



The CURRANT

MARIN MONTESSORI SCHOOL

#2 WINTER 2015

“You can't use up creativity.
The more you use, the more
you have.”

MAYA ANGELOU



Contributors to *The Current* • Zarrin Atkins • Heather Brinesh • Lynwen Brennan • Lola Daley • Tony DeRose • Elena Janney • Jules Layman • Brooke Pedersen • Joni Perry • Michael Rutchik • Anna Yarbrough • Generous and Talented MMS Photographers

When I was in first grade, my teacher, Mrs. Wenning, found it hard to describe my artwork. But then there was not much to say about blotches of brown and green dripping on the page, especially when the assignment was to “paint your family.” I continued my artistic endeavors only to find similar reactions. I think that was when I learned I wasn’t *creative*. I went on to be a reader and writer and a student of mathematics, but an artist I was not. I know that at some time in that process I accepted my limitations and stayed away from artistic challenges. Then, at about 6th grade, I discovered music and the guitar, and the creative dam burst. I had a chance to reframe my sense of self; from then on my key life experiences were all about inventive response to my life through music. Interestingly, I also began to paint—bright, intense colors in free form shapes—purely for my own enjoyment of the process. I studied theater arts and performed in several plays through high school and college. Clearly, I had overcome Mrs. Wenning’s initial responses to my brown blobs.

In many schools, creativity is stifled because it doesn’t fit within the prescribed responses to the acquisition of knowledge. It is complicated and difficult to assess and judge. It takes time to make a painting or put on a skit. It is easier to fill in a workbook or take a written test. Truly creative thinking and learning is fluid and flexible and happens in leaps and bounds—it does not travel in straight lines, easy to predict.

Fortunately, brain science research is leading us toward a refined understanding of the role of creativity in learning. It is broadening our vision of inventiveness beyond the arts into all phases of learning. The opportunity to respond with imagination to a learning challenge internalizes the knowledge in such a way that mere memorization cannot. Creativity engages the head, the hands and the heart in a holistic way that builds on the known and frames new explorations.

Creativity has become the very trait that many employers rank at the top of their list of qualities for employees. Seeing the world through fresh eyes, interpreting the world in new ways, designing innovative products and experiences—these are the drivers of economic growth.

At Marin Montessori, we embrace creativity in many forms and support its evolution in countless ways in every one of our classrooms. This edition of *The Current* explores how and why this development happens and showcases its impact on several MMS students and families. I hope that it will inspire you to encourage your child’s creativity to its fullest, and to free your own imagination by letting go of any Mrs. Wenning of your own.

Have fun exploring.

JIM MUNGER
HEAD OF SCHOOL

Through a Montessori Lens

In Toddler and Primary Classrooms

In her book *Montessori Learning in the 21st Century*, Shannon Helfrich states “From the earliest cultural societies, the human has sought to use the hands to express herself and to shape the world for personal use. The evidence of these efforts is reflected in the artifacts left behind – the first tools, paintings in caves, elaborate tombs and writings. We see the skill of the human’s hands bound up with the development of the mind.”

**“Every child is an artist.
The problem is how to remain
an artist when he grows up.”**
PABLO PICASSO

At Marin Montessori School, the nurturing of creativity begins in our Toddler community and continues through the Primary. These youngest children in the first plane of development are trying to make sense of the thousands of impressions that they have absorbed since birth. The two-year-olds learn the specific language that helps them classify what they see in their immediate environment: family, animals, clothing, furniture, household goods, musical instruments and the like. At the same time, they begin to refine their hand movements and develop the ability to focus and concentrate through use of the activities. In the Primary classes, the sensorial materials allow for further classification. The child who began at three, for example, matching the first box of colors, red, yellow and blue, over time is able to grade seven tablets within one color from dark to light and now understands that there are many shades of each color. From the first lesson on the bells, learning how to strike a bell carefully, children progress from matching the sounds to putting the bells in the correct order of the scale, and then they play tunes and compose songs of their own.

In order to be creative one must develop many skills. The Montessori environment is designed to support the child’s natural interest in the world around him, to master the use of tools, refine the senses and, most important, be given the freedom to be creative without the limitation of waiting for an art or music class.

JULES LAYMAN
MMS LOWER SCHOOL DIRECTOR

At the Elementary Level

Years ago, a student gave me a story about a lonely king, King Ginkgo Biloba, who was in a class all his own. The troubling tale of how King Ginkgo Biloba went through the monotonous, daily rigors of ruling over his subjects who lacked diversity was humorous, factually accurate, and happened to be an interesting comment on contemporary society. This simple lesson on the classification of plants—which had recently been presented to my students—somehow catered to this student’s imagination. Imagination and time led to this innovative tale.

**“There is no greater education
than one that is self driven.”**
NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON,
ASTROPHYSICIST AND COSMOLOGIST

Students flourish in environments where they are able to utilize all aspects of their creativity and imagination in the work they produce. These moments happen daily, and rarely do teachers, as observers, see the same thing twice. Recently, I watched two Elementary children cooking nachos in a thermal oven they designed and constructed. I walked back upstairs to my office to find two girls giving a presentation on the history of making paper. I’ve seen the creation of flow charts with specialized graphic symbols representing the United States branches of government, and listened to songs written and composed by students. I have even witnessed conflict resolution through the process of creating a meal for fellow classmates.

“We must use time creatively.”
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Maria Montessori noticed an explosion of imagination and creativity during the Elementary years (the second plane of development). During this time, children develop a strong desire for their intelligence to be extroverted. When combined with active imagination and time in which to explore, that desire blooms into creativity. Montessori classrooms were thus designed to encourage and foster this development. The foundational skills for creativity are further enriched during the Elementary years as

children proceed with confidence and take risks in exposing their minds to others. In MMS Elementary classrooms teachers provide outlets and specialized guidance that encourage students to experience a variety of lessons, thereby providing them with the keys to the larger world. Once this introduction has been shared, we stand back and give them time and permission to innovate. It's very exciting!

ZARRÍN ATKINS
MMS ELEMENTARY LEVEL DIRECTOR

In the Adolescent Environment

“There is a variety, life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique.”

MARTHA GRAHAM

Adolescence is a time of great transformation of body, mind, and soul. What Montessori teachers observe is that adolescents need to process everything and do so by finding their individual voices through dialog, music, physical movement, and artistic expression. Self-expression and creative exploration are central to the experience of the adolescent.

Adolescence is also a time of vulnerability and creation, a time of experiencing deep friendships and relationships. Adolescents are just developing a sensitivity and awareness of the beauty and significance of other people and other cultures. In contrast to their challenging academic work,

artistic expression allows them to express themselves and their connections to others. Creative expressions provide pathways for them to begin to understand the universe and the human experience. These avenues are uniquely individual and foster successful connections to the emotional and intellectual experiences of ideas.

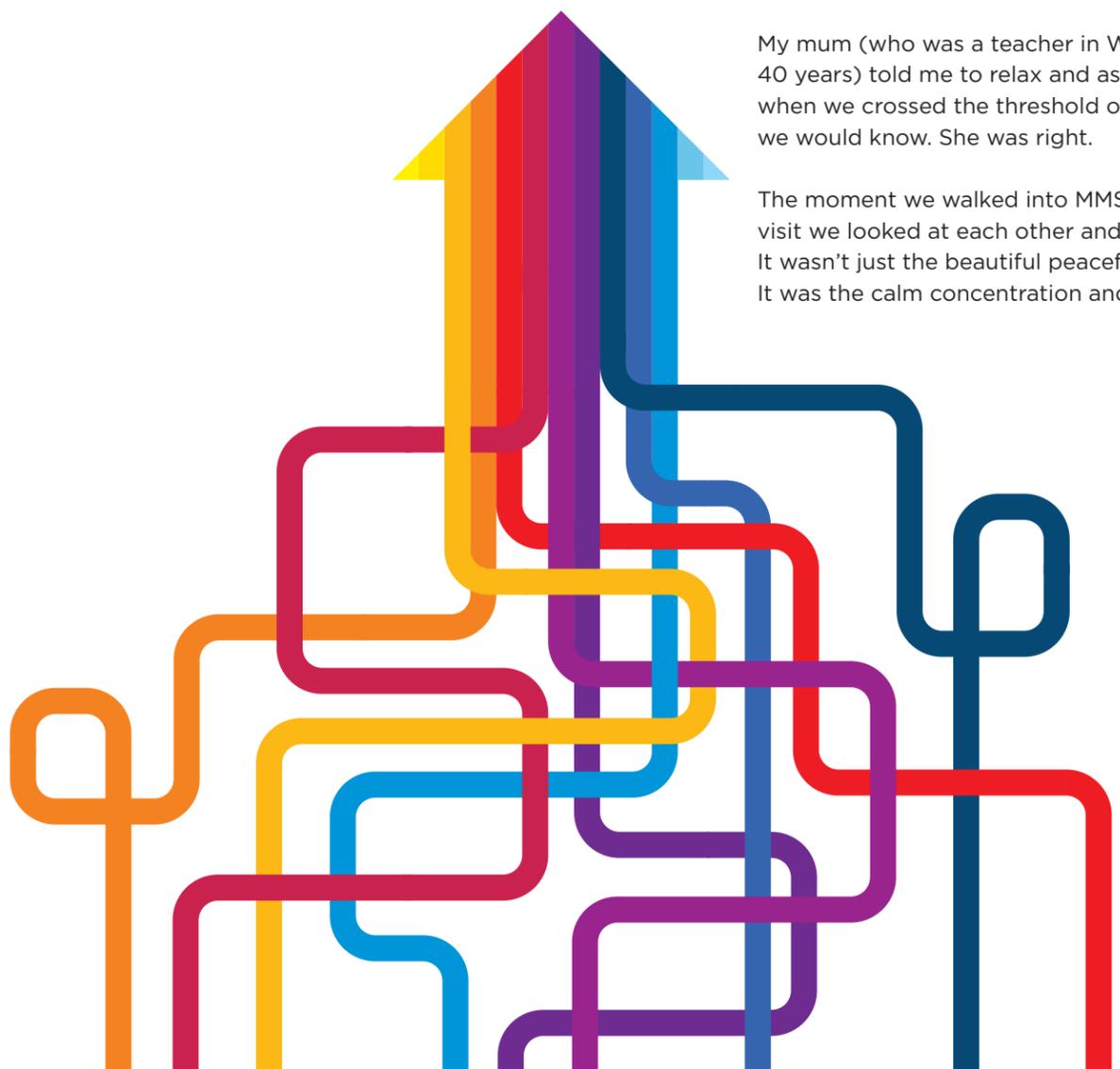
Current research has found that the adolescent brain has a need for creative exploration as it develops an expanded consciousness and works to be able to see the world through new lenses. Coupled with that need is an emotional spark, an intense internal sensation that occurs as the adolescent seeks to create meaning and develop a sense of his or her adult self. At the same time, adolescents experience insecurity and need safe environments in which to take the creative risks that move them along the path of emerging adulthood. By creating or performing works of art adolescents express emotions, connect with community, gain confidence from the positive feedback, and begin to see themselves in a new light.

In Montessori adolescent classrooms prepared materials on open shelves are replaced by teachers who work side by side with students toward intellectual engagement and enlightenment and who actively model adult life. This format applies to the creative expressions portion of the program as well. Professional artists, jewelers, woodworkers, potters, cartoonists, musicians, and photographers are among practicing artisans who are brought in to work with students, who are encouraged to explore unique avenues of creative, expressive interest. In doing so, adolescent students are able to gain a better understanding of themselves as individuals and look ahead to the adults they will become. The essential role of creative expression for junior high students is twofold: to give them a way to express and explore the individual inner self while at the same time connecting deeply with others.

ANNA YARBROUGH
MMS JUNIOR HIGH DIRECTOR



Elemental Essentials



My name is Lynwen Brennan. My family is new to Marin Montessori School this year with our son Tom busily engaged in the community of the Pelican classroom. My husband Pat and I both work for Industrial Light and Magic, the visual effects company founded by George Lucas and part of Lucasfilm. We were invited to share our thoughts about why we chose MMS for Tom, and whether our work in a creative field had an influence on our choice.

At Lucasfilm we have on-site daycare, so we were able to bring Tom to work with us from the age of four months. To this day, Tom thinks it is perfectly normal to have R2D2 visit your classroom on a regular basis, and he also thinks every kid gets to borrow coloring pencils and draw alongside some of the best artists in the business.

As Tom's time at daycare was nearing an end, we began our search for kindergarten. We looked at literally every school in the area - private and public - and I know we were not alone as parents in finding it all a little overwhelming.

My mum (who was a teacher in Wales for over 40 years) told me to relax and assured us that when we crossed the threshold of the right school we would know. She was right.

The moment we walked into MMS for our first visit we looked at each other and said, "This is it." It wasn't just the beautiful peaceful environment. It was the calm concentration and yet infectious

enthusiasm in the classroom, and the respect and empathy shown by every student, parent, and teacher we met. It was also our observation of the collaboration and collective practical problem-solving skills that we saw in the classrooms that reminded us so much of what we love about our work environment.

We were not specifically looking for a Montessori school, although we had heard of the program and were intrigued. It was only after our first visit and first Open House that we did any real research to decide if it was the right choice for Tom.

The aspects of Montessori education that most appealed to us were the multi-age classrooms and the concept of "follow the child." Again, like any five-year-old, Tom has a pretty strong point of view—he can have intense periods of concentration when his curiosity is peaked, and he can also have periods when his interest flits from one thing to another in a seemingly random way and he doesn't always want to go with a pre-defined flow! We didn't want that spirit to be stifled or forced into a box. We also wanted an environment where every child's uniqueness was celebrated.

We were intrigued about research we found that affirmed Montessori's dedication to supporting a child's own innate love of learning. The environment has been shown to cultivate divergent thinking and problem solving in a way that transfers to the creative domain.

There are direct comparisons between the Montessori method and our own work at Industrial Light and Magic. In visual effects, there are no rulebooks or direct paths; self-motivated personalities with diverse skills work together to create something unique. At ILM, we are constantly being asked to do something that has never been done before. Assignments are challenges. At the outset, we often have no idea how we are going to complete them, but we know we have to promise that we can deliver on deadline. Failure isn't an option!

I never get tired of seeing our artists and engineers brainstorming and experimenting with ideas. Our workforce is the most diverse you could imagine: sculptors, painters, rocket scientists, PhD

programmers, computer engineers, physicists, photographers, actors, and animators in constant collaboration.

We have a saying at ILM that "no idea is a bad idea." There aren't right or wrong answers, just discoveries. It takes a unique combination of skills, curiosity, experimentation, and audacity to create the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, the epic worlds of *Star Wars*, Davy Jones in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, or the robots in *Transformers*.

We were interested to see so many similarities in the teachings of Maria Montessori and our work ethic at ILM. That's not unusual in creative and innovative companies.

As reported in the *Harvard Business Review*, Professors Jeffrey Dyer of Brigham Young University and Hal Gregersen of INSEAD Business School surveyed over 3,000 executives from innovative companies and found that "a number of the innovative entrepreneurs also went to Montessori schools, where they learned to follow their curiosity."

Montessori alumni in creative fields include Google founders Larry Page and Sergei Brin, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, video game pioneer Will Wright, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs!

When Barbara Walters interviewed the Google founders in 2004 they credited their Montessori education for their success. "We both went to Montessori school," Page said, "and I think it was part of that training of not following rules and orders and being self-motivated, questioning what's going on in the world, doing things a little bit differently."

"Montessori taught me the joy of discovery," said Will Wright. "It's all about learning on your terms rather than a teacher explaining stuff to you."

Is Tom a future inventor, innovator, or artist? Who knows?! But I will say that it has been wonderful to see his whole creative self developing at MMS. We are happy to know he is in an environment where his curiosity is nurtured, his independence and collaborative problem solving skills encouraged, and his self-confidence growing daily. Those skills will help him no matter what he decides to do.

LYNWEN BRENNAN
MMS PARENT, PELICAN CLASSROOM

My interest in art started early. I grew up in the Midwest with several siblings and during the long winters my parents would take us to the St. Louis Art Museum, which offered free admission and had long hallways for us to run through. I remember being so curious and amazed by all the paintings and sculptures. It was as if there was another world hanging on the walls just waiting to be explored.

Art has been my window into learning and has continued to bring joy to my life. I share this with my students. Art in the Montessori classroom is not just a singular Friday activity to create a product for display—students are engaged artistically in their work across all subjects throughout the day. As their teacher, it is my job to help them seek beauty in each subject and to inspire them creatively.

I recently completed a comprehensive art album for elementary teachers and presented my work at a Montessori teacher-training course. This album was more than 6 years in the making and includes the work of my students throughout my teaching career. Following are some of my thoughts about art and teaching excerpted from the album.

Why Study Art?

“The ability to see reality in form, colour, in proportion, to be master of movements of one’s own hand—that is what is necessary. Inspiration is an individual thing, and when a child possesses these formative elements he can give expression to all he happens to have.”

- MARIA MONTESSORI

By studying art, we help children reach their full potential. Art is the voice of the imagination. As Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Art enables children to express

their own creativity. It is joyful and it helps them understand their passion and find ways to express it. Art is not just a study for gifted people; it is a way to look at and to communicate with the world. Every child deserves the opportunity that art provides.

Art develops mental skills that are not developed by any other discipline. In studying art we are dealing with symbols that cannot be expressed in any other way. Art calls on and develops new forms of cognitive skills. Lessons in art are needed to develop aesthetic perception through multi-sensory experiences. Self-expression is the key to recovering human authenticity and spirit in the developing child.

Over many thousands of years, our knowledge of the customs and beliefs of humankind have been derived from surviving works of art. It is only recently in the history of the world that written records come forth to our aid. Art is an essential part of the common core of knowledge. It connects students to their heritage and helps them understand where they have come from. By studying art, we gain insight into the cultures of the world.

What happens in our future will depend greatly on the way the human species uses the opportunity to think and act in a new way.

Creativity has been confused with the ability to do things with our hands, or with the talent that only great artists or geniuses have. In fact, creativity is the capacity to love, to find the right answer to everyday problems, to innovate, to take risks, and to re-create.

In each person there is an innate creative potential waiting to be expressed and developed. This potential can only emerge if the individual gets in touch with the inner self with enough awareness and strength to let go of his or her inhibitions. Freedom is essential, criticism damaging.

JONI PERRY
MMS UPPER ELEMENTARY TEACHER

Art for All

Tips for Supporting Creative Interests

Take care with language about the work of your child. Make observations, not judgments, by posing questions and asking about the process as it unfolds.

Because of well-intentioned comments about their artistic products, children as old as four already have feelings about themselves as artists.

Listen for the “silent critic” that can take over during creative expression.

Empower your child with new language about his or her work. Be gentle as he develops an independent analytical eye and begins to articulate what he likes about the artwork.

Remind him that there is no right way to draw. As long as it is the way he wants it, it is perfect. This does not mean everything he does is perfect. He can start over without feeling like he’s failed. There will be more attempts to start a project than completions of the work. This is not failure. This is process.

Children should not be made to feel guilty about copying

from other artists or other visual data because they will interpret it differently, as all artists do.

Do not look for pretty products. Creating art is a process—the journey is the destination and the final project is not the goal. Following a set of predetermined steps to make a pleasing product is not an art education. Painting a watercolor is not just putting paint to paper; it has a complexity incorporating color theory, composition, and design. There are so many things that happen simultaneously in the creative process.

Art is often mystery and chaos and may not have one resolution or outcome. This is a challenge of creating art. Creating art is an exercise in coming to terms with change. It is about new discoveries and can be glorious or frustrating, so prepare your child for the unexpected.

Art is dynamic, not static. There are many things going on in a variety of ways, with all the elements and principles of art mixed with emotions. When dealing with art concepts, conflict and connection often happen simultaneously. Be patient as your child works.

Art connects us to our emotions, our history, our culture, and all the other parts of our lives. It is worth the great effort and determination your child invests every time he pursues his work. Be gentle. Observe thoughtfully. Respect the effort. **J.P.**



The Invention of Photography



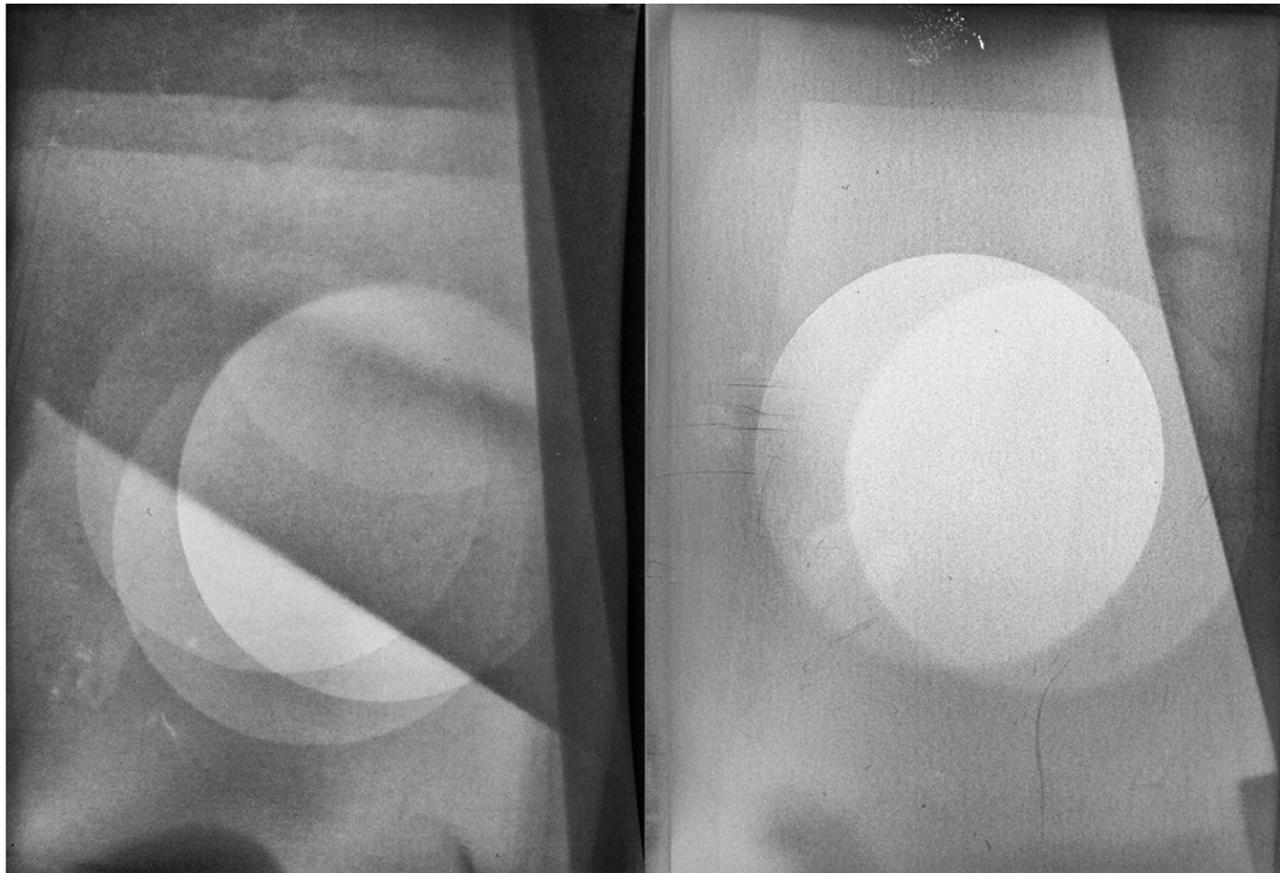
EQUIVALENTS 2014, BY ALFRED STIEGLITZ?



PORTRAIT OF EMERSON, BY ANNIE LEIBOVITZ?



R. MUTT'S HANDLE, BY MARCEL DUCHAMP?



ECLIPSE (OR ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE), BY MAN RAY?



BACK POCKET, SAN RAFAEL, BY ROBERT FRANK?

When I first considered how I would teach traditional darkroom photography to the camera-phone generation, I thought about the concepts and people I've loved most during my years as a photographer. The physics of light (Einstein), the chemistry of silver (Fox Talbot), the design of optics (Leitz), the mechanics of apertures and shutter speeds (Barnack), the social impact of subject matter (Hine), the decisive moment (Cartier-Bresson), and the death of a moment (Avedon), as well as a lifetime of aesthetic lessons from all the visual arts. There would clearly be no problem creating a robust syllabus.

I have accumulated a rich library of books and materials that can illuminate any of these concepts or people in ways that I still get excited about. So I hauled a selection of these materials into the first day of class fully prepared to inspire my students to dig deeper into this world I have discovered and loved. Guess what came next?

I discovered that I am a photo-nerd. The only difference between a photo-nerd and any other type of nerd is that photo-nerds notice things that others miss, so we see exactly how much glaze covers the eyes of those with whom we attempt to share our passions. (There's an interesting photo project: *Glazed Looks*.)

I wanted to weep as my students turned the pages of some of the finest photobooks in the world

without even looking at any of the photos. It was time to improvise a new plan.

I call it my get-out-of-the-way plan. There are only 7 weeks per session, and the invention of photography took several centuries, so I give the kids a nudge. But that's all. Camera Operation: 2 minutes. Enlarger Functions: 1 minute. Chemistry: 90 seconds..."Wait, is that my photo appearing in the developer? Cool!"

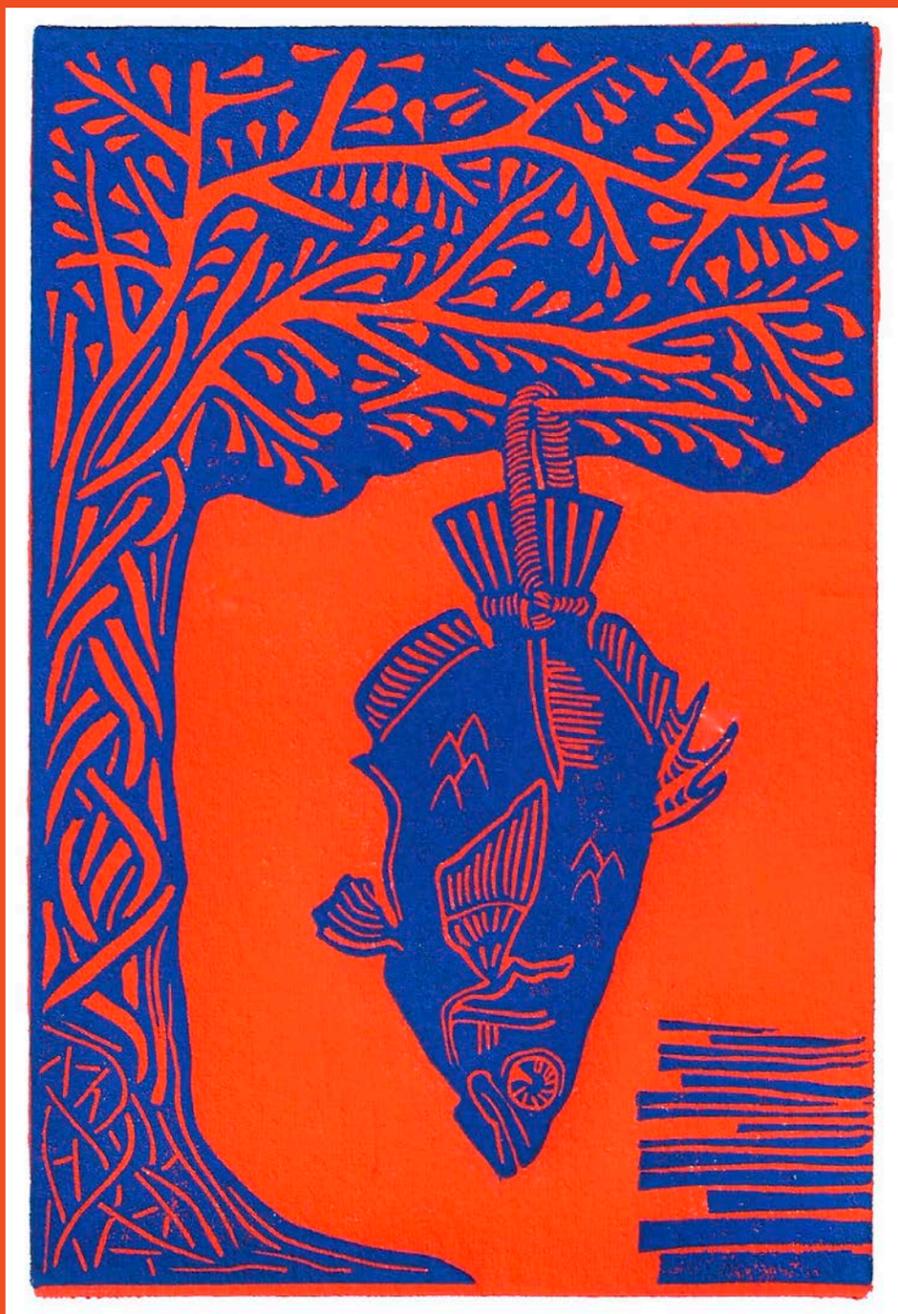
Gotcha.

Now the glaze is gone, and suddenly they're looking at photos. Mostly bad photos. But they're looking and that's what's important. Fox Talbot's first photo was pretty bad too...it's only the most famous photo in the world. But he made more and so do they. Some of them invent clever work-flows to maximize the number of prints they can make in a session. Others keep tweaking the settings on the enlarger to get one print just right. A few discover happy accidents (that are always so hard to repeat). And they all start to develop a critical eye that causes them to consider how they might shoot better next time.

As the weeks go by, I start to notice little things that make my day. All those cool (nerdy) photographic concepts I had planned to share with my students: they are sharing them with me. Like true nerds. Like they just invented them or something.

Because they have.

**MICHAEL RUTCHIK
JR. HIGH PHOTOGRAPHY INSTRUCTOR
MMS PARENT**



Why I Create Art

My name is Elena Janney, and I graduated from MMS in 2007. I started making art in Miss Allison's (Great Blue Heron) classroom at a very young age, though I did not then call it by that name. It was simply a sewing project or a pressed flower, a map of South America or a study on beetles.



Art lessons were presented to me with the same seriousness and care as math lessons (a fact I would later come to see as extraordinary). There were no dividing lines drawn. I was taught

that a science report could and should look like a painting. I learned algebra and embroidery in the same lesson. Every Thank You Note was its own canvas with 20 lines.

My Montessori teachers encouraged me to integrate art into everything I did. It was not separate, demoted to an extracurricular; it was everywhere. Making a piece of work beautiful was a way of showing care and taking ownership. There was a premium on originality of thought and the ability of self-expression. Creativity replaced the traditional A+ as the holy grail of achievement in the classroom, and it made anything seem possible. This was the domain in which I was fortunate enough to grow up: a world without grades, where the conventional ceiling, a fixed definition of success, was simply blown away.

As I remember it, the ultimate instrument for weighing academic/artistic accomplishment at MMS was the laminating machine. It sat bulkily on its own table in the back room, surrounded by a cloud of mystic authority. In order to operate the laminator as a student, you had to produce a piece of work you were truly proud of, something beautiful and obsessed over. Only then could you determine the work worthy of lamination. I still remember lovingly feeding a prized leaf rubbing, and later a study on ceremonial masks, into the machine to be encased

between sheets of clear plastic that melted together with a buzzing sound, always careful not to get my fingers caught between the hot rollers.

I loved the feeling I got when I was totally invested in the making of something. And I loved knowing I had created something worth laminating. I would later come to learn that the psychologist, Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihályi, describes those productive periods of full absorption and unwavering creative focus that I loved so much as the mental state of Flow.

My teachers at MMS helped me see the value in being able to enter Flow and they encouraged me to discover what enabled me, as an individual, to get there. They showed me that this self-knowledge was as important as any other tool I was developing. Even before I learned to put a name on it, I knew that creating art was, for me, the most natural way to enter Flow.

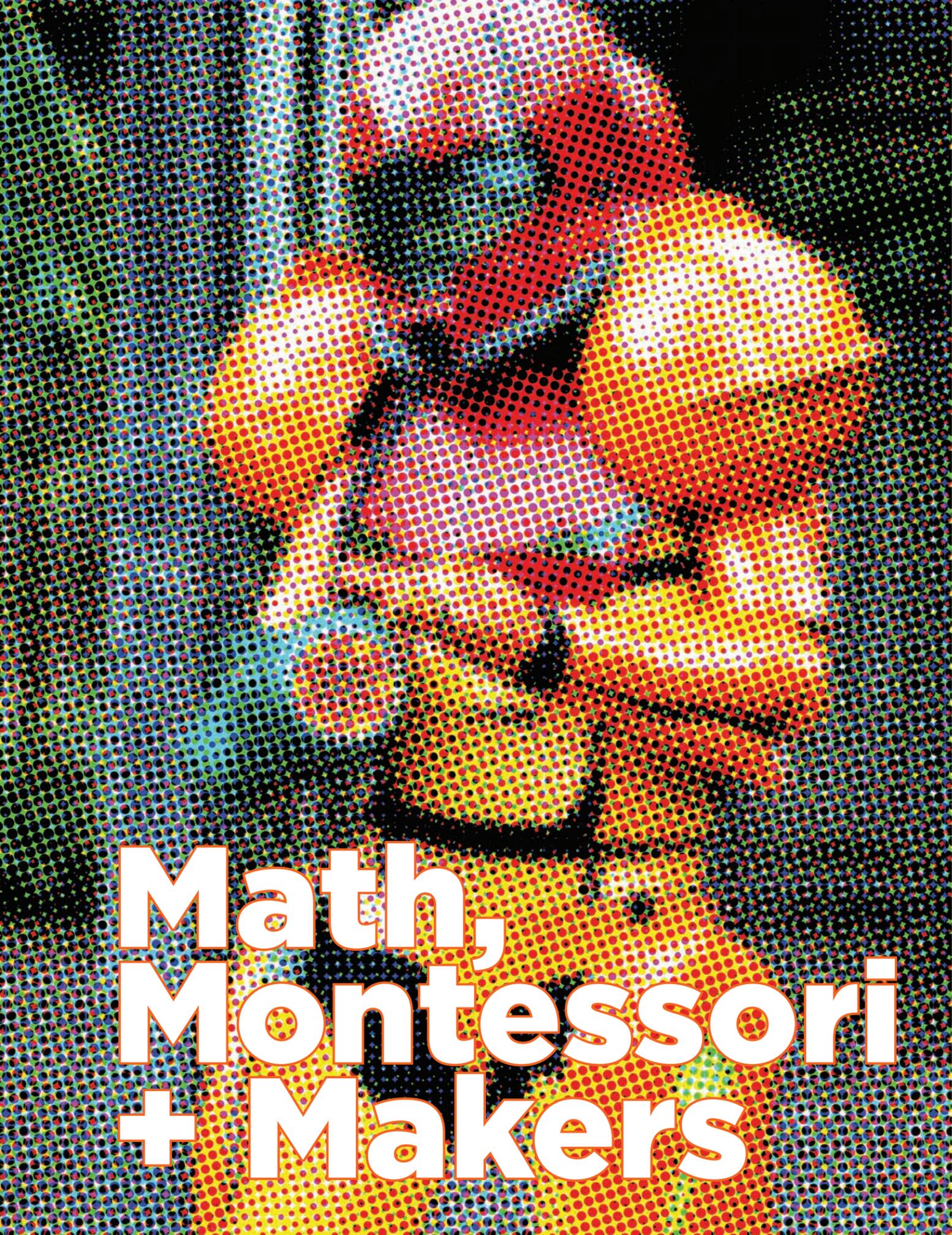


Art helps me think. It is my frame for the expression and understanding of ideas and stories, all tied together by beauty. I love printmaking in particular because I relish the challenge

of reducing things to their simplest and most vivid forms, into darks and lights. It is making these decisions, from a place of earnest observation, that appeals to my creative and intellectual curiosity. It is a different way of looking at the world. When an image exists already in my mind, making a block print is simply a matter of choosing what to remove so that others can see it, too.

The way I learned to make art, it is a way of connecting with other people, of sharing something of my reality, of what things look like through the lenses I carry. I am grateful to have spent my early years in the company of peers who were deeply engaged in their own creative endeavors and thus shared with me and inspired me every day.

ELENA JANNEY
MMS GRADUATE 2007
VASSAR COLLEGE FRESHMAN



Math, Montessori + Makers

We never intended to attend a Montessori school, or any other private school for that matter, which is why we enrolled Sam, our older son, in our local public school at age 5.

Kindergarten and first grade went fairly well, but by second grade Sam was becoming convinced that he was bad at math. The emphasis in math by that point was on computing quickly. Sam, then as now, picks up concepts quickly, but he wasn't particularly interested in the repetition needed to increase his speed. He was far more fascinated by advanced topics such as binary arithmetic, the kind of arithmetic used by computers. We clearly recall the day when Sam excitedly went into second grade math class to demonstrate how binary addition works, but his enthusiasm was squashed because the structure of the school couldn't accommodate such individual interests. It didn't take long after that to see the light of curiosity in his eyes start to fade. That was cause for serious concern because curiosity and creativity are two of our most important family values.

We knew it was time for a change, so we asked Sam to sit in on a MMS class. He came home with such joy that he knew that was where he wanted to be, even though it meant leaving his friends. Once enrolled in the Lower EI at MMS the light immediately came back on. It burns brighter than ever today as Sam completes his junior year as an engineering major at Harvey Mudd College. When it came time for our younger son Joseph to attend school there was no question that the right place for him was MMS. Joseph is now a junior at The Bay School.

At MMS, their creative interests weren't a hindrance to their academic learning, they were an essential part of their classroom experience. In addition

to having their creativity stoked at MMS, they also gained a well-developed sense of personal responsibility, and perhaps most important of all, the ability to learn on their own.

Their creative expression and self-directed learning is evident in practically every facet of their lives, including the series of Maker Faire projects they have exhibited each year since 2008. Maker Faire is an event held every May in the Bay Area where people from all over the globe share their self-constructed projects with the public. The breadth and variety of projects is so extraordinary that President Obama hosted the first-ever Maker Faire at the White House earlier this year, and Ira Flatow, host of NPR's Science Friday program said, "If you're ever worried about the level of creativity in the U.S., visit a Maker Faire." Sam and Joseph's projects have included Saphira, an eight-and-a-half foot tall animatronic fire-breathing dragon, Project: Varia, an electronically equipped costume inspired by the video game Metroid Prime, The Viper, a *Battlestar Galactica*-themed flight simulator that can rotate the fuselage of a repurposed airplane 360 degrees on two axes, and for Maker Faire 2015, Joseph and several of his friends from The Bay School are working on The Exosuit, a powered exoskeleton designed to allow the wearer to lift 400 pounds with little effort.

Creativity, curiosity, and the ability to learn on one's own are several of the most important traits we look for when hiring new employees at Pixar. One reason is that our industry changes so quickly that we can't predict what technologies will be needed even a few years from now, much less over the course of an entire career, so focusing on these timeless skills is essential. Maria Montessori understood all of this over a century ago, and it's never been truer than it is today.

TONY DE ROSE
MMS ALUMNI PARENT

Joyful Expression

We get a lot of happiness and joy out of writing and expressing ourselves, and we want to share the experience of writing a play. We would like to talk about how we collaborate and share ideas, our inspiration and favorite spots to write, and our process of creativity along with solving the various problems that arise when creating a piece. Our recent play, a mystery, has taken some time and energy to perfect, but we have come to a point where we can share our process with you.

We get the most excited at the first step: creating a plot for the play. We start by throwing out a flurry of ideas that we fit together later. Our ideas come in short pulses triggered by something or someone. Not all are realistic or great, but we eventually get down to the best possible version.

We have had our difficulties, but most of the time we enjoy writing together. When we disagree it is frustrating and upsetting because we each have a strong opinion of what we want. It is not the most appealing part of the process, but it is a major part. We typically split up the decision-making. As part of our collaboration we rewrite lines several times so that they fit to what we both envision. Collaboration is one key to unlock the door to writing.

The great part about writing a play is the thought of getting the audience thinking in a different way. Mystery is such an amazing genre to write and

create. The reason is mostly because the audience gets to fill in the blanks, which lets their minds imagine and get into a more creative state. We love a great mystery and the detectives that solve them.

We are deeply inspired by just putting pen to paper. The most inspiring writing spots for us are out in nature. We also get inspiration from each other, and that is one of the great things about writing together. The world is rich with things that spark our ideas.

We think a very gratifying part of writing a play is finally seeing it performed on the stage. Excitement runs through you when you see what just seemed like words on a page turn into a production. It is also sad knowing that the whole creative process is over. It helps to know that there are a lot more opportunities that will arise in the future.

We hope this has showed you a little bit about our creative process and passion for writing. When you let your creativity flow it always has a fantastic result. To end off, we share two quotes that speak to us:

"A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is to see dawn before the rest of the world." -Oscar Wilde

"No great artist ever sees things as they really are, if he did he would cease to be an artist." -Oscar Wilde

LOLA DALEY + BROOKE PEDERSEN
MMS UPPER ELEMENTARY PLAYWRIGHTS



An Artistic Journey



MY CREATIVE PROCESS

One of the most difficult aspects of making art is getting started, and making time and space to devote to creating something new is sometimes the most challenging. To make the most of limited time, I keep a number of different projects going so that I can return to them at any time. I have a project for when I am feeling creative, one for when I am stuck, and many paintings waiting for finishing touches or corrections. I make a commitment to myself to sit in my studio at least once a week, usually on a weekend. When I am feeling inspired I can paint all day; when I am not I might fix one or two things and then move on to something else.

Paintings vary by material and subject matter. Sometimes I start with abstract shapes or a solid bright color and then “draw” on my image (often a portrait) with paint, blocking in the shadows more than focusing on lines. On the other hand, I love to work on Masonite board (a wood composite) or cardboard. I love the porous surface so much that I do not want to cover it with paint initially, so I draw my image in pencil before I begin. I use photo reference for most of my work. Finding a good reference with strong light can take as long as the painting itself, yet I need an exciting reference to have the energy to complete a work, as a single painting often takes upwards of 50 hours to complete. I often listen to books on tape while I work. I find this helps me maintain my focus. H.B.

Marin Montessori School marked the beginning of my artistic journey. It was also the environment in which I developed most as an artist. From a very early age the school provided me with a model for sharing my life in a real and meaningful way. Finding the balance between passion and practical life—between art and work—has been my constant goal. As a teacher at Marin Montessori’s Junior High I have realized that goal.

My education at Marin Montessori School began in the Primary level. I have distinct memories of watching Miss Margy (Sheehy) fill an oval with straight, consistent lines. Endeavoring to achieve perfection, I found this activity deeply engrossing. In Elementary classrooms, I was encouraged to make everything beautiful. My record book was colorfully decorated, and I spent as much time as I could drawing the picture on the back of a thank you or compliment letter. Math was decorated, and reports illustrated. Art was in perfect balance with work. My teacher, Phyllis Pottish-Lewis, reached out to me for community art projects as well. I worked on every single auction project and was often given a lead role in design and execution. Members of my community recognized and supported my artistic passion and skill, and I grew up happily realizing that I was both student and artist.

With no Montessori middle school available to me I was enrolled in traditional school. Art ceased to share space with my academics. I had to find time outside of school to pursue my craft. Even

taking a Saturday class at the local community college did not fulfill my desire to have my passions integrated. After middle school and freshman year at a traditional high school I decided to move on to independent study, which allowed me to spend a lot more time on art, primarily by taking many community college art classes in addition to my regular high school curriculum. Ultimately, my goal in high school was college, and I discovered Hampshire College. With no departments and a culture in which undergraduate students design their own major, I was able to finally pursue art and literature simultaneously and without conflict.

Today, as a teacher at Marin Montessori’s Junior High I have continuous opportunities to learn. Academically, I engage in planning course content and keeping up to date on adolescent learning and psychology; creatively, I am always asking myself how to turn a concept or historical event into an experience. In my quest to connect with and inspire my students I am always learning about new artists, techniques, and styles. Student enthusiasm for Monet prompted me to take my painting class to the Legion of Honor to see his paintings. Viewing Monet and other works with my students allowed me to experience familiar artists as if for the first time. I am currently painting a portrait of Frida Kahlo (inspired by my work in Joni Perry’s classroom many years ago) and will be using the painting in an upcoming Humanities lesson on The Great Depression. Teaching shapes the art I create, and the artwork I make influences the classes I teach.

HEATHER BRINESH
MMS JUNIOR HIGH TEACHER
MMS ALUMNA

“An artist’s only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and in his own terms, not anyone else’s.”

J.D. SALINGER

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