Unearthing the Inner Compass

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The University of Montana

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UNEARTHING THE INNER COMPASS

By

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Professional Paper

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ABSTRACT

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Unearthing the Inner Compass

Chairperson: Professor Karen Kaufmann

The process of composing a body of artwork was to prove my artistic ability and prepare work for submission to artist-in-residence programs. To achieve this goal, I committed eleven months to this project. Inspiration for pieces came from my travels, interests in American Indian culture, wildlife, trees, photographs, and still-life objects. I devoted as much time as possible in my make-shift apartment studio working on art. Balancing career and home activities was a habitual challenge. I learned to trust my intuition while creating art making choices that reflected my intended message. Fear of public opinion floated through my mind as I worked on each piece. In the long run my own satisfaction with the work was all that mattered. And with that attitude, I realized my goal by completing thirty-two pieces of art as opposed to the intended fifteen. Each piece reflected personal growth.

Unearthing the Inner Compass exhibition opened to the public Saturday, December 11, 2010. Forty-seven people came to my opening reception. I unveiled a professional body art containing paintings, prints, art quilts, and collage. This solo exhibition at the C.M. Russell Museum elicited positive remarks from colleagues, friends, and family. I succeeded in organizing an exhibition establishing me as a credible artist within the museum and community.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have encouraged me during the past three years while I worked to obtain my Master of Arts degree and to everyone I extend heartfelt thanks. In particular I am filled with deep appreciation for my husband, Paul, whose devoted love, support, and belief in my ability as an artist never wavers. To my parents who always tell me, "hang in there and do what it takes to get the job done." I thank my brother Kevin whose honest interest in living in the moment and passion for outdoor exploration provides me inspiration. Thanks to Kathi, Brooke, and Eric who listen to my wild stories and love me anyway.

The logistics in covering my time away from my job was greeted with support thanks to former museum director and curator Anne Morand and chief of operations Susan Johnson who granted me permission to take leave from the C.M. Russell Museum to attend classes on The University of Montana campus in Missoula for five weeks in the summers of 2008 and 2009.

Gratitude goes out to all the staff and docents at the C.M. Russell Museum who acknowledged my aspiration to earn an advanced degree, especially to interns Loni Judisch and Alyse Johnson who maintained the museum education department in my absence; Darrell Beauchamp for permitting me to hang my work in the museum; Theresa Stephens for helping me fine tune the exhibition invitation I created using Adobe InDesign for the first time; Mary Beth Ewen and Steve Oiestad whose keen eye for detail and superb exhibition installation skills made my art look professional on the museum walls, and Barbie Brunelle and security staff whose proficiency in facility events made the opening reception run smooth as silk.

My sincere appreciation is expressed to Sandra Johnson Thares of Clark and Lewie's for her catering finesse and generosity. Special thanks to Julia Becker, Jackie Larson Bread, Barbara Erb, Cindy Kittredge, Brenda Kornick, Carol O'Bagy, Steve Oiestad (as artist), Cynthia St. Charles, and Steve Seltzer whose conversation, guidance, and creativity helped me to pay attention to my authentic voice.

Graciously I express thanks to my committee chairperson Professor Karen Kaufmann who magically appeared at a time when I needed encouragement and without hesitation worked with me on this journey along with committee member David Garrick and Professor Rick Hughes. Additional thanks to the Creative Pulse staff includes Dr. Randy Bolton, Michael Butterworth, Dr. Rafael Chacon, Dorothy Morrison, Dr. Ann Wright, and in memory, Dr. James Kriley, who all pushed me forward to help me reach my artistic goal. Thank you all very much.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.................................................................................................. iv
CHAPTER I: INTENTIONS ............................................................................................ 1
   Unearthing the Inner Compass .............................................................................. 1
CHAPTER II: PROCESS .................................................................................................. 4
CHAPTER III: ACHIEVEMENTS ................................................................................ 12
CHAPTER IV: DOCUMENTATION ............................................................................. 15
CHAPTER V: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT .................................................. 16
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION ...................................................................................... 21
BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................ 25
APPENDIX A................................................................................................................... 26
   Selected Artwork ...................................................................................................... 26
APPENDIX B................................................................................................................... 31
   Preparation and Installation of Exhibition .............................................................. 31
APPENDIX C................................................................................................................... 32
   Opening Art Reception Saturday, December 11, 2010 ........................................... 32
APPENDIX D.................................................................................................................. 34
   Biographical Sketch with Price List ........................................................................ 34
APPENDIX E................................................................................................................... 36
   Exhibition Opening Invitation ................................................................................. 36
CHAPTER I: INTENTIONS

Unearthing the Inner Compass

What does it mean to "unearth the inner compass?" What does it define? How do you unearth something inside your mind and soul? More importantly will you listen to the message unearthed? The real question asked in the pursuit of my Master of Arts degree in Fine Arts is: Am I an artist? And, who will care?

The goal to develop a body of artwork is for my own personal journey. It is a chance to understand and listen to personal reflections while creating a statement through the visual arts. The journey was initiated to generate a body of artwork to enhance my non-traditional educational career and for application to artist-in-residence programs. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Life was meant to be lived, and curiosity must be kept alive. One must never, for whatever reason, turn his back on life."\(^1\) Curiosity to know what challenges befall a person who is doing what they love is what led me to seize the opportunity to get back into a creative routine. I wanted to commit time every day to something I enjoy and cater to my artistic impulse.

Curiosity keeps my sense of wonder intact breeding new ideas and new learning potential. Curiosity drives me to attend Yellowstone Institute field classes about bison, participate in surface design workshops, experience meditation, and learn to make gelatin prints. These activities keep my brain functions positive which affects my health and well-being.

The journey includes a search for balance while attempting to uncover my inner artistic compass. How can I balance work with artistic play, healthful living, career, and other daily responsibilities? Would learning to be cognizant of feelings from within my

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body help me to secure my need for art-making? Would exercise help to energize my body to find balance in work and play? These questions I hope to answer.

To develop a body of art for personal satisfaction was broadened when asked by professors to prepare work for an exhibition to be viewed by the public. Pursuing art for personal reason was fine, but inclusion of a public viewing would potentially solicit response from an audience outside my comfort zone. What I didn't realize is the goal of my graduate proposal inadvertently reached deeper by asking others, "Am I an artist?" I was to prove to myself and the community that my skills in the art world are believable. In addition, the project was an attempt to provide insight and understanding about the art-making process to enhance my instructor duties at the museum.

I believe a teacher needs to practice what they teach in order to understand the needs of who they teach. My belief was exemplified in a handout called "Characteristics of the Creative Pulse Master Teaching Program" which were built from teaching ideas developed by former professor at University of Connecticut, Vincent Rogers. One paragraph stated:

Teachers of the arts cannot truly understand the student's struggle in their development as an artist and creative thinker unless they are personally confronted with the struggle of their own development as an artist. They need to understand the nature of mastering new directions, refining styles and approaches, and what risk taking means personally. Being an artist is not something we acquire or even complete. It is a way of life.2

This idea confirmed my own belief that an art teacher proves more convincing when they regularly practice their own art-making. And I was going to use the next several months to explore this teaching idea on my own.

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My intention was to widen my familiarity with fiber, painting, collage, and printmaking. I wanted to force art-making into my life and push obstacles out. Mapping out large blocks of time to facilitate creative moments was a chance to examine my preconceived notion that a "true" artist is someone who works from sun up to sun down on their art with financial gain as the outcome.

In my career as arts and humanities coordinator, Artrain USA tour manager, librarian, and museum educator I have been the organizer. I am the one to coordinate and facilitate programs, tours, exhibits, performances, and classes for others to participate. Being in the background as a program organizer enlists skill sets that are seen only by the smoothness in which the activity takes place. Being in the foreground as an artist whose work is on view for others to see enlists skill sets similar to that of an actor on a stage: you write the script, study the dialogue, and perform. Emotions are on view, front and center, through the art and the art maker. Spending time to develop artwork allows me to be on the artistic side of this equation. It is a feeling that I wanted to experience and feel successful in completing. The Creative Pulse graduate program has given me a venue in which this could happen and for that I am grateful.
CHAPTER II: PROCESS

The approach to make art was based on my background as an art student, experience as an instructor, and strong organizational skills as a librarian, and tour manager. I used art techniques familiar to me which included printmaking, fiber arts, collage, and painting. My idea was to spend enormous amounts of time in the wilderness surrounded by forests, mountains, and wildlife. In reality this hope was limited due to travel time and cost which required me to find an alternative approach to obtaining resources for my art inspiration. Books, photographs, memories, magazines, and experiences topped my resource list.

To help me grasp other perspectives I contacted professional artists to discuss how they approached their artistic journey. They included textile artist Cynthia St. Charles and Blackfeet bead artist Jackie Larson Bread. Each woman began her career in a profession other than art before striking out as full time artists. St. Charles was a teacher and school psychologist, while Bread worked in the museum field. St. Charles works intuitively. Bread often finds inspiration from something she has seen. Bread captures her ideas in a sketch prior to beginning her project. St. Charles says, "I may work on an entire piece before I realize the driving force behind the imagery." Either way, both artists work within the framework that suits their own needs.

My approach to art-making occurs when I find the time. From eight o'clock in the morning to four-thirty in the afternoon I am the education and program coordinator at the C.M. Russell Museum. Time for me to make a fiber art quilt or paint a picture usually comes before seven-thirty in the morning or after seven-thirty in the evening. Larger blocks of art time are found on weekends if I'm not scheduled to work. A friend once said
their definition of an artist was "someone who sold their art." I think part of my desire to devote time to make art was to express that I even though I don't produce art eight hours a day and sell it regularly; I too, am an artist.

Work spaces for artists vary. Jackie Larson Bread produces her work while seated in her main living area. Cynthia St. Charles has a large studio in her home. Of course a separate studio space would be terrific. The area where I make art encompasses one-third of the combined living and dining space in our apartment, arranged to accommodate a sewing machine, easel, drawing table, loom, and work table. I would love to enjoy a separate area where I can be alone listening to music while catering to my artistic needs. I have come to the conclusion you try to find the best suitable place and that's where you work. Until a more grand opportunity is available, the storage boxes, fishing tackle boxes, or the floor in my living room where we also eat, talk, watch television, and relax is where my supplies will live and where I will work on my art. The major difference between me and the two artists I talked to is we all make art, but their art is a full-time job.

Motivation for my art projects came from various sources including our spectacular June wedding and honeymoon at Kapalua Bay beach in Maui, Hawaii; a meditation and writing workshop in Moose, Wyoming during July; an August classic car show in West Yellowstone, Montana, and a camping and gem mining expedition to Philipsburg, Montana in late summer.

The clear yellow color of a hibiscus, the sound of people laughing, the grind of sand between my toes, warmth from the sun, stillness in the woods, the lyrical sound of the conch shell, the taste of fresh pineapple, and mountain views are the memories stuck
in my mind that may spark a project in the future. I enjoy this quality about making art. The route to the final piece is often more rewarding than the end product. The journey is where I tend to get lost. An idea for my artwork often emerged out of curiosity towards a specific color palette, pattern, shape, or texture. Sometimes an image was ignited by a memory, mood, or experience. New materials or tools on my work bench often encouraged an idea for me to express. Pieces of my work went from realistic imagery to abstract and vice versa. The creative process was sometimes challenging and sometimes methodical. Each piece of my art evolved.

Part of this evolution in my art included devoting time to the process. Painting on canvas or fabric with enough energy for the imagery to manifest took patience. I learned when I make art my preconceived notions are only romanticized versions of what really happens. I found my own challenges and rewards included learning to balance work with home life.

Balance of obligations at home and work were a major obstruction. Stress from work came home with me, creating a barrier in my desire to get busy in my studio space. I found to pacify my frame of mind it was best to have multiple projects in progress. For example, the mountain on my piece *Yellowstone '88* was too close to the top fabric edge and it defeated the flow of the landscape. I changed the design by pinning the fabric into a lower mountain shape and walked away. While not certain about how to resolve the composition issue I set up a canvas panel, squirted out several colors of oil paint and without an image in mind, cranked out a painting with a palette knife. Painting impulsively managed to distract me from thoughts of my job and the fiber piece quandary allowing me time to vent.

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3 Kim Kapalka, *Yellowstone '88*, 2010, Collection of Artist, Great Falls, MT. see Appendix A.
To facilitate spontaneity, I tried to pay attention to intuitive feelings during times of making art. For example, as I quickly brushed oil paint on a canvas I sensed in the paint strokes a face staring back. Using a palette knife allowed me to scrape paint off one area and apply it quickly to another. Bright yellow and orange oil paint defined the central space on the panel. It took years of practice to train my eyes and intuition to recognize a good piece of art. Learning this skill helped me to know when to stop making marks on the canvas. On this particular painting I let it set until I woke in the morning. With a fresh outlook at the image in paint and in a half lit room the shape of a bison head surfaced on the canvas. I saw its jaw open and nostrils flared as if taking in the smell on a dusty, August day when the herd is stirred up and the aroma is heat. I added a bit of black to symbolize the horn and mouth then titled it *Summer Heat*, a study created with spontaneity and intuition.

In designing a piece of art there are solutions to obstacles if I pay attention to the materials I use. For example, in the preliminary design stage of an art quilt I had to decide on the fabric orientation. The brightly hand-painted cloth looked liked a flower scene when viewed vertically. When I turned the fabric horizontally, a landscape clearly came to view. Guided by intuition and the phrase "keep it simple stupid" (K.I.S.S.) taught to me in a high school design class, I worked with the horizontal image in my head. Layering other colors and cut shapes of fabric on the silk inspired the piece *Yellowstone '88* which portrays a forest of trees arranged amid a valley of fire.

While actively preparing this collection of artwork for my thesis exhibition, I tried to engage in a dialogue between the art medium and my inner voice. Through this dialogue I chose to paint, print, collage, or sew my projects. Every piece constructed was

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4 Kim Kapalka, *Summer Heat*, 2010, Collection of Artist, Great Falls, MT. see Appendix A.
not worthy to show. Factors defining what pieces were worthy included composition, color, texture, size, and shape. In addition, the completed piece had to convey a certain personal feeling to be considered acceptable to me. It is hard to describe my process of selecting good art, but I found an intuitive message was sent to my brain when my eyes determined the piece was good. The act of looking at all sorts of art, and a lot of it, I feel helped to train my mind to judge the good from bad.

In Professor Karen Kaufmann's kinesthetic intelligence class I recall her saying, "your body knows the answer." Reading chapters in the book Discovering the Body's Wisdom, by Mirka Knaster it says that, "As we stopped listening to our bodies, we gradually stopped knowing how to listen."5 When I spend too much time at the computer my shoulders begin to creep up towards my ears and I ache. Ignore the symptom and the tension stays which causes me aggravation and unproductive work. Change the situation and the ache subsides permitting me to resume output. When I listen to my inner self I reflect my true character. In designing a collage I get a feeling that says, yes, it works. And when it doesn't work what I see feels out of sync.

One project began with inspiration from a souvenir pin purchased at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument bookstore. I read park brochures and maps to learn about Custer's battle with the Indians. Oil paint was the medium of choice to depict my idea. And, I approached the project without a thumbnail sketch. When I stepped back to examine my work I realized the image on canvas was close to that of the image on the pin. It was too literal. It didn't feel right. I removed and reapplied paint from the canvas with a palette knife. No. The image was still a garish representation of the pin. In a discussion about the piece with my friend Jackie Larson Bread she said, "Express what it

means to you. Use your own voice.” Upon her suggestion I removed myself from the work for a few days.

When I came back to the piece, I used the sketch in advance approach. Sketching allowed me to assess my progress. The outcome from that evaluation led me in a new direction. I selected collage instead of oil paint as my mode of expression. Random images were collected from magazines, maps, and brochures that caught my eye because of color, subject, size, or pattern. I pared down the pile of material keeping the pictures with the most potential to communicate my message. Pieces were arranged in a satisfying composition and enhanced with acrylic paint. The predominant feature shows three crosses marching left from the center of the piece to the foreground. A mass of rocks on the right horizontal plane resemble a fortification. Embodied in each cross are detailed images of men fighting. This collage earned the name *Battlefield*. Amazingly, the piece was well liked by the public and not seen as a literal translation of a historical event.

An activity to take me out of my comfort zone involved my participation in a weekend workshop in Moose, Wyoming. The program, "Finding your Authentic Voice: Meditation, Writing and Nature as a Path to the Sacred Self," took place at the Murie Ranch located within the Grand Teton National Park boundary. The goal was to find connectedness with nature through living mindfully. We walked through the woods listening to sounds of the forest and the presence of all things natural. Numerous hours were spent in guided meditation exercises. We were encouraged to listen to ourselves while embracing the wilderness. I experienced the weekend by writing and sketching the nature around me.

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6 Kim Kapalka, *Battlefield*, 2010, Collection of Artist, Great Falls, MT. see Appendix A.
In awe of the meditation experience and feeling related to a force larger than myself, I reflected on words of Matt Daly in his *Field Guide to Journal-Writing in Nature*, who says the Murie Center exists to "explore the value of nature and its connection to the human spirit." This statement exemplifies naturalists' Olaus and Mardy Murie's love for the wilderness and their drive to preserve it. And because of my wilderness workshop experience at the Murie Center, when I contemplate a landscape with fiber, paint, or collage now, the view of the Grand Teton Range from the Murie Ranch is prevalent in my mind. I keep photographs of the area in my journal as a source of inspiration. I rip out pictures in magazines with the Teton Range for collage. The natural environment in that area has made a definite impact on my inner compass. Participation in "Finding your Authentic Voice" workshops is comparable to attending the Creative Pulse program; both aim to help the individual look inside for answers.

Another region I hold dear to my heart for inspiration is the Yellowstone ecosystem. It is a place where wild is defined not only by vast acreage, but by rugged mountains, lakes, waterfalls, thermal features, forests, vegetation, and the animals that reside in its boundaries. Wolves, fox, eagles, bobcats, mule deer, and waterfowl are exciting to watch. My favorite animal to study is the bison. These animals are represented in my art work because they symbolize power and perseverance which I respect. I find bison have been a metaphor throughout my life in my art making adventures. Watching the pure strength of a bison as it fights for dominance during the rut is amazing. Another animal equally astonishing is the bull elk that majestically carries pounds of antlers on its head for reproduction rights. These portraits of nature remind me how humans are a small

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part of the grand cycle of birth, life, and death. I feel my art also follows a cycle. It is a process. The process is often more engaging than the final result. And after it is done, I move on.
CHAPTER III: ACHIEVEMENTS

At the beginning of this project my body surged with excitement at the idea of spending time to make art. However, as I proceeded not only was I nervous at the prospect of my artwork being on view for the public, but concerns grew about my ability to make fifteen pieces for my exhibition. It was a struggle to stay productive. Not every piece that came off my easel deserved to be shown in public. Doubts about my abilities created a fear that I was undertaking too much. Once I settled in to my work and stopped making excuses, what I achieved was thirty-two strong pieces of art ranging from prints, to fiber art quilts, to collage, sculpture, and paintings.

I proved to myself that I can successfully make art and on a regular basis. I accepted the fact that I made good pieces and bad pieces along with pieces to use as a springboard for artwork down the road. Expressing my ideas through collage and paint carried more elements of the explorative process whereas fiber work seemed to be more methodical. Knowledge about the properties of a diverse group of art mediums allowed me to successfully combine techniques and feel good about problem solving.

My commitment to develop a collection of art helped me to understand and empathize with the struggles of an artist. In a conversation with pastel painter Steve Oiestad he said, "The hardest part of being an artist is to find the discipline to do your work." It wasn't easy to find time or veer from distractions in order to make art. Procrastination was a constant friend. In an engaging workshop for museum staff facilitated by Karen Marsolek of Made You Think, Inc. called "Creating Community that Counts" she said research shows it takes approximately twenty-one days to change a

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8 Karen Marsolek, "Creating Community that Counts" (in-service workshop, C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls, MT, January 10, 2011).
habit. From the beginning of this graduate project I wanted to break my time wasting habits to develop the discipline needed to create artwork without excuses.

The balance between art, work, and family was hard but not impossible. I received support from my husband and family that helped me to rise above the limitations of the physical environment we carved out in our apartment. My husband did the chores like laundry, housekeeping, and dishwashing. The distraction of television and internet was prevalent. Fortunately, I did my artwork in spite of the disruptive forces. Music and art have been known to provide countless hours of inspiration although I didn't integrate the two disciplines to my advantage. My next goal is to discover a place where I can work with more music and less television to see what transpires within my art.

In my drive to execute art for public view, I learned that I am successful when I set goals. For example, as part of my objective to prepare for an exhibition, I set a specific date for the opening, and then worked towards that deadline. Some credit for this task must be given to the faculty of the Creative Pulse program who insisted on a proposal outline. Setting specific deadlines to mark steps towards the completion of my professional paper and art show kept me on track. Every two weeks I tried to produce one quality piece of art. Sometimes, that didn't happen. Reasons included family obligations, work conflicts, lack of materials, uncertainty about a composition, wet oil paint, use of the wrong adhesive, and a broken sewing machine. Nonetheless I moved forward tracking my progress on a large calendar. It didn't matter if it was five minutes or five hours, time spent in my studio space earned a star reward on my calendar. Complete a piece of art worthy to show and my calendar was awarded a red star. Accomplishments
were not taken lightly. There was an internal celebration upon the completion of an exhibit worthy piece. Each achievement was part of the path to reach my goal.

An aspect of my twelve month art-making venture that I didn't anticipate was the credibility bestowed upon me by colleagues and peers. Making art was to prove to myself I am an artist with the discipline necessary to complete the challenge. What I didn't realize was by placing my artwork on the walls of a gallery space such as the C.M. Russell Museum my competence as an artist would be tested. The exhibition apparently confirmed to others my ability to make art. I was taken seriously as being skilled and artistically versed to provide instruction. The success of my exhibition validated my opinion in conversations about graphic design for promotional materials. These observations made me feel as if I passed an unspoken test which proved my value to the museum and the community. This was an interesting outcome to witness.
CHAPTER IV: DOCUMENTATION

Various methods of documentation were implemented to measure the progress of my work. I often wrote in my journal using a free flow writing technique acquired years ago after reading *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. Her techniques for writing helped me to obtain the most honest look at my inner voice. The notes I wrote frequently uncovered issues that needed my immediate attention like how to solve a tour schedule conflict at work or supplied an answer in situations about how to proceed with a collage. Seeing words written often helped me to get a clearer grasp on a topic.

As mentioned earlier, I used a calendar to track the days I worked on my project. Red stars were given when I completed a piece of work good enough for my show. When I read a book with information pertinent to my project I took notes. Articles about art techniques and artists were read for information relevant to my project. Sources I deemed of value were referenced and filed for future use. The skills I utilized to accomplish this documentation process were grounded in the twenty years I spent in the library profession, where I became adept at seeking, organizing, and disseminating information.

I found one skill became preparation for learning another skill. Fortunately my background as the arts and humanities coordinator at the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library thirteen years ago worked in my favor. In that job I learned how to organize, install, and promote exhibitions from the perspective of a gallery director. Coordinating my Master of Arts show gave me the chance to familiarize myself with exhibition dynamics from the artists' point of view.

Financial costs added to the stress of putting together a show. My expenses included art supplies, framing, the hanging system, photography, invitations, printing,
postage, reception refreshments, reception room décor, and thank-you notes. I hired professional photographer M.A. McMillan to assure quality representation of my artwork for my professional paper, exhibition invitation\(^9\), and applications to artist-in-residence programs. Due to my financial restrictions I chose what I considered to be the ten strongest pieces to represent the overall body of art created. McMillan Studio shot the ten pieces of art I selected with the end result being a beautiful record of my artistic style.

Additional details for the show were ironed out after executive director Darrell Beauchamp granted me permission to hang my work in the C.M. Russell Museum. Public relations coordinator, Theresa Stephens fine tuned the invitation I designed to announce the opening reception. The Printing Center in Great Falls printed my invitation while I compiled a guest list of 174 people. Russell Museum curatorial staff Mary Beth Ewen and Steve Oiestad installed my exhibition\(^10\) with precision which included vinyl lettering and text labels. Their mathematical skills and keen visual eye helped my show look fantastic within the assigned space.

On the day of the exhibition opening, Saturday, December 11, 2010 my husband Paul helped me prepare a biographical sketch and price list\(^11\) of my work. He took snapshots\(^12\) of the art on the gallery walls as well as of the visitors who attended as documentation of the event. Sandra Johnson Thares, a friend and owner of Clark and Lewie's Catering was hired to make and serve refreshments. All total forty-seven family, friends, and coworkers came to view the art on display. It was truly a professional affair; one that I am proud to have accomplished with the help of people in my community.

\(^9\) Kim Kapalka, *Unearthing the Inner Compass*, exhibition opening invitation, see Appendix E.
\(^10\) Kim Kapalka, Preparation and Installation Photographs, see Appendix B.
\(^11\) Kim Kapalka, Biographical Sketch and Price List, see Appendix D.
\(^12\) Kim Kapalka, Photographs of Opening Reception, December 11, 2010, see Appendix C.
CHAPTER V: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

It takes confidence to achieve results. I believe art educators' benefit from regular practice of their artistic skill which reflects in their personal growth and classroom instruction. Significant pieces are not created when the work isn't tackled. For years, doubt in my ability to devote time to art-making clouded my mind. Curiosity about what it would be like to build a show edged me toward organizing work for public view. As successful pieces emerged from the result of my art exploration, the growth of my portfolio made it easier to make more art.

I gained great admiration toward the work accomplished by other artists from undertaking my own project. Empathy developed. Devotion and good work habits developed which helped me to stick with the process. There were times during the last year when my studio space became terribly cluttered and unorganized. I found the chaos paralyzing. It would take major exertion to force myself to clean the area. This assessment confirmed my suspicion that surroundings effects production because even at work I noticed a tidy office equated to a productive day.

Not going to the woods or mountains as often as I liked required me to look closer to home for inspiration. I replaced stimulation in nature with inspiration from photos, magazines, simple objects, and memories. I used still-life compositions to explore emotion through cool and warm color combinations. Success came in small packages like finishing a drawing or choosing a color palette. Each step built a layer for the next step.

For me each project suggested that the visual arts are capable of contributing problem solving skills to other disciplines. Authors of the book *Studio Thinking* identified "observation, envisioning, reflecting, expressing, exploring, engaging and persisting, and
understanding the art world\textsuperscript{13} as practices that "Once taught in the arts studio, these dispositions might transfer to other contexts of learning."\textsuperscript{14} My own art-making accomplishments took me through these eight learning processes. I looked for solutions when I made mistakes and encouraged kids in the classes I taught to do the same. I talked to others about their art to help me understand their process in relation to my own. I practiced empathy in the classroom when projects were challenging. Skills used to solve problems in my art were used to solve problems in coordinating programs at work. The development of this project made me realize that organizing and staying organized is my strength in my art and in my job.

What I like about the art-making process is the freedom of expression without anticipation of the end result. With art there can be uncontrolled experimentation; not being exact. It was obvious in painting. I could spread on the paint in thick layers with large swipes of my palette knife. Then, with a different size knife I could pull off paint uncovering layer by layer of paint leaving a color strata. In my piece titled \textit{Unearthing the Inner Compass}\textsuperscript{15} I achieved just that, with the end result being an abstract painting resembling heavily forested woods in a landscape.

Experimentation flows into my teaching at the museum by providing skills to solve problems. I see elementary kids with ideas in their heads for art projects but they lack the skills to execute their ideas. Material limitations and preconceived notions interfere with their desired results. My goal is to encourage each student to try to resolve

\textsuperscript{15} Kim Kapalka, \textit{Unearthing the Inner Compass}, 2010, Collection of Artist, Great Falls, MT. see Appendix A.
the issue. A fourth grade boy in a recent class drew a wolf. He tried several times to draw it bigger but without much success. He kept asking for more acetate which was the surface on which the final image needed to be drawn. With the acetate supplies limited I suggested he draw the wolf large on newsprint then trace it on the acetate. He chose a different avenue. To solve his design dilemma he used the small wolf sketch he favored and repeated the image several times. Then to add interest to his story he drew a moose within the wolf pack. Poof, through trial and error he solved his own problem. My own experience in problem solving helped me to understand his quandary and admire his solution.

Project significance surfaced when I assessed my experience in the art of mindfulness which was part of the Murie Center workshop I attended and concluded it was relaxing, emotional, and contemplative. A poem by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1998) read to us during the meditation weekend sums up my experience:

Mindfulness is about being fully awake
In our lives. It is about perceiving
The exquisite vividness of each moment.
We feel more alive.
We also gain immediate access
To our own powerful inner resources
For insight, transformation and healing.\(^\text{16}\)

Being alert to the food I ate, the places I walked, and my surroundings instinctively connected to me to my well-being. To instill well-being in the kids who attend Art Explorers classes at the museum, I facilitate "Brain Dance"\(^\text{17}\) movements taught to me in the Creative Pulse by Professor Karen Kaufmann. In my class, we loosen up by directing attention to breathing and simple movements that get the oxygen flowing through our

\(^{17}\) Anne Green Gilbert, "BrainDance" 2009, class handout.
bodies. I notice after a couple weeks of Brain Dance the kids become at ease with the movements and their coordination improves. There is no proof doing these exercises each week advance their art-making ability in my hour long class but I find it creates a fun environment in which to make art.

My project to develop a body of art and provide a public preview really created a boost to my ego. As a result, many words of congratulations have come my way. Amazement has been voiced by friends, colleagues, and family of my artistic accomplishment. The praise generated from my exhibition cemented my position in the museum community. I have succeeded in getting through three-years of my career at the museum, while attending summer graduate classes, conducting independent project research, writing papers, making art to build a portfolio, and making plans for our June 2010 wedding. The achievements resulting from this entire graduate school process has exceeded my expectations.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

During the last week of classes on campus in the summer of 2009 Creative Pulse staff asked each student to select a committee and write a proposal for our final project leading to a professional paper. The sky was the limit! I selected my committee and excitedly wrote my proposal. The first sentence in my draft said, "I intend to develop…a body of art using mediums that speak to me."¹⁸ I was finally getting the chance to have a reason to work on my own art.

Two days later my proposal was rejected. I met with my committee chair who told me to focus and consider writing about what it means to be entering the fifth decade of my life and the connection to my work with museum docents. I was devastated. My journal entry states, "I need to focus on one topic. Docent training…hmmm…I really am not hip on it but it is a way to incorporate Creative Pulse concepts and exercises—integrate. And that's the gist of it."¹⁹ The next day as I began to think about conducting research for my proposal I wrote, "I've been completely denied my art experience."²⁰

Throughout the course of the next few months I labored over my project. In August I had written, "I wonder. What is it like to be immersed in the passion of art, music, or dance that you do it before anything else?"²¹ I wasn't feeling that passion in my work. Anger and frustration were met daily by tears and depression. I was physically and emotionally ill.

By late fall I questioned my project and my decision to pursue a Master of Arts degree in a program that did not fulfill my needs. While re-reading my journal entries I

¹⁸ Kim Kapalka, (notes drafted for original Creative Pulse professional paper proposal, July 15, 2009).
¹⁹ Kim Kapalka, (journal entry, July 19, 2009).
²⁰ Kim Kapalka, (journal entry, July 20, 2009).
²¹ Kim Kapalka, (journal entry, August 14, 2009).
realized something had to be done. I decided to listen to my inner self and contact my committee chair. We set an appointment on The University of Montana campus to talk. When the day arrived, my husband and I drove the three hours to Missoula where I was stood up. After a period of disbelief, and during my attempt to find a phone, I stumbled upon help. A coincidental meeting with Creative Pulse faculty members Karen Kaufmann and Rick Hughes led me to re-direct my proposal which was causing me tremendous grief. Karen encouraged me to pursue my original desire which was to develop a body of my own art. Under her direction I submitted a new proposal. And to better suit my needs, I elected to change my advising committee.

The turn of events provided me a new outlook with a new goal. The new approved proposal fell into place with synchronicity. Even though I was initially upset to postpone my project graduation timeline from May 2010 to May 2011, I eventually acquiesced to the idea. Work on my art was not always struggle free, but I learned to overcome adversity. Allowing the appropriate amount of time to complete thirty-two pieces for my exhibition helped to ground me as a person. I became diligent at spending time in my studio space even after a long day at work. The creative process gave me a humbling experience in art-making and renewed my respect for artists and their profession.

From this experience I realized the strength in my character is the ability to organize with success. I try to embrace this fact. In the past being considered a person who organizes information made me angry because I felt like anyone could do the task. Not so. Through art-making I learned to survey strengths and eliminate weakness because it makes a difference in the outcome. For example, collage was the medium of choice
when I was stressed. If a collage didn't look or feel right, trusting my judgment became imperative to designing a cohesive piece. Trusting my judgment allowed quality to reign high.

Placing my art on public view set me up as an actor on stage. The exhibition content directly reflected my skill, ability, and personality with irrevocable consequences. Fortunately comments from the viewing audience have been favorable. My own family had no idea that my talent stretched to so many mediums. Coworkers have been astonished by the wide range of subject matter and techniques I use to produce art. The fact that I made art after work hours made an even bigger impression.

It has been a major achievement to get my art finished, framed, photographed, and installed. The opening reception took as much effort to accomplish as it did to make my art. All-in-all the hard work and devotion I withstood, paid off with positive remarks and kudos coupled with a personal sense of triumph. *Unearthing the Inner Compass* exhibition remained on view December 11, 2010 through January 12, 2011 which was longer than initially anticipated. An estimated four-hundred people beyond the original forty-seven guests who attended my opening reception saw my artwork because of meetings, workshops, programs, and parties held in the Ah Wah Cous Gallery where the art was exhibited. And surprisingly, seven pieces of my art sold.

In the end it boiled down to be curious, be mindful, and "listen to your body, it has the answers,"\(^{22}\) which in my case was true from the very start of my Creative Pulse experience. As kind words were directed to our group during the "Finding your Authentic Voice" workshop with leader Barbara Erb, I recall her reciting a traditional Buddhist

\(^{22}\) Karen Kaufmann, "Kinesthetic Intelligence" (lecture and movement practice, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, June 23-29, 2009).
metta (loving-kindness) meditation, "may I be safe, may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I live with ease." She continued, "Once the beauty and love is felt towards you, offer this refrain in return, "may you be safe, may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you live with ease." These words rest in my ears in an effort to live mindfully.

Somewhere along the way life's turns drove me away from my need to make art. The Creative Pulse program at The University of Montana offered direction, opportunity, and permission to grow artistically. The experience at times has been exhausting. The positive outcome has affected me personally and in my teaching. Critical thinking skills helped me to overcome obstacles, construct art, coordinate an exhibit, and submit an application to the Grand Canyon National Park Artist-in Residence program where I hope to gain skills as an artist and become a better instructor in a non-traditional educational setting.

In addition, a dialogue was created between the thinking, the doing, and the final result. As I evaluate the portfolio that emerged after months of art-making, I have found healthful habits form a nucleus at work, home, and play. My devotion of time and energy gave me permission to explore the talents locked up in my core and unearth the inner compass.

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23 Barbara Erb, "Finding Your Authentic Voice Workshop" (meditation session, Murie Center, Moose, WY, July 31-August 2, 2010).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BrainDance for Ages 5-Adult. Anne Green Gilbert. 


APPENDIX A

Selected Artwork

Photo by McMillan Studio

*Apple*, oil on canvas panel, 18" x 24"

Photo by Kim Kapalka

*Battlefield*, collage, acrylic paint on panel, 14" x 11"

Photo by McMillan Studio

*Five Posts*, oil on canvas panel, 7" x 5"
4, oil on canvas panel, 7" x 5"

*In Flight*, oil on canvas panel, 7" x 5"

*New Day*, handpainted silk, photo transfer, cotton, 20.5" x 19.5"
Owl Study in Green, oil on canvas, 14" x 11"

Past & Present, collage, 10.5" x 10.5"

Self-Portrait, intaglio, 8" x 9.75"
Summer Heat, oil on canvas panel, 5" x 7"

UHU, gelatin print on paper, 5.5" x 4"

Unearthing the Inner Compass, oil on canvas, 8" x 10"
Vessel #1, handpainted denim, beads, 5"L x 4.75"L x 4"L x 3"h

XO, gelatin print, fabric, collage, acrylic paint on canvas, 8" x 10"

Yellowstone '88, handpainted silk, cotton, 45.75" x 24.5"
APPENDIX B

Preparation and Installation of Exhibition

Photos by Kim Kapalka and Paul Hart

Kim sews in apartment studio

Kim makes labels for fiber piece

Reward wall calendar in studio

Curatorial staff install Kim's exhibit

Steve and Mary Beth install Kim's art

Mary Beth applies vinyl
APPENDIX C

Opening Art Reception Saturday, December 11, 2010

Photos by Paul Hart

Kim at exhibition opening reception

View of exhibition south wall

Kim's husband looks at art

Kim's family and museum docents

Exhibition view of west wall

Kim with Bread family
View of west wall

Brother's family with Kim and Paul
photo by Lynn Neumann
You are invited to attend the opening reception for

**Unearthing the Inner Compass**
Masters of Art Thesis Exhibition
by Kim Kapalka

Saturday, December 11, 2010
1-3 p.m.

Ali Wah Colis room
at the C.M. Russell Museum
400 13th Street North
Great Falls, Montana

Refreshments will be served.
This exhibition will be on view December 11 through December 30, 2010.