This book brings together interviews with twenty-one artist-teachers from different parts of the world, offering many insights into their identities, challenges and creative and pedagogic practices they have adopted. Based in a range of educational situations—from compulsory to post-secondary education, art schools, departments of art education and community-based environments—these educators discuss their own training in fine art and/or art education, research interests, teaching methods and theoretical outlooks, collaborative projects, students’ ambitions, exhibitions and the different approaches they use to connect their educational and artistic commitments. The discussions take place against a contextual backdrop that is tackled in every interview, bringing to the fore the impact of social, political, historical and institutional frameworks on artist-teachers. Illustrated with images of works and projects by each artist-teacher in the book, the volume combines the visual and the verbal in a way that reflects the complex experiences and identities of the interviewees.

Raphael Vella is a Senior Lecturer in Art Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. Apart from coordinating and teaching in art education courses, he also teaches courses in fine art and theory. His publications address the relationships between contemporary artistic practices and education, art education in the Mediterranean, identity in art education, photography and cultural studies, and arts-based research. He is also actively involved in the curation of international and Maltese exhibitions and cultural events, and in recent years he initiated projects such as Divergent Thinkers (aimed at creating a platform for emerging artists based in Malta) and the Valletta International Visual Arts festival (VIVA). He is also a practising artist, having shown his work in many contexts, including Malta, Venice, Warsaw, Tokyo, Reims, Buenos Aires, Nicosia and Oxford.

Cover image: Stammer – class, Shady El Noshokaty, multimedia installation, Cairo, 2010
Artist-Teachers in Context
DOING ARTS THINKING: ARTS PRACTICE, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

VOLUME 2

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Scope:

In the arts, the concept of theoria goes back to the original notion of thinking as a form of reflection/contemplation that remains integral to practice as both a practiced thought (phronesis) and as critical practice (praxis). This book series is aimed at capturing and reasserting the wider possibilities that we give ourselves by doing the arts. It explores how the arts and education can only converge through paradox, where what we seek by doing arts thinking remains an open work and in continuous inauguration.

Thus Doing Arts Thinking is an alternative view of arts education. Rooted in arts practice and arts research, it purposely retains a degree of ambiguity. It is not limited to “thinking about the arts”, or engaging with art theory as a separate entity from practice. Rather, this book series intends to show that to mistake arts thinking for abstract theory would be as false as dismissing arts practice for mere making; which would result in a narrow view of both arts practice and arts research, especially when a third element – that of arts education – is involved.
Artist-Teachers in Context

International Dialogues

Raphael Vella
University of Malta, Malta
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Note: In all the interviews in this book, Raphael Vella’s questions or statements are represented by bold typeface while sections in regular typeface represent the interviewee’s answers.
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RAPHAEL VELLA

INTRODUCTION

Being What You Teach

By addressing everyone as if each person were a lover of art, indeed, an artist, we liberate desire and enthusiasm. If only because a school populated by impassioned people is a more vibrant school, and nothing guarantees the maintenance of passion more than the annual arrival of young men and women consumed by the passion to make art, I want to plead here for the maintenance of art schools conceived as crucibles in which technical apprenticeship, theoretical instruction, and the formation of judgment are brought together to create a unique question of address... We should ask ourselves why Beuys had up to six hundred students lapping up his words at the Düsseldorf Academy... Perhaps the art school of the future will not necessarily be an institution made of bricks and run by an appointed team of professionals, but nothing more or less than a mode of transmission of art addressed to everyone as if they were all artists.

(de Duve, 2009, p. 24, original emphasis)

ADDRESSING OTHERS AS ARTISTS

Schools don’t liberate desire and enthusiasm automatically. We can probably all remember mind-numbing moments in our schooldays that dragged by at a snail’s pace, our imagination stifled by repetition and sheer boredom. It is not unfair to think that at least some of these moments would have been due to a teacher’s lack of passion or formulaic teaching modes. In the teaching career, enthusiasm is not a given, but whenever it is present, that career has the potential—as philosopher Maxine Greene once wrote of “the kinds of education required in a technological society”—“to remind people of what it means to be alive among others, to achieve freedom in dialogue with others” (Greene, 1988, p. xii). How, indeed, can educators and learners achieve this freedom? Art theorist Thierry de Duve asks us to imagine a school not as a building but as a “mode of transmission of art” which addresses everyone as an artist rather than as a person who lacks the requisite cultural baggage—a school, that is, where the teacher’s form of address takes the potential of each student’s desire and enthusiasm for granted. But, in imagining this scenario, de Duve assumes that the teacher is himself or herself an artist too. He is, after all, writing about art schools rather than the compulsory educational system, even
though the metaphor of the artist-learner can be inspirational in the latter context as well, as evidenced, for instance, by the student-run Room 13 which began in a Scottish primary school in 1994 (Adams, 2005). It is perhaps relevant that de Duve refers to Joseph Beuys—arguably the best-known artist-teacher of the second half of the twentieth century—as an excellent example of an artist who could address all those who cared to listen as artists. Having an artist-teacher who assumes that he or she is preaching to the ‘converted’, therefore, would seem to be the most effective way of sustaining the student’s or public’s passion for art. The artist-teacher and the artist-learner or artist-public would co-exist within a system that is much bigger than the school’s physical confines, populating a dynamic social sphere in which art’s mediation happens in a way that does not presuppose the public’s ignorance.

However, this desire for a mode of transmission that avoids excessive didacticism is also invoked at times in order to maintain a particular hierarchy of the arts and education. I am referring to the hierarchy that pits the artist against the teacher, the adventurer against the pedagogue, the professional against the mere enthusiast. According to this order of things, pedagogy (gallery education, for instance) represents a simplifying, mediating tool between art and its public, relegating the function of education to an unwelcome procedure that dumb’s down artistic experiences and spoon-feeds, even patronises, the audience. In a contemporary art world that has become increasingly associated in recent years with an “educational turn” (O’Neill & Wilson, 2010; Allen, 2011), debates have frequently revolved around the challenge of developing educational strategies that work hand-in-hand with curatorial and artistic goals, yet such debates also tend to echo frictions and power imbalances that characterise a field in which educators working in arts institutions such as galleries are generally seen as mere service-providers whose work is subordinate to the more professional work of curators and artists (Kaitavuori, 2013, pp. xiii–xiv). The very existence of such an imbalance would also seem to imply that, despite the recent proliferation of discourse revolving around the blending of pedagogical processes and art-making (for example, Helguera, 2011), we are still faced by a general perception that interprets teaching and art-making as mutually exclusive careers with different social statuses. In accordance with this perception, teaching and art-making would therefore appear to belong to two partially overlapping yet separate realms or ‘communities of practice’, defined as groups of people which are mutually engaged in joint enterprises and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998).

While this friction may derive from a lack of knowledge about the work and expertise of educators (Allen, 2013, p. 65), it is nevertheless clear that the question of status has substantial social and personal implications, as some of the artist-teachers’ narratives collected in this publication confirm. However, some of the interviews gathered here also show that the borders of such institutional realms can be transgressed and even merged into each other, often from within the institutional frameworks of art practice and/or education. Contemporary artists who appear to have extended Beuys’ model of pedagogy-as-art (such as Tania Bruguera and Pablo Helguera), artists who have enacted educational environments in their installations
INTRODUCTION

(Vella, 2015) and teachers who persist in being artistic practitioners show that forming part of one community of practice does not invalidate membership of other ‘communities’. Indeed, we need to remember that the very notion of ‘community’ is in flux and cannot circumscribe our incomplete understanding of artist-teachers’ identities. Referring to the incompleteness of any such ‘communities’, Dennis Atkinson expresses these infinite reconfigurations of the artist-teacher’s identity when he writes that “art always incompletes art, learning always incompletes learning, the subject always incompletes the subject and communities always incomplete communities” (Atkinson, 2011, p. 130).

This incompleteness or refusal to impose limits on artist-teachers and their professional identities is also the motivation behind this book’s emphasis on different cultural, political and institutional contexts. Despite the fact that the experiences of artist-teachers based in international contexts sometimes overlap, it is also obvious that artists and educators in different geographical scenarios are confronted by substantially diverse political realities, challenges, norms, ambitions and conditions of work. Developing more international perspectives on the subject contributes to a stronger awareness of culturally specific conditions and helps us to gain more nuanced understandings of preconceived ideas about art teachers, such as the idea that those who opt for a teaching career are less artistically able than full-time artists (see Rush, 1995). At the same time, many of this book’s individual interviewees’ hybrid experiences and encounters with different educational situations—often in countries or continents that are markedly different from their country of origin—help us circumvent the essentialism of identities regulated solely by national, territorial or ethnic qualities. The complexity of each interviewee’s personal history and negotiated sense of ‘being’ implores us to prefer a perpetual reassessment of artist-teachers’ experiences and practices over hasty resolutions of what is often perceived as a struggle or identity crisis.

ARTISTS-TEACHERS: THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The need for more international or comparative approaches to the study of artist-teachers is corroborated by the fact that existing literature tends to focus on realities in specific areas, particularly the US and parts of Europe that are perceived as ‘centres’ of contemporary art. Some literature has studied specific national frameworks, such as Galloway et al. (2006), which evaluated the Artist Teacher Scheme in the UK. Other publications are more international in scope. The individuals included in another collection of interviews with artist-teachers (Mollin & Reardon, 2009), for instance, are mainly well-known, European artists teaching in academies in the UK and Germany: artists like John Armleder, Liam Gillick, Erwin Wurm, Walter Dahn and Tobias Rehberger. In his study of artist-teachers throughout Western history, Daichendt (2010) also references mainly British, North American and German artist-teachers and institutions, such as Arthur Wesley Dow, Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton and the Bauhaus. It is relevant that in Daichendt’s list of five perspectives
that characterise literature on artist-teachers (p. 10)—historical accounts, studies of artist-teachers’ education and dual identities, partnerships between artists and teachers, studies of individual teachers and nontraditional artist-teachers (based in museum settings, for instance)—he does not include comparative studies on artist-teachers.

To say that an understanding of the different cultural and socio-political contexts in which art teachers are situated is important is not to say that their practices merely reproduce traditional structures and local habits. Rather, it means that their artistic goals and educational projects are expressed within localised contexts that are increasingly shifting and transnational in nature rather than territorial. It also means that the myth of a universal understanding of contemporaneity resulting from globalisation must be replaced by a space within which singularities, hybrid structures and forms of sociability enmeshed in global media as well as different economic conditions can be rendered intelligible. The individual narratives collected here are not representative of a global collectivity (artist-teachers in general), nor do they represent precise national patterns, but they do testify to the workings of different temporalities, histories, policies, personal challenges and even privileges within the lives and experiences of international artists who teach. The frequent references to different contexts in the interviews remind us that an artist-teacher’s self-image exists within and is possibly coloured by specific social realities, labels and practices.

These workings are especially evident in one of the themes listed by Daichendt: education and the dual (or multiple) identities of artist-teachers. The relationship between artist-teachers, artists in schools and even artists’ gender and identity theories has been explored elsewhere (Zwirn, 2006; Hall et al., 2007; Thornton, 2013). Some art teachers may perceive themselves as having mainly an educator’s identity, while others may think of themselves more as artists or as a combination of the two. Identities may also shift throughout one’s teaching career and may depend more on self-legitimation than any clear-cut criteria that define the role of artist-teachers (Thornton, 2011, p. 35). Naturally, self-legitimation alone cannot guarantee acceptance by other stakeholders in the fields of art and education, such as full-time artists, curators, gallerists, academics, teachers of other subjects, and administrative staff in schools. To some extent, arts-based research has contributed positively to the field by developing new theorisations of practice and innovative formats for research and by making headway in doctoral studies and literature in different cultural contexts (Nelson, 2013), yet this in itself has hardly been sufficient to wipe out prejudice and tensions.

In a significant way, the roots of existing identity issues are often traceable to the education of future art teachers, and education is by its nature enmeshed in social structures, discourses and conventions that affect motivations and ideas about the status of artists and teachers. Perceptions about the art teacher’s career are affected by factors like a weak (or strong) grounding in the literature of art education attained during initial teacher education programmes, the influence of
mentors and the support of administrative staff in schools (Hatfield et al., 2006). The course structures of preservice art education programmes and job requirements for art teachers vary from country to country. In some contexts, as Daichendt points out (p. 4), degrees in art education may include comparatively little studio practice or do not expect prospective art teachers to have a first degree in fine art, as is the case in the Netherlands (Hoekstra, 2015, p. 354). In other countries (the UK, for instance), art teachers would have generally received a first degree in studio art before obtaining a further postgraduate certificate in education or even an Artist-Teacher MA, which has been shown to have a positive impact on students’ artistic and pedagogical practices (Page et al., 2011). Having entered the formal educational system, beginning teachers’ identity conflicts may be aggravated by heavy teaching workloads and limited time for creative work, which can also lead to burnout (Mack, 2012). Occasionally, artist-teachers’ placement in ambiguous “boundary positions” that are not shared or understood by colleagues in schools or academic contexts and the contrast between their ideals and formal roles, expectations or the subject’s low status lead to feelings of marginalisation and even departures from the educational system (Cohen-Evron, 2002; Scheib, 2006).

While the existence of such identity conflicts may raise some doubts about the viability of de Duve’s dream of a generalised mode of transmission between artists who support or empathise with each other, they also testify to the need for a more thorough understanding of the benefits that can be reaped from the overlaps between art and education. A better understanding of artist-teachers’ negotiated identities can lead to revisions in initial art teacher education programmes, making students more aware of culturally specific and international challenges they could face after graduating. Students in arts education could explore these inner dialogues more self-consciously and in the company of their peers (see Carter, 2014, for instance). Professional development opportunities for art teachers in schools could have a wider than usual remit that integrates the artist’s needs with those of the teacher (Scheib, 2006). A more authentic engagement with artistic practice could also lead to a refinement or redefinition of education itself, which is often bound by curricular and policy frameworks that do not encourage the open-ended kinds of learning we associate with contemporary artistic practices and the work habits of creative practitioners. There is much to learn from the stories of those who refuse to compromise art’s alliance with change and the unknown for the sake of prescribed outcomes. Hence the need for interviews such as those in this publication.

THE INTERVIEWS

The twenty-one individuals included in this book were interviewed over a period of several months in 2015. The interviews occurred in a number of iterations, commencing with a series of individual and context-specific questions (rather than standardised questions) that were then expanded in subsequent rounds. The interviewees deliberately represent a wide range of artist-teachers based in different
countries in Europe, Asia, North, South and Central America, Australia and the Middle East. Thornton describes contemporary artist-teachers as “professional artists who teach students in art schools, or an art teacher in general education who also makes art” (2013, p. 20). The selection here is somewhat wider and includes teachers of varying ages based in secondary schools, post-secondary colleges, schools of fine art, departments of art education in universities, and even artists who have worked on educational projects. Following an idea elaborated by Daichendt, who interprets the artist-teacher’s role as “a philosophy for creating and thinking” and states that the role “has less to do with the professional activities of an artist and more to do with an active thinking process applied to educational situations” (p. 65), the questions and answers in the interviews emphasise artistic thinking processes and their potential at different educational levels. The interviews also discuss the ways different professional experiences and paradigms co-exist and contribute to each other, and try to highlight the advantages (rather than merely the ‘problems’) of occupying an in-between or fused space.

As stated earlier, this balancing act does not simply express the various artistic and educational commitments that artist-teachers may have but also refers to transnational influences and educational experiences that characterise the majority of individuals interviewed. As the history and dissemination of contemporary art show us, borders are becoming increasingly porous and artists tend to think of themselves as forming part of an international network that shares information channels and artistic or curatorial modes of presentation and communication. Some interviewees in this book received at least part of their artistic education outside their country of origin, while others have taught for sustained periods of time in international contexts. Some travel to produce or show their creative work in different countries while others speak of international mentors who have inspired their own visions and teaching methods. These narratives of physical and intellectual migrancy bear witness to a desire to do away with romanticised or polarised understandings of place that clearly separate one meaning-making system from others. At the same time, social realities and learners encountered in international contexts present a broad range of situations and challenges that show us that the global dynamics of art and art education are often experienced differently, which may lead to redefinitions of the prospects and roles of artist-teachers in different countries. A handful of interviewees, for instance, speak of political transitions that have characterised the places they inhabit and discuss how such transitions have affected their students’ ambitions and themselves as artist-teachers. One interviewee discusses the way his minority status during his childhood affected his own education. Another speaks of the lack of opportunities on the Mediterranean island he was born in and the subsequent need to travel abroad to study. Some artist-teachers in higher education teach their students to be sceptical of a market-driven art world, while others who are based in contexts where innovative forms of art face serious challenges feel that their educational role makes them somewhat responsible for nurturing contemporary trends in their country. While artist-teachers’ experiences
of hybridity, mobility and transition result in many converging ideas, they also testify to different cross-cultural fertilisations and institutional milieus that are characterised by culturally specific circumstances.

One of the converging ideas that emerges from several interviews is the marginalisation of art educators’ work in schools, universities and in the art world. Several artist-teachers discuss the relatively low status of art in school curricula, a fear of change, or an emphasis on conformity and standardisation (for example, when instrumental notions of economic productivity and an obsession with grades and qualifications overtake more aesthetic or ‘human’ aspects of art-making). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the problematic status of the subject transcends curricular hierarchies and is also associated with the choice of an artistic career as well as, in some cases, the status of art education as a discipline in academia. In some academic and cultural contexts, this marginalisation of art education seems to perpetuate itself in the art educator’s work elsewhere, given that some artist-teachers feel stigmatised in a cultural sector that may perceive their creative work as being amateurish or even fake. On the other hand, some artist-teachers consciously resist the seductions of the art world and believe that the real-life situations they find or even create in the educational sector offer more genuine possibilities for change.

The interviewees’ experiences of the ‘dual identity’ of the artist-teacher are varied. A handful have experienced some success as full-time artists represented by galleries or funded by official cultural entities. Others left behind their artistic career for several years before returning to it, or have had to organise their time systematically to sustain both their artistic and teaching practices. A few have also found time for a third activity in their careers, like art therapy. The very idea of a dual identity is problematised by several artist-teachers, who interpret art as a fundamentally holistic approach to living that is not only about the artist’s relationship with techniques or materials, but also about one’s relations with others in the street, the classroom, and so on (a “total art experience”, in the words of one artist-teacher based in Beirut). Education, according to this view, is one aspect of life amongst others. One artist-teacher prefers to think of identity as being made of “a lot of pieces” rather than two parts, and in saying this, she is clearly voicing the views of several others. Besides, some see the actual experience of art-making as an essential component in an art teacher’s life, helping that person to build an intuitive understanding of artistic processes, attitudes and problem-solving possibilities that feed directly into their pedagogies.

Several interviewees, in fact, speak of the rich possibilities involved in linking artistic thinking processes, attitudes and instrumental knowledge (teaching artistic techniques, for instance) with educational environments. One artist-teacher creates performances that, in her words, “deterriorialise the functions of teacher and student”. Another has initiated long-term projects with adults in public spaces, while others feel intellectually supported by the development and spread of arts-based methodologies in research and have engaged in methodologies like a/r/tography. Having developed a creative output or having an artistic attitude toward
teaching are understood as assets. In some contexts, such as Germany, this attitude has expanded into a full-blown philosophy of art education, expressed by the term “artistic art education” (künstlerische Kunstpädagogik). In other contexts described by interviewed artist-teachers, the advantages of combining artistic work with teaching include the possibility of developing collaborative work or performances with learners, learning from each other’s creative work, teaching about the relevance of ‘messy’ or unpredictable work that does not follow strict rules, deconstructing arbitrary divisions between creative and non-creative areas of education, and inspiring learners with projects or workshops dealing with artistic or political issues that one would have already researched in one’s own practice.

The interviewees’ discussion of the political and social realities they inhabit also expresses the diverse cultural scenarios in which they work as artists and educators and how these realities affect perceptions about the role of art educators in society. These realities affect artist-teachers at different stages of their career. A Singaporean art teacher, for instance, speaks of the difficulties he faced in the US, where he was expected to question his professors—an expectation that he feels his earlier Confucian upbringing and education had not prepared him for. This contrasts with the statements of a US-based artist-teacher, who describes social engagement and the questioning of authority as a “family tradition” back in her childhood and youth. Learners’ ambitions are indebted to local, successful ventures or predicaments: young, aspiring artists in Mexico dream of emulating their compatriot Gabriel Orozco while their counterparts in Cairo dream of leaving the country, according to an Egyptian artist-teacher interviewed here. In some contexts, artist-teachers are accused of using teaching methods that are ‘Westernised’; in others, they have faced persecution for opposing a regime. Some of the more ‘difficult’ contexts provide very inspiring stories about the significance of creative teaching. In one narrative, for example, an artist-teacher describes her approach to teaching art in Beirut and explains, amongst other things, why she believes that discussing Cézanne’s apples with her students at the height of the conflict in Lebanon was relevant, despite the tragedies that her students and herself were experiencing so closely. In her words, the most distressing experiences helped her understand that those painted apples were “a stabilising force amidst the social and political upheavals”.

Possibly, what these interviews transmit is not so much a desire to find a resolution but the need to engage with and even embrace the tension that may reside within the co-existence of art and education. This tension permeates the themes, process-based work, unpredictable outcomes and collaborative pedagogies of many artist-teachers. To some extent, art education is this tension. Cuban artist Tania Bruguera has stated: “I don’t want an art that points at a thing. I want an art that is the thing” (quoted in Thompson, 2012, p. 21, original emphasis). Perhaps this is the most significant asset of a pedagogy that considers art to be more like a way of being in the world than a school subject. The most effective pedagogy is that which is already what it sets out to teach.
INTRODUCTION

REFERENCES


INTERVIEW WITH MÓNICA CASTILLO

1. THE COMPATIBILITY OF TEACHING AND MAKING ART

You were born in Mexico City but studied art in Rome, Stuttgart and Berlin. What attracted you to Europe, and in what ways were the experiences and the education you received there different or similar to what you had gained in your home country?

It is not strange for a Latin American middle class family’s child to be sent to foreign schools. I studied at the German school Alexander von Humboldt in Mexico City by chance, just because it was close to where we lived. The French or Japanese lyceum would have been almost the same. So when I thought of studying art later on, I went to Germany, because I had already spent two years in a boarding school in Bavaria and spoke German fluently. In Rome, too, I attended the German school, where I chose art as a major. I mention this to explain that my approach to art and thinking is very much influenced by German culture. I never studied art in Mexico. Moved by this inherited idea that art education would definitely be ‘better’ in Germany, I was very surprised when I started studying at the beginning of the 1980s, to learn that the art academy, following a non-academic trend and maybe also a sense of inertia, didn’t have any scheduled teaching at all. There were art history classes, teachers with more or less specific backgrounds, and as a student, I was able to do whatever I wanted. No grades, no classes, no degree.

As a whole, I can say that coming back to Mexico in the mid-1980s and meeting artists my age, I was surprised to see that they only worked if they had a show coming up. In Germany I learnt that art is a way of being in life and is also a way of ‘working’ life. Art praxis and thinking as the centre of life, as a central value to which everything else (money, time, affects and body) is related. To work on the relation between art and life is anchored in German Romanticism…not to speak about the relevance of work.

In Germany I had access to books and to art exhibitions (we are talking about a pre-internet world), and the presence of a close art scene was also very formative. All of these things existed in Mexico City back then, but in a very exclusive way.

As a whole I can say I learned to be more committed and to take art very seriously. I worked very hard for many years.
INTERVIEW WITH MÓNICA CASTILLO

What do you mean by “the relevance of work”?

I mean ‘work’ as a central value in German culture. In Mexico we have a different relation to work. Outside the big cities (and sometimes even there), family, religion and celebration are as important as work. Compared to Germany, work is not seen as the main activity for one’s personal fulfilment.

Figure 1. Mónica Castillo, Self-portrait as another person, 1997, oil on canvas, 90 × 80 cm
So you see yourself as a Mexican woman imbued with a German way of thinking. Perhaps your education in the visual arts could be seen as a metaphor for your own works of art, which have often dealt with the fragmentation of the self. It is relevant that the title of one of your exhibitions which travelled around South America was Yo es un Otro (I is an Other). Judging from your own experiences and work, would you say that art helps us to understand ourselves more or is it only a way of coming to terms with the self’s duplicity?

Louise Bourgeois talks about the fatal relation between art and life: the more you dig into yourself (history, image, body), the more you free yourself from a burden and tie yourself to it at the same time. I don’t think I “came to terms” with myself through painting self-portraits. I stopped making them because it became easy and also because they were successful and people started to think about me simply as my self-portraits. In actual fact, I had started this investigation because I thought I could establish a distance between the object being represented and myself.

I don’t think we are two (a duplicity), I think everybody is a lot of pieces and maybe the happiness of making something with forms and materials, that echoes in your body and affect, is a way of feeling (whole?!), or finding, at least temporarily, something outside where you ‘belong’. In a way, making things—and since a number of years, collaborative making too—is a fulfilling way of being in a specific context. Making something that ‘fits’ in a context or being able to react to something and to make a gesture that is acknowledged as ‘fitting’, is definitely a high.

Around the year 2000, when I stopped doing self-portraits, I kept researching painting and trying to imagine, in my terms, what the origin of representation could be: touch, the surface, the material and its relation to the living object. At that point, I received an invitation to create a school in the Mexican Caribbean and I practically stopped making art. My whole energy went first and foremost into creating the curriculum, then moving to Yucatán, where we started putting the school together with next to nothing: ten plastic chairs and tables, a monitor, a VHS cassette player and my personal laptop. It was an incredibly challenging situation. Life practically swept away all my concentration for making art. Teaching in such a precarious environment, with an institution that was not structured at all—students were very sceptical and kept asking if it really was going to be a serious thing…—gave us the possibility of being really crazy in class. It was lots of fun, and to be honest, also scary at times, because limits were not very clear. There was always something going on. After investing four years in this project, I had become a bureaucrat. I missed making art very much, but at the same time I realised I could not go back to where I was before. It had already been done and the experience in Yucatán had moved me deeply in ways I’m not able to verbalise yet. It has to do with Mexico being a violently stratified society, which, through my privileged upbringing and the many years abroad, I hadn’t really been in touch with. Paradoxically enough, the only thing that occurred to me was going back to school myself…but in Germany
INTERVIEW WITH MÓNICA CASTILLO

again! I spent three years in Berlin studying and trying to answer questions about the relations established between people, when creation is at stake.

Figure 2. Mónica Castillo, Model for a Self-portrait, 1997, textile, 160 × 40 × 15 cm
There I got to know this interesting exercise called ‘common space-individual space’ developed by Gregorz Kowalski, a professor at the Academy in Warsaw. This non-verbal ‘game’ can be played in relation to all kinds of topics and formal issues. It’s a ‘pre-artistic’ way of signifying, finding things out about oneself, one’s relation to others and the meaning constructed in specific contexts.

Since I came back to Mexico, I have been working with art as a vehicle to move socially and explore contexts to which I did not have access. This happens mainly through participation projects that are related to education. Lately I have been collaborating on a project that is taking place in a suburb of the Mexican city Oaxaca. It’s a group of self-organised neighbours and three artists, and we are making collaborations for and with the people in the neighbourhood. These are collaborations on creation, workshops, programming cinema and so on, actually, very humble gestures…I also moved there and we have a beautiful house, where we have artists-in-residence, who we, as a collective, invite to work in the neighbourhood. Recently, I have been drawing diagrams which envision and explain the structure of the project and developing a cooking book with other women, based on food we can get in the local market. On an educational level, this project offers all participants situations during which they constantly learn from each other. There is one elementary teacher, a student, a convenience store’s cashier, an electrician, a woman who makes and sells embroidery in the market, a high school student, an urbanist and an artist, a former student of mine, who grew up there.

Let’s talk a bit more about your shift to education. Since 1986, your creative work has been shown in scores of solo and collective exhibitions. What led you to decide that you wanted to be a teacher?

For me teaching is a privilege, a field of research, a challenge, but also lots of fun. I agree with Joseph Beuys, who said that teaching was his most important work of art. I enjoy making art a lot, but I have never enjoyed the art world: shows, curators, galleries, PR, art as commodity, and so on. To some extent, to me teaching is a way of coming to terms ideologically with art-making. It’s a modest service to an institution, and here in Mexico, this is a neglected institution. It’s a way of creating collaboratively, without having this dark side of the commercial art-world or being attached to the big spheres of money and power. But I think it’s also important not to interpret it naively: the institution of education is a protected space where, structurally, teachers delegate the answers to tough questions to students. I can be a very critical thinker as a teacher, but the student is expected to react and make something out of that.

Nevertheless, to me developing projects with students is as exciting as creation, since I have to imagine who is this person who knows lots of things but is not able to articulate them. What does s/he want? Is it creation, affect, biography? What is at stake? How far can we go in problematising together, without me making a personal statement through the student? I think education just works out when both
persons, the student and myself, meet in an exciting place. When both sides discover a mystery together. If this doesn’t happen, it’s terribly boring for both sides. The student thinks that I’m a bad teacher and a frustrated artist and I think that the student does not have much to offer, artistically speaking.

Do any of your students become teachers of art rather than artists? How do you feel about this?

It’s interesting… actually I don’t have many students who have become full-time teachers, at least the ones with whom I’m still in touch. Many have taught temporarily. When it has happened I enjoy talking with them very much about how they feel being ‘on the other side’. I’m also curious to know what and how they do in class.

Strangely, I’m very proud of the ones who have taken risks by finding different ways of being an artist: one is working on experimental art therapy, another is working at an underwater sculpture museum, one moved to a little beach town to surf and paint, one is travelling, drawing a journal about encounters with women’s organisations. Another one, a well-off girl, married a very poor guy and they are creating a cultural centre together. I feel very sad when they think the commercial art world is the only option and they work hard to get attention, without being really convinced of the way it works. In the last few years, I have been working a lot with them, discussing different fields of possible action within art—the commercial field being just one among many others—imagining ways of expanding the field of creation together in terms of where and how to do that, imagining life situations together, where maybe risk is a way of achieving a little sense of freedom… To still feel inspired and challenged by my ex-students is a great thing. To feel surprised seeing that they imagined something I couldn’t even get close to. But strangely enough, only a few of them teach and as far as I can remember, not one of them has chosen an institutional academic career. To see them turning into bored teachers would definitely disappoint me. But it seems that there is something strange going on that I had not realised until now: me, being passionate about teaching and not having any ex-students who feel the same way about it…

Given that you are so passionate about teaching, have you ever thought about the limits of art education? Is there anything an art teacher cannot teach?

It’s a tricky question. There are too many things involved to define a limit: institution, specificity (history, gender, class) and moments of the different actors (teacher and student). How does a student integrate and understand knowledge? Teaching is, as we say in Spanish, “like shooting into the sky”. It has happened to me that former students hug me thankfully many years later for all the things “they’ve learned from me”. Sometimes, I do recognise some positions and language and I get the feeling that I did have an influence, but sometimes I’m terrified of what they’ve become
and ask myself whether I’m responsible for what they are. Nowadays I try to show
different ways within art of becoming a professional, but I see a strong trend in
young people who dream of becoming a rock star: an artist, but also a celebrity.
I don’t teach them to become ‘star artists’ and students know me, but there are always
a few who end up investing their time in public relations, running after gallerists, and
going to openings. So, I think as an art teacher, you never know exactly what you
taught and what you didn’t. It depends on so many things working together.

Could you delve a bit more into the specifics of your teaching methods? For
instance, you spoke earlier about the Escuela Superior de Artes de Yucatán
in Mérida in Mexico. Tell me a little about the educational programme you
created there.

The school in Mérida, in the Caribbean, was founded in 2004. There were concrete
issues we wanted to address, very basic ones, like reacting to the schools in
Mexico City. Back then, video, multimedia and photography did not have the same
importance as painting and sculpture. I still had some faith that contemporary art
could be distributed and approached in a less institutionalised and commercial
way, especially in a place like Yucatán. In five years, we created a strange and very
ambitious programme, based on a pseudo-semiotic structure, with lots of (too many)
classes, where we pretended to meet all the possible fantasies a student could have.
Reality then showed us that an institution should not try to ‘possess’ all the desires a
student can have. We had one central topic per semester and all classes and teachers
had to work around it, similar to the way Waldorf schools work. We had discussions,
once every semester, where all teachers discussed each student’s work. We were able
to invite interesting artists I knew, from different places. We were passionate about
teaching. There were very traditional thinkers and also radical left-oriented artists, migrants from Cuba, very young artists, who had just finished school and me, who came from the established art world. We could do really crazy things, like covering the school in graffiti together, getting all the students into buses and taking them to Mexico City to see museums, or organising a competition, in which we sent the winner to visit Europe. We improvised a lot, imagining things together at all levels. The best part of the school was feeling alive with students and teachers, engaging in very serious fun by making sense through signifying. It had more to do with an adventure than with a specific knowledge base that I had gained through my work.

And today? What are the dynamics and challenges that affect the teaching of art especially in higher educational institutions in Mexico? What kinds of opportunities exist for young artists?

I teach at the “Esmeralda” (Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado “La Esmeralda”), the biggest and most renowned art school in Mexico. Now, what affects education mostly is the ‘Gabriel Orozco dream’. Since the 1990s, with the funding of galleries, being an artist has become associated more with recognition than becoming a critical person. But it remains largely a dream because, of course, they don’t know what it takes to be an ‘internationally recognised artist’. It’s fine to be ambitious, but it’s very easy to lose a sense of context. Most students and artists who have this ambition think that showing one’s work around the world is a goal, instead of working at the grassroots level. It’s very common here to see artists and students seduced by power, dreaming of being taken into account by an institution (a gallery or museum), of being in a position where you can decide over others or ignore them, or wanting to be admired like a rock star. So, it’s difficult for me sometimes to make the point that it’s far sexier to operate in the margins, being in touch with people, acting in concrete contexts, bringing producers and public closer to each other, thinking about the local and about education as a highly political activity, and so on.

I also understand that it’s very abstract for them. I’ve been assessing a self-organised cultural project in the suburbs of Oaxaca city and decided to dedicate this year to it and there I’ve seen that students from Mexico City, through getting to know and living the experience of this ‘lab’, understand the liberty and limits of creation in a self-organised context. This would be a direction that I would encourage students to take. I don’t believe in helping or training students to get as fast as possible into the art institutions, because it doesn’t allow the future artist to imagine new ways of making his or her art public.
INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLY NAIDUS

2. YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME
The Serious Business of Socially Engaged Art

You’ve worked as a teaching artist for almost four decades. Tell me a little about how it all began. Were there any specific events or political movements that helped to convince you that you needed to engage yourself actively both as an artist and an educator?

As the granddaughter of immigrants who were seeking refuge from poverty and pogroms in Eastern Europe, I was supposed to live out the American dream and choose an upwardly mobile career. I was being pointed towards something in the world of science that would lead to a lucrative occupation. At the end of my senior year, my high school art teacher asked which art school I had chosen to go to. I responded impulsively, “You’ve gotta be kidding me; no way! I’m going to do something serious with my life!” That snide remark has served as an illustration for my students for many years. What does it mean to live in a culture that constantly instils the attitude that the arts are frivolous?

In truth, my values were and continue to be quite counter-culture. Participating in the ‘rat race’ was something I sneered at, like a good number of my generation did. I could see the immense contradictions of the status quo early on, and wanted little to do with upward mobility. Living simply and collectively, and doing something that served others, seemed a much saner way to be present in the world.

Social engagement was a family tradition. I was taught to think critically about what I was learning in school and to question authority. We went to antiwar marches, signed petitions and canvased for progressive candidates. Whether organising for the local: changing the girl’s dress code in high school, or against the bombing of Cambodia, I experienced my nascent activism as functional and effective much of the time. When our progressive candidate (Eugene McCarthy) lost, my father would remind me that we were part of a river of activists and that victories emerging from the grass roots might take generations of organising. Although I was inspired by all the burgeoning movements of that time, I could also see how progressive groups fragmented, factionalised and sometimes became dogmatic. All of this was discouraging to my idealistic self so I stepped away from outright activism during my first years in college and chose a more inward path of self-exploration and reflection.

As my high school art teacher had observed, I had developed an addiction for using art to make sense of both my inner and outer chaos. All through my childhood I had used art as a way to process my feelings. I was considered an ‘overly’ sensitive
INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLY NAIDUS

kid who spent a lot of time alone stringing together words, images, stories, sounds and gestures to express a whole world of fantasy, but mostly angst: the alienation of growing up in the land of shopping malls, being dark-skinned and different in the world of whiteness and freaking out about nuclear war. Encountering *Echo of a Scream* by David Alfaro Siquieros in the Museum of Modern Art was one of those “aha” moments; here was an artist who understood how to convey the shadows of a world that most people choose not to look at. I was mesmerised by his truth telling.

I first began to understand the power of pedagogy to transform people in high school. I observed two dynamic teachers, one who taught poetry and theatre and brought emotionally wounded young people out of their shells, and the other, a former marine and football coach, who had the courage to teach the reality of the Vietnam war, and helped students run a teach-in after the bombing of Cambodia. Both were great risk-takers and role models for me.

In college, I studied with Paul Wellstone, when he was a young activist. I was beginning to think it was the norm to have social justice advocates as teachers. It was a surprise when I encountered the opposite, and ironically that often happened in the art classes. Some explicit episodes with sexism in the latter threw me back into the ring of activism. One of my male professors thought he was flattering me when he said that I could be “the one” female art student who could make it in the “boy’s club.” He suggested that the other female students would become good art collectors once they had married well. His insults (and he thought he was praising me) were startling to me, but the timing couldn’t have been better. One of my female peers had a connection to the new feminist art programme at CalArts and we were able to access some of their resources. Our college had very few female professors (the art department had none) and our art history lectures made it appear that only white men made art. So we occupied the department chairman’s office and made our demands known: women faculty, our own exhibition space, female visiting artists, etc. As a result, we had a festival of women’s art and performances, the art history lectures gradually changed and women faculty were hired. Two visiting feminist artists gave us a dose of a dogmatic approach to feminist art, and we thankfully had the good sense not to follow that narrow path. Every one of us went on to become serious, practising artists, all shaping feminism into something truly liberatory. And none of us married “well”, at least not in the sense that my teacher had imagined.

In graduate school, a theory-based, conceptual approach to art-making was dominant at the time. I was introduced to the writings of Ivan Illich, Paolo Freire, John Berger and Neil Postman and began my journey into how key questions could be brought into the classroom to raise consciousness. In post-graduate school I explored feminist and race theory and bell hooks’ writings on pedagogy became an important piece of my tool kit.

As a result, I could not conform to teaching art in the traditional ways (technical exercises, lessons in western aesthetics and current trends in the art world). Instead students developed projects, often collaborative ones, where they deconstructed myths, questioned stereotypes and assumptions and told their own stories.
As a teaching artist in NYC museums I had lots of practice in “teaching art as a subversive activity”. My students were encouraged to ask questions about the work they saw on the walls, not just what does this work mean, but who is this art for and what stories were being told about whom? We talked about privilege, who has it and who doesn’t, and how does one claim one’s values in a culture that tries to erase them. Similarly, once I had arrived in academia, I experimented with many different strategies to help students find their voices while learning about social issues that impacted their lives. My summers teaching at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont, training with Augusto Boal of the Theatre of the Oppressed, and teaching for Goddard College (with its John Dewey-influenced, learner-based pedagogical model) in their newly founded MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts also gave me many new strategies for working with students.

A most recent fusion of my art and teaching practices has taken place over the past dozen years at UW Tacoma, where I was invited twelve years ago to “teach whatever I want” with interdisciplinary majors and non-traditional public university students. More about this later…

Lucy R. Lippard has written that she admires your “commitment to an alternative path to teaching art and social justice without contradictions”. What kinds of contradictions do you think she was referring to? Can we—indeed, should we—avoid contradictions in education and artistic practice?

I believe that Lucy is referring to the contradictions of the marketplace and what it means to be an artist in this time of late Capitalism, without playing the game of galleries, dealers and being beholden to the whims of status-driven collectors. I briefly tasted that experience when my practice was young. With the mentorship of a few older artists, I explored the activist margins of the NYC art world, went to openings, met peers and exhibited in many group shows – most of them in alternative spaces, but a few in museums. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time with the right thing and got some recognition.

Articles about my work in *Art Forum*, *Art in America* and the *NY Times*, felt like too much attention, too soon, since I was in my mid-20s at the time. I was unprepared for the competitive energy it stirred up from others. I felt untested and not at all wise – I did not yet understand the ageism of the art world and how it eats its young. I saw the opportunism, ego-stroking needs and pretensions up close and it felt bone-deep wrong, given the intentions I had for my work. With the world appearing to head towards nuclear war (and many other disasters that were accelerated during those Reagan years), the act of sipping cocktails at fancy art parties with people discussing their real estate deals just didn’t make sense or appeal to me. Some artists I respect deeply have had a greater tolerance for those contradictions and both they and their work appear to not have suffered for it. I was not very resilient or mature, and thankfully had both the instinct and opportunity to leave so that I could grow in the ways I wanted and needed to.
INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLY NAIDUS

An artist ‘friend’ told me that by leaving NYC at that moment when my career was clearly blossoming would essentially throw all my gains in the trash; she said it would be like falling off the edge. So I let myself fall and the further I got from the hubbub of the art world, the less I heard its siren call.

Once I was in Los Angeles, the marketplace’s shadow could not compete with the lively alternative art scene there. I had no shortage of venues for my work and intellectually engaging peers. The only compromise in staying there was the challenge to my health.

Things are quite different here in Seattle where socially engaged and feminist art practices are not as commonplace because they have not been taught (LA had the Woman’s Building spawning a couple of generations of practitioners). This distinction has encouraged me to make my studio a place for gathering peers in monthly discussion groups and to find interdisciplinary allies outside of the local arts community while I build an audience for my projects. I also maintain a fruitful dialogue with artists, teachers and activists all over the world through my ‘Arts for Change’ Facebook page and several other online discussion groups.

The neoliberal explosion of the art marketplace during the last few decades has become repulsive to many artists who discover early on that the whims of the industry have little to do with the depth or merit of their art. Some younger artists are choosing the entrepreneurial model to survive, creating businesses and becoming freelance public artists while others are joining collectives and developing permeable egos so that they can collaborate well, create stronger projects and offer each other support. Some of us older artists are choosing to do the same.

You are frequently involved in educational projects in which the word ‘change’ features prominently. At the University of Washington Tacoma as well as in the workshops you conduct at your Seattle studio and the Facebook page you mentioned, you talk about “arts for change”. What does change mean to you? Are artistic changes as relevant or important as political changes? Is it possible that the notion of change within educational contexts becomes too prescriptive beyond a certain point?

Frankly the word “change” has almost become a cliché for me, especially since the word was co-opted by political candidates to imply “support me, I’ll give you what you want” and then, lo and behold, we received more of the same. I wish there was another word to describe the evolution in thinking and acting that needs to happen. “Transformation” could be that word if it didn’t have similar baggage. But I don’t want to get stuck in the semantics.

The truth is that we need art that really shifts people out of denial, to help them grasp more deeply what is happening to the planet right now. We need art that allows people to grieve, feel less isolated and dream the future we want. And all of that means changing gears, changing perspective and seeing what’s under the surface. Our American public has been so dumbed down by the media and an educational
system that was damaged by defunding, standardised tests and more. This process was started with the neoliberal agenda ushered in by Reagan and subsequent administrations.

As suggested earlier, I believe that all art has a politics, so the two merge in my mind. Can art create legislative change? Perhaps if it touches people so deeply that a grassroots movement emerges and it pressures those in power to change policies. One form of art that has the potential to do that is interactive, community-based work – when people are moved by a story to tell their own, that’s when I’ve seen people actually shift a fixed position. Being heard and seen creates an unexpected momentum.

Within the classroom one cannot predict what changes will occur, especially if you are really engaged in a radical form of pedagogy. So I don’t consider this prescriptive, quite the opposite. You can set an intention (we will make art about the ecological crisis), provide a context (in this moment in time, with these tools and concepts) and resources (with these readings, experiences, understandings of history and materials), but where the students go with that, both individually and collectively cannot be prescribed and, in fact, shouldn’t be.

What I find compelling about what you say is that you have communicated your ideas about art, feminism and social change in many different contexts: from formal classrooms to museums and even community-based projects. How does your relationship with your audience change when you shift your teacher’s/activist’s location?

First it’s important to find out where we are located in relation to the context that we are working in. We do the research to find out who our audience might be, and look at how to create connection with them through shared concerns, questions and stories. Once we’ve found those places, we look to find common ground or experiences. Learning how to listen to who is in the room and discover how differently they might perceive things has helped me open up my heart rather than shut down and carry prejudices into spaces where it would inhibit dialogue or provoke some kind of cultural imperialism to occur.

How would you say your own practice as an artist has changed over the years? Were there any significant events, political milestones or authors whose work influenced such changes?

Moving multiple times across the continent for reasons that were both economic and health-related has had a big impact on my practice. I never planned to be this nomadic, but it has given me the gift of cohorts and networks in many places and a decidedly ‘un-provincial’ point of view. With each move, I’ve had to start from scratch in a new community and that has been both humbling and hard work. This experience echoes something I practise in the studio: I sometimes avoid the things that I do well
They were the best of friends, he thought. He didn’t really understand oppression and didn’t really want to. It made him so uncomfortable.

Figure 4. Beverly Naidus, So Uncomfortable, a culture jammed image from the series \Other: Breaking Out of the Box, 2001
so that I can be in that uncomfortable, exciting and beginner’s place where I know nothing. The ‘mistakes’ yielded by these experiments offer an antidote to smugness and often send me in productive directions. The gift of being invisible in a new context offers time for research, deep internal reflection, stream of consciousness drawing and photography, improvisation with materials and just putting everything on pause. Eventually, when new cohorts arrive, I get to collaborate and brainstorm with a new team, make a new home for my work, and develop a renewed sense of purpose.

As I’ve aged, I’ve witnessed and experienced so many challenges including those caused by economic limitations, patriarchy, racism and unhealthy environments (neoliberal academic institutions and polluted air, water, etc.), but despite all these issues I’ve been very lucky and privileged. I can make art and write about these challenges, and find audiences who resonate with my questions and experiences. My media seem to change often, although I always return to words, photos, mixed media drawings, improvisations with found objects and interactive installations.

Figure 5. Beverly Naidus, Eden Reframed: An Ecological and Community Art Project, 2011, eco-art inspired by permaculture design, Vashon Island, WA
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Over time, I’ve developed more efficient, portable forms (digital ones as well as objects that roll or fold up and easily fit in boxes) or ones that take root and yield harvests, like my eco-art project on Vashon Island.

Being unexpectedly evicted from several studios on my current campus required me to be enormously resilient and adaptable. I began working more outside, studied permaculture design and created *Eden Reframed* on Vashon Island, WA. The lack of significant work space also catalysed the writer in me, and my book, *Arts for Change: Teaching Outside the Frame* (New Village Press, 2009) emerged.

Wonderful writers of speculative fiction and revisionist histories have strengthened my resolve to tell different stories about the future and the past: Ruth Ozeki, Ursula LeGuin, Marge Piercy, Octavia Butler, Barbara Kingsolver, Starhawk, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Ernest Callenbach, Leslie Marmon Silko, Kim Stanley Robinson and Rebecca Solnit.

There are spiritual roots to much of my socially engaged work. They come from different traditions. Joanna Macy, a Buddhist teacher and environmental and anti-nuclear activist helped me transform my despair and cynicism about the future into art that might inspire action. Due to her influence, my installation about nuclear nightmares, THIS IS NOT A TEST became more explicitly interactive. Joanna often speaks about our relationship to “future beings.” Our new collective, ARTifACTs is imagining our descendants in *We Almost Didn’t Make It: An Illuminated and Participatory Manuscript from the Future*.

Doing grief rituals with Sobonfu Some of the Dagara people gave me a deeper understanding of how to work with personal and collective grief as part of “Curtain Call: Portable Altars for Grief and Gratitude.” Thich Nhat Hanh led a retreat for activist artists where I was given tools for being present, using my art for healing and more. Meditation practices, yoga, sweat lodge ceremonies, dream work and earth-based rituals all have offered me spiritual nourishment and added to my art practice.

Here in Seattle, my dance community has given me a space in which to express things that I can’t say with words or images; they taught me about “contact improvisation” – a concept that I have taken into the studio, creating balance and tension between objects, dreams, textures, ideas, colours and feelings.

My husband, Bob Spivey, who aside from being an extraordinary partner and stalwart activist, scholar, poet and a lay Buddhist monk, introduced me to social ecology and the many passionate activists, scholars and teachers from the Institute for Social Ecology.

What kind of role, if any, do your own works as an artist play in your teaching methods?

When I was invited to teach at UW Tacoma they told me I could teach whatever I wanted. Given that it is an interdisciplinary programme without the resources for a conventional art department, I wanted to experiment with teaching art thematically rather than from the medium, allowing content to determine the forms. Students
share the stories about the topic in various media (everything from digital art, artists’ books, performance and site-specific installations). They learn to think critically about the issues discussed and the art that they research with similar content. They develop skills with visual grammar to make their work as compelling as possible. They learn about process-based work, collaboration and how to use art as an intervention in everyday life. In every class they keep journals where they are encouraged to take risks with materials and ideas, vent about the course content and brainstorm projects.

Each course is based on the themes within major bodies of my own work. In other words, THIS IS NOT A TEST inspired my ‘Art in a Time of War’ class. Given my concerns about continuing wars, the high suicide rates among veterans, and the amnesia and ignorance about the causes and histories of war, I felt this course was ideal for our student body, many who are vets or grew up in military families, in a community surrounded by military bases. There are also a sizeable number of students who come from families who are refugees from war-torn areas. My artist’s book, One Size DOES NOT Fit All, provoked my ‘Body Image and Art’ class. Decades of work about environmental issues inspired my ‘Eco-Art’ course. Coming to terms with my identity as a person of colour, raised to be white, and making work about those issues encouraged my class in ‘Cultural Identity and Art’. ‘Labour, Globalisation and Art’ emerged from my installations about unemployment and nine-to-five life, as well as
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my work as an activist within the global justice movement. ‘The Artist as Visionary and Dreamer’ was inspired by my work in dream groups, as well as my long history of making art about dreams and nightmares and my desire to help students imagine a world quite different from Hollywood’s dystopian futurism. The latter passion was influenced by my years teaching at the Institute for Social Ecology, where I learned about reconstructive visions of the future, again not prescriptive ones, but ones that will help people imagine the future we want.

Working within academia at an underfunded state institution, with a constantly changing administration, has had many limitations but I am grateful for the freedom I have in the classroom and take full advantage of it. We do meditation, read and watch materials that are critical of racial, gender and class oppression and work with community collaborators like the Washington State Labor Council. Artists from the networks I’ve created around the world have arrived in the classroom, including visits this year from the Beehive Design Collective and Bread and Puppet Theater. I experience my work with students much like facilitating a ten-week, community-based art project.

If we are able to go against the neoliberal tide, our proposed major, Arts in Community, will be approved before too long. The curriculum we have developed over the past 13 years will be used to train students to develop art projects in a wide variety of community contexts. In my Seattle studio, and eventually in Tacoma as well, I will continue to teach workshops, modified versions of my content-based courses to a diverse group of adult learners. The goal is to seed cohorts who connect with a wide spectrum of socially engaged art practices and see what emerges.