Arts-based Research for Ideation and Meaning-making

Michael Walberg

The Art of Education University

Dr. Andrea McDonough

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Author Note

Michael Walberg https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6903-1341

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Abstract

Artistic education extends beyond technical skill with the ability to conduct research through art, anchoring the justification for arts education in its adaptability and societal relevance. Artist-teachers, pivotal in guiding students, face the challenge of balancing reflective artistry with professional development (Thornton, 2005). The Artist-teacher's experience provides a unique perspective and an opportunity to explore and discover artistic processes and meaning-making in the classroom. Arts-based research offers a pathway for artist-teachers to navigate this balance, fostering conceptual thinking akin to artistic processes and nurturing empathy through engagement with aesthetics (Leavy, 2018; McIntyre et al., 2004). By employing objects and images as tools for inquiry, arts-based research facilitates a non-linear exploration of the creative process, informing pedagogy and inspiring students to create art with more profound significance (Franklin, 2014). As the author delves into arts-based research, the convergence of personal artistic exploration and pedagogical insights underscores the transformative potential of integrating this process methodology into art education. This research illuminates the synergies between artistic practice, pedagogy, and arts-based research, positioning the artist-teacher as a catalyst for demonstrating the artistic process to create meaningful art in the classroom.

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Arts-based Research for Ideation and Meaning-making

My story

Becoming an artist and educator began with a 20-year painting, advertising, and design career. I was always interested in everything creative. Since childhood, building, making, and organizing have always seemed natural. I wanted to be the best at whatever I was tasked to do. If I did something, I tried to understand it, streamline it, and modify it into something new, perfect, and memorable.

Like most people, I did not have a perfect childhood. I was disconnected from my 15-year-old birth mother when I was two years old. I was placed with guardians related to my birth mother. Although I would stay with that family growing up, adoption papers were never signed, and I retained a different name from my step-siblings. The separation from my mother caused a diagnosis of emotional retardation and hyperactivity. I have always moved fast. I did talk a lot growing up, but I was never aggressive. I was an early test subject for Ritalin to deal with my independent nature. I do not remember it having much effect, although guardians, doctors, and teachers would argue otherwise. Despite the drugs, I failed the second grade and had to revisit the same grade and watch my previous classmates continue without me. I cannot remember anyone teaching me anything, but I remember being judged. I never got along with my older brother. He was 40 pounds heavier than me, so I did my best to keep my distance. We never attended the same schools. My saving grace was the love my younger sister had for me. Sadly, I did not appreciate her then as much then as I do now.

My new family lived in a rural area, far from the classmates I would see at school. Our closest neighbors were three miles away. I did not see the friends I had made at school or over the summer. Every year was like starting over.

I have always taken art and craft classes, but not everyone understood my work. My earliest experience was drawing pictures of myself pulling a fire alarm. I did not know what it was, but teachers were amazed at the drawings I did recording the incident. From then on, I drew and scribbled all the time. On the bus, at home, or in the back of class. Some classmates would give me a nickel or a dime to draw their favorite cartoon characters. When I was not drawing, I was reading comic books. This is where I learned my morality and sense of justice: good always defeats evil, and if you work hard, someone will notice.

I started working at 15 years old. My first job was washing dishes at a nearby golf course. I worked every Sunday and cleaned up after parties during the week. This led to a position at a fast food restaurant, where I became assistant manager. After two years, my experience and reputation as a manager earned me an offer as a night cashier at a neighboring gas station, which would allow me to attend community college. The replacement manager from my previous job sought to make his reputation by accusing me of stealing carrot cakes after I had given two weeks' notice. I do not know where this accusation or acrimony came from. I had nothing to do with the theft, but the accusation rescinded my place at the gas station. Had I known better, I would have hired a lawyer and sued for defamation, but I was only 19 years old and did not know better. A disagreement about a late night with my foster father ended in an ultimatum. If I did not like his rules, I could leave. Being stubborn, I threw my comic books in my car and left. I have yet to return, though I do visit occasionally. I needed a new plan if I was ever going to go to college.

The Army offered me an alternative: a two-year enlistment and an educational college savings plan. The Army brought me to Washington DC, and my high test scores earned me a posting to the "The Old Guard," the official ceremonial escort to the President of the United

States. After completing my tour, I left active duty. I finished my service commitment in the National Guard by completing Officers Candidate School (OCS) and earning a commission as a second lieutenant in the Military Police MP Corps. Concurrent with my Military academy completion, I entered the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC.

I remember what the Dean said on the first day of art school. "Ten years from now, 95% of you will never hold a pencil again. "Not me," I thought to myself. I was in this for the long haul. If I stayed true to my goals, I was sure to succeed. My pursuit of a degree in the arts would take precedence over everything else.

All art schools are full of outsiders. The roles students fall into are almost clichés. However, I was beyond that. A strait-laced soldier who had recently finished his tour as an infantry soldier that still drilled on weekends in the National Guard and went through the Officer Candidate school to be commissioned a second lieutenant. I wasn’t outside; I was on another planet.

I lasted a year longer than David Lynch, one of Corcoran's most famous students, with a year and a half longer than Jared Leto. I did very well in the first year but not so much in the second year. Abstract expressionism was the focus of the fine arts program. New York or Los Angeles should have been my destination because I was more interested in illustration, painting, and storytelling. I learned a lot about loosening up and handling paint and materials, but I had to work full-time at night to afford tuition, board, and supplies. Eighteen credits combined with 45 late evening hours a week carrying ice and cleaning toilets took their toll. Despite finishing my assignments, I could not get to class on time. I was not as lucky as Warhol. My inability to balance survival and academics led to my dismissal.

I had to transfer and start over at a local university with a minor in art education. My transfer credits allowed me to study advertising and theater and even walk on to the university football team. I completed my degree with a 3.65 GPA but was not ready for the workplace. I was still working at night, but it wasn't enough to cover the rent. I became homeless and lived in an abandoned storage room attached to a friend's business. I painted and put up shows. People looked, but no one was interested in buying. I was involved in the Mayor's DC Bicentennial art exhibit, and Art-o-matic shows, among others. I had written and illustrated a children's book and exhibited it at Capitol Children's Museum. Even though test readings of my children's book delighted children, publishers were not interested.

The fine art direction I was taking in life was not working. I needed a change of strategy. I spent time working with community access television and eventually started teaching television production. I started learning graphic design using early Macintosh computers, which got me small gigs and my first real job doing production art at a small advertising agency. My skills and knowledge of computers landed me an opportunity at a dying flagship department store marketing agency. While the experience of working with a talented group of experienced artists grew my skills to a professional level, it did not last. The department store was sold, and the marketing department was dissolved.

With more and more people learning digital design, it was time to up my game and learn new skills. In 2001, I began studying three-dimensional (3D) modeling and animation. I learned Autodesk 3DS Max animation by traveling to New York on the weekends. I learned quickly and was offered a job training other artists in 3D. I had a choice: teach in New York or test my illustration skills in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles seemed the better choice for breaking into cartoons. I was hired to do print production for a periodical marketed in four states. I continued to study 3D, switching from 3DS Max to Alias Maya. I tried to sell my skills as a storyboard artist. These opportunities led to teaching animation at educational training centers and, finally, teaching an advanced computer graphics course for three years at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. I was recruited to travel to China to open animation schools. My partners could not reach agreements with Chinese educational institutions, and I had to return to America once my Visa was up. However, the experience left a lasting impression and a desire to return to China.

Back in LA, I signed up for TEFL training. Concurrently, I started working with Los Angeles producers, creating comics, storyboards, and animated music videos while drawing cartoon characters at the beach. I saved enough money to return to China two years later.

Returning to China was like starting my career over. I worked long hours teaching ESL in Beijing training centers. For five years, I worked 14-hour days, spending three to four hours each day traveling to and from work. This experience prepared me to enter the Chinese public education system first as an ELA (English language arts) and AP art history teacher and finally as a high school International Baccalaureate (IB) visual arts teacher, a position I hold today. During this time, I decided to pursue a Master of Art Education degree at AOEU to help inform my teaching pedagogy.

Rationale and Problem Statement

The question that has emerged from contemplating the stated problem is: *How can art teachers use arts-based research to investigate the ideation process and meaning-making?* This question can be more personalized to my own artistic practice by asking a more specific question: *How can modeling a conceptual and ideation process improve my ability in deeper*

thinking to make more meaningful art? This research project was utilized to investigate meaning-making and the ideation process, with the results informing the art practice and art-making process with an ultimate goal of enriching artwork meaning with the possibility of transference to other disciplines while at the same time promoting and growing the artist-teachers art practice.

If the arts are to retain a place within public education, they must answer the questions of what the arts can teach and what students can learn from them (Hetland et al., 2013). Parents want their children to be inspired, not just memorize facts (Bostrum, 2003). An artistic value that can be taught is the ability to use art in research. Defining the concept of *meaningful work*, often invoked in support of funded programs or educational reform, has become as elusive as attempting to define art itself. To enable students to produce work that carries actual substance, they must have a clear starting point and a well-defined purpose. Emotions and personal opinions, while important, should not be the sole academic justifications for the survival and continued relevance of the arts. Instead, the rationale should be rooted in the legacy of the arts, its capacity to adapt to society's evolving needs, and its role in shaping the present and future.

Students must cultivate a functional creative process for them to evolve as artists. The initial challenge of commencing work is creating an idea that captivates them. Students often struggle with concept generation and over-conceptualize their interests. In their haste to seek solutions and finish the project quickly, they obstruct the crucial developmental and gestation phases for realizing substantial bodies of visual work (Croft, 2016). Essentially, they attempt to conclude their projects at the very outset, striving to finish before they have begun (Croft, 2016).

Artist teachers are better equipped to assist students by continuing to practice as reflective artists, yet creating new work regularly can be challenging for them. Artist teachers are also expected to complete professional development to inform their practice. Arts-based research can accomplish these requirements for artist-teachers (Thornton, 2005). Arts-based (ABR) researchers must think conceptually in symbols and metaphors, engaging in different ways of thinking and transforming the essence of what is learned into a coherent expression (Leavy, 2018). This process is akin to thinking like an artist, fostering an engagement with aesthetics, and nurturing the capacity for empathy (McIntyre et al., 2004). Arts-based research employs objects and images as tools for inquiry, allowing for a non-linear, critical progression of the creative process (Franklin, 2014). Utilizing ABR to study and develop artistic processes with personal themes and directions can significantly inform teaching and inspire students to create more meaningful art. After two and a half years of graduate study, the eagerness to return to my art practice and bring that experience back to the classroom is palpable. As I delved deeper into ABR, I grew excited to integrate its profound insights into pedagogy while continuing my practices as an artist, extending the role beyond that of an art educator to an artist-teacher.

Key Terms

Artist Teacher Scheme (ATS)

The concept of a dual learning culture. Teacher-students and students-teachers where instruction is taught with dialogue, and everyone becomes jointly responsible for a process where everyone grows (Thornton, 2011).

The Creative Process

The creative process is often referred to as a sequence of thoughts leading to a novel,

adaptive production (Lubart, 2000). The process includes stages and activities involved in creating visual or expressive art involving ideation (generating ideas), conceptualization, sketching or planning, material selection, creation or execution of the artwork, and reflection or critique.

Art/studio practice

The term *art practice* refers to the process or activity of creating, producing, and engaging in artistic endeavors (Hetland et al., 2013). Art practice involves the application of creative skills, techniques, and concepts to communicate ideas, emotions, and aesthetics to an audience. Research-based arts practice refers to making artworks that relate and explore a specific subject that includes a contemporary message. Art practice is a creative and critical form of human engagement that can be conceptualized as research (Sullivan, 2006).

Arts-based research (ABR)

ABR is a research-based art practice whereas making artworks relates and explores a specific subject often with the inclusion of a contemporary message. Arts-Based Research integrates artistic practices and methods into the research process. It involves using various art forms as a means of inquiry and a way to communicate research findings. Arts-based research explores phenomena, conveys insights, and engages audiences in innovative ways. It is defined as the use of personal expression in various art forms as a primary mode of inquiry (McNiff, 2013).

Creative process

Stages or phases include preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Wallace, 1926), as well as conception, idea development, making the art, and completion (Mace et al., 2002).

Creativity

The process of having original ideas that have value (Robinson, et al., 2016).

Design process/ Design thinking

A systematic approach or series of steps that designers and creators follow to develop, refine, and execute a design project. It involves problem-solving, creative thinking, and decision-making to meet specific goals and objectives. With design thinking, the six phases—framing a question, gathering inspiration, generative ideas, making ideas tangible, testing to learn, and sharing the story—form an iterative approach that is adapted for each specific challenge (IDEO, 2023).

Divergent thinking

A creative process that encourages the exploration of various perspectives and novel approaches. Divergent thinking encompasses associative thinking, which involves subconscious associations between concepts, and flexibility or task switching, allowing the unconscious shift of attention between tasks or categories (Kamp et al., 2015).

Growth Mindset

The growth mindset harnesses the intrinsic drive to learn through curiosity, discovery, experimentation, and socialization—all instinctive drives known as *play* (Elkind, 2007). The growth mindset encourages taking risks, embracing learning opportunities from failures and believes that ability and intelligence can be achieved through effort (Runco, 1994).

Ideation

The creative process of brainstorming, developing, and innovation to perfect ideas (Dam & Slang, 2022).

Idea development

Where initial design ideas can be built upon, edited and synthesized with other ideas to make them more feasible concepts (Leavy, 2018).

Response art

Artwork created by art therapists in response to material that arises from their therapy work with clients or as part of art therapy supervision and training (Fish, 2012).

Studio habits

Studio Habits refer to the regular practices, routines, and behaviors that artists and creators engage in within their studio or workspace. These habits can follow generative energy through interactions that generate and illuminate studio experiences as they unfold. The studio habits consist of developing craft, engaging and persisting, envisioning, expressing, observing, reflecting, stretching and exploring, and understanding art worlds (Hetland, et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Life is a process not unlike artmaking. You cannot start at the end. It is seldom what we think and rarely what we expect. Our resistance and purpose in life are revealed as we live it. To grow, we must go through life's ups and downs to a destination that is often a surprise. Art-based research also lives in the process of questions, discovery, and illumination with the hope of new information and perspectives that will improve our lives and understanding of the world we live in (Eubanks, 2012).

The challenge for students to make meaningful art lies within their ability to understand what meaningful art is and develop a process that builds on their interests and curiosity. The next section, the literature review, will cover research on the meaning of art, creative processes used by artists and designers, and the rationale and methods of arts-based research.

Literature Review

Current educational pedagogies such as Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), Common Core, Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), and International Baccalaureate (IB) Visual Arts, to name a few, espouse the importance of students making *meaningful art*. The term meaningful has become abstract jargon that only blurs definitions, uproots a long and evolving history of meaning, and replaces it with a discourse theory that serves itself (Wolf, 1975) (de Moura Gomes & Sales Buonicontro, 2017). Meaning in art has always come through a process rather than an epiphany or God-given gift espoused in scripture and popular belief (Keller, 2020). Despite these beliefs, art, and creativity can be learned in a framework of participation and interaction (Vygotsky, 1978); creativity can be seen as a state of mind where all parts of intelligence work together (Saebø et al., 2007).

By understanding the purpose of art, students can be inspired by their interests as a starting point and realize their ideas through artistic process and reflection (Lin, 2019). Inspiring students to create meaning in their work without overthinking or losing interest is daunting for educators. With a simplified teachable creative process, students can find a starting point and work on their idea through a process that will reveal meaning through its usage. The connection and knowledge discovered will be revealed through the reflective process. This task is best suited for *artists' teachers* who are not merely educators but working artistic practitioners. These artist-teachers are best suited to teaching and inspiring creative skills with their reflective and artistic methods (Thornton, 2011; Adams, 2003). The arts-based research that springs from this environment leads to a meaning-making process to explore and discover the artist's interest and the inner workings of the creative process, not only as an artistic endeavor but as an academic one (McNiff, 2013).

Historical Context of Meaning, Value, and Mimesis

To consider art's value and meaning, it must be viewed and considered in the context of its long cultural history. No single idea, theory, or feeling can encompass art's meaning, as its current existence and purpose are constantly in flux. Examining historical theories makes it possible to arrive at a nuanced and practical definition, purpose, and meaning for art.

The value of art has been associated with technical skill, the theme, and the meaning supplied by the commissioning patron. The meaning and value of art characteristics can be closely related to function and purpose, falling into categories of ceremonial, persuasive, and narrative forms, with mimesis or imitation of nature as the driving force. In Plato's mind, art's purpose was to illustrate how the object existed in God's mind rather than our own, seeing and showing how God sees things, thus attaining a divine level of beauty (Bell, 2017). Art's historical purpose was to be beautiful, and its meaning was to illuminate beautiful things.

Imitating beautiful things remained a prime motivation for art creation during the humanistic ideals of the early Renaissance through the Enlightenment (Bell, 2017). Even so, the natural world of God's flowers and mountains was still considered superior to anything artificially made by man. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 –1804) claimed that natural objects could be beautiful but not sublime, lofty, grand, or exalted in thought. The sublime was an attribute of the mind, not nature. The final art product might not only look like nature but become a natural thing and become nature (Puppe et al., 2022). While the artist's skill and design were essential for creating beauty, the artwork appeared for its own sake, intended to produce a pleasant response. However, beauty in art was not the sensation or concept communicated through the art - it *was* the art (Puppe et al., 2022). Even though the concepts of imagination and ideas could be combined, reflection on the artwork could not have

any part in the estimation of its beauty or meaning. It became understood that the realm of art consisted of special objects that possessed special status and were, therefore, to be regarded specially (Tavin, 2007).

Art theories constantly changed and evolved from imitative to creative to expressive. Painters were no longer solely interested in creating nature but in expressing the unseen feelings of the artist. The definition and meaning of art expanded from a set of marks coming together to claim our attention to markings on surfaces to represent visible things to concepts that tie a set of visual experiences together (Bell, 2017). Arthur Clive Bell (1881–1964) posited the theory that lines and colors combined in a particular way can stir aesthetic emotions. Bell described lines and colors as *significant form*. In his 1914 book *Art*, Bell claimed the ability of the artwork to provoke an aesthetic emotion was the most crucial aspect of art (Bell, 1913). While the detail of the work may excite our admiration of the artist's skill, true artists were dedicated to evoking aesthetic emotion through the significant form. Objects and artifacts needed to provoke emotion to be called meaningful works of art. Without this sensibility, there can be no aesthetic experience or true and lasting meaning (Bell, 1913). This is the essential quality in the work and distinguishes art from all other classes of objects (Bell, 1913).

Susanne Langer (1895–1985), an American philosopher, further explored the effects of artwork on the viewer's minds. In its abstraction and morphological mirroring of emotion, the form was central to Langer's ideology. For art to have meaning or significance, it must acquire this meaning by mirroring or symbolizing other things (Hagberg, 1995). She asserted that art involves the creation of forms that symbolize human emotions (Langer, 1953) and serves as a means of expression when language falls short (Langer, 1953). When a word or mark is arbitrarily used to represent or suggest something, it can be termed an associative symbol, as

its meaning relies entirely on association (Langer, 1953). Subjective experiences are structured and not confined to mere moments; they are also open to conceptual comprehension, reflection, imagination, and detailed symbolic expression. Artworks are expressive representations, conveying the essence of human emotions (Langer, 1953), giving the viewer access to the unsayable (Hagberg, 1995).

English philosopher Robin George Collingwood, FBA (1889 –1943) believed art and language were alike and served as physical expressions of preexistent mental or imaginary objects. Collingwood concludes that art is imaginative and expressive, and thus identical to language (Hagberg, 1995). Art does not have to be a concrete object but is fundamentally a vehicle for expressing emotions and feelings that evoke an *aesthetic experience* or an *emotional response* (Hagberg, 1995). According to Collingwood, there are two types of art: *proper* art and *vulgar* art (Hagberg, 1995). V*ulgar* art includes four types of art: craft, magic, representation, and amusement (Hagberg, 1995). *Proper* art is the *expression of emotion*. The art instantly becomes an affair of the subjective mind. In other words, art becomes a personal experience rather than a physical manifestation (Hagberg, 1995). Richard Wollheim countered this argument by pointing out that for an artwork to exist solely in the artist's head was to denigrate the importance of the physical artwork (Wollheim, 1968). He and many like him believed that an artist must get their hands dirty for the artwork to become the work of art that it is (Malmcrona, 2021). While Ridley agrees with Wollheim's argument that we should not illicitly confine artworks to the insides of people's heads, he stresses the importance of acknowledging the imaginative contribution of the audience to the experiences that artworks can yield (Malmcrona, 2021). Ridley states that the artwork's meaning depends on the audience's ability or opportunity to engage with physical form (Hagberg, 1995), enabling them

to abstract these components in their imagination and allowing new information to emerge (Malmcrona, 2021).

The ideas of form influencing the mind were shattered In the mid-twentieth century by American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1994), who believed that the idea that art was tied to the use of its materials. In his most famous essay, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Greenberg claimed that high or meaningful art became the purveyor of the increasingly materialistic bourgeoisie or middle class, which he believed to be just the latest term in a succession of social orders (Greenberg, 1939). Bohemia became the avant-garde or modern movement to assert itself against the stifling standards of society, which had become Kitsch, a sort of cheap entertainment or low art. The Avant-Guard art was necessary to keep culture alive until real socialism could be realized (Greenberg, 1939). Greenberg concluded that all real modern artists must be true to their materials. For Greenberg, painting's area of competence lies in three factors: the flatness of the surface, the shape of the support, and the properties of the pigment or color that is put upon that surface. Although Greenberg championed avant-garde art, he saw modern art as an unfolding tradition. By the end of his career, he found himself attacking new forms of avant-garde art, defending the movements he earlier championed. The concept of art continued to shift with each new idea as a sort of iconoclasm of theory. Each new theory advocated and challenged the last, creating new jargon and definitions that further obscured and confused art's value, purpose, and ultimately, its true meaning.

Meaning and intention

Marcel Duchamp challenged all artistic conventions when he abandoned the construction of art altogether and instead declared objects, the readymade - art. The visual puns he created culminated in the exhibition of his fountain - a porcelain urinal signed - R. Mutt.

Now, truly, anything could be considered art (Phillips, 2023; Witham, 2013).

Changes in art understanding did not stop with Duchamp. Art was flooding the market, giving rise to numerous art theories continuing to explain and justify its value and meaning. Institutional theory, Championed by George Dickie, was among the longest-lasting and strongest of these theories. Dickie claimed, a work of art is an artifact of a kind to be presented to an art world public and art institutions such as museums and galleries, and specific agents working within them. These art institutions have the power to dictate what is art and what is not (Schroeder, 2013). This institutional theory claimed that for something to be considered a work of art that it must be worth contemplating (Tilghman, 1999). In contrast, Gardner asserts that the valuable nature of art is aesthetic (Puppe et al., 2022). These two views talk about aesthetic contemplation and aesthetic reward (Dickie, 2000). None of these theories guarantee value or meaning. This provokes the question of whether it is possible to see an artwork without a theory to go with it (de Moura Gomes & Sales Buonicontro, 2017). If anything could be art, we must turn from sense experience to thought and philosophy.

Modern art is becoming almost entirely literary, where the paintings only exist to illustrate the text (Wolf, 1975), and philosophers, theoreticians, and critics only exist to extend their privileges to the point that the philosophical discourse about art becomes art (de Moura Gomes & Sales Buonicontro, 2017). The manifestos created to define the true meaning of art were designed to destroy all other manifestos before them, leaving us with the conclusion that the meaning of art could not be defined.

It is time to change the question from what art is – to what art does (Smith & Reilly, 2007). Accepting that the concept of identifying and defining art is unsatisfactory (Smith & Reilly, 2007). The problem is that procedural descriptions become a description of art's social

operation, in effect, becoming a social description. The philosophy of art has moved so far towards a social description that it now addresses issues and problems with sociology; in short, art becomes sociology. Smith and Reilly contend that theories trying to define art no longer function as an argument and serve no purpose other than to sew conflict and dissension (Smith & Reilly, 2007).

Thus, art cannot be measured or defined out of the context of its history. It can be understood through society's changing and evolving uses throughout time (Clowney, 2011). Understanding that art is constantly changing in purpose and construction, the idea of "meaningful" becomes an abstract buzzword without meaning itself. These terms and discourse confuse students and disassociate them from the art experience (Croft, 2016). With this realization, the question shifts from what art is to what art does and what we want it to do (Smith & Reilly, 2007). The most straightforward answer is that *art connects*. An artist has the ability to create work that encourages a connection between viewers and their visceral response to the work (Lin, 2019). Artists start their artistic process with a personal intention to learn or experiment (Allen, 2014; Croft, 2016), connecting their meaning or intention with an audience. The phenomenon that is used to create this connection is the creative process.

Mindset, Concept, and Creative Process

Cultivating a growth mindset, fostering a sense of play, and emphasizing creative thinking are crucial components of art education in promoting innovation and meaningful art creation as traditional educational paradigms evolve to prioritize 21st-century skills. Inspiring a growth mindset with a sense of play is integral to the artistic process, particularly in teaching innovation and meaningful art creation (Kamp et al., 2015). Attempting to force students into a specific learning mold is ineffective. Creativity may not be a matter of learning but

remembering or unlearning (Skaggs & Twede, 2023). The growth mindset encourages taking risks, embracing learning opportunities from failures and believes that ability and intelligence can be achieved through effort (Cote, 2022).

This growth mindset harnesses the intrinsic drive to learn through curiosity, discovery, experimentation, and socialization—all instinctive drives related to play (Elkind, 2007). These skills need to take precedence over outdated outcomes related to authority, control and conformity (Skaggs & Twede, 2023). Achieving this balance between work and play is crucial to creativity and innovation. A fixed mindset can lead to negative self-judgment which hinders intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy (Mawer, 2014). When a growth mindset is coupled with divergent thinking methods it creates an optimal environment for creative ideation and innovation. Divergent thinking encompasses associative thinking, which involves subconscious associations between concepts, and flexibility or task switching, allowing the unconscious shift of attention between tasks or categories (Kamp et al., 2015). These mindsets and cognitive abilities are foundational for generating big ideas (Lin, 2019). These big ideas rise from artists' questions, interests and curiosity. These attributes combined with a sense of play amalgamate to guide and motivate artistic practice, shape personal connections, and drive the creative process.

Artistic and design processes are similar but have different outcomes. Thinking like a designer leads to solutions, while thinking like an artist leads to discovery (Lin, 2019). Artistic discovery is at the heart of meaning-making and meaningful response art. Response art is artwork that was originally created by art therapists in response to material that arose from their therapy work. It is often private, with clients or as part of art therapy supervision and training (Fish, 2012). It can serve the artistic process as a means of research and inspiration.

The artistic design process is a critical developmental process, as opposed to a linear, truncated, dualistic design working method (Hetland et al., 2013). There are distinctions between problem-solving projects and creative production projects. Problem-solving is pursuing the problem's solution, while creative production differs and evolves from artistic practice (Lin, 2019). A fundamental premise of artistic inquiry is that the end cannot be known at the beginning. It is a circular process that informs production at every step. Successful processes encourage accomplished technique in the service of producing interesting work (Robinson, 2016) though accomplishment in the arts is not always required. The general working process of artists involves some form of idea generation, prototyping, execution, and exhibition. The most effective approach would be an eclectic amalgamation of these methods to synthesize a suitable working method that fits the needs of the ever-changing social studio environment.

Artistic practice involves the questions of what artists do when they create artworks and how artists pursue meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with the resulting artwork often ambiguous to evoke active interpretation (Lin, 2019). Design is used as a tool for better communication, but concepts are employed and developed to promote creativity and innovation. The challenge is to resist the obvious and not seek out familiar landmarks, striving for original and novel solutions. Design answers to a set of questions associated with the what and the why of the design problem or idea to be solved (Eilouti, 2021). However, in the artmaking process, there are no correct answers and the process often develops new questions and problems.

Design can be divided into three main stages: problem definition, conceptual design, and detailed design, which includes concept generation (CG), transformation, and

objectification (Eilouti, 2021). The design process works through generative modes that produce iterations and reflects on their practicality and effectiveness as a form of action research or research by doing (Eilouti, 2021). In contrast, The artistic process is a pathway to exploring and discovering new insights and knowledge (Borgdorff, 2011).

Selecting a big idea is a crucial factor in the artmaking process. Big ideas start with questions and interests and are formed by the artist (Lin, 2019). Artists use big ideas to guide and shape their artistic practice. These big ideas consist of themes and questions that captivate and motivate artists, sometimes for years, and show up in personal connections, knowledge, artmaking problems, and boundaries (Walker, 2001). Artists will often conflate the big ideas with their identities making personal connections that bring projects to life (Walker, 2001).

Idea and concept are two different terms and should not be used interchangeably. An idea must be processed into a concept (Croft, 2016). *Concepts* are abstract mental maps visualized to guide the creative process (Croft, 2016). There are often issues when the speed of the process denies the gestation period necessary to turn an idea into a concept. The inner senses or the problem can drive concept generation (CG). CG can be classified into three phases: property mapping from one object to another, blending concepts, and concept integration into thematic relations (Eilouti, 2021). CG methods can be retrospective, which means using existing resources, or prospective, which entails visualizing future events or performance expectations (Eilouti, 2021). Retrospective methods can involve physical referencing based on context, analogy, themes, metaphors, or symbols. These ideas can be used in problem-solving, definition, and problem communication (Hadian & Arefi, 2016).

The FEMAD source-target mapping process can help transform the concept into the design. FEMAD means finding, extracting, mapping, adapting, and developing. Pressman

simplifies the process of *the three I model*: inspiration, ideation, and implementation (Eilouti, 2021).

The application of *Design Thinking* (DT) is an imaginative process aimed at inspiring innovation, with its roots in problem identification, solution generation, solution implementation, and ideation (Taspinar, 2022). Design is inherently solution-oriented and can serve as a catalyst for innovation (Taspinar, 2022). DT finds applicability not only in the realm of art and design but also in business, facilitating the generation of innovative solutions within constraints (Dunn, 2007). In the corporate landscape, there has been a paradigm shift from traditional work patterns to the adoption of design shop thinking, breaking down problems into individual projects to be solved rather than ongoing enterprise tasks (Dunn, 2007).

Design Thinking is a problem-solving approach and mindset for learning and collaboration (IDEO, 2023). This active process prioritizes empathy with the problem and the formulation of well-defined and researched solutions (Taspinar, 2021). It embodies both art and science, integrating intuition and imagination. It is a process characterized by instinct. This balance between intuition and imagination yields self-discovery and creative expression, with the insights gained being applied to the ultimate goal (Taspinar, 2021).

IDEO, a prominent proponent of design thinking, introduced this approach to the business world, gaining fame through its redesign of a shopping cart (Taspinar, 2021; IDEO, 2023). Tim Brown, IDEO's founder, advocates a design thinking approach encompassing five phases: Empathizing, Defining, Imagining, Prototyping, and Testing (Interaction Design Foundation, 2016). Brown's approach is akin to an artist's journey of discovery, as it revolves around understanding people's needs and motivations, paralleling the artistic process of research, observation, and recording human behavior to inform product development. The

design process, much like art, involves pushing past apparent solutions, combining related and unrelated ideas, creating tangible prototypes, and fostering discourse for refinement (IDEO, 2023). In contrast, Riverdale's sequential approach to design thinking shares similarities with Brown's phases but converges solutions at the center of the process (Taspinar, 2021). This adaptation showcases the versatility of design thinking, which can be adapted to different contexts, much like the adaptability inherent in the artistic process.

Artistic design diverges from commercial design methods by placing greater emphasis on the quest for understanding rather than solely focusing on finding solutions. Adopting a thematic approach can yield not only insightful but also stimulating outcomes, influencing the evolution of research cycles. Following the establishment of the initial argument or overarching concept, data is collected from both the contextual study and the creative process (Lin, 2019). A key challenge lies in organizing the generated data into meaningful information, often achieved through the use of provisional labels to segment information. It's through this meticulous process that themes naturally come to the forefront (Lin, 2019).

Artistic research often involves some interpretation where the artist-researcher must reflect on the context and artifacts created during the process (Lin, 2019). Artist researchers are the researcher and the subject (Lin, 2019). In order to reflect on an activity, the activity must cease allowing an evaluation of progress and what new possible awareness has been learned (Croft, 2016). The process is a reflective conversation with the materials and the situation (Walker, 2001). This ongoing dialogue can make for an elusive process.

A reflective practice of documentation records awareness of conceptual and reciprocal insights and information is crucial to the art practice (Walker, 2001). The critique is one example of this process. Visual journaling could be another. The reflective process is a learning

and knowing process in the action of artmaking. Exploring this artistic knowledge adds depth to understanding, decision-making, and the refinement of abstract reasoning (Haroutounian, 2019). Artists manipulate ideas by realizing them internally, working through them to create a unique personal interpretation (Haroutounian, 2019). It is a cycle of deconstruction, reconstruction, and synthesis. By thinking about what you have done during the doing, one can influence the further action of doing (Walker, 2001).

There is always a danger of final solutions being forestalled due to constant reevaluation (Walker, 2001). However, this cycle of problem reformation will birth new ideas and knowledge. Using these process tools leads to solutions we will refer to as meaning-making in art. This understanding and self-reflection is not unlike IDEO's process of studying human behavior and combining ideas (IDEO, 2023). In both examples, the artist is reflecting in a circular process to glean new information and ideas, not unlike research in *response art*, where the image is used to carry the felt sense, sharing it with others. This sense can help communicate complex ideas and support supervisor insight, capturing an experience for further reflection (Fish, 2023). This nonlinear design and artistic process is central to the principles of the Studio habits of mind circular approach to the artistic process.

The studio habits of mind (SHoM) offers an innovative circular process focused on cultivating a studio culture that centers on critical thinking through studio assignments and the learning derived from artistic creations, emphasizing the import paradigm and fostering students' independence and engagement. The SHoM introduces a unique circular process designed to place paramount importance on critical thinking that revolves around artworks (Hetland et al., 2013). SHoM is deeply rooted in the concept of the import paradigm, which revolves around the serious use of knowledge in the pursuit of complex and significant

undertakings. It equips students with the skills of alertness and the inclination to utilize their acquired knowledge, skills that have the potential to transcend disciplinary boundaries and benefit various fields (Hetland et al., 2013).

SHoM encourages students to think independently and critically about issues that genuinely interest them at present. This pedagogical approach comprises a circular process involving eight fundamental steps: developing craft, engaging and persisting, envisioning, expressing, observing, reflecting, stretching and exploring, and understanding art worlds (Hetland et al., 2013). Throughout this process, students are urged to identify patterns, learn from their mistakes, and envision innovative solutions, ultimately fostering a culture of creative and intellectual growth.

Making art that connects revolves around adaptability, cultivating a growth mindset, and nurturing independent thinking. Traditional educational paradigms have shifted toward 21st-century thinking approaches, challenging students to think independently, take risks, and learn through experimentation and discovery. Using Design Thinking methods, artists can use commercial problem-solving methods, incorporating thematic approaches, empathy, and the study of human behavior. These approaches use a growth mindset and divergent thinking to foster innovation and create meaningful connections and solutions.

Artists teachers, and arts-based research

Response art differs from the design thinking process in the fact that art therapists create images as a way to discuss and reflect on their clinical work and practice (Fish, 2012, 2019). This strategy is a valuable resource for conveying understanding and empathy. Art-based research in the classroom can inspire change and productivity in the service of meaning-making art. A teaching studio supervised by the *Artist Teacher Scheme* (ATS) gets

everyone involved to become jointly responsible for a process of growth (Fried & Zehavi, 2021; Thornton, 2011). The benefits of teachers involved in art practice are self-evident. Artist-teachers who continue to practice their art show an improved quality of students' learning (Thornton, 2011). An evaluation of ATS revealed that two-thirds of participants identified gains in subject knowledge (Hall, 2010). Freed from teaching spaces, teachers can follow their creative practice, eventually transferring the benefits back to the classroom (Hall, 2010). Everyone involved becomes an experimenter, a learner who wants to find out, test, discover, and solve in a studio with teachers learning alongside pupils (Cote, 2022; Thornton, 2011).

Art-based research (ABR) conducted by the artist-teacher bridges the artistic and academic gap. It legitimizes the arts as not only a creative discipline but an academic one that researches, explores, and creates new information and knowledge, tapping into the power of the arts to create new ways to see (Leavy, 2018). These new ways of seeing can inform the artistic process and illuminate artistic intention.

ABR can be a powerful tool to challenge existing stereotypes and dominant ideologies. It can give platforms to marginalized voices and illuminates fresh perspectives (Leavy, 2018). Most artmaking begins with the lives and interests of the artists. Artists are inspired by personally felt problems, which can be broad but also personally relevant. Often, a personal issue becomes a theme (Eubanks, 2012). The Artist researches and mines data about these subject matters and focuses inward (Eubanks, 2012). Artists often make complex associations based on personally felt issues, creating metaphors and new meanings (Eubanks, 2012). The research is extended into artmaking. Ultimately, artists must decide whether their work is legitimate (Thornton, 2011). Artistic research requires an interpretation of the stages of the

creative process (Eubanks, 2012). There is a historical precedent for artists researching their projects. Theodore Gericault did meticulous research for *The Raft of Medusa,* consisting of reading accounts of survivors, technical research at the morgue, and preparatory drawings of corpses. George Seurat studied light and physics to develop formulas for optical painting (Eubanks, 2012). Hans Haacht's research did social research to support his photography of slums in Manhattan (Eubanks, 2012).

Art is knowledge construction and evidence of research (Fried, 2023; Lin, 2019). Artists could always perceive and present life with integrity (McNiff, 2013) and bring individual concerns to broader social and cultural issues (Lin, 2019). Arts-based research (ABR) uses art to respond to questions and inform social research (McNiff, 2018; Fish, 2018). Knowledge is an active ingredient in the artmaking process. The process is continually adjusted to the consequences learned by the artist. The results can form new problems or new potentials to be considered (Walker, 2001). These big ideas come from general and artistic knowledge (Walker, 2001). In the search for new understandings, artists ignore the obvious and cliche, opting to explore new ideas while investigating and discovering the world (Walker, 2001). This synthesis creates new information, understandings, and complexities about our world (Walker, 2001).

Art-based research (ABR) is based on aesthetic knowledge (Nielson, 2004). Its creation was inspired by the work done by Margeret Naumburg, one of the first art therapists, in 1961 (Vick, 2012). ABR exists between the arts and the sciences in a unique way that it can create new ways to see, think, and communicate (Leavy, 2018). Art can hold our attention, move us, and change our perceptions (Leavy, 2018). It can offer new insights and learning by tapping into connections inaccessible to other research methods and is especially suited for theorizing

and exploring connections in complex human relationships (Leavy, 2018). The psychological constructs of artistic expression can be used as raw material in scientific analysis (McNiff, 2013).

ABR uses response art (RA) in all art modalities to further understand and give form to intersubjective (existing or shared by more than one conscious mind) dialogue (Fried & Zehavi, 2021). Our experience of the world around us is always subjective, singularly perceived through our senses. Only through our imagination can we discern possibilities and options (Allen, 2014). Researchers can express their understanding of the participants 'experiences without the interference of preconceived notions or judgments (Fried et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2009). It is a lived experience defined as the first-hand and direct knowledge we gain from personal involvement in events and interactions. However, at the same time, as Jean-Paul Sartre (Webber, 2008) observed, we are captured by the gaze of others and are objects to their lived experiences. (Fried & Zehavi, 2021). Using ABR, we can research and write about the intersubjective dialogue between the self and others. Images are used as a tool for connection, investigation, and communication (Leavy et al., 2018). The dialogue between the researcher and the research participants is incorporated into the researcher's art, which is created in response to the participants or subjects in the study (Leavy et al., 2018). Drawing and painting are standard tools to illuminate connections and relationships in new ways (Fish, 2018). The results can often predict or show the inner life, which may not be apparent during the construction. The image can be a signpost pointing in a direction or perspective, possibly leading to a genuine path (Allen, 2014). Images must be witnessed, affirming the ever-evolving story (Allen, 2014).

Art-based research (ABR) aims to bring out and make known the intersubjective experience through art-based dialogue between researcher and research participants (Fried & Zehavi, 2021). Implementing ABR requires the researcher to stay faithful and responsive to the process that unfolds as it creates its own way of knowing (Fried & Zehavi, 2021). The use of ABR requires the researcher to actively engage with the arts and produce knowledge through creative encounters (Fried & Zehavi, 2021).

Conclusion

Artist teachers can continue their practice as producing artists while inspiring others on their creative path as artist-teachers. Artistic processes and research can be linked or transferred to 21st-century skills and academic pursuits and still make meaningful or *intentional* art. Art starts with self-belief (Thornton, 2011). Meaningful art is linked with the artist's intention and realized through the artistic process. The task of defining art becomes irrelevant because art can be anything. Thus *meaningful art* also becomes a term which is irrelevant out of the context of historical precedence and theory. What art does is the most important concern when it comes to meaning. It is the artist's ability to reach an audience past the novelty of being new, flashy, shocking, or seductive in order to form meaningful and lasting connections with a purpose, such as leading people back to nature or social health. A practicing artist and art teacher, the *artist-teacher* is best experienced and prepared to demonstrate and model artistic practice while inspiring students to develop their own individual artistic process (Thornton, 2011). This dialogical process can also be internal. The art classroom becomes a studio fostering individual and collaborative creations of art, becoming a synthesis of teacher and student views and understandings of the world (Thornton, 2011). This synthesis promotes a greater understanding of society and the world (Thornton,

2011). Arts-based research can foster and support this dialogue and understanding. These ideas are used in all the arts. One example is the theater of the oppressed, where creator Boal believed that dialogue is the hallmark of democratic ideals (Boal, 2000). This synergy of dialogue equates to creativity. The art is the evidence (McNiff, 2018).

Methodology

The purpose of this research project is for me to reconnect with my art-making practice and artist identity outside of the school setting to better inform my teaching practice and grow as an artist and a person. Demonstrating and modeling the artistic process as an artist-teacher, I will be better able to teach it (Cote, 2022; Thornton, 2011; Hall, 2010). After three years of graduate study, I am enthusiastic about reimmersing myself in art practice and embracing the role of a reflective arts-based research artist. As a narrative archaeologist, my focus lies in delving into the depths of meaning through the intertwined realms of memory and imagination.

The incorporation of the arts into the human research experience has ancient historical roots. Artistic methods transformed into a mode of research when early humans gained the capacity to reflect on the markings they created. These methods served as a means to theorize and elucidate phenomena, predating scientific or logical research practices (Sullivan, 2005). Arts-based inquiry has always played an important role in broadening perspectives and enhancing how information is gathered and represented (Sullivan, 2005).

The significance of the arts extends into our understanding of history, where interpretations of ancient art and artifacts have informed our understanding of culture, history and the human condition. This process involves a multifaceted approach encompassing measurement, imagination, and conjecture, effectively blending quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Sullivan, 2005). The combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of historical narratives, providing a nuanced understanding that goes beyond mere data and embraces the richness of human creativity and expression.

Moving from ancient interpretations of art and artifacts shaping history (Sullivan, 2005) to contemporary art-based research, a seamless link emerges. The multifaceted approach in

historical understanding paves the way for integrating artistic practices into research (Sullivan, 2005), echoing Elliot Eisner's vision for innovative methodologies (Eisner, 2005). Bridging history to modern academia, the continuum of human creativity persists—a testament to the enduring dialogue between past and present (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011).

The artist-teacher returns the research practice back to the studio classroom as a way to validate the arts as an academic practice. Artist-teachers, through the synergy of teaching and artistic practice, cultivate a learning environment that surpasses conventional boundaries in art education. Artist-teachers blend of the contemporary and ancient—a pursuit of knowledge unbounded by time, propelled by artistic expression and pedagogical innovation (Cote, 2022; Thornton, 2011; Hall, 2010).

The pedagogy centered around the creation of new knowledge through reflective processes finds its optimal expression when entrusted to artist-teachers who transcend the traditional educator role and actively engage as working artistic practitioners. These artist-teachers, as highlighted by Thornton (2012) and Adams (2003), bring a unique blend of reflective and artistic methods into the teaching space, fostering an environment where creative skills are not only imparted but also deeply inspired.

Within this practice a distinctive dual learning culture emerges—one that encapsulates both the perspective of the artist as a teacher and that of the artist as a producer. Thornton (2005) emphasizes that the artist-teacher can seamlessly navigate between the roles of teacher and student, fostering a growth mindset dialogue. Rosenfeld et al. (2014) state, “As both teacher and artist we are required to be cognizant of our own artmaking processes, both how it works and why it is important to us, in order to make this process visible to our students” (p. 210).

Art-based research seamlessly integrates artistic practices into the research process, viewing art-making as a distinct form of inquiry—an open-ended, artist-driven learning process leading to the discovery or construction of new knowledge (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011). Coined by Elliot Eisner in 1993, the term emerged from his belief that universities should foster spaces where doctoral students can explore innovative research methods and concepts. Eisner's vision aimed to create environments supporting methodological pluralism and encouraging the exploration of alternative ways of knowing (Eisner, 2005).

In my upcoming artistic endeavor, I envisage employing the SHoM guiding framework in tandem with elements drawn from the IDEO design process. This combined approach will serve as the driving force behind a sustained investigation and inquiry within the realm of arts-based research. The SHoM framework, proposed by Hetland et al. (2013), provides a comprehensive structure that encompasses essential dispositions for creative thinking, such as observing, reflecting, and engaging persistently in the creative process. Complementing Hetland's process is the integration of elements from the IDEO design process that brings a human-centered and iterative approach to problem-solving and ideation (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). The synthesis of these methodologies aims to cultivate a dynamic and systematic exploration where feedback, reflection, and critique become integral components of the arts-based research process.

This endeavor aligns with the principles of transformative learning and reflective practice (Mezirow, 1990), emphasizing continuous learning and critical examination of one's creative process. The ultimate goal is to deepen my understanding of the reflective, creative process, fostering an enhanced ability to meaningfully connect conceptual ideas with a broader audience.

This experience will not only reconnect me to the arts, but will also inform my teaching practice as an example of one way to execute a reflective creative process. This research is two-fold. The first part is an examination and demonstration of the reflective artistic process using the concept of disconnection as the subject to be demonstrated. The profound impact of early childhood experiences, particularly those involving the separation of children from their birth parents, resonates deeply within the realm of personal narratives and artistic expression. This arts-based research project seeks to delve into the complex and multifaceted themes surrounding disconnection in early childhood environments. Through the lens of multimedia visual arts, including both digital and traditional painting, this inquiry aims to investigate and inform the artistic process, intertwining the perspectives of participants and the reflective insights of the artist-researcher.

Art-based research answers questions by creating a unified body of work in response to questions and research according to Lev (2020) art forms are the primary form of inquiry in Art-based research. The results of this work will serve as an example of the creative process in action.

In this research, I will conduct a mixed-method inquiry using both qualitative and quantitative tools to collect data (Efron and Ravid, 2013). My research will explore the impact of early childhood separation using archeological and imaginative visual artifacts to stimulate discovery, specifically in the exploration of themes stemming from children being separated from their birth parents.

Within the context of adopted, orphaned, and single-parent children, the exploration of disconnection unveils profound themes intricately tied to identity and belonging. For adopted children, the narrative unfolds as a journey toward self-discovery, grappling with questions of

roots and cultural identity. In contrast, orphaned children navigate the challenges of finding a place and a sense of belonging after the profound loss of familial connections. A common thread that weaves through all three groups is the search for family and home, prompting an artistic exploration of diverse definitions and manifestations of familial bonds.

The emotional landscape of disconnection, encompassing feelings of abandonment, isolation, or longing, serves as a poignant canvas for artistic expression, capturing the complex tapestry of emotions these children navigate. The narrative becomes a journey toward connection, portraying the triumphs and challenges faced in establishing meaningful relationships and carving out a place in the world. Themes may also emerge related to attachment, relationships, and the dynamics within single-parent households, shedding light on the resilience and strength inherent in these children. The artworks become a visual exploration of loss and a celebration of the ability to overcome disconnection, revealing the empowering and transformative journey toward self-discovery and a resilient sense of identity. Throughout this artistic inquiry, the interplay between the child's reality and societal perceptions surrounding adoption, orphanhood, or single-parent households adds layers of depth to the narrative, fostering a nuanced understanding of their experiences.

Action Researcher Role

Approaching the culmination of my graduate journey, I am eager to reconnect with my artistic practice as an artist and teacher. The array of challenges and experiences encountered has invigorated me, providing fresh insights into the artistic process and the creation of meaning.

Throughout this research process, I position myself at the core, embracing reflexivity to adapt to survey and critique feedback. This adaptive approach allows for the generation of new perspectives and information, enhancing the depth and significance of the study.

Artist Statement

My goal for this artwork series was to reconnect to my art-making and bring awareness to childhood disconnection from the perspective of the disconnected and promote awareness of the importance of family and heritage. This project serves as an example of how the creative process works.

I am a multimedia narrative archaeologist dedicated to uncovering meaning in the present by delving into the past. Through a fusion of digital and traditional methods, I explored both 2D and 3D, visually manifesting the realms of imagination and archaeological memories from my personal history. A common thread running through my work is the theme of childhood disconnection.

Employing a range of tools, I utilized traditional drawing media and sketchbooks alongside digital software like Toon Boom Storyboard Pro for ideation and visualization. Sculptures were crafted in 3D using clay as well as programs such as Maxon ZBrush and Autodesk Maya, aiding in the conceptualization of designs for final compositions. The resulting artworks seamlessly blend sculpture, drawing, and painting in a fluid style that spans from realism to abstraction. Throughout this creative journey, the process was constantly refined through surveys and feedback critiques.

The overarching concept for this series revolved around art-based research, employing an amalgamated design process to explore the phenomenon of childhood disconnection—its

causes, consequences, and enduring effects. Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative feedback, I unearthed new knowledge and inspiration.

My artistic objectives extended beyond personal reconnection to the craft; they encompass raising awareness about childhood disconnection from the perspective of the disconnected, advocating for the importance of family and heritage. This project serves as an illustrative example of the intricate workings of the creative process.

Project Site

I lived in a Chinese apartment attached to the school grounds that allowed for a unique perspective and focus. I was surrounded by a foreign culture, which made me aware of cultural differences every day. For over ten years, I lived in a foreign society without incident. Having successfully addressed the challenge of job security, I was free to concentrate on seeking a qualitative truth rooted in emotional integrity.

My apartment was attached to the school by a security gate. The school is located next to river canals and man-made lakes not far from the mountains. Throughout the three-week time period, I entered reflections in my journal sketchbook and created art every day. During the entire production phase, I actively sought feedback through survey and critique

As an artist-researcher, I used my home studio as a space for creative exploration, blending digital and traditional painting and creating a graphic narrative framework. The study fell in the middle of the Chinese spring holiday, so art production continued for a 24-hour period during this vacation time. Using wheeled tables, my apartment accommodated painting, sculpture, and digital design. I worked in both Apple and PC format. I used the high school classroom for large-format work when needed. I reflected and prototyped using field

notes/research and journaling to triangulate data in order to discover patterns, similarities, and outlier information.

Participants

I was the leading participant in this research study as a way to reconnect with art-making practices. I initiated a purposive research conversation by recounting personal memories and recreating them as a visual narrative, delving into the emotions of separation, often suppressed through coercion, force, or prescribed substances. The research conversation unfolded with a focus on the artist, with survey participants and peer critique feedback that fostered interaction through an online Google Forms platform and engagement from selected peers from the high school art department. Other participants, including art teachers and AOEU students, were gathered from the Slack forum.

Procedures

Art is an unfolding process that creates new information in a visual form (Lin, 2019). The process of design has remained similar throughout history. When a problem or challenge needs to be solved, a system of trial and error begins a process to a solution. Throughout history, artistic challenges and problems have come from patrons or clients. This is still true today, though artist creators, content creators, and artists as authors are becoming commonplace. The enduring commonality is a process in which the work is created.

Contemporary theories, in a competitive quest for attention and novelty, have become abstract to the point of relying on buzzwords or acronyms in order to draw attention to be original. These new theories have described their steps and methods with new words and vocabulary, effectively becoming local jargon with abstract definitions that further confuse meaning. I have studied several methods, including SHoM and IDEO design thinking, and

intend to combine these methods into a working process that uses plain and understandable language.

The SHoM emphasizes the importance of expressing and understanding the intentions behind artistic choices, cultivating a sense of craftsmanship, and exploring various ways of connecting with and responding to the world (Hetland et al., 2013). The methods encompass a range of skills, including observing, reflecting, envisioning, and engaging in persistent experimentation. Artists develop the ability to stretch and explore their ideas, take risks, and learn from mistakes. Some argue that the framework places too much emphasis on the artistic process and habits, potentially neglecting the significance of the final product. Critics suggest that a more balanced approach should consider both the process and the outcome of artistic endeavors.

IDEO's design thinking process comprises five iterative stages (IDEO, 2023). The first, Empathize, involves understanding user needs through activities like interviews and observations. In the Define stage, the problem is clearly articulated based on gathered insights. IDEO encourages diverse thinking to generate creative solutions, followed by the Prototype stage, where tangible representations are developed for testing. Finally, the test stage involves obtaining user feedback on prototypes and informing refinements. This human-centered, collaborative approach fosters innovation by emphasizing empathy, iteration, and a deep understanding of user perspectives throughout the problem-solving process.

I have combined the best elements of both these theories as well as incorporating over 30 years of experience in commercial design and education to amalgamate a basic working process that is functional and understandable without introducing new terminology or hypothetical concepts to create five new works of art connected to the research question theme.

Rather than a circular process, I propose a linear process divided into a creative and a production phase with a circular reflective component that allows for correction and innovation as the project moves toward the completion or sharing phase. This process respects the time deadlines applied to the project and allows for the estimation of completed projects, which is a vital skill in both the educational and commercial sectors.

The development and creation of five new and unique works of art will test my amalgamated process. This will be demonstrated and evaluated as it evolves through two main realms -Creative and Production, spanning eight intermediary steps that encapsulate a journey of exploration. These steps include reflection and sharing. In the Creative phase, the initial steps include defining interests and curiosity and posing relevant questions. Transitioning into the Production realm, the subsequent stages encompass researching and appropriating information, exploring through ideation and prototyping, reflecting via feedback and critique, synthesizing by incorporating and blending new insights, innovating through visualizing new ideas, and finally, sharing the outcomes through exhibition and testing for connection, be it in small or large formats. This comprehensive approach underscores a dynamic and iterative process, seamlessly integrating creativity and production in a cohesive journey of discovery and communication.

Data Collection Tools

My data collection tools grew out questions about the artistic process and connecting with my audience (Efron & Ravid, 2013). My research instruments would include surveys and artifacts and documents (Efron & Ravid, 2013). My data collection strategy was mixed method research including quantitative surveys and qualitative questionnaires. Respondents encountered a series of Likert-type scale responses, spanning from "never" to "always' ' or

from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Mertler & Charles, 2011). These scales were used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions (Mertler & Charles, 2011). Leveraging the themes identified in survey questions, I created response-based art to translate the freshly acquired knowledge into a visual narrative form. This quantitative survey data was complemented with qualitative critique questionnaires given mid-process (see Appendix A) and a final critique on project completion (see Appendix A).

Data collection proceeded immediately at the start of the project with visual journal entries (see Appendix B). The feedback was used to prototype and enhance concepts and designs, setting the stage for a comprehensive critique. Subsequently, the critique feedback informed the second iteration of the art, which was shared with students on Slack for survey feedback. The received feedback underwent analysis to identify patterns and similarities, guiding the incorporation of valuable insights into the final compositions. The final compositions were part of the final critique and discussion.

Data collection consisted of utilizing sketchbooks, visual journals, and generated art, as seen in Appendix B. Artifacts, artwork, and process journals (Efron & Ravid, 2013) were created within the framework of the research question, responding to qualitative feedback obtained through surveys and critique (see Appendix A). Quantitative data obtained from art surveys via Slack for students were analyzed to identify patterns and similarities, while qualitative critique input will drive concept, innovation, and understanding. I created graphic narratives using digital art mediums such as digital painting, collage, and 3D visualization presented as standalone compositions, storyboards, and graphic novelization. Graphic design software, including Adobe Photoshop, Procreate, and Autodesk Maya, was employed with the aid of Wacom Digital Tablets.

Data Analysis

To substantiate my theories in arts-based research, I initiated a mixed-method approach to data collection (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Focusing on the theme of disconnection, I commenced documenting insights through textual entries and visual representations within a dedicated visual journal. This journal served as a platform for ideation, refinement, and conceptualization of overarching ideas and concepts.

Throughout the journaling process, which encompassed freewriting, sketching, and prototyping, I embarked on outlining the storyline for an animatic. Employing the "straight ahead" technique—a fundamental approach in animation involving the sequential creation of images—I systematically crafted successive frames, akin to the fluidity of freewriting, as depicted in Figure 1. This iterative process facilitated the organic development and visualization of narrative elements, paralleling the creative spontaneity observed in Figure 2.

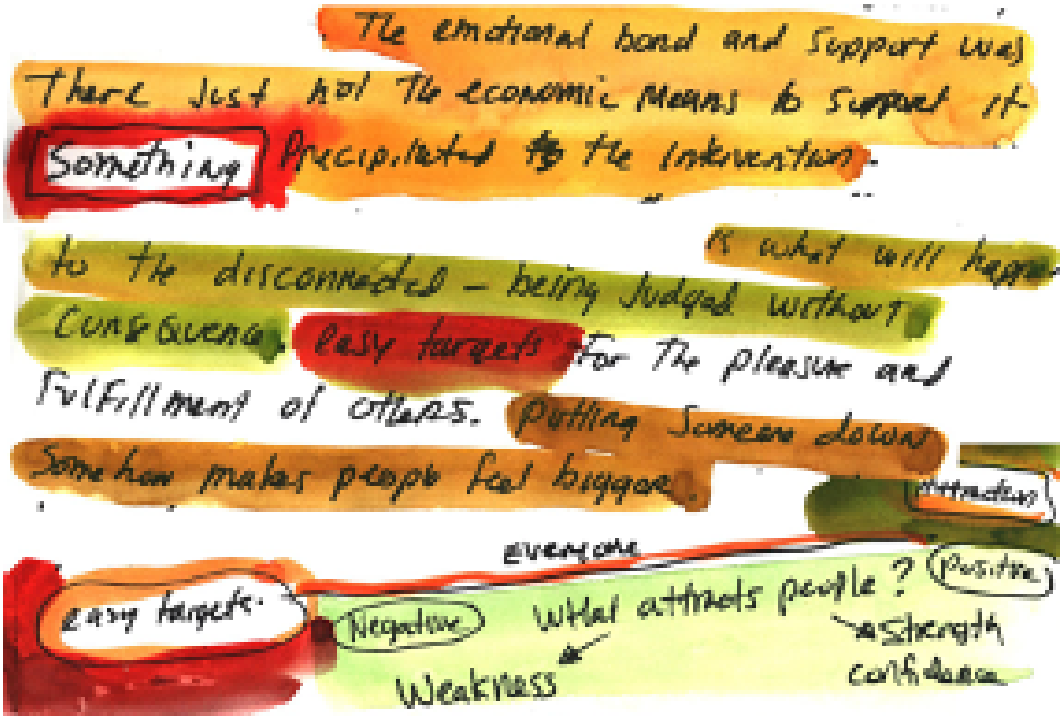
Figure 1

Sample Of Storyboarding



Figure 2

Sample Freewriting Example From A Visual Journal



Interchanging between journaling and storyboarding proved instrumental in shaping the cognitive process. As the project unfolded, I delved into the conceptualization of concept-based sculptures, as illustrated in Figure 5, to complement the animatic. The animatic itself was envisioned to be divided into two distinct vignettes, each featuring related yet separate storylines.

The evolution of these two narratives eventually spurred the emergence of a third storyline. Regrettably, due to constraints imposed by time limitations, this third narrative lies beyond the scope of the current project. However, it remains earmarked for realization at a future juncture.

Figure 3

Process Photos Of Conceptual Sculpture: Man With A Toolbox



Note. The freestanding sculpture was created with a wire armature and air-dry clay.

Over three weeks, I dedicated myself to a rigorous development regimen and reflective practice, meticulously maintaining a daily journal entry, as depicted in Figure 3. Adhering to a consistent and disciplined approach, I recorded my thoughts and reflections at least once daily. Moreover, there were instances where journal entries occurred spontaneously, with some days witnessing multiple entries, occasionally even two or three within the same day.

Figure 4

Visual Journal Entry



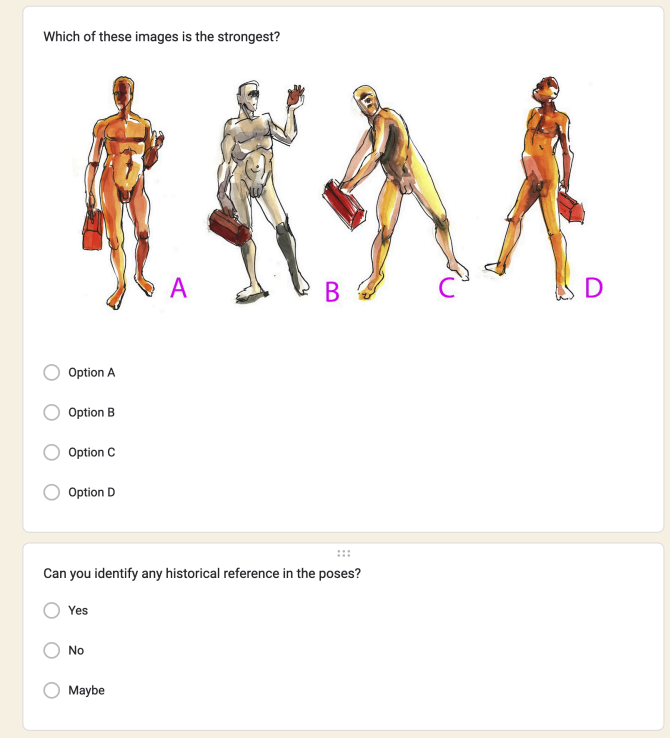
I initiated the first feedback exercise by orchestrating a mid-process critique facilitated through an online survey tool. Leveraging Google Forms, these mid-process feedback surveys played a pivotal role in assessing respondent comprehension, evaluating directional efficacy, and identifying areas necessitating refinement (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Google Forms, being readily accessible and cost-free, provided an inclusive platform for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data while also preserving respondent anonymity.

The survey design incorporated Likert rating scales to quantify responses (Efron & Ravid, 2013) , offering five nuanced choices spanning from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Grounded in visual and textual examples extracted from the visual journal, as

depicted in Figure 5, the survey questions were structured to gauge comprehension, emotional resonance, and thematic alignment, thereby eliciting actionable feedback. I avoided biased questions that would influence respondents (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Figure 5

Google Forms Midpoint Survey Question Example



I employed qualitative methodologies to solicit more personalized feedback, incorporating open-ended questions to prompt respondents to provide brief paragraph responses (Efron and Ravid, 2013). Initially, I intended to utilize NVIVO software, as recommended by Efron and Ravid's influential work on action research (2020). However, due to the accelerated pace of the schedule, I needed more time to familiarize myself with the software for data input. Nevertheless, my exploration of NVIVO's functionalities and procedural methodologies proved enlightening, deepening my understanding of the coding process essential for transforming qualitative inputs into measurable data.

In essence, coding involves assigning labels to data, serving as succinct summaries of each data point's significance. These codes function as analytical tools for organizing and categorizing information (Kriukov, 2021). Subsequently, the coded data is clustered into thematic containers, representing broader concepts or themes. These themes, less specific and more encompassing, encapsulate commonalities across the data set, thereby facilitating the derivation of measurable insights (Kriukov, 2021). To manage the qualitative data generated during the visual journaling process I used a tally process (Efron and Ravid, 2013). I manually sorted and labeled entries into their respective themes.

Fundamental conceptual themes from the visual journaling exercise included connection, growth and acceptance, survival and disruption, social challenges, creativity, and reflection. Employing a word cloud strategy, I visually represented these thematic insights, as illustrated in the word cloud example depicted in Figure 6. This approach enabled a succinct visualization of prevalent themes within the qualitative data set.

Similarly, I adopted a systematic approach to organizing quantitative data gleaned from both the midpoint and final critiques, employing analogous strategies for sorting and analysis.

Figure 6

Word Cloud Visualization Of Visual Journal Qualitative Data



Note: Themes are ranked by frequency and visualized by font size

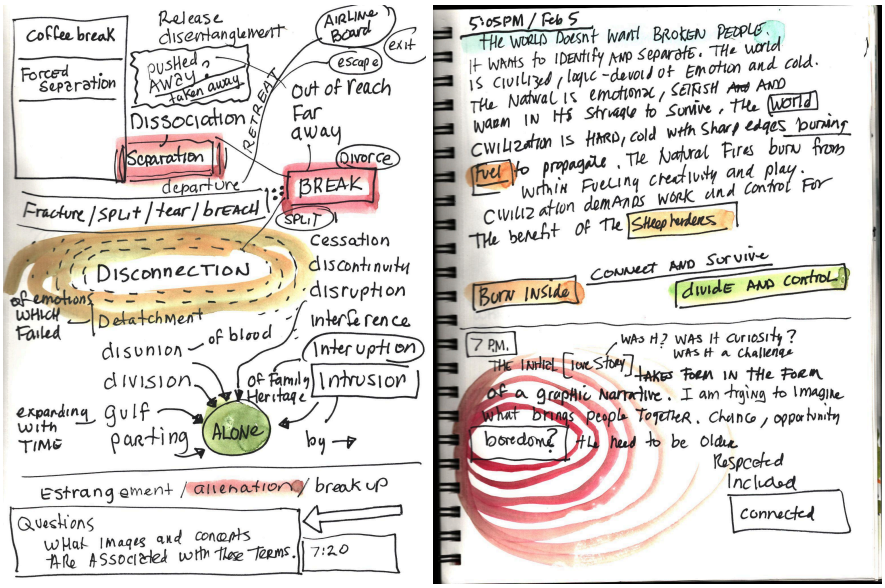
Reliability and Validity

Art-based research (ABR), which emerged as a distinct paradigm from traditional qualitative inquiry, stimulates active scholarly discourse regarding its credibility and suitability. Credibility, or the internal validity of research, remains a focal point of discussion, ensuring coherence between the researcher's interpretation and participant perspectives or factual accuracy (Cohen et al., 2011). *Member-checking* involves presenting research ideas to participants for validation. However, concerns persist regarding the method's robustness, with limited guidance on conducting comprehensive member checking, potentially compromising the validity of ABR outcomes (Doyle, 2007). Time limitations did not allow for member-checking procedures, but respondents' quotes were not changed from their original input. Incorporating participant-generated artifacts alongside themed insights questions confirms ABR's validity (Leavy, 2017). Despite challenges, proponents advocate for ABR's unique capacity to deepen comprehension of lived experiences and facilitate democratic dissemination of research findings (Finley, 2008). Nevertheless, skepticism persists regarding the adherence of ABR to conventional quality criteria in qualitative research (Hammersley, 2007; Leavy, 2008). This ongoing discourse underscores the imperative for continual exploration and refinement of ABR methodologies to bolster their validity and reliability as a research approach. Questions were carefully written to point back to the research questions. I used tally sheets to codify data into themes (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Data was triangulated from the visual journals and two online Google surveys representing three separate sources. Survey participants were largely art teachers and graduate students whose anonymous participation was volunteered through the Slack forum, further adding to the integrity of the information gathered.

Results

Demonstrating and modeling the artistic process has made me better able to teach it (Cote, 2022; Thornton, 2011; Hall, 2010). By starting with my own beliefs (Thorrnton, 2011), I was cognizant of my art-making process; starting with themes that were important to me, I was better able to understand and execute this process (Rosenfeld et al., 2014). The entire process was personally relevant, where my memories and imagination were broken down into themes (Eubanks, 2012). The visual journals utilized in this study have served as a conduit for uncovering and examining narratives concerning the essence of familial bonds and cultural heritage. Within the collected themes, a significant exploration revolves around the ramifications of hedonistic impulses and the concomitant responsibilities and constraints imposed by societal intervention. The entire process became a reflexive conversation with the materials and the situation (Walker, 2001). As exemplified in Figure 7, the initial stages of this inquiry commenced with word association exercises and freewriting sessions, laying the groundwork for deeper exploration.

Figure 7



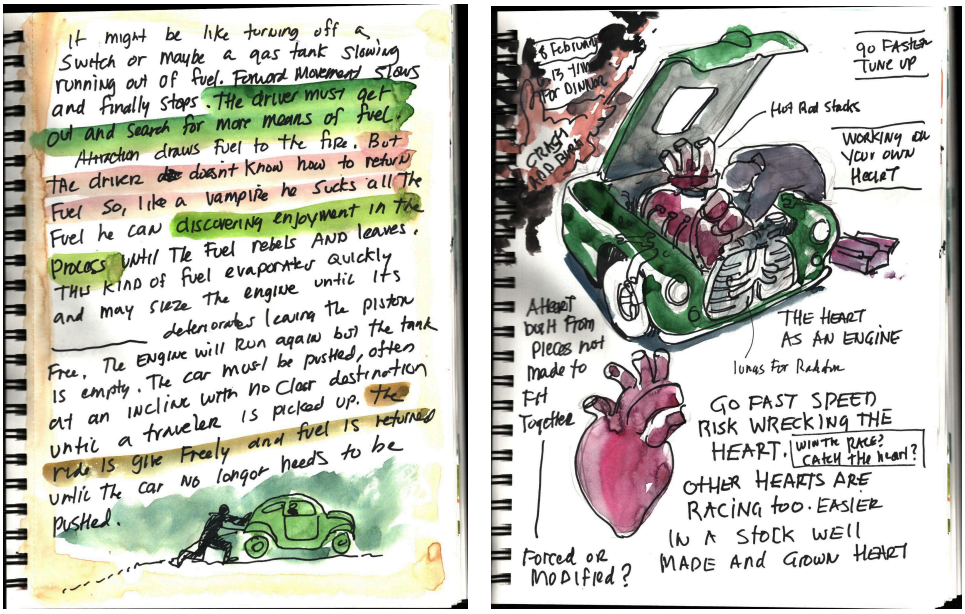
The journal's visual and written entries have unearthed profound contemplations on survival amidst the challenges inherent in contemporary society. My Artistic research involved interpretation and reflection on the context and artifacts created during the process (Lin, 2019). I have become both a researcher and a subject (Lin, 2019).

The disconnection theme led to reflections highlighting the poignant struggle for individual identity and a sense of belonging, which stand as pivotal themes pervading the journal entries. Additional Research findings underscore the gravity of developing themes of childhood trauma and family disconnection, with statistics indicating a sobering reality: approximately three in ten adolescent girls will experience pregnancy before reaching the age of twenty. Nearly 352,032 children (Kelly, 2023) will end up in the foster care systems, according to the annual public report from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). When considering the inclusion of maternal and paternal figures, this figure extends to nearly a million citizens, all grappling with the profound trauma of familial separation.

Continued work in visual journals organically developed the metaphorical concepts of engines and tools, which serve as metaphorical mechanisms to mitigate the emotional toll wrought by experiences of loss and detachment. These concepts are recorded through visual representations and written reflections, exemplified in Figure 8. These ideals connected with survey respondents evoking aesthetic experiences and emotional responses (Hagberg, 1995). The art did not have to be complete or rendered to a high standard. As Smith and Reilly (2007) so eloquently stated, it was not what art is that was important; it was what art *does*. The art was *connecting*. The work connects viewers and elicits a visceral response (Lin, 2019).

Figure 8

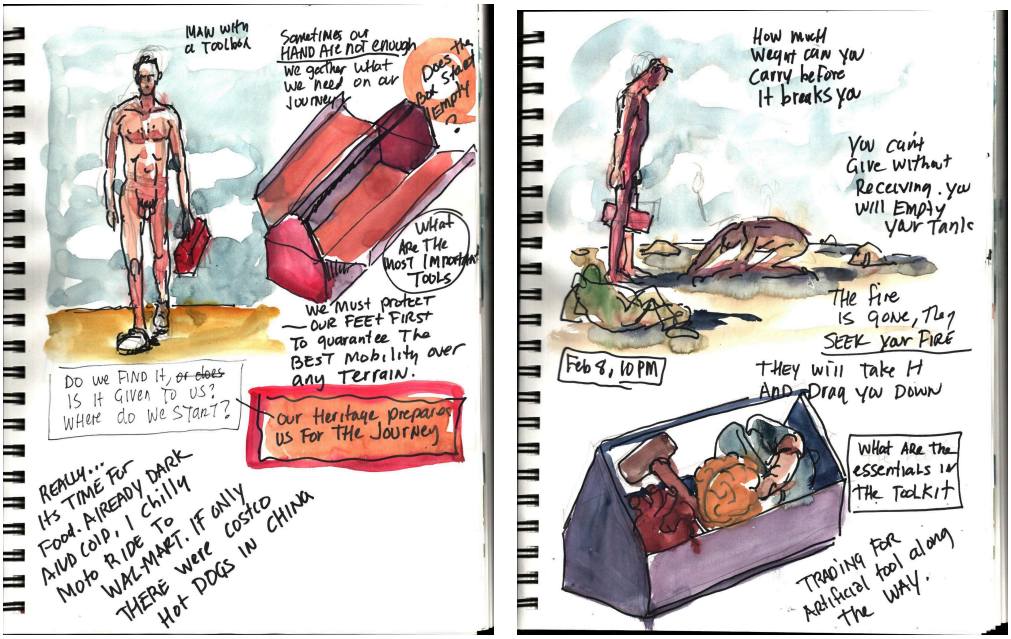
Visual Journal Page



These ideas morphed into the man with a toolbox theme, as seen in figure 9.

Figure 9

Visual Journal Page



Throughout the journaling process, common themes emerged, as seen in figure 10.

Figure 10

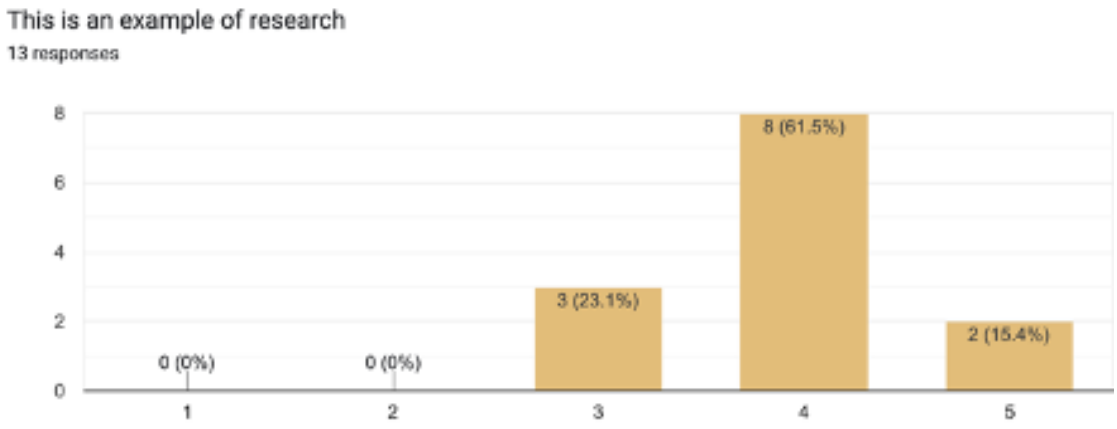
Journal Themes



The visual journals helped me develop the big idea and theme (Lin, 2019) and now it was time to elicit feedback. Using Likert scaled questions I generated measurable information. Given examples from the visual journal respondents, 71.4% being teachers, agreed that research had been done. Qualitative evaluations showed that respondents were connecting with intended themes and research as seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Connection To Themes Results



Showing storyboards also revealed results that respondents understood conceptual intentions. This can be seen in the figure 12 word cloud generated from respondent answers which were labeled as themes. Larger themes represent similar responses by frequency.

Figure 12

Qualitative Survey Responses Measured By Codified Theme Frequency And Font Size



Surveys showed that there was clear interest and understanding in the project as shown in Figures 13 and 14.

Figure 13

Quantitative Survey Results

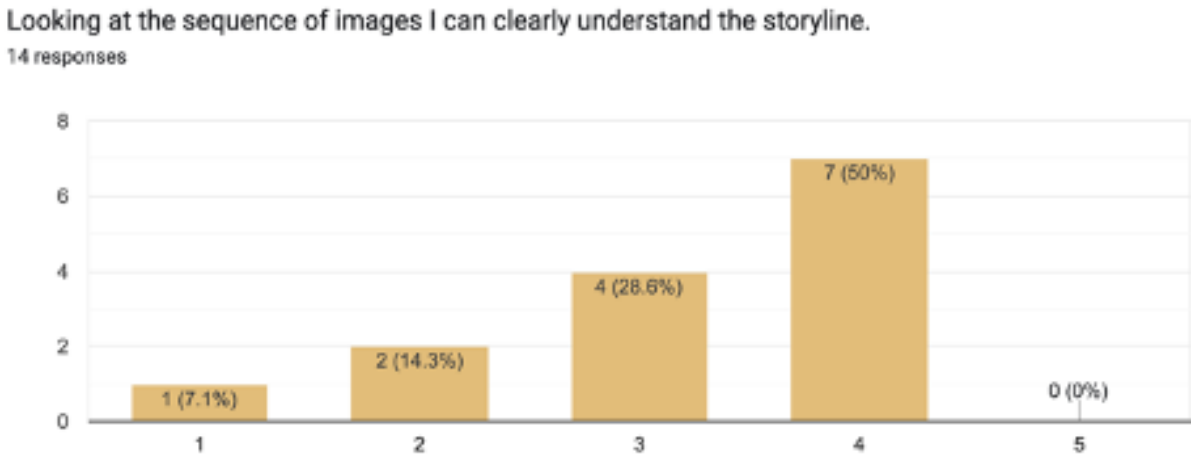
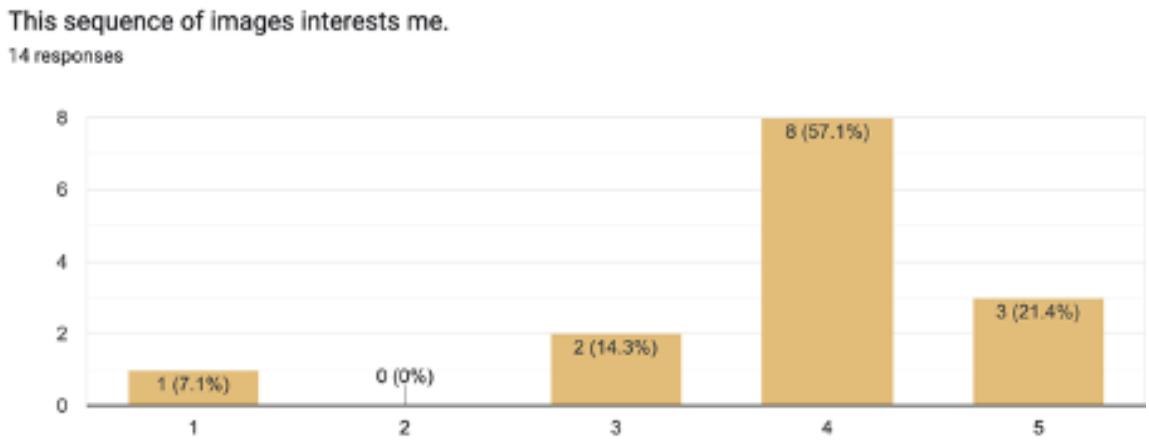


Figure 14

Quantitative Survey Results



Overall qualitative results were gathered and sorted into themes to reveal respondents' reaction to open ended questions as seen in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Qualitative Survey Word Cloud Visualization



Using the data gathered from the mid-point critique I continued working on the two animatics and two sculptures as seen in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Sculpture Process Photo

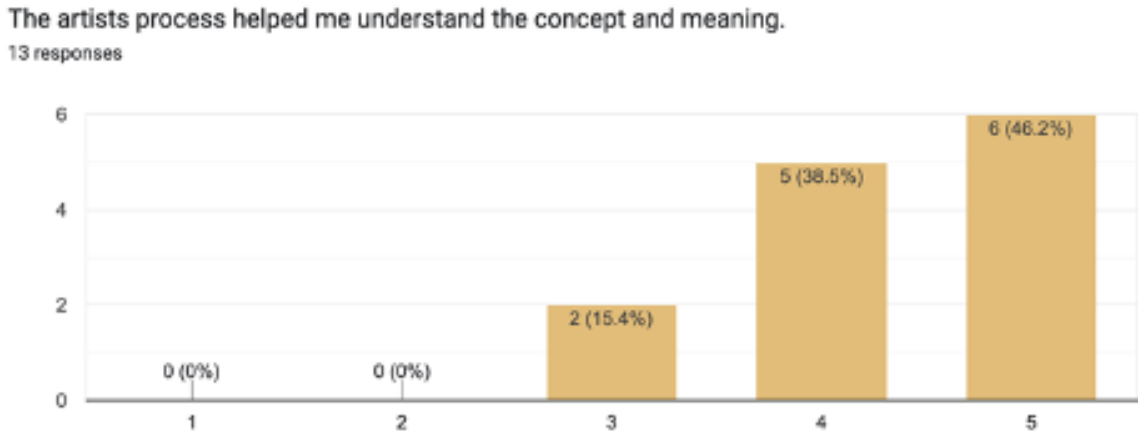


A major takeaway was the respondents' almost universal claim that seeing the process helped them understand and connect with the art as seen in figure 17. Viewers acknowledge that understanding the background and context of the artwork is essential for grasping the artist's intended meaning. This aligns with experiences in museums, where reading exhibit introductions helps interpret the artwork.

Seeing the process of gathering ideas and applying them to the artwork helps viewers understand the thought process behind the creation. This adds clarity to the narrative and enhances the impact of the messages conveyed. Overall, the feedback suggests that providing context, explanation, and narrative alongside visual artwork aids in understanding, connecting with, and appreciating the deeper meaning and messages embedded within the artwork.

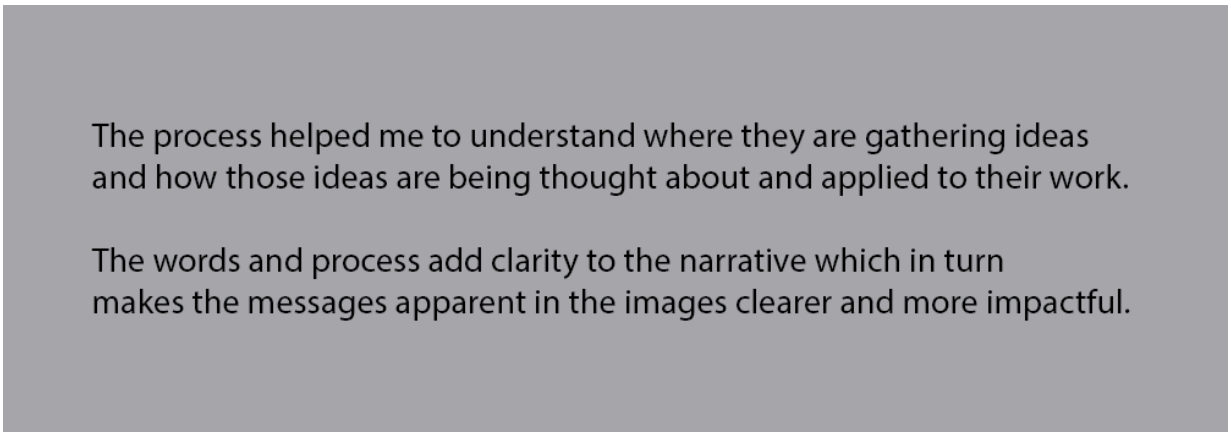
Figure 17

Quantitative Survey Responses



Viewers appreciate gaining a deeper understanding of the artist's intent and narrative through the additional context provided. This helps them connect with the artwork on a more profound level. The process of sharing thoughts, ideas, and the narrative behind the artwork helps clarify the meaning and messages conveyed in the images. It allows viewers to see the progression of ideas and how they are applied to the work. Examples of respondent answers can be seen in Figure 18

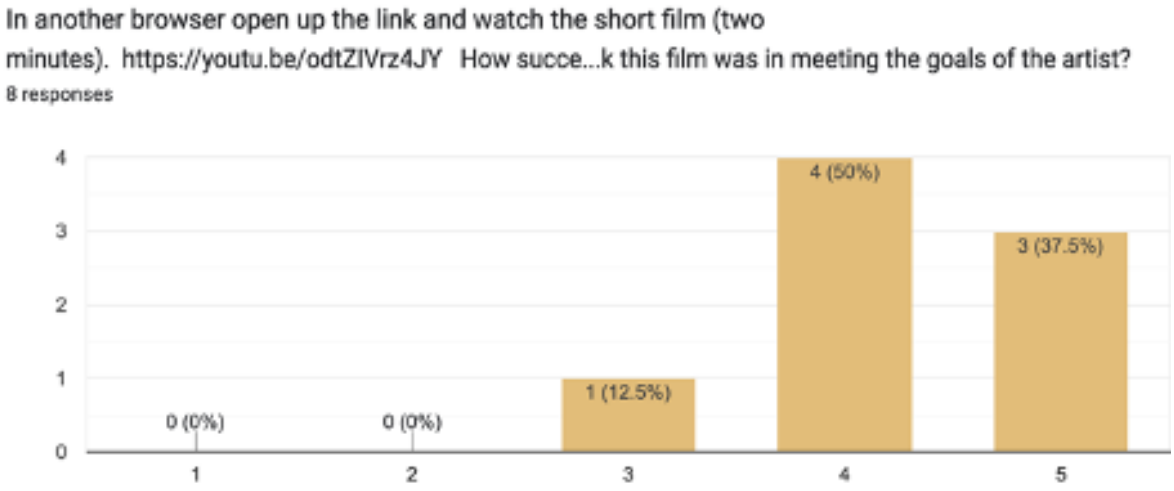
Figure 18



The final critique survey consisted of the same quantitative Likert questions and qualitative survey questions about each of the finished artworks as seen in Appendix C. The survey result as exemplified in Figure 19 included a brief artists statement. All respondents agreed that the artist had met their goals.

Figure 19

Quantitative Survey Responses



Comments typical of respondent answers can be seen in Figure 20.

Figure 20

Short Answer Qualitative Survey Responses

3. The contrast on style from the perfection of the school building to the sketchy imperfection but humanness of the characters strengthens the message about the complexity of the human connection.
4. Yes, the animation is nicely presented and the goal is clear based on the given content.
5. The film does an excellent job of showing how the girl was going through different emotions through the expressions and body language drawn. It was apparent how she was feeling. The use of flame-like shadowing over the scene as the girl melds into the "bad boy" expresses the negative nature of this choice.

The analysis of viewer responses revealed several prominent themes within the artwork. These included Narrative Depth, Contrast and Complexity, Emotional Expression, and exploration of artistic suggestions and concepts of identity and belonging. Viewers expressed appreciation for the use of storytelling as a vehicle to convey intricate themes and emotions within the artwork.

One notable observation was the striking disparity between the highly detailed backgrounds and the more stylized character designs. Despite arising unintentionally due to time constraints, viewers interpreted this incongruity as reinforcing the message surrounding the intricate nature of human relationships. This contrast underscored the nuanced dynamics of connections and emotions depicted in the artwork.

Viewers also lauded the artwork for its adept portrayal of emotions and inner struggles through various means such as facial expressions, body language, and artistic techniques like shadowing. These elements facilitated viewer empathy towards the characters and facilitated an understanding of the emotional journey depicted.

The themes of longing for belonging, even at the expense of compromising one's true self or engaging in potentially harmful behaviors, resonated strongly with viewers. This exploration of identity and belonging not only enriched the narrative but also prompted reflective contemplation among the audience. Overall, the artwork effectively communicated complex themes and emotions, eliciting a profound response from viewers and prompting introspection on the intricacies of human connections and personal identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the utilization of visual journals in this study has provided a profound exploration of familial bonds, cultural heritage, and the complexities of contemporary society.

Through word association exercises, freewriting sessions, and visual representations, the study has delved into themes encompassing hedonistic impulses, societal constraints, and the struggle for individual identity and belonging. The research findings shed light on sobering statistics regarding adolescent pregnancies and children in foster care, highlighting the widespread impact of familial separation and trauma. Moreover, the emergence of conceptual frameworks within the journals, such as the "man with a toolbox" theme, illustrates metaphorical mechanisms aimed at mitigating emotional tolls.

Feedback from respondents, including teachers and qualitative evaluations, demonstrates a clear understanding and connection with the intended themes and research. The process of sharing the background and context of the artwork has been instrumental in enhancing understanding and appreciation among viewers. The artwork effectively communicates complex themes and emotions, prompting introspection on human connections and personal identity. The striking contrast between detailed backgrounds and stylized character designs unintentionally reinforces the intricate nature of relationships, further enriching the narrative.

In essence, the study underscores the power of visual storytelling in conveying profound themes and emotions, fostering empathy, and prompting reflective contemplation among viewers. Through the combination of visual and written elements, the artwork serves as a compelling medium for exploring the complexities of the human experience.

Discussion

This research venture deliberately embraced a disciplined yet creative approach rooted in reflexive arts-based methods (Lin, 2019). The journey yielded results that pleasantly surpassed initial expectations. Through the faithful practice of journaling, as seen in Figure 21, storyboarding, sculpting, and surveying, a body of work organically emerged, stemming from the process itself rather than borrowed ideas (Walker, 2001; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011). At its core, the aim was to forge a genuine connection with an audience.

Figure 21

Sample Visual Journal Entry



Note. Art journals were entered daily on 80-pound A4 spiral sketchbooks in marker and watercolor.

Driven by personal interests, inquiries, and a spirit of curiosity (Lin, 2019), the exploration unfolded from contemplating disconnection to weaving intricate narratives and conceptual tapestries. Historical anecdotes found new life by melding animation and sculpture,

blending fact with imagination. A crucial element of this personal odyssey was the self-imposed challenge of time constraints, allowing the medium to be dictated by the ebb and flow of the creative journey.

Initially rooted in themes of personal disconnection, the project naturally evolved to encompass a broader array of characters and ideas. It became clear that engaging an audience required finesse, avoiding a preachy or overly didactic tone. Instead, the goal was to provoke thought, inviting viewers to explore new perspectives while honoring their own beliefs and knowledge.

This immersive experience provided renewed insight into the struggles faced by students, particularly in managing time and maintaining focus amidst looming deadlines. A key takeaway was the primacy of intrinsic motivation over mere academic accolades. In the realm of creativity, genuine passion, and steadfast dedication are paramount, ensuring that projects resonate authentically and meaningfully.

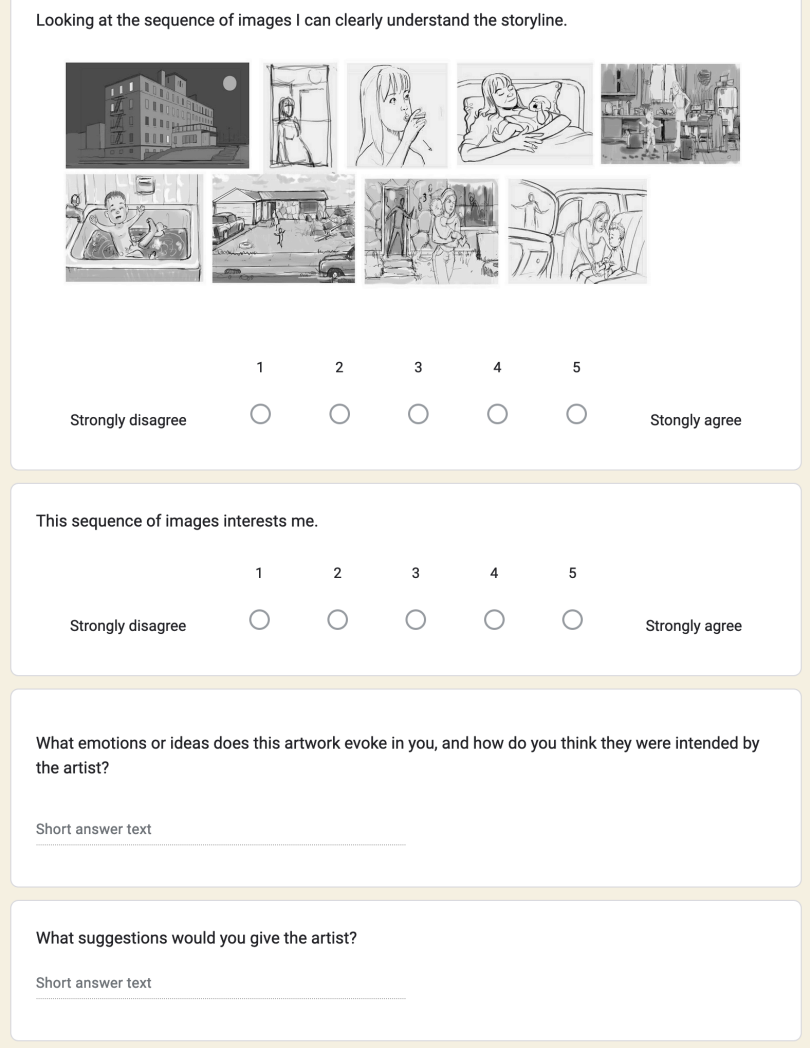
Implications

It's evident that respondents were intrigued by the process of meaning-making and expressed a desire to delve deeper. The reflective process yielded ideas that were more profound in their connections and left a lasting impact. This kind of thoughtful approach is what students should aim to cultivate, prioritizing infusing meaning into their work rather than rushing toward the final product and solely showcasing technical skills. This tendency often results in work that lacks a lasting aesthetic or emotional resonance with the audience. By presenting a body of work and highlighting the development of ideas through visual journaling, students can grasp that the process yields results and may feel encouraged to give it a try.

Utilizing online surveys proved instrumental in establishing a connection with the audience (see Figure 22). Through a series of ongoing feedback sessions and final critiques, I was able to validate the resonance of my work with the intended audience.

Figure 22

Sample Google Forms Survey



Note. The online Google forms included sample artwork from the project and asked qualitative and quantitative questions.

Initially considering Survey Monkey as a platform, I found it cost-prohibitive, especially for students. Instead, Google Forms emerged as a robust alternative, offering

qualitative and quantitative research capabilities. Its built-in features for generating graphs and charts proved a significant time-saving asset. I pioneered innovative sculpture teaching methods within the artistic process, employing free-standing wire armatures and air-dry clay (see Figure 23). Transitioning from non-drying oil-based clay to more durable materials, such as the Monte-Marte brand air-dry clay and LA Doll premier clay, enabled excellent permanence and ease of manipulation (see Figure 24). These discoveries directly inform my approach to teaching sculptural techniques, emphasizing three main steps: gesture, armature, and detail, emphasizing incremental progress and reflection.

Figure 23

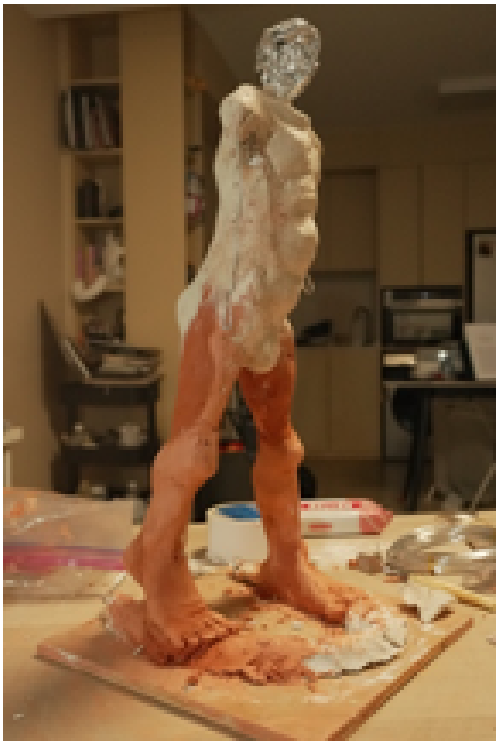
Process Photo Of Freestanding Wire Sculpture



Note. The free-standing wire armature was stuffed with tinfoil to save clay cost.

Figure 24

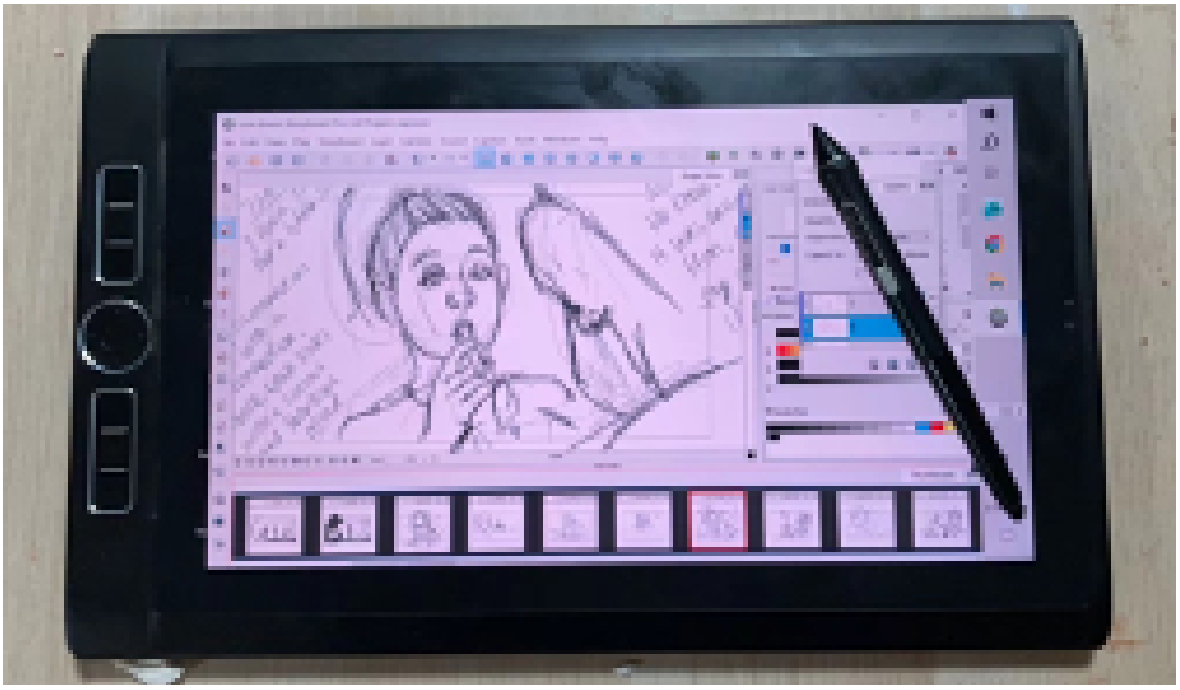
Process Photo Of Freestanding Wire Sculpture With Added Air Dry Clay



Integrating a digital tablet and storyboard software revolutionized my workflow (see Figure 25), liberating me from the confines of a traditional desk setup. This newfound mobility allowed for creative exploration in various settings, whether lounging on the couch or drinking coffee at the mall. The flexibility afforded by digital tools facilitated fluid ideation and productivity, enhancing the value of time spent at the desk.

Figure 25

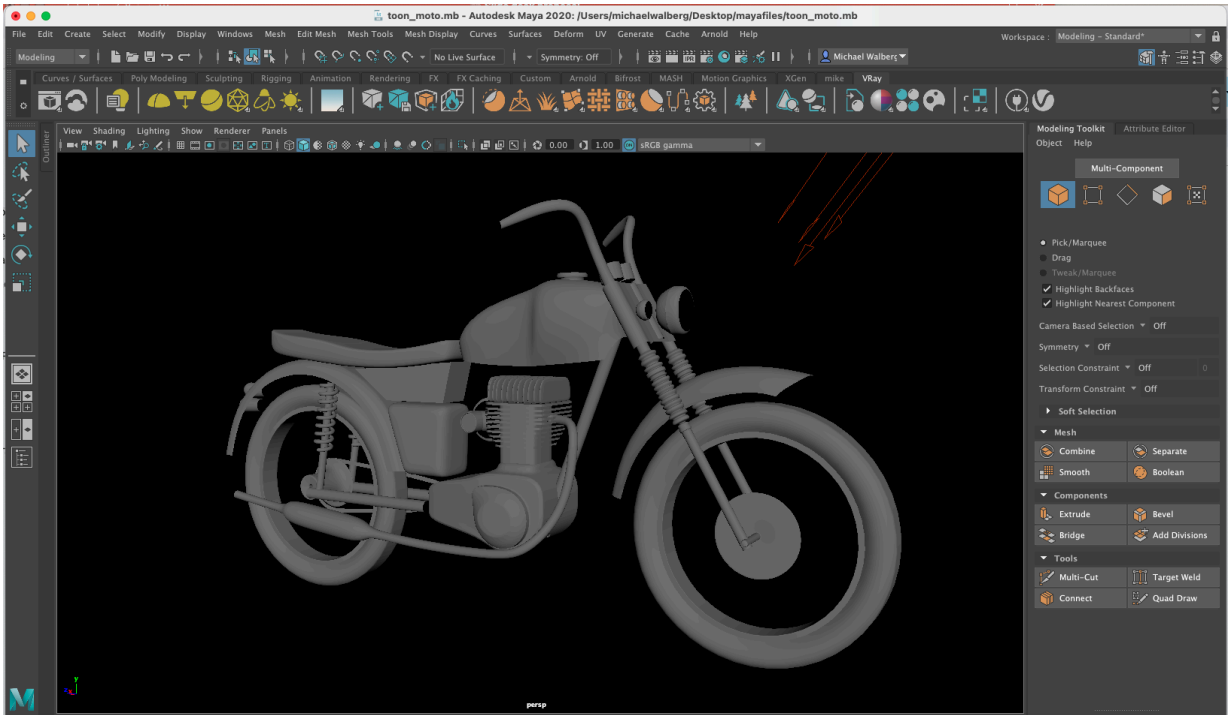
The Wacom Mobile Studio Pro Digital Tablet And Storyboard Pro Software



Central to this transformative process was seamlessly transitioning between sketching and rendering, leveraging the Wacom Mobile Studio Pro digital drawing tablet and Toon Boom Storyboard Pro software to refine ideas (see Figure 25) iteratively. From shorthand sketches to detailed renderings, the iterative nature of the process enabled dynamic storytelling and problem-solving. Supplementing hand-drawn sketches with 3D digital modeling in Autodesk Maya further enriched the creative journey, solving complex spatial and narrative challenges.

Figure 26

Autodesk Maya 3D modeling



Examples of original 3D digital models, such as interior school sets, motorcycles (See Figure 26), and unfinished bedroom sets, underscore the versatility and efficacy of digital tools in shaping narrative vision and facilitating storytelling sequences. The process of modeling continued aiding the thought process and was an essential tool in discovering new ideas. This realization supports teaching in multiple disciplines, with one medium informing another. This amalgamation allows the doing to mix with thinking. This combination inspires input processing to develop new information and insights to be recorded and reflected upon. Students will find this an invaluable record of their individual growth.

Limitations

Balancing time, resources, and expectations is a perennial concern for artists, myself included. Striving for excellence often involves comparing one's work to that of peers and

published works, which can be inspiring and daunting. Over time, I've learned to accept the outcome of my work as a reflection of the time and experience invested in it rather than solely measuring it against external benchmarks. This perspective shift has been instrumental in fostering a healthier relationship with my creative process.

In my role as an educator, I've observed similar sentiments among my students. I often emphasize the importance of valuing the time and attention devoted to each piece, viewing it not as a race to completion but as a journey of focused problem-solving. Recognizing that additional time can refine and enhance the outcome, while also acknowledging the inherent beauty and authenticity of time-constrained creations, is a valuable lesson for aspiring artists. This approach fosters both skill development and creative exploration, ultimately leading to the emergence of a unique artistic style.

While my initial plans involved animating sequences, the evolving narrative proved too expansive to fully realize within the constraints of time. However, this limitation sparked a shift towards conceptual sculpture, as seen in Figure 27, exploring themes of familial inheritance and the creative use of tools to bridge gaps in knowledge and history. Moving forward, I intend to allocate more time for creative development and production, allowing for a more thorough exploration of conceptual storytelling.

Figure 27

Final Sculpture Of Mechanically Tuned Heart



Note. Air dry clay sanded and painted with oil and sealed with Damar varnish.

Although time constraints precluded extensive data analysis using software like NVIVO, I employed simpler methods such as word cloud generation and theme identification to distill qualitative data into actionable insights. While these approaches may need more depth of formal analysis, they provided valuable insights to inform my creative process and decision-making.

Navigating the interplay between time, resources, and expectations is an ongoing challenge in artistic endeavors. Artists can cultivate a more sustainable and fulfilling practice by reframing productivity in terms of focused attention and creative exploration.

Recommendations

This experience has given me valuable skills in estimating the time required for personal and commercial project development. These skills will allow me to better estimate and balance my own limited resources between teaching and artmaking.

The project's success can be attributed to discipline and consistency. By concentrating on one idea, I cultivated authentic concepts that effectively conveyed my intentions. This focused approach led to noticeable interest and curiosity, as reflected in online surveys. Moving forward, I plan to continue using surveys and visual journals to gather information for reflection.

SHoM and Ideo were great starting points in researching and developing processes but more time needs to be spent examining and testing processes from other disciplines like architecture and engineering. These processes need to be broken down into understandable chunks for delivery to students using language students already understand and don't have to learn. The biggest challenge will be developing teaching strategies for research and reflection as key components of the artistic process. A simple mirror will be my starting point in teaching reflection. I envision students looking at themselves and asking the question - how can I be better, where do I want to go, or what do I want to be. These open ended questions should get students thinking inside rather than just producing answers which are often shallow and sometimes glib. I have had success in teaching students APA citation formats before assigning them short presentation projects that require at least two citations. This is a habit that needs to be reinforced.

Moving forward, I will be returning to the animation project and working towards its conclusion as a final realized fully animated vignette with sound effects and music.

Conclusion

This research venture embraced a disciplined yet creative approach rooted in reflexive arts-based methods, yielding results that pleasantly surpassed initial expectations. Through the faithful practice of journaling, storyboarding, sculpting, and surveying, a body of work organically emerged, stemming from the process rather than borrowed ideas. At its core, the aim was to forge genuine connections with an audience.

Driven by personal interests, inquiries, and curiosity, the exploration unfolded from contemplating disconnection to weaving intricate narratives and conceptual tapestries. Historical anecdotes found new life by melding animation and sculpture, blending fact with imagination. A crucial element of this personal odyssey was the self-imposed challenge of time constraints, allowing the medium to be dictated by the ebb and flow of the creative journey.

Initially rooted in themes of personal disconnection, the project naturally evolved to encompass a broader array of characters and ideas. It became clear that engaging an audience required finesse and avoiding a preachy or overly didactic tone. Instead, the goal was to provoke thought, inviting viewers to explore new perspectives while honoring their beliefs and knowledge.

This immersive experience provided renewed insight into the struggles faced by students, particularly in managing time and maintaining focus amidst looming deadlines. A key takeaway was the importance of intrinsic motivation over mere academic accolades. Creativity, genuine passion, and steadfast dedication ensure that projects resonate authentically and meaningfully.

Utilizing online surveys proved instrumental in establishing a connection with the audience. Through a series of ongoing feedback sessions and final critiques, I validated the

resonance of my work with the intended audience. Transitioning from non-drying oil-based clay to more durable materials like air-dry clay enabled greater permanence and ease of manipulation. These discoveries directly inform my approach to teaching sculptural techniques, emphasizing incremental progress and reflection.

Integrating a digital tablet and storyboard software revolutionized my workflow, facilitating fluid ideation and productivity. Examples of original 3D digital models underscored the versatility and efficacy of digital tools in shaping narrative vision and facilitating storytelling sequences.

Meaningful art starts with the heart, literally. In today's world, it is crucial to recognize the connecting force that art holds within a society's culture. Art celebrates triumphs, expresses deep feelings, and reflects the artist's personal interests, curiosities, and questions. Without this starting point, art risks becoming mere craft or entertainment, lacking the depth and intent that elevates it to fine art (Tilghman, 1999).

The creative process reflects this search for meaning by building ideas, reflecting, and accepting feedback as a way to expand consciousness and grow (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011). Through this process, I have recognized challenges in my own history, not in my making. Overcoming these challenges has been a trial, but it has also rekindled my confidence as an artist and a teacher. This journey has not only been about achieving a Master's status in education but about rekindling artistic endeavors with the confidence that my voice matters.

My search for meaning, imagination, and newfound skills in arts-based research and data analysis will produce media worthy of attention and consideration. With reinvigorated artistic process skills, I am ready to complete projects and send them out into the world, hoping to make it a better place than it was before.

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Appendix A

Figure A1 Google Forms Online Midpoint Survey Questionnaire

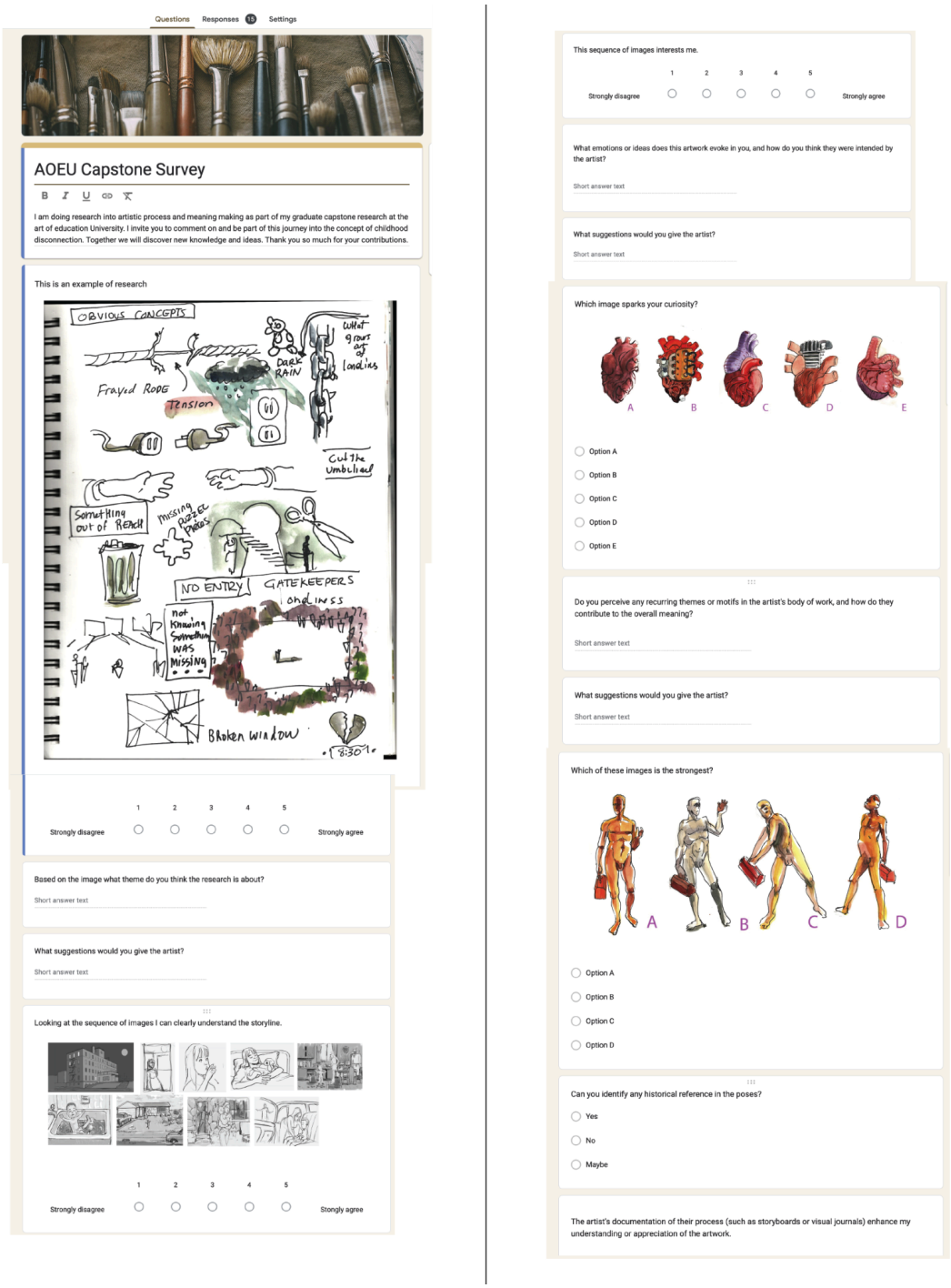


Figure A2 Google Forms Online Midpoint Survey Questionnaire

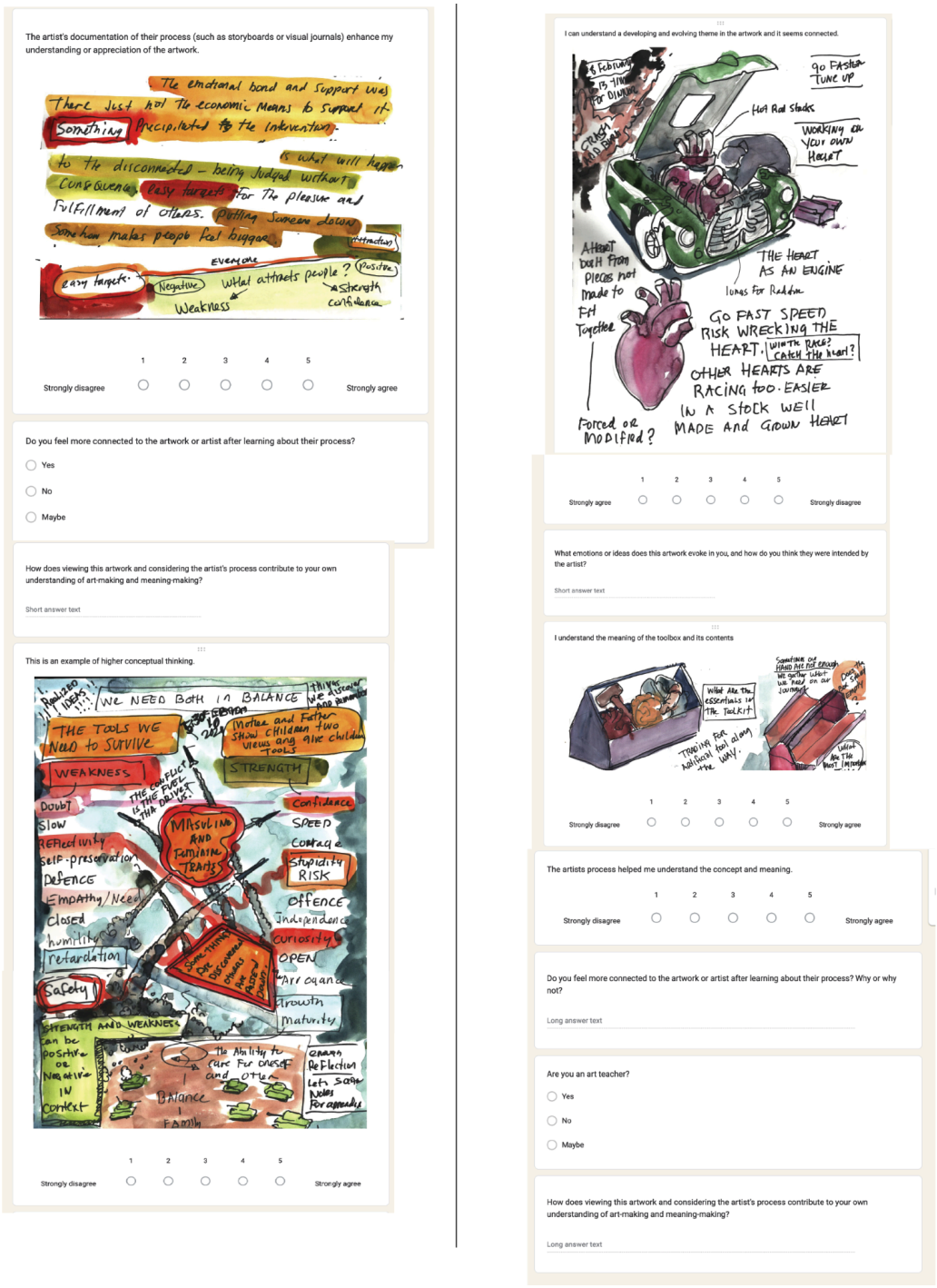


Figure A3 Google Forms Online Final Critique Survey

Questions Responses 0 Settings



Final ABR Capstone critique survey

Today over 250,000 children are inducted into the foster care and social services yearly. In addition to these youth, 500,000 men and women are disconnected from their biological children. This means nearly a million citizens are facing loss and a search for belonging from the severing of chemical and historical connections. This destruction of familial bonds has long reaching impacts into the well being and growth of all involved. Should Children's rights to their heritage and history be more important than individual parents rights to happiness or societies need to co-parent? These are questions I am asking as complete my arts based research into the theme of childhood disconnection.

My goal for this artwork series-is to reconnect to my art-making and bring awareness to childhood disconnection from the perspective of the disconnected and promote awareness of the importance of family and heritage. One of the main themes is what is passed on through family, what is discovered and what is lost. This project will serve as an example of how the creative process works. The overarching concept for this series revolves around art-based research, employing an amalgamated design process to explore the phenomenon of childhood disconnection—its causes, consequences, and enduring effects. Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative feedback, I aim to unearth new knowledge and inspiration. All research, ideation and final work was completed over a three week period

In another browser open up the link and watch the short film (two minutes). *

https://youtu.be/odtZlVrz4JY

How successful do you think this film was in meeting the goals of the artist?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not successful	○	○	○	○	○	Successful

In your opinion how does the artwork demonstrate the goal of the artist? (Cite visual evidence)

Long answer text

How do you think this artwork could be improved or better address the artists statement intention?

Long answer text

What feelings or thoughts do you experience while looking at this piece?

Long answer text

How successful do you think this film was in meeting the goals of the artist?



	1	2	3	4	5	
Not successful	○	○	○	○	○	Very successful

In your opinion how does the artwork demonstrate the goal of the artist? (Cite visual evidence)

Long answer text

How do you think this artwork could be improved or better address the artists statement intention?

Long answer text

What feelings or thoughts do you experience while looking at this piece?

Long answer text

https://youtu.be/1IcUPytauZk

How successful do you think this film was in meeting the goals of the artist?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not successful	○	○	○	○	○	Very successful

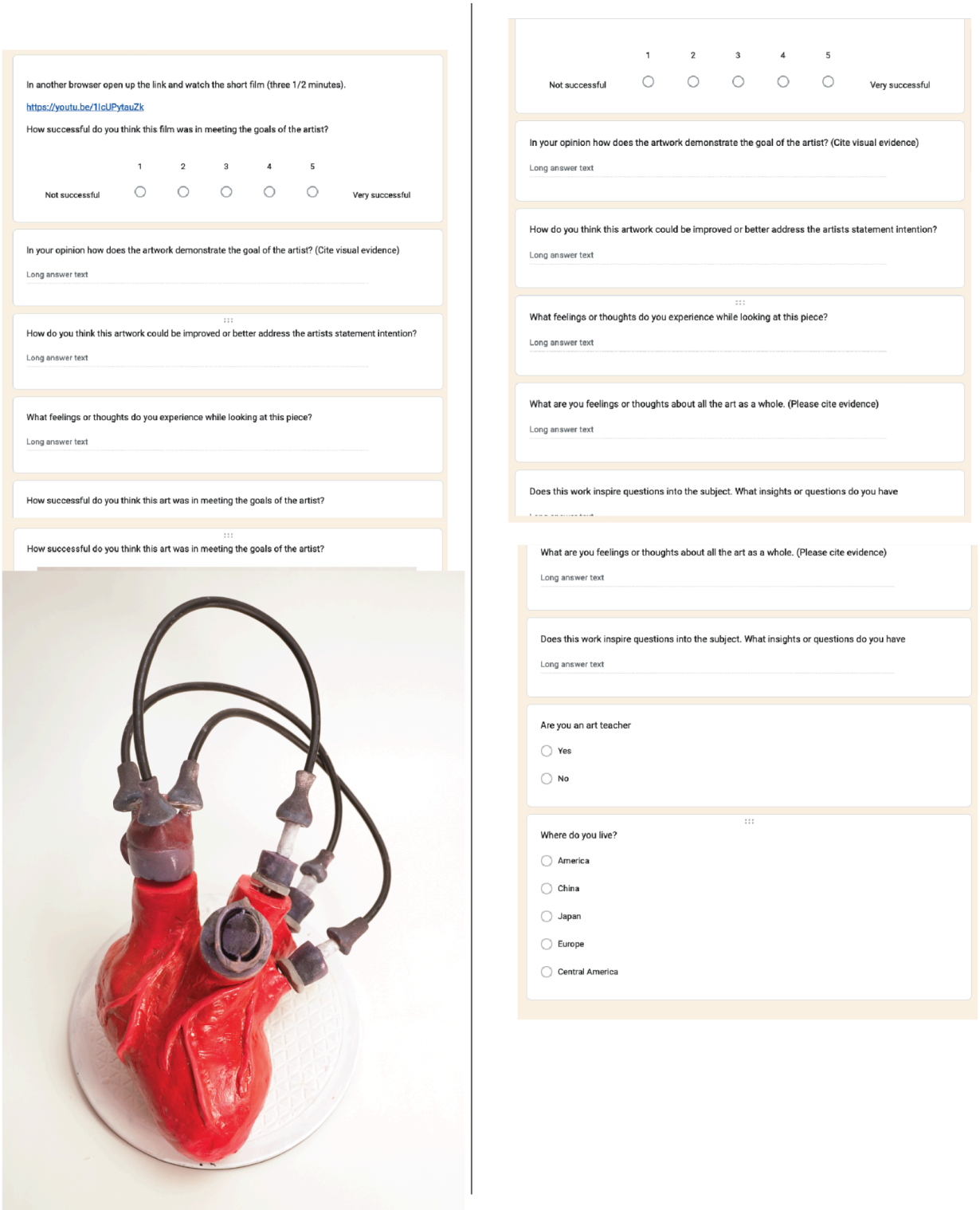
In your opinion how does the artwork demonstrate the goal of the artist? (Cite visual evidence)

Long answer text

How do you think this artwork could be improved or better address the artists statement intention?

Long answer text

Figure A4 Google Forms Online Final Critique Survey



Appendix B

Visual Journal Pages

Figure B1

Visual Journal Sketchbook Entries By Date

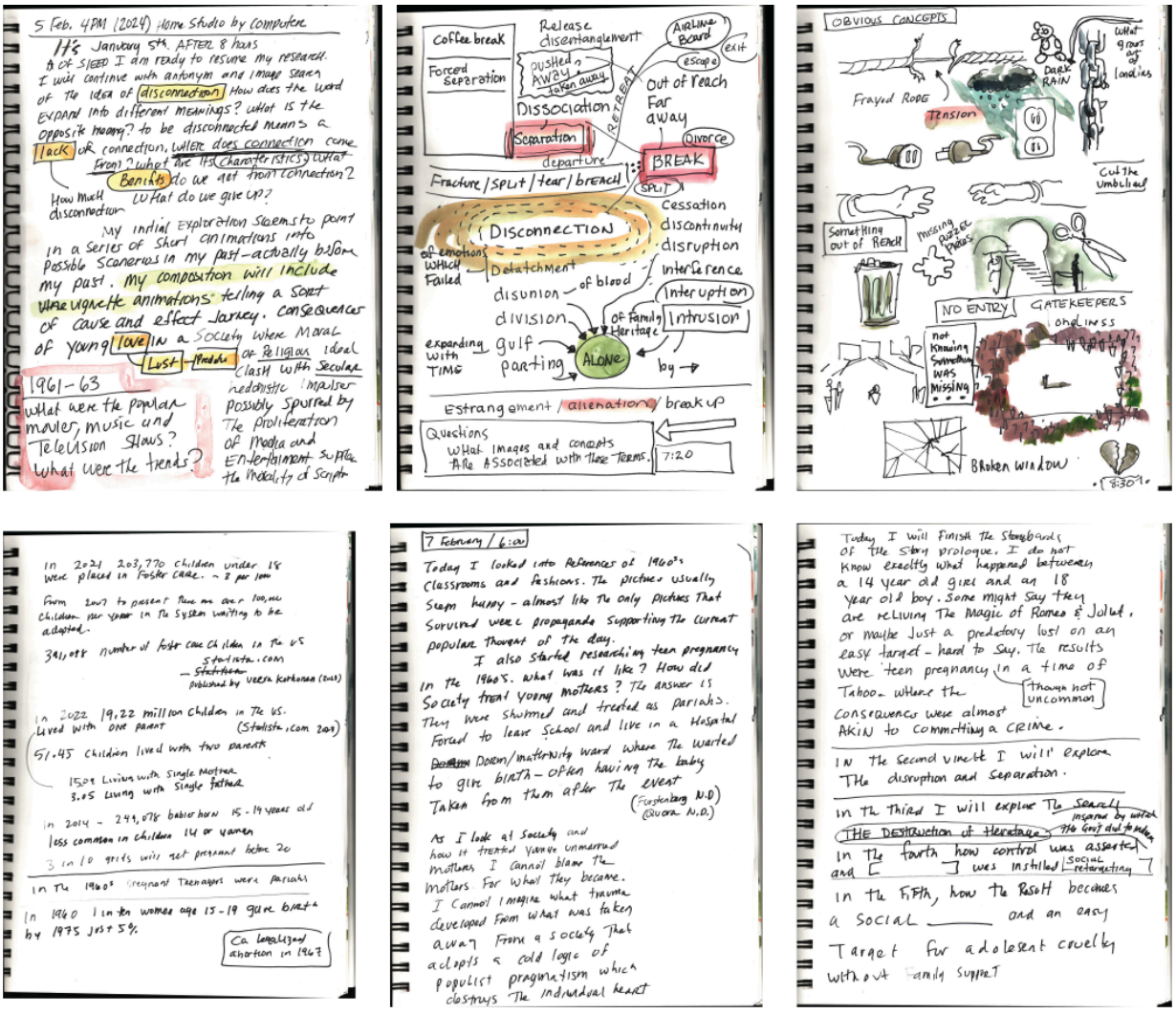


Figure B2

Visual Journal Sketchbook Entries By Date

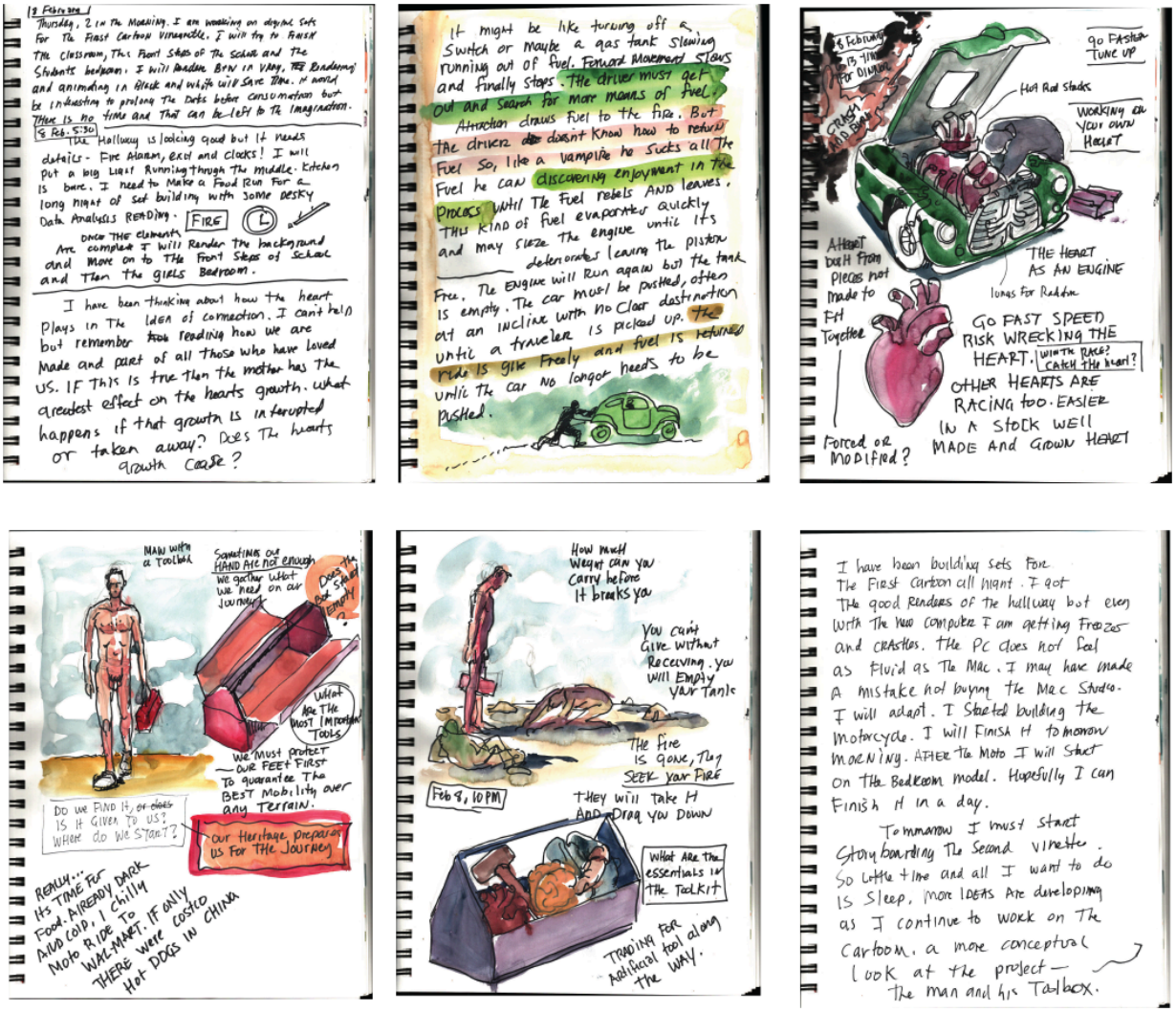


Figure B3

Visual Journal Sketchbook Entries By Date

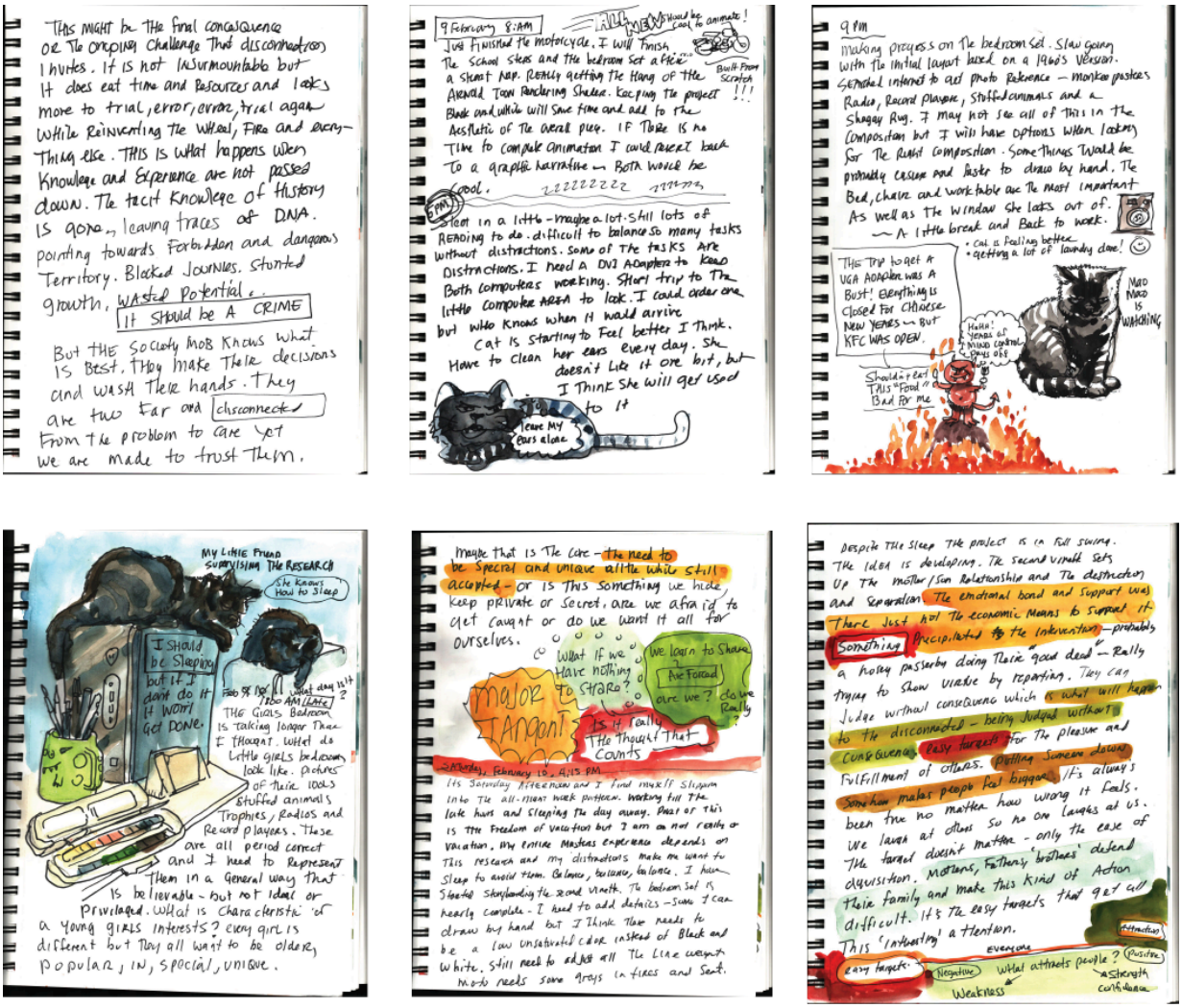
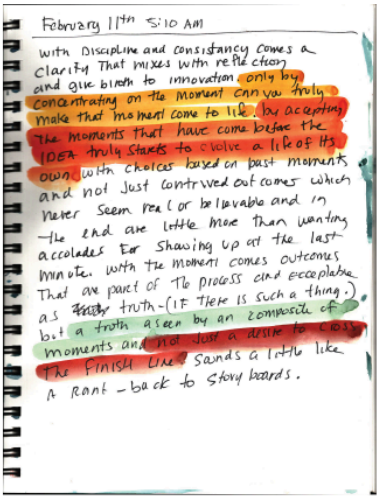


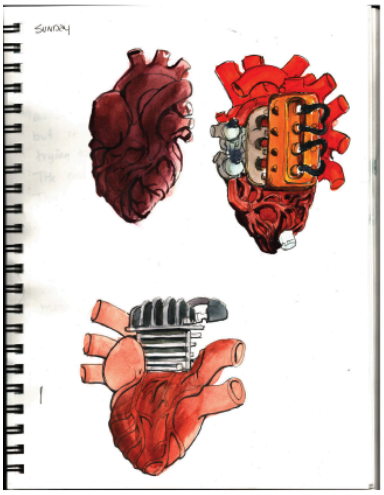
Figure B4

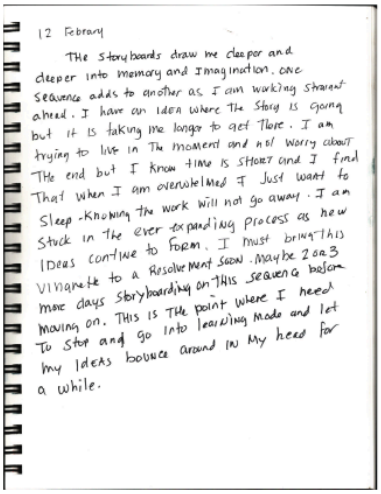
Visual Journal Sketchbook Entries By Date











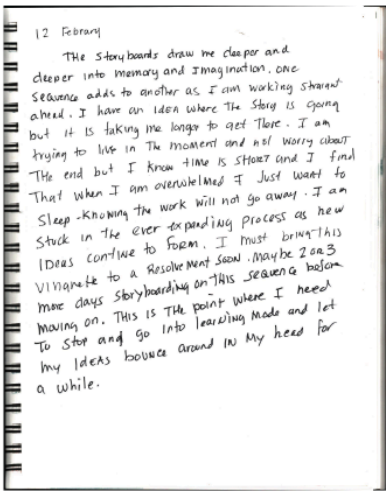
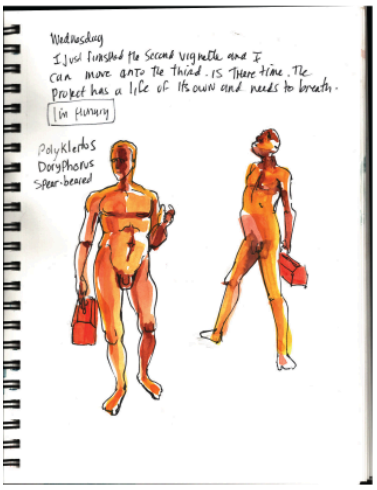
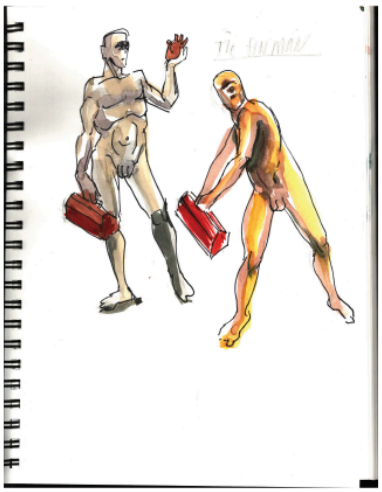


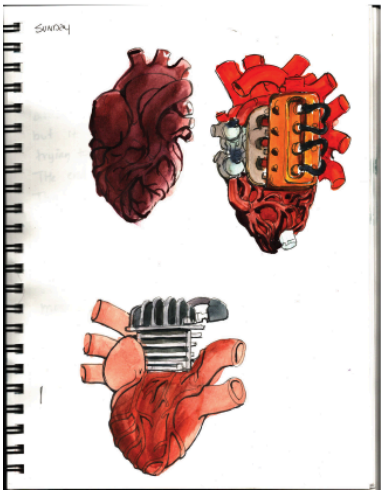
Figure B5

Visual Journal Sketchbook Entries By Date









Appendix C

Completed Artwork

Figure C1 - Hot Rod Heart, View One



Note: Hot rod heart, Michael Walberg, 2024, 18” x 9”, oil and varnish over air dry clay

Figure C2 - Hot Rod Heart, View Two



Figure C3 - Man With A Red Toolbox, View One



Note: Man with a red toolbox, Michael Walberg, 2024, 19”, Air dry clay over wire armature finished with oil based clay.

Figure C4 - Man With A Red Toolbox, View Two

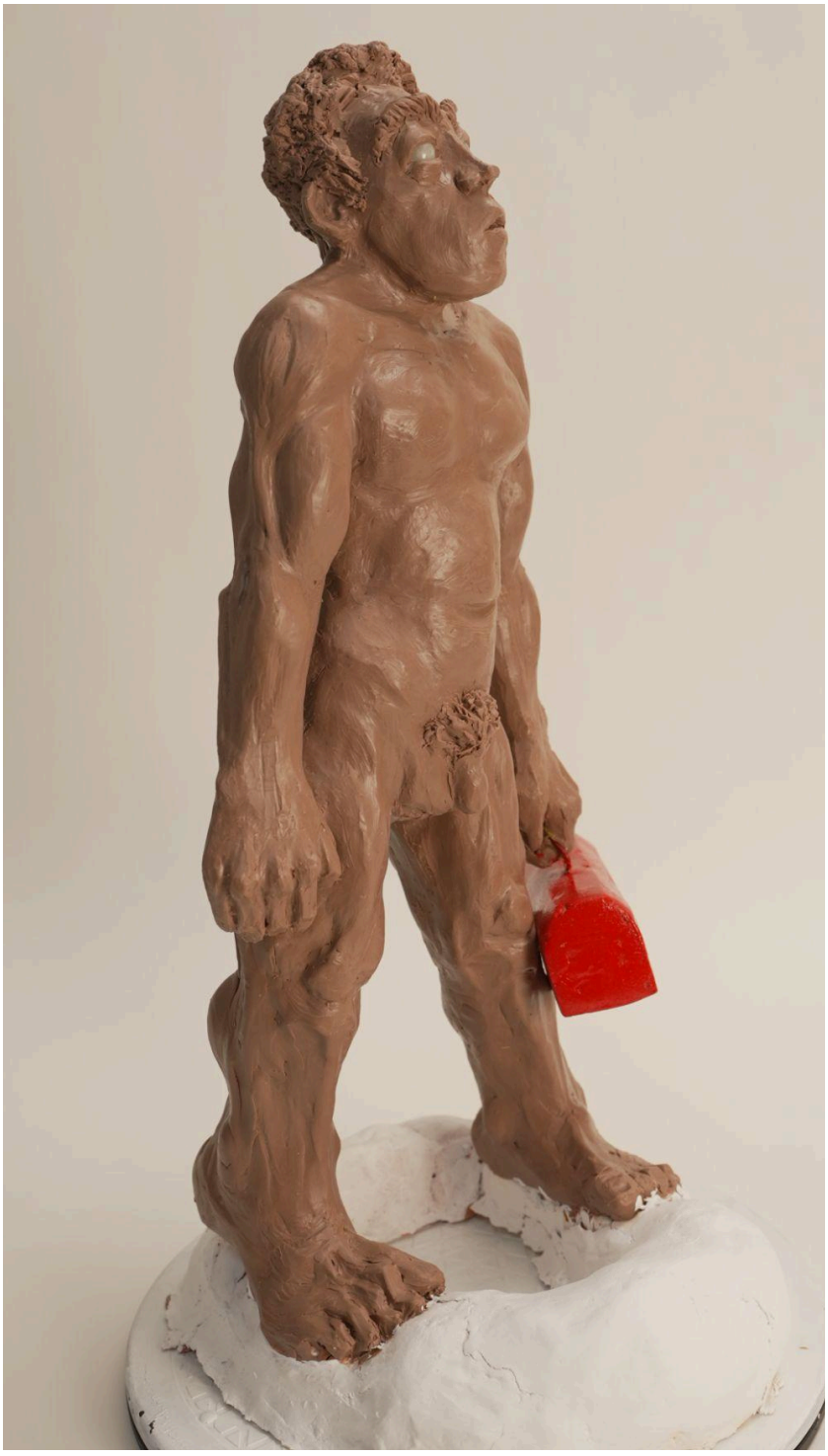
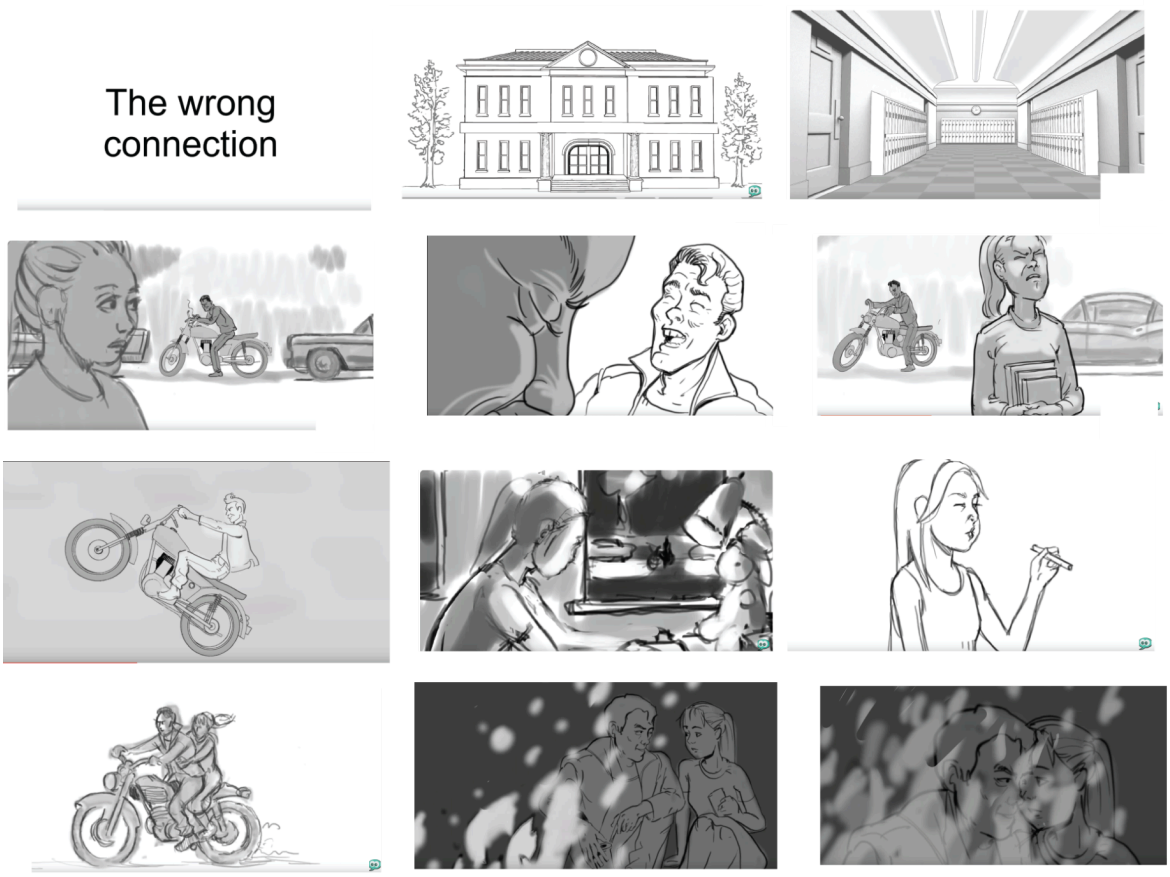


Figure C5 - Animatic Storyboards For Short Film *Wrong Connection*



Note: Wrong connection, Michael Walberg, 2024, Digital storyboard animatic

This video is not public. View full video animatic with this private link to youtube.

https://youtu.be/odtZIVrz4JY?si=959X-gWGJMCOxPii

Figure C6 - Animatic Storyboards For Short Film *Disconnected*



Note: Disconnection, Michael Walberg, 2024, Digital storyboard animatic

This video is not public. View full video animatic with this private link to youtube.

https://youtu.be/1IcUPytauZk

Figure C7 - Visual Journal

