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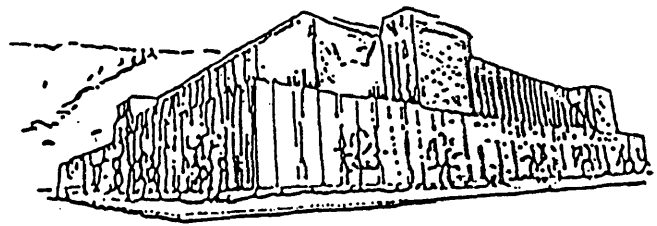
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ANALYSIS OF CREATIVE PROJECT

"RAGE"

PERSONAL RESEARCH

by

Mark A. Beauchene

B.S. Western Montana College, 1989

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of


Master of Interdisciplinary Studies

The University of Montana

1996

Approved by:

  
Chairperson

  
Dean, Graduate School

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"Rage" (19 pp.)

Director: Dr. Randy Bolton



"Rage" is an artist's in-depth look at anger and how it manifests itself. Through a series of large paintings, likened to medieval war banners, I created not only a body of art work but a tool that evoked and was the impetus for concentrated discussions about anger, family dynamics and alcoholism. The research looked at the issues that surround the lives of Adult Children Alcoholics.

I studied a number of books that dealt with the effects of alcohol on family systems and the children in those family systems. The gathering of this information, along with hours of introspective reflection, allowed me to begin to create a series of paintings that expressed my rawest of feelings in regards to anger.

The banners became a tool I used in the classroom as well as out of the classroom. In the classroom my students spoke of their feelings regarding anger and alcohol, as well as listened to stories I told of growing up as a child of an alcoholic. The students and I gained a deeper understanding of each other and the issues being grappled with. The banners worked as a tool for healing my family, as well as colleagues and friends, and by allowing open discussion about anger and how it is manifested in one another.

The presentation of the banners went from a visual display in the woods to a rather public event that people close to me had a vested interest in seeing the project to completion. The banners were hung in the great pines of Western Montana and left for five days. The final act in the project was the burning of the banners.

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# **CREATIVE PROJECT STATEMENT**

## **The Initial Intent of the Project**

The intent of the project grew out of the suggestions made by the Creative Pulse faculty in a letter received by myself in August of 1995. It was suggested and discussed in the letter that I study anger and its effect on me. As a result of the attached correspondence, the research, as the letter predicted, began immediately.

Interestingly, the letter did not initially elicit an anger response, but rather a feeling of embarrassment and hurt. As a student of the Creative Pulse, I looked for the letters each summer as summaries of the work completed that year, and reflections of the work to be completed in the coming year. Unfortunately I found my letter to be summary of three angry summers spent in the program and a reflection that I am an angry young man. I was embarrassed that the summary and reflection that took place about me did not focus on the proactive changes that occurred in me as an artist/teacher during the past three years.

Through numerous discussions with both faculty and friends, I found myself ready to study anger as it manifested itself in me. The feelings gave way to the creation of a very graphic illustration of a slit wrist flowing with blood and a hand twisted in agony.



## **What was Actually Achieved and Accomplished**

The project was about the need to gain a better understanding of anger on an intellectual level as well as the emotional complexity of anger. Through a number of books, many hours of reflection, several hundred miles of road work, thirty pounds of body tissue and a series of 5'x20' war banners, a deeper understanding and awareness of the nature of anger was discovered.

As a child of an alcoholic I was drawn to study how anger was related to being the product of an alcoholic household. Throughout the years I had read several books directed at self improvement and personal understanding for adult children of alcoholics (ACoA). I returned to a book by Wayne Kritsberg, The Adult of Alcoholics Syndrome, and learned that anger is manifested in an ACoA because he or she feels emotionally abandoned. Because the ACoA feels emotionally abandoned, they have an overwhelming sense of fear that is unnamed, but expresses itself through anger. The anger is a way to deal with their fear, and is manifested in distrust and resentment. Distrust in their parents and when they are young, and distrust in the world when they are older. Resentment grows because anger and rage are repressed, because it is not acceptable to be angry in an alcoholic system. When reading this book I could see parts of myself in Kritsberg's theories.

By understanding to some degree where the anger response is derived I can start to take more control of the response. For example, when there is a disagreement about the color of a paint chip, I can begin to understand that a disagreement is not emotional abandonment.

The information of how an anger response occurs for an ACoA caused me to reflect on why upon receiving my letter from the faculty I felt hurt, and from the hurt and embarrassment, grew anger. According to Kritsberg, hurt manifests itself in an ACoA after they have passed through a fear barrier. Often ACoA only feel anger because they can not pass through the fear barrier to reach their feelings of hurt. I think that I was able to pass through this barrier because I had discovered where some of the feelings are derived.

Once there was an understanding of the basis of anger I needed to learn to redirect the energy involved in anger in a more positive and proactive direction. I stumbled on to the book Mutant Message Down Under by Marlo Morgan. Morgan went on a four month long walkabout across Australia with a tribe of Aborigines who called themselves the Real People. The Real People believe that the only way a person can ever change their given attributes is by their own decision to do so, and all people possess the ability to reconstruct and eliminate parts of their personality. There are no limits to the extent of what traits can be released or acquired. Thus I have the power to understand and change an anger response, to deny feelings of abandonment, to learn to trust rather than distrust and to learn to work through feelings of hurt and sadness.

In discussions with my father-in-law, who is a professor of stress management at San Jose State, he encouraged me to use running as a form of stress management. He suggested that each mile is devoted to reflections on a particular subject. After thinking and re-thinking a given issue during a run, the emotional quality of the anger

response lessens, and I as the runner am left with a more proactive solution.

Together, my father-in-law and I, are planning to run a marathon, and I currently run and reflect approximately fifty miles a week.

With a deeper understanding of my anger response, the production of war banners was undertaken. The banners were molded after those of medieval armies. The purpose of the banners for the armies was to motivate troops to win battles as well as intimidate the enemies. The war banners I created were not produced to intimidate others, as with the medieval banners, but simply to be held up as an expression of raw emotion of the personal battle undertaken. Each banner represents a part of the discover process, expressing emotional fallout resulting from a deeper understanding of the core from which anger arises. The work was done to help facilitate desired changes in my personal being.

Upon completion of the banners, the placement or display was a barrier to overcome. Was it enough to plant them on a hill top in California or did the placement play a bigger role in the culmination of the project? The size lent itself best to the out of doors, as did the subject matter. It was decided that Montana was the most appropriate place for the unraveling of the work because Montana was the birth place of the issues. The banners were displayed in the forest of Western Montana near the property where I was born. I did not feel the need for a public display of the work, but more for a journey back to where the issues began. I chose to hang them from trees using twine and tree branches because I found the organic quality aesthetically pleasing.

The banners remained hanging for five consecutive days and nights in a symbolic gesture to myself and my four siblings. Then the banners were burned my last night in Montana. I could not roll them up and tuck them away, or throw them into a dumpster or give them away to someone, so I chose to burn them in a bonfire. I wanted the only evidence of the banners to be the changes they evoked. It should be noted that all the banners except "The Baby" were burned. This piece represented a sense of rebirth and innocence that could not be given up.

## **Expected and Unexpected Results**

The expected result of the body of work was to gain a deeper understanding of anger and how this anger is sparked within. The unexpected result was the opening of communication and discussion about anger and its role in a persons life.

While the banners were displayed in Western Montana they became the center piece of many discussions about family dynamics and childhood recollections. The work definitely allowed healing to occur. Topics that had never been discussed by family members before suddenly became safe. There was a clear sense of open communication about the effects of my father on his children. The banners had become a tool because any discussions about anger, hurt, and family secrets were previously not allowed.

The installation of the work in the forest of Western Montana indeed became an event. There were some fifteen people who all had a vested interest in the banners. Those interests ranged from siblings who grew up in the same alcoholic family situation to in-laws who grew up in similar alcoholic situations and appreciated my interest in re-focusing my energy. Each person had some deeper connection to the pieces other then just a relationship with me.

The banners were not only used as a tool with family members, but also as a tool with my students. Because the production of the banners took place in the classroom, my students took an active interest in their meaning. After explaining the large pieces of fabric and black paint to my students, I had to explain the harshness was the need for a positive form of self expression. There were many discussions on

the topic of art as the vehicle for venting a range of emotions in a less than destructive manner. These discussions also allowed me to discuss being the child of an alcoholic, to freely discuss the impact of drinking and the impact that alcohol could and did have on me.

The most unexpected result of the project was the nature of the works themselves. Without thinking about it, the banners started to take on a religious quality. The two works in particular are the "Crucifixion" and "The Hands". The symbolism in the "Crucifixion" is blatant, where as "The Hands" may not be. When tackling the issue of abandonment I was faced with early years of religious training. There was no greater form of abandonment than the "Expulsion From the Garden". "The Hands" are representational of one reaching out while the other refuses to grasp a direct example of the emotional and physical abandonment that I dealt with as a child of an alcoholic father. "The Crucifixion" in a sense has double meaning, one being the obvious, a man giving up life freely and the other being a willingness to brutalize ourselves. The self imposed brutality in this case is not of a physical nature but rather an emotional nature.

After leaving the Catholic Church fifteen years ago, I have returned to find a sense of security in the teachings. The banners took on such a religious quality, which was obviously significant in my life when I was younger. Thus, I have chosen to return to the Church and try to rediscover that significance.

## **Significance of the Project**

The significance of the project centers around three main findings:

Understanding the effect of alcohol on my family system, the awareness of abandonment issues as related my anger, and the discussion and exchange of ideas concerning abandonment and anger issues. Other points of significance are an awareness of alternative methods of dealing with anger, and a body of work to be proud of.

When there is understanding there is room to heal. The awareness of the effect of chemical dependency on a family allows one to start to free themselves from the issues of the past. This is not a job easily or quickly covered. I have only just begun to understand and am working to heal.

Not until the researching of the issues of anger was there any understanding of abandonment issues as related to myself and anger. The findings have opened new doors of self understanding and forgiveness. For example, I now have an awareness that conflicts and miscommunication are not issues of abandonment or rejection but merely conflicts and miscommunication.

The most intense and unexpected aspect related to the project was the avenues of dialogue that the art work opened. The work allowed years of silence to end as free discussion of the abandonment issue took the focus off the individuals and placed it on the objects themselves. There was an outpouring of sentiments about the past and the future.

The banners themselves helped to evoke a change in the expression of anger.

The art work allowed for the venting of feelings in a positive and constructive format. Another method I used to relieve hostility was long distance road training. In the past ten months running has become a true companion. It is a time to focus all attention on the matters at hand. There are few outside distractions and no competition for attention. One is left to the solitude of road training. The real benefits to this method of stress release is in the loss of some thirty pounds and the best physical condition in many years.



## **Affects on the Artist/Teacher**

The Real People in Morgan's book Mutant Message Down Under believe that the only real influence anyone can have on another person is to act as a role model. I see myself in a powerful position as positive role model for students, colleagues and friends. With this in mind, I as the artist/teacher, need to try to be in a constant state of mindfulness about my actions and reactions. Learning to understand this mind set has been the most rewarding aspect of this project. It has become evident that when approaching a situation in a proactive fashion, I reap more beneficial results from a proactive attitude. This is no to say the old ways don't re-enter the scene very now and then.

This project allowed me to have many open discussions centering on the arts as a method of expression and the importance of that role in our schools. Bringing this project into the classroom allowed many students to speak of mutual feelings of rage, despair, fear, and pain. Because I expressed these feelings in the banners, my students were given the freedom to talk about these feelings and exhibit similar feelings in their art. Self expression has been a topic of discussion at my school this year as students seek to express themselves in their manner of dress, and the school administration seeks to control that expression. Through numerous discussions with several students we have explored other means of expression that are not deemed unacceptable. Art can be one of those avenues.

## **Artist Statement Regarding Appendices**

Beginning on page 12, I have attached the University of Montana correspondence received in August of 1995 which served as the impetus for this project.

Beginning on page 14, I have attached color photographs of the banners as they were displayed in the forest of Western Montana.

Beginning on page 18, I have attached a photograph of the silkscreened image that served as my signature on the banners. The image is of myself taken at a young age in the log cabin my family lived in near Whitefish, Montana. The cabin no longer stands today, but was near where the banners were displayed.

The University of  
**Montana**

School of Fine Arts  
The University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana 59812-1220  
(406) 243-4970

July 28, 1995

273-3446

Mark Beauchene  
29851 Lower Valley Rd.  
Tehachapi, CA 93561

Dear Mark:

Thank you for a thoughtful project proposal. We see that you have come a long way in your development and agree that issues of development are important for your attention.

However, we do not agree with your notion of "finalizing, wrapping up, or freezing points of development or transformation" by understanding and painting them. There is no finalizing our development. It is on-going and often elusive.

Meaning is what we make. You make the meaning of your own personal performance, personal teach, and life. This program is about achieving an awareness of a life-long struggle with our own learning, our own teaching, and our lives -- and making meaning of those, not wrapping them up or finalizing them.

We are suggesting a different approach to your exploration of your development. We are urging that all the body of your work deals with and focuses on one thing -- the exploration of the emotional state and quality of anger.

You are clearly not "done" with this and probably never will be! We don't expect that this will give you final conclusions about anger. We only expect you to explore how you have to deal with anger emotionally, intellectually and expressively through your works. If you ever find a way to control anger and re-channel it to make it nothing but a positive experience, we will publish your book and invite you back for a major presentation. You do not yet own mutual responsibility for the anger response. And, we assume this will all probably make you very angry!


This proposed series of painting -- the body of work -- may be only a beginning exploration on this subject. A theme and a work in progress, so to speak. You might think of the voodoo dolls as a starting point of this kind of expressionism so that you won't get too bound up in assigning meaning to things visually. Project raw feeling in the work, not symbols that stand for qualities and characteristics of your sense of anger.


Perhaps you want to look at anger at the moment before it happens and the moment after it happens.


If your dolls served you as a way of "letting go" then this project is yet another step in that continuing process. What does it take to really let go of that anger? What does it take to remove the pins, to unravel the dolls, to take them all apart -- figuratively speaking? You clearly perceive the problem. We are suggesting one more step with the process.


We are available for assistance and consultation in your pursuit. Try phone, mail or E-mail.

Sincerely,

  
James D. Kriley

  
Randy Bolton

  
Karen Kaufmann

  
Dorothy Morrison

















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