The Development of an Artist

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARTIST

By

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The Development of an Artist

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The goal of my final creative project was to receive instruction in the area of the visual arts, create a body of work that would be displayed in an art gallery or other appropriate setting, and emerge publicly as an artist. This goal was important to me for two reasons. The first reason was that for many years I had suppressed my own need to create and express myself through art for various reasons: lack of instruction and fear of stepping out of the box and expressing myself creatively. My final creative project has led to an awakening of my ability to express myself through my artwork and make personal connections with my paintings. Focusing on the basic elements of art in my instruction and integrating this new knowledge into each of my paintings has produced a great deal of personal growth as an artist. The second reason this goal was important to me was that integrating the fine arts into the curriculum of the public schools has always been a priority. Teaching visual arts to the students in my regular education classroom was something I have strived for, yet I felt I lacked the skills needed to teach it well. This project resulted in the realization that I was an artist who could produce works of art pleasing to others and myself as well. In addition to addressing my lack of personal art and development as an artist, I also resolved the problem of having the skills and knowledge to bring quality art instruction into the classroom. While this creative project has been focused primarily on my own artistic development, my students will reap the benefits of my growth for years to come.
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In the past two years of the Creative Pulse a metamorphosis has taken place in my soul. The artistic facet of my life had been shut down and carefully contained only emerging for specific occasions. I allowed myself to create for my students in order to make lessons exciting and novel. I made sure that they had numerous opportunities to express their creativity. I was creative for my two children and supported whatever creative endeavor they were interested in; however, expressing myself as an artist was a luxury that I did not allow myself. In fact I had not created my own artwork since junior high school!

The Creative Pulse masters program recognizes how dry a teacher’s essence can become when he/she is not encouraged to feed his/her own artistic soul. In the first year of the program I found myself caught between amazement, discomfort, and liberating bursts of joy. The lid of my tightly contained box of personal creativity was pried open with specific intent by my professors.

When I left The Creative Pulse after that first summer, I was fearful that the reawakening would slip away as each mile took me further away from the professors who had taught me so much and the inspiring classmates with whom I had shared the last five weeks. Thankfully, this was not the case. The box was open and would not willingly be shut again. The first day I returned to my home in Big Timber I ran into two local artists that I knew lived here, who I had not previously met, Jack Hines and Jessica Zemsky. They invited me to their home and studio. My husband and I visited that day. I was so
encouraged by their words of wisdom and advice. Jessica said, “It was fun to meet you. Now it’s up to you. Get busy!!” Her words reminded me of one of my favorite quotes.

   Whatever you can do,  
   Or dream you can, begin it.  
   Boldness has genius,  
   Power and magic in it.

   Goethe

   I followed both Jessica Zemsky and Goethe’s advice and immediately dove in. I found my instructor when I picked up my daughter, Hannah, from a summer art class she was taking. Susan Lavold studied Fine Arts at the University of Montana and has completed independent studies in 22 European countries. When Susan learned about the Creative Pulse program and what I wanted to accomplish throughout the next year, she agreed to be my mentor. We started lessons a week after I had left the Creative Pulse. Our studies included pencil sketch and art history, with focus on painting in oil.

   As the year progressed I was also able to take watercolor classes with Bonnie Conner, another local artist, through the Adult Education classes offered at Sweet Grass High School. I took her fall and spring class offerings. Brian Persia from Bozeman offered a pottery class at the Two Rivers Gallery that was a wonderful experience for me in a new medium.

   My daughter, Hannah, joined me in most of my lessons. It was a joy to watch her emerge as an artist, growing in her artistic abilities and confidence. Two of her paintings, a watercolor and oil, were selected by a local gallery to be part of an art show. What a memorable moment it was to see my daughter at an artist’s reception and know that my own willingness to stretch and explore was part of the reason she was there.
I experienced tremendous growth because I had never before had the opportunity
to take lessons. I had followed Jessica’s advice and had “gotten busy.” My instructors at
the Creative Pulse had given me permission to feed my own soul and I arrived back at
school for my second year a changed person.
II.

INTENT

The second year with the Creative Pulse brought new inspiration, more awakening, honed skills, risk, and rigor. My intent in this research project was to study, learn, practice, grow, and take myself to another level as an artist. I planned on creating a body of work that I would present to our local gallery in hopes of it being accepted for show.

My first step in this process was to apply for the Teacher Exploration of the Arts Grant through the Montana Arts Council. This is a grant program for elementary teachers who teach art but do not have a background in that subject. The teacher works with a professional artist to develop their skills as a visual artist. The award of $500 is made to the school and the school pays the professional artist directly. I sent out my application for the T.E.A. Grant on August 12, 2009, and anxiously waited to hear back from the Montana Arts Council.

My next step was to immediately begin lessons again with my mentor, Susan Lavold, whether or not I received the grant. I would focus mainly on oil painting because this was her specialty, and I had developed a passion for this medium throughout the previous year. I had never worked with oils before, but the first time I felt the smooth glide of the brush and oil across the canvas I was hooked. I am enthralled by just the smell of my oil paints when I squeeze them out on my pallet. I had to learn everything from how to mix paints with a pallet knife to what to mix with the oil paints to give them more glide. I love the texture I can achieve by applying layers over layers. One of my
favorite things about oils is when I make a mistake I can paint over it and rework it until it is right. Watercolors are very unforgiving that way.
III.

PROCESS

In mid August the Montana Arts Council awarded me the T.E.A. grant. I chose the same artist that I had worked with the year before on my field project to again be my mentor. Susan Lavold and I worked well together, and I knew she was an inspirational and creative teacher. The schedule for the grant stated that we would start September 29, but I was anxious to begin, so we began lessons in August. Once again my daughter, Hannah, and her friend, Emily joined in on the lessons. It was such an inspiration to have their twelve-year-old uninhibited energy around me.

My first project was to finish an oil painting of a white buffalo that I had begun in January of 2009 (Appendix A). The sky and bluffs in the background had seemed to just flow onto the canvas instinctually; however, the landscape was a challenge. I needed to learn about atmospheric perspective to show the distance between the bluffs and the foreground. After studying online lessons with John Hagen, I was able to achieve the appearance of distance I needed. Hagan states, “We live in a world of atmosphere. The closer to the ground the thicker the veil. This mist of suspended particles interferes such that objects on the horizon seem fainter and have less color (saturation) than were they to be situated much nearer.” I accomplished the horizontal distance of the foothills in front of the bluffs by diluting the oil paint with walnut oil and creating a wash to brush over the foothills.

I learned a lot about authenticity when using a realism style of painting. I studied the mature male buffalo carefully through the work of Wes Olson who has studied bison for over thirty years. The buffalo in my painting is a mature white male, approximately
seven years old. I worked at accurately portraying the characteristics Olson depicted for a bison of this age.

“The cape is heavy and sharply demarcated. The hump is definitely that of a bull and can no longer be confused with a cow’s. The hair on the forehead has begun to fill the space between his horns and the rostral swelling has formed. The beard and lower neck mane are rich and pendulous. His chaps are full and hang below his knees. The belly is firm and taut with well-defined muscles. The sheath and tuft are prominent and easily seen from a distance.” (Olson, 70)

I also had to think about the authenticity of plant-life and environment. One of my favorite plants, the Indian Paint brush, was my first choice for the meadowlark to perch. However, after studying the grassland areas of Wyoming, I knew sagebrush would be more realistic.

Highlights and shadows are some of the more basic elements of art. Without much previous instruction, these simple basics were new to me. The highlights and shadows needed to be worked out correctly with the light source in the top right hand corner. I made several mistakes with this at first, which was exacerbated by the use of several source photos with light coming from different angles. My brother had taken several photographs of the Pumpkin Buttes for the background of the painting. The photos were taken from different angles at different times, which created different shadows. I had to remind myself of the chosen position of the sun in my painting as I worked on the shadows. I also printed some photographs of white buffaloes off the internet to help with the colors and textures of the creamy white fur. The sun shone from
different angles in these photos as well. I had to look at the many different photos I was using and imagine the light and shadows where they needed to be.

I spent several hours a week painting the landscape with the buffalo. Most of the work on this painting was done in the presence of Susan on Saturdays. I did not have the confidence to paint on my own without her ready advice; however, I did work on the sky and bluffs by myself.

My easel was set up in my dining room because it receives the best light from a big picture window. Unfortunately this meant that paints, brushes, and rags had to be cleaned up and put away for every meal. At one point my husband asked if we were ever going to get our dining room back. I'm afraid the answer is no unless he builds me a studio!
IV.

CHALLENGES AND DISCOVERIES

On September 4, I decided to take two of my oil paintings to the Two Rivers Gallery to a jury meeting of the board members. The gallery was having a show in October that featured wildlife paintings. I had been working on a painting of a white buffalo for the past six months and was feeling good about how it was coming along. The board, consisting of well-known local artists, did not accept my work into the October show, but they did invite me to a show for up-and-coming artists that would be featured in the spring. Basically, they felt I had a lot of potential but was not ready for the October show. While feeling discouraged, I was also inspired to work harder and put in more hours in the studio or, in my case, the dining room where my easel was set up. Dr. Kriley’s words of encouragement floated around in my head, “Just do the work!” Another unexpected result of this setback was that it gave me more courage to work on my own. The higher the stakes had been in my painting, the more dependent I seemed to be on the advice of my mentor. When the gallery did not accept the white buffalo painting (Appendix A), I felt free to work on my own, changing the nose and eyes that I instinctually had not liked. It didn’t matter if I messed it up because it had already been rejected. The results were I learned that I could blank out and repaint the eyes, nose, jaw line, and rostral swelling over and over to give the buffalo a different look each time. I could also do this without the aid of my mentor sitting with me for each adjustment. My ability advanced a great deal as a result, and I began to paint independently with greater confidence.
I also called one of the board members of the Two Rivers Gallery and asked if she would critique the buffalo painting for teaching purposes. Suz Marshak is a local artist who I knew could give me some good feedback. She graciously agreed to meet me at her studio. She pointed out that my painting needed stronger contrasts especially with the shadows. Taking her advice I went to work on the buffalo again, deepening the shadows on the animal and the landscape working for a more dramatic contrast. I also tucked her advice away for my next painting.

One of my biggest realizations during this whole process was that "I AM CREATIVE!" This hit me as I was putting together my ideas for a painting in an old wooden window frame. In the middle of the night I thought about an old window that I had rescued from an older home of ours. I had images of a fractured light painting of orange poppies floating around in my head. I lay there and wondered if the window was out in our garage, and whether I would remember any of this in the morning. The next day I had nagging thoughts until I finally remembered! Digging through a multitude of junk piled recklessly, I found what I was looking for covered in cobwebs and dirt. After scrubbing my treasure, I was further excited to discover that the smallest canvases that I had on hand were a perfect fit for the four wooden frames. As I planned out the vibrant blues and greens I would use to show the refraction of the sun and how cool the orange poppies would look against these vibrant colors, it hit me: I really am a creative individual. I know we all are. God created us in His creative image, but I think that was the moment when I truly believed it.
V.

PROJECTS

My next project was a painting of the roadside sunflowers found on most county roads of Sweet Grass County (Appendix B). My attention was drawn to the particular sight of a silhouette of sunflowers against flowing grasses and the Crazy Mountains. I found myself lying down on the red scoria rock of Howie Road on a stormy night trying to capture this scene with my digital camera. The classes I have taken with the Creative Pulse have given me the courage to work with the tools of technology needed for this new painting. Armed with several pictures of the scene I wanted to paint, I began sketching.

The principle of design that I was focusing on in this painting was movement. I wanted to capture the essence of the sunflowers and grasses turning, twisting and bending with the famous Big Timber wind. In an online lesson on the principle of movement Teresa Bernard states,

Movement can also be created by action. In two-dimensional works of art, action must be implied. Implied action in a painting creates life and activity within the composition. This is best illustrated by the direction the eye takes along an invisible path created by an arrow, a gaze, or a pointing finger. Action can also be indicated by the “freeze frame” effect of an object in motion, such as bouncing ball suspended in mid air, a jogger about to take that next step, or a swimmer taking a dive, etc.

I also wanted to do a better job of using contrast in this painting. John Lovett explains contrast in this way,
Contrast is the juxtaposition of opposing elements eg. Opposite colors on the color wheel – red/green, blue/orange etc. Contrast in tone or value – light/dark. Contrast in direction – horizontal/vertical. The major contrast in painting should be located at the center of interest. Too much contrast scattered throughout a painting can destroy unity and make a work difficult to look at. Unless a feeling of chaos and confusion are what you are seeking, it is a good idea to carefully consider where to place your areas of maximum contrast.

In addition to my online research, I took a break from the oil painting to do a study of contrast, movement, and pattern using polyform clay (Appendix C). With the instruction of Susan Lavold, I rolled and cut the clay into many shapes and designs, and then placed it around an empty wine bottle, which I then baked in the oven.

The main focus of this study was to learn how the contrasting colors set against each other made each other “pop.” This needed to be evident across the room as well as up close. In my work I have a tendency toward fine detail. It was more difficult for me to work on sharp contrasts at first, but as I progressed up the bottle, I began to understand contrast more thoroughly. Value contrast is most evident when black is next to white and when light values from one end of the gray scale are next to dark values from the other end. I also worked on simultaneous contrast by putting two pure complementary colors next to each other. I noticed when I did this how much brighter they both appeared, or how they "popped".
I was able to achieve the impression of movement by swirling the clay around the bottle horizontally, contrasted with a vertical movement. Marbling the clay also accomplished a sense of movement.

Pattern is created by repetition, so I repeated different designs in the clay as I moved up the bottle. I also used pattern to represent texture.

When I was finished, I noticed that my clay bottle had an art deco look. With the contrasting color combinations rolled out, they were distorted into a geometric rather than floral pattern. The angles were squared off into a mechanical version.

This had been such a worthwhile and enjoyable lesson that I decided to take it into my first grade classroom (Appendix D). This was an excellent teaching opportunity, because children love the hands-on experience of working with and rolling clay. I was amazed at how quickly they grasped the ideas of contrast and movement. We had worked earlier in the year on color theory with a kinesthetic paint activity. The students had dipped their feet into the primary colors and mixed them into secondary and tertiary colors as they moved around on large sheets of white paper. They later painted color wheels and we discussed contrasting colors. Pattern is also a curricular topic in first grade, and it was fun to review it with the medium of clay. The students applied their knowledge of contrasting colors and repeating patterns as they molded the clay around the bottles. Artistic independence and creative flow are expressed in this activity in such a way that every bottle is a unique masterpiece.

Armed with a new understanding of contrast and movement, I dove into my sunflower oil painting. Yellow/orange and blue are almost opposite each other on the color wheel; therefore, the sunflowers stand out strongly against the stormy sky. I
wanted to pull the viewer in with a central horizontal view. I also worked at using dark
shadows among the grasses.

Finally, I applied what I had learned about atmospheric perspective from my
bison painting to the sunflower painting. Once again I needed the feel of distance for the
mountains and field behind the sunflowers. Creating a saturated color scheme in the
background created the desired affect of distance.

While I was working on the sunflower painting, I also began a small painting of a
Springer Spaniel with a pheasant (Appendix E). I wanted to try my hand at an
impressionistic style of painting.

I spent several hours studying different Impressionist paintings at Big Timber’s
two art galleries (Hodges Fine Art and Two Rivers Gallery) and googled images of works
by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissarro. Then, I
began my own painting. I worked at imitating the short quick brushstrokes of color
which, when viewed up close, look messy and unreal. Yet, when viewed from a distance,
the colors blend together by our eyes, and the painter’s subject becomes recognizable. I
enjoyed the feeling of freedom involved with the short-quick brush strokes. I felt the
background was somewhat successful in this style; nevertheless, as I worked on the dog
and pheasant I found myself reverting to a detailed paint stroke again.

Once again I attempted to have a piece of my work juried into the Two Rivers
Gallery. They did not accept my painting of the Springer Spaniel but were encouraging
about the progress they felt I was making as an artist.
Composition was an important principle in my next painting (Appendix F). Painting a still life in oil with the added challenge of cloth folds was something I wanted to try.

Composition consists of creating a balance between the different elements of the picture. Composing is part of the layout, for it is in this first process that every part of the drawing is structured. When composing individual elements, the different proportions of every part of the model must be kept in mind. When composing a group of objects you must also observe their relative proportions (Cerver, 24).

As I composed the objects for my painting, I realized what a huge process this was. “To situate the elements correctly, you must first learn to see the separate parts as if they were one. The layout process is a great help in developing this skill” (Cerver, 25). I used a 24 x 24 board to place the objects on because I wanted to relocate my composition to refer to whenever I was painting. I spent all of one afternoon placing and replacing objects and draping the material I had purchased until I felt like I had a composition worth painting. Then, I took several pictures with my digital camera so that I would paint the still life from just the right angle.

Before I began painting the still life with oils, I wanted to learn more about folds and creases in fabric. After researching I learned that there were five basic folds.

The drape fold is created when fabric is suspended by two points. You will see this fold in cowl neck sweaters or when fabric is draped over something. The drape fold will make a "U" or a "V". The column fold, also known as a tubular fold, is the most common of all
the folds. You'll find it most often in drapery and clothing. To recognize it, look for cylindrical folds that hang from one point of suspension. When fabric falls in layers and the folds actually rest inside one another, interlocking folds are created. When fabric is fitted over a cylindrical or tubular shape such as the sleeve of a coat, it creates a coil fold, named after its spiral appearance. A coil or spiral fold can also be found in a pant leg when the fabric bunches at the knee or a sock that has fallen down around the ankle. Inert folds are created when the fabric is not being suspended at all. The creases and folds can go in every direction. Because of the many layers, there will be a multitude of overlapping surfaces and hard edges. (Hammond, 84-85).

After studying my still life arrangement, I decided the fabric contained mostly inert folds, but there were also some column and interlocking folds. I first began sketching the three types of folds with pencil and paper. Applying darker tones where the fabric overlapped, shading in the darkest areas, and leaving the areas of reflected light gave the folds their realistic curved look. Then, I thought about how I would transfer this knowledge to oil paints and began my painting.

In my next painting of an orange flower set against green grasses and a deep purple background (Appendix G) I transferred what I had learned about fabric folds to the texture of the petals. I was also able to create a much more three-dimensional look with the knowledge and experience I had gained in the element of contrast. I painted the flower on a 12 in. x 12 in. gallery wrap stretched canvas. I surrounded the orange flower with a wild array of green grasses that stretched around the edges of the canvas and
curved back along the one and a half inch depth of the sides. The deep purple I used as background with the grasses served as a nice contrasting color while also giving depth as the grasses stretched like fingers around the edge of the canvas into the almost black-purple sides. As I look at this painting, I can see a great deal of growth in my skills as an artist.

The painting of the four poppy canvases that I placed in the old window frame flowed easily from me (Appendix H). I noticed with both the orange flower and the poppy paintings that I needed very little instruction from my mentor, Susan Lavold. In fact most of the painting was completed on my own with just a few words of advice from her. I again attempted more of an Impressionistic style of painting with the poppies. After the painstakingly detailed strokes of the orange flower, I really enjoyed letting loose with the splashes of color. This painting has been my most enjoyable one because I really relaxed and had fun with it. Short brushstrokes of green were the reflected light of trees mixed in with several vibrant shades of blue or purple that represented fractured light in the sky. I was much more successful with the Impressionist style in this painting than I was with the Springer spaniel painting; however, I was still not quite there. The jury at the Two Rivers Art Gallery did not accept this painting for exhibit but were once again encouraging about my progress. I met with Suz Marshak again to critique the poppy painting. She felt that if I were to tone down the blues in the sky by mixing contrasting colors into the blues that the painting had the potential for the gallery. She demonstrated this mixing of colors and also talked about areas where shadows could be added to the painting to give it more depth. She felt the window frame was very appropriate for the subject of the painting.
The old window frame with its aged and rotted areas of wood provided a perfect frame for the poppies. I loved how the blackened wood provided a nice touch of drama to the painting. The composition of the piece was designed to give the effect of looking out a window into poppies, grass, and sky. After chipping away for hours at the old glazing and pulling out the glazing tips, I was able to remove the old panes of glass. I cleaned up the old wood and replaced the glass with the canvases.

I began a new painting of an old log cabin that is on the homestead where my mother grew up in Miles City, which we refer to as "the farm." The cabin was an original structure on the farm my grandparents bought in 1938. I captured a picture of the cabin at Christmas time. A few weeks later I was preparing for work when I noticed an incredible sunrise with yellow, pink, purple, and blue hues. I quickly snapped pictures! That night my mom and I were visiting when she mentioned the sunrise that morning. I asked her if it had glowed above the little cabin, and she said it was amazing. This inspired me to paint the two sights together (Appendix I). I wanted to use the instruction that Suz Marshak had given me about toning down colors by using contrasting colors; therefore; the main focus of this painting was color theory.

I asked permission to teach a class period with the 8th grade art class. I wanted to talk to them about exhibiting their own artwork and to discuss the different venues available. I began the class by explaining about my masters program, and then I played the Final Cut movie I had made last summer, "What Makes an Artist an Artist?" The Two Rivers Gallery is very interested in promoting student artwork, and I explained the jury process to them. After talking about other ways to exhibit work, I described the art show that Hannah, Emily, and I were hosting that weekend. I also expressed the
realization I had come to about the critical importance of allowing an artist the time to create in different ways. Finally, I asked them to respond to three questions: 1. What makes an artist an artist? 2. List some ways to give creativity an outlet. 3. Would you consider exhibiting your artwork someday? Cole answered, "The things he/she draws or creates and their perspective on what they are drawing or painting make them an artist. Also why they created what they did and the soul they put into their drawing." Cole stated, "I think an artist can appreciate good art when they see it and when they make good art. Also when an artist can pick any random item out and turn it into art." Carlie, an eighth grade girl said, "An artist is someone who just doesn't do art because their mom, dad, or teacher makes them. They do it for passion and love and something they put their heart and soul into." From Ty, an 8th grade boy I received, "An artist is defined by the way the artist expresses herself or himself through their art. I consider everyone an artist. Life is a canvas, everyone has a brush. Art has infinite genres; sports, literature, construction, life, the list would never stop. Everyone expresses themselves, thus they are an artist."

I am always amazed when working with students how clearly they see and understand the important lessons in life. Their eloquence and ability to nail down ideas I had been struggling with because of lack of confidence was refreshing.
VI.

EXHIBITS

As I painted throughout the fall, I began to think about different ways to display my work. I noticed artwork displays in various settings other than art galleries such as bank lobbies, lawyer’s offices, coffee shops, etc. A local coffee shop called Crazy Bean had a display in its conference room that I admired when I held a parent/teacher conference.

I asked my mentor, Susan Lavold, to meet me there to ask her questions about the process of showing my work in this manner. We discussed the importance of the placement of the furniture in the room so as to provide for mobility right up to a painting for the viewer. Paintings should be hung at eye level but higher than my eyes to accommodate for a man’s height. Hanging the paintings in such a way to create a visual balance is of noted import. The pieces should be grouped according to subject matter, framing, or chromatic interest. We talked about the significance of hanging artwork that will have the biggest impact on the viewer on the wall that is opposite of the entrance to the exhibit. Creating a positive relationship with the owner of the establishment is of extreme importance as well. Susan also showed me how to establish contacts with newspapers to advertise an upcoming show without added expense for the artist. She explained how including other artists in the exhibit can help make the space more interesting and expand the capacity to have a recognizable show.

After receiving permission from the owner of the coffee shop, I hung my painting of the sunflowers in an exhibit with other artists in the conference room.
VII.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

On January 28, I received the e-mail that I had been working towards. "Your canvas wrap flower was juried into the show." The Two Rivers Gallery, the Sweet Grass Artists' Alliance, was created by local artists and community members in June of 2008. This painting was the fourth painting that I had attempted to jury into the gallery with no previous success. They had mentioned the possibility of a show for "up and coming artists" in the spring; however, this was not a show in that category. This was the real thing! It was an incredible experience to receive the Gallery's Artists' Reception post card in the mail and to see my name on it (Appendix J).

The reception was held February 19, 2010 on a Friday evening. It was attended by close to 75 people. The gallery's three rooms were full of beautiful art created by talented artists from Big Timber, Bozeman, Billings, Livingston, and the surrounding areas (Appendix K). I enjoyed visiting with other artists and learning about their pieces. I have to admit that it was quite a thrill to see my painting highlighted in a special spot!

A week later I was planning on taking my first grade class on a gallery walk in downtown Big Timber. My plan was to take them through the two art galleries and then on to the new bakery for a treat. I thought it would be a neat cultural experience for them, and inspiring for them to see their teacher's artwork hanging in one of the galleries. However, when I called the gallery to arrange the field trip, I was told my piece was no longer in the gallery because it had just been sold! We will still take this field trip, but I will wait for spring and nicer weather. Who knows, maybe their teacher will have another piece hanging in the gallery by then.
Having spent the year painting and creating a body of work, I wanted to share my paintings with others. My daughter, Hannah, and her friend, Emily had painted by my side all year as well. I had seen so much growth in all of our work that I knew it would be an incredible experience to set up and participate in an art show. Hannah, Emily, and I discussed where a good location would be and decided upon the Carnegie Public Library. The Library agreed to let us have our show in the reading room which was a perfect atmosphere for an art show with its cozy setting made up of a gas fireplace, comfortable chairs, and rock ledges perfect for propping up paintings. I created an invitation (Appendix L) and we wrote out a list of people we would like to invite. I wrote an artist's statement (Appendix M) and then guided the girls in writing theirs.

The event took place on March 6, 2010 and was well attended. The guest book had fifty signatures, and I thought of a few more people who I knew had attended but had forgotten to sign the guest book. My husband and his friend, Rod, played acoustic guitars, and there was an abundance of good food and sparkling cider (Appendix N). We all felt the event had been a wonderful experience and a great success, which included the sale of two more of my paintings.

This event was the culmination of all I had worked towards over the last year and a half. Each painting had been a bridge to the next, a teaching tool that had expanded my knowledge of oil painting. I could see the growth in each painting, which resulted in the confidence to paint independently of my mentor. As I lost myself for hours in my work I noticed the growth in my soul as well. My feelings of fulfillment and contentment were the result of hours spent in front of the easel. The nagging lack of self-confidence and
self-awareness in my ability to express myself artistically that I had felt over the years was fading away.

While I had sacrificed time spent with my family I also knew I had given my daughter a gift of the artistic knowledge of herself at an early age. She nonchalantly explained her artwork to guests who were amazed at her young ability; while I stood back proudly watching her confidence and poise.
VIII.

SIGNIFICANCE

I began my final creative project with this question, "What makes an artist an artist?" Is it someone whose work shows exceptional creative ability or skill? Or, is an artist a painter, sculptor, or writer who is able by virtue of imagination, talent, or skill to create works of esthetic value in the area of the fine arts? Is it someone who is able to create a piece of artwork whose subject matter others can intimately relate to, or someone whose work is selected to hang in a gallery? Is an artist one who is able to see things not as they are, but as something they can be? Was I an artist?

As I researched, painted, and created my body of work, I realized that the answer to all of those questions was, "yes." I also realized that my focus on this question had shifted to another idea. It was not so important to know whether or not I was an artist, but to understand the significance of our need to create as humans. Because we were all designed by the Creator who molded us in His image we are all artists. When we deny outlets for this creativity, whether in dance, writing, visual arts, or music, we deny growth and life to our soul. We live in a fast paced world with constant demands on our time and attention. I had allowed myself to be sucked into this whirlwind of life and had starved my artistic soul. As a mother I often sacrificed my own needs and desires for those around me. When everyone had what he or she needed I could think about what I needed which usually meant just getting some sleep. When I embarked on this journey with the Creative Pulse my family was very supportive and ready to pitch in. However, the reality of their sacrifice was more than they had bargained for. Creating takes intense concentration and time. It is hard to tell your kids to leave you alone for several hours
especially when you are right there in the dining room. There were times when I actually felt I had messed up a painting when the creative flow had been completely disrupted. There were times when I felt I had messed up a child because I didn't take the time to listen to the crisis of the moment. My husband had a full load with his own job, but he handled a larger share of responsibilities in order to free up the time that I needed. We all sacrificed, but I am proud of the message that learning, stretching, creating, and growing, while sometimes painful, is worthwhile.

As a teacher I can help children understand who they are as artists. I can provide multiple opportunities for them to create and discover their talents. I hope to impart to them the idea of lifelong learning and indulging in their creative nature through what I have learned in this final creative project. Had the Creative Pulse not helped me explore my need to express myself through art, and bestowed upon me the courage to pursue it, I don't think I would be able to share this truth with my students.

The two years spent working on my creative project have been full of learning and growth, and they have created a hunger to learn more. I plan to continue painting and taking art classes long after the culmination of my masters program because I now understand that I need to honor my inner artist or I won't be the person I need to be for my family or my students. I look forward to the joy it brings me to paint a scene from nature that has moved my soul, capture its essence, and then share it with others.
APPENDIX A

"White Buffalo"

APPENDIX B

"Sunflowers on Howie Road"
APPENDIX D

"First Grade Students"
APPENDIX E

"Faithfulness"

APPENDIX F

"A Study"
APPENDIX G

"Backyard Beauty"
APPENDIX H

"Poppy View"

APPENDIX I

"Miles City Homestead"
APPENDIX J

"Gallery Postcard"
Sweet Grass Artists’ Alliance
Winter Variety Show
February 19 - March 18

Artists’ Reception Friday February 19, 5:00-8:00 pm

Come in to meet the artists and enjoy refreshments!

Featured Artists include:

Mia DeLode        Don Marvine
Russ Docken       Bruce Rinnert
Laurie Gano       Leslie Stryker
Kasia Gorski      Shirley Wempner Norquist
Neil Jussila      Lori Wheeler

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APPENDIX K

"Two Rivers Gallery Artist's Reception"
APPENDIX L

"Invitation"

Wheeler & Myrstol

ART SHOW

MARCH 6, 2010 12:00-2:00 PM

AT THE CARNEGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY
IN THE READING ROOM

Come and enjoy this body of work presented by Lori Wheeler,
Hannah Wheeler, and Emily Myrstol.
APPENDIX M

"Artist's Statement"

After graduating from high school in Plevna, Montana, Lori Wheeler went to the University of Montana to complete her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Elementary Education. She is currently working on her Master of Arts in Fine Arts in Integrated Arts and Education at the University of Montana in a unique program called the Creative Pulse. As part of her requirements for this program, Lori has been studying under the instruction of Susan Lavold. Choosing oil paints for her medium, she began painting a body of work in the summer of 2008.

Teaching first graders is one of her greatest passions. Yet, Lori also had a desire to create and make personal connections through her own artwork. Having no formal instruction in art and having little spare time between teaching and her family, this desire lay dormant until Lori began her Master's program with the Creative Pulse. With the help of the Creative Pulse and her mentor, Susan Lavold, Lori was able to experience the creative expression and growth she desired.

"When I witness God's different creations, I want to slow down and take in the wonder of life. I notice the shadows, shapes, and colors which become a painting in my mind, an artistic experience that I want to preserve and share with others."
APPENDIX N

"Library Art Show"
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