RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING
Re-charging the IMAGination

As artists and educators, we continually find ways to energize and invigorate our practice. Now, as we strive to make sense of unprecedented global events that have uprooted our routines we are at new beginnings compelled to again witness the power of art to bring us hope, joy, and meaning. In this issue we present visual essays that have demonstrated novel and innovative ways that artists, educators, and community members recharge as an active commitment to revitalize the imagination and sense of wonder. These essays illuminate how visual language and aesthetic experience brings optimism and resilience into the creative process. By exploring the unexplored they refresh the imagination of self, learners, and community members.

As newly appointed co-editors we are also at new beginnings exploring the unexplored and honored to present this, our first issue. We are grateful to Teresa Eca who pioneered and edited IMAG through these past seven years and to graphic designer Angela Saldanha for her keen dedication and vision. We hope to follow their path to Re-charge Imaginations for our readers through many upcoming IMAG issues.

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Contact: InSEA Publications, Quinta da Cruz. Estrada de São Salvador, 3510-784 São Salvador, Viseu Portugal

Website: https://www.insea.org/publications/imag

Email: imag-editor@insea.org

Frequency: Three issues per year

ISSN: 2414-3332

DOI: 10.24981/2414-3332-11.2021
IMAG issue 11 RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING

The first issue by the IMAG QUARTET ::
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Front and back cover image: ©Wanfei HUANG
Renew, Recharge and Resiliency Development Through Artmaking During a Global Pandemic

Keywords or phrases: Covid-19, resilience, arts-based learning

Abstract

Resilience is the ability to cope in the face of adversity. This visual essay describes how artmaking served as a catalyst for personal and professional rejuvenation and resiliency building during a global pandemic. Data was collected through visual artifacts, reflections, discussions, and exit surveys. Findings suggest that workshop participants felt that artmaking strategies could be integrated into their curriculum and adapted for their personal and professional well-being.

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Introduction

If we asked you to name a historical event in your lifetime, what would you choose? A year ago, we might have selected the horror of 9/11. However, the COVID-19 global pandemic would now top our list. Indeed, living, learning, and working during a pandemic has been fraught with both enormous challenges and opportunities impacting our personal and professional lives (Hicks, 2021; Kantawala, 2021; LeJevec, 2021). This visual essay describes how artmaking served as a catalyst for personal and professional rejuvenation and resiliency building during a challenging time. More specifically, as the pandemic dragged on, we wondered: “Who is taking care of teachers’ well-being? How might we utilize artmaking to support local teachers?” These concerns inspired us to create a four week-long visual art professional development workshop for K-12 teachers.

Our Participants

We invited a group of educators from a local school district to attend a free artmaking workshop (February 4 – March 4, 2021). Participants who attended all four sessions earned a continuing education certificate.
Workshop Overview

During our weekly synchronous zoom meetings, we engaged in brief warm-up activities, introduced contemporary artists and children’s literature¹, and provided artmaking prompts. “Completed” art works were not expected, but participants shared weekly reflections and artworks.

Prompts included:
Week 1 - Repetition. What is worth repeating? What is not?
Week 2 - I AM (my identity)
Week 3 - I Can’t, But I CAN…
Week 4 - Celebrating Our Accomplishments

¹ Contemporary artists featured in workshop:
1. Reginald C. Adams (US)
2. Melissa Miller (US)
3. Susan Herbert (British)
4. Alma Lee (US)
5. Ken Hoffman (US)
6. Svyetlan Junakovic (Croatian)
7. El-Anatsui (Ghanan)
8. Olu Armoda (Nigerian)
9. Ocean Sole (Kenyan artist cooperative)
10. Calder Kamin (US)
11. Virginia Fleck (US)
12. Vic Muniz (Brazilian)
13. Yao Lu (Chinese)
14. Victor Nunes (Brazilian)

Children’s literature featured in workshop:
1. Quick As a Cricket by Audrey & Don Wood
2. Joseph Had a Little Overcoat by Simms Taback
3. Galimoto by Karen Lynn Williams

For my animal, I choose a moth. A moth is a symbol for transition and change which I believe to be a theme in my life recently. Moths are also always determined in seeking the light in the darkness. This has been a dark year and I have often had to remind myself to focus on the positive and seek the light in others/situations. The moth is also a creature of the night guided by the moon which is a symbol I included in my border.
Mother Nature Interlude

After our second workshop, Austin, Texas experienced unexpected severe winter weather, causing widespread power outages, water disruptions, as well as business and school closings.

We had no choice but to reschedule our third workshop. On top of many personal and professional demands, the storm gave us an opportunity to demonstrate flexibility, which is an important characteristic of resilience.

After The Storm

Our group was eager to reconnect with one another, share our winter weather stories, and begin a new artmaking activity. As we discussed how lack of resources had recently impacted our lives, conversely, we considered how limitations in materials might inspire creative solutions. After examining several artists, such as El-Anatsui, who use discarded objects to create artworks, we were eager to create art from recycled materials.
Virtual Gallery Walk

As part of our final celebration, we utilized Artsteps (2020) to create a virtual gallery. Participants expressed surprise and pride at seeing their creations in a digital format. Beranger commented that it was exciting to see her work on such a large scale and that she looked forward to using a virtual gallery in future critiques with her high school art students. Kaley, a speech pathologist, said that she never imagined that her artwork would be in a gallery, and she thought it looked “pretty cool” (personal communication, March 4, 2021).
The Award Goes To...Or What Our Participants Gained

As a wrap up activity, participants created an achievement ribbon that showcased a personal success from the workshop. Kaley felt empowered to create art without step-by-step directions. Similarly, Angela said that the open-ended activities reminded her how much she enjoys making art for her own enjoyment as opposed to simply making instructional examples for her classroom.

Each participant acknowledged the need to re-connect with their creative side and not “worry about how things are supposed to look—just do it” (personal communication, March 4, 2021). Beranger reflected that making time for artmaking is important and that “this hour is a gift to myself” (personal communication, February 11, 2021). Katie’s grandmother passed away during our workshop and she stated that artmaking contributed to her resiliency during this difficult time. The participants felt that our professional development workshop was informative, engaging, as well as personally and professionally useful. Initial findings suggest participants experienced additional factors which strengthen resiliency through artmaking, such as personal accomplishment, self-awareness, freedom to take risks, creative expression, and vision for the future.

What We Learned

In closing, it has been said that the arts cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world (Greene, 2000). We hope that the lessons learned in this workshop will not only find their way into our participants’ classrooms, but also into their lives. Artmaking helps us make sense of the world, process our feelings, connect with others, renew our hope for tomorrow, rejuvenate our well-being during difficult times, and help build resiliency (Heise, 2014; Heise, 2013). Online teaching and learning can feel isolating, yet technology enabled us to build new and strengthen existing relationships with educators through artmaking during a global pandemic.
References


Heise, D. (2013). Fostering resilience through art. In K. Tavin & C. Ballengee-Morris, (Eds.), Stand up for a change: Voices of arts educators (pp.112-120). National Art Education Association


