
empty canvas : wondering mind

an artisan's workbook

compiled and written by miriam louisa simons

for all the extraordinary students
I have been privileged to work with and befriend

you asked for it: here it is

may it nurture your own creative questions
as they form the ground beneath your feet



Blind Men on a Log bridge
By Hakuin Ekaku
(The Gitter Collection)

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9 notes & anecdotes

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As long as creation dominates your existence, you will keep growing and evolving. Evolution thwarts entropy, decay and aging.

Deepak Chopra



NOTES & ANECDOTES

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6	for visual learners	18	visual induction 1
7	abstraction and projection	19	visual induction 2
7	the rhino and the baboon	19	want more practice?
8	an impossible object?	20	the Muller-Lyer illusion
8	invent your own impossible figures – and pictures	21	the Ponzo illusion
9	stage an interview	21	big, bigger, biggest
11	filling-in	22	which line is longer?
11	finding	22	parallels or curves?
11	matching	23	the vase/faces illusion
12	categorizing	23	the reversing Necker cube
12	pattern completion	24	the duck/rabbit paradox
13	save and restore ...	24	the 'wife/mistress' image
13	inverse drawing	24	mirror, mirror ...
14	rotating dice	25	the spreading effect
15	find the other view	26	stereoscopic images
16	folded pattern	28	mystery pictures
		29	figure and background 1
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index of activities (cont.)

BOOK 3: wildsight – the innocent eye

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7	the body circuit	23	less is more
9	one object, intimately	24	windowpane drawings
9	shadows and soda bottles	26	a list of light
10	tree project	26	an en-lightened vocabulary
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13	'not-looking' drawings	28	push-pull drawings
14	peeking allowed	29	ladder of light 1
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15	25 versions of your hand	30	figure-of-four
15	microscopic self-portrait	30	'dem dry bones' revisited
15	life-size self portrait	31	paper bag scrunch
15	introduce speed	31	the texture trail
15	use a metronome	31	texture hunt
15	limit your lines	31	textured impressions
15	ant antics	32	texture eyes 1
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16	manic magazine drawings	32	texture and wash
16	pass-it-on portraits	33	paint-chip hunt
18	outlines and inlines	33	color in collage
18	scribbles in space	34	ladder of light 4
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23	mystery drawings (and paintings)	38	befriend a native neighbor
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index of activities (cont.)

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12	the pink pig	30	the big brain picture
13	inner images	31	esp drawings
13	mandala magic	32	homage to Andre Breton
14	common senses and secret senses	33	daytime dreamtime
18	mapping the journey	34	night-time dreamtime
18	colors in mind	35	the 101 problem
20	one-hue improvisation	36	the dance of the universe
21	musical mind 1	38	through the eyes of an electron ...

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BOOK 5: making fun of play

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9	tissue stains	25	disciplined doodling
9	splatter and draw	25	doodles with a purpose
10	water painting	26	line and verb
10	beautiful blots	27	luminous doodles
11	monoprints	28	pulp painting
11	frame-ups	29	web of pulp
12	suminagashi	30	platter of pulp
12	make up a dice game	31	washi bowls
13	free-associate	31	finger puppets
13	the fickle finger of fate	32	weave a painting
14	quotes and poems and people	33	the tallest tower
15	inspirational news – a new synthesis	33	invent a toy
15	pics and poems	34	make a maze
16	juxtapose	34	a moment-a-day book
16	make a 'follow your fancy' book	36	wondering with wax
17	invent a new game	36	sgraffito
17	tanagrams	37	wax prints with pipe-cleaners
18	from tanagrams to calligrams	38	bind and dye
19	circle, triangle and square	38	fold and dye
19	a rose is a cork	39	stitch and dye
20	rainbow circle	40	cardboard cut-outs
21	throw the dice	40	glue relief blocks
22	shape-seeking	41	carved eraser stamps
23	rainbow poems	41	cut and weave and stitch
		42	copy and color and stitch ...

index of activities (cont.)

BOOK 6: creative constraints

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8	shape-making	28	lines with feeling
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9	shapes in relationship	28	patterns in line
10	shape and surface texture	29	pattern-making with line
10	tactile shapes	29	line in motion
12	the 'simple' sunflower	30	linear gestures
13	flower of life	31	what kind of script?
16	snowflakes and stained glass windows	32	reinvent the alphabet
18	feeling our way into form	32	write a picture
18	forming forms	32	calligrams in code
19	form and function	33	pictograms without pictures
19	forms at work	33	wondrous wordsmithing
20	moving forms	34	throw some light on light
20	make a mobile	34	playing with light
20	make a spinning toy	35	patterned light
21	make a people-carrier	35	playing with pattern
22	soma cube constructions	36	light as magician
22	invent a new helper	37	make an illuminarium
24	design and make a precious package	38	white magic
25	design a dwelling	39	ladder of light drawings
27	line language	40	an aleatory adventure
		41	a color compass

index of activities (cont.)

BOOK 7: outside the square

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8	deep space	23	curious cubism
9	lining-up space	25	Thiery's figure
10	folded space	26	bird's eye views
11	reflected space	26	x-ray views
12	ambiguous space	27	dissected and magnified views
13	colored space		
15	time slow	29	inside & outside views
16	time fast	29	a fly's eye view
17	make a flip-book	30	borrow someone else's eyes
18	make a film	31	fifteen sets of eyes
19	make a time-line	32	poems + pictures + poems
20	present a <i>phadas</i>	33	Janus masks 1
	performance	35	Janus masks 2
21	time travel – distant	36	the number 11 problem
21	time travel – recent		

index of activities (cont.)

BOOK 8: creating from wonder

page

- 4 **unfold your myth:** me, myself, I
- 6 **veritable vestments:** stitch up a life-vest
- 8 **Buddha-body:** my body book
- 10 **the heart of the story:** the 'nub' of me
- 12 **galactic grey matter:** cartooning the brain
- 14 **a sanctuary for the secret senses:** the Sensorium project
- 16 **playing with process:** process, play and practice
- 18 **metaphorically speaking:** process as metaphor
- 20 **objets trouvées:** nature, culture, and 'found' objects
- 22 **deconstructing & recycling:** deconstruct to reconstruct
- 24 **shape-shifting:** changing places
- 26 **quantum realities:** enter a new universe
- 28 **culture and creativity:** create a culture of creativity
- 30 **the three questions:**
 - what really matters to me?
 - why does it matter?
 - how can it be expressed?

index of activities by visual language element

For readers who are curious about visual language and wish to extend their fluency, this index is arranged into the areas of focus formally studied in the art classroom: *color, tone, form, shape, line, texture* and *pattern*. Because they are topics explored in some depth within this curriculum, I have also included *light, space, movement* and *time*. Many activities appear in more than one list for reasons that will be evident, but in general the activities are listed according to the focus of instruction.

color	book	page
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an aleatory adventure	6	40
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'dem dry bones revisited	3	30
paper bag scrunch	3	31
ladder of light 4	3	34
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playing with pattern	6	35
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make an illuminarium	6	37
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ladder of light drawings	6	39
an aleatory adventure	6	40
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form

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texture eyes 2	3	32
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the tallest tower	5	33
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form and function	6	19
forms at work	6	19
moving forms	6	20
make a mobile	6	20
make a spinning toy	6	20
make a people-carrier	6	21
soma cube constructions	6	22
invent a new helper	6	23
a precious package	6	24
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curious cubism	7	23
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Janus masks 1	7	33
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shape

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10 + 10 + 10 drawings	3	37
befriend a native neighbor	3	38
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from tanagrams to calligrams	5	18
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shape-seeking	5	22
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line

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life-size self portrait	3	15
introduce speed	3	15
use a metronome	3	15
limit your lines	3	15
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more ant antics	3	16
manic magazine drawings	3	16
pass-it-on portraits	3	16
outlines and inlines	3	18
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mystery drawings	3	23
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windowpane drawings	3	24
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line and verb	5	26
luminous doodles	5	27
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lines with feeling	6	28
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pattern-making with line	6	29
line in motion	6	29
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reinvent the alphabet	6	32
write a picture	6	32
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pictograms without pictures	6	33
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borrow someone else's eyes	7	30

texture

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everything is itself	3	10
the texture trail	3	31
texture hunt	3	31
textured impressions	3	31
texture eyes 1	3	32
texture eyes 2	3	32
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10 + 10 + 10 drawings	3	37
befriend a native neighbor	3	38
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tactile shapes	6	10
lines with feeling	6	28
touchy-feely lines	6	28
linear gestures	6	30

pattern

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matching	2	11
categorizing	2	12
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tree project	3	10
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compost painting	5	8
suminagashi	5	12
disciplined doodling	5	25
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bind and dye	5	38
fold and dye	5	38
stitch and dye	5	39
cardboard cut-outs	5	40
glue relief blocks	5	40
carved eraser stamps	5	41
shape-making	6	8
the 'simple' sunflower	6	12
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make an illuminarium	6	37
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light

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an en-lightened vocabulary	3	26
'dem dry bones' revisited	3	30
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time

	book	page
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space

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Thiery's figure	7	25
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inside & outside views	7	29
a fly's eye view	7	29
enter a new universe	8	26

movement

	book	page
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push-pull drawings	3	28
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'not-looking' action drawing	3	36
musical mind 1	4	21
musical mind 2	4	22
line and verb	5	26
invent a toy	5	33
form and function	6	19
forms at work	6	19
moving forms	6	20
make a mobile	6	20
make a spinning toy	6	20
make a people-carrier	6	21
line language	6	27
line in motion	6	29
linear gestures	6	30
make an illuminarium	6	37
time slow	7	15
time fast	7	16
make a flip-book	7	17
make a film	7	18

technical books and tips

With today's easy availability of information in all technical areas via the internet and its search engines it seems unnecessary to overload this series with 'how-to' instructions. An important part of the creative process is researching and experimenting as we journey – and it is often in those activities that we discover new ideas and inspirations. The books listed here are those which were useful in my own learning, and while there have been many more books on these topics published since, I still find them worthy companions.

papercraft (recipes for mixing pulp etc):

(also good info on suminagashi and making artist's books)

Paper Pleasures

Faith Shannon
(Angus and Robertson)

shibori:

Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing
Wada, Rice and Barton (Kodansha International)

shibori, batik and more

Surface Design for Fabrics
Proctor and Lew (Revised ed 1995, Univ of Washington Press)

shibori tips:

- Wet the fabric before tying, clamping or stitching.
- Make sure the bands are tight for clear lines – particularly on fine fabric.
- Wet dyed fabric looks darker than when dry. Test-dry a scrap before undoing your bindings or stitches.
- If using several colors always start with the lightest.
- Household dyes aren't very 'fast' so wash your dyed items separately, in cool water.

batik:

The Technique of Batik
Noel Dyrenforth (re-issue B T Batsford)

suminagashi:

Suminagashi: The Japanese Art of Marbling
Ann Chambers (Thames and Hudson)

printmaking:

including glue relief printing

Basic Printmaking Techniques
Bernard Toale (Davis)

Painting Without a Brush
David Ferry (London, Quarto)

technical books and tips, cont

carving eraser stamps:

Learning by Heart
Corita Kent & Jan Steward (Bantam)

weaving/interlacing:

Interlacing: The Elemental Fabric
Jack Lenor Larsen (Kodansha International)

artist's books:

The Art of Kveta Pacovska
Michael Neugebauer (Verlag AG/North-South Books)

Coleur Coleurs
Kveta Pacovska (Editions du Seuil)

sacred geometry:

Crystal and Dragon: The Cosmic Two-Step
David Wade (Devon, Green Books)

Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice
Robert Lawlor (Thames and Hudson)

Sacred Architecture
A T Mann (Dorset, Element Books)

The Power of Limits
Gyorgy Doczi (Shambhala)

quantum physics and art:

La Dance de L'Univers
Marie Simone Detoeuf (Paris, GLACS)

hues for color wheels:

How to See Color and Paint It
Arthur Stern (Watson-Guptill)

Alizarin crimson
Cadmium red *light*
Cadmium orange
Cadmium yellow *pale*

Phthalocyanine green
Phthalocyanine blue
Ultramarine blue
Titanium white

Please don't accept substitutes – these colors have special properties necessary for the accurate mixing of secondary and tertiary hues.

recipe for stiffening silk or washi:

Dissolve 1 tbsp cornstarch in 1 tbsp cold water. Add 200ml boiling water. Heat - stirring continuously - until thick and clear. Remove from heat and add 1 tbsp PVA glue. Stir, and set aside to cool. This makes the basic mix, which can be further diluted depending on your purposes. Keeps well in the fridge for a week or so, or longer if you add a few drops of formalin.

bibliography

This bibliography is intended to provide a general overview of the books and articles that have helped to shape the ideas expressed in **empty canvas : wondering mind**. More details of those used as direct references are listed at the end of each section.

The **educational** and **philosophical** writings of J. Krishnamurti have been seminal in the development of the approach taken. In particular:

Education and the Significance of Life
This Matter of Culture
Letters to the Schools
The Impossible Question
Krishnamurti's Notebook
Beyond Violence

The ideas of **physicist** David Bohm, whose life and work explored the nature of thought and its relationship to social and environmental problems, have been greatly influential. Essential works include:

Thought as a System
Changing Consciousness (with Mark Edwards)
Science, Order, and Creativity (with F. David Peat)
Wholeness and the Implicate Order
The Ending of Time (with J. Krishnamurti)
On Dialogue
On Creativity (Edited by Lee Nichols)

Marion Milner's writings have been treasured as rare examples of a synthesis between the disciplines of art, psychology, and ruthless scrutiny of the workings of her own thinking and perception. Recommended: *On Not Being Able to Paint*; *A Life of One's Own*; *An Experiment in Leisure*; *Eternity's Sunrise*.

Cont ...

Whilst I have rightly or wrongly avoided 'belonging' to any spiritual or religious group, my personal philosophy has been significantly enriched by the insights inherent in Zen Buddhism. Particularly by those expressed by writers such as D. T. Suzuki, S. Suzuki, Alan Watts, David Brazier, Thich Nhat Hanh, John Daido Looi, and of course the historical enigmatic masters themselves.

The influence of ideas expressed and put into practice by **educational** pioneers such as Dewey, Montessori, and Steiner, is acknowledged. In the contemporary context, the following writers have been influential:

Sylvia Ashton Warner, *Spinster*

Peter Abbs, University of Sussex

Walter Lipman (especially *Philosophy in the Classroom*)

Colin Rose, *Accelerated Learning*

Stephen C. Clem and Z. Vance Wilson (National Association of Independent Schools, USA)

Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind; the Theory of Multiple Intelligences*

Guy Claxton, *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind*

Writers in the general **scientific** category who have provided original and provocative input include:

Colin Blakemore, *The Mind Machine*

Jacob Bronowski, *The Origins of Knowledge and the Imagination*

Marvin Minsky, (M. I. T) *The Society of Mind*

Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*

Bill McKibbin, *The End of Nature*

Dana Zohar, *The Quantum Self, and The Quantum Society*

Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind*

In the field of **anthropology** these writers have been of interest:

Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture, the Silent Language*

Jean Liedloff, *The Continuum Concept*

Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*

Cont ...

In the related fields of **sociobiology** and **mythology**:

Claire Fisher, *The Anatomy of Love*

Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee*

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *The Masks of God*

Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child*, *Evolution's End*

In the world of **psychology**, the giants Freud and Jung must be acknowledged, particularly Jung's *Man and His Symbols*

In **contemporary psychology** the following books stand out as contributing significantly:

Robert Ornstein and Paul Erlich, *New World, New Mind*

Robert Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness*

Arno Gruen, *The Betrayal of the Self*

David Brazier, *Zen Therapy*

In the area of **cognitive research**:

Jerome Bruner (Harvard University), *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*

Edward Hill, *The Language of Drawing*

R. L. Gregory, *Mind in Science; Mirrors in Mind; The Intelligent Eye*

George Nelson, *How to See: Visual Adventures in a World God Never Made*

Edi Lanners, *Illusions*

Jim Adams, *Conceptual Blockbusting*

Many artists, psychologists, and philosophers have written on the phenomenon of **creativity**. The following have been important to the development of this work:

Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Artist Within, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*

Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*

Jean Houston, *The Possible Human*

Jan Steward and Corita Kent, *Learning by Heart*

Peter Evans and Geoff Deehan, *The Keys to Creativity*

E. H. Gombrich, as above.

Cont ...

Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*
Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*
Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*
Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking and Art and Visual Perception*
B. Ghiselin, *The Creative Process*
Marilee Zdenick, *The Right Brain Experience*
Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*
P. E. Vernon, *Creativity*
Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*

In the wider area of the **visual arts** the work of the following writers is acknowledged:

Robert H. McKim (Stanford University), *Experiences in Visual Thinking*
Natalie d'Arbeloff, *An Artist's Workbook*
Karl Gerstner, *The Forms of Color*
Peter London, *No More Secondhand Art*
Judith Cornell, *Drawing the Light from Within*
Frederick Franck, *The Zen of Seeing: Seeing/Drawing as Meditation*
Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw*
Ajit Mookerjee, *Yoga Art*
Gyorgy Doczi, *The Power of Limits*
Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*
Robert Kaupelis, *Experimental Drawing*
Mona Brookes, *Drawing for Older Children and Teens*
Namgyal Rinpoche, *Unfolding Through Art*
Fred Gettings, *You are an Artist: a practical approach to art*
Judith Wilde and Richard Wilde, *Visual Literacy*
Douglas Cooper, *Drawing and Perceiving*

notes about this series

the holistic curriculum and the 'middle ground'

empty canvas : wondering mind presents activities that might bridge the gap between the provision of knowledge as required by conventional examinations in Art and Design, and the unfolding of a student's art education (*educare* – to draw out) in the wider, holistic sense. We could call this gap the 'middle ground'.

The student's own education can flower only through his or her own ability to inquire; the art of questioning is vital to the living of an intelligent life. Fundamental to the activities in this series is an attitude of mind that is wondering. The pedagogy and methodology of art and design are explored via activities that question perception, intentions, expectations, prejudices, and practical processes, rather than directing students' energies towards the production of prescribed 'artworks'.

As this inquiry unfolds, it reveals parallels between the attitudes and gestures necessary for creative work in the studio, and those that serve well in the living of a life crafted by intelligent questioning. These parallels are noted and questioned. Important wonderings arise, such as the possibility that crafting a truly creative life might be synonymous with the unfolding of consciousness – and what that might mean.

mapping out the curriculum

What if I'm only seeing part of the picture?

To begin with we explore how little we really notice, how perception is conditioned to see partially and how what we see is largely determined by what we look for.

What if I could learn to see more?

Having established that we don't see fully, we then experiment with ways that might help us to look. Looking isn't the same as seeing, but it's the starting point. Our first looking experiments focus outwards, on the *as-it-is* of external things. Seeing without shadows, seeing without preconception or label, requires a certain way of looking, an open wondering way.

What if I looked inside as well?

We carry this way of wondering next into the inner world of the secret senses, the world of the imagination, intuition, the uneducated layers of consciousness. Successful exploration of the 'outer' and the 'inner' worlds is to a large degree dependent upon our ability to relax, to let go of mental and physical tension.

Cont ...

What if the best way to work was to play?

The best way to relax and open and wonder is to play. Play doesn't necessarily mean goofing around; it's likely to be hard work, but wrapped up in playful pleasure. We are free to play because we do not have to meet pre-conceived outcomes.

What if constraints were genuine helpers?

To play effectively we need some limitations, some guidelines within which to be wild and free. So we check out the ways that limits can empower our explorations, and whilst climbing about on structures and scaffolds we may open up fresh and unfamiliar vistas: new ways of seeing.

What if I looked from different perspectives?

Exploring these new ways of seeing, we may uncover insights into the way that altered perspectives create altered realities. Hidden within these unlikely and unfamiliar points of view, we might discover one that resonates with our own inner artscape.

How could I weave it all together...?

And finally, we put it all together: our looking, seeing, playing within structures and on scaffolds, plus some new perspectives, and explore the playing field of larger creative projects. At every moment we have the opportunity to engage wondering mind, to listen to our secret senses, to watch our miraculous hands in action, and to create for its own splendid sake: the sake of Creation.

personal motives

What do I hope to accomplish by making the thoughts, experiences and activities that constitute this book, available?

On my own path as a student of perception and creativity, I often longed for a companion – a companion that could provide suggestions about places to begin, questions to explore, processes to experiment with. All the art books available to me seemed to assume that I wanted to learn how to make the predictable kinds of paintings and artworks I wasn't at all interested in. With the exception of the books of Betty Edwards and Frederick Franck, there were none available to me (at that time) that invited one to explore ways of seeing. And none at all that emphasized the 'what-if' process of wondering mind at work across a wide variety of media and activity.

The same longing followed me into the classroom when I began teaching. There were books of activities, yes, but they were for the most part technically focused. One needed a vast array in order to cover the whole field, and the time was seldom available for sorting and sifting what might be useful from what was not.

And importantly, it seemed that a resource such as this might fruitfully explore that 'middle ground' referred to above. If this material will make it easier for young teachers, and for artisans of any age and stage, to both practice and share their insights into the creative process, I will have achieved my lifelong aim.

anecdotes

In early drafts of this material, each grouping of activities was introduced by a few personal stories and observations which I eventually decided to edit out. Keeping the text uncluttered was my priority. However, with the encouragement of my students, who insist that the personal experiences of their teachers are relevant and informative for them, I am including some of the 'cuts' here. Perhaps they will also be of interest to some budding artisans, if only to affirm that someone without formal schooling in art and design can end up teaching the subject as well as creating a successful studio practice.

sketching the background

There's something to be learned from the artisan at work in the studio and it isn't to do with how to craft a perfect pot or a pretty picture. It's to do with the attitudes and the ways of 'looking' of the artisan, and the relationship between the artisan and the object being made. It's to do with those things that go together to form a foundation upon which creating might happen.

Inquiry into the creative state has never been far from my mind. It seemed to be hard-wired into my brain, and found its expressions in the pages of my early notebooks. Some - like the above - date back to my studio days as a free-lance fashion designer. Others appear even earlier, when I was a fledgling teacher in the classrooms of state-run schools. Eventually, at about the time I began teaching at the tertiary level, I began to attempt to organize my 'research' tentatively, scarcely aware that I was bringing formality to the inquiry.

First I decided to take note of the states of mind experienced when studio work was flowing in that almost miraculous way I associated with *really* creating, as opposed to manufacturing, or reproducing. Attitude seemed crucial to this dynamic.

That inevitably led me to notice that there were certain ways of looking, or 'gestures' that were made by the looking apparatus, and I tried to pinpoint them. This was difficult, as they seemed to occur when my critical observation had its gaze 'on hold' - or was operating elsewhere. Often the gestures would dissolve when the sharp focus of my measuring awareness was directed at them, rather like the way a stereoscopic image will fade away when one tries to examine it too closely. (This made me think of the way quantum physicists talked about being unable to measure quantum phenomena, of 'quantum indeterminacy'.)

Cont ...

The third area of my research was to notice the qualities of my relationship with the piece being worked or crafted.

Early jottings written in old notebooks include:

- playing the 'what if?' game
- suspending my preconceptions
- looking 'widely' rather than with tuned focus
- being able to turn limitations into advantages
- 'just pretending' – following my fancy
- looking for unlikely connections
- looking 'back-to-front' – seeing space as object
- looking inside-out – seeing from the center outwards
- looking from a planar perspective
- looking with foreground as background
- looking from everywhere at once, eg cubism
- being patient with the ho hum bits
- finely crafting, as though every work was the masterwork
- being receptive to the materials, letting them reveal their story
- being respectful of the tools, seeing them as my hands and brain
- being ready to release the end result and move on to fresh work
- focusing on artisanship, not product
- being able to perceive the 'whatness' of things – studies or materials
- seeing where things meet – edges
- sensing when to 'hang in there,' and when to withdraw, rest

From lists like this, I began to make summaries of key words:

Attitudes: *playful, accepting, wondering, questioning, suspending, patience, detachment, receptivity*

Ways of looking: *'wide', unlikely connections, unlikely relationships, back-to-front, inside-out, foreground as background, planar, edges, multi-views, detecting 'whatness'*

Ways of crafting: *care, artisanship, relationship, communing*

Cont ...

For a long time I was, to a great degree, emotionally dependent on my studio practice. This was hardly surprising, because that involvement brought me a kind of sanity that would overflow into my larger life. Equally addictive was the *curiously sharp sense of joy or mild ecstasy that comes when you find the particular form for your creation ... the experience of 'This is the way things are meant to be'*, as Rollo May puts it. I knew that joy and ecstasy intimately. The main question that haunted me though, was whether one could experience that kind of coherence and joy in the whole of life, because clearly there were times when the studio experience was absent from one's life. And also there was a niggling suspicion that this joy was not 'true' if it was dependent upon something. What about all the human beings who would never see the inside of a studio – were they to be excluded from knowing this joy? I turned my inquiry more seriously towards the examination of those attitudes and perceptual gestures that I had isolated.

I researched everything I could get my hands on that addressed the issues – creating, joy, psychological attitudes, perception, and the relationships of these to real education. When I came upon the writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, I knew I'd found a goldmine. They contained insights that I could acknowledge as true from the results of my own inquiries, and there were many more that would help me to find the 'right' questions to continue my wonderings.

What is needed is not philosophy or belief,
but for the mind to be free to investigate, to discover, and to be creative.

Krishnamurti's inspiration led me to pack up my studio, leave the relative security my teaching posts and my reputation as a fiber artist in New Zealand, and join the staff at one of the schools set up to experiment with his educational vision – Brockwood Park, in Hampshire, England. I took my questions with me, hoping that I would find the answers within what I imagined would be a uniquely sane, inquiring, and creative community.

What I found, instead of answers or my idealized versions of sanity and creativity, was a group of genuine human beings all struggling with their own particular wonderings, just as I was. We came from all corners of the earth and from a multiverse of cultures. Initially my confusion was exacerbated by the mixture of ideas everyone posited as their personal understandings and interpretations of what Krishnamurti was proposing: that all our problems arose out of the erroneous notion of a self separated out from the actual multi-sensory experience of life.

Cont ...

My questions broadened, deepened, and matured in that extraordinary environment. I understood that to come upon anything at all in life that I could call true, a constant state of wondering was required, but that I could not force that state to occur without separating myself from it and causing conflict. I began to see the connection between those attitudes and perceptual gestures I had observed in the studio and those necessary for looking at one's life creatively. In the studio those attitudes and gestures arose naturally, for I was totally 'in love' with my endeavors there. But I could not simply decide to apply those attitudes to the rest of my life for there were many areas I wasn't in love with but needed to live out anyway. I was left with the list itself, and I began to slowly and carefully examine each item, trying to do so without applying value or purpose. It was impossible to do that without the energy of the inquiry flowing over into my lifestream, and soon it appeared that every gesture I explored was relevant to the quality of my entire life.

Changes began to be noticeable as these connections became real and vital ways of looking at my life. And I began to suspect that the only reason that I had not been able to do this before was because I was afraid of moving beyond the safety net of a cultural worldview that promised (but failed to provide) safety and sanity. I also realized that the inquiry itself was demolishing that worldview, and recreating a new one with questions as its fluid and flexible structure, without any resolution or decision on my part. It did seem, however, that I needed to have the intention to inquire. In this respect I was fortunate: insatiable curiosity came bundled with my DNA.

It is only when you are constantly inquiring, constantly observing, constantly learning,
that you find truth, God, or love; and you cannot inquire, observe, learn,
you cannot be deeply aware, if you are afraid.

My naturally curious mind made it easy for me to question and to challenge the concepts inherent in the worldviews I had acquired as well as created, but it failed to help me move from the deep-seated psychological belief that 'I' was 'someone going somewhere' – somewhere 'better', somewhere more 'enlightened'. In fact it was excruciatingly painful to even cast the beam of wondering upon that issue, even though intellectually I could see the incoherence of the 'I' concept. I had to approach this 'no go' area from a different angle, to creep up on it unawares.

Cont ...

It was by wandering around upon the scaffold of the quantum worldview that I was able to do so. Not to 'eliminate the self', but to find new ways of viewing it, how it has arisen, and its role in the fabric of my life. In an unexpected way, relinquishing my perceived need to vanquish the self freed me to explore it and live with it. Freed from being the ogre within some kind of fanciful spiritual value system, it lost its 'identity,' and fell into the wondrous construct that it actually is – the sum total of sensory awareness unified. A paradox, yes, but then quantum physics is full of paradoxes, and we are physical creatures. And is not this statement from Krishnamurti equally paradoxical?

It seems so impossibly difficult to be simple, to be what you are and not pretend.

To be what you are is in itself very arduous
without trying to be something, which is not too difficult.

For every phenomenal event that occurs we exercise our capacity to create meanings – by default. Those meanings will always reveal the degree of our freedom from the necessity for them to be absolute truths. In life, as in the art room, we first create, and *then* we understand.

Brockwood Park and a sandal-slap ...

The extraordinary nature of what we call *creativity* is antithetical to any prescriptions or methods we may invent to attempt to capture it, as well as maps we may chart to pin it down. Even to entertain an idea about what it may involve can be dangerous. In an early conversation with the Principal at Brockwood I voiced my concerns that it might not be possible for me to be 'creative' if I were to be a staff member there. His quick-fire response moved the ground under my feet: *Then you aren't being creative*. That was like a sandal-slap on the face from a Zen master.

It was also the overture to the most exciting, excruciating and enriching chapter in my life – a chapter of intense inquiry, of personal challenge on every level, and of immense rewards in the interaction with students and staff. This book was probably seeded earlier, but it was at Brockwood that the focus began to whittle the material into shape.

During my stay there, a group of teachers met several times to share our ideas about what we called the 'middle ground'. Brockwood is a school, with clear responsibilities regarding its educational role in the lives of the young people who study there.

Cont ...

So inevitably there are examinations for which students need to prepare. But further than its educational responsibilities, Brockwood is committed to the serious exploration of the vision of its founder, Krishnamurti. That vision includes the flowering of compassion and true intelligence in the student, as well as academic excellence.

The 'middle ground' as I understand it, refers to the relationship between these two responsibilities – not merely theoretically, but practically. In other words, how do we teach our respective subjects (in my case, Art and Design) with this relationship in mind? This may seem like overstating the obvious, but in fact it presents a great challenge to any teacher deeply committed to the part they are playing in the unfolding of a young person's life. Krishnamurti's own words are beautifully succinct regarding the purpose of the school:

Brockwood is a place for learning the art of questioning, the art of living ...
It is a place which must demand the awakening of that intelligence
which comes with compassion and love.

As I worked on putting this material together, I recalled those meetings. I hope that the spirit in which these activities can be explored, whether in the classroom or in self-directed study, will contribute towards understanding of the "art of questioning" and the "awakening of that intelligence." It is important. Perhaps everything turns on this.