3

ART-BASED RESEARCH

◆ Shaun McNiff

♦ *The Domain*

I never made a painting as a work of art, it's all research.

—Pablo Picasso

Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies. These inquiries are distinguished from research activities where the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations that take place within academic disciplines that utilize more traditional scientific, verbal, and mathematic descriptions and analyses of phenomena.

The domain of art-based research, a more focused application of the larger epistemological process of artistic knowing and inquiry, has come into existence as an extension of a significant increase of studies researching the nature of the art experience in higher education and professional practice (McNiff, 1998a). As an artist, I began in the early 1970s to investigate artistic processes with the methods of psychology. Although I learned a great deal from these studies and continue to work closely with

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various human science disciplines, I realized with the assistance of my graduate students that the arts, with their long legacies of researching experience, could be used as primary modes of inquiry, especially when it came to exploring the nature of art and its creation. As colleges and universities offer master's and doctoral programs that combine the arts with other disciplines and artists look for ways to use their skills as researchers, the academic environment is becoming more responsive to new methods of investigation. These trends owe a great deal to Rudolf Arnheim (1954, 1966) and Susanne Langer (1951, 1953), who validated the cognitive aspects of the arts to large academic audiences and established the intellectual basis for approaching art making as serious inquiry.

Rather than just reflecting upon artistic phenomena in case studies, interviews, and other explanatory texts, students now ask if they can pursue the process of painting to learn more about a particular aspect of painting or elicit the creative imagination to let the characters in their expressions describe themselves and their experiences, and so forth. We are discovering how these art-based methods, making use of a larger spectrum of creative intelligence and communications, generate important information that often feels more accurate, original, and intelligent than more conventional descriptions.

I have been surprised by the enthusiastic way in which the idea of art-based research has been received. When I published *Art-Based Research* in 1998, informed by what I learned from my graduate students, primarily at the master's degree level, I was ready to have the work dismissed by the research community. Instead I discovered how the idea of researching human experience through the arts makes complete sense to people, especially those of us who long to integrate art with service to others and revive partnerships between art and science.

I have always used the arts as primary modes of inquiry, but it was the simple action of naming this process "art-based research" that carried the work into major new dimensions of possibility. I advocate small "r" research and the demystification of the social science research enterprise that tends to separate research from practice.

In this chapter, I attempt to gather together many different examples and vignettes of what art-based research can be together with suggestions regarding methodology. I also try to show in working with a dream how knowing through the arts takes place in ways that are distinctly different yet complementary to more logical cognition and how artists throughout history can serve as models for art-based inquiry. My goal is one of inciting a sense of the vast potential that lies in this area.

♦ *Art-Based Inquiries*

My work as a researcher took a decisive new turn in 1989 when I used my own art as the primary mode of inquiry in *Depth Psychology of Art*. I felt that this more direct and firsthand approach enabled me to get closer to the artistic process than I could by interviewing others. I have great respect for the latter research method, but I wanted to explore something more experimental and empirical. I asked myself the kinds of questions that I had previously posed to others, and I responded through the artistic process as well as through words.

In *Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination* (McNiff, 1992), I continued engaging my art as the basis of inquiry. I used my practice of responding to paintings with imaginal dialogue to perfect this

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method originating within the Jungian tradition (Chodorow, 1997; Hillman, 1977, 1978, 1979; Watkins, 1983) and make it more useful for others. I worked with a series of 26 paintings made over an extended period of time and responded to each through imaginal dialogue that I recorded, edited, and presented in the book as a demonstration of the process.

There is no better way to understand a particular aspect of creative practice than to research it in this direct way. Since I was also growing increasingly uncomfortable in using others to advance my ideas and methods, firsthand empirical experimentation offered a practical resolution to these ethical concerns. The focus of my research shifted away from experimenting with human subjects and toward the more direct examination of the artistic process. I want to emphasize how even though these artistic expressions may come from within me, I nevertheless attempt to study the art objects and the process of making them with as much objectivity as possible. I am intimately connected to what I make, and this relationship can further understanding, but it is still separate from me. The examination is both heuristic and empirical and thoroughly artistic.

I continue to expand this work with my ongoing explorations in which I respond to paintings through movement, vocal improvisation, performance, poetry, and ritual. I use my experimentation with these processes, as well as my experience with others as a "teacher-researcher"(Gallas, 1994), to learn more about how varied media can offer interpretations of art works that transcend the linear narratives that we conventionally use to respond to art. All of this research is part of my life-long examination of the process of interpreting art in more sensitive, imaginative, and accurate ways.

My teaching and personal artistic expressions have been the primary domains of my art-based research. In my studio classes we involve ourselves in particular forms of artistic expression, and then we systematically describe and reflect upon what we did, comparing our experiences to those of others in the group and to materials presented in published literature. We explore issues such as how movement improvisation offers something to the interpretation of art that cannot be accessed in words, how many people find it easier to have an imaginal dialogue with another person's painting than one of their own, and so forth.

For those who wonder how one of these ideas can be expanded into a research project, a study might focus on the process of making paintings and then responding to the pictures through movement with the objective of exploring how movement interpretations can further understanding in ways that are different from narrative description.

The artist-researcher might create a series of paintings over a period of time and then set up a research protocol whereby the artist interprets the image through spontaneous body movement in the presence of one or more witnesses. The paintings can be both large and small and in any medium and with totally open-ended subject matter (my personal preference), but individual researchers may wish to limit choices, variables of size, media, color, subject matter, and so forth, in keeping with the goals of the particular project. A study of movement interpretation can focus on paintings in a gallery made by others, although my interest as an artist, art therapist, and teacher has always focused on how different sensory expressions can help us to further relationships with our own art.

A specific and constant period of time might be given for the movement responses (i.e., 2 to 5 minutes), with the witness serving as timekeeper. Recorded dialogue and

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notes after the movement process can then focus on the unique features of the movement interpretations, new insights that they generate, how they affect a person's perception of the painting, whether or not the movement process helps the artist become more intimately connected to the painting, how fear and resistance to moving may influence the process, and so forth. These same questions can be explored systematically over a series of sessions.

The study might also engage the witness in responding to the painting before or after the artist moves. Other designs might involve both the witness and artist-researcher making paintings and responding to each other's work, or video documentation might be introduced—the variables and protocols are endless, and each direction offers new areas of research and learning. My recommendation as described later in this chapter is to keep the project design as simple, systematic, and constant as possible since the creative process will inevitably present variability and depth.

As someone with extensive experience working with both artists and beginners, I can report that in many forms of art-based research personal skills are essentially variables that need to be noted. In most art media, with the exception of playing musical instruments where expression requires technical ability, the absence of experience may even be viewed in a positive way as limiting bias. The persistent challenge that I face with both artists and beginners is the very universal resistance to new and unfamiliar modes of expressions that I embrace as a natural force that can draw attention to the need to let go and act with more spontaneity.

People often ask how the arts can research problems and questions outside the domain of artistic expression or how knowledge gained from artistic practice can be applied to experience within organizations and communities that might appear to have little direct relation to art. In *Creating With Others: The Practice of Imagination in Life, Art, and the Workplace* (McNiff, 2003), I give examples of how the arts help us improve the way we interact with others by learning how to let go of negative attitudes and excessive needs for control, learning how to foster more open and original ways of perceiving situations and problems, gaining new insights and sensitivities toward others, learning how the slipstream of group expression can carry us to places where we cannot go alone, learning how to create supportive environments that inspire creative thought, and realizing that nothing happens in creative expression unless we show up and start working on a project, even with little sense of where we might ultimately go with it.

Using art-based research methods outside the circumscribed area of people already committed to artistic expression can be a challenging yet intriguing prospect. Let me try and give a possible example based on my experience with percussion in groups. We might ask how sustained rhythmic expression with drums can help people to transform conflict in organizations. The basic premise of this possible study might be that drumming and rhythm can connect people to forces of transformation and insight outside the realm of rational thought. How do the physical vibrations, energies, discipline, and physical expression of drumming alter our relationship toward particular phenomena? Can a creative process such as drumming be more effective in transforming a conflict than verbal interventions? How does the drumming activity further letting go, inspiration, focus, safety, and the power of the group slipstream?

As stated previously, the variable of the drummer's skill will influence outcomes. A person capable of creating a resonant and pure pulse with the drum is more likely to evoke the various influences and powers of this type of expression than someone who is

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self-conscious and unable to access the expressive qualities of the instrument and who experiences frustrations with the medium that might ultimately increase tension. The type of drum, the nature of its voice—deep and soothing versus sharp and penetrating—will also have an impact on the outcome. Therefore, the study might involve a leader who sets the pulse, provides quality instruments, and draws less experienced drummers into the rhythm. I predict that the skills of the leader in engaging others will have a significant impact on the quality of the experience.

The drumming process and the rhythms it generates offer many opportunities for verbal descriptions of effects on people. As a thoroughly empirical activity it also lends itself to different kinds of measurement. The sounds can be recorded with the goal of identifying patterns, variations, and other distinguishing features. I have always supported collaboration between art-based research and traditional scientific methods when questions and problems call for this kind of inquiry.

The simple question of how sustained rhythm in the practice of drumming can help us deal with a personal or group problem opens up numerous directions for inquiry and new learning. However, many people will instinctively say, "What in the world does drumming have to do with solving the problems I am having at work or with another person? I need more direct and practical help. I can't waste my time in a drum group."

Perhaps the perception of a drumming experiment being strange or irrelevant may be a key to its ultimate value since it offers different and new ways of thinking about and dealing with problems. In keeping with the dynamics of the creative process, what appears most removed from the problem at hand may offer a useful way of transforming it.

When difficulties in human experience become deeply lodged within individuals and groups, this is usually a sign that we are stuck in our ways of dealing with them. A shift in methodology can bring tremendous insight and relief. The process of drumming, and the use of our hands, bodies, and other senses as well as the activation of dormant dimensions of the mind, may offer ways of solving and re-visioning problems that are simply not possible through descriptive and linear language. The art-based researcher asks these questions and then sets out to design experiments and situations that will further understanding of the phenomena.

♦ *A Focus on Method*

Both art-based research and science involve the use of systematic experimentation with the goal of gaining knowledge about life.

I have discovered how easily art-based researchers can become lost and ineffective when inquiries become overly personal and lose focus or a larger purpose, or when they get too complex and try to do too many things. Therefore, I always focus on the creation of a clear method that can be easily described and then implemented in a systematic way that lends itself to the reporting of outcomes. Ideally, the method can be replicable and utilized by other researchers who may want to explore the problem separately. Experimentation with the method and learning more about it can even be a primary outcome of the research and an aide to future professional applications.

Perhaps a defining quality of art-based researchers is their willingness to start the work with questions and a willingness to design methods in response to the particular situation, as contrasted to the more general contemporary tendency within the human sciences to fit the question into

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a fixed research method. The art of the art-based researcher extends to the creation of a process of inquiry.

Sigmund Freud's method of psychoanalytic practice emphasized pure observation and attentiveness to the immediate situation. Paradoxically, Freud, who freely indulged himself in theoretical reductions after-the-fact, offers what I view as a most essential guide for the creation of methods of inquiry in art-based research. In 1912, he said

> Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and are treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from presuppositions. (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 114)

Freud clearly understood how important it is to withhold conclusions of any kind when investigating human behavior, and it is unfortunate that the theories he developed have been so widely used to label expressions according to predetermined concepts.

In keeping with Freud's immersion in the present moment without judgment, students repeatedly tell me how confusing it can be to try and fit their vision into someone else's fixed system. They feel liberated when encouraged to establish their own ways of researching questions.

To freely observe and suspend judgment, the researcher needs a clearly defined structure of operation as with Freud, whose method is in many ways more lasting than his theories. My experience consistently reinforces the importance of establishing a relatively simple and consistent methodology for artistic inquiry. The simpler the deeper, I say as a guiding principle, and this direction is consistent with the way in which science attempts to place controls on variables. Since artistic expression is essentially heuristic, introspective, and deeply personal, there needs to be a complementary focus in art-based research on how the work can be of use to others and how it connects to practices in the discipline. This standard of "usefulness" again corresponds to the values of science, and it protects against self-indulgence that can threaten art-based inquiries.

Emphasis on method helps the researcher avoid the confusion that may develop when the internal inquiry is not informed by clear, purposeful, and consistent organization. As with artistic expression, structure often liberates and informs the art-based researcher.

A colleague of mine describes how students pursuing more personal visions in research frequently initiate projects that cannot be replicated or even used by someone else. His guiding question with regard to research methodology is, "Can someone else do it?" (B. Logan, personal communication, May 17, 2005)

Where art-based research and science share this focus on a clearly defined method that can be used by others, the former process is by nature characterized by endless variations of style, interpretation, and outcomes. While many areas of science strive for replication and constancy of results in experiments, the arts welcome the inevitable variations that emerge from systematic practice. Science tends to reduce experience to core principles while art amplifies and expands, and I see the two as complementary within the total complex of knowing. Within what has become known as the "new science" of physics there is a widely recognized acceptance of this interplay.

As we compare the different domains of artistic and scientific knowing, it is essential to avoid the tendency to reduce one to the other and the assumption that one is more truthful. It is more intriguing and ultimately more productive to look at the similarities

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and differences between the approaches and how they can inform one another. Where science focuses on what can be objectively measured, art emphasizes the unique and immeasurable aesthetic qualities of a particular work. Yet art is characterized by consistent formal patterns and structural elements that can be generalized beyond the experience of individuals, and the new physics reveals how physical phenomena are far more variable and subject to contextual influences than once believed. Both art and science are thoroughly empirical and immersed in the physical manipulation of material substances that are carefully observed.

The translation of art experiences into descriptive language can present a number of challenges to the art-based researcher. The student who deeply believes in the power of arts to access realms of experience beyond the reach of descriptive language might ask: "Do we have to translate artistic insights into words? Didn't Merleau-Ponty (1962) say that the words of science and all other attempts at description are ways of 'concealing phenomena rather than elucidating them' (p. 21)? Isn't the pure art experience in movement, sound, or paint, the ultimate truth that is lost when we try to communicate it in another language? Aren't you contradicting the core premise of art-based knowing by attempting verbal descriptions?"

Although I agree that artistic knowing is not something that can always be reduced to language and that there is considerable truth to the phenomenological declaration that "the original text is perception itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 21), I do persist in the effort to speak and write about what I do in the arts. The original perception in this respect provides the stimulus for the unfolding of thought and the ongoing process of interpretation. My efforts to describe the process of art-based research in words are also practical and motivated by a desire to convey information and ideas that are hopefully useful to others. Spoken and written language is thus a pragmatic tool, not a prerequisite of validity. I welcome and look forward to future inquiries by art-based researchers, working in artistic disciplines such as sound and movement, who strive to communicate outcomes in ways that may not rely on descriptive language. Perhaps these inquiries will draw artists even closer to researchers in science who similarly seek alternatives to the verbal description of outcomes.

As we develop new methods of art-based research, it is my hope that we can pursue our goals in ways that lessen the divide between art and science and between different kinds of research. I favor a simple focus on doing "research," systematically examining and passionately imagining phenomena in whatever ways address the needs of the particular situation.

♦ *An Art-Based Exploration of a Dream*

Let me give an example of how the ways of knowing that are unique to the creative imagination can work together with language and more conventional research methods. The object of this inquiry is a dream that itself offers unique insights into experience.

I wake in the morning with a dream that enacts a situation that I experienced the previous evening with a new twist. I gave a lecture that apparently went well, but in my dream about the lecture people were sleeping, talking, and heading for the restrooms. The dream embodied the uncertainty I sensed within myself about what had happened the night before and displayed it to me through striking and disturbing images. The unpleasant

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nature of these images got my attention, aroused fears and discomforts.

The dream is a way of knowing, and it stimulates responses and attempts to understand it that collaborate with other modes of cognition. I want to get to know the dream in a more complete way, so I discuss it with others and the conversations generate new insights. I discover how talking is a way of thinking and knowing and how important insights emerge from the flow of conversation focused on a particular experience. The process of speaking with another person naturally evokes different perspectives, and there is a spontaneity that does not occur when I try to collect my thoughts about something in isolation. Relating to the dream through conversation helps me realize how all of our senses and ways of communication play an integrated role in the process of understanding experience, and it offsets the idea that words and subsequent interpretations conceal the essence of an experience.

Stimulated by how talking about the dream expands my relationship to it, I respond creatively through movement, interpreting the dream through my body. As I move like one of the figures heading for the restroom, I feel an urgency to follow my instincts, to honor them and access their intelligence. I am surprised by the sense of relief that this brings and I feel energized, physically connected to the space, more relaxed, confident, and aware of how movement has contributed to my understanding.

I respond to the figures in the audience by enacting their postures and gestures with my body. To do this I have to envision them carefully and observe the details of their expression. I make use of the artistic and psychological tool of empathy to imagine myself as one of them, to project myself into their places and sense what they are feeling. As I enact their bodily expressions, aesthetic sensibilities help me get my expression as close as I can to theirs. I feel a correspondence with their expression that is much nearer than before. I transcend my existing attitude toward them and start to see the scene in a completely different way. I feel comfortable and actually enjoy imagining the dream experience from the perspective of the sleeping audience members.

I decide to use the artistic device of personification as a way of entering into a dialogue with one of the sleeping figures, of trying to get even closer to it through poetic speech and maybe it will tell me something about itself. I personify the dream image, speak to it, and say how engaging it has changed my attitude and how differently I feel about it and the dream as a whole.

The personified figure speaks to me and says, "Relax. Go easy on yourself. Be like us and focus on breathing. Try to stop judging how you did in the lecture. Join us here and take it easy."

I pass up the temptation to ask the sleeping figure what it really thought about the lecture, sensing that it would just laugh at me and say, "There you go again. You've got to let go. We're just here, and we can teach you how to be more completely here too."

The dream is a way of knowing, and the same can be said about the process of describing it to another person, enacting it, dialoguing with dream figures, and so forth. We can continue to know it even better through painting, poetry, vocal improvisation, and various other expressive modalities, each offering its unique interpretation and understanding of the experience. This is an example of art-based knowing and inquiry, and to the extent that I engage the dream methodically and document the results, I am researching the experience. All of these responses to the dream make use of language and various forms of cognitive analysis.

The inquiry into the nature of the dream might simply stick with descriptions of how I engaged it with different expressive faculties and how they compare to one another.

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It might be helpful to make comparative mathematical entries on a scale determining the degree to which a particular way of working helped me see new things about the dream or get closer to it. Or I might ask co-researchers to witness my expressions and rate their reactions that can be compared to mine. This relatively simple activity of exploring and documenting different ways of engaging a dream shows how the arts, spoken language, numerical analysis, and other modes of thought can interact naturally in the process furthering understanding.

The very ordinary dream that I just described can be viewed as an illustration that helps us understand how art-based knowing and inquiry take place. This example also suggests the largely unrecognized intelligence of dreams that many still see as meaningless and nothing but a discharge of excess energy. The artistic responses to the dream and the feelings of discomfort it evokes transform my relationship to the experience and take it to a new place. Making the effort to interact with the experience in different ways is thus a prerequisite for new learning.

All the methods that I have used to respond to the dream and get to know it better can be applied to knowing and researching a problem that I am having at work, to making a decision, to acquiring a better understanding of why a particular person or group of people act as they do, to gaining a new perspective on a seemingly irresolvable problem or conflict, to assessing what might be happening in a particular situation, and to planning future strategies. These art-based tools and ways of knowing take us out of our habitual responses to things.

In reaction to the preceding example it might be asked whether focusing on dream images and other distinctly personal phenomena is likely to encourage the self-absorption that I guard against in art-based research. I reply by suggesting that the way we treat the most mundane or apparently inconsequential experiences may have the most to offer in suggesting a larger vision of social transformation. One of the most valuable features of art-based research might be its potential for offering very different ways of approaching the most serious problems that we face in the world today.

Art embraces ordinary things with an eye for their unusual and extraordinary qualities. The artist looks at banal phenomena from a perspective of aesthetic significance and gives them a value that they do not normally have. This way of relating to things may have more social significance than one might at first imagine.

For example, when I give the dream image its autonomy and work with it as a creative partner, I convey a sense of respect for its existence. Can I do the same in my relations with others? Will I be able to extend the same compassion and desire for empathy to the person who constantly annoys me or who opposes everything I do? Is it possible for me to suspend judgment in tense situations with others and just do my best to interpret the encounters in more creative and new ways? Maybe I can try and just listen as openly as possible with the goal of learning something new about what the person is trying to say to me.

The work is always challenging since we are generally not easily disposed toward establishing creative relationships with the things we oppose and to possibly changing attitudes that have defined who we are. Most of us find it very difficult to let go of our habitual ways of viewing the world, and it is more than likely that we manifest the same tendencies in our dealings with others. Change and insight in the personal realm are increasingly being recognized as a key source of corresponding social change. Therefore, the way in which we treat the humble images of our art-based research may have a definite impact on how we engage the world.

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Rather than trying to fix problems with our points of view, we might focus more on knowing them in creative ways as with the drumming example described above. This expanded comprehension of experience, and how we go about pursuing it, may be more helpful than proving our positions in an absolute sense. As with science, the validity of art-based knowing and inquiry is ultimately determined by the community of believers who experience firsthand what the arts can do to further human understanding.

♦ *Learning From Artists*

I encourage art-based researchers to immerse themselves in studies of how artists research personal and social experiences and how art has served as a primary agent of change in the world. It has been said writers are profound psychologists; the same can be said of artists as researchers.

My artist mentor Truman Nelson committed his life to writing novels dealing with revolutionary themes and figures. He described how his "revolutionary art is motivated by a desire to change American society" (Schafer, 1989, p. 275). Truman felt that through intensely personal and creative interpretations of historical events, the artist is able to go beyond facts and self-reflection to express conditions that are "interchangeable with other people" (p. 276). In writing his books Truman experienced a creative tension between art and reality, and he liked to cite Thoreau's effort to "make fact flower into truth." In describing this method he says: "There is an overruling psychological truth that can come out of my absorption of the total empirical substance that I am transmitting" (p. 276). The artistic or imaginal reality that emerges from this process was to him superior to the literal account of what occurred.

When people challenge the process of researching human experience through art, I like to describe Truman's belief that many of the greatest contributions to human understanding have been generated by the arts. He also reinforces the point that I make in *Art-Based Research* (McNiff, 1998a) about how fiction can take us even closer to experiences than verbatim descriptions and the tedious and formalistic literalism that pervades case study literature. Fictional explorations allow us to penetrate more freely and intimately into the particular subject matter, to identify with the characters and situations in new ways, and to speak from the perspectives of others. Methods such as fictional interviews, which can accompany literal ones in a research project, might also offer the most universally accessible forms of art-based research. One of my doctoral students (R. McGrath, personal communication, August 3, 2006) described how this method helped him to integrate a wide range of data gathered from many different interviews.

In the area of nonfiction, documentary films offer many examples of how carefully researched artistic projects can change society. Morgan Spurlock's (2004) *Super Size Me* is an exemplar for any person exploring how art and science can collaborate in examining a particular phenomenon with the goal of changing human behavior. Spurlock conducts an experiment in which he eats food only from McDonalds for 30 days and documents the physiological changes in his body—weight, cholesterol levels, and so forth. I was delighted when I saw this film, and I recommend it widely as a research model emerging from contemporary art and culture.

I also cite the work of Charlotte Salomon as an example of how art can plumb the depths of the personal soul while inciting others to creative action. After many personal tragedies and before being taken to

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Auschwitz where she died in her mid-20s, Charlotte chose to explore the full spectrum of her life experiences through a series of 769 paintings with accompanying text. This work has been published as an autobiographical play, *Charlotte: Life or Theater?* (Salomon, 1981). In this extraordinary work Charlotte strives to transform her life into what her mentor, Alfred Wolfsohn, in the tradition of Nietzsche, described as "theater," a form of art that gives existence a greater meaning. I have never experienced anything that compares to this systematic, comprehensive, deep, and creative examination of a period of personal life through art.

The work of Wolfsohn in researching the range of human vocal expression, as furthered by Paul Newham (1993, 1998) and the Roy Hart Theater, is another of the great examples of recent art-based research.

I encourage students to study how artists operate instinctively as researchers who use whatever methods of inquiry and communication further their purposes. Nevertheless, I always encounter a certain reluctance to recognize and trust personal creative resources. In response to these doubts I say to students: "What particular artistic project or series of activities can you do to further your understanding of this issue? What can you do that is uniquely yours and that grows from the authority of your experience? What feels most natural to you? Where does your authentic expertise lie? What is it that you have done that others have not experienced with the same range and intensity?"

This approach to creating a method is much more challenging than following a standardized procedure. Even the published guides to phenomenological and heuristic research give unvarying stages that students everywhere are adopting without understanding the philosophical concepts and traditions that inform them. In addition to the reliance on formulas for inquiry, schools universally organize research courses by comparing preexisting types—sometimes art-based research is even listed as one of the options. The student is then expected to conduct research according to one of the existing approaches or in some cases to mix more than one. In my experience all of the different ways of inquiry have the ability to inform one another and help the researcher design a study that best serves the particular issue. Artistic knowing can be heuristic, phenomenological, hermeneutic, imaginal, archetypal, empirical, statistical, and more.

Within contemporary artistic training there is an assumption that one studies various traditions, but then builds upon them to create a new and personal method of inquiry. The search for a method, in art and research, is invariably characterized by a crucible of tensions, struggles, a certain degree of chaos, and even the destruction of cherished assumptions. I encourage "creating outside the lines" as contrasted to following the circumscribed procedures of a textbook approach to research. Invariably the encounter with this experience is the transformative engine that carries the researcher to significant new discoveries. My book *Trust the Process: An Artist's Guide to Letting Go* (McNiff, 1998b) was informed by these experiences and the realization that if a person stays with the creative process, it will generate unexpected results, the value of which are sometimes even proportionate to the degree of struggle.

Just as science assists art-based research through its emphasis on systematic inquiry, art enhances the process of discovery in science by its responsiveness to the unexpected. As W. E. Beveridge (1953) describes in *The Art of Scientific Investigation,* original knowledge occurs when ideas are placed in new relationships to one another, a process that typically requires crossing the boundaries of previously separated domains, such as those constructed between art and science.

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Artistic inquiry, whether it is within the context of research or an individual person's creative expression, typically starts with the realization that you cannot define the final outcome when you are planning to do the work. As contrasted to scientific methods, you generally know little about the end of an artistic experiment when you are at the beginning. In the creative process, the most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly, and even against the will of the creator. The artist may have a sense or intuition of what might be discovered or of what is needed, and in some cases even a conviction, but the defining aspect of knowing through art, as I try to demonstrate in the examples given in this chapter, is the emanation of meaning through the process of creative expression.

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