unusual except that the invisible things in Matt's mind tend to be rather darkly humorous and macabre in nature. He is, in a way, a modern day Dr. Frankenstein, an imaginative creator and lover of monsters.

When making this portrait of Matt, I was inspired by his attraction to the darkly humorous and by his imagination. The plain, black canvass on the outside of the messenger bag represents Matt's outwardly calm and unassuming exterior nature, but the black-on-black screen printed vinyl stripe detailed with red stitching represents a crack in this exterior that inevitably gives his inner world away to those who aren't afraid to peek inside. The vinyl stripe is printed with the phrase, "Bring the invisible to life," to communicate in Matt's words what he has learned from studying art while his inner world is portrayed by the fabric on the inside of the messenger bag. To achieve the effect I wanted on this fabric, I photographed raw steak then digitally printed these images onto it. I then used this fabric to line the inner pocket of the messenger bag

because, just like with Matt, one needs to look slightly under the surface to find out what is really going on. The images of raw steak signify the sometimes, gory yet humorous nature of Matt's creations as well as the raw potential Matt possesses. So it is my hope that in carrying and using this messenger bag Matt will continually be reminded to bring his inner world to life regardless of how shocking the results might seem at first.

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### **Trolin'**

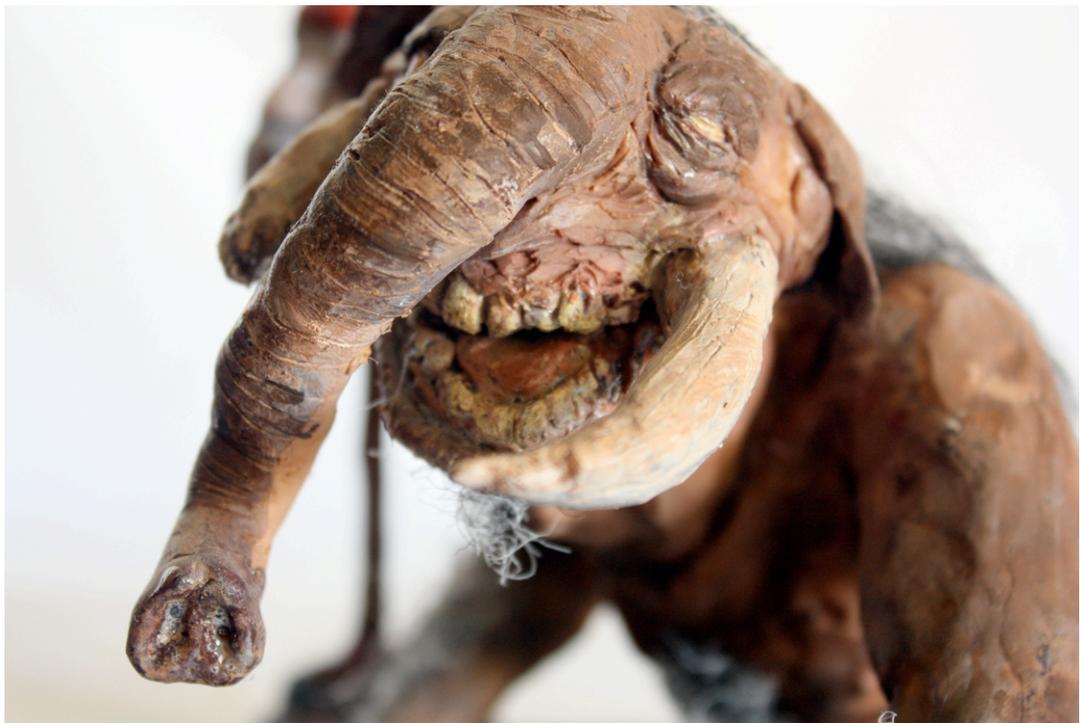
*sculpture*

mediums: air-dry clay, Sculpey, paint

Matt Baehr

My biggest artistic influence from the moment I started drawing was creatures. Dinosaurs were my biggest fascination from age two through five and an apatosaurus was my first recognizable drawing. As I got older not much changed. I began drawing inspiration from all of my favorite monster movies. At age seven I started sculpting and it became my passion. Now I'm still sculpting and taking all of my inspiration from horror movies. Now seeing my own monsters in the movies doesn't seem that far out of reach. This piece illustrates the age-old war between trolls and gnomes with my own gruesome twist.





**Michael**

*“Through studying art I've learned to see a lot of things as interconnected, it's made everything more relevant to everything else. It's like the missing link for me.”*

- Michael hails from Sherburne, a small town near Fairmont and Mankato in southern Minnesota. His Dad is a Boiler Operator and his Mom is a School Social Worker. Michael is the baby in his family with two older sisters who don't live in Minnesota anymore. When recalling his childhood, he states, “Art wasn't a big part of my life growing up. I didn't really even pursue it very much beyond what we were required to do.” He also discusses his experiences in school as really frustrating a lot of the time and even though he loves to learn, he found himself on academic probation before applying to AHS. Just before Michael entered high school the art program was cut, so he ended up taking wood shop class and it was the only class he did well in. He struggled in a lot of other academic areas.

To escape or remove himself from his academic struggles, Michael sought out quirky, creative endeavors. He first got interested in art by watching Bob Ross programs on public television in middle school and just began to follow along with his instruction. This led to playing with basic drawing programs on the computer one day and then he just kept after it. After high school, Michael plans to study animation and interdisciplinary art, possibly advertising.

But despite his academic struggles, Michael is really inspired by learning about new things then making an art piece about it as a way of solidifying his knowledge about it then communicating it to other people. He shares, “I like to do research on things like biology—like now I'm researching how colors develop in nature and what the

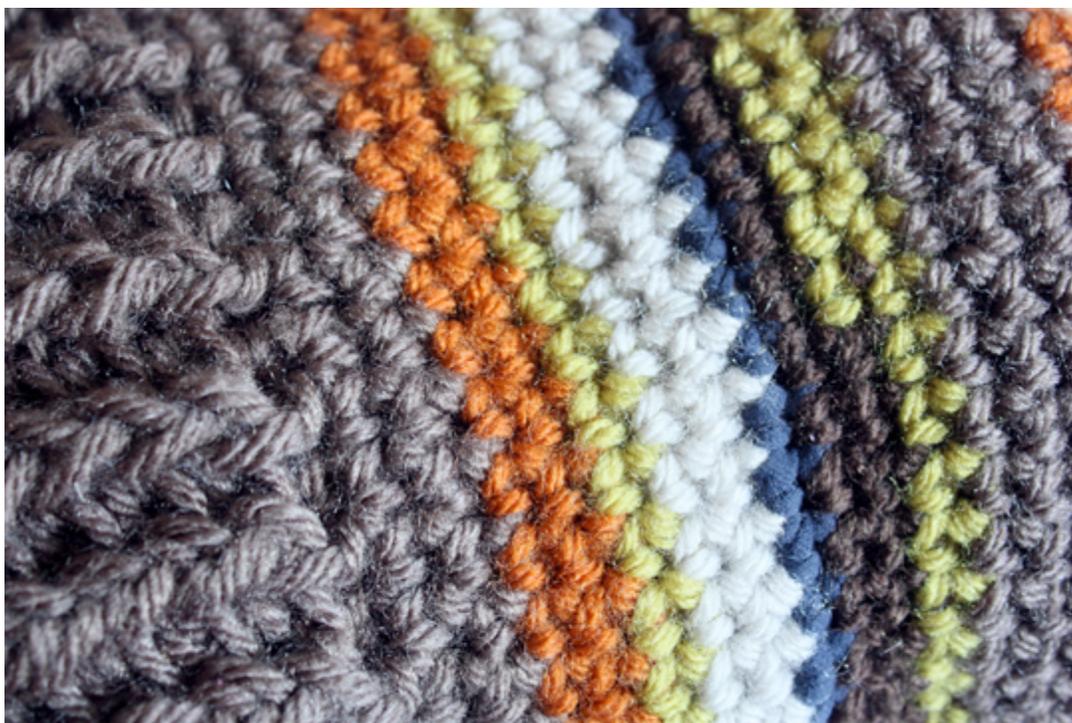
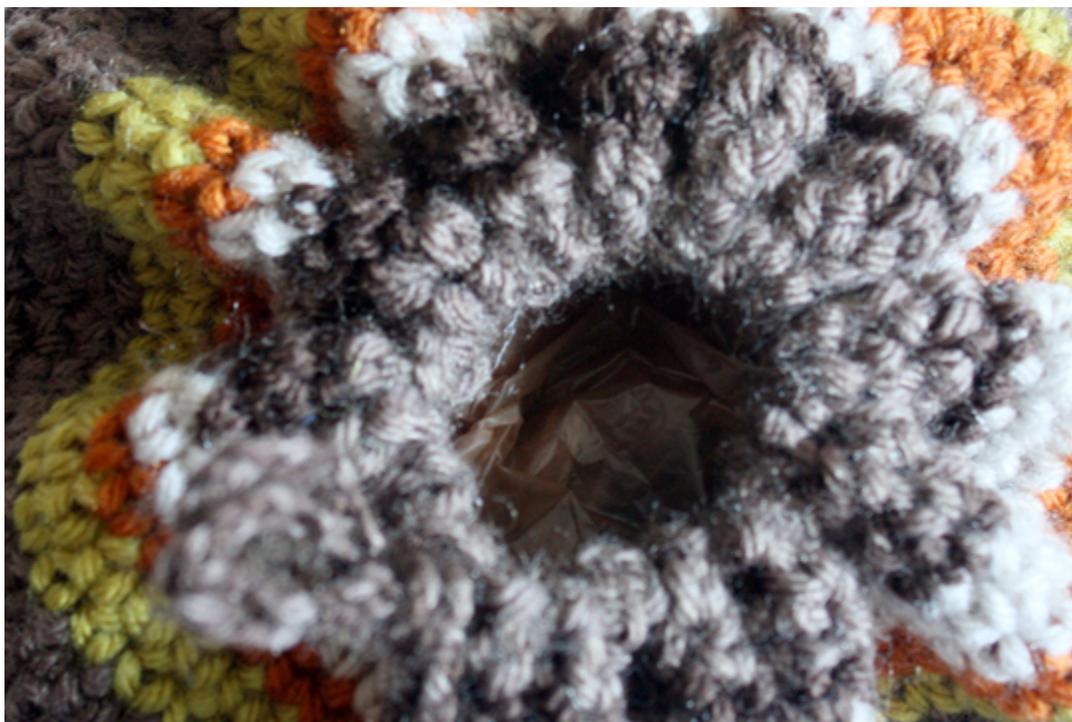
different variables are that drive color evolution and I'm making a video piece about what I've learned that is conceptual, aesthetic, and maybe could be educational for someone who sees it.”

When first attending AHS, Michael was really reluctant to consider himself an artist, but once he developed a concise view of what he considers art and why he make it, when he had clear definition of his motivations, he was able to classify himself as an artist. He states, “Now, after studying art, I'm more confident and I have clearer goals for what I want to do with my life. My art has become more public and I'm able to bring more of my ideas to fruition by following the creative process to the end rather than just spinning ideas for myself.” He continues, “Through studying art I've learned to see a lot of things as interconnected. I can see a lot more relationships between different disciplines, it's made everything more relevant to everything else. It's like the missing link for me.”

The self-portrait, *Art*, that Michael submitted for exhibition clearly depicts the interdisciplinary nature typical of his work. The words, which are names of different academic disciplines, and the cell-like imagery Michael used in the composition are all visually connected throughout the foreground and are overlaid on a background sprinkled with interconnecting grids. Through the use of this symbolism Michael clearly depicts the intellectual and connected concepts he gets inspired to explore in his work. The piece also portrays what he feels is his role as an artist and what he has learned from studying art; to make connections between various areas of knowledge. Michael says, “In a nutshell, I make art to express what I know or what I come to know, it's an extension of learning for me.”

Throughout the remainder of our conversation, Michael also discusses that by studying art he has learned to make things and pursue learning in ways that are meaningful to him. He explains, “Art is expansion in its purest sense. It's association of one idea with another, which is metaphor, and it's about symbolism in relation to communication. It's the opportunity to create something independently that matters to me and articulates my experience.” Michael has also discovered that, “Making art can help me develop more independence in my academic explorations. I've learned to follow my curiosity and inspiration through the creative process to the other side where there's a product that I made that I can share with others and be really proud of. Making art is really how I learn.”







**Michael**

*convertible hat*

mediums: wool yarn, handmade recycled t-shirt yarn,  
handmade silver beads

Michael is, at heart, an artistically inclined philosopher and intellectual. He approaches life with his mind first and he has a deep love of learning. Through studying art, Michael has learned that making images as another way of learning and knowing. He has learned to highlight connections then share what he learns with the world as a means for coming into ownership of his learned knowledge.

After talking with Michael I was inspired by his active, flexible intellect, and his desire to connect ideas and bodies of knowledge together visually in his art. In this portrait I wanted to play with the idea of a thinking cap since Michael always seems to have his on. The crocheted cap is made from simple wool yarn intertwined with recycled t-shirt yarn. The stripes represent the many layers of Michael's mind and his ability to learn from everything he finds around him then interconnect this new knowledge in order to create something new. To represent the flexibility of thought Michael possesses I wanted this piece to have multiple purposes, so this cap can also convert to a neck cuff by opening up the top and slipping it over the head. The drawstring at the top controls whether this piece forms a cap or a neck cuff in the same way that Michael controls the outcomes of his intellectual explorations. The handmade silver beads that wrap around the ends of the drawstring are stamped with the words, "Interconnected," and "Relevance" which were Michael's words to describe what he

feels he's learned from studying art in school. It is my hope that when wearing this piece Michael is inspired with an abundance of brilliant new ideas and connections to make and share with us in his art.

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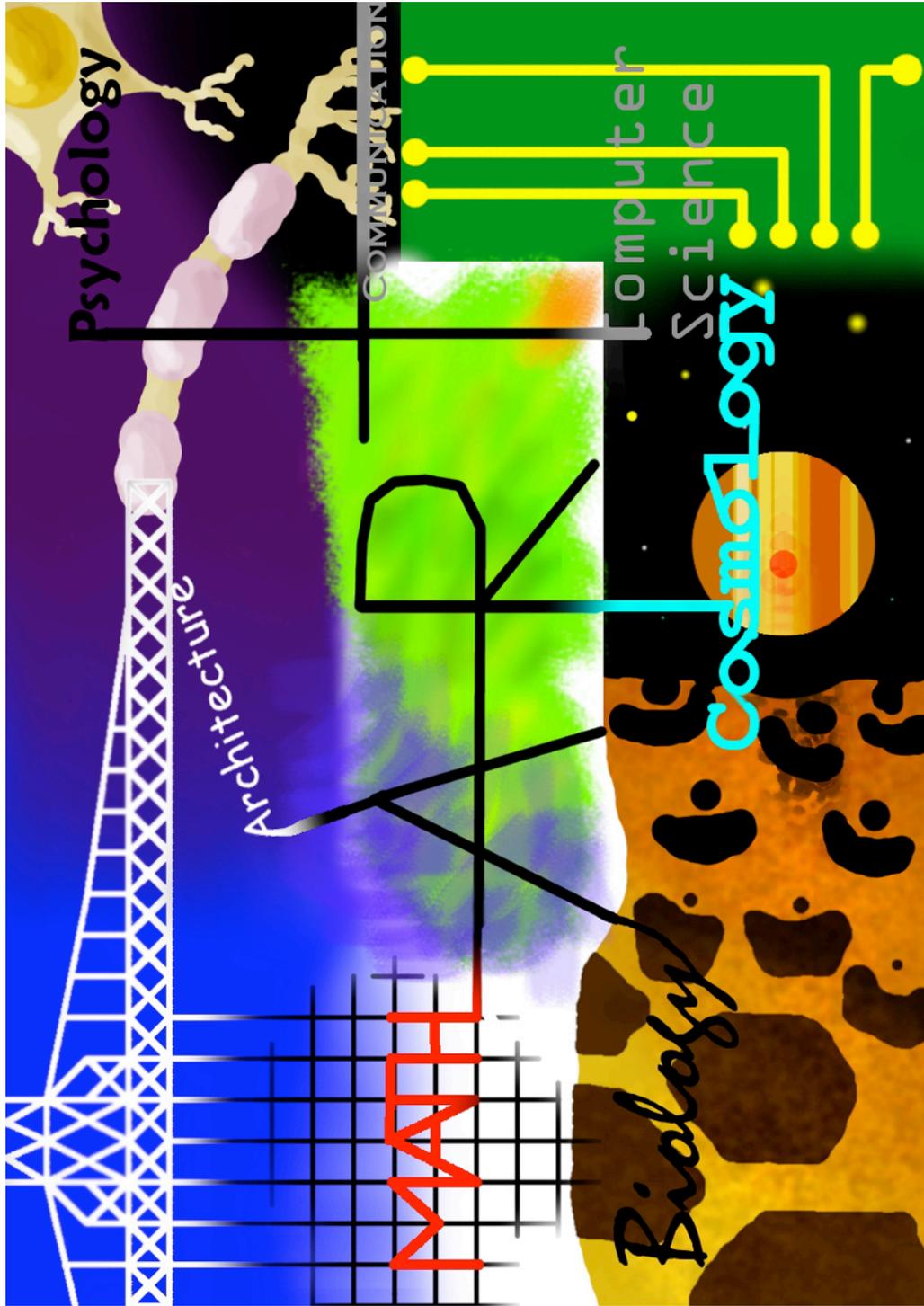
## **Art**

*digital illustration*

mediums: ink, photo quality inkjet paper

Michael McConnell

My piece visually explains what I feel my role as an artist is. I make connections between various areas of knowledge. Literally in this piece, and figuratively in life, where those connections occur I make art. My art is inspired by what I learn about. By making art I solidify my knowledge as well as pass it along to others. All of the things listed and illustrated around the edges of my piece are topics that I have incorporated into previous works.



## Nicola

***“Making art is such a thoughtful, cerebral yet emotional experience and from studying art I’ve learned to fuse imagery and concepts that are important to me.”***

Nicola was born and raised in Southeast Minneapolis and is only child. Art experiences were prolific in her house growing up since her Dad is architect and her Mom is a Business Manager in an architect firm. Throughout school Nicola was involved in the theater program and even performed at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. She first became interested in art through interactions with her grandma who used to work in fiber arts, puppet making and doll arts.

Nicola is really inspired by instances where science and art meet and at the time that I interviewed her she was planning to create an independent studies major at the University of Minnesota in global studies, environmental studies and collaborative arts. She explains, “Collaborative arts melds visual arts with performance art. It’s where I can explore connections between everything I learn and know through actively performing art.” Nicola is also interested in interdisciplinary sorts of learning and making art, especially public art that prompts or promotes audience participation. She says, “Making art is such a thoughtful, cerebral yet emotional experience and from studying art I’ve learned to fuse imagery and concepts that are important to me.”

The self-portrait pieces, *Poison Sumac*, *The Language Of Thirst*, *Luminescence*, and *Unearthing*, that Nicola submitted for exhibition depict her thoughtful creative process and the conceptual underpinnings of her work. In each of the videos she performs music to a series of orchestrated light shows over environmental or natural imagery. She also uses spoken word and group musical performances underlying

moving video images in a few of the videos. But as a whole, these abstract films are an exhibition of public performances Nicola did to raise awareness about various environmental issues she finds important. She created these dances of light, color, image, and sound to bring her concepts to life and get her messages into the audience's head because, above all, for Nicola art is an advocacy platform, a method for drawing attention to issues. She explains, "I need a purpose to make something. I am most inspired by social and contemporary issues and creating social action with art." Nicola needs for her art to have deep roots and meanings, "not just for me but I want what I create to become meaningful to other people too. I guess at the heart of it I'm an activist with my art."

We continue and discuss that through studying art, Nicola has also learned to look at the world in a multidisciplinary, connected way. And although she considers her experiences in the schools she attended prior to AHS filled with opportunity and diversity, she decided to apply to AHS so that she could pursue a more rigorous arts and academic program. Now, at the end of her senior year, Nicola feels she made the right choice because she's learned creative ways to communicate about issues that are really important to her, ways of communicating she feels she can't do as effectively using other modes of communication. "In my art I get to create a world, a forum where social norms and attitudes and trends can be questioned," she says, "I can also create a space and where I can draw attention to life's little pleasures like the green of the trees we take for granted." She continues, "With my art I want to help us as a society question what we're doing and examine consequences of our collective actions." In describing her artistic intentions and goals, Nicola says, "I just think communicating these big

ideas with an audience through performance art and with imagery is the most powerful way to stick in people's brains. I mean if an image is worth a thousand words, then I want to put hundreds of images in people's brains when they view my work so they vividly remember the messages I'm trying to convince them to act on."







**Nicola**

*jewelry tree*

mediums: Swarovski crystals, glass and plastic beads, wooden beads, mirror pieces, handmade silver bead, flannel fabric, ribbons, wood frame

Nicola's connection with making art runs deep.

Through studying art Nicola has learned how engage in a thoughtful, cerebral and emotional creative process to make and use images that help her create awareness about issues that are important to her. She has learned to create a forum where norms can be questioned, and to evoke people's common appreciation of life's simple thrills and beauties. For Nicola making art is both a self-reflective activity and a way to hold a mirror up to humanity so we can question what we see.

In creating this portrait of Nicola I was inspired by the deep, thoughtful passion she brings to her art and I wanted to explore the concepts of self- and world-reflectivity. The tree with its far-reaching roots and knotted trunk are representations of Nicola's creativity, ever-growing point of view, and of her artistic platform for advocacy. The handmade, silver plaque affixed to the front of the trunk of the tree is imprinted with the word, "Thoughtful" to summarize the creative process Nicola says she's learned to engage in by studying art. The mirrors on the back of the tree depict Nicola's reflectivity, and the jeweled pieces adorning the front of the tree symbolize life's simple thrills and beauties she seeks to draw our attention to with her art. Lastly, the orange owl affixed to the front of the tree represents Nicola's constant pursuit of wisdom through artistic examination. As a whole, this piece depicts the cyclical, creative

process that Nicola engages in during her artistic explorations and I hope by wearing the jewels that adorn this piece Nicola is perpetually inspired to continue feeding her creative roots and making art so her artistic platform continues to grow and be enriched.

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### **Poison Sumac, The Language Of Thirst, Luminescence, Unearthing**

*digital films*

Nicola Carpenter

#### **What is ART to me?**

Art is a way to concentrate,  
a way to see our surroundings.

Art is a way to communicate  
a way to show what we notice.

Art is a way to criticize,  
a way to question what we are told.

Artists learn how to see things closely,  
and once we see things closely,  
we can see the cracks in our way of life,  
and can share how to see,  
how to look,  
with the world.

Whether it be theater, film, painting, or music,  
art has the capacity to change minds.  
It can become a kind of creative propaganda  
for ideas, for thoughts.

I don't make art for myself, but for the viewer.

I want to share how I love the smell of fresh air,  
love to feel cool clean water,  
enjoy the company of different species,  
and that by just LIVING how we live,  
we're robbing these things from the future.

I also want to share my optimism,  
and the beauty I see in the world,  
in people, in humanity.

Art is a way to concentrate,  
a way to see our surroundings.

Art is a way to communicate  
a way to show what we notice.

Art is a way to criticize, a way to question what we are told.



**Rebecca**

***“By studying art I’ve learned skills I can use to make images that bring what I find in my head to life, to describe what I imagine with images.”***

When I first sat down with Rebecca for our interview, she appeared shy, trepidatious and introverted at first, but as our discussion progressed, I learned that she is secretly very outgoing. Growing up in Edina, Minnesota as a middle child was filled with lots of activity, but these activities surrounded sports more than art. She describes her whole family as athletic and “artistically challenged.” But she says she’s close with her family and still really enjoys traveling with them and playing the odd pick-up game of volleyball.

At the school Rebecca attended prior to applying to AHS, she discusses feeling a lot of pressure to perform academically and achieve high grades. To try to stay ahead of the achievement curve and stand out, she assumed a lot of leadership roles in sports, like becoming captain of the track team, she almost obsessively pursued extracurricular academic activities like math league and science competitions. She explains, “I always felt like I could do that kind of work in math and science easily, I could always succeed with it, I just didn't love it. My heart just wasn't in it and I just didn't feel like I could be adventurous enough in those arenas. So I decided on sort of a whim to take a painting class and that's what did it for me.”

Rebecca was eager to apply to AHS once she learned about it from her art teacher and she says attending AHS is the best thing she's ever done. “Perpich is where I really became an artist, where I gained confidence and independence in my artwork, and where I really felt like I could access the professional art world. I learned that I can

reach my goals,” she says. And a little further in our conversation, Rebecca discusses how her art and painting have come to really mean a lot to her in ways she didn’t expect. “By studying art I’ve learned skills I can use to make images that bring what I find in my head to life, to describe what I imagine with images,” she says.

For Rebecca, making art is how she connects her inner and outer worlds. The self-portrait pieces, *Untitled*, that she submitted for exhibition are fantastical illustrations of whimsical, humorous poems she wrote. These drawn and painted compositions she created demonstrate her learned abilities to bring her imagination to life on the page using images. Rebecca rendered the animals she conjured up in her head in as charming, sweet characters, yet their stories are somewhat melancholy as depicted by the poems. With these compositions Rebecca invites us to share an adventure into her inner, fantastical world, and by juxtaposing the funny and charming images with the sad and lonely poems, she describes her take on the types of fairy tales she imagines so we can see them too.

Thus it is evident that through studying art and learning techniques to make images, Rebecca has also learned how to examine knowledge and her lived and imagined experiences through an artistic, creative lens, “and to make something concrete from nebulous, intellectual things like concepts and facts.”







## Rebecca

### *backpack purse*

mediums: vintage and new fabric, computer generated fabric, re-purposed men's tie, ribbon, handmade silver zipper pull

Through studying art Rebecca has learned to communicate the presentations of her subconscious mind. She has learned to make images to enliven what she finds in her mind's world and engage the viewer in an imaginative, visual journey to the depths of her fantastical thoughts.

In making this portrait of Rebecca, I was interested in creating a representation of the richness of her mind using the metaphor of a surrealistic garden. The white fabric on the outside of the bag represents the infinite potential of Rebecca's subconscious mind, and the deep pink chrysanthemum flowers (traditionally a symbol of optimism and joy) signify the sudden bursts of rich, imaginative imagery that grow there. However, the mums are not permanently affixed to the bag, and rather are pins that can be removed when desired and affixed to other garments much in the same way that Rebecca can choose to pluck various ideas residing in her mind's world and bring them into reality. The computer generated fabric I designed to line the inside of the bag is illustrated with a pattern depicting a graphic representation of hundreds of seeds. These seeds portray ideas, stories and thoughts that have been planted but not yet sprouted inside Rebecca's mind, and the handmade, silver zipper pull attached to the zipper bisecting this plane is stamped with the word, "Connect," to convey in her words what Rebecca perceives she has learned from studying art. The pull also helps to draw the

zipper together much like art making for Rebecca helps her draw her inner and outer worlds together. So I hope that when using this bag Rebecca is encouraged to continue connecting things within her world and to grow and harvest all the seeds of possibility in her mind when making art.

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## Untitled

*illustrations*

watercolor and ink

Rebecca Rose

Ready for  
Anything

Art is the end of the thread that connects my mind to the outside world  
Vulnerably positioned and awaiting critique, my work is translation

Decipher it  
But that doesn't mean the tangled web of thread gets any smaller

In fact  
It does everything but

Our conversation continues visually and psychologically

You wrap yourself in a cocoon of thread  
And it's only a matter of time



**Seth**

***“By studying art, I've learned to capture and articulate all the beauty and ugliness and benevolence and hatred and all the other dichotomies each of us embody. I've learned to examine aspects of our existence visually and with moving images in order to make sense out of it.”***

Seth's enthusiasm for art and being an artist is just plain contagious. It's easy to see even after just a few minutes of interaction that when he's making his art he's in his element. But this wasn't always how things were in Seth's world. He grew up in Minneapolis with his two younger sisters and his parents who are both writers and editors, and even considering all the support he got at home for pursuing his passion, he didn't experience much support from his teachers or peers. The issue being that in his previous school environments, making films wasn't considered an art form. It was just seen as something devious that bored teens do to get attention on YouTube according to Seth's recollection.

But for Seth, this wasn't the purpose by any means. He likes to write and tell stories.

“This is just all that I love to do. I'm obsessed and I think it's going to take a lifetime to satisfy my obsession with making films and telling stories this way.” Because his passion wasn't seen as a legitimate way to express himself, Seth wasn't terribly motivated to learn in classes he took at his old school, and he struggled in lots of ways. “I made it by, but not by much! Mostly I just tried to get through each day,” he says, “I used to have clinical issues with self-esteem and depression, so in school I just kept my head down and just looked forward to going home so I could do what I really loved to do. I was just biding my time in school.” This was not a healthy attitude towards his

education, Seth reflects, but he didn't know what else to do. He says, "Until I started making art and communicating with images, I felt like I was a very square peg trying to fit in a very round hole."

The digital self-portrait photograph, *This Is Not Me*, that Seth submitted for exhibition depicts this struggle he engaged in for a long time and the artistic identity he developed as a result. The apple pierced throughout with dark, sharp, foreboding nails can be interpreted to depict Seth and how his painful experiences in school affected him daily before he started exploring art courses. While the flaming candle seems to insinuate that he has somehow found hope and purpose in his existence despite his past struggles. The antithetical title Seth chose for this piece can also be interpreted to indicate that he has moved on from thinking of and portraying himself this way. I believe this portrait representation of Seth clearly depicts the journey he has been on to find his natural modes of communication, and making lens-based art seems to be just what he was searching for.

Seth states that he has been interested in photography and film since about 6th grade. He states, "These are raw art forms that are all-encompassing, especially film making. It takes in music, set design, lighting, dialog or script and the human element and moves it from a giant mess of beauty into a story." He continues, "It reflects realism. I like to take the idea of reality and manipulate it or find fantastical situations and place them in real contexts." And beyond AHS Seth has big plans; to first attend Columbia University to study filmmaking and production, then to debut his first film by the time he's 25. He beams, "It's easy to be ambitious when you love what you do. I want to be able to show an audience what I'm thinking, what I'm feeling, what I'm

seeing. The camera is a window into my weird, sometimes twisted mind, but it's also a way for me to explore and portray the human condition, and a means to mirror ourselves to ourselves as a society.

A little further into the interview, Seth says, “By studying art, I've learned to capture and articulate all the beauty and ugliness and benevolence and hatred and all the other dichotomies each of us embody. I've learned to examine aspects of our existence visually and with moving images in order to make sense out of it.” Seth excitedly continues, “Filmmaking allows me to examine the human condition, to open my work up for interpretation and can foster discussions with larger parts of society.”

It's clear from his exuberance that Seth has truly come into his own through studying filmmaking and photography, and his seemingly insatiable drive to create art, and his affection for this pursuit is tremendously endearing. He says finally that, "Studying art is like living in a dream or a fantasy. I never thought I could make a living from doing something like filmmaking before I got to try it out and experiment with it. Before it was just something I was dying to do just for me, for fun, as an escape, but now I've learned it's actually possible for me to get to spend my life in this fantasy!"







## Seth

*laptop sleeve*

mediums: screen printed vintage and new fabric

Seth's unbridled, giddy and childlike enthusiasm for making art is undeniable and rather endearing. During our interview Seth shared that although making art to express himself has been his passion as long as he can remember, his way of going about it wasn't nurtured or accepted until he came to AHS. Now, through studying art Seth learned that making and using still and moving images can be a method for examining our humanity and social constructs in order to make sense of experiences, for highlighting inauthentic conventional thought patterns, and for actively portraying his individuality.

For Seth, the experience of finally getting to express himself in the way he desired without social pressures or artificial restrictions felt unreal, like "living a dream or fantasy," and this experience was incredibly influential for Seth. Dream and fantasy served as my initial inspiration for this portrait I made of him. The computer is where Seth's artistic visions, dreams and fantasies become reality; it is the medium with which he coalesces the images, video and sound he captures with various digital media tools. So I chose to create a special laptop sleeve to portray Seth. One side of this reversible sleeve is adorned with utilitarian, steel grey canvas fabric screen printed and appliquéd with various textures and images of digital media tools. Additionally, interspersed throughout this textural landscape I've screen printed the phrase, "It's like living a dream or fantasy," to convey in his words the raw excitement Seth feels when engaging

in his creative process and when studying art. Overall, this rougher looking side of the sleeve represents Seth's freewheeling passion for making digital art that has finally been unleashed. The other side of the sleeve is made from a sophisticated, black, pinstripe fabric appliquéd with a very wistful, vintage fabric depicting rockets, space ships and robots. This side of the sleeve characterizes Seth's dedicated and serious pursuit of artistic expression paired with his childlike enthusiasm and when using this laptop sleeve it is my hope that Seth will be reminded to keep pursuing his passion with blissful determination.

**This Is Not Me**

digital photograph

mediums: ink, photo quality inkjet paper

Seth Oberle

I made this surreal self-portrait choosing not to photograph my physical representation. I chose an apple to symbolize the fact that when I was a student in my old schools all my teachers and peers would try to teach me the right way to be; how to be just like every one else. But I don't work the way every one else did and school was hell for me. Putting a square peg in a round hole doesn't work. Much like the nails in the photo that are poking into the apple the teachers were persistent and tried to teach me their beliefs. But I knew these artificial beliefs did not belong inside me, and, finally, I recognized one single spark, represented by the candle, inside me. My creativity and self-expression that were buried deep inside me have been found and brought out of me through exploring my unique way of making art.



**Thomas**

***“Through studying art, I’ve learned that I can bring all my interests together to tell a story.”***

When describing his family, Thomas states, “We’re kind of an intellectual family. We’re all sort of geeky like that.” Thomas is definitely the kind of kid in school who got sent out of the room frequently for talking too much and asking too many questions. He’s outgoing, precocious and when he gets excited about something he claims he can talk about it for days.

Thomas grew up in Roseville, Minnesota with his one, younger sister. His Mom is a stay-at-home Mom and his Dad is a Health Care Planning consultant. Thomas’s interest in art developed very quickly as a child. As we talk, he shares that when he was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, he got really “geeked” about ancient Egypt after he saw an episode of Sesame Street where the main characters met a little Egyptian ghost boy, “then I saw the movie The Prince of Egypt and I was a gonner! I knew then that I wanted to make movies and animations and I haven’t let go of that dream yet. He goes on to say, “So my first art project was a movie about Moses and I was the main character and I enlisted half the neighborhood to appear in it too. I wrote the script and did everything. It even included animation special effects. My Dad helped me and was my camera man.” This was the start of Thomas’s journey, and now as graduation looms he has made plans attend New York University and go to the Tish School for film studies.

Thomas also describes his inspiration as coming from all four corners of the earth and everything in between; spirituality, religion, other cultures, science, scaring people-he has an obsession with horror movies-philosophy, books he reads, history and

almost everything else under the sun inspires him. He is also obsessed (in a healthy way he assures me) with the act and process of creating. “When I make art, I associate with Mad Scientists, I feel like Dr. Frankenstein. I'm taking materials from the earth, the basic elements, and compiling them, cobbling them together and breathing life into them. I infuse what I make with life. That's why I like animation the best. You can actually take random objects and make a little homunculus out of them then give it life.”

Thomas describes his interest in art as an intense affinity for examining science and philosophy and imagery simultaneously. He wants to be a sort of Renaissance man like Leonardo da Vinci. Currently he pursues making sequential art that tells a story like comic book arts, filmmaking and animation. He says, “Through studying art, I've learned to tell stories, to communicate symbolically and graphically. When I make art I'm taking my ideals and translating them into visual communication, taking something divine and putting it into physical form. Through studying art, I've learned that I can bring all my interests together to tell a story.”

The self-portrait, *Dr. Thomas Boguszewski's Castle of Delerium*, Thomas submitted for exhibition clearly indicates this. In the comic book he rendered he portrays himself as a mad scientist who gets inspired to create something from disparate parts or ideas, and the pursuit of breathing life into his creation becomes maddeningly all-encompassing for him. This story Thomas illustrates is essentially a dissection of the creative process he's learned to engage in through his pursuit of studying art. Thomas identifies with the “Mad Scientist” archetype most closely when he is making art that visually communicates about his ideas, inspirations, and stories with an audience. This piece illustrates Thomas's belief that his creative process is both a means of breathing

life into his ideas and a means to pursue research into concepts that interest him. He explains, “Like right now I'm researching alchemy and ritualistic symbolism because these ideas are going to be incorporated into one of my projects. So through studying art I've learned to create and use a symbolic language that I can use to communicate about aspects of all I learn, about humanity, and about our existence here as a species.”

For Thomas, studying and making art is also something he considers essential to his hierarchical needs. He feels that, "Making art is almost like dreaming, because when you dream, you take all the stuff in your unconscious mind that you've experienced in a day or a week or whatever, and collage it into a cool little video that you get to watch in your head at night. And after you've had the dream and you wake up, you might not be able to consciously understand or decipher it completely, but you still get the meaning behind it on some level even if you can't articulate it” Ultimately Thomas is driven by the pursuit to recreate these little dream movies in the waking hours for everyone to see. He says, “I take the ideas I see in the world and in almost a dream-like way using time, imagination and inspiration, I can combine them and put them into a story, whether the outcome is a painting or a movie, it's all just a story about the secret order behind life.” He concludes, “It's like with masks. Since you choose them, they show what you feel like on the inside. Since you design them, they show your inner character. So even though you wear them on the outside, it's your inner spirit coming through from the inside.”





## Thomas

### *belts*

mediums: military style cotton belts with nickel finish buckles, digital collages, resin

Thomas is a philosophical storyteller. When you talk with him it is inevitable that you will begin

discussing one topic but end on a completely different note, yet where the conversation ends up is still somehow related to where it began. Through studying art Thomas has learned to use visual images to tell stories. Whether through animation, film or other forms of sequential art, Thomas's biggest artistic thrill is telling a story, and usually his stories represent the imaginative and sometimes dark but humorous constructs of his inner mind.

To create this portrait of Thomas I was inspired by the storytelling mechanism of film and popular movies. To reference the darker, twisted subject matter that often emerges in Thomas's stories, I digitally collaged scenes and imagery from classically famous horror movies such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* and *Birds*, William Friedkin's *Exorcist* and Steven Spielberg's *Poltergeist* among others. In each of the digital collages I embedded the phrase, "Art is creating a story," to capture what Thomas perceives he has learned to do through studying art. Then, to freeze these images forever in time similarly to how the camera is used to capture fleeting moments, I sealed the collages in resin. The utterly utilitarian, black, blank, military style, cotton belts are roughly the same width as 35mm film and they represent all the latent stories lurking in Thomas's mind yet to be developed and shared. I affixed the resin encapsulated digital

collages onto the belt buckles to denote that the story is where Thomas's artistic vision comes full circle, the story is what holds his art together. So, I hope that when wearing these belts, Thomas is encouraged to continue developing, directing and producing his stories for presentation to his audiences.

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### **Thomas Boguszewski's Castle Of Delerium**

*comic book*

mediums: pencil, pen, digital photo-collage

Thomas Boguszewski

*Dr. Thomas Boguszewski's Castle of Delirium* is a story outlining precisely *why* I make art. In many ways, the artwork is its own artist statement. However, while *Castle of Delirium* explains why I create art *in general*, I will now relate to you how I created the work and why I made certain specific choices with the concept and design of the comic book world.

#### **How did I make it?**

In June of 2009, I doodled the comic in a story-sketch format, wrote a script, and then came up with thumbnails for all of the pages. However, I didn't finish the actual comic pages until July 2010. When I sat down and started sketching in 2009, the entire story came pouring from my fingertips with incredible ease, and doing the thumbnails for the pages was a blast because I could practice making layout gags and comics storytelling tricks. But when the time came to pencil the "finished" pages, I froze up, and I didn't touch the project again for many moons.

I think the reason for this was that after improvising the comic once already, I was grasped by a terrible *boredom* at the prospect of "just drawing my thumbnails all over again." Plus, I was intimidated at the prospect of making "a whole 24 page comic" out of nothing. I felt that each drawing I did during the penciling stage was just a means to the end of having a "finished comic" and I was afraid that such a process had no place for improvisation.

Basically, I had a poor grasp of the artistic *process*.

Over the course of the next year, I began to collect ideas and come up with the outlook that I needed. While studying the Liberal Arts at New York University, I read about

German dramatist Bertolt Brecht who theorized that a piece of “epic” theater needs to be made out of scenes that could stand as self-contained *episodes*. While taking a Filmmaking course over the summer I realized that the best feature films are made up of scenes that could stand alone to some degree as short films. On my way back to Minnesota I read a book on writing called “Bird by Bird,” in which author Stephanie Meyer recommends breaking any writing project into “small assignments” that one can complete one at a time. All the while, I thought about the fact that graphic novels are collections of individual chapters, which are sets individual pages, which are sequences of self-contained panels. And when I set foot in my house in June 2010, I understood what I needed to do.

Instead of attempting to draw *Castle of Delirium* in one go and in order, I decided that I would take an improvisational approach to each individual panel and each individual page. I would improvise the art like flexible “flesh” over the rigid, but invisible “skeleton” of thumbnails. I realized that *every piece of a work has to be piece of work!*

After coming to this conclusion I scripted a small sequel to *Castle of Delirium*. In this mini-comic, I bemoan the fact that I have an army of giant robots in my head, but all I can manage to make are *tiny* robots. In the end, I realize that I can build the big robots out of smaller robots that I improvise. The small robots assemble like a swarm of nanites, a complicated Power Rangers Megazord, or the cells in a Chuck Close painting until they form my big piece — a giant robot with which I can take over the world! After I started the final draft of *Castle of Delirium* in June 2010, I finished it almost as quickly as I finished the first draft. I was able to find so many little details that I could have fun with that I never lost interest.

In the end I found that no page is superfluous and the story would not make sense if I were to take out so much as a single panel. However, I could still look at each page of the comic out of context and enjoy it as a piece of comics storytelling. The way I see it, this is the ultimate goal of a comics artist, and seeing the piece come together in such a way was the ultimate high. After finishing *Castle of Delirium*, I remembered why I liked to tell stories with pictures in the first place.

### **What is the effect that I desire?**

I love *Dr. Thomas Boguszewski's Castle of Delirium* because it is not just a well-told story about a mad scientist with cool pictures and funny jokes; it is also saturated with ideas! It is an exercise in abstract thinking designed to promote abstract thinking. It's a comic about comics, an artwork about art, and a philosophy about philosophy. It is one of the most “meta” things I have ever done.

Though my pieces always have messages, much of my best work has a “meta” component —its content somehow refers to its form. This is probably because I am interested in art's role as a means of communication. Above all other aspects of art, I am concerned with art as language. This means that in order for me to get excited about

a story, I also have to be interested in “learning the language” that I’m telling it in. I also seek to educate people using my art, and I do this by not only having an educational message, but by delivering it in a way that makes the medium visible and hopefully, learnable.

### **Why did I choose to do a mindscape comic book?**

I had so much to say about why and how I create art that a single image just wouldn’t cut it. I consider myself a storytelling artist first and foremost, so I knew from the get-go that in order to communicate my philosophy on art and paint a picture of my personality, I needed to weave a story. I would do an inner self-portrait where my inner self was not a figure, but an entire dimension.

The world of *Dr. Thomas Boguszewski’s Castle of Delirium* is a “brainscape” —a whole world set within my head! It is a representation of my inner world, which means it is also an allegorical representation of my mind itself. If my psyche is my soul, then the psychic dream world that surrounds me is really myself.

I developed an idea based upon research on Carl Jung and the Alchemists that every individual really does have a whole universe inside himself. This inner world is the inner self. I believe further that: 1. The inner world of ideas and the outer world of nature are congruent. 2. The gestalt of nature and everything in it —also called “The All”— is the true definition of “God.” And 3. Therefore, when actualized to be the size and shape of nature, the human soul really is “in God’s image” or “one with God.” This philosophy is so important to me that my stand-in character alludes to it within the pages of *Castle of Delirium*.

The environment of *Dr. Thomas Boguszewski’s Castle of Delirium* represents my inner world —otherwise known as my “unconscious mind” or my “big self.” To balance that, my stand-in character, the mad-scientist narrator, represents my “consciousness,” “ego,” or “little self.”

### **Why did I depict myself as a mad scientist?**

I depict myself as a mad scientist because I simply feel like one whenever I make art. I love to figure out how things work, whether they are in nature or in art. I consider art and science to be intimately tied together and I could never separate them. As an artist, I am also an inventor —I tinker with my art as I create it. When I put in a little bit of effort into a piece, observe the results, and then make changes, I am essentially performing a series of scientific experiments. When I make an animation and see my art begin to move, I am known to shout, “it’s alive!” at the top of my lungs. Plus, I love to critique and analyze things, and there isn’t an artist around who doesn’t feel like his work is being “dissected” during critique.

I find the archetypal image of the mad scientist to be an apt and romantic analogy for the creative human being. I believe that artists discover ideas the same way that scientists discover truths about nature. Nothing is ever “made up.” Instead, I think the

ideas are already there—they have always been there—waiting for the scientist, shaman, or artist to dig them out of the realms of the unknown and bring them home to his people like Prometheus bringing fire down from the top of mount Olympus. The artist and the scientist are heroes in this sense; they go on a *hero's journey* of discovery and bring a bit of wonder to the surface.

But mad scientists are not popularly heroes. In fact, they are among the most widely-recognized *villains*! This is because, in addition to having genius, “mad scientists” have the marvelous quality of being “mad!” They are insane and uncontrollable. Mad scientists break all the rules of conventional morality in the name of discovering the truth... and that’s why I love them!

I get a thrill from the dark and twisted, and I love black humor. Vincent Price is my favorite actor, and the Addams family is my idea of the perfect family. But I’m no sadist—I admire spooks, villains, and weirdoes who break every social norm... as long as they manage to be genuinely good people at the same time. Often the monsters I admire are good people purely *because* of their non-conformity. In such tales it’s the norms that are wrong, not the subversive weirdoes. Characters that are weird and spooky, but ultimately good, show us that when we strip away social constructs and false limitations, it becomes easier to live the life we want. We can be weird, we can be eccentric, and we can be creative.

Mad scientists often lead incredibly creative and whimsical lifestyles. To be a mad scientist is to be a renegade magician who is so wildly inventive that he is capable of turning his environment into a living extension of his imagination. Dexter’s laboratory and Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory are two examples of such living dream-worlds in fiction. As a storyteller and a showman, I truly wish to build a new world from imagination—in more ways than one! That’s precisely what I aimed to do with my mindscape: become a mad scientist with the ability to recreate the world exactly as I imagine it, and fill it with what it needs... ideas and joy.

### **Why do you like alchemy so much?**

I like to take things that most people would find frivolous or silly—such as cartoons, creature features, or comic books—and find the unintentional lessons locked away in them. I take things that most people would just consider to be pure mass entertainment, such as comic books about mad scientists, and I work like an archaeologist to dig up its “philosophical gold.” “Philosophical gold” is a term from Alchemy. I make a lot of references to alchemy in *Dr. Thomas Boguszewski’s Castle of Delirium*, because I see a correlation between the creative cycle and the alchemical process of antiquity.

The alchemists weren’t just kooky pre-science chemists who wanted to turn lead into gold. Alchemy was actually a spiritual practice, and the experiments were metaphorical. Alchemy was all about taking something apart and putting it together in a new, more “pure” shape. They identified a cycle and swore up and down that this process was the process used to create something meaningful out of chaos – whether that meant turning

lead into gold, turning a bad man into a good man, or turning random materials into beautiful art.

### **Why are there so many trains?**

In my view, the universe —especially the inner one— is like one great big array of *Tracks* guiding things to and fro. The idea that the mind is a system of bridges connecting islands together by “train of thought” is a visual metaphor that I have tried to explore in various projects, but I finally got a chance to try it out with *Castle of Delirium*.

I think that all arts and sciences stem from the human race’s unique ability to draw connections between ideas and things that aren’t tangibly linked. The same faculty that allows us to see faces in wood grain allows us to see pictures in pigment, hear the poetry in words, and appreciate the emotion in music. Human-brain thinking is all about connections, so I feel it is very important to illustrate this through the image of connecting trains.

Not only so the trains make a great metaphor, but also I knew that I could add to my “evil genius” persona if I depicted myself blowing up trains, crashing them together, or tying maidens to the tracks. By causing mayhem and collisions on the tracks, I symbolize the way that the best color schemes, compositions, and jokes come from the union of opposites —juxtaposition is the heart of drama, the key ingredient of creativity and a major feature of the infrastructure of the brainscape.

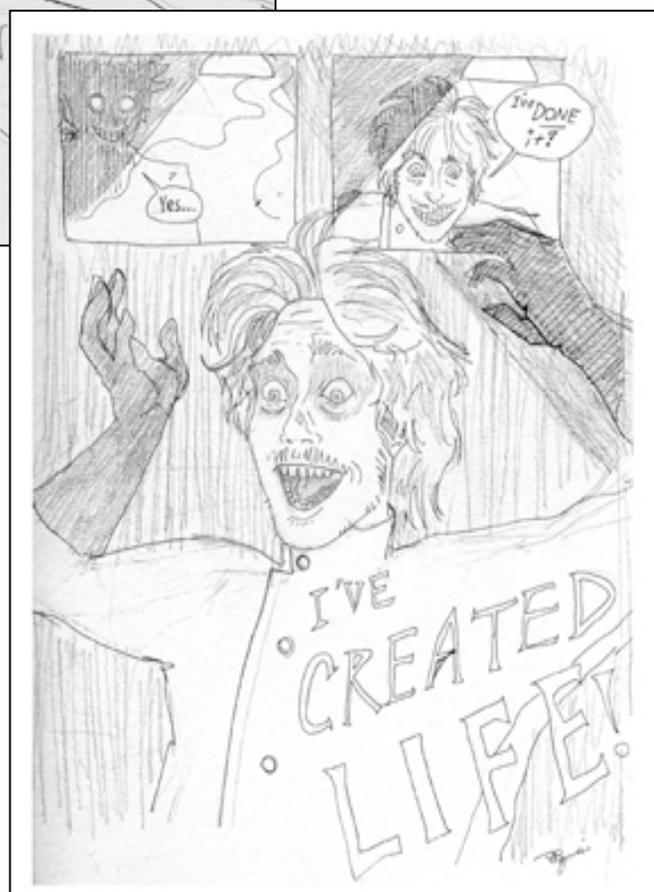
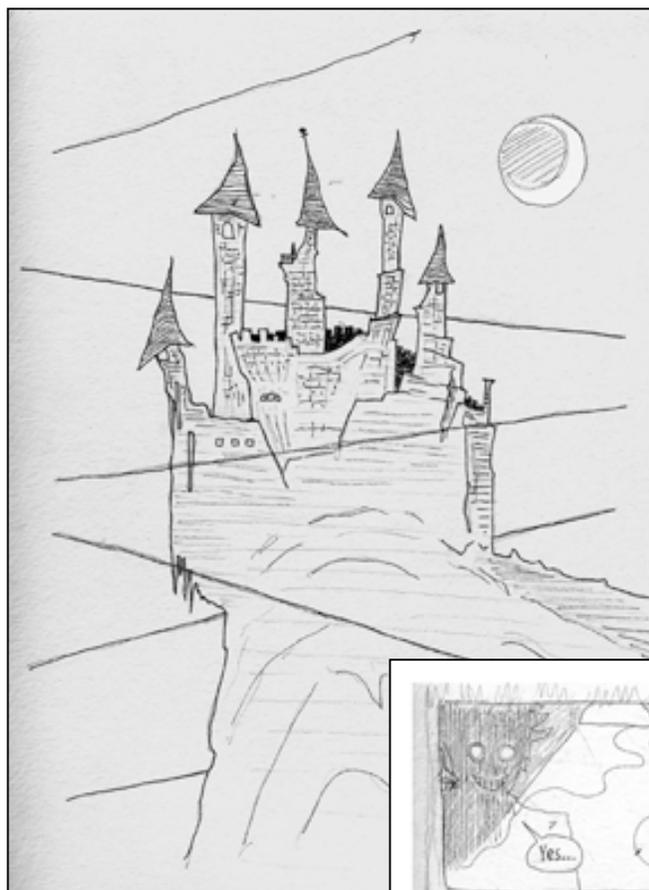
I christen my train “*Zeitgeist*,” which is a German word meaning “the spirit of the times.” The *Zeitgeist* describes a set of ideas that appears across the entire human race to independent thinkers, but at the roughly same time. It explains why there are well-documented instances of inventions being invented by two people independently, but at the same time. It explains the old idiom that “great minds think alike.” I equate the *Zeitgeist* to the state of the “collective unconscious,” so what would be a better name for the engine that drives my consciousness-scientist around the tracks of my unconscious-brainscape?

This world and its *Tracks* illustrate the true meaning of the “unconscious mind.” It’s as if a person’s inner world is a big interconnected web of ideas, and these ideas, like facts of nature, are there whether we’re aware of them yet or not. Billions of ideas, both private and universal, are living in this infrastructure independently of what we know or think. Our consciousnesses, which are like tiny spotlights on a huge dark disk, travel along logical pathways and encounter these ideas as we go along, as if they were waiting to be discovered.

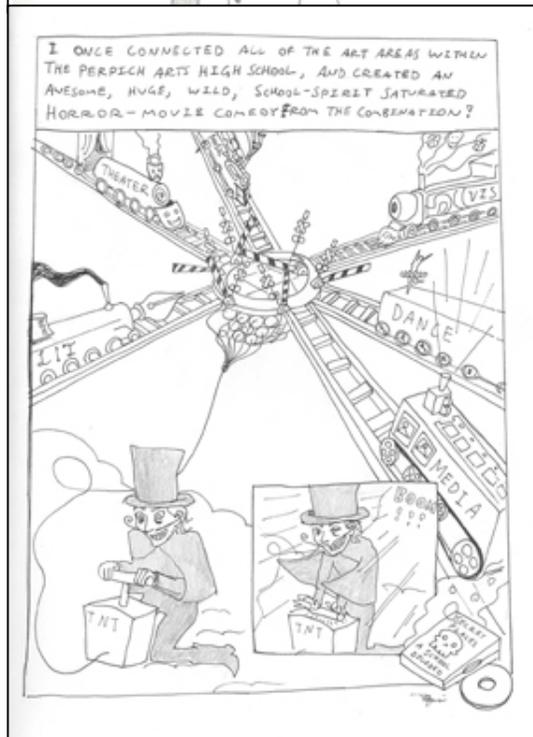
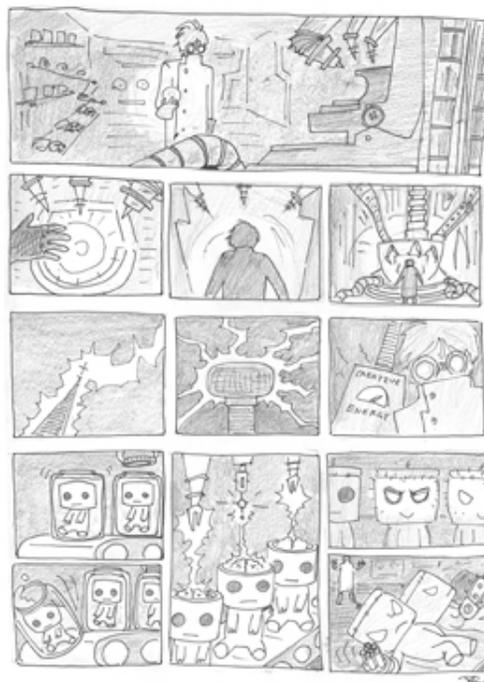
The metaphor of the trains illustrates the notion that both brain and universe are natural machines. Our thoughts and our lives follow a path and will have an ultimate “destiny.” Yet, at the same time, we are only aware of the journey one moment at a time, so we need to keep driving the engine forward consciously if we want to complete the trip.

**Who influenced me/why do I believe what I do?**

It would be impossible to write about *Castle of Delirium* without pointing out that I was influenced by Scott McCloud or his book *Understanding Comics*, which is a graphic novel that explains how the very language of comics functions and has deeply influenced my love of meta-art. I also give credit to Stephen Nachmanovitch and his book *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, in which the author explains beyond a shadow of a doubt that the act of playing is absolutely crucial to creativity. I have already alluded to the immense influences that twentieth century psychologist Carl Jung and the long tradition of Alchemy had my views of philosophy, psychology, and spirituality. Also among them are figures such as Carl Sagan and Alan Watts, whose modern, rational takes on science and spirituality still manage to echo the works of the ancient Hermeticists. The work of Joseph Campbell has deeply informed my ideas about what *The Hero's Journey* is and it is because of Joseph Campbell's writing that I am able to see the spirit of the hero, shaman, and divine savior living on in both the high and low artists of today. I have already mentioned Stephanie Meyer, and would once again like to recommend her book *Bird by Bird*. The list of people who have inspired me could go on forever, but these are among the most influential. Among the people I know in real life, my friend Michael McConnell has always provided a clear and rational bounce-board for my philosophical ramblings. Plus, my friend Katharine Anderson consistently inspires me and keeps my interest in comics alive. Katharine must also take credit for coming up with the term "brainscape" for this project, and inspiring me to make one.







## Tyler

*“Basically, art for me is very personal and there’s just nothing else like it.*

*I’ve learned to express my individuality, my uniqueness.”*

Tyler and his one, younger brother grew up in Plymouth, Minnesota in a house that was, as he lovingly describes it, always filled with noise and friends and messes he created. Tyler is the kind of kid who knows everyone and loves creating relationships with people. He is also one to read people easily. But school hasn’t always been an easy place for Tyler to be. During our conversation he describes how he struggled to keep up at the school he attended before AHS. He says, “I was diagnosed with dyslexia in middle school and just had a hard time in school with the work load and comprehension of what I was learning and reading even though I was taking all these special reading courses all the time. But with art and images and by learning to interpret and make images, I discovered ways of learning that didn’t require reading words. I learned to read images.”

It was in 5th grade Tyler decided he wanted to be an artist because it was one of the only areas in school he felt he could succeed. Now, after graduation he plans to pursue printmaking and painting but hasn't decided on the best course of action towards further study yet.

Throughout our conversation, it becomes clear that for Tyler, making art isn't an intellectual pursuit, but rather an emotional one. He says, “I'm inspired most by how I feel about things, so artistic expression is relevant to everything in my life. I would fight for art any day. It's just, the most simple, easy to understand, and basic ways to

communicate. It's an essential part of our human experience and this is just the biggest way I know how to communicate about things that are important to me."

The self-portrait, *Minnesota Magic*, that Tyler submitted for exhibition speaks to his emotionally driven objectives for communicating visually. The painting is big, somewhat rough, and bold; a lot like Tyler might seem when you first encounter him. The hands emerging from the deteriorating background form the sign language letters "M" and "N" and evoke the identifying hand signs a gang might use. Tyler is a self-professed "Minnesota Maniac," meaning that he loves living in Minnesota and all that goes along with that. This painting clearly and somewhat humorously calls attention to Tyler's passion about this community and the tight relationships he has formed there that have become important to him. The prominent "MN" hand sign silently but proudly seems to call the viewer to join Tyler in his passionate affinity for Minnesota while simultaneously professing the strong allegiance to this community he has developed. In this painting Tyler shares something unique and very personal about himself with the audience thus portraying what he feels he has learned from studying art: how to express his individuality and uniqueness for the world to see.

Throughout the rest of our conversation Tyler also talks about how his learning in art has meant that, "Art has become essential to who I am. Through studying art I've learned that I can express my ideas and inspirations and share pieces of me with other people. I have also learned to do something with all the things I'm asked to think about and read about in my other classes." Tyler continues, "Basically, art for me is very personal and there's just nothing else like it. I've learned to express my individuality,

my uniqueness. Art is just all I need to do, it's who I am, and it's all I ever want to be and all I ever want to do.”







## Tyler

*sketchbook*

mediums: outdoor upholstery fabric, vintage belt, hand letter pressed pages, waxed linen thread

Art is simply what fuels Tyler, and is, as he says, the only thing that motivates him to do anything

else. Making art is a way of life for Tyler and the private exploration of his ideas that he eventually makes public are his reason for being. Although this may sound altruistic and dramatic, it actually depicts Tyler's relationship to art making quite well. For him, making art is intensely personal and through studying art he has learned to make and use images that synthesize his experiences and ideas and allow him to construct his identity and communicate his individuality.

Because art making is very personal for Tyler, he is the type of artist who is never without a sketchbook or something to draw on to capture all his reflections and feelings as he experiences his day. So it felt natural to me to create a personalized sketchbook as this portrait of him. The wrap cover of the book is made from hearty, outdoor upholstery fabric secured with a strong brass buckled belt emulating Tyler's seemingly tough exterior that protects his ideas before he's ready to share them with anyone. Inside, the letter pressed signature pages are printed with various highly ornamented Ts suggestive of logos, tattoos or emblems that signify the emotionally charged and deeply personal nature of Tyler's artwork. In each "T" I also embedded the phrase, "This is me. It's personal," to convey in Tyler's words what making art has come to mean for him through his study of it and to portray the rawness of these

feelings. Lastly, the paint splatters strewn throughout the book portray that this sketchbook is a place for risk taking and experimentation, and I hope that when using it Tyler lets his ideas loose to live freely on the pages if for no other purpose than to give him a reason to be.

### **Minnesota Magic**

*painting*

mediums: acrylic paint, canvas

Tyler Hawkinson

This piece represents how I have felt my whole life about art and how my life has always revolved around art. Art is what makes me go. It is all of my energy and emotions. Abstractions like this are what have always come out of my head, abstractions mixed with reality. Art is the only thing that makes me get up in the morning. I am not good with words and never have been so I'll keep it short and sweet. My life around art is equal to ADSLGKHAKDFHS,NGLKV.HDFK,MHEKTIC BNVKSDF,HGNZKJS,DM.HELLFNVKJS.EMRHDGNZFKJV,HMNSRDGFKH,NE RAKGJFBNV,ASDFASDFJKCALMINGFDAKL;DFSKLFDKLFKFOQFWOIERQW IUOERIOURDFKJDFKDKHLGFBREATH TAKINGHGRIOTOIUUIODVJKLDFJKL DAFUNJHGADHJKGHKASGHSADGLASDKLGHAHHHHHHHHHHHHAGWHY CANTYOUUNDERSTANDDISFUNKSHINALFGAFDSGDFAHGHDAHDFGASAL LNIGHTERSSDKJFHASDLKFALLDAYERSSJKHDSILHAFKLHEVANASDFKLH ACHALENGSDFKJHASDKLHADSLGKHDA SDFAS...



### **The Exhibition**

As mentioned previously, to attempt to share the results of this study with a broad audience beyond higher education and to expand and perpetuate advocacy discussions to include a greater constituency who may not normally be exposed to such conversations, the artistic portraits I created as a means of analysis and data reporting along with the student-submitted self-portraits and artist statements were exhibited in the gallery at the Perpich Arts High School in Golden Valley, Minnesota from January 5, 2012 through March 15, 2012. This event was a unique means for sharing the results of this study and an engaging means through which to reflect on the purpose and messages herein. By gathering all the portraits of students and their perceptions of their learning and presenting them along with our respective artist statements as a cohesive body of jointly purposed work, I feel as though the students were assisting me in making a case for expanding arts advocacy literature to include their perspectives.

The exhibition was also the first opportunity for the students who participated in the study to see and engage in conversation about their visual and narrative portraits, which was also an intriguing experience. All of the students conveyed their surprise and delight at my accuracy in portraying and representing unique aspects of them and their perceptions of their learning, which was incredibly rewarding as an artist. And many expressed the same passion for engaging in arts learning as they did when I interviewed them two and a half years ago, which was rewarding as a researcher.

And as intended, the exhibition seemed to be both an effective means for bringing a little bit of extra attention to the arts advocacy issues explored in this body of work and for eliciting participation in this conversation from a broad audience.

Throughout the duration of the exhibition I solicited viewers to participate in an anonymous survey (Appendix E). The purpose of this survey was to gather viewer feedback about and reactions to the artwork, the students' perceptions of their arts learning and the varying purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education portrayed in the exhibition. The survey was intended as a means for me, as artist/researcher, to gather feedback about the viability of the ideas presented and to gauge how the advocacy messages inherent in the portraits and show literature were interpreted and received by the audience. To add context to the survey, in my first 4 questions I asked if participants engage regularly in any artistic or creative endeavors (and if so, what and why). I also asked if they had experiences participating in K-12 visual arts classes and, if so, what they think they learned from studying art in school.

So far I have collected 53 of these surveys and the responses to the first 4 questions are extremely varied, yet in preliminarily examining the responses to my last question asking for viewer feedback about the content of the exhibition I am finding that, surprisingly, 32 viewers discussed being engaged in and intrigued by the exhibition because the themes addressed revolved around students' perceptions of their arts learning and the benefits/purposes/value of arts education, a perspective many seemed to find unique. One viewer stated, "I love this exhibition because it is about students-people making art for the love of creation. They learn to think through these pursuits. For creative people, as these students are, this seems to be the education that capitalizes on their strengths and helps them transfer their strengths to the rest of their lives." Another said, "I really like the mixture of art and social science as a way of examining

this theme!” And, lastly, another viewer stated, “Wonderful and completely beneficial idea that I’m glad is being discussed outside of University walls.”

As stated earlier, the purpose of this survey was simply to gather viewer feedback about the themes addressed in the exhibition and to gauge how the artwork and advocacy messages were interpreted and received, not to serve as any sort of empirical data. Considering that the exhibition was installed at the Perpich school gallery I understand that my audience and survey participants may consist largely of people who are already interested in studying, teaching and pursuing arts education and that survey results will undoubtedly reflect this. Also, the simple fact that this is an art exhibition compounds this issue because the people who usually attend art exhibitions regardless of where they are installed will usually self-profess to be interested in the arts or they would not attend. So I realize these factors affect the types of responses I have received on the survey, but, again this survey is not intended for analysis beyond simply reading them to see if viewers grasped what the exhibition was about.

Thus, in this spirit, the responses quoted above and others I read like them indicate that the exhibition themes and purpose were largely understood and resonated with the audience. They also indicate that the exhibition did serve the intended purpose of engaging a broad audience beyond those in higher education in this advocacy discussion.

### **Themes from the Data and Comparison to Themes in Art Advocacy Literature**

Throughout my discussions with the students, several themes emerged from their responses to my research question: *What do you think you have learned from studying visual arts in school?* (Appendix C, question 23) The responses students gave to this and other, supporting, questions during their interviews were diverse, and each contained many concepts. As stated previously, during analysis I transcribed each of the students' interviews and dissected the content of their responses along with the content of the artist statements they each submitted. In this effort I was looking for and highlighted specific key words and phrases found in or relating to words (bolded in the Table 1 below) contained in the 8 themes I discussed in my arts advocacy literature review (Appendix B). This examination yielded a total of 79 different coded responses<sup>2</sup> or response indicators. Then I grouped similar phrases and response indicators together into thematic strains that I further coalesced into one summarizing statement per theme. In this schema, I determined a theme statement could be created out of 3 or more response indicators with similar content and ideas expressed by the students through the various modalities I was examining. This process yielded a total of 12 themes I deciphered from the students' responses, and after the 12 themes were determined and articulated, I proceeded to compare the results with the 8 arts advocacy literature review themes (Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> If a phrase or response indicator repeated in a students' set of responses I included only one instance as counting towards the total of 79.

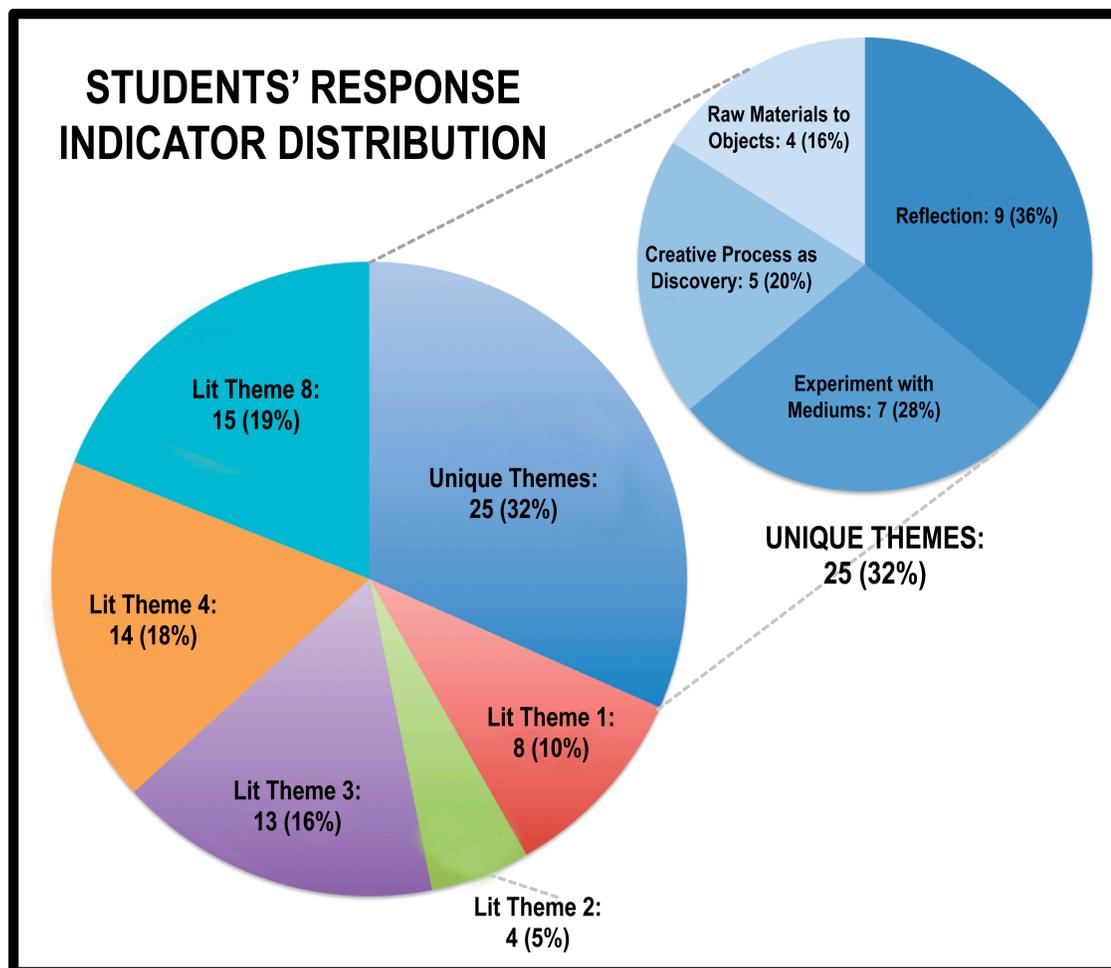
<b>#</b>	<b>Art Education Advocacy Literature Themes</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Through Studying Visual Arts, Students Perceive They Have Learned to:</b>
1	Art Education as Integration: Students learn to <b>make connections</b> between disciplines	1	create relationships and make connections between seemingly disparate ideas or knowledge. (8)
2	Art Education as Visual Culture and Visual Literacy: Students <b>learn about and question, their everyday world through examining and creating images</b>	2	examine and create everyday visual or aesthetic experiences for self or others. (4)
3	Art Education as Essential to Cognitive and Imaginative Development and Growth of Mind: Students learn to use their <b>imagination</b> , to <b>communicate</b> using <b>symbol</b> and <b>metaphor</b> to make <b>meaning</b> , and to <b>create original expressions of ideas</b> , practice <b>flexibility</b> , and <b>take risks</b>	3 4	use a variety of materials to satisfy inspiration and imagination, and to tell an original story using visual representations. (8) communicate visually, metaphorically and symbolically to create original expressions of ideas. (5)
4	Art Education as Human Experience, Expression of Self and Identity: Students learn to <b>construct their identity</b> and <b>express themselves</b> visually	5 6	express very personal ideas and individuality. (9) create personal meaning, develop a personal perspective, develop a point of view. (5)
5	Art Education as Career Preparation: Students learn <b>skills</b> such as <b>creative thinking, problem solving</b> , effective <b>communication</b> and working <b>collaboratively</b> , that are transferrable to a variety of contexts	(0)	
6	Art Education as a Rigorous Academic Subject: Students learn <b>unique academic knowledge</b>	(0)	
7	Art Education as Support for Student Achievement and Academic Success: Students experience <b>increased success in school</b> as a result of their art education	(0)	
8	Art Education as Artistic Ways of Thinking, Knowing, Experimenting, Communicating and Learning: Students learn unique <b>ways of thinking, reasoning, knowing, discovering</b> , and <b>communicating knowledge</b> by learning to <b>act and think like artists</b>	7 8	visually synthesize ideas and create/communicate something new from knowledge learned in other ways from other academic disciplines. (12) participate in a different way of learning, thinking about, studying, experimenting with, communicating about and coming to know something. (3)

In the resulting comparison table above it is evident that 8 of the 12 themes from students' responses aligned clearly with 5 of the 8 themes I identified in field advocacy literature. Field literature themes 5, 6, and 7, *Art Education as Career Preparation*, *Art Education as a Rigorous Academic Subject*, and *Art Education as Support for Student Achievement and Academic Success* respectively, did not correlate directly with any of the statements students made. This phenomenon could be attributed to many things. Perhaps these themes are more teacher, school, or society centered, or perhaps students are not paying as much attention to or attracted to these aspects of art education as overtly as others. I speculate that these aspects of art education learning articulated in advocacy texts that are aimed towards positioning art education as career preparation, academic rigor and support for student achievement simply may not be the kinds of learning that come to mind first or mean as much on a personal level for K-12 students. They may also not be the types of learning the students enter into arts classes seeking in the first place. Overall, the responses students gave to this research question discussed the personal nature of their art, what they feel they get to make and do in their art classes and artwork, what aspects of their lives and experiences they get to explore and express. As Constance Gee states, "All the [advocacy] slogans in the world can not change our basic relationship with art. Art is part of our lives because it brings us *pleasure*, not simply casual pleasure, but pleasure of engagement. Art makes us feel, it makes us feel alive sensuously, emotionally and intellectually. Such pleasures are for the most part intensely personal, especially with regards to visual and literary art forms." (Gee, 2004, p. 15) Furthermore, Gee explains, "The made for public consumption rewards for art education that headline arts advocacy campaigns are

usually quite beside the point of why art teachers teach and why students take their courses.” (Gee, 2004, p. 15)

So it seems that in this case themes 5, 6, and 7 may fall more under the prevue of “made for public consumption” advocacy slogans Gee refers to, as these themes did not resonate with the students at all according to their responses. This is not to say that these benefits of art education are non-existent, but rather that they are simply not as important to the students from their point of view.

In contrast, it appears there are three primary areas where students’ responses most frequently align with field literature themes. First, a total of 15 responses students



**Graph 1: Students’ Response Indicator Distribution**

gave mirrored field literature theme 8, *Art Education as Artistic Ways of Thinking, Knowing, Experimenting, Communicating and Learning*. Next, 14 responses corresponded with field literature theme 4, *Art Education as Human Experience, Expression of Self and Identity*. And, third, 13 students' responses aligned with field literature theme 3, *Art Education as Essential Cognitive and Imaginative Development and Growth of Mind*. Intriguingly, according to Graph 1 above, this segment of the data represents a total of 42 (53%) student response indicators which is just over half of the 79 total. The first and third of these primary aligned themes, 8 and 3 (32 responses, 35%), specifically describe aspects of artistic, creative and imaginative thinking, cognitive development, and reasoning that are seen as inherently characteristic of the arts. These are also the aspects of arts learning that the students most frequently purported to seek out and enjoy simply because the experiences they've had in doing so noticeably contrast their learning experiences in other types of classes.

Also, in these two aligned theme strains, especially in the 15 instances I linked to field literature theme 8, students predominantly discussed their arts learning as satisfying a deep-seeded need they felt for creating or doing something new, personal and imaginative by visually synthesizing knowledge they were inspired by that they learned in other ways or in other academic disciplines such as science, social studies, and mathematics. Meaning that the concept of exercising creative and artistic ways of thinking, relating to knowledge, and coming to understand ideas, perhaps more than other themes identified, seem to resonate most consistently with students in this data set and are seen by the students as provoking, exciting, unique and specific to their arts learning and artistic explorations. Perhaps this is because students in fact do learn a

specific set of skills in art classes rarely addressed elsewhere in the curriculum.

Recently Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland conducted a study in Boston area schools to evaluate what the visual arts could achieve in the classroom. They examined classroom practices of high school art teachers and students to discover what learning goes on in an art classroom that is unique. In the study it was concluded that, “While students in art classes learn techniques specific to art such as how to draw, how to mix paint, or how to center a pot, they’re also taught a remarkable array of mental habits not emphasized elsewhere in school.” (Hetland & Winner, 2008, p. 29)

In their analysis Hetland and Winner identified eight habits of mind that arts classes taught. These habits are: Develop Craft, Engage and Persist, Express, Reflect, Question and Explain, Evaluate, Stretch and Explore, and Understand Art World. The opportunity to learn, engage in and practice these habits of mind is what I believe students were referring to when describing their learning perceptions related to these two aligned themes. For example, in part of Laura’s response where she says, “I’ve also learned to develop concepts visually, things like social commentary and bigger, personal ideas that are now behind my pieces (Stretch and Explore) that I want to communicate (Express) to an audience.” And in part of Carson’s response where he stated, “Art for me is just how I think (Reflect) and prefer to communicate (Express). It’s what drives me.”

These statements illustrate that both Laura and Carson highly value their arts learning because they perceive it is there they have learned unique ways of thinking and doing, communicating and making things with knowledge learned that they have not experienced elsewhere in their schooling. Therefore, I believe these two aligned

responses directly correlate with the unique mental habits and artistic ways of thinking and knowing students are reported learn and exercise in arts classes that Hetland and Winner deciphered. I also believe that the large number of response indicators I gathered relating to these two aligned themes signify that these aspects of arts learning are most relevant, apparent and valuable to students.

As for the other primary aligned theme I identified, 14 responses (18%) correspond with field literature theme 4, *Art Education as Human Experience, Expression of Self and Identity*, and describe aspects of art education that are about personal exploration and expression. Here students described learning and developing artistic skills (drawing, painting, etc.) for the purpose of expressing personal feelings and ideas, exploring identity and human experience, expressing identity and human experience to the world, creating personal meaning from experiences, developing a personal perspective/point of view/artistic voice about issues or experiences.

This theme portrays the dual introspective and expressive qualities of the arts. Tom Anderson in *Why and How We Make Art, with Implications for Art Education* states, “When we express ourselves through making art, we create something tangible to look at, hold, reflect on, feel, and try to understand in our minds and bodies. Artists as diverse as the abstract expressionist Mark Rothko and the naturalist/environmentalist artist Andy Goldsworthy agree that what they do is create meaning when they make art. Artists connect ideas and emotions through the physical act of constructing aesthetic forms to represent their meanings.” (2004, p. 31) He also says, “Another reason why we make art is to communicate something that counts to someone else. This second motivation is social.” (Anderson, 2004, p. 31)

I think part of Tyler's response mirrors this theme very poignantly. He said, "Basically, art for me is very personal and there's just nothing else like it. I've learned to express my individuality, my uniqueness." He also stated, "Art has become essential to who I am. Through studying art I've learned that I can express my ideas and inspirations and share pieces of me with other people." Several students in addition to Tyler passionately articulated similar perceptions of their arts learning and discussed the importance and uniqueness of this aspect of their experiences. I believe there could be several reasons for this, but perhaps most prominently because students seem to view the art making experience as a personal world-constructing experience that involves working towards expressing deeply personal conclusions and reactions to their humanity. And because, as Anderson states, art making is an activity engaged, "simply to find, construct, and express meaning in life." (2004, p. 38) I think this theme, as basic as it might sound, portrays that students feel they get something personally rewarding out of their arts learning and art making experiences that satisfies their quest for inner discovery in ways that other learning can not.

As for one of the last two areas where students' responses aligned with field advocacy literature, theme 1, there was less frequency of correlation, but students did offer some surprising summarizations of their learning here. A total of 8 responses (10%) corresponded with field literature theme 1, *Art Education as Integration*. For example, in part of Michael's response he states, "Through studying art I've learned to see a lot of things as interconnected, it's made everything more relevant to everything else." And Thomas also says, "Through studying art, I've learned that I can bring all my interests together to tell a story." The students who described this as some of what they

have learned by studying art genuinely seemed to recognize the natural interdisciplinary nature of the arts. However, interestingly, students' articulations of this theme positioned other academic disciplines (Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, etc.) as sources of inspiration for artworks they make, whereas in advocacy literature the arts are usually positioned as being infusible into the learning of other subjects as a means to increase student motivation and learning success. Jessica Hoffmann Davis states that in the infusion model, "the arts are invited from the outside into the general education setting in order to enrich student learning. Music of a period, for example, may be played in the history class. Students create collage maps in geography or tribal masks in social studies" (2005, p. 102). Here and elsewhere in the integration advocacy literature the arts are painted as being in servitude to other academic disciplines, yet the students' responses here indicate that they view the other academic subjects in servitude to the arts for their inspirational purposes. This contrasting view held by the students could be attributed to many factors, but in this case I think that the phrasing of the interview questions from the arts learning point of view combined with the arts/academic integrated nature of the curriculum they were exposed to at AHS could have largely influenced the students' answers here. Never the less, the phenomenon is still intriguing and might be something that could warrant further study in the future because it is a different way to examine the benefits and purposes of arts integration.

And in the last aligned theme, (2) *Art Education as Visual Culture and Visual Literacy*, I found a total of only 4 (5%) student response indicators that aligned with field advocacy literature. As with other themes that were not given much attention in this study by students, it is difficult to decipher exactly why only 4 of the 79 gathered

response indicators aligned with field literature, but in this case I will venture to say I believe lack of exposure to these terms and ideas about examining and deciphering images may be one culprit. More of these students may very well be engaging in learning about practices of critically examining and creating everyday visual or aesthetic experiences for themselves or others, they may just not be fully aware of this way of discussing their endeavors.

Also, these students may perceive the practices of decoding imagery and examining contexts of artworks they view or make as activities they engage in privately or only in media/film studies classes or in art history contexts. And in my experience these students tended to categorize these types of courses as an academic pursuit rather than an artistic one because of the factually oriented content and the lecture based methods through which instruction was usually presented. So when asked to articulate an answer to my research question, I think the students most commonly spoke in terms of what they feel they have learned from the standpoint of the studio and art making courses they experienced without thinking to include experiences from their art history or media/film studies classes in their answer schema. Thus, in this case then the structure of the curriculum that the students participated in at AHS should also be considered a factor that influenced the lower number of response indicators here. The Visual and Media Arts students are required to take art history courses that are rigorous where I have witnessed them engage in visual culture examinations and learning activities, but the courses are delivered as a stand-alone subject outside of the studio classes. Also in their studio courses the students are exposed to little of this learning and discussion because the studio instructors tend to rely on students participating in this

type of learning in their art history courses, so it not presented explicitly in studio classes very often. Therefore I think the structure of the AHS curriculum does not overtly assist students in connecting what they learn in art history and film/media studies to what they learn in their studio classes.

And finally, of interest in this section are the four unique student response themes I deciphered that fell outside the parameters of this comparison and did not seem to correlate strongly with any of the 8 field advocacy literature themes I identified:

9. make and use images as a means for reflection and to compile a record of experiences. (9)
10. experiment with different mediums and ways for expressing ideas and framing/examining themes to inform artwork. (7)
11. use the creative process as a method of inquiry and discovery. (5)
12. take raw materials and make them into functional objects. (4)

It is interesting that these unique themes all encompass ideas of personal reflection, experimentation, discovery, and learning to manipulate raw materials; all aspects of visual arts education that are unique. I find these four themes interesting and worthy of highlighting here for the purposes of fostering discussion in the field of art education for two reasons. First, because, combined, these themes are comprised of 25 individual student response indicators from this data set, which equates to roughly 32% (Graph 1 above). This is a significant amount of the total of student response indicators I deciphered. This means that the other 68%, or roughly two-thirds, of students' response indicators positively correlate with field literature themes while these ideas, despite the

amount of attention my students afforded them, seem to lie on the periphery of current discussion trends in advocacy literature.

Second, these themes are interesting because they describe unique, creative and expressive skill sets, and important learning that takes place when engaging in studio practice and the artistic, creative process specifically. When actually discussed in arts advocacy literature, the artistic creative process is often highlighted as something students might experience cursorily during art classes, and even then it is usually simplified and discussed as a brainstorming process students learn in their arts classes that they can transfer to other realms of their learning and lives. For instance, in *Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning* from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, it is stated that, "Arts education requires students to draw upon their creative abilities and to deepen them as well. The benefit is that this creative thinking, once learned early, lasts for a lifetime and can be applied to other endeavors." (1996, p. 10)

This entire publication that is ostensibly advocacy-purposed, along with others a lot like it, makes no mention of the unique creative process artists and designers engage regularly in studio practice as a means of learning and thinking let alone as a means of reflection, experimentation and discovery like my students described. I see this as problematic in advocacy literature because statements like this are a bit vague and do not necessarily need to be describing unique visual arts learning to be valid. One could easily replace the first word of this statement, "arts," with "mathematics" or "social studies" and the statement would still be true. I do not disagree with the claims of the statement per se, but I do believe statements like this paint a rather generic and even

trivial picture of what students really learn in art classes, especially when this is the only type of statement the public is exposed to. This and statements like it also just perpetuates notions that the purpose of art instruction in the curriculum is to train students to be successful in other, more important academic endeavors they participate in during the rest of their school day. Whereas, I speculate that if more statements appeared in advocacy literature that discuss the creative process as my students did, perhaps the public along with policy makers, administrators and school boards would have the chance to develop a more balanced perspective that includes understanding the unique learning students are doing in the arts that simply does not happen elsewhere in the typical curriculum with as much intensity and frequency.

Ultimately this gap can be primarily attributed to the fact that arts advocacy initiatives and literature tend to contain very specific political or policy-oriented agendas that have many motivations. In the case of statements like the one above, the agenda is to call attention to the versatility of the thinking, problem solving and reasoning skills students learn in arts classes, and to offer this up as a reason for keeping jeopardized school programs intact. This advocacy agenda has been increasing in intensity during the last 25 or so years for several reasons, but most recently due to decreased art instruction time to accommodate rigorous, test-driven curriculum in other subjects, and school budget shortfalls resulting in cuts to or elimination of arts and music programming. As Constance Gee states, “Since Sputnik and the advent of the more math, more science, era in public education, arts educators and researchers have sought evidence of knowledge and skill transfer between arts learning and academics at astronomical rates.” (Gee, 2007, p. 6)

But this tactic was also likely chosen because it seems to be the most publicly relatable since no real, specialized knowledge of or experience with the arts or the artistic creative process is needed to understand the claims. Along these lines Gee also contends that reasons given in advocacy literature to support arts education typically fall under three, easily digestible, broad categories of societal interest and purpose. “Arts education is justified and marketed as a means to improve (a) the individual as a person, (b) the individual as a contributing member of society, and (c) the human community.” (Gee, 2004, p. 12) She continues to describe most arts advocacy initiatives as concerned with marketing the arts as places for people to engage in spiritual and moral examinations, emotional maturation, brain and skill development, and personally therapeutic activities because these are the sweeping, “feel good” aspects of visual arts learning that are the easiest for the public to consume, understand, and make captivating sound bytes out of in our intensely competitive, media driven, market-centered society.

Therefore, in light of this phenomenon I can see how these four themes might not necessarily fit with the nationwide advocacy agenda of the past, yet we as a field seem to be shifting our advocacy efforts now to take stances on why arts education should be valued on it’s own terms and advocated for accordingly. Gee States, “Let us, within reason, whisper what they need to hear [to grow or keep arts programming intact] but strongly and steadily beat the drum for the intrinsic qualities and contributions of art study and practice... By all means, let us make and cultivate connectivity among the various disciplines, however, let us also keep central deep learning in the subject area for which we are responsible.” (2007, p. 10)

Little by little, more literature has been arriving on the scene that discusses newer paradigms of arts advocacy such as the one Gee describes here, and I believe that these four unique themes could prove to be useful on this new front where we ascribe to valuing and advocating for the arts on their own terms. The prominence of these themes in my students' responses indicate that they are certainly ideas worthy of further examination and they should not continue to be overshadowed by other advocacy pushes, but rather included as significant parts of our discussions in the future in order to more accurately represent arts learning and round out advocacy messages currently in play. Continuing to discover and discuss other unique learning that takes place in the arts, including the ideas that the students articulated in this study on the whole, could be an exciting and refreshing, yet necessary, new path for arts advocacy to explore. For I, like many other art educators, researchers and writers, argue that if we continue to conduct our advocacy endeavors as we have these past 25 or so years we may philosophize and propagandize ourselves out of existence. Along these lines Gee states, "Present conditions present serious strategic choices to the art education field. If care is not taken, the field will talk itself out of a place in many schools either by promoting theories that deny the value of the arts on its own terms or by embracing the ever-changing advocacy agenda that promotes the kind of art in schools that requires no special professional competence in art itself and, at base, is not about student learning at all." (2004, p. 19)

So I think engaging in new inquiries such as I have done here about the kinds of unique learning happening in school-based arts programs from many different points of view (including more students' perspectives and perceptions), and paying attention to

new ideas about valuing the arts and advocating for the inclusion of the arts in the K-12 school curriculum as presented in studies like this will play an integral role in creating new perceptions of our field thus ensuring not only our survival but perhaps our growth and expansion as well.

## Conclusions

Overall, the students' responses to my research question tended to consistently congregate around and align with ideas tied to larger social, psychological and personal reasons people make art: "At the root of it, we make art to make sense of things, to give meaning to our existence. When we express ourselves through making art, we create something tangible to look at, hold, reflect on, feel, and try to understand in our minds and bodies." (Anderson, 2004, p. 31) Students responses also correlated highly with ideas commonly held in the field that the arts, "value spontaneity, originality – they salute the unpredictable and the immeasurable; they challenge and reflect on the indefinable; and bask in the convoluted; they revel in nuance, value the kaleidoscope of viewpoints and de-construct social conventions and codes... The Arts have whole languages of meaning that have no direct need of words, and these languages of creative life can be used for exploring, describing, interpreting, challenging, celebrating, mourning for, and reflecting upon the world," (Boyd, 2002, p. 10) For the students, these aspects of the visual arts are what drew them into and kept them so intensely engaged in their visual arts learning through their senior year of high school. These are also clearly some of the biggest reasons the students value their arts learning, as captured in the passionate testimonies they gave during our interviews.

Also, of the 17 students I interviewed, 15 discussed learning to make something tangible with aims of understanding, connecting with and making meaning from experiences or things they learned elsewhere as they were inspired. They also consistently described learning to communicate visually and to represent things symbolically and metaphorically as a means to create original expressions of ideas. This

indicates that the majority of these students primarily perceive they learned artistic ways of thinking through studying art in school consistent with my literature review theme number 8. For these students, artistic practice is a way to make use of what they learned elsewhere and to process or reconcile their experiences as described here:

in making their own works of art, students have the opportunity to integrate the learning they are doing in various subjects and to express the interrelationship of ideas and feelings that they are discovering in and out of school. Because of the scope of their imaginative nature, the arts open many doors to students and offer unique and important encounters with making sense of learning and putting it to use. (Hoffmann Davis, 2008, p. 5)

The majority of students in this study also clearly articulated such encounters that encompass important learning they engaged in that they feel is unique to their study of the arts.

Of course, considering that these students demonstrated a strong interest in the arts, that they were attending an arts-focused school of choice at the time I interviewed them, and that many of them planned to pursue some form of arts education beyond high school, one could argue that these students' perceptions of their learning might not be the norm. I understand how such arguments could be fueled by common misperceptions about the AHS program. Perceptions that discuss the program as only accepting students who were likely the top performers in the visual arts program at their former school, and perceptions that the students who attend AHS belonged to a small group of students at their former school who demonstrated serious interest in art and in

pursuing art education beyond high school.

While I acknowledge that this study may be seen as somewhat limited in scope because of these perceptions and other limitations discussed in detail in Appendix A, I maintain that diminishing the results of this inquiry because of these perceptions and limitations is short sighted because the students who I worked with are in fact typical of those who attend AHS. They are typical in that each of them came from different high school programs throughout Minnesota to enroll at AHS just as their peers did. And they are typical “Arts High Kids” in that they applied to the program, participated in the rigorous admissions process, and were accepted to AHS just like their peers.

As for the misperceptions about what types of students typically get accepted into AHS, I can attest that in practice the admissions panels at AHS (which I served on each of the 7 years that I taught there) prescribe to accepting students who simply demonstrate potential for artistic growth and a passion for learning. These desired characteristics can arguably be demonstrated by a very wide population of high school students and have little to do with an applicant’s performance in previous art classes or interest in pursuing the arts beyond high school. Therefore I believe the students’ perceptions gathered and discussed here could actually be representative of those of a greater number of students than may be initially apparent.

Furthermore, nationwide there may be many more students like those attending AHS than one might expect. How else can we account for the healthy number of colleges and universities throughout the United States offering degrees in visual arts and maintaining lucrative visual arts educational programming? According to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the

2008-09 academic year 89,140 college students nationwide received their bachelor's degree in Visual and Performing Arts, and 14,918 students received their master's degree in these fields. (NCES, 2011, tables 282 and 283 retrieved on Dec. 12, 2011)

That is a total of 104,058 students in just this one year, and when one examines this data gathered from 1970-71 until present, it is clear to see that the number of these degrees conferred is up 2,588 from 2007-08. Even if these numbers are crudely and inaccurately cut in half to account for the combining of the visual and performing arts disciplines in this survey, this data still describes a large number of students who at some point in their K-12 and early college careers decided they were seriously interested in pursuing visual arts and studying in this field beyond high school. So, again, to dismiss the results of this study under the inaccurate assumption that the AHS students portrayed are somehow overly special because of their pronounced interest in the arts would be doing a disservice to our field because, as this data indicates, there are clearly many more students like these in our K-12 schools.

Thus, it is my hope that the multifaceted portraits of students' perspectives about their learning in art education that I have presented and discussed here will round-out and assist in broadening our discussion in the field about the benefits and value of school-based art education. Discussions about student learning in art have informed our work in the past, but not in very prominent or impactful ways. So it is my hope that students' perspectives and voices will start to play a bigger role in doing so in the future. And in that objective, I intend for this research to begin or at least be near the forefront of this trend of adding the often-overlooked student perspective to our arts advocacy conversations. In the literature I examined there is a noticeable deficiency of

work highlighting the student point of view on arts learning. And while there are numerous claims about what students learn from their art education as arguments for keeping arts programming in schools, some of these claims, although still valuable, are not substantiated or corroborated with actual students' accounts or perceptions. Also, the results of my comparison of students' perceptions with advocacy literature themes indicates that there are many more diverse types of learning going on in art classrooms than much of our current field advocacy literature communicates and makes use of.

So I feel it will benefit teachers, researchers, policy makers and administrators to learn directly from students' stories, point of view, and experiences in order to better represent the comprehensive and unique outcomes of visual art education and inform ongoing discussions about arts advocacy, school reform initiatives, educational policy decisions, curriculum offerings and graduation standards. Furthermore, creatively representing and exhibiting portraits of students' perceptions as I have done is intended to draw attention to the student point of view and highlight its importance to a wide constituency including teachers, researchers, policy makers and administrators. Although I speculate that if pursued further and on a larger scale, I believe another endeavor such as this could increase students' efficacy concerning their education and could make conversations about this topic more inclusive, accessible and focused, thus potentially increasing their reach and impact as I have attempted to do with the exhibition aspect of this project.

Lastly, as Jessica Hoffmann Davis asserts, "The history of arts education advocacy teaches us that the integrative nature of the arts allows us to wrap and rewrap arts education in many colors, but the wrapping and rewrapping has made the field

seem soft, undirected, and dispensable rather than strong, focused, and essential” (2008, p. 6). I believe that this research could help to strengthen and focus perceptions of the field of art education by pinpointing what it is that the arts do and teach uniquely as articulated by the students in order to assist in making the case for the essentiality of the arts to education.

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## Appendix A

### Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative research project that was designed to gauge students' perceptions about their learning in school-based art education then compare their perceptions with arts learning purported as taking place in K-12 classrooms in arts advocacy literature. One limitation of this study is that the findings do not provide empirical data that can be generalized to all students by any means. Another limitation is that the scope of this project (for the purposes of manageability) included only a specific group of students who:

- 1) demonstrated marked interest in the arts,
- 2) actively pursued their arts education in many capacities and often through multiple venues with parental support and often guidance
- 3) were operating in a unique, specialized, arts-based, and studio focused school context.

Thus, I concede that these students' perceptions have likely been influenced by their exposure to and participation in focused, high-level studio practice and instruction while attending AHS. This combined with the fact that these students have likely been indoctrinated as advocates for arts education simply as a result of participating in the AHS program for their final years of high school did not escape me. Yet, although these students' perceptions and values might seem wildly unique on the surface, in reality I think they still present perspectives that are worthy of discussion in the field because regardless of how their perceptions were shaped, these students (as portrayed in their narrative and artistic portraits) actually normatively represent the small number of K-12

students who actively desire to learn in art and intend to continue their pursuit of art educationally beyond high school, personally, and professionally. They represent that typically small group of students found in many schools who are “the art kids;” those students who persistently come to the art room during their lunch breaks or before and/or after school because they just want to do additional work on their project. This is the type of student who is most likely to participate in summer and after school art programs, volunteer to be a teachers’ aide, and take every art class offered until the options are exhausted and they proceed to sign up for independent study credits. These students can arguably be found in many schools and are most likely the next generation of artists and maybe even art teachers or art teacher educators.

So I realize that this study is examining perceptions of a small, seemingly unique group of students who’s perspectives and perceptions have been influenced to value the arts and might not be considered the norm in comparison to all K-12 students, but I speculate that in relation to “the art kids,” particularly at the secondary level, these students’ perceptions are more common than might be expected. Thus I argue that these students’ perceptions deserve our attention and discussion if for no other reason than at one point many of us who are now arts educators were once probably a lot like them.

Another limitation of the study is the subjectivity of how I organized the student response indicators into themes to compare them with my arts advocacy literature themes. I understand that my methods for creating the themes are somewhat subjective, that the boundaries between them may not, even now, seem perfectly clear, and that the themes are somewhat intertwined and even slightly overlapping in some cases due to their qualitative nature and the qualitative nature of my data gathering and analysis. For

example, in student response themes 3: *use a variety of materials to satisfy inspiration and imagination, and to tell an original story using visual representations*, 4: *communicate visually, metaphorically and symbolically to create original expressions of ideas*, and 5: *express very personal ideas and individuality*, several of the concepts within each of the themes could easily be seen as highly related, overlapping or even as redundant. This is particularly true in the concepts concerning telling an original story/communicate original expressions of ideas visually, metaphorically and symbolically/express very personal ideas. In a way these phrases could all be seen as saying the same thing, to express very personal ideas. And a little of that is understandable as the motive of self expression is inherent in what the visual arts are. However I tried in these cases, as in other cases where the theme content seemed to overlap with one or more other themes, to organize and group or theme students' responses according to the primary purpose(s) for the visual expression the students articulated. So in this case, in theme 3, I deciphered the students' primary purpose for visual communication to be telling a story. In theme 4 I deciphered the students' primary purpose for visual communication to be creating an original expression of ideas. And, in theme 5, I deciphered students' primary purpose in creating the visual communication to be expressing individuality.

I tried several other ways of grouping the student response indicators and for organizing and articulating the themes, but I felt this method allowed for the most transparent, authentic and easy to follow organization and common articulation. So, I agree that my organizational methods for the student response indicators and schema for creating the themes can be seen as subjective, but whenever possible, when organizing

students' response indicators into said themes I triangulated my analytical findings by comparing students' responses from their interview with ideas they articulated in their artist statements then I cross referenced this with analysis of the artwork they submitted. So, in this endeavor, because I took such care in triangulating my findings, I feel I did my best to represent, organize and articulate the student response themes as authentically as possible.

Next, my position as artist/teacher/researcher could be seen as another limitation of this study because these positions of power and knowledge could be said to have influenced students' responses during the interview. To minimize my effect on the students and alleviate any concerns of coercion or persuasion I randomly and blindly chose the participants from a group of students who were not enrolled in any classes I was teaching at that time. As all participants were former students of mine I had no holds over them academically. I also had a non-teacher (administrative assistant) colleague of mine who the students did not have contact with at AHS act in my stead to initially meet with the chosen students, describe the study, and distribute and collect student and parent consent forms. Also, in creating the interview questions I worked with my advisers to draft questions students would understand that were also as non-leading or non-invasive as possible. During the interview students were also given the choice to pass on answering any question they did not want to answer without having to give a reason. And when delivering the interview I made sure that students understood the nature of the study as well as my role as primary researcher. I also made every effort to keep my comments on students' answers to an absolute minimum during the interview and I consistently only asked questions and used prompts that were included

on my approved list. Ultimately I feel that through exercising all of these cautious measures I did my best to minimize my influence on students' responses to my questions, yet I understand that interviews are interactional and there is no way to truly assure I had no influence on the conversation short of having an assistant not affiliated with the students in any way deliver the interview in my stead.

Yet for this project I felt that taking a step like this would de-personalize the experience for students too much, and, because I was actively seeking students' honest perceptions and opinions in the interview, I wanted to be sure they would be comfortable enough with the interviewer to offer their answers candidly. So I felt it was necessary to perform the interviews with students myself, and that the benefits of doing so outweighed the risks of my influencing the students' answers.

Lastly, my role in this study as artist/teacher/researcher could also be seen as problematic because as an artist, former K-12 visual arts teacher, visual arts teacher educator, and art education researcher I am explicitly an advocate for arts education, and for strong arts programming in the schools, and magnet arts schools like AHS specifically. Also, these roles could be seen as coloring my interpretations of the students' responses and their perceptions of their learning.

As for these roles influencing my interpretations of the students' responses and their perceptions of their learning, one could also argue that if I was a teacher of a foreign language or science and I conducted this same inquiry, my role could be seen as having another type of influence. Being an artist, teacher and researcher I feel gives me the perspective and expertise to interpret and portray students responses and perceptions

of their learning with more accuracy than if I were operating outside my field. So, in truth I see this factor as an asset to this study rather than a limitation.

Also, from the beginning of this project I tried to be as transparent as possible about my positioning this work as an examination of and commentary on arts advocacy themes in the field. I feel that at no time did I hide my agenda or my affinity for the arts and arts education in these pages. I fully acknowledge that my perceptions and position as an arts advocate have affected the nature of this work, how I have situated this study in field literature, and even my intentions for what I hope the study will accomplish and mean to the field. But I believe this to be advantageous considering the creative nature of this project and the field it is meant to serve. This advocacy agenda I have adopted is not unlike that of the majority of my colleagues in this field. Advocate is a role taken on naturally from the moment you enter the art education field and quickly experience the realities of the educational landscape in which you are supposed to try and operate. And because of the ever-precarious position of the arts in the school curriculum, anyone involved in arts education, even on the periphery, can be categorized an advocate because recent educational policy decisions, the current media blitz emphasizing the importance of science, math, technology and engineering education, and other education reform initiatives have simply positioned us this way. So with this study, I chose to exercise my position as an arts advocate to at least try and better our situation because the alternative is to stand by and watch our field slowly disappear from the American educational landscape and that is simply unacceptable.

## Appendix B

### Student Video Interview Questions

#### Students' Perspectives on Their Learning in Visual Arts Education

1. Tell me about yourself and your family background.
  - a. Does your family engage in art or art appreciation together in some way?  
Or have you at some time in the past?
2. Tell me about your background as a student.
  - a. What did you like about your old school?
  - b. What didn't you like about your old school?
  - c. Did you have a lot of friends at your old school?
  - d. What academic classes did you take?
3. How or why did you first become interested in art?
  - a. Was there anyone in your life who influenced your interest in art?
4. What do you see yourself doing after high school?
  - a. When did you decide you wanted to do this?
5. What motivated you to apply to be admitted into Perpich?
  - a. How did you first learn about the school?
6. Tell me what you remember about your admissions review and acceptance into Perpich.
7. What do you like about Perpich? (What makes this school work for you?)
  - a. How is Perpich different than the schools you've attended before?
  - b. Why do you think Perpich is different than the schools you've attended before?
  - c. What's the toughest part about being a Perpich student?
  - d. What do you think you're learning or getting here that's different?
  - e. What do you wish you could get more of here? Is there anything missing?
8. If you were going to describe Perpich to a friend who was thinking of applying here  
(for visual arts), what advice about going here would you give them so they could do well here?
9. How do your parents feel about you attending Perpich?
  - a. Have they supported your choice to go here all along?
10. Do you feel successful at this school?
  - a. Why or why not?
11. What do you think about your teachers here (both academics and arts)?
12. What do you think about the daily schedule and how your time is structured?
  - a. Is there enough time in your classes?
  - b. Is there enough free time in your day to work on your projects/homework?
  - c. Is there enough time with and access to the teachers?
13. How do you feel about the homework and workload you're expected to accomplish here?

14. What do you think about the other students here in general?
  - a. Are students competitive with each other?
    - i. Where do you see this? How do you deal with this?
  - b. Do you compare yourself to other students?
15. What kind of art interests you most? Why?
  - a. What mediums or type of materials/techniques do you like to work with most?
16. What inspires you?
  - a. Where do your ideas come from?
  - b. Why do you make art?
17. Do you consider yourself an artist?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. When did you first begin to consider yourself an artist?
18. What did your friends think when you told them you were leaving your school and going to school here?
  - a. Do you still keep in touch with these friends?
  - b. What do they think about you or say about or to you now about it?
19. Did you find it easy or difficult to make friends here?
  - a. Do you think there are cliques here?
20. Do you think of yourself differently now that you go to Perpich?
21. Do you think you've changed since coming here?
22. Do you think your art has changed since coming here?
23. What do you think you have learned from studying visual arts in school?
24. Do you think the learning that happens in your art block is different than the learning that happens in your other classes?
  - a. If so, how are they different?
25. Did you take art classes at your old school? What classes?
26. What do you think you are getting from your arts classes currently?
  - a. What do you like about them?
  - b. Is there anything you don't you like about them?
27. Do you think all students should learn in and about art in school?
  - a. Do schools need to include art class offerings for students? Why/Why not?
  - b. What do you think people get from learning in and about art?
28. Do you think your arts learning, skills and knowledge help you in school?
29. Give me 3-5 different words off the top of your head that come to mind right away when you think of art:

## Appendix C

### Student Consent Letter

#### Students' Perceptions of The Benefits of Visual Arts Education

You are invited to participate in a research study of students' perceptions of the benefits of learning in visual arts in schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently enrolled as a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student at the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School in the Visual Arts program. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by: Colleen Brennan from the Curriculum and Instruction department in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

#### Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine your attitudes about and perceptions of your learning in visual arts in schools (including at the Arts High School) in order to understand what you feel you have learned through studying visual arts in school. It also involves understanding how you value or do not value learning in visual arts.

#### Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, Colleen will ask you to do the following things:

- participate in one interview that will be video recorded
- participate in one photographic session conducted by Colleen in the context of various settings at the Arts High School
- create an artistic response using any means you deem appropriate (written response, video recording, voice recording, visual representation or a mix of these options) to address the following questions:
  1. Describe yourself as an artist.
  2. What do you think you've learned or gained from participating in visual arts classes in school?

In addition to the artistic response piece you create, you must also submit an artist statement to Colleen that explains how the piece you chose to create addresses these questions. Colleen will collect your artistic response piece and statement for analysis and will create narrative stories and visual artwork about your perceptions and educational experiences based on interpretations she makes of your responses to the interview questions, your artistic response piece and your artist statement. Furthermore, your artistic response piece, photos of you, and your artist statement along with Colleen's artwork and artist statement will be included in an exhibition that will be attended by the general public and will accompany the dissertation paper and defense presentation. Colleen will also include photos of you and your artistic response piece along with text from your artist statement in the written, published dissertation paper and all papers, articles, materials and presentations related to this project that follow.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are no risks or benefits involved in participating in this study.

**Compensation:**

You will receive a \$10 gift card to Utrecht art supply store to compensate for participation in this study after you have completed all the components of the study as outlined above. There will be no other benefits, academic, social or otherwise, for your participation.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report Colleen creates or publishes, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. You will be able to provide a pseudonym and your real name will not be identified. Any discussions during the interview will not be shared openly with the other faculty and staff at the Perpich Center and will be considered confidential information. Colleen will keep all research materials for five years after the collection of data has ended in May 2009. After five years, Colleen will destroy all materials properly. Until then, research records, notes, photos and video recordings of your interviews will be stored securely in locked drawers and password-protected files on Colleen's personal computer and only she will have access to these records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Colleen, the University of Minnesota or the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School (AHS). Your decision to participate or not participate will not influence your enrollment at the school, your class standing or your grades in any courses in any way. There will be no extra credit points or other grade rewards given to you if you choose to participate in this study. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study is a personal decision. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question you choose at any time, for any reason, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with Colleen, the University of Minnesota or AHS. If you decline to participate, no explanation about your decision is necessary and your decision will have no impact on your relationship with Colleen, nor will it influence her views about you or your personal character.

By signing below you are consenting to participate in this study, to be video taped during an interview and to be photographed, and you are signifying release of your permission for these representations of you, along with the artistic response piece you created, your artist statement, and excerpts from your interviews, to be included in an exhibition as described above that will be attended by the general public.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Colleen Brennan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her by phone or email:

office phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

cell phone: (XXX) XXX-XXX

email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Or, if you prefer, you can also contact her advisors at the University of Minnesota:

Dr. Cynthia Lewis

Dr. James Bequette

office phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

office phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

email: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

email: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. I also give permission for my video interview (in part or whole), photograph, original artwork (artistic response piece) and artist statement to be used and published and exhibited in all venues and materials related to this project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Parent Consent Letter

#### Students' Perceptions of The Benefits of Visual Arts Education

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study of students' perceptions of the benefits of learning in visual arts in schools. Your child was selected as a possible participant because they are currently enrolled as a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student at the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School in the Visual Arts program. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing for your child to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by: Colleen Brennan from the Curriculum and Instruction department in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

#### Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine your child's attitudes about and perceptions of their learning in visual arts in schools (including at the Arts High School) in order to understand what they feel they have learned through studying visual arts in school. It also involves understanding how they value or do not value learning in visual arts.

#### Procedures:

If your child participates in this study, Colleen will ask them to do the following things:

- participate in one interview that will be video recorded
- participate in one photographic session conducted by me in the context of various settings at the Arts High School
- create an artistic response using any means they deem appropriate (written response, video recording, voice recording, visual representation or a mix of these options) to address the following questions:
  1. Describe yourself as an artist.
  2. What do you think you've learned or gained from participating in visual arts classes in school?

In addition to the artistic response piece your child creates, they will also submit an artist statement to Colleen that explains how the piece they chose to create addresses these questions. Colleen will collect the artistic response piece and statement for analysis and will create narrative stories and visual artwork about your child's perceptions and educational experiences based on interpretations she makes of your responses to the interview questions, the artistic response piece they created and your child's artist statement. Furthermore, your child's artistic response piece, photos of your child, and their artist statement along with Colleen's artwork and artist statement will be included in an exhibition that will be attended by the general public and will accompany the dissertation paper and defense presentation. Colleen will also include photos of your child and their artistic response piece along with text from their artist statement in the

written, published dissertation paper and all papers, articles, materials and presentations related to this project that follow.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are no risks or benefits involved in participating in this study.

**Compensation:**

Your child will receive a \$10 gift card to Utrecht art supply store to compensate for participation in this study after they have completed all the components of the study as outlined above. There will be no other benefits, academic, social or otherwise, for their participation.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report Colleen creates or publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child as a subject. They will be able to provide a pseudonym and their real name will not be identified. The discussions she conducts with your child during the interview will not be shared openly with the other faculty and staff at the Perpich Center and will be considered confidential information. Colleen will keep all research materials for five years after the collection of data has ended in May 2009. After five years, Colleen will destroy all materials properly. Until then, research records, notes, photos and video recordings of Colleen's interview with your child will be stored securely in locked drawers and password-protected files on her personal computer and only she will have access to these records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to consent for your child to participate will not affect their current or future relations with Colleen, the University of Minnesota or the Perpich Center for Arts Education, Arts High School (AHS). Your decision will not influence your child's enrollment at the school, their class standing or their grades in any courses in any way. There will be no extra credit points or other grade rewards given to your child if they participate in this study. Your decision to allow participation or not is a personal decision. If you decide to allow your child to participate, they are free to not answer any question they choose at any time, for any reason, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time with out affecting their relationship with Colleen, the University of Minnesota or the AHS. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, no explanation about your decision is necessary and your decision will have no impact on your or your child's relationship with Colleen, nor will it influence Colleen's views about you or your child's personal character.

By signing below you are consenting for your child to participate in this study, to be video taped during an interview and to be photographed, and you are signifying release of your permission for these representations of them, along with excerpts from their interviews, to be included in an exhibition as described above that will be attended by the general public.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Colleen Brennan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her by phone or email:

office phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

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Or, if you prefer, you can also contact her advisors at the University of Minnesota:

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study. I also give permission for my child's video interview (in part or whole), and photograph to be used and published and exhibited in all venues and materials related to this project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Exhibition Statement

# WELCOME!

Thank you for viewing my exhibition. This body of work represents the culmination of six and a half years of work towards my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, Art Education at the University of Minnesota. I created the portraits here as part of my doctoral thesis dissertation where I examined Arts High School (AHS) students' perceptions about what they have learned in school-based visual arts education programs as compared to views most prominently articulated in field advocacy literature about what students are believed to be learning. The purposes of this study were to identify congruencies or gaps in theory and to expand art advocacy conversations about the purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education beyond current parameters. Through the use of arts-based educational research and reporting methods that encompass the artistic, creative process, the primary research question examined was:

### ***What do students perceive they are learning from studying visual arts in school?***

The 17 students from the AHS Visual Arts and Media Arts classes of 2009 represented here by my useable or wearable portraits and their self-portraits were randomly chosen to participate in this study. During interviews, each student discussed their experiences in school as pursuants of visual arts education and articulated what they perceive they learned from studying visual arts in school. After collecting this data I decided to create artistic portrait objects and narrative portraits that would serve two purposes throughout this project: first as a means to synthesize, analyze and interpret the interview data I gathered, and, second, as means to report it in a public venue so as to engage a diverse and broad audience in a discussion about the purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education.

When making art I most enjoy creating things someone can use or wear and experience aesthetically on a daily basis. I also enjoy creating things that tell a story about the person who owns and/or wears my creation. My favorite mediums of fabric, fibers, sewing notions, jewelry findings, photography, and printmaking come together here for this purpose and to visually

capture and portray the likeness and essence of my subjects and their perceptions in a way that I hope is thought provoking and engaging for an audience.

In this study, analyzing the interview data I collected along with the student-submitted artist statements, and student-submitted self-portrait artwork exhibited here has illuminated that students' perceptions of their learning in school-based art education programs are varied. Through creating individual artistic and narrative portraits of the students and their perceptions, I was able to synthesize students' responses to the research question into thematic strains. Then, by comparing these themes with those found most frequently used in field advocacy literature, it was discovered that some of what students perceive they have learned, such as how to create relationships and make connections between seemingly disparate ideas, how to use a variety of materials to satisfy inspiration and imagination in order to tell an original story using visual representation, and how to express very personal ideas and individuality, easily aligns with field literature. However, it was also discovered that some of the students' perceived learning, such as how to make and use images as a means for reflection and to compile a record of experiences, and how to use the creative process as a method of discovery, lie outside theories addressed in field advocacy literature.

Therefore, after conducting this inquiry, I concluded that although the majority of art education advocacy literature accurately describes students' learning, the new ideas students posed in this study could provoke and influence expanded discussions in field literature about the purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education for use in advocacy initiatives.

So, as you make your way through this exhibition I encourage you to recall your own visual arts learning experiences, and I challenge you to ask yourself, "What did I learn from my visual arts education?" By examining and reflecting on our individual visual arts learning experiences and discussing them with each other I believe we can find commonalities between our experiences that could inspire and unite us around new ways to advocate for keeping healthy visual arts programs in schools.

**Appendix F****Exhibition Attendee Survey**

Examining Students' Perceptions of Their Visual Arts Learning:  
Portraits of School-Based Art Education from the Student Perspective

# TAKE MY SURVEY!

1. In your spare time do you regularly do anything you consider artistic or creative (such as write, play a musical instrument, draw, dance, take photos, paint, act, doodle, scrapbook, etc.)? (Circle one.)

Yes                      No

2. If so, what do you do and why do you do it?

3. During your K-12 education, did you participate in any visual arts classes? (Circle one.)

Yes                      No

4. If yes, in reflecting on your experiences, what do you think you learned from studying art in school? Use the back of this sheet for additional space.

5. After viewing this exhibition, what are your reactions to the theme addressed: students' perceptions of their learning and the varying purposes, benefits and value of school-based art education? Use the back of this sheet for additional space.