

**Creative Wandering: Writing, Reading, Painting as Knowing through A/r/tography**

by

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Submitted Alison Fast in partial fulfillment of the  
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## Abstract

This thesis project addresses ways of knowing at the intersection of a multiplicity of ways of being as mother, artist, researcher, teacher and learner. The pages that follow aim to document the entanglements of learning and living, making and being made by creative acts. Through a year filled with the immense life challenges such as this year, 2020, acts of making and arts education have the capacity to transform lives and to awaken persons to their will to imagine a society of love. Arts education can cultivate hopefulness for living and a resistance to the systems of domination as those who engage the arts gain a critical awareness, moving from numbness to action. The document is a record of a period of time in a woman's life that is postpartum, the time following the birthing of a child and the birthing of the self as a mother in the world. It also documents the negotiating of identities, and how the various callings one takes up in life have the power to inform and enrich the others. Painting is recognized as enabling the development of thought alongside reading and writing. Through taking up processes whose outcomes are unknown, one may experience the unsettling ambiguity of going to a place one has never been before and searching for meaning and understanding in processes that are so familiar, yet difficult to understand in their totality. The work is meant to encourage a disposition of curiosity in the world and attuning oneself to take notice of that which shows up in the world, continually learning and growing. The hope would be that in taking up a living inquiry curiously in the world, one's life may be enriched and enlivened, hope-filled and transformed. This work is largely indebted to the writings of Tim Ingold, Sylvia Kind, Rita Irwin, Mary Oliver, Maxine Greene, Anne Lammott, bell hooks, Walter Brueggemann, Carl Leggo, Jorella Andrews, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, amongst many others.

## **Lay Summary**

This project explores the conditions for knowing as an artist, researcher, teacher, and mother. Painting, mothering, reading and writing are processes examined simultaneously to understand their relations in creating environments for learning and teaching. The work also explores the potential for art education to contribute to social justice through empathy, caring for the inner self, living hope-filled and nurtured lives, and the power of creative imagination.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Alison Fast.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Lay Summary.....	iv
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Dedication.....	x
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: On being: Writings, Working Writings, Made Things.....	18
Chapter 2: Thinking with Tim Ingold’s Making.....	60
Chapter 3: On Being Mom, <i>Documenting Postpartum</i> .....	74
Chapter 4: On Painting, <i>Material Presences</i> .....	83
Chapter 5: Coming Into Focus, <i>The Societal Role of Art Education</i> .....	95
Chapter 6: On Moving Forward .....	122
Bibliography .....	141

## List of Figures

Figure 1, <i>Small Summer, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo).</i> . . . . .	16
Figure 2 <i>Painting on studio floor with smaller watercolour sketches over top (own photo).</i> . . . . .	24
Figure 3, <i>Work in progress painting leaning up against wall</i> . . . . .	29
Figure 4, <i>Work in progress</i> . . . . .	32
Figure 5, <i>Hands Holding (own photo).</i> . . . . .	35
Figure 6, <i>Work in progress</i> . . . . .	38
Figure 7, <i>Paint Palette (own photo).</i> . . . . .	40
Figure 8, <i>Watercolour painting in progress</i> . . . . .	41
Figure 9, <i>Crossed Feet</i> . . . . .	44
Figure 10. <i>Detail of a painting</i> . . . . .	45
Figure 11. <i>Flat Painting</i> . . . . .	49
Figure 12. <i>Drawing Play</i> . . . . .	50
Figure 13. <i>Folded Hands</i> . . . . .	52
Figure 14. <i>Small Hands.</i> . . . . .	53
Figure 15. <i>Painting leaned against studio wall.</i> . . . . .	57
Figure 16. <i>Beachcombing, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo).</i> . . . . .	58
Figure 17. <i>Landscape, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)</i> . . . . .	72
Figure 18. <i>Song, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)</i> . . . . .	81
Figure 19. <i>Still Hills, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)</i> . . . . .	93
Figure 20. <i>On Every Road, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches (own photo)</i> . . . . .	120
Figure 21. <i>Still Hills Installation View.</i> . . . . .	137
Figure 22. <i>Still Hills Installation View.</i> . . . . .	138

Figure 23. *Still Hills* Installation View. . . . . 139

Figure 24. *Still Hills* Installation View. . . . . .140



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I would like to thank my family, my parents, my brother's family, and my husband — you've all encouraged me to follow and develop the passions and interests that make me feel alive, no matter how afraid I may be. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for believing in me.

## **Dedication**

This project is for my son and future children. I write and study with the hope of understanding processes of learning and making so that I may be better at helping them know what it means to be continually learning and living with curiosity, empathy, and, most importantly, hope. While being rooted, anchored, and freed in promise and always growing in the knowledge of what it means to live well in the world.

# Introduction

*Go to a place you have never been before*

From the beginning of my time spent in art school, I have wrestled with developing a way of talking about the meaning of making. I've hoped for a better understanding of the creative processes in my own life and the works of other artists that I encounter. It may be the inner creative impulse that James McKernan (2007) describes as an essential trait of the artist, teacher and researcher. I've wished to identify my own creative impulse and follow its beckoning trail. In this way, I hope to see the way that creative processes transform and change those who engage them. Graeme Sullivan (2006) suggests, "art practice, in its most elemental form, is an educational act, for the intent is to provoke dialogue and to initiate change" (p. 33). Creative processes have the potential to move us to think differently, envision change, and be renewed. In the act of making, perspectives shift or change in ways one could hardly know would have happened otherwise. One comes to know themselves more, or differently, seeing the world differently. The potential for transformation in acts of making and looking at art is expansive. In this thesis, I hope to investigate what is at play in acts of making and encountering art.

A pedagogy of art making recognizes creative acts as emergences of new understandings which have the ability to alter or shift one's way of knowing and seeing in the world. In *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, Maxine Greene (2001) believes that education is, "a process of enabling persons to become different" (p. 5). Thus, engaging in acts of making shares in educational hopes for growth and change. To live a life devoted to art making is an engagement in a process of becoming. Greene suggests in her book that this becoming requires a severing from assumptions or things taken-for-granted to allow persons to imagine the world as *otherwise*

(Greene, 2001, p. 116). To me, this reflects a call for movement. A call to go to a place which you have never been before and to take up a disposition of openness to what shows up for you in the world, to what might happen.

*Where are the places we have never been before?*

For my own creative processes with this thesis, I have found resonances with the prompt *to go to a place you have never been before*. I was first introduced to this idea in a course taken with Dónal O'Donoghue at the University of British Columbia in the spring of 2019. I think of place as new awareness, perspective, and ideas, through and around the making processes. These could be places at which we arrive unexpectedly through inquiry, with a willingness to imagine *otherwise*. New places can be concepts or moments of awareness that I arrive at through engagement in reading and writing. I also think of new places through on ongoing relationships to paintings as they can lead to new awareness, a place I've never been before. Making calls for a correspondence with materials that brings maker to a stance of mutual leading and following, ending up in a place different from that which may have been anticipated. For my thesis project, I desire to know more of what happens in moments of making, by simply attending to them and writing about experience. My hope is that in the making, writing, and living I would come into a deeper knowledge of what is happening in these moments, of their purpose and value to my life and potentially of others who wish to pursue the same thing.

*What*

In this study, I began by setting limitations to work within, in order to collect data that gives the work a sense of direction. I decided on writing a certain amount each day for forty days. The idea was that during this specified period of time I would also be working in the studio, painting. The choice of forty days was not meant to be specific; it was more so a familiar

number. Forty is a number used repeatedly in the Bible to distinguish a time of significance whether waiting, wandering or wondering. These initial days of writing and making were filled with uncertainty and waiting, not knowing what exactly would come of it all. The creative process is done in waiting and anticipation of *something* that we hope might happen. As a new mother, I underestimated the way that this role determined the way that I was able to continue in this creative process. The way of being as a mother caused me to see that I would work in fragments; short, sporadic snippets throughout the day, the in-between moments. There was an urgency as the ideas that showed up needed to be caught, in order that I may gain openings of clarity. The process of working, writing, and living simultaneously aid me in understanding the homes of knowing I inhabit.

My hope would be that in documenting new awareness and the way I am made different through the educational act of artistic inquiry and scholarly inquiry, I may understand the potential at play in acts of making. Though I do not know exactly what will come to fruition, I hope to engage this process of growth through painting, writing, looking, learning, listening, and living. In the end, there will be a body of paintings which will be presented as a solo exhibition at a gallery in East Vancouver. There will be between 5-7 paintings, ranging from size 16 inches by 20 inches up to approximately 48 inches by 60 inches. I will continue ways of working in the studio I have already begun, but now with an emphasis of taking notice through an education lens, so that I may develop ways of understanding the significance of the work. The paintings are being made up of various thoughts, images, and fragments of my lived experience. I imagine stitching together aspects of the world that I encounter and bringing them to the canvas. Through this process I will arrive at a new place, with new awareness of the potential in the ordinary bits of living. The written part of the project will be in the chapters that follow this one. I hope to

document the writing as it happened, then to revisit it in the passing of time in the hope that moments of clarity and new understandings will emerge for moving forward. I will simultaneously look at what is happening in the writing and the studio work, and perhaps diffract from these both to offer perspective on the various roles in which I inhabit as mother, co-learner, artist, scholar, teacher, friend.

### *A Word on Painting*

Painting demonstrates a way of seeing the world in fragments. It's exactly this way for Raoul De Keyser. When reviewing Keyser's exhibition at Whitechapel Art Gallery, Andrew Wilson (2004) states that Keyser "...has realised that the world about us is glimpsed as fragments and that painting itself contributes to such a way of seeing: the abstraction is already there in life as much as in painting" (p. 37). As I am going about my everyday life, there are moments that stop me, when I see the world as painting and painting as the world. I see with a new awareness of it. I think about paintings when I look around and imagine with a curiosity for the *not-yet*, what is not yet made, but could be. Paintings are fragments of what already exists in the world. Through my self-study in a/r/tography, I wish to embody these ideas of painting as a way of seeing and imagining that which is not immediately seen. For this reason, I have chosen to include images of paintings I made during the past year as interludes in between chapters. Also between chapters are short poems written in the ebbs and flows of daily living as a mother and artist.

### *The “Why?”*

Dónal O’Donoghue (2015) describes scholarship as, “a form of creative work that is receptive to thought, cultivates and nurtures it, without insisting that knowledge ought to be created to support or abandon previous understanding” (p. 346). The inquiry I am proposing in this thesis offers a way of seeing the entanglement of scholarly and artistic inquiry, the value of engaged reading and writing as a process of growing.

### *Aesthetic Education*

Maxine Greene (2001) believes in the tremendous potential of aesthetic education, imagination, and freedom. Aesthetic education provides learners with experiences that develop a sensitivity of perception, senses, and imagination, particularly in a work of art, that calls for attention (Greene, 2001, p. 6). Aesthetic education offers a mode of thinking and doing that enhances living. Greene identifies the importance of the imagination in education as a way of seeing beyond the given world to imagine the not-yet. To go to a place you’ve never been before requires the will to re-imagine. The imagination is transformative, enabling individuals to gain perspective on their world, with the capacity to see what needs to change. Greene suggests the importance of individual engagement of materials and encounters with aesthetic objects to develop a sensitivity of perception for the imagination to be freed (Greene, 2001, p. 10). Students need a personal encounter with the materials in order to free themselves to imagine. Greene argues that by attending to aesthetic objects, the student is transformed in how they engage with the world around them. Through experiences in aesthetic education, Greene suggests that students and teachers find their own voice, their own agency, and practice using them (Greene, 2001, p. 11).

Greene's work relates to the work of Sylvia Kind, as she emphasizes how engagement with materials causes one to think in dialogue with others, bringing forth new thoughts and ideas to emerge. Kind's research involves the Children's Centre at Capilano University in British Columbia, where she investigates the ways that materials enable thought. Kind asks the question, "What if materials shape us as much as we shape them?" (Kind et al., 2017, p. 4). Kind believes the studio elicits a call for attentiveness, slowness, and paying attention to the correspondence of happenings in the studio. She emphasizes the need for an active listening to what emerges for children as they engage with materials. The collective gatherings in the studio at the Children's Centre illuminate a pedagogy of togetherness. Co-learning is an important nature of the work as multiple ways of thinking become entangled. Kind sees the children she works with as co-learners with her in the becoming of material awarenesses. For Kind, the entire environment is at play in acts of making. Thus, the studio requires a focused attention to piece together layers of meaning. With materials, children can participate in a deeply transformative and embodied mode of learning and knowing. Kind's notions of the liveliness of materials are present to me in my studio work as I think about engaging painting and thinking with materials. From Kind's work, I have come to be better attuned to the way that materials move me. Further, how does material engagement inform written inquiry? Through this project, I hope to see these two processes reverberate back and forth in a dialogue that leads to questions, wonderings, awareness, and new knowledge. Moreover, I think about the everyday practices of mothering as creating a mode of working that emphasizes the way that thoughts are generated, captured, and documented. The nature of the work, written or painted, reflects the nature of being that was a part of its making.

*Ingold on Making*



Tim Ingold (2013) is a significant influence in my thinking through making as he discusses engagement with materials, transformation, being, and the art of inquiry in the book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Ingold quotes Dormer and Adamson when saying that thinking through making is when one allows “knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us” (Ingold, 2013, p. 6). Ingold believes in a back and forth relationship with the materials; just as we act on to them, they also act on to us. Ingold offers this as a possibility for how artistic inquiry can offer new ways of knowing across other disciplines. In advocating for learning by doing, Ingold states, “we grow into knowledge rather than having it handed down to us” (p. 13). As a teacher, Ingold considers how his perspective towards knowing informs his teaching practice by arguing that the intent behind teaching must be transformational, where learning is not about passing on information but rather creating a space for self-discovery. Ingold offers the possibility of thinking through making as a process of growth (p. 21). He wonders about “the extent of human involvement in the generation of form” (p. 22), meaning that there are multiple forces at play in making, humans being a part of the way made things come together. In discussing a basket weaving activity from a course he taught, Ingold observed how the material reflected something back about their maker, as each was different and the conditions of making also shaped the form that each basket took. This basket weaving exercise was significant for Ingold’s understanding of “what it means to make things, about how form arises through movement, and about the dynamic properties of materials” (p. 24). In what is meant by materials, it is worth mentioning that there are many understandings, one as being the physicality of the world’s inherent nature, the other being the human agency that appropriates this physicality, taking the raw and manipulating it to finished objects (Ingold, 2013, p. 27). To me, Ingold

wishes to articulate the interrelationship between material agency and human agency, that rather than assuming one dominates over the other there is instead a mutual responding that occurs. Both Ingold and Kind's research with the agency of materials suggests that materials have the capacity to take us places we have never been before, shifting thinking and bringing change. Their ability to act on us and elicit an unexpected response portrays their potential as guides to new awareness.

### *A/r/tography and Self-Study as Methodology*

A/r/tography is the methodology which best resonates with my way of thinking about artist, researcher, and teacher throughout this thesis project. A/r/tography explores the rhizomatic relations of theory and practice (Springgay et al., 2008, p. xx). Instead of seeing theory as separate from practice, a/r/tography attempts to restructure theory as practice. As a rhizome is understood as an "assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. xx), a/r/tography seeks new understanding at the thresholds of artist, researcher, and teacher. A/r/tography is a process of continual becoming, asking of questions, and the creation of new meaning through dwelling in in-between spaces. In describing a/r/tography, Irwin and Springgay (2008) state, "A/r/tography as practice-based research is situated in the in-between, where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry" (p. xxi). Irwin and Springgay (2008) paraphrase Doherty and Kwon when they acknowledge that within contemporary art, place is "re-imagined as 'situation'...a relational constitution of social, economic, cultural and political processes" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxi). Places are the situations we find ourselves in, entangled with their social, economic, cultural, and political meanings. Within art and education literature, the artist practice is being legitimized as a form of research practice, as a way of coming to know place.

Springgay and Irwin (2008) state, “The intellectual, imaginative and insightful work created by artists and educators as practitioners is grounded in ongoing forms of recursive and reflexive inquiry engaged in theorizing understanding” (p. xxii). Further, Irwin and Springgay claim that artist, “practices are not comfortable taken-for-granted ways of being but are rather the challenging practices of learning to perceive differently within our everyday practices” (p. xxii). These two statements portray the tremendous effort of artists and researchers to identify ways of learning and knowing that may be overlooked or unnamed. To be an artist researcher practicing a/r/tography is to engage in artful inquiry and writing, understanding these two processes as interconnected in the pursuit of understanding (Springgay et al., 2008, p. xxviii). Irwin and Springgay identify six guiding concepts for the a/r/tographer’s practice: continuity, living inquiry, metaphor, opening, reverberations, and excess. Metaphor stands out as relating to my work, as place is understanding arrival at new knowledge or meaning in artist practice. Moreover, the theme of arriving at a new place relates to all six of these guiding concepts. The places of a/r/tographical inquiries are saturated with potential.

The identities of artist, researcher, and teacher explored through a/r/tography can lead to an investigation of one’s living practices through self-study. Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) define self-study as, “the study of one’s self, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the ‘not self’” (p. 266). Further, Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) summarize the work of LaBoskey in her description of the elements of self-study when they say, “LaBoskey outlines five elements of self-study: it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and it defines validity as a process based on trustworthiness” (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 21). Self-study largely emerged out of a desire from teachers to improve their own practices (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, pp. 14-15). This meaning

that teachers sought out to further attend to their own perspectives towards teaching in order to grow themselves. Carl Leggo (2008) writes about the need for the study of self in order to be able to make connections outside of ourselves (p. 4). He suggests, “We need to write personally because we live personally, our personal living is always braided with our other ways of living...” (Leggo, 2008, p. 5). Writing from the personal enables one to develop and nurture a “sense of voice” (p. 10). This *sense* enables one to know themselves, and perhaps in knowing ourselves more we can understand the significance of the work we do and then offer this awareness to others. In her book *Teaching Community*, bell hooks (2003) speaks to the need for feminist thinkers to utilize accessible terms that would enable a larger inclusive audience (p. xi). She feels as though feminist ideas remain hidden within academia rather than reaching out due to lack of accessible language. The personal as political can become a message that transgresses boundaries outside the academic world (p. xiii). This offers a way of understanding the form that my thesis takes, a personal self-study, meant to be accessible in portraying a process of living and learning, painting, reading and writing, mothering and growing. As hooks speaks of the creative process, particularly for women artists, she recognizes the entanglement of living and making—that making is never happening solely in the interaction with materials. Acts of making begin in the forethought, the preparation, the downtime and anticipation of what might happen.

A/r/tography through self-study emphasizes the voice of the researcher as one navigates living in a continual process of becoming. Carl Leggo’s (2008) poems are reflective of his own memories and history. He comes to understand his life through writing and studying his own voice in recalling his past. Furthermore, Anniina Suominen Guyas (2008) describes her writing and artistic practice by saying, “I form words and sentences and consider connections to texts and the experiences of others,” (p. 27) and “I continue to use my photography to create surfaces

for understanding” (p. 32). Guyas’s work portrays a continual becoming evident in the practices of artist/researcher/teacher. In further articulation of her work, she states: “I find the necessary break for survival personally and professionally, a space in which shifting meaning, incoherence, and resonance replace coherence, permanency, and reaction” (p. 32). Her process remains open to that which emerges through practice, the unknowns and questions. Her work demonstrates the process of discovering, searching, and finding. Guyas’s statement shows what is characteristic of the artistic practice with an aim at revelation through slow discovery rather than telling the truths of someone else. Renee Norman’s (2008) writing and artistic practice represent her identifies as artist, researcher, and teacher, as well as wife and mother. Norman’s work exemplifies the entanglements of these identities. Pauline Sameshima (2008) uses metaphor to illustrate her practice in a/r/tography when she describes the way that her mosaic tile art practice pulls together parts that were separate, much like the way she would “think about connections and situations from multiple frames” (p. 45). She comes to deeper understanding and knowing when her hands are in motion (p. 48). Further, she states that “the act of motion, touch, and manipulation produces a movement toward acknowledgment of the unexpressed known in both physical and metaphoric ways” (p. 49). This idea of the unexpressed known reveals a reality of continual emergence and becoming through acts of making. Sameshima states, “living a/r/tographic inquiry is situating and accepting self as a continuous burgeoning being” (Sameshima, 2008, p. 49). To engage in a/r/tography is to tune into a lived becoming.

#### *Methodology - The How?*

The methodology for this thesis will be a/r/tography through self-study. These methodologies reflect the paradigm of interpretive inquiry which embraces complexity, unknowing, unforeseen outcomes and a desire for new knowledge. In self-study the specifics of

the outcome are not predictable in their fullness and the results cannot be articulated before engaging in the research. When thinking about going to a place I've never been before, the place ends up being different than I imagined before arriving. With a desire to understand, interpretive inquiry can aid in the process of self-awareness and discovery. In this way, a/r/tography is similar to action research as one investigates their own practice with the desire to improve it through deeper understanding (Smith, Week 1, 2019). My hope is that through this a/r/tographic self-study I could gain clarity and understanding of my own creative process and production of knowledge through making and writing. Both these fields of thought focus on understanding as well as lived experience. Self-study comes from lived experience as a practice-led research inquiry. Practice-led research enables the possibility of utilizing creative practice as research. This self-study will incorporate contemplations on my creative practices in relation to scholarship as a way of working that enables and investigates thought, developing new ideas and awareness about what it means to make. (O'Donoghue, 2015, p. 346). Graeme Sullivan (2006) defines practice-led research in visual art programs as a process in which "studio art practice is being reconceptualized as questions about degree programs beyond the MFA are addressed" (p. 21). The challenge here is to understand how visual art programs engage studio-based teaching and art learning practices as forms of scholarly inquiry (Sullivan, 2006, p. 21). For the purposes of my study, I have engaged practice-led researchers as my conversation partners in the research, such as Carl Leggo, Sylvia Kind, Rita Irwin, Di Brandt, Barbara Bolt, Luanne Armstrong, Natalie LeBlanc, and Veronica Hicks, to name several.

Through my self-study, I aim to understand how this living inquiry consisting of painting, reading, writing, researching, and mothering reflects a disposition towards pedagogy that I embody, a process of lived learning.

## *Dewey & A/r/tography*

In the text “Dewey through A/r/tography”, Richard Siegesmund (2012) explores the relation of Dewey and the study of a/r/tography. He recognizes the parallel between John Dewey’s emphasis on knowing through sensing and a/r/tography as, “a process of knowing through the senses” (Siegesmund, 2012, p. 101). This idea of knowing by sensing suggests an inquiry with emergent outcomes, unfolding and stumbled upon. Painting also is a way of knowing that develops through sensing.

John Dewey’s (1934) idea of *experience* speaks to how a series of events correspond and influence each other. Dewey conveys an experience with an illustration of the way a stream flows into a river. He says, “In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself” (Dewey, 1934, p. 36). Dewey’s comments suggest the potentials held within our experiences as parts come together and intersect. There is always more at stake in experience and with careful attention one can tune themselves to recognize all that is at play. Dewey explains the nature of an experience when he says,

every experience is the result of interaction between the live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives. A man does something; he lifts, let us say, a stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing. The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. (Dewey, 1934, p. 44)

Dewey (1934) explores the relationship that arises from the correspondence of creature and object. He speaks of experience as a pattern and a structure in relationship. Through perception, action and consequence are joined in relationship and Dewey says, “This relationship is what gives meaning; to grasp it is the object of all intelligence” (Dewey, 1934, p. 44). When one grows in understanding of an experience, meaning is deepened. Dewey says, “...Art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience” (p. 48). The doing, undergoing, outgoing and incoming of experience are parts of making and inquiring that I hope to access—a relationship that develops between perception, action, and consequence. I hope to see how a disposition of paying attention is a way of knowledge production, a process of knowing through making and studying where ideas and thoughts flow with each other.

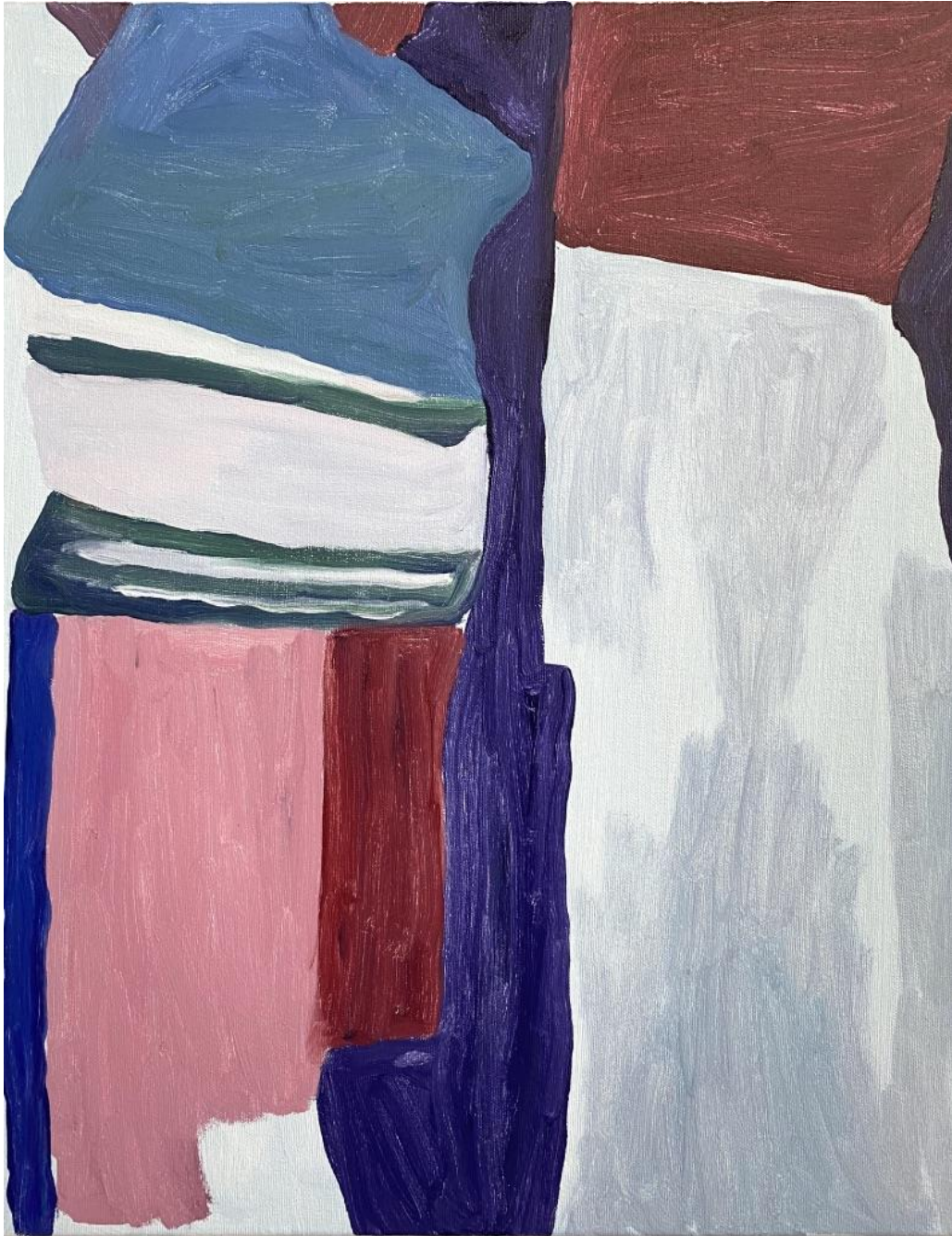
I mention all these writers, thinkers, scholars, artists, because I believe in the rhizomatic connections they have with the inner creative impulse that propels me forward to further study and inquiry. I am hopeful that I will find more connections along the way. This project is one that in ways I have already been living and will continue on after concluding. I wish to continually enter in to these places that I have never been before, and hopefully draw others to notice their own new places. In that way, I think of the thesis as a cross-section into where I am now, what I am thinking and making without knowing exactly what that will lead to. I also hope the work could be a proposition for others to consider what it would mean for them to engage in going to the places they have never been before. I hope to convey that in stepping into uncharted territories, one takes up a disposition of continually learning and remaining curious. I hope to suggest that learning is a way of living in the world, remaining continually curious, and this



curiosity about the world can develop the criticality to seek change as well as the means to endure difficulties.

**Figure 1**

*Small Summer*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on Canvas, 16 by 20 inches (own photo)

## **Cotton Drive**

When we walked down  
Cotton Drive, pink petals covered  
the street. Parting ways  
as we move through them. Weightless

and in piles together on road's  
edge. How many had fallen  
while we stood watching? Brightly beaming  
through panes. The jagged tree

branches break up a blue  
wide sky, like a mosaic  
stained glass window.  
Snowflakes fallen gently to meet

the ground swept away  
by the next chilling gust  
that nearly knocks us  
off balance. We've walked past

this street dozens of times  
and every chance we get  
we notice the spring goes  
again. Pink petals replaced

by the smallest specks of green,  
bright and fresh. The buds to flowers to leaves  
as the speck fills in the tree.

## **Chapter One**

### **On being: Writings, Working Writings, Made Things**

A large part of this project was to generate a body of writing as a form of data collection whilst making a group of paintings. I embarked on forty days of writing in an effort to collect and gather thoughts about my own acts of creation. In this way, everyday becomes a search for meaning by collecting and gathering fragments throughout the day. With writing, I am hoping to come to a better understanding of the meaning of the creative act, ways of knowing with materials, and how materials are alive, acting on artist and maker. In tandem with writing, I am interested in the way that painting causes movement and captures a gesture. It situates artist and viewer, connecting the body to the present. Further, in taking up this process I hope to shed light on valuable principles for pedagogies of teaching and learning in the processes of maker and material. This chapter includes excerpts of words from the forty days of writing; as I went back through the writing I selected these passages as potentials for further thinking. This process gave space for thoughts to be documented, worked with and developed for further understanding. With this process, I hope to suggest that learning is a way of living in the world, remaining continually curious, and this curiosity about the world can offer the stamina for living with hope in the face of difficulties. I have the growing conviction that curiosity is the precursor to humility, that in being curious, one recognizes that there is much that they do not know and must grow to understand. Humility is necessary for seeing the humanity in ourselves and each other, thus bringing about togetherness rather than division, love of self and those around us.

In the book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Tim Ingold (2013) states that “it takes effort and vigilance to hold things together” (p. 94). To me, this means that growth, knowledge and learning require a conscious focused attention. I’ve found this to be true in my life as a mother, artist, writer, and student. The pages that follow document the precious first months of my son’s life. In this time, I became a mother and would reconcile my desire to pursue my creative practice in and through this new identity of mother. Ultimately this work is about finding myself in the midst of giving constantly to another, and how this posture of serving is what lead to a renewal of self. It is a kind of storying through the lived experiences of becoming in motherhood. I thought, perhaps, that these strands of identity would enhance and inform each other. And that maybe, in writing about it all, I could come to know myself, my creative practice, the ideas and concepts of interest, and the things I value as a mother, all as part of my own process of growth in learning and knowing, making and being. This project is very much so for myself, and maybe even my son. It became a place to work out the thoughts that I caught throughout the day before wrestling with them. In turn, it’s become a way of living, inquiring, questioning, writing and making, and I hope to have caught a wave that I will continue to ride for the duration of my life as a mother. I know more than I did before I began, but in no way do I feel able to resolve, to confidently say, *this is that*. Rather, I’ve come into knowing a way of chasing, capturing, pursuing and finding meaning that I wish to pass on to my own children in order that they may remain continually curious about this world, as a means of having hope and courage, hoping for the best and being captivated by creativity and all the things one can come to know if they take up a disposition of learning to learn in the world. Therefore, this effort, this work to hold things together, is for my family, my son, with the aim of inspiring him to know what it is to learn and live in continual inquiry, wondering and wandering throughout

his life; rooted and anchored, but frequently pursuing a deeper understanding. The reality is that each new awareness, idea and thought that I write about may be familiar, in fact common, to others. By no means do I consider any of this writing to be novel or nonexistent anywhere else, for that would be silly. Instead, it is simply another iteration of what may be already known to someone else. Just that it is a first attempt for me. Maybe this record may reveal how one lives and learns with curiosity about what shows up to them in the world. More so, how one can take hold of the circumstances of their life, noticing the ways of knowing that are present there. Perhaps, it is also about working with conventions and disruptions. In the book *Stylish Academic Writing*, Helen Sword (2012) portrays the importance of interconnecting disciplines within academic research and writing. She believes in taking up ways of writing and researching that are outside of one's area of expertise in order to gain different insight on what may seem given to a particular scholar within a particular field. She says,

Like surgeons who believe they have nothing to learn from pit stop mechanics, academics who think they have nothing to learn from researchers outside their own discipline risk missing out on one of the greatest pleasures of scholarly life: the opportunity to engage in stimulating conversations, forge intellectual alliances, and share ideas with people whose knowledge will nurture and stimulate our own. (Sword, 2012, p. 16)

Sword's words here suggest the value of engaging in the unknown, in order that it may illuminate what one thinks they know already. I look for resonances, by allowing my differing identities a place to dialogue with each other, in written word and in doing, in making and living.

Day One

## **Beginnings**

It is an unsettling thing to begin a project where the outcome is unknown. The path is also unknown. I am not sure what it is exactly that I am setting out to do nor am I aware of what it will require of me. I have this urge to do something, that there is something to understand more deeply. This involves the process of making, of creating, of thinking and writing. It is a process of understanding myself and the meaning that I pursue for reasons that I want to know more. My work as an artist has always been continually a fulfilling and also frustrating endeavour. It drives me, but also puzzles me. I feel muddled in my words in the attempt to describe it or give it meaning. I wonder at why we feel the need to fill our actions with meaning by using words to describe them. I feel frustrated when words fail. Simultaneously, words can illuminate a creative process. Words can give access to a process that feels only personal. Perhaps, words reflect our making experiences back to us in a way that offers fulfillment. Further, perhaps pairing words to our own processes of making has the ability to reflect the making processes of others back to themselves. We identify ourselves through other's words, and through the webbing of words and experiences together, we come into ourselves and our processes more deeply. One may ask, why does this matter? Why do we search for deeper understanding of the creative process of ourselves and others? It must be because there are aspects of these processes that are so personal that they are difficult to describe, yet they are so meaningful that they locate us in a way. They help us to know ourselves and to sense our own being (DeBolla, 2001). To sense our own being is something that may be a condition of being human. We want to know and sense that we are here. We also want others to know and sense ourselves as "here" too. We hope to listen and be heard. We hope that our gestures of making will mean something. I'm not sure who I refer to as the collective we. But I mean we in the sense that I am assuming that I am not the only one who feels this way, I am assuming that others also have a desire to be validated as being here. It is perhaps something so personal, that our desire for others to validate our existence is not something that we talk about in the way that it is so literal. Rather, we seek out validation from others in differing ways, in approval. Perhaps, in speaking and writing about the creative process, one is searching for validation, for the acknowledgement of being here. The desire to have our being noticed may be a result of an underlying reality that our presence in the world is finite. And because of this finitude there is the longing to outlive ourselves, to be noticed. We desire to be seen, heard, felt and known, for ourselves and from others.

## **Day Two**

### **Impulses, desires**

I am curious about the impulse to make something visual. One looks at something, say a scene, an object, or imagines an image and desires to create from that experience. For myself, I see something, and I want to reconfigure it, remake it with paint. I wonder what it is about looking that leads to making. What does looking provide to the process of making? Maybe it provides content or a structure to create within. This is something that seems relevant to the creative process, a framework or structure to create within. Perhaps, because what can constitute an artwork seems limitless, a structure offers the bounds necessary to have an assurance about the result of a creative process. Looking involves noticing the way that things appear in relation to each other, their meeting points. To look, one notices voids and gaps, interesting configurations. There are overlapping shapes and textures. This way of looking offers the opportunity to see beyond the practicality of things, into their potentials as the content for something else.

The act of looking locates us, we know ourselves as present in a space based on how it appears to us. The act of looking is not neutral, we see with our own lenses and perspectives, informed by the fabric of our lives. Think of a classroom of multiple students sitting around a still life painting all different things, we see things differently. This is why it is important to identify what we ourselves see, we understand ourselves better in coming to see how we see, as we come to know that which shows up for us. It may be that coming to know ourselves becomes a theme as I write, the creative process enables us to come to know ourselves. We want to know ourselves more deeply, this may just be a condition of being human. We spend a lifetime trying to figure ourselves out. The search to find ourselves is often filled with uncertainty, a sense of feeling lost. Finding ourselves is a roundabout process, requiring an active letting go in losing ourselves (Solnit, 2006). Losing ourselves reveals something about us in the process. So why endure the process of losing ourselves? It seems to me that it is important not to remain stagnant, rather to keep moving towards, to remain in pursuit. One may suggest that you may have never found yourself if you never truly lost this sense of self. Losing oneself is about a pursuit of something beyond oneself. It's about delaying assumptions to let in light and newness. It is a movement.

The impulse to make something can be a venture towards losing self. An opportunity to question the possibilities of certain marks, shapes, colours, and forms. In this losing, with time one can see anew that which was veiled before. The act of looking involved in making requires an active noticing (Greene, 2001). This takes practice, which then becomes utilized in other ways of knowing. Through looking, one can sharpen their ability to become attuned to their surroundings.

### Day Three

#### **Presence**

The act of making allows for a specific focus on the present. Presence is the power of the act of making. In the present moment, it is all too easy to focus on the regret of the past or the fear of the future, thus causing the now to be clouded. In the creative act, one is able to escape from the enticement of past and future. For myself, I cannot help but only think about the decisions I make in the present as I am in the mode of creating. This state of being is cause for the emergent nature of the studio. In remaining present to the creative act one can experience liberation from thoughts that drift to past and to future. I experience a relief, a refreshment whilst making that offers a moment of reprieve, a pause from habitual ways of thinking. The act of making offers the possibility of emergent outcomes that I could not force. Therefore, I work with an eager anticipation of that which I cannot predict. The outcome unfolds before my eyes in a way that is exciting, frustrating and discouraging. The presentness possible in the studio helps me to locate my own self. I feel my presence in the way that I look, the way that I paint or draw. I see the marks that are made from my own hand and I learn in this process. What constitutes a good or bad decision in the studio? What about my decisions do I accept or when do I reject and make over? I decide without knowing the decision as "good" or "bad." Only in hindsight later on, after time passes, am I able to see a work with the clarity to affirm the decisions made in the process.

What causes or leads to the decisions that I make in the paintings? I take from moments and glimpses that stand out to me throughout the day, these moments when I am caught up in the act of looking. In looking, I capture something that is to become transferred onto the surface of my painting. This capture offers a structure for what emerges in the act of presence in the studio.



Why is there a need for structure for the act of making in the studio? Within a context that has such vast possibility, a structure offers an artist a sort of niche to work within.

Stepping into the studio space is like capturing a mindset of presentness to the ever fleeting now. The act of making offers the possibility to focus that which is before us. Making gives the opportunity to be present to ourselves, to sense our own movement, our own way of making decisions. Though the present may be muddled, as time passes clarity emerges.

Day Four

### **Lagging, intuition**

It is difficult to sit down to write, when the subject of the writing is undetermined. The possibilities feel endless. Sometimes, it feels as though the subject will determine itself through the *doing* of it, other times this does not seem so clear. Like today, for instance, I sit down to work on a painting, then I move on to the writing and I cannot figure out how to articulate or write about the experience of painting. Yet, I feel this desire and need to capture what it is about this experience that continually moves me.

A constant question in my head while painting is, “what if?” What if I do this, what if I change that, what if I add that? Action often precedes the question but satisfaction is delayed. I do not know if the decision was successful or not until I have had distance from it. Directly following the action are moments of uncertainty, lack of confidence in the decision, which elicit more decisions and changes to the painting. Finally, there is a breaking moment where all the decisions come together in a moment of pause, to look and feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their culmination. That which I am looking at whilst making the painting, provides the structure for these decisions to be made. However, I abandon what I am looking at and focus on that which is emerging on my painted surface, and this takes over. It is as if the decision-making process of painting is like a tunnel, and the decisions are made without knowing what awaits or how things will fit together. There are moments when things open up and I can see more clearly how the parts come together as a whole. This process yields continually differing results, new places I arrive to. Painting offers this opportunity—to take a journey, arriving at a place I have never been before, to see the gestures of my lived life in a way I did not anticipate. I see the way that colours relate in ways that are surprising, a combination of shapes and colours that draw me in and help me to see the now. These times spent looking, noticing, and decision-making in painting are moments of reprieve in the present moment. The intuitive and impulsive take over. I step in to instances of absolute clarity, *knowing* what to do next, and unsure of where this kind of “knowing” comes from. I wonder how I reach this sort of intuition, what has caused me to make the kinds of decisions that I find myself making. I believe this kind of intuition is the culmination of the fragments and collected ideas throughout one’s living.

**Figure 2**

*Painting on studio floor with smaller watercolour sketches over to*



*Note. Own Photo*

Day Five

### **Recollections of 9/11**

I cannot help but write to record my experience of September 11, 2001 on this day 18 years later. I was in elementary school enjoying a regular day at school, perhaps in spelling class. I noticed the adults around me take on an unexpected demeanor, flurrying and coming in and out of the classroom. I saw my German teacher walk quickly down the hall, coat and briefcase in hand as if leaving in a hurry. Then, I remember black box TV screens turned on in the corner of the classroom, with teachers huddled around them. I had not been told the events that were causing such behavior; however, the tension in the room was calling for me to notice. Leaving school that day, there was a rush of embraces; siblings, parents, children all holding each other tighter than hours previous. There was awe, shock, and fear in the air. It was not until arriving home after being informed of the events that occurred that day, that I began to piece together the tension and behavior I witnessed among my teachers earlier.

Following the events of that day, the horrific images on the screen of planes flying into the buildings were replayed continually. It is as if their continual reemergence in media changed them into a spectacle to view rather than the horrific act that they were.

Moving forward, I found myself thinking of the dust that enveloped the city. Noticing the masks worn by the residents in New York. I remember seeing videos of pedestrians running away, fleeing the buildings. I obsessed over the stories of the people who were fortunate to escape the towers, and constantly watching the news and hearing of the bodies recovered in the rubble. The stories of firefighters and police that sacrificed their lives to protect and save others were numerous. I remember watching George W. Bush stand behind his small podium in the White House, addressing the nation with solemnity and disbelief.

I remember Maxine Greene talks about the creativity necessary to think up such an awful act. I think this draws attention to the negative potential of creativity. Creativity is typically discussed in a way that is positive and empowering, but the negative possibilities for a developed creative mindset can be horrifically destructive. I hesitate to even use the word creativity when referring to such an act as that which occurred on September 11, 2001. The twisted minds that conjured up such an event seem to be isolated from the love that exists in human relationships and the grief that ensues in losing a loved one.

Day Six

### **Movements, empathy**

As thoughts of 9/11 linger in my mind, I wonder, how does one continue in the artistic pursuit when exposed to such adversity? How can I continue to make whilst there is suffering around me? How does making help the reality of the horrible atrocities that occur every day in the world? Maxine Greene (2001) writes that art will not change the world, but it will change the individuals who in turn can change the world. Art can cause the onlooker to be moved so profoundly in a way that enables one to see beyond themselves. This is what is so important for those of us in the world, that we practice the ability to see beyond ourselves. It is paradoxical that the creating or encountering of a work of art at once causes one to notice themselves, looking internally, and also to be moved beyond oneself, practicing noticing surroundings. With these realities of encountering a work of art one could ask, why is it important that one notice themselves as well as notice their surroundings? There are many ways to answer this question, so perhaps I will attempt naming some of them. This is, of course, only from my perspective and may be highly disagreed upon.

It is important to be moved to look beyond oneself because it causes the world to be opened up for what it is, filled with vast differing perspectives and understandings. It is our nature as humans to look internally and become consumed with our own worlds, and it is counterintuitive to look outside of ourselves. This meaningful act needs to be practiced. We need to look outside ourselves. Making art and looking at art allow for this practice to happen. Looking outside of ourselves enables the ability to look to others' needs, possibly even before our own. This is immensely useful in resolving disputes and in reconciliation.

Looking beyond ourselves enables an individual to imagine possibility, outside of their own understanding of what is possible. For example, exposure to a range of cultures and ways of knowing illuminates a whole range of possibilities that may have been veiled before. It is extremely helpful at times to come into knowing new ways of thinking about the fixed compartments of our lives that may provide limitations.

Aesthetic education provides learners with experiences that develop a sensitivity to their perception, senses, and imagination, particularly in a work of art, that calls for attention. By attending to these moments, the student is transformed in not only how they engage with artworks but also with the world around them. Through these experiences, Greene suggests that students and teachers find their own voice, their own agency, and practice using them (Greene, 2001, p. 5).

As individuals, we are changed when exposed to circumstances that cause us to rethink what seems given in our lives. At times, this exposure is desired and at others it is a tremendous burden. Either way, in the exposure to that which illuminates our fixed world we are moved, shifted from where we were before. These changes can be mountainous or incremental. This is how we grow and change. Perhaps as Greene suggests, this is the way art can save us. Greene says, "I believe that opening windows and doors for persons, releasing them to use their imaginations and their minds and their perceptual capacities, may save lives as well as change them" (Greene, 2001, p. 47). Stepping outside of our own perspectives, into another's shoes requires the imagination. This moves us from our fixed worlds towards a more inclusive perspective. This is how one can stand with the immense suffering of the world in one hand and the importance of the creative pursuit in the other, because the imagination through creativity changes lives by helping us see beyond ourselves. This ignites relationships and interaction. Perhaps, through growing in perspective, we can participate in alleviating some of the suffering of the world by cultivating the ability to *see* each other.

## Day Seven

### **Playing Rocks**

I feel joy when I can watch children discover something for the first time. Children engage beautifully with so many simple pleasures of life, often the overlooked. Adults have an opportunity to develop a new appreciation for the things at which a child wonders. I had the opportunity to watch my niece collect rocks, place them in a container, throw and hit them together. As I watched her, I thought about the tendency to become so familiar with the experiences of our lives that small things lose our interest. In a way, our familiarity blinds us to the beauty that surrounds us. Her fascination reminds me of what there is to be noticed in these rocks, in the things that surround us. It is a reminder to pay attention, to notice, and appreciate what I see. In order to have aesthetic experiences, one must practice the skill of taking notice of what is before them. My niece exemplifies the kind of attention that can be paid to the ordinary with a disposition of awe. These moments help us notice ourselves noticing. Whilst discovering

parts of the world, she is discovering herself. She feels what it is like to see, touch, and hear. She practices noticing her surroundings.

In early childhood education and beyond, I wish to help students practice noticing their surroundings. This active discovery enhances the experience of living. As humans, we have a growing awareness of our finitude. This is reason to focus on the present moment. The aesthetic experience enables presence in a specific moment of being. I see that clearly as I watch my niece play with the small rocks; she is present to the moment of discovery and it reminds me of the importance of this kind of experience just by watching her.

I feel this kind of presence whilst looking and painting. Perhaps that is what is so captivating about watching a child engage with materials, for they embody a sort of fascination that reminds me of what there is to be appreciated.

As I think about this young girl, fascinated by rocks, I think about the opportunity to arrive at a place one has not been before. These rocks offer something new, a new discovery or place, that she has not experienced before, and in watching her I am brought along in that experience as well. I can step into her shoes and reimagine the experience of feeling a rock, being enthralled by the noises and feelings and letting these things consume me.

Day Eight

### **Colour, petrified worlds, critique**

A painting offers the opportunity to play with many varying combinations of form and colour. The potential held within colour seems endless. As I spend time painting, this is what strikes me most, the potential possible within colour. Colours come together that I have not seen before, but the question of “what if” propels me to try. Laying colour grounds onto the surface, I hear, almost like a gentle whisper, the next colour to mix and add to the growing composition. Then, in actualizing this colour, it almost never matches the colour that came into my head, the colour becomes what it is. Achieving distance from a painting is as important as the making of it. Distance enables one to see it more clearly for what is without the attachment from the process of making. In this way, distance enables clarity in many areas of life. Distance from a place we are familiar, from what one attaches themselves to, causes what is there to show up in the places that were hidden before. The process of achieving distance is often a path of uncertainty in wonderment of what it will be like to return to that which is being left. As I come back to a painting I have left, or attempted to forget, I come back to it and this coming back is characterized by surprise. As I come back to the painting, I feel disappointment or sometimes I feel pleasant surprise. Another kind of distance is one where I am able to enter into someone else’s perspective. Whilst looking at a painting, another’s position on the painting, what it elicits for them, is a way of achieving distance from my own perspective. We are undoubtedly changed when we become aware of the perspectives of others around us, when the seemingly familiar becomes strange. I see my own work differently once exposed to the nature of how someone else sees it. I understand Maxine Greene’s (2001) notion of the need to be freed from a petrified view of the world in this way, with an ability to imagine things as otherwise (p. 22). That is the same with the works of art that one creates; they become fixed objects, seen only in a specific way, but once opened up to others, we gain clarity. This is the benefit of the critique within art education. A critique offers the perspectives of others to be taken into further consideration. In art school, I experienced many of these and for them I am grateful. Yet, a concern that lingers would be the possibility for critique to cause the student to lose their own voice in the midst of participation. For example, there is no avoidance of a hierarchical structure of whose opinions matter most

within the critique setting, and for reasons that I cannot entirely unpack here, however, this may cause the student to omit their own perspective and adopt someone else's.

Day Nine

### **Performing painting, Exhausted painting, Knowing Painting**

I've thought often of the urgency I feel to continue painting, to keep moving forward, each day in some way or other. With painting, one can take on a painterly way of looking at the world. This constant and everyday mindset gives painting a way of being understood as "exhausted." The urgency to keep painting is a constant beckoning call. I do not feel the sense that I have arrived, I keep doing. Rather, there is always more to be done, more to paint. This is where I think of the idea of exhaustion, the work is tireless. I also thought of the exhausted painting while looking at Paul Housley's work, "The Ego and the Id" recently at Monte Clark Gallery in Vancouver, BC. The work had a quality that felt "exhausted", that Housley had worked tirelessly on the painting. To me, the paint drips feel like sweat drips, exhausted, losing their "preciousness." The paint has been worked over. This paint has picked up, collected, elements in the room of its making, dust, hair— indicators of where it came from. This painting feels worked over. It knows struggle, indecision, lack of precision, quickness and speed. It knows repetition coming back over and over again. There is a sense of motion. It feels coincidental like an unknown result, becoming what it is through the process of being made. It reveals how labor intensive it is not from its precision but from its urgency. These figures appear exhausted, both with their heads down. It's almost as if this is a moment in the fight where these fighters catch their breath.

Day Ten

### **Anticipation**

Yesterday, I was on a flight from Chicago to Vancouver. Just prior to landing, the pilot made his routine announcement to ready the cabin for arrival. There was then a noticeable shift in the demeanor of the passengers on the flight, a shift from a drowsy endurance to one of anticipation. From the rear of the plane, I looked forward to see many of the heads in front perked up over the headrests, leaning for a view out the window, a chance to see what surroundings were visible as a way of locating themselves. I wondered about the many times I and others on the plane may have experienced this sort of anticipation. However many times one may have had this experience, the desire to locate oneself in relation to their surroundings did not seem to lose its novel. At least it had not for me. I have revisited this moment several times since it occurred, and I have wondered what about it has sparked my interest. I think it may have to do with the objectivity and singularity of each passenger's experience in anticipating arriving at their destination. It may have seemed that each person was interested in looking out the window to locate themselves, perhaps to identify how much longer till landing, or whether the plane is over land or ocean. A passenger may look out the window to identify surroundings from a different perspective. I noticed the intersection of Main Street and Southeast Marine Drive in a way I had never seen it before. In that moment of identifying this intersection, my mind immediately recalled the experience of crossing through that intersection as a pedestrian or in a car. Using these past experiences, I was able to identify the intersection, thus offering a way of locating myself in anticipation of arriving. The anticipation of arriving at a destination provides

sustainment to continue on. There are images that come to mind of what it would be like to land at the destination, what would be waiting for me. Each passenger imagines a different destination.

Passengers on an airplane anticipate the arrival at a destination, in the same way that through learning, one anticipates the clarity in self-discovery. Tim Ingold suggests that we learn through self-discovery, and that anticipation characterizes the path of self-discovery (Ingold, 2013, p. 2).

### **Figure 3**

*Work in progress painting leaning up against wall*



*Note.* Own photo

Day Eleven  
**Simple meanings**

As I read the parables from the New Testament teachings of Jesus Christ, I notice profound lessons that lay in simple words. In this way, I wonder at how the small moments of our lives hold more than what they may seem. Simple experiences are an opportunity to come into deeper understanding of what seems mundane, or given. Perhaps, this is a way forward for a project, looking for meanings lingering in the experiences of my every day. I am interested in stopping to take notice of the moments that could pass me by, making the familiar strange. This takes an active focus and sense of questioning as I live out the day. With the passing of time, one cannot control the way that a day rolls into the next, the years roll into the others; the only thing one can do about this is to become present to the moments that are now. One could take up a disposition of anticipation of arriving at a destination, taking the time to notice the moments that show up to us through the process. I suppose in reading the parables of Jesus it makes me think about the meanings that lay in many of the simple things in life. These meanings wait to be discovered, and by attuning myself to that around me throughout the day, I may be able to uncover them.

Day Twelve

### **Studio and Mothering, Not Knowing**

A studio is a difficult space to set up. It is an environment that must be able to capture a specific atmosphere. But there is the need to be able to cultivate a certain rhythm in the space, for it takes time and effort to feel at home.

As a mother, I find my artistic inquiry all the more intertwining with my living, out of necessity. I have no other choice but to think about my creative process while doing other things. I recorded my morning thought process today as a way of unpacking how I think about creating whilst living the mundane and ordinary parts of my day.

Wake up,  
feed baby, change baby,  
put in laundry, glance at studio desk,  
hold fabrics, imagine how I will sew them together,  
imagine stretching the fabric.  
Pull out sewing machine, rock baby, lay baby down for nap.  
Sit down, sew, hear baby, switch laundry, eat.  
Feed baby, sit down to sew, think about what to eat for lunch, think about what I have not prepared for dinner.  
Take baby for a walk, feed baby, lay baby down for a nap.  
Wish I could be sewing, wish I could be painting, wish I could be rocking baby.

Motherhood is filled with conflicting feelings, at once longing for what I do not have and once I have it, longing for what I had. It is also an exercise in balance. Balancing the various things that call for my attention throughout the day; the work at home, the work I want to do, the ways I want to be present to the fleeting moments. The balance is difficult to find, as it requires a focus on the present moment, forgoing all else and making the difficult decision to only be thinking of that which is before me now. The nurturing responsibility of mothering stirs up a way of remaining constantly attuned to his needs. I care for him in the present because I must, he needs my body right this moment. My body works for him and it has been from the beginning. Mothering is the most sacrificial thing I have ever done and I suppose will ever do. I give much



of myself to raise this little boy and give him all that he needs to come into this world. It is my body that must do this difficult task.

There is an uncertainty in making artwork that I am uncomfortable with, I want to know what I am doing, where the process is going. I feel uneasy with not knowing what to do or what will become. This is where the making of an artwork feels like being in a tunnel without having a light source to indicate the ending of the tunnel. It is disorientating, unsettling. I feel that also with the process of a/r/tography, for the unpredictability of the process leads to an uncertainty that feels risky. The potential of a dissatisfying outcome lingers. This makes continuing on in the process difficult, and moments of breakthrough are what propel the work forward. Waiting for the breakthrough is tiring.

Day Thirteen

### **Learning for learning, *Doing*, Following Flow**

I wonder how often the question of whether this work even matter comes across my mind. Does this matter, and whom does this work benefit? Then I think about the way that Tim Ingold (2013) talks about learning to learn. He says, “It is, in short, by watching, listening and feeling — by paying attention to what the world has to tell us — that we learn” (p. 1). Perhaps, the work only benefits me in the sense that I am that one that learns what is to be learned. But it is the spirit of learning to learn that I am able to share with others through the work. That each person can be encouraged to learn what there is to be learned in the world. It is an orientation towards the world that I am trying to understand for myself, in order that others may too see the value of this way of living in the world. The experiences of our lives form the way we think about the world, and this way of thinking becomes “given” to us. We become comfortable in our ways of seeing and understanding the world, yet this can become a limitation when we become unable to unpack the experiences that have shaped us. For this, we need to make the familiar strange and investigate our inclinations, assumptions, and what seems given to us.

Tim Ingold (2013) describes the nature of the anthropologist when saying, “If its method is that of the practitioner, working with materials, its discipline lies in the observational engagement and perceptual acuity that allow the practitioner to follow what is going on, and in turn to respond to it” (Ingold, 2013, p. 4). In the same ways, an artist works with materials and responds to that which emerges in the process. In the acquiring of knowledge, the knowing that comes from *doing* is often overlooked. One might attend a course, in order that they may gain a kind of knowledge they previously were not aware of. But with being as knowing, there could be more that lies in our everyday lives that is to be noticed and learned from, rather than an assumption that the only places to learn are within the four walls of a classroom. Perhaps, it is these “four walls” that offer the space to consider the learning that happens elsewhere. What if the classroom is meant to orientate students outward, recognizing the potential for learning outside of it in a living inquiry? This is where self-study holds its strength. There is much to learn from what we take notice of in the world, a focus on our sense of being. The events of our lives change us, causing a response that affects the trajectory of our thinking and lived lives.

I resonate with Ingold when he says, “In the art of inquiry, the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the material with which we work. These materials think in us, as we think through them” (Ingold, 2013, p. 6). I experience this idea as true in the coming together of a painting; there is much that cannot be predicted before the painting is in its phase of being made, the choices made during the process are specific to the moment. The materials lead my thinking and move me to make certain decisions. I follow the

materials unfolding before me. In the same moment, my curiosity pushes the material towards the next thing, a moment of “what if.”

**Figure 4**

*Work in progress*



*Note.* Own photo

Day Fourteen  
**Mothering changes**

Today, my baby rolled over twice. As his mother, it is interesting watching Levi grow and change. As the person who has continually been closest to him, sometimes I see the changes in hindsight rather than as they are happening. I wonder how this relates to the way that we learn, in thinking about the perspective that distance provides. It is only through photos that I can register just how much Levi has grown since his early days. Other ways I know he is changing are based on memory, for he is heavier and my arms fatigue quicker. How do we learn from hindsight? Noticing the changes in things allows one to see more clearly the way things were before.

Day Fifteen

### **Aliveness**

What does it mean for bodies to be alive? I am intrigued when Ingold (2013) describes the body as a “tumult of unfolding activity” (p. 94). He continues to say, “It takes effort and vigilance to hold things together, whether pots or people” (p. 94). To me this seems to suggest there are other forces in action on our bodies, and that we may have no control over our bodies. Our bodies are on a trajectory that we cannot alternate; though we can delay the effects of this force, we can never stop it. In this sense, time changes everything, but the ability to withstand this varies.

Day Sixteen

### **Teacher and Student, Co-learners**

Today I witnessed the interaction of educator, student, and material in an unexpected way. Of course, the interaction cannot be accurately summarized by these three parts, as there were many more parts that contributed to the event. It was compelling watching educator and student correspond with each other by alternating leading and following in the act of working with charcoal. The alternating of roles suggests different ways of being than the commonly hierarchical perspective of teacher over student, as here they are co-learners. Student and teacher as co-learners offers an alternative to the role of teacher, seeing student’s ways of thinking as opportunities for new ideas about the subjects that can become stagnant. This student moved, rolled and tapped in an emancipated way that was striking. I wondered of the work that had to be done to cultivate this kind of environment for student and educator. They played with movement, material, with a disposition that was curious for what might happen, what could be possible. I watched as the two placed the charcoal on their toes, feet, hands and faces. There seemed to be an absence of fear whilst these two subjects were co-learning. They were freely anticipating what was possible in their interaction with the material. There was a disposition to this child of confidence. The charcoal brought out a belief in this experience for the student and the assurance to see what could be done, that something would happen. I was captured and brought into the flow of this event between them; between the materials, the music, all the factors in the room that animated the experience. We were all brought into and caught up by this moment of flight, that went beyond the factors and towards something more, something significant. There was silence and yet also noise, pauses whilst also moving. The children seemed caught up in the rhythm of the flow in the studio as if they believed in it, as if they believed in the experience of letting in to that which charcoal provokes in them. This, of course, takes practice, a constant returning back to the material. Throughout the time in the studio with these children, the charcoal was acting upon the educators, students and myself as a viewer. It was wrapping us all up in the experience of it. I felt captivated by this flow between student, teacher, material and

environment. Ingold (2013) closely studies the event of flying a kite to explore the dance of agency between human and material (p. 99). Dance is a fitting word as the roles of the two parts are meant to become indistinguishable, since both are fully required in order to make the dance of flying a kite happen. But Ingold is drawing his readers' attention to what animates this interaction of kite and flyer. There is something that happens that causes the flying in a way neither the kite nor the flyer could have anticipated; this is the role of the air. In a lecture to a class of students, Sylvia Kind described this kind of flight as something that happens that is more than either of the individual parts could have done on their own (Sylvia Kind, personal communication, November 24, 2019).

## Day Seventeen

### **Mark-making Does**

In a class to her students, Sylvia Kind asked the question, "What does mark-making do?" (Sylvia Kind, personal communication, November 24, 2019). In asking this question, Kind suggests that it is not a question to be answered but rather a question to ask so that it might lead somewhere or to something else. This way of thinking derives much from Karen Barad's idea of diffraction. My experience with mark-making is by no means universal. There are many factors to what mark-making does, and it ranges amongst all kinds of makers. For me, mark-making captivates. It requires all of your attention. It is transformative, in the sense that little by little mark-making causes one to change their way of focusing on the world. Mark-making is a translation of how I experience the world, it is also direct, which is my experience of the world. I take in moments throughout my day and bring them to the paintings, translating them into this emerging, constantly changing visual language. Mark-making causes me to try out possibilities, it causes me to succeed and also to fail. It causes me to bring things together that would otherwise be separate. Mark-making moves my body to "dance" the painting. I step back, step forward, kneel down, stand back up, bend forward, tilt my head, sit down. It controls the way my body moves around the studio. I am consumed by bringing the marks together to make something and that causes an urgency in moving my body. Mark-making alters the way that time passes, I become so caught up that time becomes different. Mark-making exhausts me, it exhausts the painting. There are endless marks to be made on a painting and thus the marks portray the effort. Mark-making causes me to become prolific, accumulating many marks. Mark-making feels like a continual pursuit, always chasing after what is waiting on the horizon, only to realize that this horizon continues to move as I move towards it. But this does not discourage the effort, it is as if the possibility of arriving at the horizon is what keeps me going and continuing to make marks. Ingold (2013) suggests that, "The living work of art, however, is not an object but a thing, and the role of the artist is not to give effect to a preconceived idea but to follow the forces and flows of material that brings the work into being" (p. 96). This describes how an artist responds to mark-making in a way that is a call to follow and attend to that which shows up in the marks. It is the agency of the marks that call for the action of the artist. This view of artist working is distinctly different than artist possessing an idea in mind then bringing it to fruition in a physical sense, so therefore the artwork is simply the embodiment of a prior idea. For Ingold, the liveliness of an artwork is in the material. The material is what calls for the response of the artist. The artist develops the ability to remain attuned to the material, to push and change and react to what shows up for them in it.

**Figure 5**

*Hands holding*



*Note.* Own Photo

Day Eighteen -  
**Responsiveness in the Studio**

Rather than seeing the mind and materials separate or as one acting upon the other, Ingold refers to Gregory Bateson's understanding of mind and environment as corresponding alongside each other. Ingold quotes Lambros Malafouris, saying that if "cognition is indissociable from action — *'then material culture is consubstantial with mind'*" (Ingold, 2013, p. 97). There is an entanglement of body, mind, and materials that wraps these parts into an all-encompassing experience.

Ingold, Bateson, and Malafouris bring my attention to the way materials act on me whilst in the studio, how I am moved physically, visually, mentally in the presence of paint and the environment of the studio. This takes the emphasis off of myself as the "creator" and moves it towards my role as responder, participant. Responsiveness is an essential state of being in the studio, a posture of responding to what emerges in that space. As one practices a disposition of responsiveness, seeing themselves as a participant in the space, one is able to take better notice of that which happens in the studio is beyond themselves. Like many other disciplines, responsiveness takes repetitive practice. In acquiring this disposition of responsiveness, one develops a sensitivity to the world around them. Responsiveness transfers to other parts of being, having the ability to be attuned to the events that come up in a life.

Therefore, in thinking about "cause" and "effect" within the studio practice, Malafouris' quote calls for me to see the way that materials act on me. It makes me think about how my mind is at work whilst I respond to that which the materials are bringing up. The studio offers the space to notice visibly the way materials shape and affect me. It gives me reason to look and notice how the materials of my everyday living affect the way I live amongst them.

Somehow in responding to what materials draw out of us, we become more aware of the things in our lives that we may otherwise avoid or remain naive to. We can become so caught up in the way the world operates that we forget to, as Maxine Greene (2001) says, imagine things as *otherwise*. For Greene, this is the way to social change, helping people to imagine things as *otherwise* and to reimagine petrified worlds. There is potential held in making that causes makers to better notice the realities of their worlds.

Day Nineteen

### **Slowness**

Time acts on me as it brings a sense of urgency. I feel a lack of time in relation to the time that I feel I need. Slowness is counterintuitive. It is as an acceptance that all one may or want to accomplish will not be achieved, or it will become in a time register devoid of rushing. It will come as it may. To take on the disposition of slowness in the world is to resist the given parts of the world.

Day Twenty

### **Mothering, Mother, Motherhood**

Motherhood brings what is unforeseen. No one enters into it knowing how it will feel or what it will be like. It is a state of being which requires a continual surrender to the new and the unknown. Mothering requires the sacrifice of body, mind, and spirit. You are no longer your own, for a younger, more vulnerable life needs the care and nurturing of a mother. As a mother, time changes, and children are embodiments of how time changes us. There is an entanglement of time passing and the growth of a child and mother. Time feels complex, it both moves forward and stands still. Mothering causes one to feel satisfaction at levels they could not have imagined as well as anxiety that feels troublesome. Due to the necessary demands on a mother, she must

live to collect ideas as fragments in the midst of living life. This can cause the work to feel frustrating, yet it also has the potential to bring further meaning and purpose to the role of mother, as offering the space to think differently about things in a generative way whilst living out the demands of motherhood. Mothering has the potential to bring up ideas, thoughts and considerations that otherwise may not have occurred. To be a mother is an opportunity to practice balancing the many roles in which she operates. The coinciding of different roles, or ways of being, is the chance to imagine the possible ways these parts can inform each other. Being an artist informs the way I mother, which informs the way I relate to others around me as a friend, daughter and partner.

Mothering is transformational in the way that what it requires of you is so demanding it calls for a complete shift in the way one thinks of themselves in relation to those in need of care, forcing an attitude of selflessness. Motherhood necessitates multitasking, operating at multiple levels of thought at once. At one moment considering basic needs of food, the next considering developmental needs, the next consumed with thoughts of one's own needs.

Day Twenty-one

### **Studio Presence**

A couple months back, Paul Housley had a show at Monte Clark Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia titled, *The Player Becomes the Game*. One of the works I came back to several times was, "The Ego and the Id." An overall impression left from the work was exhaustion. The tireless work of the artist made the painting feel tired, as if so much effort, time, thought into the painting left the work exhausted by the process of its making. One painting, "The Player Becomes the Game," held within it everything that was ruminating from the rest of the work; it held a state of being exhausted. The paint drips seemed like sweat drips and, exhausted, it has lost its "preciousness." The paint had picked up elements in the room of its making, dust, hair—indicators of where it came from. This painting felt worked over. It knows struggle, indecision, lack of precision, quickness and speed. It knows repetition, coming back over and over again. There is a sense of motion. It feels coincidental like an unknown result, becoming what it is through the process of being made. It reveals how labor intensive it is, not from its preciseness but from its urgency. These figures appear exhausted, both with heads down. It's almost as if this is a moment in the fight in which they are catching their breath. I feel the difference between how quickly time passes when making an artwork and yet, in onlooking, time seems to move much slower. I feel exhausted. I look at tired bodies, bodies pushed to their limit. Bodies pushed, bodies tired. Bodies giving it their all, bodies sweating, bodies longing for rest, bodies pushing out every effort. In their effort they are not concerned with appearance, but zoned in on their craft, their sport.

Being present to this work I cannot help but feel, sense, see, how it has an affect on me. Peter DeBolla (2001) refers to a Barnett Newman painting when writing about this same kind of presence. He says the painting causes him to be present to himself, his existence, and his being there in front of it (p. 39). I imagine how this relates to Housley's presence in his studio whilst making the painting that I look at before me. How does the act of making also, like looking at an artwork, cause one to notice themselves as present? I think about the differences between Housley being present to the painting in a different way than I find myself present to it and to myself now. The paint causes a kind of action on Housley, a movement on his body as he pushes it around. In ways, the painting continues to do so to me as I stand before it, it holds me there for a moment, lingering. As I step forward and back, the paint reveals itself over time.

The work in the studio is another kind of presence to the body. Studio presence causes the body all sorts of movements with the purpose of following what emerges when body, mind and material correspond with one another. Perhaps art-making is the opportunity to practice presence in a way that will enable one to be present to their life in a whole new way. Art-making has the capacity to wake one up to notice the parts of their lives that show up for them. By this I mean that an art practice provokes the artist to pay attention to moments of significance that rise up as the inevitable result of living with curiosity towards the world.

**Figure 6**

*Work in progress*



*Note. Own Photo*

Day Twenty-two  
**Kite-Flying, Corresponding**



In chapter seven of Tim Ingold's (2013) book *Making*, he describes the entanglement of roles between a kite-flyer, kite and air, potter, wheel and clay, herdsman, toggle and rope, all as a dance of animacy. The dance of animacy between artist, paint and paintbrush would also be interesting to explore in the context of how Ingold discusses these other relations. He explains this dance of animacy between human and artifact as not simply an interaction but rather a correspondence. In the example of kite-flying, he suggests the need for the artifact, the kite, in order to correspond with the material, the air (Ingold, 2013, p. 101). The material itself cannot be credited with holding all the agency for the correspondence to occur, rather, it is better described as a dance, where the components take turns leading and following. Finally, using the example of a cellist using a cello, the musician not only plays the instrument but also, possibly more importantly, corresponds with sound. It could be argued that anyone can learn how to play an instrument, but what sets one musician apart from another is their own particular way of corresponding with the sound that the instrument enables. This is where Ingold suggests the importance of craftsmanship, of "finely honed manual-gestural skills" (p. 102).

Day Twenty-Three

### **Something Happens, Anticipation and In-between**

Much of the work in the studio is done with the anticipation of something happening. One prepares the space for this something to happen. A potter wedges clay, a painter prepares a canvas, a photographer loads film. These are moments of anticipation, an in-between space, left but not arrived at yet. The in-between is uncomfortable, filled with ambiguity, uncertainty. The in-between is liminal, lacking clarity of what will transpire. Perhaps, the unknown has become familiar in the sense of not knowing. One may know what has become of this anticipation in times prior; however, the present is new. These traces of circumstances prior may be a part of what propels the artist forward, for she has felt the anticipation and arrived, finding the sweet reward of her efforts. The material moment has been initiated, yet it has not been actualized. The artist does not know exactly what their preparations will bring about. Therefore, in this sense, the work of the artist is a venture into unknown potentialities. The artist sets the stage for this "something" and waits with expectancy, hoping that their efforts will not be wasted.

I move about the studio, pacing, moving. Moving this, placing that, shifting. I leave and come back, still preparing. The wonderment of what will fill this space, what will cover the surface and how will I arrive there? All I can do now is prepare, set the space for the event to occur. In one way, the painting is an event that occurs, it has a beginning and an end. However, this beginning and end are ambiguous, when does the painting begin and when does it end? From this vantage point, the whole process of bringing the painting into being is under scrutiny. Does it begin with the thought, or inclination to begin the process, i.e. acquiring the support? Or, perhaps, the collecting of moments and fragments with the desire to bring them together somehow? When does the painting end? This has long been a topic of discourse surrounding the impossibility of identifying a clear ending to the work. One might suggest that the work continues in each interaction with it, while others may deem the work finished once it departs from the studio or when the artist declares it is finished. In this sense, the beginning and the anticipation and the ending of a work of art are entangled together. The anticipation is what causes the collection of ideas and fragments, the preparing of the support, setting up the space. For me, these are beginning points of the painting and these moments of start are wrapped up in the emergence of the painting.

Anticipation is cause for a quality of slowness. our anticipation of events occurring gives these events the feel of slowness, lagging. The lead up feels slow and laborious, exhausting. The reward comes slow, after much build up. Sometimes the reward is never really that, a reward. A disposition of anticipation is a slow presence to what emerges from the preparing for something to happen.

The something that I am describing is that which animates, activates, the correspondence of human and material in the making of an artwork. Ingold writes, "...Even if the maker has a form in mind, it is not this form that creates the work. It is the engagement with materials. And it is this engagement that we must attend to if we are to understand how things are made" (Ingold, 2013, p. 22). From the engagement with materials, something happens. The artist may have an idea in mind, a direction they are headed in, but the actualization of this thought is only done in correspondence with materials. Ultimately, the materials act upon this initial idea or thought, causing it to come to fruition in ways one may not have initially predicted. The "something" is the part of making which reaches beyond what a maker could have foreseen.

**Figure 7**

*Paint Palette*



*Note. Own Photo*

**Figure 8**

*Watercolour painting in progress*



*Note. Own Photo*

Day Twenty-Four  
**Studio as anticipatory continued...**

I have mentioned before the structure, system, or limitations an artist may develop to create their work within. To me this lends to the idea that the artist initiates, creating the space for “something” to happen. As mentioned before, this is often characteristic of the time spent in the studio, with an anticipatory mindset, in preparation for what will happen. Therefore, the limitations that an artist creates within are done so with the anticipation that something will happen. Though it varies as to what one can predict will come about, an artist anticipates that there will be something that comes about in the process. Anticipation is surprising when the anticipated often does not come to fruition in the way imagined. The anticipated brings with it the unknown, newness, unfamiliarity, surprise, and clarity. The anticipated is a process begun with the hope to discover. However, it requires an effort of forever chasing, as it never becomes what one might imagine it to be. Anticipatory is a quality that begins to make sense of the emergence in the studio, processes that bring about work that I could not have fully predicted or imagined in their totality. The work is always different than I thought it would be. This is what makes the work in the studio invigorating, it’s a constant unfolding of new forms and ideas that keep me continually anticipating what would come about next. In identifying the quality of anticipation, one may understand that the work in the studio is never conclusive but rather a continual becoming. Anticipation is not meant to be descriptive of the way one works in the studio, but rather offering one way of meaning to what happens in this liminal space.

Day Twenty-Five

### **Knowing in present, realizing in hindsight, making sense of**

Motherhood is a learning by doing. The moments of uncertainty are so because they lack familiarity. I do not know yet how to respond or act, so I learn by doing. One may suggest that you can never really be prepared to become a parent. Others might say that you do not know what it is like to be a parent, a mother, give birth, etc, until you do it. It is a way of knowing that comes through action, moment by moment. I had this funny encounter once with a person late one evening in my studio. After making some kind of comment about the continual necessity I am to my baby, and the exhaustion that came with that, this person responded, “well you knew what you were getting into right?”. And in the moment, I contended and said yes of course, I knew. But in further thinking, I really did not, for how could I? I could imagine, of course, what it would be like to be a mother, but I couldn’t know what it felt like until I experienced *mother* myself. So, in hindsight, I wish I would have said something like, “well, not really actually, it’s only become real as I’ve come to experience it.” But, alas, the conversation is long gone, and so is my chance to assert what I really feel. I have found that I come to see things only in hindsight rather than in the present. *It causes me to wonder if we know things before we realize that we know them.* This suggests that awareness of knowledge is different than the knowledge itself, it takes time to know that we know what we know. Often knowing is not apparent immediately, but after repetition or the passing of time. Knowing reveals itself at a later time. Rather, there is a way of knowing that reveals itself in the present moment. In this way to know, and to know that one knows, is both a present and reflective of past. For example, standing in front of an artwork, knowing is in the presence of this artwork. Yet, the event lingers and this also reveals ways of knowing the art work when one is absent from it.

Why does one feel the need to make sense of things? What propels one to the journey of self-discovery? Where does the motivation come from to bring meaning to our experiences? It may be a shared human condition to derive meaning from the experiences that make up our lives.

However, the question remains, *how* does one come to understand meaning? I want to suggest that meaning comes from *doing*.

In first chapter of his book “Making”, Tim Ingold (2013) talks about the class that he developed at University of Manchester where he facilitated regular conversations between artists, architects and anthropologists discussing the overlap in their fields of study. It was not long before he realized the need for “*doing things ourselves*” (p. 9). Their conversations, while meaningful, could only take them so far. Conversation about making lacked a way of knowing that only comes through doing. Therefore, the class began to do acts of making together and they concluded that the *doing* offered much meaning to their discoveries together in other ways than what is accomplished in seminar.

Just as with Ingold’s class, there are ways of knowing that only come through making, *doing*. I take only five minutes of doing in the studio before I realize how little control I have over the materials with which I engage. Paint dries out before I am able to use it, or colour mixes in ways that get out of hand. There is a continual initiating and responding that happens, in moments that come up as I experience them rather than being able to predict or anticipate them. Familiarity builds in time as the continual surprise of the unknown becomes part of the activity in the studio, but every surprise is different. *Doing* whilst making is an act of discovery. The work of an artist, learner, and educator all entail a process of search and discovery.

Day Twenty-Six

### **Achieving Distance, Painting, painted**

Learning is like following a chain link rope, one link in the chain leads to the next, to allow one to make sense of the previous chains and illuminate future links in the chain. Making is the same way, it is a journey from one step to the next following where the path leads, a “flow” from one thing to the next (Ingold, 2013, p. 46).

In chapter five of his book *Making*, Ingold refers to Deleuze and Guattari when he suggests the possibility that “...painters cannot see what they are painting” (Ingold, 2013, p. 72). One must achieve a certain distance in order that they may be able to fully see the work they are engaged with; then again, one could argue whether or not they will ever truly be able to “see” the work. I achieve this distance by spending time away from the painting, days, weeks, months. Time helps me to *see* the painting. Somehow, documenting the painting with a photograph, taking the painting out of the same physical space I am in, allows me to see the parts that I cannot see when I am with it. Just as it takes time to learn the characteristics of the material, how it acts on me, how it moves and behaves, it also takes time to learn how to stay at a distance from the work, allowing me to truly see it. What would happen if I purposefully remain close and resist the urge to keep my distance? How does remaining close hide what is revealed at a distance? How does keeping a distance from the work alter the trajectory of it?

While thinking about the perdurance of an artwork, the way that an artwork endures time, I wonder, how does a painting come alive? Does an artwork have pointed moments of aliveness? I could try to identify all the moments in which a painting comes alive. Every new encounter with it, coming back to the painting in the studio after time spent away from it, breakthrough moments where the painting and I become dislodged from the fixed point we may have been caught up in, each different voice that speaks to their presence felt beside the painting, each voice speaking to the presence of the painting. Every time the work enters into a new space, seen differently. Each time a stretcher is built, or the supplies to create the stretcher are collected.

Each “a-ha” moment before the painting, when time spent in front of the work gifts the viewer with a new part of itself. Every new layer of paint, or every moment the artist steps back to see the whole. The paint leads the artist to see the work differently. Any time one achieves this kind of distance brings the surprise revelation of what is held within the artwork, veiled before yet visible now.

**Figure 9**

*Crossed Feet*



*Note.* Own Photo

**Figure 10**

*Detail of a painting*



*Note.* Own Photo

Day Twenty-Seven

## **Writing and Painting, Reading**

Why is it that the writing feels more important than the painting? There is a sense of hierarchical value between the two disciplines of this project, the writing and painting. Perhaps this comes forth from the tendency to place a great emphasis on understanding through language, seeing language as the best way to infer information back and forth, to convey meaning. Is it not possible to communicate with other ways, other mediums of communication? Of course it is. Therefore, one cannot suggest that writing is of most importance in achieving dialogue or developing ideas. This structuring of importance is a falsity, for both practices inform and bring clarity to the other. The writing is a way of working out with plain language what happens in the studio. It is in this way that the writing reverberates back a way of knowing that which is the experience in the studio. The painting gives substance to the writing in that it provides the content for which to roll ideas around, to bounce back and forth. Writing implies reading. Reading is an integral process, as it pushes along ways of thinking about writing and painting, materials and makers. Vice versa, the writing offers new ways of thinking about what paint does, how it acts on those who use it. However, the way that they inform each other is not always so clear. Much like the way Ingold (2013) suggests that materials are not passive but rather active, causing those who encounter them to respond in ways that alter or change one's course of action, so it is with reading the thoughts and ideas of others. One's own curiosities can be found in the words and writings of another. This shapes the way one's thoughts develop. The three processes of reading, writing and working with paint cannot be distinguished in terms of differing value but are rather caught up in an ever-circulating system, continually informing each other. Because of the nature of these entangled processes, the one who engages them is caught up in a never-ending project. From the beginning, one may think that there is an end point, an arrival to anticipate that these practices of reading, writing, and painting will eventually lead them to, only to find out that this end point is a moving target. The maker, writer and reader will become swept up in an entangled process that is a living inquiry. It becomes a way of living, of being. In this sense, the practice becomes a way of showing up in the world, rather than a means to an end. In the end, to look towards a practice such as the one I have developed, and to assume that it will lead to a final destination, is a mislead hope; rather this process lends to adopting a disposition of anticipation of what is to come, to what is there and what can be seen. It is an attempt to come into deeper ways of knowing and being in the world.

Day Twenty-Eight

### **Clay Ecologies**

While participating in a course taught by Sylvia Kind, the class was tasked with the prompt to choose a material, and notice the ecology surrounding us whilst working with it. In her book, *Encounters with Materials*, Kind (2017) and her co-authors, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Laurie L. M. Kocher, demonstrate the potential ecologies that are present in the engagement with clay. The use of the word ecology describes the way in which a material has a life and acts upon its environment. The focus of the course was to pay attention to the way a material acts on an environment, human and non-human. There were several realizations during this exercise that have lingered. First, the clay caused us, the participants, to re-conceptualize the liveliness of a dead tree laying across the forest floor. We noticed the way clay fills cracks, collects debris from the ground as it drops, and covers. Clay moulds to the surface it is laid upon, it imprints and imitates. The air was cold and the clay retained the coldness, transferring cold to our hands. Clay left remnants with skin that was left dried out, it transferred pigment as the moisture of the bark



attached to the moisture of the clay. After more time spent with the clay, we began to notice the collective impulses of filling in the gaps in the bark with clay, then clay was filling in crevices, cracks, holes, and voids. The clay created the space for us as participants to notice the small details of this fallen tree, noticing the qualities in the bark, the way that pine needles attach themselves to the clay in a way that is magnetic. The clay moves our bodies around the log, over it and under it, looking for more places calling to be filled in. As participants in the experience, we walked outside without much of an idea of how clay would act on us and where it would stop us. The experience was full of entanglements of clay stopping, moving, changing us whilst we manipulate, move, and change it. It is a continual back and forth without clear linearity as to how one exactly acts upon the other, but we can only wonder at what these relations might be, or how they come about. In this instance, a clear distinction of roles, of cause and effect, is not necessary as it is not the goal of the process. Rather, the motivation is to notice and wonder at what is happening in the interactions, in the experience itself. I can only know that I did not have an ability to predict what would happen with the clay, but something did happen, and how that “something” came about is what I am curious about.

Day Twenty-Nine

### **Coming to love what one loves**

In James K.A. Smith’s (2016) book, *You Are What You Love*, he asks his readers to consider the ways that one learns to love the things that they love. Perhaps, he suggests, it is through the habits of our lives that form and shape that which we come to love. What kind of habits do we cultivate in our lives that develop a sense for the things we love most? How can this be thought of in relation to the way one thinks through making? A continual return to materials, to seeing what they can do, what they do. And perhaps, Smith suggests, this correspondence with materials only causes a maker to delve deeper into noticing the potentialities of these materials.

I want to consider colour as material in the sense of Ingold’s (2013) notion of material and maker. The way colour acts in the making of a painting could be thought of in the same way that Ingold (2013) thinks of writing a book, with a mind of its own, charting its own path, beckoning its writer to follow. Colours call out and reverberate from each other. Paint does have a mind of its own, and a painter follows its path. The painting becomes in the process of its formation. It is through the laying down of different colours beside each other that one knows how to continue on, for the thinking is laced in the doing. Painting is not the execution of a plan, the plan is to make the painting; therefore, to follow its path. This path is one that becomes itself through the exchange of material and maker corresponding, leading and guiding together.

The studio is a space for working, thinking, and making all intertwined with each other. This is why I work in the studio while writing on this project, as I am thinking through making, and writing these thinking thoughts down, documenting and painting. Writing and painting offer a way of reflecting back the experience, making sense of it, and going back to the studio again to test what came of it. The making kickstarts the thinking, the thinking causes the making; it is an entanglement that I am satisfied with, always wondering at the intermingling, where one begins and one ends.

Day Thirty

## Material Lives

I think of the liveliness of processes of making, such as writing and painting. When talking about materials such as charcoal Sylvia Kind (2015) suggests that, “materials are not just static bits of matter waiting for someone to do something to them, but are always already in the midst of becoming something else” (Kind & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, p. 99). Kind’s words offer a way of thinking of materials from a non-human centered perspective, recognizing that materials have lives of their own. Kind (2017) asks,

What if humans’ role in shaping materials is not as central as we believe? What if materials shape us as much as we shape them? What if we pay attention to the effects of things and to how things move together, not asking what an object or a thing or a material is, but what does a material do? (p. 4)

Materials do things that show lives of their own. What materials do, demonstrates their own liveliness. It seems to me that this can be said of most all materials, that they do what they do. A painting remains alive, even when it may be considered finished. Paint rots its surface, loses its colour. Other come to see it, and the painting lives on in another imagining of it. Of course, materials do the things they do as they are experimented with. Thus, experimentation is largely a quality of the encounter between maker and material. Kind (2014) says,

Experiments are not without risk, of course. Outcomes cannot be predicted or known in advance. There is always the danger of reproducing the same, of decomposing one or more elements of the assemblage. But if we are prudent in our experimenting, we can open up worlds. (p. 870)

With perseverance, and an active working with what a material does, new worlds of what is possible begin to emerge. New moments, potentials, come from noticing what is possible with a material.

Due to a material’s inherent liveliness, artist and maker experiment with what comes of a material encounter. It is unpredictable and requires an attention, an active noticing of what shows up. In this way, Kind explains how time is much like materials. Borrowing from Karen Barad, she explains that time is a “dynamic participant in framing life...time is unpredictable, a materializing force that brings newness and surprise” (Kind, 2014, p. 875). Once we begin to notice the ways that materials have lives of their own, we can begin to recognize all the more so how a human-centered notion of the world fails to acknowledge all that is the liveliness of materials.

## Day Thirty-One

### Makers as making

It is interesting to think of maker as both a verb and a noun. A maker is what one is and also what one *does* all tangled into one word. It is with a shift in perspective that one sees maker in differing ways. Maker seems to imply a sense of control over that which is being made. Though there is an element of control, too often one fails to see the way that a maker encounters and reacts to the materials she works with. Working with materials is transformative in this sense, for materials have the capacity to change us, to change the way we act, think, and *know*. In borrowing from Tim Ingold’s (2013) *Making*, one comes to know through doing. The doing is a process of knowing for oneself rather than being told. In thinking about the way that Ingold brings different disciplines alongside each other in his book, one can only wonder, what is the same amongst all materials? Are there universal qualities to the materials we work with, and if so, how does that make one think about the effectiveness of the word disciplines to distinguish

ways of knowing from each other, is this really necessary? Perhaps I could attempt to understand these material commonalities.

Working with materials opens new ways of working with those materials, it is an ever-flowing emergence, a path to be followed. As makers engage with them, materials open up to their makers in a continually unfolding process.

**Figure 11**

*Flat painting*



*Note.* Own Photo

**Figure 12**

## *Drawing play*



*Note.* Own Photo

### Day Thirty-Two

#### **Learning and Pack-Donkey People**

As an educator, Ingold's book *Making* informs the way the students learn. Much like the way Ingold speaks about straight-lined people and pack-donkey people, could this also apply to the way that one thinks about education? A straight-lined approach towards education may only see students as receivers of knowledge, acquiring education for the ability to be qualified for a specific career path. A pack-donkey approach towards education may be one that emphasizes enabling students to take on a life of living inquiry, pursuing knowledge and learning for themselves. Though becoming qualified for specific career positions is important, what would happen if a disposition of curiosity and a living inquiry were just as important as being qualified? Ingold's book confirms the importance of enabling students to become curious about the world and learn things for themselves. The question then becomes, where does the educator fit in all of

this? The best thing an educator can do for their students, I believe, is offer support and set students on a path of lifelong learning. But how does one come to know the importance of learning as a lifelong journey? Maxine Greene's 2001 book *Variations on a Blue Guitar* suggests that as educators, one must live a life of inquiry in order to encourage students to do the same.

Day Thirty-Three

### **Making and deciding**

Why is it that any time I may have an idea, a vision for what a work will look like, it does not materialize in this form? Perhaps this is because of the liveliness of materials, which alter the outcomes of our encounters with them. I can have a very specific plan and still there is a surprise, an unexpected turn, in seeing the way things come together. Artist responsiveness directly correlates with what materials do. In my experience, colour has a mind of its own, suggesting what comes next, which colour belongs beside the other.

Making denotes deciding. One could choose to only see decision-making as an imposition onto materials, such as the idea of artist as the genius from which the work is produced. Rather, decisions emerge in correspondence *with* materials. The decision-making process of the making of an artwork is an entanglement of artist and material, as Ingold (2013) states, a force field of flows between maker and material. Much like the way the air acts for the kite and kite-flyer, enabling their correspondence, I am curious what the third component is between painter and paint. This is perhaps the surface for the painting, for without a surface a painter is unable to paint. I do not mean surface in the traditional, rectangular sense, as there are plenty of painters painting in a variety of forms and surfaces. However, it is the surface that enables one to push paint along and that causes one to *paint*.

I do and then I come back and write. The writing informs the way I think as I make, and the making informs the way that I come to write. Ultimately, the materials act on me. I am captured and curious, I hope to make sense of this action by writing and continuing to correspond with materials.

Day Thirty-Four

### **Barad, Knowledge, Mothering**

As stated in an interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012), Karen Barad believes that the agency in things, human and non-human, is the potential for things to mutually respond to each other. Barad says, "Agency is about possibilities for worldly re-configurings" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 55). Perhaps Barad is suggesting a different way of thinking of relations with things. In so doing, one can begin to release the human subject from being the central force recognizing the entanglement of human and non-human in the way things come to be. Further, Barad encourages readers to consider all other contributors at play beyond the human and non-human. After reading Barad's interview, a thought lingers— it is difficult to see things differently, to be open to things not being as they appear. As she mentions a lack in scientific literacy, Barad argues for "all kinds of people around the lab bench, so that scientific literacy should no longer be seen as being solely the responsibility of the Sciences" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 53). One of the greatest difficulties is having the courage to see things differently. To think *with* other disciplines, thus changing the way one sees their own, in turn recognizing the interconnectedness of things in ways otherwise taken for granted.

One thought that I have had since becoming a mother, this entirely vulnerable thought as I wake in the wee hours of the morning to the whimpering cry of my newborn, is that there is no

one else who can do this for me. In these early days, it is only me for this little babe. I am fortunate to have the support and assistance of family and friends around me, but I cannot be replaced by them. I long for supportive families for all women mothers but I know this is not the case. I am grateful. Yet, no one else can achieve the inquiry, acquire new ways of learning, of knowing, for us; we must venture down its path ourselves. We are, of course, encouraged along by the ideas, thoughts, and input of those around us, yet these sources of input do not replace our own way of doing to know things. We must seek after that which we desire to know. Therefore, knowledge becomes something to be gained through doing rather than information to be downloaded.

**Figure 13**

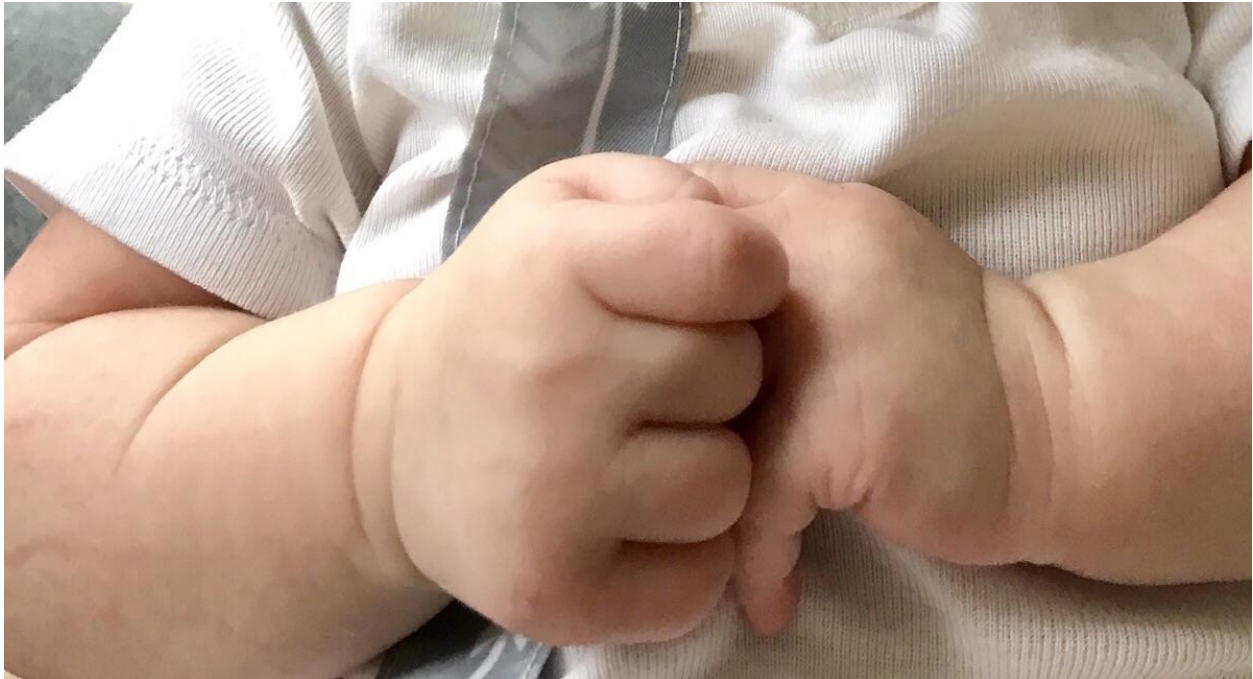
*Work in progress on easel*



*Note. Own photo*

## Figure 14

### *Folded Hands*



*Note.* Own Photo

### Day Thirty-Five

#### **Materials Surprise, Paintings as Assemblages**

I think of the painted works, and written works as assemblages, collecting and gathering ideas to make sense of them in correspondence with each other. In being present to a making moment, one does not hold a full understanding of all that is there. It takes time and distance to be able to hold things together to make sense. Much like the paintings, this writing process is a stitching together of ideas, thoughts and input from others, piecing them together to know what there is to know.

Artists come to know through *doing*. Artists also enable insights into what happens in acts of making by doing. They think with the materials and processes that emerge. As with painting, one may not know what the outcome will be, but one courageously, and hopefully, follows the path of its making. Artists are inquisitive, posing questions, problem solving, finding solutions. Artists' work is tireless effort, always searching, moving towards an ever moving, shifting target. Always in pursuit, never arriving, yet sustained by this pursuit. It is the pursuit that is shaped by the artist's correspondence with materials. Materials shift, change, stay the same, move, and more. Materials surprise the one who lingers with them. This surprise is one thing that particularly interests me, the way we can be so attentive to a material, then in a moment be completely caught off guard. One can *know* a material in one moment and then in the next moment feel completely distant. I would call this a moment of shift, when materials change from familiar back to unfamiliar again. This characterizes a leap in one's awareness of the potential held within a material. A moment of surprise, I would suggest, is what propels forward

a pursuit of a material. The possibility of having one's perception shift and expand lures one towards a fascination with materials.

The moments of surprise, as mentioned before, demonstrate all that is held within our experiences that are veiled and then revealed. One can become so enthralled with their perception of how things are that in a moment's notice a shift can open up new ways of understanding from a shifted perspective. This is not to say that our perception of things is false, rather, one's own perception is just that, one's *own*. It can hardly be understood as representational of an entire experience, rather simply a sliver. When we come to terms with the limits of our perception, we may become more motivated to understand what or how one's perception was constructed in the first place. Perhaps this is why artists engage in material pursuits, to continually be brought to a new or different perception of what was seemingly familiar. When the familiar becomes strange, opportunities for knowing and learning present themselves. As the familiar continues to be made strange, one is able to separate themselves from their taken-for-granted world.

For me, painting offers an opportunity for familiarity to become unfamiliar again. As I combine fields of color, the gestures and mark making surprise me time and time again. I can begin with a plan only to have it completely altered by the surprises that emerge as a result of what the paint *does*.

#### Day Thirty-Six **Forms, Designs**

The process of engagement changes form in its material presence, as well as in the mind of the maker. There is a transformation that happens from what was thought to what is, and the result is often surprising. The surprise, I would suggest, becomes the hope for every creative pursuit. Thus, artists and makers continue in their processes in hope of more moments of surprise. Ingold's quote offers the dilemma to understand more of how things are made, and this making event is one that is puzzling and intriguing all at once, causing scholars, artists and viewers to want to understand a making moment. This is where Karen Barad's concept of diffraction is particularly useful, for one does not assume that an event of making can be understood in its totality; rather, one derives possible meanings and potential outcomes in a generative and suggestive manner (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012). In this way, diffracting from events of making gives ways of knowing and understanding the significance of these events, not in an effort to be prescriptive but to develop layers of meaning. His question towards the end of the quoted section above illustrates the need to go through with making things to come to understanding. Making causes something to happen; in being with the things made, this changes how they act and thus changes the way one perceives them. A design is filled with anticipation for what the "destination" or the actualization of the design *will* be like. But a design is only that, limited in its actuality, limited in what it can hold. Ingold's questions asks readers to consider that the design is only part of the process of making; through actualizing a design, the design is refined and sharpened, and made to be what it is.

In order to understand how things are made, Ingold proposes one pays attention to the engagement with a material. In paying attention, one may think diffractively about what happens in moments of engagement. It requires an attention that is sensitive to the back and forth, mingling dance of all that animates a making moment. Pedagogical narrations in early childhood educational settings attempt to be focused on that which comes about in encounters with materials for children and educators.



Day Thirty-Seven

### **Living Inquiry, Processes of Thinking**

How does one best document processes of thinking? Perhaps, in this very writing process, the writing is another form of documenting thinking. I think *with* the words that I write. Just as painting documents part of the thinking, the writing documents another part of thinking. The writing is an attempt to document the artist's way of thinking, connecting, gathering, collaging, assembling, putting together. The initial format for this project was a chronological recording of forty days of writing, attempting to write a certain amount each day and failing or often barely meeting the mark. This demonstrated the way that thinking processes are entangled with living a life. As a young mother, time is not my own. I am sitting down in one moment, the next I am back on my feet to care for my young one. I take a breath, lift my feet from the weight that holds them down, to rest and anticipate time to myself, only to have that switch in an instant. This writing and working process is one in which I hold ideas and concepts of making, learning, thinking, painting all in tension, and this tension guides the process without determining its outcome.

Kind is continually asking her students to consider what is at work, at play, in acts of making. She encourages students to notice the maker in relation to material and the environment. I wonder how then we can notice ourselves in relation to material and environment? How is our way of noticing limited, what do we miss, what do we pay attention to? This is where it becomes most interesting to me, the realization of the things that capture us.

Day Thirty-Eight

### **Thinking with, endings as pauses**

In chapter two of *Making*, Ingold describes the event of making baskets with the 4 A's class. This event was heavily generative for thinking about the ways of engaging with and thinking with materials. There was much to learn in the act of making baskets, thus showing that something is revealed in the acting and doing of basket-weaving. That "something" is up for interpretation. However, one can wonder how the environment surrounding a making event has its effect on the event of making. Ingold suggests that in basket weaving, one develops "a rhythm and feel for the material" (Ingold, 2013, p. 23).

In one of her classes, Sylvia Kind spoke of the environment of materials using a metaphor of attending to all that transpires at a birthday party. A birthday party cannot be broken down into being simply cake, candles, decorations, etc. For the party is much more than this; it involves who does and does not come, how one feels after, or before in anticipation of the event. And when does the party end? Well, as Kind suggests, endings are never that, an end. Rather, an ending is a space, pause, or continuation of something else (Sylvia Kind, personal communication, October 24, 2019).

In "Collective Improvisations," Sylvia Kind (2018) writes of her studio experiments with charcoal with children as part of the Children's Centre at Capilano University. One thing that showed itself whilst working with charcoal was the way the children became fascinated with seeing themselves in each other's drawings. This novelty of seeing themselves represented from another vantage point was continually curious. Kind witnessed the children, on several occasions, come across a roadblock in their drawings, unsure how to translate what they see with charcoal onto paper. These problems became opportunities to think *with* the materials, towards growth (Kind, 2018).

Day Thirty-Nine

### **Musical becomings**

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's performance of J.S. Bach. There was much that was at play in the making of music before me. The entanglement of music made resonated with the way that Ingold (2013) talks about kite-flying, in that there are many parts working *with* each other. Just as Ingold (2013) suggests that a maker develops a "rhythm and feel for the material" (Ingold, 2013, p. 23), the musicians had learned a way of signaling, following and leading, waiting for each other as they correspond with the instruments. Each player learns to give the space necessary to each sound and instrument in the becoming of a song. The sounds of an instrument move the body to find them, with all the fine tuning and honing of skill to access.

While sitting, listening to the musicians, instruments and sounds, I thought about ideas as active in the way they come and go. There is the hope that they are snatched, recorded, or caught. Ideas that come to mind are ways of thinking *with* the events of our lives, provoking their beginnings. We think *within* our lived lives in that the things that show up for us cannot be predicted or foreseen; they happen and it is up to us to decide how we listen, document and record them. Perhaps a living inquiry is a disposition toward what shows up for us in the world, and involves not only noticing but recording these moments, so as to continually build upon that which our lived experience stirs up.

Another thought that came while watching and listening to the musicians and sounds before me was the idea of music making as a gesture. Gestures are a large part of the way one thinks about mark making, particularly in visual arts. Musicians also make gestures in the making of music. Only the most talented of musicians can notice the subtle differences between gestures of musicians in the way one plays and corresponds with a musical instrument. The musicians played a particular piece by J.S. Bach that required them to perform in rounds which, to my naive musical knowledge, means that they would play alternating who begins and who follows. This different way of beginning the piece allows for continually making a familiar melody unfamiliar in the way that differing instruments come together, notes and sounds alternating their alignment in the duration of the piece. It is a continual reimagining and hearing the potential for the ways that sounds can align. I think about the way of alternating and changing what is already present in the making of an artwork to see the work differently, perhaps changing the orientation of the piece by looking at it from a different angle

Day Forty

### **Gestures**

What would change if we saw learning as a way of living in the world? How would this affect the way students engage with their education?

Gestures are a part of the way that a painting comes to be, a musical piece is heard, and humans communicate. Gestures are tangled up in the way that one lives their life. Identifying one's own gestures in the world offers a way of living that is enriched. As I am painting, I have become less interested in representing something; rather, I am interested in gestures in and of themselves. Gestures capture movement in a way that causes a viewer to imagine the hand of the maker. Gestures demonstrate their liveliness in the way that they hold action. Just as sounds move the body, paint moves the body too. Ideas move the body to record and document them. Gestures can be exhaustive, for they are laborious and require much effort.

Writing over the past forty days has been both challenging and revealing. It has been challenging to find ways to put into language the thoughts and ideas that come up throughout the day. It has been revealing in that it gives space to work out what I think about things. I am thinking with the writing practice that I have taken up. There are often moments of silence, uncertainty about what is transpiring, and other moments of enrichment, of developing a better sense for the things that show up to me in the world. This has been a process of documenting and recording, as living is filled with potentials for deeper knowing and understanding. The writing has encouraged me to take notice, to ask questions, to ponder and think further rather than take things as they are. I have developed another level of thinking through things, thinking beyond things towards what they stir up. When there is difficulty in expressing the thoughts and ideas that I am attempting to record, remaining attuned and enduring the difficulty develops the writing, the thinking, and the way of speaking the ideas. Writing is very much so for myself, for as I write I speak back to myself things that I have thought. This reverberating of thoughts into text, and text to thoughts, allows for an enlivening of my everyday experiences, recognizing their potentials to pull me deeper, bringing me closer to that which I am always chasing.

**Figure 15**

*Painting leaned against studio wall*



*Note. Own Photo*

**Figure 16**

*Beachcombing*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)

## **What Got Us Through**

We eat breakfast together in the morning. Two eggs  
sunny sides up, music playing buoyant melodies.  
Over shoulder glimpses to you, sat in your highchair,  
your throne. Spoon cautiously clasped in a learning hand.  
You are playful being you. Flashes thrust back, flash  
forward of baby squabbles, mid-nights alarm clock cries  
out of deep rest. Then back to this morning five-part symphony  
a chattering, clacking and clanging. Each days lines are walked alike  
the next and the former. Chattering morning, clacking afternoon,  
clanging evening, these daily symphony lines, this music written  
already and yet to be written to you, to you, again.

## Chapter Two

### Thinking with Tim Ingold's Making

*After much writing and thinking, I've come to realize that I'd like to spend a bit more time with the ideas of Tim Ingold's book Making. Thus, I've decided to do delve into concepts from the book.*

#### *Introduction*

While working in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, Tim Ingold found himself working with students of art and architecture. This close correlation with different disciplines caused him to question the possible relations between anthropology, art, and architecture. He was curious about the way that these disciplines understand making and living in the world and how their perspectives could inform each other, offering new ways of thinking about one's own practice. From this curiosity sparked the initiation of a seminar class, with the objective of conversing and sharing with each other in the hopes of finding connections between these fields of study. They decided to engage in the act of making together as a way of offering insight to the conversations they had in class. Though they did not set out a plan of what would be achieved in the course, Ingold and those who participated agreed that the course was significant in giving new ways of thinking about the interrelationships of their fields of study (Ingold, 2013, p. 9). As Ingold moved on to the University of Aberdeen, he collaborated with faculty at the School of Fine Art and the Visual Research Centre in his pursuit of understanding teaching and learning practices of art and architecture from the

perspective of anthropology. This is when, along with his colleagues, Ingold developed the course “The 4 As: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture.” This course is largely the premise behind writing his book *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture*. The purpose of this course was to help students think about the possibilities of thinking about these disciplines from the perspective of learning *with* rather than *about*. Ingold states, “The aims of the course were to train students in the art of inquiry, to sharpen their powers of observation, and to encourage them to think *through* observation rather than *after* it” (Ingold, 2013, p. 11). Much like a hunter, learning to hunt from observing and knowing the ways of the animal they are pursuing, Ingold wants to instill a way of seeking after learning in this same sort of way, learning through observing, acting, and being (Ingold, 2013, p. 11).

Similar to the purpose of the course “The 4 A’s”, in the book *Making* Ingold (2013) sets out to demonstrate that these disciplines are ways of “thinking through making” (Ingold, 2013, p. xi). For Ingold, making is a correspondence, a mutual leading and following, between maker and material (Ingold, 2013, p. xi). With this book, he aims to explore the ways that art, architecture, anthropology, and archaeology all exist as processes of maker and material, mutually corresponding with each other. The hope would be that in seeing the relation between these disciplines, their own manifestations of maker and material would offer insight onto other disciplines, or perhaps see that though separated by academic institutions or professions, they really have more in common than one may assume. With this agenda in mind, Ingold effectively explores the fields of study, exemplifying their relations through materials.

In his preface, he suggests that books “have minds of their own” (Ingold, 2013, p. xi). This is very much so the way the book seems to have come about as you read it, it reads as a process of stitching together ideas and thoughts, present and past, in a web of text that

accomplishes a book's purpose. It does so not in a descriptive way, but rather through a way of offering experiences and ideas, suggesting ways of understanding maker and material. In doing this, Ingold mentions the materializing of a book, this book in fact, acknowledging his role as an author in correspondence with the emergence of the writing. This suggests that materials, even those which one may feel they have "control" over, do have a life of their own. They become something that one may not have predicted and this lends to this idea that as makers, we follow their lead in more ways than we may know.

### *Learning With*

Ingold begins by clarifying what he understands as a way of learning in anthropology. He does so by reflecting on an experience with the Saami people in north-eastern Finland. In this instance, he was continually encouraged to "*know for yourself*" (Ingold, 2013, p. 1). This idea suggests that knowledge can be gained through a process of self-propelled discovery, that we come to know through our own experiences rather than being told of this knowledge. In the work of anthropology, Ingold suggests, one learns through observing and doing. Ingold encourages his reader to consider how one can learn *with* the things that we study rather than *about* them (Ingold, 2013, p. 2). For example, a student of music could learn all that there is to learn about the instrument, but this is only part of the learning. Learning with a musician would offer a completely different experience, knowing an instrument not from information gathered but rather from close exposure to one who is a master of this instrument (Ingold, 2013, p. 3). Ingold is not suggesting that this is the superior way of learning but rather one that must be considered alongside other ways of growing in knowledge.

### *Searching*



Throughout the remainder of the book, Ingold emphasizes the importance of an approach towards learning that is *doing*. He suggests that through *doing* we come to know the things that we know (Ingold, 2013, p. 9). *Doing* requires an active searching, and it is through searching that we come to know; not that the searching leads to an end result, but rather it becomes a way of living in the world. In searching, one takes up an orientation towards the world that seeks to find and learn from it. This becomes the intention of the *doing*, in that one does with an intention to continue learning. The mind and the heart become engaged in learning through doing as a means of growth and movement.

Ingold acknowledges the entangled processes of human initiative and material response, describing this as the force field around materials (Ingold, 2013, p. 22). The force field encompasses the liveliness of a material, human and non-human. In this sense, Ingold refers to Deleuze and Guattari when describing the flow of materials, and that those who work with materials follow this flow (Ingold, 2013, p. 25). Ingold says this:

Materials are ineffable. They cannot be pinned down in terms of established concepts or categories. To describe any material is to pose a riddle, whose answer can be discovered only through observation and engagement with what is there. The riddle gives the material a voice and allows it to tell its own story: it is up to us, then, to listen, and from the clues it offers, to discover what is speaking....to know materials we have to follow them.... Their every technical gesture is a question, to which the material responds according to its own bent. In following their materials, practitioners do not so much *interact as correspond* with them...Making then, is a process of correspondence: not imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming. (p. 31)

Here, Ingold speaks to the liveliness of materials, the ways that they act on those who engage them. Materials have the ability to alter a life's course in however small or large a way. They demand a response.

In attempting to understand the cause for mounds, a common archaeological find amongst the ruins of ancient civilizations, Ingold (2013) argues that the *becoming* of mounds is a process of continual growth. Ingold argues against the notion of archeologists who suggest that mounds are discovered as monuments, petrified in the past. Rather, he conveys the need to see these mounds as alive, continually growing, both in the times of their beginning as much as now. He says, "Today's deposit becomes tomorrow's substrate, buried under later sediment" (Ingold, 2013, p. 77). This demonstrates the way that mounds are continually evolving. This is true for the mound as a whole as much as the individual parts that come together to make up the mounds, the particles continually changing, becoming. In this sense, mounds are ineffable as they are difficult to locate a beginning and end, rather only understood through a lens of continually growing (Ingold, 2013, p. 77). This is how Ingold proposes one comes to see thinking through making, as in continual movement.

#### *A question*

In his book, Ingold seems to suggest that materials continually come from and return to the earth, much like that which happens in the life of a mound. However, I am curious how this could be seen in the realm of the sustainability issues that are urging residents of the Earth to take notice. What about the materials generated by human hands that the earth cannot absorb back into itself? How do we see Earth's rejection of some materials? Ingold suggests, "To *inhabit* the world, by contrast, is to join in the processes of formation" (Ingold, 2013, p. 89). How can we, as *inhabitants* of Earth, join in its formative processes to offer help to the Earth

rather than harm? Mark Dion is an artist whose work raises an awareness for how art can respond to the environmental crisis imposed by global capitalism. Dion's artworks which incorporate plastics found in the ocean act as a warning for what will become a much larger issue. In thinking about Dion's work, one can imagine the role that art plays in making viewers to face issues of consumption and excess, particularly how art works relate to the world they live in (Lookofsky, n.d, paras. 1-3).

Ingold (2013) offers *Warrior* by Henri Moore and *Infestation Piece* by Simon Starling as examples of artworks that each, though similar, suggest a different kind of aliveness of materials. *Infestation Piece* has been submerged underwater for several years, and its surface taken over by mussels. Thus, when one encounters it, they cannot help but feel the overwhelming sense of the way these mussels are taking over the figure. While *Warrior*, on the other hand, would seem static, frozen, and petrified. There is an aliveness in *Infestation Piece* that is captured by the visceral quality of the mussels covering the surface of the piece. When looking at *Infestation Piece* Ingold suggests, "...we can at least look *with* it and feel some sympathy for its plight" (Ingold, 2013, p. 92). Ingold discusses the fact that living and non-living things need careful care and attention to remain held together. Without this care, things rot, fall apart, breakdown and disintegrate. Ingold makes the point that, "Left to themselves, materials can run riot. Pots crumble; bodies disintegrate. It takes effort and vigilance to hold things together, whether pots or people" (Ingold, 2013, p. 94). It is interesting to think about the nature of things to trend towards their own destruction, and they need intervention for their own restoration. This shows that materials have lives of their own, regardless of human intervention. Humans work to maintain and preserve; this shows that materials have a life that cannot be contained and suggests that as humans we have less control than we may think.

In each of Ingold's chapters, he offers a kind of image or example which he expounds upon to convey the essence of making and materials. One image he uses is of a kite and kite flyer. Human and artifact engage in a dance of agency (Ingold, 2013, p. 98) where there is a continual overlap of leading and following, corresponding with one another. However, Ingold highlights that the dance is not between two members but rather, three. There is a third component that enables the kite to fly, and that is the air. A kite does not fly solely with a kite flyer and kite, one must have air as well. Ingold offers readers the chance to think about the kite flyer's need to correspond with the air (Ingold, 2013, p. 101). The kite flyer and kite, once animated by the air, are able to do more than what they are capable of individually. The three parts are caught up in a dance of animacy, following what comes up in each moment. One may be inclined to describe this as an interaction between the three parts described before, yet Ingold hesitates from the use of this word as he feels it implies, "... that the interacting parties are closed to one another, as if they could only be connected through some kind of bridging operation" (Ingold, 2013, p. 107). Hence, Ingold uses *correspondence* as a word to suggest what happens between maker and material. He says, "To correspond with the world, in short, is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to *answer* to it" (Ingold, 2013, p. 108). This *answer* back to the world is cause for newness to reveal itself, through presence *with* and attending to that which happens around us, the materials of our lives. The artist's work is a way of offering an answer back to the world. The work does not describe or represent, even in the instance of a photograph; it is an answer to that which shows up in the world for the artist. It is possible that the artist never sets out to describe or represent, but instead offers a perspective into the world, their answer to it. In this sense, the artist thinks *with* and *answers* to the world of materials.

### *Telling, Drawing*

Ingold speaks of the kind of telling in stories that enables readers to follow a path. Stories enable their writers to tell what they know without articulating it verbatim, but rather by creating an experience for their reader to discover (Ingold, 2013, p. 110). Ingold conveys the difference between telling and articulate speech by suggesting articulation's preoccupation with cohesion and fluency. Telling of stories leaves the space for generative thinking, it remains open. Whereas, Ingold suggests, articulate speech is closed, fixed in its transference of information. However, "...if all speaking were like that, we would have no stories, no myth, no poetry, indeed no verbal arts of any kind. If all making were like that, we would have no axes and no cathedrals. And if all thinking were like that, we would have no sympathy" (Ingold, 2013, p. 111). Telling encompasses the way that Ingold thinks about language, making, and thinking. The words of told stories move their readers. Finally, when thinking back to the exercise of making baskets with the 4 A's class, Ingold attempts to summarize that which was at play between basket and weaver when he says, "...as in our experiments in basketry... the twist of the string was generated in a kind of force field that included both the forces imparted by our manual movements and those intrinsic to the material itself" (Ingold, 2013, p. 121). There is a give and take correspondence between materials and makers that is tangled in a force field of energies acting between and on each other.

Finally, Ingold proposes drawing as a way of telling (Ingold, 2013, p. 125). He goes on to offer different kinds of lines, geometric, abstract, and awful. Lines tell. They are traces to be

followed, they do not represent, but rather aim to capture an essence. In this way, “the drawing is not the visible shadow of a mental event; *it is a process of thinking, not the projection of a thought*” (Ingold, 2013, p. 128). One thinks with the drawing of a line. The drawing of a line captures one’s thinking process, because it *is* this process. He captures this idea in comparing the modern city with an ancient city. The modern city is characterized by many straight lines, roads that predate the buildings surrounding them. Whereas in the ancient city roads follow the wandering lines of their original journeyers, pack-donkeys, winding about. Lines have essences that leave their mark on the those who follow them, so much as lines capture the qualities of their maker (Ingold, 2013, p. 139). Ingold (2013) tells us the following:

Yet as we have already seen, the quality of movement when we write by hand, or for that matter when we draw, extends into the lines that appear on the paper. The duration, the rhythm, the varying tempo, the pauses and attenuations, the pitch and amplitude are all there. These lines are both inspired by, and carry forth, our affective lives” (p. 140).

Rather than straight geometric lines with their start points and end points, Ingold urges his reader to think about the ways that in life, these do not exist, rather, “...there are only horizons that vanish as you approach them, while further horizons loom ahead” (Ingold, 2013, p. 140). He believes that there is a way to embody living as a straight-lined person and a pack-donkey person. Straight-lined people are much like the modern city, connecting points in the quickest way possible, while the pack-donkey of the ancient city follows a path that may not be the quickest, easiest or most convenient. The pack-donkey engages a meandering line, wandering through the city, so the process becomes just as important as the destination. The straight-lined donkey overlooks the journey, with the sole focus on a destination. Ingold’s understanding of maker and materials is that both follow a journey without a specific destination in mind, but

rather something emerges throughout a wind-path, much like that of a pack-donkey. Ingold quotes T.S. Eliot's question, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?" and suggests that, "Truly, never in the history of the world has so much information been married to so little wisdom..." (Ingold, 2013, p. 141). Perhaps, he is suggesting that we live in an age of much awareness and so much information at our fingertips, yet in his eyes, this abundance has not been married to a growth in wisdom. Ingold's words cause the reader to consider what it would be like to take up the disposition of a pack-donkey in the world:

obdurate, capricious, dogged, curious, petulant, at once captivated and astonished by the world in which they find themselves. They will not be hurried but go at their own pace. They live in hope, not under the illusion of certainty. Their paths may go this way or that, unpredictably. They find the grain of things and follow it, and in so doing find themselves. All learning...is self-discovery. Where next? *Know for yourself!* (p.141)

With this disposition Ingold calls for particular kind of attunement to the world, one that is curious, hopeful to discover and eager to learn, following lines of many kinds, in order that one may take up the attitude of learning to learn (Ingold, 2013).

### *Remaining Thoughts*

One thought that lingers for me throughout the book is a desire to understand what Ingold considers to be included as art. He speaks of nature, archaeological digs, anthropology, and yet does not seem to specify what he considers to be art. In further thinking, perhaps Ingold is not concerned with defining art so much as he is interested in conveying the way that architects, anthropologists, archaeologists, and artists all have similar ways of engaging with materials as makers of differing kinds. He is not out to define these roles and their differences, but rather offers the potential of their similarities. In Chapter One, Ingold gives the metaphor of swapping

out books from their usual places. By switching them into different genres, this provides new insight to otherwise fixed ways of thinking about them, and gives them a new context (Ingold, 2013, p. 14). Ingold is hoping that the convergence of differing disciplines will illuminate qualities that may not have been noticed without their comparison. Perhaps, in discussing the relationship between material and maker, Ingold is suggesting a wider perspective on what constitutes a maker, one who corresponds with materials. The ability to see the relation between disciplines furthers the potentials within themselves, to continue to think new and emergent thoughts about the capabilities within a discipline. Thinking with Ingold, with his convergence of disciplines, makes one think that the materials makers work with are physical and also conceptual. What possibilities are present when we think about materials as concepts? The maker, scholar and artist all correspond with materials. Maker is both a noun and verb. The idea of a maker is both what one is and an action, that one is doing something generative, creating and producing, responding, *corresponding*.

Ingold accomplishes that which he set out to do in the preface, create a deeper understanding of maker and materials through the different lenses of anthropology, archaeology, architecture, and art. The methodology of the book is one in which Ingold follows the path of the book as it emerges, piecing together experiences and ways of thinking from each discipline to come to better understandings of making with materials, learning and teaching. The book is not descriptive in the sense that it comes to a finite conclusion, but rather each chapter points to something for the reader to consider and take notice of, furthering their own understandings of maker and material relations. This is where the effectiveness of Ingold's "argument" makes its impact, in the way that Ingold in the very process of writing is thinking *with* the writing, thus *doing* what he is also trying to write about. The writing as process is tangled up in what it is



trying to divulge to its reader, the maker and material process of relation. There is a strong resonance between the writing itself and the processes Ingold wishes to capture. This is precisely the book's strength, that Ingold continually takes up the way of learning, or *knowing*, that he tries to convey to readers throughout the book. Ingold's book is not meant to be understood as a means to an end, descriptive and conclusive. Rather, Ingold thinks *with* the experiences he writes about to make sense of the maker and material, learning and *knowing*. Therefore, the book does not have a final resolution; rather, it is a line offering readers to follow its path.

**Figure 17**

*Landscape*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)

## After He Goes To Sleep the Second Time

Bedtimes are rushed minutes much more than a few months ago. I tire and wait, watch and long, to take me back to when

*My bedroom window faces west. Morning comes light air afresh, and new. Morning eyes, heavy, tired, not willing to let go the night sleep.*

this time like the first dive underwater into a cool lake, refreshing after an afternoon spent in the sun, soothing like bath bubbles that fill the room

with pockets of perfume. To be ice cold awake, wishing now could linger rather than fade. Freeze here. I used to sit and rock Levi. Head pressed

*I've woken up to the dripping, filling presences of rain drops drumming on my window sill. After days of sun brilliant to meet me, wet air feels cold.*

to chest, mouth slowly drop open falling into a deep sleep. *Back and forth, forward and back, from toes to heels, no feel to rush*

to reach for the next to-do post like a button carrying me on to the next lap of the race. I used to hold him as long as I could

*But the day continues, minute turns to minute an hour by hour. Morning eyes turn to day eyes, and forget their sleepiness.*

and reluctantly put him down in his crib. Little sun shadows that bend around curtain screens that open. I saw those. Only now

I distract easily, these words bring me back to focus, to figure how to spend days end with Levi in arm again.

*I know more now than the last time I looked at these trees at this time but still less than tomorrow. Guard and guide these steps of mind.*

## Chapter Three: On Being Mom

For many of the mothers whose work I have read, we toil with the nature of motherhood, but we do not wish it away, or regret the decision. I wanted to be a mother. I read of mothers who choose to write poetry, or write in short concentrated segments, bracing for the next disruption to take them away from focus. I've found this to be the case for myself as well, continually aware that the next disruption can come at any moment. I've heard it said once that disruption is good, it is important so that one does not continue on in one way of thinking but rather is interrupted to consider something else. In living and learning, we must embrace the distractions, the disruptions in thinking and accept them as generative for developing thought and digging more deeply into that which we chase after, that creative impulse. As I learn as a mother, and artist, I've come to be regularly in the company of ambivalences.

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Through the working out of this thesis, sorting, finding, reading and searching, I've become a mother. My hope was that I would be able to document the processes of coming to a place I have never been before. And in writing that proposal before birthing my son, I had no idea that *mother* is the most significant of the new awarenesses I've come to and have never been to before. Mothering has challenged my idea of what it means to be an artist, a student, a writer, and scholar. To be mother felt like it would be able to remain a separate compartment of my life while I continued on in pursuing my artistic inquiry, only to realize that the demands of motherhood shift the way I carry out all other parts of my life. I am continually distracted, disrupted, from moments of focused attention. There are moments where I feel I could burst with delight in the aftermath of a glimmering smile from my son, then moments where the hours move slower than leaves changing seasons. I think often of the responsibility for this young

vulnerable life, while simultaneously feeling vulnerable myself. I learn stories and know moms who have lost sons and daughters and I hold my little babe, looking into his eyes and being reminded of the need to let go and recognize how little is really in my control. That is where I cling to the ordinary, the mundane, everyday duties, the opportunities to care for my son, as teachers of gratitude. I hope to remain faithful in these small moments. I've wondered often, how do I continue my creative work amidst the demands of mothering?

This writing that follows is meant to elaborate on the qualities of being a mother that transform and change me. I hope that in writing about these things, I might see them for what they are. I believe that as a woman, speaking about being a mom, it might do ever so small a part in breaking down that which has boarded up motherhood to keep it out of view. As I rely on the courage of mothers before me, my own mother to birth me, I hope to do the same for mothers after me. I write about it in this way to offer my story into the legacy of the valuable work of nurturing and caring, raising up life. I write to help others to feel the courage to write and share of their experiences. It is too often that one may feel their story is not significant *enough* to merit the attention of another. But perhaps the inclination to validate our lives based on the attention of others misses the point, maybe we should see that we ourselves have the ability to choose to believe and know that each and every life is valuable. And perhaps, if we can fuel the courage to share our lives, this might change us to believe, see, and write out the value of our own lives.

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The irony in motherhood is the juxtaposition of togetherness and isolation. One might feel together with surrounding community while also terrifyingly alone. If a mother has a partner, there can still be stifling isolation here. A partner will struggle to understand what it is to be a mother. I want him to know, to feel, to experience what it is like, but I am continually confronted

by the fact that he will not. Not that he does not want to, but we live with the startling dissonance that empathy only takes one so far, the shoes of another cannot be fully stepped into. So, we try. We talk, share, and listen in hopes of moving towards the other.

---

I am encouraged to read the words of moms who are being honest with themselves in their writing. They try their hardest to name what mothering brings up in them. That is what I want to read, the words that feel so honestly true that I see myself. For a moment, someone else understands, validates, and resonates. I am taught by the words of mothers. I seek out the guidance, familiarity and learning that come from finding myself in stories told by other moms. Robyn Sarah (2008) says:

I had children, and for them — with them — I recreated a lost realm, the embrace of a primary home. In becoming a mother I felt myself viscerally linked to all humanity and all of human history. These are no small things. Caught in the powerful undertow that is generation, I felt the elemental currents and cross-currents of time, the layering of natural and human cycles; and those currents, as I regained voice, became my chief delight as a writer. Time, once the tyrant, became my subject. (Sarah, 2008, p.49)

She sees becoming a mother as partaking in a larger story beyond herself, giving meaning, *purpose*, to the day to day, menial and mundane.

---

The work of mothering is an art of navigating distraction. You can expect not to be able to complete any one task without there being something expectedly unexpected to happen. Levi is beginning to be communicative. I've wondered what it will be like once he can speak back to me, argue with me, and disagree with me. How will I know how to respond? When that time

comes, I hope to remember him as a baby, in my arms quietly content. I've become so focused on time with him. I write things down daily to help myself remember the things I'll one day forget. I fill a box full of the things that hold reminders of these early days. We need reminding of the moments that hold significance. I need to set things aside for a later time in the hope that these things would bring me back to the moments they point towards.

---

Rebecca Solnit (2005) writes about life in a way that pays attention to the overlooked. She notices what is to be noticed, hidden in the mundane familiarity of everyday living. Her writing enlivens the experiences of the ordinary and makes one believe in their significance. Her focus reminds me to focus on my own daily living.

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In her chapter in the book *Double Lives*, Susan Musgrave (2008) writes, ““I’m a writer,” I say trying to sound convinced. Throughout my pregnancy, I’ve been determined to hang on to this image of myself, though lately, instead of writing, I’ve been pricing crib monitors and, instead of reading Dostoyevsky, speed-reading *Diaper Dialogue*” (Musgrave, 2008, p. 23). Musgrave portrays the ambivalences of mothering and continuing on in one’s creative work, the struggle with identity and how to fit them together. I’ve felt this way too, struggling to hold on to the image I have of myself, while also embracing the new image.

The duties of mothering become excuses not to work. Or do they? Or is the mothering the real work? It may be easier to fold laundry than it is to figure out a painting, for instance. Both take a different kind of exertion of effort. One’s daily tasks can easily become barriers to studio work. It is a deliberate fight, a worthwhile battle to do the creative work. The mothering work is work that takes a priority of immediacy, while the work of making has a sense of urgency.

Things need to be attended to here and now, they cannot wait. But I also find moments to remember my curiosity and interests outside of my mothering life.

Mothering and making have to work together: there must be the space for both. A mother's pursuit of her passions, no matter how they materialize, must be able to coexist with the nurturing of children, should she choose that path. A woman should not have to choose between work and family. There must be the space for both together. To choose one over the other, artist over mother, mother over artist, feels as though I would be deserting one side of myself.

Susan Musgrave (2008) quotes Ken Kesey when he says, "I felt like you can write forever, but you have a short time to raise a family" (Musgrave, 2008, p. 28). Kesey's words make me think about the finite periods of time we have for certain things to be accomplished. Bodies have windows of time. Bodies tell us when they can no longer do. Bodies tire, and bodies disintegrate. The finite motivates me, perhaps more than I even know or come to recognize.

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It is necessary to document the struggles, ambivalences, challenges, and joys of motherhood to learn from them and gain an understanding of being a mom. I hope to see the real experiences of others, as a way of understanding and naming difference. The pressure of mothering and challenge of home-making force me to be honest.

A day's work is filled with partially completed tasks. Nothing is finished in its entirety. It is a continual carrying on of partial tasks taken up from the day before. Writing and making remind me of the dialogue happening continually inside me. I wouldn't know what to think, writing and making speak back, communicating myself to myself. As a mother, making and writing remind me that I am here. I can keep paying attention to learning and growing.

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Robyn Sarah (2008) says, “Over the years I’ve learned that long fallow periods are part of my rhythm as a writer (as they were even before I had children) and that this is something I must simply accept and work around” (Sarah, 2008, p. 48). We have to believe that as mothers, we are still working towards our crafts in the pauses and openings. Mothering forms our perspectives on the things we work towards. Motherhood keeps me from taking for granted, in time and mental space. There is an urgency when I have a moment of focused attention. Mothering helps me recognize that there is potential in the way that I use my time. Mothering helps me see the finite nature of time, that there is not an endless amount. That one day, my time as it is will run out. Mothering shakes me awake to the movement of time. Therefore, I must use the time that I do have, that I have been given.

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I let myself attune to the building of knowledge in my son’s mind and heart, as a way of disrupting the familiar for myself, learning again by watching him. Di Brandt (2008) also believes in the creative energies of early childhood. She says:

How I loved sitting on the floor with my children and their friends, making up poems while they played with their dolls and crayons and kittens and blocks and puzzles and paper and scissors. Early childhood was a perpetual state of intense creative chaos, an environment in which I and my poetic instincts thrived. I was blissful, I felt tuned to the cosmic wellspring of creativity and expressiveness. But it was also a very fraught time, given its many cultural pulls and stresses in so many aspects and directions. (Brandt, 2008, p. 55)

Here, Brandt also says much of what I have been trying to say all along, but she says it better. She describes this time of being with her young children as a “fraught” time, one of difficulty

considering the challenges of cultural influences on her own priorities. Yet she also mentions the tremendous “creative energies” she experienced in the midst of mothering with her children. To mother is to recognize the entanglements of being. It is almost as if in mothering, one is in a correspondence with the children in care. I think of when one refers to the birth of a child, one hardly ever mentions the birth of a mother that has happened at the same time. Perhaps, this reveals a tendency to look beyond, to look past, or to forget a mother.

---

There is pressure on the time I am away from Levi. These moments away from him are like the breaks, the cracks, the in-between. Luanne Armstrong (2008) says, “I practiced writing in the bits and pieces and cracks and fractures of my life, and I learned to live there as well” (Armstrong, 2008, p. 71). As I read the stories of mothers and their pursuit of creative careers, there words are filled with struggle, fight, challenge, and difficulty, yet also joy. Learning to work in the gaps, the spaces of time. Throughout this process, I’ve learned a rhythm of working in the in-between. I’ve also come to see the way that the in-between moments of my life sustain and fill up the other kinds of moments. I am more fully myself when I take captive, and hold onto the overlooked, in-between. In this sense, I hope to stitch together, collect, the things that happen in the in-between spaces of living. As I live in motherhood, nothing is too small for my attention, or at least I aspire to think this way. I hope to be invested in the small bits, to look and take notice of what is, collect and hold together, to truly see. I hope.

**Figure 18**

*Song*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)

### **This Could Go One of Two Ways**

I wait for your eyes to droop, heavily,  
down and close, letting rest take over.  
You trust me to know how long to  
wait before you've given in completely,  
Then you know I'll turn you over and  
gently set you down. I'll leave you now  
for a brief while, while I put my feet up,  
take my deep breath and rest till  
together we fill again with liveliness.

## Chapter Four: On Painting

Stephen Westfall's (2008) article titled "Slow Painting" speaks of a painting's ability to call for a viewer's attention and time in a slow reveal. In quoting art historian Robert Storr, Westfall says that John Zurier's works "emphasize the phenomenology of surface and colour through the visible traces of the painter's labor, though his touch is by comparison almost shockingly light and simultaneously visible...paintings are the sum of sudden insights and urgent responses" (Westfall, 2008, p. 66). Sudden insight and urgent responses speak to the way that time acts on the process of a painting becoming. A painter develops a sensitivity to flows and rhythms of insight and response whilst sitting with the work. The viewer of paintings comes to see these insights and responses perform themselves over time spent with the work. Westfall believes in slow painting as a stance in the world. Westfall suggests that there are contemporary painters who "insist on a phenomenological experience over a connotative one" (Westfall, 2008, p. 62). Further, he believes that the phenomenological experience of painting has a specific contemporary significance and this lies, perhaps, in a painting's slowness, for by comparison to the quick digital world, paint is always slower. Westfall continues in stating that all the painters mentioned in the article take up a certain preoccupation with time in the making and viewing of paintings. When speaking of Frecon's paintings, Westfall (2018) says:

To be fully present with Frecon's paintings, one had to adjust one's sense of being in time. Upon making such an adjustment, visitors were rewarded by the revelation of a

layer of meaning that subtends the merely retinal: the fullness of Frecon's paintings could be said to emerge from their illumination rather than to be laid bare by it, and that sense of emergence is something that must be felt in time. (Westfall, 2008, p. 62)

Here Westfall conveys the way that time engages the viewer in being present to Frecon's paintings, in a slowness of reveal. As one recognizes the layers of meaning within the visual, time passes and moves forward, transforming the viewer in the process. "The Slow Painter openly courts time as a partner in the process of distributing paint on a surface and as an arbiter of style" (Westfall, 2008, p. 62). In this sentence, Westfall believes in the slow engagement with time as an important co-maker in the coming together of a painting.

---

I am trying to say that there is meaning hidden in things even if we do not originally perceive it as so. One might write something off, because of not being familiar with it or not having a previous interest. But perhaps, in leaning into the things that are unfamiliar, perhaps even uncomfortable, meaning will flow and rise to the surface. We may see our own selves in a different way, or fall in love with something entirely new. One must be willing to be caught off guard by that which they are unfamiliar with, and let that unfamiliarity have its way in them, changing and transforming them. This prepares for the next experience of this kind until living is a never-ending acceptance of the new, and transforming it into that which one already knows, a process of becoming.

Mothering, making, writing, all are a slow chipping away at the same thing over and over again, over a lifetime. I realize how much of mothering happened before Levi, before even pregnancy, in the anticipation. Without the luxury of hours on end to sit away at the studio, or at the laptop writing, the project of making as a mother is in small bits over long periods of time.

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I tried to teach myself how to paint a bird today, I painted over fifty birds. Looking at pictures, imagining them in my head, I painted them again and again. I figured something out.

The problem of painting asserts itself to me like an unrelenting headache. Yet, amidst the pain and disorientation, I continue and am ever growing in my belief in the project of painting. I hope to bring together the voices of many others whose words on painting have offered me some relief, some glimmer of hope that this unrelenting headache will rise, ease and that perhaps clarity will ensue. This practice has not been linear, but has been rather loopy, almost like a meandering line. Like the line blazed by a pack-donkey, the logic is inherent and intuitive, it must be decoded as the animal makes a decision to turn here, wander there, sometimes moving, sometimes stopping (Ingold, 2013). Drawing from art historical paintings, sketches, photographs, and intuitive impulses, the paintings I make become a record of a multitude of encounters, the balance of following a plan and making things work together as I go. As a mother, I am interested in the balance of work and labour, dealing with the constraints of child caring whilst continuing to live with the preoccupation of painterliness in the experience of my daily life. Therefore, much of my work deals with that which is at hand, documenting the domestic and incorporating that as the bones which hold up the work. Painting provides an opportunity to focus, and yet to welcome disruption which has become so prevalent in the way of being and living as a mother.

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In the chapter “‘Before her time?’ Lily Briscoe and Painting Now,” Allison Rowley writes about Lily Briscoe’s painting from Virginia Woolf’s book, *To the Lighthouse*. Rowley says, “For Lily Briscoe, as for Eva Hesse, the act of making art is ‘absurd’ or ‘impossible’, but it

is also fundamentally necessary to her existence” (Rowley, 2004, p. 6). I live with this idea of inherent complexity in acts of making. The processes we take up as makers have histories that are complex and layered. Making denotes an output, a footprint, and made things take up space. We must negotiate the terms of our made things, over and over.

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In her introduction to the book *Unframed: Practices and politics of women’s contemporary painting*, Rosemary Betterton (2004) takes an interest in the materiality of paint and one’s engagement with it. Paint has an ability to hold the actions of its making and, for this, the viewer is able to reimagine these actions over and over, thus the painting takes on new life with each presence with it. Throughout the chapters selected in her book, Betterton argues that, “... painting is... a complex practice that engages with the psychic and the somatic; it is ongoing and relational and, at the same time, located in specific times and places” (Betterton, 2004, p. 7). Furthermore, Betterton suggests that this conception of painting remains distinct from historical notions of what a painting could be. She points to an understanding of painting as an intersubjective process rather than only a system of signs or an object (Betterton, 2004, p. 7). To me, this means the process of how the painting comes into being is legitimized as a primary topic of discourse surrounding the work.

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Betterton (2004) refers to Griselda Pollock when she explains, “women share the fantasy of the creative self, desire that privileged space of imaginary freedom called the studio according to the masculine modernist tradition” (Betterton, 2004, p. 7). Yet, this place is one of contradiction. There is a tension inherent in the desire to paint as a female. In light of this, feminist art practices displace the male genius at the center of the modernist movement. By



inserting a body other than male, feminist art practices challenge the notion of the “hyper-masculine” artist, working away in their studio (Betterton, 2004, p. 9). Betterton focuses on how female writers and artists confront a male discourse, grasping at the complexity of feminist artistic painting practices (p. 10).

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In every instance of making a painting, there is a point where I seem to be dabbling with losing it. There are risks, momentary decisions, revelations that bubble up where I am left feeling like I need to hold things together. Perhaps, this is the painting acting on me, moving me in space, shifting my perception of it. In this part of the making of paintings, I feel like I am juggling, holding my breath, holding out hope in anticipation of a moment of surprise to have its effect on me. Barbara Bolt (2004) writes of her own experience of this when painting, suggesting that the painting has a life of its own (Bolt, 2004, p. 42). Bolt asks the question, “If a painting comes to perform rather than merely represent some other *thing*, what is happening?” (Bolt, 2004, p. 43). To me, Bolt is recognizing the liveliness of materials, and the way that paint holds the actions and motions of their making in a way that enacts themselves in the glance of the viewer.

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Barbara Bolt (2004) attempts to theorize the performativity of paintings. She utilizes Gilles Deleuze and his use of performativity through his concept *flexion*. Bolt employs Deleuze by suggesting that language and bodies reverberate to one another, speaking back and forth. Language, in this sense, would be that of materiality. Materials are communicative. As Deleuze is quoted by Betterton, language has the ability to reflect the body that held it (Bolt, 2004, p. 45). Bolt proposes that, “...in painting there can be a mutual reflection between bodies and imaging”

(Bolt, 2004, p. 56). When one looks to an image, the body is also there in it, with the image. When I think to my own practice, materials have their way, and I find myself following along, playing, figuring. In a similar way, Bolt says, “where materiality insists, the visual language begins to stutter, mumble and whisper” (Bolt, 2004, p. 47).

Barbara Bolt (2004) suggests that Paul Cézanne’s work captures the overlap of essences between landscape, paint, and actions. Bolt says, “In Cézanne’s paintings, we become aware that a picture is not separate from its production” (Bolt, 2004, p. 52). There is an exchange, a back and forth, a response and co-respondence of all that is at play in the making of things. Recognizing this is important for any maker of things, to see that they themselves do not hold a heightened position, but are caught up in an entanglement with the materials that move them. Bolt mentions the presence mastery. How can mastery be thought of with materials that assert themselves? In what ways is mastery a misleading word, as it seems to imply dominance over, rather than a corresponding with? Perhaps mastery with materials recognizes the liveliness of matter that takes vigilance, effort, and time to know and understand.

When discussing the paintings of Indigenous Australian artist, Jane Harris, Bolt suggests the performance of paintings plays out slowly over time and with committed attention. She says that paintings hold the motions of the body, the landscape and the materiality of paint. The painting plays over the acts of its making. Rebecca Fortnum (2004) employs Norman Bryson’s notion of the glance to suggest the viewing body is given the perspective of the artist, and made the central figure in the viewing experience (Fortnum, 2004, p. 114). In the book, *Painting*, Terry R. Myers (2011) includes a comment made by Mary Heilmann, when she suggests that each of her abstract paintings can be considered an autobiographical marker (Myers, p. 132).

Heilmann says:

This is the front. That's behind. No, that's the front and this is the background. That's an edge. No it's a line. That's a space. No, it's a thing. Round and round, and over and over. This way of looking makes a still moment move in time. Gazing at a picture like this can amuse me for hours. It's like watching a movie. (Myers, 2011, p. 132 )

Here, Heilmann plays with and is captivated by the performance of the painting. She describes the kind of viewing experience that I feel to Bryson's glance and Fortnum's description of Jane Harris's works. Myers (2011) quotes Marlene Dumas as she writes, "Painting is about the trace of the human touch. It is about the skin of a surface. A painting is not a postcard. The content of a painting cannot be separated from the feel of its surface..." (Myers, 2011, p. 94). She also says the following:

(Painting is a messy business.) It cannot ever be a pure conceptual medium. The more "conceptual" or cleaner the art, the more the head can be separated from the body, and the more the labor can be done by others. Painting is the only manual labor I do. (Myers, 2011, p. 94)

In both statements from Dumas, she negotiates the thinking and making that become entangled in the labor of painting. In the book, *Painting at the Edge of the World*, Douglas Fogle (2001) suggests that Dumas's writing portrays a personal way of relating to painting (Fogle, 2001, p. 24). Dumas's sentiments about painting are strongly connected to her person, her way of making, and her body living through painting. Paintings capture a visual language and time of a maker's life, they hold moments, fragments even, of a life, and this undoubtedly has its effect on those

who encounter a painting. Bolt (2004) engages Charles Sanders Peirce's idea of *fact as*, "the pressure of the dynamic object in constituting meaning and effects. In imaging, the dynamic object insists that its presence is felt" (Bolt, 2004, p. 50). The materials of the painting assert themselves in the way they cause both viewer and maker to not simply look past but to look at, to notice materials in and of themselves. Materials make their presence known and felt by embodying the subject who moved them.

Myers (2011) proposes that, "Painting is a great unbroken tradition that encompasses the entire known history of man. Painting is, above all, human" (Myers, 2011, p. 26). The acts of mark-making are actions that have existed through the entirety of humanity. Perhaps, this is the reason for painting's continuous revival, for as humans exist, painting exists. Painting has survived multiple deaths, and its resurgences often come through in other mediums. Painting's presumed death could be because paint itself was overlooked and became a means of accomplishing something else, out of a concern of representation. In *Painting*, Myers includes part of Daniel Birnbaum's text, *Where Is Painting Now*, when he explains that painting has become a medium that is not limited to a rectangular frame. Painting is identified in other genres, mediums, and modes of work. This demonstrates a shift in understanding what a painting can be and where it can be. Painting may have been deemed dead but it has shown through in many other genres. Its death has enabled artists and painters alike to identify painting as a philosophical way of thinking and making (Myers, 2011, p. 158).

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In February 2020, a panel discussion at Monica King Contemporary in New York took place in conjuncture with the show *New Skin*, addressing the current state of abstract painting (*Two Coats of Paint*, 2020). Participating in this discussion were Katherine Bradford, Sharon

Butler, Craig Stockwell and Thomas Micchelli, along with curator and artist Jason Stopa. Stopa began the conversation by addressing the possibility for abstract painting as a political act. Both Sharon Butler and Craig Stockwell believe that, as a return to traditional and meditative practice, painting has the ability to aid in enduring through difficult times. Stopa utilized Bradford's point to question: is it necessary that art engage contemporary societal issues? Stopa and Micchelli propose that just because an artwork is not addressing politics overtly does not mean that it is not politically engaged. Both Stopa and Micchelli acknowledged that art has the ability to move us, in ways that can be difficult to put into words, and this is the great power of art. Stopa furthers the dialogue by introducing the correspondence that happens with materials acting on maker, and maker acting back on material. Further, Bradford suggests that painters build up a vocabulary that they rely on over and over again. In talking about chance, Sharon Butler remarked, "In the intentional, there's an element of chance, and in chance, there's an element of intention" (*Two Coats of Paint*, 2020, para. 16). By speaking of chance, Butler identifies the liveliness of materials. Stopa contends that the current conversation within abstract painting is about developing a way of talking about art making. In the face of a neoliberal capitalist society, a painting calls for a different kind of attention from the viewer, slow and time absorbing. In this sense, the paintings reveal themselves slowly, over time. Paintings offer a kind of experience for those who choose to engage with them differently from a rushed, strictly functional, profit-motivated way of being in the world (*Two Coats of Paint*, 2020).

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Anne Ellegood (2008) interviewed Amy Sillman in 2008 about her show *Directions* at Hirschhorn Museum. Sillman is interested in making her paintings in a way that appears as though they are barely holding themselves together, almost falling apart, showing vulnerability,

fragility, and humility. She is curious about the possibility of finding meaning in making something by hand that is not completely understood in its totality by the maker. She pursues the edges of what she knows, to see what lies on the other side, to push for something unexpected and surprising. By utilizing the weird, uncomfortable, and awkward beauty, she works through a position of discomfort to see what is possible (Ellegood, 2008). I continue to think of painting as a way of arriving at a place I've never been before, this being a process of discomfort and creative wandering. I may have a plan or an idea for the painting and yet it often becomes something different than that. Somehow what I imagined the painting to be becomes lost in translation of the material moments that comprise its emergence.

**Figure 19**

*Still Hills*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)

**A brushstroke is a word is a gesture**

Paintings with poems  
and words with paint  
Paints painting words  
with paint or writing  
with words so written  
painted words  
paint like words  
write with paint.



## Chapter Five: Coming Into Focus

As I have continued on in this living inquiry, life circumstances and world events have made me question, reconsider, revisit, and change. The global pandemic of COVID-19 has brought a waterfall of unforeseen circumstances. The riots following too many Black persons losing their lives unjustly are yet another indicator that things are not how they ought to be. My curiosity throughout all of this has been, how am I changing? How am I a part of the problem and in what ways can I help? These events have given me reason to question the motive behind my writing and artistic practice, and a desire to search for the purpose of my work as a contribution to a reimagined society that is just, filled with peace, hope and love. I have come to see that an investment into the importance of the imagination and education for freedom are necessary to address in understanding what is at play in acts of making. Acts of making are transformative. The arts have the potential to grow, to change and transform those who encounter them. This transformation is a part of the puzzle in transforming society, by building a community of love, hope, and peace. In this chapter, I think with Carl Leggo, Jorella Andrews, Walter Brueggeman, and bell hooks, in theorizing the importance of creative practice for personal and societal growth.

### *Carl Leggo and Storying the World*

Throughout my autoethnographic study, almost daily writing has been a way of processing thought, developing ideas, and coming to understand what I know. I began writing shortly after

my son was born. This functioned as a two-fold way of writing that would be necessary to complete my MA program, and also as a way of remembering and being present to all that may be happening in the transition to motherhood. Writing became a reflective gesture to speak myself through the unknowns and learning curves of motherhood. The writing became a way to look back and to notice how I progressed and changed across time. This also represented those times where I was not able to be in the studio painting, so writing filled a need for expression, for making. Then I began to find myself intrigued by playing with words in ways that related to how I would play with paint. This is where poetry became the seeming next step in the inquiry process. Poetry was not something I had spent much time with, in fact I had mostly written off my ability to engage with poetry because of how my previous teachers would grade my ability to engage poetry. They judged my ability as often subpar or below; therefore, I've lived the last decade assuming that I was clumsy with poetry. As I grew in paying attention, and taking notice, I found that the poetic inquiry would well up inside of me and come out onto my small pocket notebooks. I began my play at poetry. Through this I began to see that poetry could be a way of being, of knowing, and of coming to understand my surroundings. Poetry could heal, and offer a space of rest and peace. Poetry could fill, enliven, and sustain me through the days of the hard work of childrearing. Poetry could actually cause me to enjoy the mundane leaps and bounds more than I would have thought. And thus, I began to experience the transformative power of poetry. This is when Rita reminded me of the work of Carl Leggo. Leggo's work was a homecoming for me, as it spoke to much of what my a/r/tographical study had become: a way of knowing through doing and being. Leggo's narrative inquiry is a way of making sense of his experiences and therefore coming to understand, grow, and change. Leggo speaks of the way that the writing shapes him (Irwin et.al., p. x). William F. Pinar (2019) introduces the book *Storying*

*the World: The Contributions of Carl Leggo on Language and Poetry*, as a project that encapsulates the work of Carl Leggo. He begins by quoting Leggo, who says, “To engage with poetry is to live in the heart’s way, to acknowledge the truthfulness of emotion and experience as significant teacher” (Pinar, 2019, p. ix). Pinar demonstrates Leggo's relationship to poetry as a practice that lives with him, forms and shapes him. Pinar points to Leggo’s interest in understanding what it means to be human and how one goes about finding answers to these kinds of questions (Pinar, 2019, p. xi). Pinar again quotes Leggo, saying this:

Poetry connects us with wonder and mystery,’ Leggo promises us. ‘Poetry is a way of knowing and being and becoming.’ Becoming human? ‘What does it mean to be human? A poetics of research asks this question, and seeks to answer it. (Pinar, 2019, p. xi)

This resonance of wonder and mystery, of seeking after language and attaching this to experience, furthered my investigation into Leggo’s work, as it relates to materiality and material engagement with lived experience. Erika Hasebe-Ludt (2019) recognizes a pedagogy of the heart as the pivotal part of Leggo’s contribution to discourses about learning and teaching (Hasebe-Ludt, 2019, p. 1). Leggo’s work recognizes the heart as a source of knowing through listening and paying attention. Hasebe-Ludt speaks to how Leggo urges readers to follow the plea of Virginia Woolf, “to find relations and affinities between seemingly incompatible things and ‘to re-think human life into poetry.’ ...to address fear with a curriculum of love and with courage” (Hasebe-Ludt, 2019, p. 2). Throughout my painterly, scholarly and living inquiry, I have searched for links between things to see how they resonate, strengthen and develop together. Leggo (2018) describes that painter Harlan Hubbard recognized the relation of his interest in painting as an interest in living (Leggo, 2018, p. 6). This shows that creative engagement is living experience. Poetry enables Leggo to engage in living. Furthermore, poetry opens worlds of

understanding to how one makes sense of experience. As such, Leggo suggests that, "Poetry can inspire our curriculum studies by opening up innovative ways for paying attention to language, which, in turn, opens up new ways of knowing and becoming, and new ways of researching the experiences of daily, quotidian, human experiences" (Leggo, 2018, p. 8). By forming knowledge on human experience through poetry, we can come to know, see, hear, and feel. Along with poetry, Leggo understands story as a way to know and journey through living. In the experience of grief, Leggo utilized writing in making sense of the tragedy of loss. Leggo suggests that poetic inquiry could be confused for a search towards self-discovery. Leggo says this is not so for him. He says, "I search, but I am not searching 'to know myself.' I search in order to live, to become, to explore possibilities in a kind of creative wanderlust. I am engaged in 'the perpetual and elusive process of becoming'. Poetry is my companion on the journey" (Leggo, 2016, p. 31). For Leggo, writing inquiry is a continual process of searching to continue searching, it is an unending source of engaged living. Leggo (2012) describes the entanglement of narrating story when he says, "So, we narrate ourselves and we are narrated by our lived experiences. Therefore, we are both the subjects and the predicates of the discursive functions that compose our subjectivity which is always plural, multiple, tangled, mysterious, malleable, and unpredictable" (p. 40). In this way, our becoming is always in process, moving and changing. Writing our story, through narrative, poetry, and painterly inquiry, are companions helping to make sense along the way. With an investment into our own stories of making, we come to see identity, place, and relationship to those around us (Leggo, 2012, p. 42). Leggo (2005) encourages students to write autobiographically in an effort to sit with and learn from experiences in order that they may become more effective teachers (Leggo, 2005, p. 118). Leggo proposes that in paying attention to our own stories, we can better aid in the process of a student wandering through their own.

Hope is a word that Leggo (2011) uses often in his work to describe the outflowing of his writing projects. He describes himself as surprised and challenged by the way that writing reveals glimpses of hope. Leggo quotes Virginia Woolf in saying that the task of poetry is this:

to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole, not a fragment; to re-think human life into poetry. (Leggo, 2011, p. 57)

This struck me as significant to my own inquiry, as I have set out to stitch together ideas to form new understandings. I have sought to seek after the mysterious affinity of things, to tease out meanings and develop a deeper awareness of processes that have brought healing and hope to my life. Leggo (2011) writes, “In my writing, I seek to live attentively in the moment, and to know the momentous-ness of each moment. I seek to enter lived experiences with a creative openness to people and experiences and understandings” (Leggo, 2011, p.67). This statement summarizes what painting, reading and writing have grown to mean to me as a way of knowing and being.

When I think of all the tragedy, struggle, turmoil and challenge that has happened this year, I think to Leggo’s suggestion that, “Lifewriting is all about recognizing (as in knowing again) one’s position and the possibilities of relationship that emerge from a keen sense of location” (Leggo, 2010, p. 76). In life-writing, one can be made to face their position in the world, for as uncomfortable and challenging as it may be, it is necessary for a life that seeks justice. In this way, life writing has the potential to be the beginning of change, for with critical introspection one can see the room for growth. Irwin (2019) quotes Robert Bringhurst when he states, “What poetry knows, or what it strives to know, is the dancing at the heart of being” (p.

83). I've wondered, what does poetry know that painting also knows? What could it mean to dance at the heart of living?

Leggo's work demonstrates a constant grappling with the purpose and meaning in storying through life. He suggests that, "The real purpose of telling our stories is to tell them in ways that open up new possibilities for understanding and wisdom and transformation" (Leggo, 2008, p. 89). I recognize this as Leggo's underlying awareness of an unending need for growth and change. An orientation towards living that is open to change understands the limits of perspective and the need for renewal. Leggo (2007) quotes Jean Vanier from *Becoming Human* when saying the following:

we have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness, the centre of sentimentality and emotion, instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow. (Leggo, 2007, p. 98)

Leggo utilizes Vanier's belief in the power of heart to demonstrate that storying speaks to and from the heart. Leggo is trying to help us see that the heart has been misunderstood as weak and unreliable, when in fact it has the potential to connect us to the real. Poetic inquiry aims at the space between things. As Leggo (2007) says, "Becoming human is a lifelong commitment that requires practice. A poetics of research acknowledges that we are all in process, always in process" (p. 106). Poetry seems to be a way to access and preserve the process of becoming. Leggo continues on to say that his relationship to poetry is rhythmic, holding him to each day and moment (p. 107). For Leggo, poetry is sustaining, hope-filled and energizing in the midst of the ordinary busyness of living. Throughout his work, Leggo refers to Walter Brueggemann's book *The Prophetic Imagination*. Leggo appreciates Brueggemann's work in the way that the

imagination is realized as a powerful act of resistance to dominant consciousness and Leggo writes that in each of his poems he seeks this kind of imagining (Leggo, 2004, p. 138). Leggo and Brueggemann both understand the energizing passion poetic engagement ignites.

When speaking of coherency, Leggo makes a remark that spoke to the inner conflict I have been feeling throughout this last year of becoming mother while also working, writing, painting, and learning. I have struggled to know how to fit the various parts of me together. I have struggled to know how to fit the parts of this a/r/tography project together. Leggo writes,

My lived stories are not coherent because I am not coherent. I do not stick together.

Most days I am fractured, broken, piecemeal, divided, decentred. I present a facade that seems seamless, but the image is really a patch-work quilt, an extemporized contraption of scraps. So, why should my writing create the illusion of coherence when I really want my writing to re/present the multiple subject positions that I occupy in my living experience? I am not one main and complete idea. I am a legion of ideas—ideas without end. (Leggo, 2004, p. 148)

For Leggo, writing reveals. Writing is an opportunity to tell the truth, be honest, and move through living with hope.

### *The Question of Painting*

Throughout this past year, painting has been a way of coming to understand the ideas I've wished to explore in this thesis. It has been the surface to play with and push beyond limits of my perception. In the book, *The Question of Painting*, Jorella Andrews (2019) refers to the power and entanglements in Leah Durner's paintings when she says,

As explorations of colour and of the materiality of paint, Durner's poured enamel abstractions unashamedly embrace the often complex dynamics of beauty... At issue instead are reconfigurations of awareness, passion, insight and rhetoric with respect to how the world — including the complex, layered image-worlds in which we are immersed— might be enjoyed, observed, pictured and questioned. (Andrews, 2009, p. 15)

This demonstrates the way in which painterly abstraction grapples with reconfiguring, layering complexity. Painterly abstraction calls on a viewer to navigate the problems of the painting. In this way, paintings confront and challenge viewers to navigate their murky terrain. Every time a viewer may encounter a painting that reconfigures what is known in the world, they are reminded of the possibilities within perception, thus changing their perception. Andrews utilizes the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty throughout the book. She states, "Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, argued that philosophical propositions could be regarded as viable only insofar as they were rooted *in* our lived engagements with the world and applicable *to* these realities" (Andrews, 2019, p. 18). Philosophy must speak to and resemble the reality of one's experience in the world. Andrews suggests that Merleau-Ponty understood painterly practice as being able to ask the kinds of questions which cause one to consider one's place in the world in a way that is lived and practical (Andrews, 2019, p. 22). Andrews portrays Merleau-Ponty's fascination with painting as a way to be challenged and changed. She says this:

Following Merleau-Ponty, at issue is painting's capacity both to enter and create territory that is unavailable to cognition as conventionally understood, which remains unnoticed, unimagined and, therefore, also unquestioned within the exigencies of everyday life. The willingness to enter this under-examined and therefore unfamiliar territory, in which we



find ourselves complicit, and in which we may find ourselves subject to challenge, change and what feels like dispossession — rather than the more conventional visual bringing-to-expression of particular ideological positions or critiques; within the Merleau-Pontean model those are secondary practices — I take to be foundational to social and political efficacy at whatever level or intensity this might be required.

Crucially, these modes of awareness are fundamental orientations that can be cultivated and practiced, without, exclusion, by everyone, everywhere. (Andrews, 2019, p. 22)

Here, Andrews (2019) is demonstrating with Merleau-Ponty's ideas that the openness to receive a painting that is unconventional, surprising, or unexpected reflects a certain orientation towards the world that is useful for societal change. Sitting with that which challenges and obscures cultivates a readiness and willingness to accept the limits of knowledge. In this way, Andrews suggests that while one's work might not overrule previous knowledge, it can speak to a kind of human experience that is relatable and this is valuable (Andrews, 2019, p. 31). Painting has an ability to enact the everyday and mundane in a way that calls for attention, raising one's awareness of the mundane in ordinary living, thus transforming living (Andrews, 2019, p. 42).

Andrews (2019) demonstrates Merleau-Ponty's belief that empiricism and rationalism failed to acknowledge the complexity of human experience in the world. The notions of objectivism established a false sense of being able to detach mind, body, and world. Andrews writes of Merleau-Ponty, "His overall objection was that the systems of thought produced in each case failed to articulate the richness of our everyday experiences of what it is like to live in the world of other people, things and events" (Andrews, 2019, p. 84). Andrews describes Merleau-Ponty's interest in the observance of everyday encounters with the world as a starting point for understanding human behaviour (p. 85). Merleau-Ponty believed that perception

through naïve consciousness is already in itself meaningful without the need for an external structure to make it so (Andrews, 2019, p. 86). One could derive much knowledge from paying attention to and unpacking everyday engagements with the world. Andrews states, “Merleau-Ponty presented painterly investigation as characterized by the creation of new structures” (Andrews, 2019, p. 89). In referring to the artist El Greco, Andrews points to Merleau-Ponty’s call to proactively reimagine that which is otherwise overlooked. He suggests that the paintings of El Greco represent his “*active* navigation of his condition, and of the world, *by means of* this altered mode of seeing” (p. 97). Andrews speaks to the complex entanglements of hands, eyes, materiality, history and the unseen in painterly practice, thus being a place where one’s condition in the world can be articulated, expressed, and made known (p.98). From Andrews’s use of Merleau-Ponty’s notions of perception, I recognize an emphasis on the immediate, moment by moment presence to that which reveals itself to us. In paying attention to that which shows up for us in the world, we can come to better understand ourselves, our behaviours and our position in the world. From understanding, we can grow, change, and be transformed. For Merleau-Ponty, “...the world in its visual and material being immediately presents itself to us as significant, even if that significance is unresolved” (Andrews, 2019, p. 116). Ultimately, my work has been an attempt to philosophize my way of engaging in the world through making, thinking, believing, feeling, caring, nurturing and understanding. Perhaps, it is useful to think with the world rather than about it. In this sense, it may be helpful for understanding our lived experience of the world to speak directly to experience rather than to hypothesize and project what one might think to be true (Andrews, 2019, p. 125). One of Merleau-Ponty’s missions is to dismantle false objectivist claims and relish in the complexity of everyday lived experience as a way towards understanding. As Andrews states, this mission

is already being carried out by everyone who is willing to approach their perceived world as such a beginner, in an attitude of at least provisionally relinquishing inherited knowledge, and belief, and with the ability to convey, in words, imagery or gesture, the meanings that arise, thereby making them available for exploration (and reinterpretation) by others. (Andrews, 2019, p. 125)

Perhaps this is the power of painting as Merleau-Ponty believes it enables one to reimagine their perceived world in a way that enlivens one's perception. Andrews utilizes Merleau-Ponty to state that a work of art can "awaken perception in others and initiate a process in which accepted notions about self and world become destabilized, require questioning, and are reconfigured" (Andrews, 2019, p. 126). What value does an engaged and destabilized perception offer to self and society? Art works and processes of making are open in the sense that they are always subject to different ways of interpretation (Andrews, 2019, p. 132). An artwork offers the opportunity to let the unfamiliar sit with us and to learn what we do with it (Andrews, 2019, p. 132). Merleau-Ponty recognized the way that "an image, through its very unfamiliarity, would provoke us to *scrutinize* it, and in so doing, to scrutinize ourselves also" (Andrews, 2019, p. 132). One's way of responding to an artwork is worth paying careful attention to, by asking what does the artwork do to you? When we open ourselves up to what an artwork can do in us, we have the tremendous potential to form new ways of thinking about the habits of living so often taken for granted. Andrews continues on to say, "For Merleau-Ponty, then, Cézanne's paintings, and his statements about the experience of painting, did not retrospectively record completed processes of thinking, perceiving or learning, or retrospectively point to the birth of new meanings but rather *enabled* them" (Andrews, 2019, p. 133). Painting enables ways of thinking, knowing, and being in the world. The reason I have begun to think expansively about learning

and teaching is because of my ongoing commitment to the practice of painting. Painting enables my shift in perception. Merleau-Ponty theorizes events of abstract movement. Andrews summarizes acts of abstract movement according to Merleau-Ponty by saying, “By this, he meant our ability to project or throw ourselves into tasks and situations that are not *demand*ed by actual or pre-existing conditions. Abstract movement is, in the first place, brought into play — largely but not wholly — by our own initiative” (Andrews, 2019, p. 146). Here, Merleau-Ponty describes abstract movement as that which is not attached to necessity. This movement possesses a freedom, resembling the world and also embodying that which did not exist before. Andrews explains the significance of the aesthetic sensibility when it comes to motivating social and political change. The emphasis here lies on the personal, the self, and the need to be changed individually in order to initiate collective change. Herein lies the power of painting, to alter or suspend for a moment one’s perception of things with the prompt to reconsider and shift. Change comes in the willingness to inquire into the parts of self that are confronted by lack of understanding and to sit with the discomfort (Andrews, 2019, p.153).

Further into Andrews’s (2019) book, she mentions Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of a painter’s uses of space, style and language as responses to the visual world. Andrews identifies Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style as gradually emerging through an artist’s focused attention on their experience of being in the world (Andrews, 2019, p. 193). Andrews writes,

Works of art communicate, then, not because their content resembles the world as we have already seen it but because they present particular ways of perceiving and responding to the world, and of sustaining intentionality and inventiveness towards it, that arouse our interest. (Andrews, 2019, p. 195)

Andrews demonstrates Merleau-Ponty's belief that painters search for a level of depth that is politically and existentially useful, thus deserving further attention (Andrews, 2019, p. 233).

Paintings have the ability to bring a kind of engagement with consciousness that transforms our encounters with the world.

### *The Prophetic Imagination*

In the book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann (2001) names the prophetic imagination as the ability to raise an alternative consciousness towards dominant culture. The prophetic imagination aims at locating effects of domination in culture to liberate, free, and point towards the implementation of a new kind of reality, by thinking beyond the seeming constraints within a society to imagine what could be possible. It is the role of artists, creatives and deep thinkers alike to point society towards wholeness and the role of society to listen (Brueggemann, 2001, p. xiv). One must look beyond how things have always been in order that a new reality can be envisioned. What could it mean to live a curriculum of love and a community of hope fueled by a prophetic imagination? Brueggemann speaks to the necessity to be a part of dominant community, yet to have an awareness of it, in order to remain distinct. The beginning of change lies in the ability to look beyond present circumstances while still operating within them. Arts education has the capability to awaken, enliven, and reignite a belief for passionate and hopeful living. Perception as practiced in arts education is crucial to the resistance of dominant consciousness. The arts create the space to dabble in perception and dialogue with those whose perspectives differ, thus informing our own. The willingness to sit with an artwork reflects an orientation of openness towards another's perspective. What if this willingness, practiced in the experience with art, was present in circumstances where perspectives differ? As perception grows, consciousness follows, and as consciousness grows a pursuit of an alternative

becomes possible (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 3). Brueggemann suggests that dominant consciousness leads to a focus on self-service without consideration of a new kind of future (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 37). Our thinking is so bound to what is possible within everyday constraints that we have lost the ability to imagine differently (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 39). Brueggemann recognizes the artist as capable of proposing new ways of looking at the present so that a new future can be realized and able to help others grasp their own ability to imagine. In this way, art communicates. Art that is about suffering and death can remind us of our finitude and reengage our perspective (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 41). As a community, prophets of alternative consciousness can offer perspectives that embolden and enliven those who engage them by offering hope (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 59). Hope recognizes a reality beyond the here and now. Hope knows that more is promised. Brueggemann identifies Jesus of the New Testament as an example in raising an alternative consciousness towards the numbness invoked by royal consciousness. He says, "Jesus penetrates the numbness by his compassion and with his compassion takes the first step by making visible the odd abnormality that had become business as usual" (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 88). Further, Brueggemann suggests, "The replacing of numbness with compassion, that is, the end of cynical indifference and the beginning of noticed pain, signals a social revolution" (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 91). Artists, as prophets of the prophetic imagination, engage a focused reconsideration and reorientation towards the present in order to enable hope for a new reality.

### *Art on My Mind*

In her book, *Art on My Mind*, bell hooks (1995) addresses identity politics within the art world, how and whom gets their work seen and heard. Her focus lies in the black liberation

struggle, specifically how art is transformative and necessary for the black community. hooks writes:

It occurred to me then that if one could make a people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their will and their power to make art, then the work of subjugation, of colonization, is complete. Such work can be undone only by acts of concrete reclamation. (hooks, 1995, p. xv)

Concrete acts of reclamation are necessary for the prophet of alternative consciousness to dismantle the royal consciousness of oppression and domination. Unfortunately, those who perpetuate the belief that art is not relevant to one's daily life are in positions of power that silence those struggling to reclaim art's importance for collective flourishing. Somehow some children grow up to forget the meaningful engagements with making that were so formative for knowledge development. How can we resist this tendency to forget the importance of making as we leave childhood? In what ways must education be framed so that the arts are not seen as an extracurricular? The imagination is a contested space. Perhaps the diminishment of the imagination moves individual focus away from self-care to a place of self-forgetfulness. And this is not on a level that one is conscious of, rather, it is a subtle silencing of genuine needs of self-care. As a result, any kind of engagement in art-making is framed as sensitive and weak rather than the incredibly courageous and important work of caring for self and society. From a young age, children often build up a belief that their voice is insignificant. What happens in a child's heart when their courage to share is silenced? Over time, what message does this teach children? What if a child was encouraged to follow the inclination to share, to be vocal and to record their ideas, thoughts, and creations? Rather than being overlooked, what if children were encouraged to share their ideas with consideration, respect and love for others? This ultimately could look

like teaching children what it means to care for self, in an effort to cultivate and care for culture. In speaking about the Black liberation struggle, hooks (1995) writes, “If black folks are collectively to affirm our subjectivity in resistance, as we struggle against forces of domination and move toward the invention of the decolonized self, we must set our imaginations free” (hooks, 1995, p. 4). The imagination is a tremendously radical space in which to reimagine systems of oppression and fight for change. bell hooks quotes the painter Charles White when he says, “...Without culture, without creative art, inspiring to these senses, mankind stumbles in a chasm of despair and pessimism” (hooks, 1995, p. 5). Art must be recognized for the self-transformation it cultivates in the lives of those who engage with it. Change begins with personal change, and personal change can be aided by acts of making and engaging art. hooks writes, “Collectively, black folks must be able to believe fully in the transformative power of art if we are to put art on our mind in a new way” (hooks, 1995, p. 7). hooks quotes Ntozake Shange as she shares the meaningfulness of art in her life: “Paintings and poems are moments, capturing or seducing us, when we are so vulnerable. These images are metaphors. This is my life, how I see and, therefore, am able to speak” (hooks, 1995, p. 7). hooks recognizes the importance of art making in the process of self-realization. Just as the car needs gas in order to run smoothly, the soul needs to be nurtured and cared for, and this can be done through acts of making (hooks, 1995, p. 20). bell hooks quotes the critic Susan Crane when she says, “Art is not simply the secret, delectable, beautiful object, but the transcendental power of creativity, the alchemical potential of materials” (hooks, 1995, p. 25). Here, Crane speaks to the incredible potential within materials that enables them to reach beyond themselves, to touch, change, and transform those who engage them. This, in turn, moves beyond the boundaries of the material capabilities into the realm of transformation that is significant for cultural reconciliation.



hooks speaks to the multifaceted nature of beauty in its ability to offer hope in the midst of difficulty. She refers to John Keats's writing, saying, "When Keats wrote the lines 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever, its loveliness increases, it will never pass into nothingness,' he attributed to beauty the subversive function of sustaining life in the face of deprivation, unrelenting pain, and suffering" (hooks, 1995, p. 49). Beauty is not here meant only in a visceral sense, but in a sense of transformation, a thing of beauty is a thing that transforms. Circumstance is transformed in the presence of beauty. When hooks refers to the absences and openings in Felix Gonzalez-Torres works, she suggests that us, as viewers, fill those holes with whatever comes from our own experiences (hooks, 1995, p. 50). In this way, we face our own realities in the midst of encountering this work. The private and public collide, suggesting perhaps that we all may have more in common than we'd like to admit and thus, this encounter enables a new way of envisioning togetherness (hooks, 1995, p. 50). The more I've engaged in this project of learning what is at play in acts of making, the more I've come to see the imagination as a political act. Not only the imagination but also the will to imagine, a belief *in* the imagination. hooks says, "The practice of freedom in daily life, and that includes artistic freedom, is always a liberator act that begins with the will to imagine" (hooks, 1995, p. 97). hooks believes that engagement with beauty has the potential to provide the sustenance to endure the most difficult of human experiences and that the will to imagine frees us. hooks continues by saying:

Beauty can be and is present in our lives irrespective of our class status. Learning to see and appreciate the presence of beauty is an act of resistance in a culture of domination that recognizes the production of a pervasive feeling of lack, both material and spiritual, as a useful colonizing strategy. (hooks, 1995, p. 124)

Teachers of all kinds can encourage the ability in themselves and their students to identify beauty and appreciate it, in their own work and the work of those around them. This is a way to counter the silencing of one's voice, which may mean radical change and transformation in the lives of young students. hooks calls for the theorization of beauty in one's life. Ultimately, she believes that in theorizing the meaning of beauty this will lead to education for critical consciousness, engaging in issues such as the place of beauty in one's life even when money, material and basic needs are scarce. By engaging these notions of beauty, hooks feels that this will allow for strategizing acts of resistance by feminist thinkers developing a collective sense of communal struggle for progress, through which the soul is sustained by beauty that abounds and uplifts (hooks, 1995, p. 124).

As hooks speaks of the creative process, particularly for women artists, she recognizes the entanglement of living and making—that making is never happening solely in the interaction with materials. Acts of making begin in the forethought, the preparation, the downtime and anticipation of what might happen. She also deems times where potentially nothing is actively happening as still time where something is happening (hooks, 1995, p. 126). hooks expresses that despite the presence of feminist thinking and practice, women struggle to justify their uses of time (hooks, 1995, p. 127). This speaks to my experience of living as a mother whilst maintaining a creative practice. It is extremely challenging to be paying attention to the present moment without concern for how else the time could be used. She says, “Women artists cannot wait for ideal circumstances to be in place before we find the time to do the work we are called to do; we have to create oppositionally, work against the grain” (hooks, 1995, p. 130). Women artists might consider utilizing their constraints as informers of their practice. Rather than

ignoring limitations, use them. Likewise, those in influential positions within the art community must make efforts to support and validate the efforts made by women artists.

### *Teaching Community*

In her book *Teaching Community*, bell hooks (2003) begins by specifying the need for feminist thinkers to deliver their message in accessible terms that would enable a larger inclusive audience (p. xi). Too often, she feels as though feminist ideas remain locked within academia rather than permeating outside of it, due to a lack of accessible language. With accessibility, she believes the personal as political can become a message that transgresses boundaries outside the academic world (hooks, 2003, p. xiii). Engaging in art education for students of all ages builds empathy and critical consciousness, which can be part of the solution toward a more just society. hooks writes, “Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv). As the title suggests, the loss of and hope for community is hook’s primary focus. She identifies the danger of the academy isolating itself from the world beyond it (hooks, 2003, p. xv). She suggests that the outcome of a progressive education is a critical consciousness of the world we live in. When speaking of critical consciousness, hooks says, “Progressive professors did not need to indoctrinate students and teach them that they should oppose domination. Students came to these positions via their own capacity to think critically and assess the world they live in” (hooks, 2003, p. 8). When students are given the tools to scrutinize the world they find themselves in, they are better able to come to their own awareness of systems of domination. With their imagination set free, students can better envision an alternative society rid of oppression and domination. This hopefulness and recognition of systems of oppression must be protected and nurtured before the voices of cynicism stifle any chance at growth. hooks states, “Our senses are assaulted by the stench of domination every day, here in the places where we

live. No wonder, then, that so many people feel terribly confused, uncertain, and without hope” (hooks, 2003, p. 12). Our voices are silenced at a young age by the indoctrination of schooling that leads children to feel shame, embarrassment and judgement. I, too, feel as though for a long time the criticism and evaluation I received in school did little to help me and more to harm me. I find myself questioning the validity of my own voice, assuming that there is nothing of benefit there, or that my own perspective is only unreliable. In the past, this sense of being voiceless had led me to a lack of interest as I see now. Only in encounters with teachers who have listened, affirmed, and provoked the areas of interest that I pursue, have I been able to gain a level of critical consciousness that enables me to question that which I formerly remained numb to. We are taught from a young age that our job as students is to please and respect the teacher, to acquire a good grade and complete the program. We are taught as students that we have an inherent lack that must be enlightened in the classroom (hooks, 2003, p. 86). hooks writes, “Public schools as well as institutions of higher education must be transformed so that learning is an experience that builds, enhances, and affirms self-esteem” (hooks, 2003, p. 79). Referring back to hooks’ comments earlier, no wonder so many people walk around feeling confused and without hope, for they’ve only been told of their lack, their inability, their shame rather than being built up. In order for education to be generative, students must be affirmed in their ability to think critically about the world they live in, to be encouraged in their accomplishments, their interests and dreams. hooks (2003) writes, “Education as the practice of freedom affirms healthy self- esteem in students as it promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously. It teaches them to reflect and act in ways that further self-actualization, rather than conformity to the status quo” (hooks, 2003, p. 72). How would society change if students were taught to seek after conditions of freedom rather than only a higher position of academic excellence? What would

happen if students were indoctrinated in the language of love and freedom rather than domination (hooks, 2003, p. 92)? hooks quotes Parker Palmer when he says, “The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require” (hooks, 2003, p. 19). A teaching vocation is a commitment to service. In serving, one is continually preoccupied by the needs of students, helping them gain clarity and understanding. hooks suggests that “Every caring teacher knows that our ideas are always in process. Unlike other professions we have the opportunity to return to our written work and make it better” (hooks, 2003, p. 91). A continual struggle for me during this thesis process has been the fight for perfection. I have felt uneasy coming to finish my thesis project for fear of all that I have not included, all that should have been said. This is a fear that I will one day face regret over what I wish I could have said. In this way, I have had great difficulty knowing how or when to finish this project. I may not have said everything that needs to be said at this moment, but I am committed to revisiting and rewriting my ways of thinking moving forward. I commit to remaining open and receptive to what I’ve missed, to continue learning and growing.

The breaking down of shame in the classroom will lead to freedom of living and learning for students. Words chosen too hastily and without consideration have such cuttngly serious consequences (hooks, 2003, p. 101). I’ve begun to experience what I’ve known to be true: that learning and living are integral to each other, requiring a focused attention and presence. As an art educator, my hope would be that students I am with sense me pointing them towards a focused engagement in their own learning and living, within and without the classroom setting. hooks (2003) quotes Palmer Parker again, stating, “Education is about healing and wholeness. It

is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life” (hooks, 2003, p. 43). With the help of hooks, I recognize the art classroom as a crucial space for developing a critical consciousness in students, enabling them to lead lives that are committed to ending domination (hooks, 2003, p. 45). Art education creates the conditions for humanization of all students, to encourage self-esteem, confidence, endurance and empathy. hooks recognizes that the majority of white people she grew up with who committed to lead anti-racist lives, made this decision when they were children (hooks, 2003, p. 54). This speaks to the tremendous potential and responsibility of early childhood educators to engage an anti-racist classroom. Art education done well creates the conditions for a practice of freedom of all students, encouraging self-esteem, confidence, endurance and empathy. hooks writes of the potential for a loving classroom. In this case she states, “The loving classroom is one in which students are taught, both by the presence and practice of the teacher, that critical exchange can take place without diminishing anyone’s spirit, that conflict can be resolved constructively” (hooks, 2003, p. 135). Within art education, critical exchange can happen through art critique, but without serious care and attentiveness art critique can turn into an experience of shame. Within art institutions, students and professors must be made aware of what is at stake in the carrying out of art critiques. When all that is at play is named, and given attention, students will have power over the critique they receive rather than feeling helpless to the voices of those speaking with institutional authority and without care. Art classrooms have the tremendous potential to teach community with a curriculum that is guided by love. She says, “To be guided by love is to live in community with all life. However, a culture of domination, like ours, does not strive to teach us how to live in community. As a consequence, learning to live in community must be a core practice for all of us who desire spirituality in education” (hooks, 2003, p.163). Learning to live

in community is a necessary part of a curriculum that leads to justice, wholeness, and the collective joy in togetherness.

hooks (2003) writes, “Schooling that does not honor the needs of the spirit simply intensifies that sense of being lost, of being unable to connect” (hooks, 2003, p. 180). This speaks to much of what is at the root of my confusion following art school. I do believe that a sense of not-knowing is generative to grow into new awarenesses, but not at the expense of a personal disconnectedness. Within art schooling, being lost in the process of inquiry and personal disconnectedness must be distinguished. Artist professors must prioritize enabling students to move towards wholeness. If community and connection are at the centre of art curriculum, many more students would leave art school feeling satisfied and accomplished rather than assuming that their way of working is somehow lacking. Art school can set one up to believe ways of making are lesser than if they do not emulate the professors they worked with. What if art schools enabled students to leave with a sense of passion, rather than a fear of what they lack? While there have been caring teachers along the way that have helped me to think otherwise, the feeling of self-doubt still weighs heavily. hooks writes, “...students are socialized via conventional pedagogy to believe that their own “now” is always inadequate and lacking” (p. 166). In what ways do modes of learning stifle growth by discouragement and lack of belief in the potential of students? If students feel as though they do not measure up to one mode of learning, how does that transcend to their image of their own ability to learn and grow? hooks quotes Parker Palmer again when he says:

Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world... I want to explore what it might mean to reclaim

the sacred at the heart of knowing, teaching, and learning—to reclaim it from an essentially depressive mode of knowing that honors only data, logic, analysis, and a systematic disconnection of self from the world, self from others. (hooks, 2003, p. 179)

I have found the idea of reclamation of ways of knowing, teaching and learning to be at the heart of my own journey of becoming, as I have continued on in following what lingers, intrigues, inspires, transcends, puzzles, and amazes me. Throughout a year of tumultuous changes through becoming a mother, living through a pandemic and being reminded to join the fight against systems of oppression, learning through painterly, poetic and writing inquiry has brought me life, endurance, hope and a sense of peace. I have sought to reclaim those parts of me that have been stilled by those who were not considerate with their words, and I have learned to be cautious in moments where my words hold weight.

hooks (2003) speaks to the way that academic institutions limit the imagination and indoctrinate minds rather than free them (hooks, 2003, p. 186) Freedom is found in the imagination, the power of imagining things otherwise, and in taking the steps towards their realization. Ultimately, art education must serve the purposes of opposing systems of domination, sparing individuals from hopelessness, to lead energized lives with the will to imagine. hooks writes, “Individuals from marginalized groups, whether victimized by dysfunctional families or by political systems of domination, often find their way to freedom by heeding the call of prophetic imaginations” (hooks, 2003, p. 186). It is my hope to bring experiences with art-making to as many people as possible, in order that their imaginations can be freed. Ultimately, laughter has the potential to bind us together as hooks suggests (hooks, 2003, p. 196). Finally, hooks states that “Dominant culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear,



finding out what connects us, identifying in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community” (hooks, 2003, p. 197). Art education has the ability to bring us together, to see and hear one another, to laugh, celebrate and grow together.

**Figure 20**

*On Every Road*



*Note.* 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. (own photo)

### **Morning or Evening**

Icicle blue window to the sky.  
Pink pastel powdery blanket  
of silhouetted trees  
stitched together with leaves.  
But time was as time is,  
a ruthless force, the least  
forgiving I'd expect it to be.

## Chapter Six: On Moving Forward

With further discussion and reflections, it has become clear that the place at which I have arrived through this inquiry is out of a desire to live fully and with hope. One could say that the creative impulse as a driving force has been hopefulness and love. Through the daily ritual of writing and setting time aside to think about the things that matter to me, I have come to see that a life of writing and thoughtfulness leads to a fuller engagement with the world. It is worthwhile to note that while I have been finalizing this document, the world has been living through a pandemic, which has been full of all kinds of unknown, loss, disparity, and the tendency to lose hope. There have been glimpses at collective efforts to have hope, such as the cheering for health care workers that happened every evening at 7pm. How can we carry on this way of living hopefully despite our circumstances? It's evident that much is out of our control in this world, yet the choice to be curious and to look for beauty can still uplift the soul whilst enduring difficulties. Surprisingly, that has become a pivotal part of this project, the realization that acts of making and creating, paying attention and being attuned to the world are about being hopeful.

I have fallen into a love for writing as a way of working through the ideas and thoughts that come up throughout the day. Rather than holding them, or in many cases missing them, I have come to recognize the immense value of taking thoughts, catching them, and working through them in the act of writing. It's been a continual navigating of the playfulness of language and thought. I learned in this process that reading and writing are essential vehicles for growing in knowledge, understanding, and awareness. I undervalued writing and reading, mostly because

I thought I was no good, as enablers of thought formation taught me. In this way, this project has become a record of my growth in reading, writing, and understanding what it is that I am truly curious about, what is at play in acts of making and what art can contribute to society. Just as the writing has recorded thinking, so too do paintings record processes of thinking. This is what I hope to investigate further moving forward, how painting enables and shapes thought. I found it quite difficult to carry on with making paintings while the writing felt unresolved or without direction. I see now that when the writing inquiry was less sure of itself, the paintings reflected this same uncertainty.

I underestimated the nature of my becoming mother in its effect on how the work came to be. I found that I could not separate my becoming mother from my thinking processes because it was mothering that determined the very structure for how the work was formed. In the spirit of entanglements, becoming mother was integral to the nature of the work. My hesitation to speak of motherhood made me curious about what messages had made motherhood feel unnecessary to include. By taking up a methodology of a/r/tography, this allowed for the inclusion of my experience as a mother, despite not knowing how it would develop within the project. It was relevant because it was part of my life while writing and making.

As a painter, I have come to resonate with the possibility of poetic inquiry. Writing has led me to link words to experience in emotive ways, resembling the connection of paint and expression. I've grown into a great love for writing, by investigating ideas through the written word. By the integration of writing and painting practice into a poetic inquiry of living, I have found avenues for engagement when faced with the duties of being a mother. The work becomes a daily celebration of all that is possible in the midst of raising children. I did not realize this at the time the initial forty days of writing began. Now I continually engage with writing as a

means of becoming. I thought it would be temporary but the spirit of daily writing has carried on. Moving forward, poetry is something I will engage with as a way of growing in understanding my way of living and noticing in the world.

In the writing and working in my studio, I have come to notice that I am invested in the idea of slowness, of things taking time and spending time with that which reveals itself slowly. I do so in the very nature of this project, giving time to think, write, do and be, all with a focused attention so that I may learn, grow, and change. I am convinced that in the effort and vigilance to understand, meaning reveals itself over time.

Writing is a way of identifying the learning that happens in living. Writing is learning. In her book *Upstream*, Mary Oliver (2019) writes, “In the beginning I was so young and such a stranger to myself I hardly existed. I had to go out into the world and see it and hear it and react to it, before I knew at all who I was, what I was, what I wanted to be” (Oliver, 2019, p.16). From Oliver’s words here, she expresses the way that knowing ourselves takes time and effort. Coming to know ourselves involves risk, and leaning into the unknown. I think back to Maxine Greene’s belief in making the familiar strange. This offers a way of examining what otherwise remains overlooked. With careful attention and humility, writing can enable one to identify and question patterns of thinking and behaving that may otherwise be taken for granted.

Throughout my writing and making, the unknown and unforeseen have continued to be topics of interest in relation to the creative process. This is essential to a creative pursuit. The search for what is not known is what pushes the limits of knowledge, expanding one’s awareness. It is a means of looking beyond. I believe this to be an acknowledgement of my own process of growing. That what is known is not everything, and there is more to become known.

In her book, *A Field Guide for Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit (2005) writes of the unknown in this way:

Certainly for artist of all stripes, the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found. It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophesies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; it's where their work comes from although its arrival signals the beginning of the long disciplined process of making it their own.

(Solnit, 2005, p. 5)

In Solnit's book, she opens with a question: "How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?" (Solnit, 2005, p. 4). Her question is one that is relevant to the creative process, for how does one follow the creative impulse to what they do not know? In the present, I move forward not knowing exactly what the discovery will be yet confident that there will be discovery. Solnit (2005) also asks a similar question when saying,

How do you calculate upon the unforeseen? It seems to be an art of recognizing the role of the unforeseen, of keeping your balance amid surprises, of collaborating with chance, of recognizing that there are some essential mysteries in the world and thereby a limit to calculations, to plan, to control. To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us. (Solnit, 2005, p. 5)

Perhaps the art of living and making is that we become students of how to dance with that which is unforeseen. Solnit shares that she has a grandmother whose story remained largely hidden to her for a long while. Once Solnit learned her story, it was much different from her expectation. Solnit (2005) reflects on the hidden grandmothers of art history when writing,

Art history in particular is often cast as an almost biblical lineage, a long line of begats in which painters descend purely from painters. Just as the purely patrilineal Old testament

genealogies leave out the mothers and even the fathers of the mothers, so these tidy stories leave out all the sources and inspirations that come from other media and other encounters, from poems, dreams, politics, doubts, a childhood experience, a sense of place, leave out the fact that history is made more of crossroads, branchings, and tangles than straight lines. These other sources I called the grandmothers. (Solnit, 2005, p. 59)

Solnit's words relate to how I am thinking about the entanglements of writing, making, and living that inform the paintings and vice versa. Solnit acknowledges the life surrounding an artwork. She recognizes the entanglement or sources drawn up, and influenced by, suggesting that a linear understanding of how works come to be fails to hold the messiness of living. That the sources and references that affect the works made by an artist are so entangled that it is difficult to tease them out, pointing to this or that to suppose that a work comes from some singular thing. All of living is caught up in the way an artist comes to make something. Solnit resonates with the pack-donkey of Ingold (2013), a meandering, wandering line. Just as it is with the methodology of a/r/tography, Solnit is inclined to think that our questions have the capacity to be more profound than the answers one seems to give as a response. Questioning, wondering and wandering are of deep value in uncovering the unknown and unforeseen, leading their questioner to a new place, new understanding, and new work.

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Much of living is learning to notice, listen, and pay attention. Artists teach this in their ways of collecting fragments, ideas, moments, and bringing them to sit with, ponder, and wait for things to reveal themselves. Artists live with anticipation that there is great surprise, great excitement on the other side of knowing. I have come to develop a sensitivity to what the day calls for, whether it be writing, reading, resting, or making. I have also recognized the



importance of going out into the world, of getting oneself in front of something that is happening in the world and responding to it. This takes practice, it takes routine and planning for the unexpected to happen. Mary Oliver (1994) writes about the romance of Romeo and Juliet, suggesting that had they not kept up with their appointments to meet each other, there would have been no romance. In writing, in making, Oliver believes in the necessity of making appointments and keeping them. One must show up to the thinking space, and keep showing up, and then in this way something will begin to happen there (Oliver, 1994, p. 7).

After all this writing, working and making, mothering, learning, and becoming, I've made a resolve to keep going, to keep learning because it fills me. But moving forward, I think I'd like to take up writing poetry. In writing, mothering, painting, learning, and teaching, there is much that is hidden, waiting to be understood, discovered. To me, poetry is a way of putting words to feelings and emotions, experiences, ways of knowing, while still recognizing the unknowable, the mystery, the entanglements, that which will always be a little beyond reach. Poems comfort and validate. Oliver says, "I learned that the poem was made not just to exist, but to speak—to be company" (Oliver, 1994, p. 33). Poems speak into existence, the things that have been there all along.

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As I have come to think of and read about poetry, I have found a similar kind of relation to paintings and poetry as a way of seeing, of looking at the world. Painting and poetry require a focus and attention to the unfolding present. Painting and poetry transform the way I look and notice as I move around in the world. I am taught by paint and poem to not overlook the mundane, to question and ask, inquire, and wonder about the little things that fill the day. I am

struck by the inversion, the switchbacks, the times of being caught off guard, of shifting perspective, framework and understanding. Reading, writing, making, and looking, all together—shift, transform, change me. Painting and poetry communicate that no thing is too small for a focused attention. That a walk around the block can be filled with encounters that become the openings to enter into the language of paint and words. As Oliver (2019) writes, “I did not think of language as the means to self-description. I thought of it as the door—a thousand opening doors!—past myself. I thought of it as the means to notice, to contemplate, to praise, and, *thus*, to come into power” (Oliver, 2019, p. 33). Words enable us to become ourselves by writing ourselves.

The poem is a moment—an instance of attention, of noticing something in the world. Perhaps the imagination comes alive in the world of things—of objects. Perhaps the poem, to become radiant, needs images, and images always involve things (Oliver, 1994, p. 74). Oliver’s words pose an interesting thought for the relationship of paintings and poems, further their presence as objects and things. Paintings, like poems, can come from things. As I am going about my everyday there are moments that stop me and I see the world as if it were a painting. I see the world with a new awareness of it. Poetry does this too. Painting and poetry alike contribute to a way of seeing, of living and being in the world, taking notice and paying attention. It is this way for painter Raoul De Keyser. Andrew Wilson (2004) describes the way that De Keyser’s work demonstrates a way of looking, of seeing the world. Of De Keyser, Wilson says, “...he has realized that the world about us is glimpsed as fragments and that painting itself contributes to such a way of seeing: the abstraction is already there in life as much as in painting” (Wilson, 2004, p. 37). Painting is a stance, an orientation towards looking, noticing, and seeing. Just as the practice of writing changes the way that one reads, so painting transforms the way that one sees

and *looks*. I particularly resonate with the way that Wilson describes De Keyser's way of painting as these glimpsed fragments of the world. Paintings are fragments of what exists in the world.

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The real educational work, as I will argue, is precisely not about facilitating expression but about bringing children and young people *into dialogue* with the world. It is about turning them towards the world and about arousing their desire for wanting to be *in* the world and *with* the world, and not just with themselves. (Biesta, 2017, p. 37)

Along with Gert Biesta, educational work of worth points learners to the never-ending possibilities held in the desire to learn. From what Biesta is saying here, I gather that art education causes one to look outwards. The student sees beyond themselves in the encounter with an artwork. They are taken somewhere else, to a new place, a challenging, surprising, or unexpected place. The student of art also comes to know that art and living are very much so in an entanglement with each other. The artist's life and their work speak to each other and communicate in a back and forth dialogue.

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I've taught in several different kinds of settings, art programs mostly. And the more I think about it, lots of the teaching I've done has been mediocre. I really do think of this often, as it seems that I have an internal conflict in every teaching situation I find myself in, always asking myself what is the goal, the purpose of teaching? What are these students hoping to get from me, from this experience? I regularly notice a difference in expectations of what should happen versus what ends up happening. There is a way that I prioritize the unfolding of interests,

discoveries or outcomes over the expectation of what should be accomplished in the class. I find there is a mixed response, and yet, other times, I find that students leave accomplishing something they'd not known they were hoping to gain. The outcome regularly looks different than what any would have expected, and yet, it is still not always satisfactory. My hope would be that in any teaching position I find myself in, a student would find their own voice and gain a passion for living. That they would venture past the utilitarian and into a realm of possibilities.

I can only hope that what I have gained in taking up this process of searching for that which is unknown to me—reading, writing, making, learning, it is the focused attention on process that has further propelled me to dig deeper, to read, write, make, look, and more—to take pictures, draw regularly, write and read continually, and notice always. That I may encourage any student of mine to take notice of what interests them and to follow that path vigorously. To not consider anything unworthy of their attention, to always search for the resonances, to stitch and bring things together. Mary Oliver (2019) writes of the teachers that she has had along the way, “Thus the great ones (my great ones, who may not be the same as your great ones) have taught me— to observe with passion, to think with patience, to live always caringly” (Oliver, 2019, p. 107). Oliver speaks of how she carries the voices, words, and wisdoms of her teachers with her in every thought. She feels undoubtedly in debt to them, her great ones. They are her continual company in mind and thought. She says, “They were dreamers, and imaginers, and declarers; they lived looking and looking and looking, seeing the apparent and beyond the apparent, wondering, allowing for uncertainty, also grace, easygoing here, ferociously unmovable there; they were thoughtful” (Oliver, 2019, p. 108). I would hope to be thought of as a teacher who was thoughtful and guided students into leading lives of thoughtfulness. Of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver (2019) describes him as the following:

This is the crux of Emerson, who does not advance straight ahead but wanders to all sides of an issue; who delivers suggestions with a kindly gesture—who opens doors and tells us to look at things for ourselves. The one thing he is adamant about is that we *should* look—we *must* look—for that is the liquor of life, that brooding upon issues, that attention to thought even as we weed the garden or milk the cow. (Oliver, 2019, p. 86)

The imagination comes alive in careful observation to the ordinary, the mundane, and the overlooked. Paintings from objects out in the world are the materializing moments when thought takes flight. A teacher and students must know that their interests are valid, and their creative impulse is worth following. Oliver says, “*And you must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life*” (Oliver, 2019, p. 34). Perhaps, this is the goal of teaching in the end, to enable students to recognize the value of their voice, and to create the space for them to share it. As students are encouraged to share their insights and perspectives, they gain a hold of their own voice, communicating to themselves and others. In doing so, students can know and come to believe that they must keep making, keep searching, keep learning. In her creative work, Oliver states that, “Reading, then writing, then desiring to write well, shaped in me that most joyful of circumstance—a passion for work” (Oliver, 2019, p. 33). Students and teachers alike develop a passion to continue working when their interests are validated and encouraged along by the supportive environment of a classroom. I know for me that is what has been most meaningful about this project, a concentrated effort to discover and follow the things that stand out to me in the world—to develop a passion for the work of noticing and making. In her book *Bird by Bird* Anne Lamott (1994) says, “What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite

you” (Lamott, 1994, p. 39). Here she speaks of books, yet her words suggest that what we notice in the world affects us, leaves a mark, changes and transforms us.

Poems, artworks, any made things seem to require a focused attention on that which unfolds in living. Therefore, how could a mother overlook this part of self in lieu of making things? Or if she does, perhaps she does so because of a hidden message that suggests she must. Lamott shares of her experiences sitting down to write; the toil, the angst, the distractions that all vie for her attention. Then she focuses her gaze on a small, one-inch square frame standing there on her desk, reminding her that this is all she must focus on in that moment, just one small short assignment (Lamott, 1994, p. 41). I, too, have found this to be a useful, necessary practice throughout writing; that projects must be taken up piece by piece, and the stitching together of small bits brings into focus what one’s creative endeavour is really about.

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As I ruminate on what has transpired throughout this project, I am all the more convinced of the potential of a/r/tography. I set out without a predetermined outcome, yet by engaging acts of making and creating, writing and reading, I have come to a new place in awareness of the things I may have otherwise never known. As an emergent practice in merging various creative forms, engaging in a/r/tography caused me to take up new forms of making, such as poetry, and to reexamine previous forms of making, such as painting. By engaging in these practices, whilst writing and reading, the resonances showed themselves and I did my best to articulate them. I am hopeful that with further thinking and making, I will continue to gain awareness of what is at play in the blending of roles of artist, teacher, and researcher through a/r/tography. The research moves forward with time and engagement with ideas and thoughts that emerge from the

a/r/tography (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p.3). This is the case for me. I see renderings that have emerged from this project, such as the role of poetry in forming new knowledge of what it means to be a mother artist, the societal role of art, and the power of hope in the imagination as awarenesses that I will carry with me into further making and thinking. Through a/r/tography, I have been able to blend the roles I live in as artist, researcher, and teacher to see their meanings together. Triggs & Irwin (2019) suggest,

A/r/tography considers what one creative image-making practice might learn from another, as well as how the spaces between already determined practices generate previously unthought images that might foster more relational ways of thinking and knowing. (Triggs & Irwin, 2019, p.1)

A/r/tography enables stitching together creative acts of making to see how they interrelate. Through my own art practice, writing, and learning poetry, I've come to understand the importance of making an image for self and for others to be able to enter into. Triggs & Irwin (2019) write, "Making images in art practice is a way of sensitizing ourselves to noticing the making of images that moves us through the world" (Triggs & Irwin, 2019, p. 5). I've come to recognize the way that making images, and being made by images, uniquely moves me through my living in the world. Further, "Irwin describes image-making as attending to a living responsibility that cares and nurtures the urge to create" (Triggs & Irwin, 2019, p. 6).

A/r/tography nurtures the impulse for image-making by helping artists, researchers, and teachers understand the potential for further learning in acts of making. Through a/r/tography I've been able to use acts of making in painting, writing, and poetry for inquiry into understanding the creative process. This study in a/r/tography has allowed me to develop my own living curriculum. With time, I hope to revisit and rewrite the research as I grow.

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In the chapter “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World”, Kathleen Stewart (2008) speaks of the nature of ontologies that are caught up in the middle of things (Stewart, 2008, p. 77). In Stewart’s chapter, she seems interested in the something that happens when things come together. This something is filled with potentiality and newness, emergence and belief in life being filled with things worth investigating. These moments of poesis are thrilling, as something happens that was not there before. Paintings can act in this way, bringing together parts to amount to something generative, exciting, complexing and full of potential.

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I hope to consider further the nature of this work as a postpartum journey. I started writing just before my son was born and have continued now up to his first birthday and beyond. I can imagine how postpartum may have been different for me, had I not taken up the practice of writing daily, hourly, in the gaps and cracks of caring for my son. I will never know what these months would have been like without the writing, and yet I recognize the growth and strength that have come through in writing. I’m further down the road of becoming who I want to be, and I have my son largely to thank for that, and this writing project as well—a concentrated focused, attempt to come to a better understanding of processes of making as a mother, artist, researcher, writer, teacher and lifelong learner. Through her work, the artist Mary Kelly explores the relationship of mother and child as it relates to sexual difference (McCloskey & Kelly, 2012, p. 1). Her work *Post-Partum Document (1973-1979)* layers a complex scholarly and artistic inquiry into the relationship of mother and child, women’s movement, and mother-as-artist, while a collecting objects from her lived experience (McCloskey & Kelly, 2012, p. 1). She pulls from



personal references of living encounters into the work as a subjective investment in her own identity (McCloskey & Kelly, 2012, p. 9). Her work represents a multiplicity and multilayering that speaks to the ambivalences of motherhood, particularly the psychological aspect of the mother and child relationship (McCloskey & Kelly, 2012, p. 5). Her work helps me see my own subjectification happening through this thesis project. In *Upstream*, Oliver (2019) writes, “One learns by thinking about writing, and by talking about writing—but primarily through writing” (Oliver, 2019, p. 17). Here, she talks of writing, but I think what she is suggesting is that makers of any kind must continue to do and act in order to grow and learn. Anne Lamott (1994) focused on the square inch frame on her desk, reminding her to focus on the task before her, an effort to handle unhelpful distractions. The way colour acts in the making of a painting could be thought of in the same way that Ingold (2013) thinks of writing a book, with a mind of its own, charting its own path, beckoning its writer to follow. I have found this to be true in this project as well, as I have followed a meandering and thrilling path. Perhaps that is the best way to think of processes of making, learning, teaching and mothering, that there is a path to follow, to stick to and see through in a never-ending process of becoming. As Oliver (2019) says, “Attention is the beginning of devotion” (Oliver, 2019, p. 16). Paying attention leads to a greater commitment to listening and learning. Attention and devotion lead to living with hope and the desire to find beauty in the unexpected. Living with hope provides the will to imagine a new reality of freedom, love, and justice. Attention and devotion build hope in the ability to be changed personally, having the ability to assess with critical consciousness and contribute to the redemption of the world.

In the end, I did have a solo exhibition of the body of paintings that were made during the time I spent writing this thesis. The paintings enabled thought, brought new ideas to write about,

and furthered my learning inquiry; therefore, I thought it would be appropriate to include a few pictures of the paintings together in a room and out in the world. I titled the show *Still Hills*, inspired from a poem by T.S. Eliot called *Virginia*. In the poem, T.S. Eliot looks at the river before him and reflects on the way time continues forward and no effort by him can stop this. So making a poem and being present to his surroundings is the only thing he can do in an effort to slow time and notice what there is to be seen. The poem becomes an effort of slowness. In a similar way, I thought of the paintings as my own efforts to remain present in a time sensitive world.

I would like to conclude with this short poem by Mary Oliver I found along the way. It stood out to me, resonated with me and propelled me forward. I will carry it with me.

*The World I Live In*  
By Mary Oliver

I have refused to live  
locked in the orderly house of  
reasons and proofs.  
The world I live in and believe in  
is wider than that. And anyway,  
what's wrong with *Maybe*?

You wouldn't believe what once or  
twice I have seen. I'll just  
tell you this:  
only if there are angels in your head will you  
ever, possibly, see one. (Oliver, 2017, p. 5)



Figure 21. *Still Hills* Installation view. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography. (own photo)



Figure 22. *Still Hills* Installation View. Photo Credit: Rachel Topham Photography (own photo)



Figure 23. *Still Hills* Installation View. Photo Credit: Rachel Topham Photography (Own Photo)



Figure 24. *Still Hills* Installation View. Photo Credit: Rachel Topham Photography (own photo)

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