



**IMAG**



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InSEA ART Education VISUAL Journal IMAG intends to provide a visual platform, which, in line with the constitution of InSEA, will help foster international cooperation and understanding, and promote creative activity in art through sharing experiences, improving practices, and strengthening the position of art in all educational settings. IMAG is an international, online, Open Access and peer-reviewed e-publication for the identification, publication and dissemination of art education theories and practices through visual methods and media.

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# Making/Teaching ART Differently

<b>Editorial</b> Steve Willis	I	<b>Distance Learning in Lebanon, Missouri</b> Elizabeth Bauer-Barker	50
<b>Project Superhero: Liberating Children’s Play Through Socially-Engaged Art</b> Suzannie Leung	01	<b>Imagination Has No Quarantine but It Is Free to Fly</b> Seija Ulkuniemi	57
<b>Arts Education in Third Spaces: A Future for Children’s Cultural Participation in Spain?</b> Clare Murray	08	<b>Joseph Beuys and the Artistic Education</b> Carl-Peter Buschkuhle	77
<b>Surprise! Learning to Communicate and “let go” Through Collaborative Artmaking</b> Kristin Vanderlip Taylor	19	<b>Reflection On Visual Art Education And Learning Through Art</b> Rachel Mason	84
<b>Community Art Projects Beyond Borders</b> Ava Serjouie-Scholz & Célia Ferreira	29	<b>Weeds</b> Ana Angelica Albano & Laura Lydia	93
<b>Integrating Contemporary Art in the PYP IB Curriculum to Open Dialogues About Cultural Diversity in Norway</b> Leticia Balzi & Cherise Storlie Kristoffersen	36	<b>Survival Kit</b> C3	151
		<b>International Artist ‘Interactions’</b> Andy Ash & Kanae Minowa	174



# Reflection On Visual Art Education And Learning Through Art

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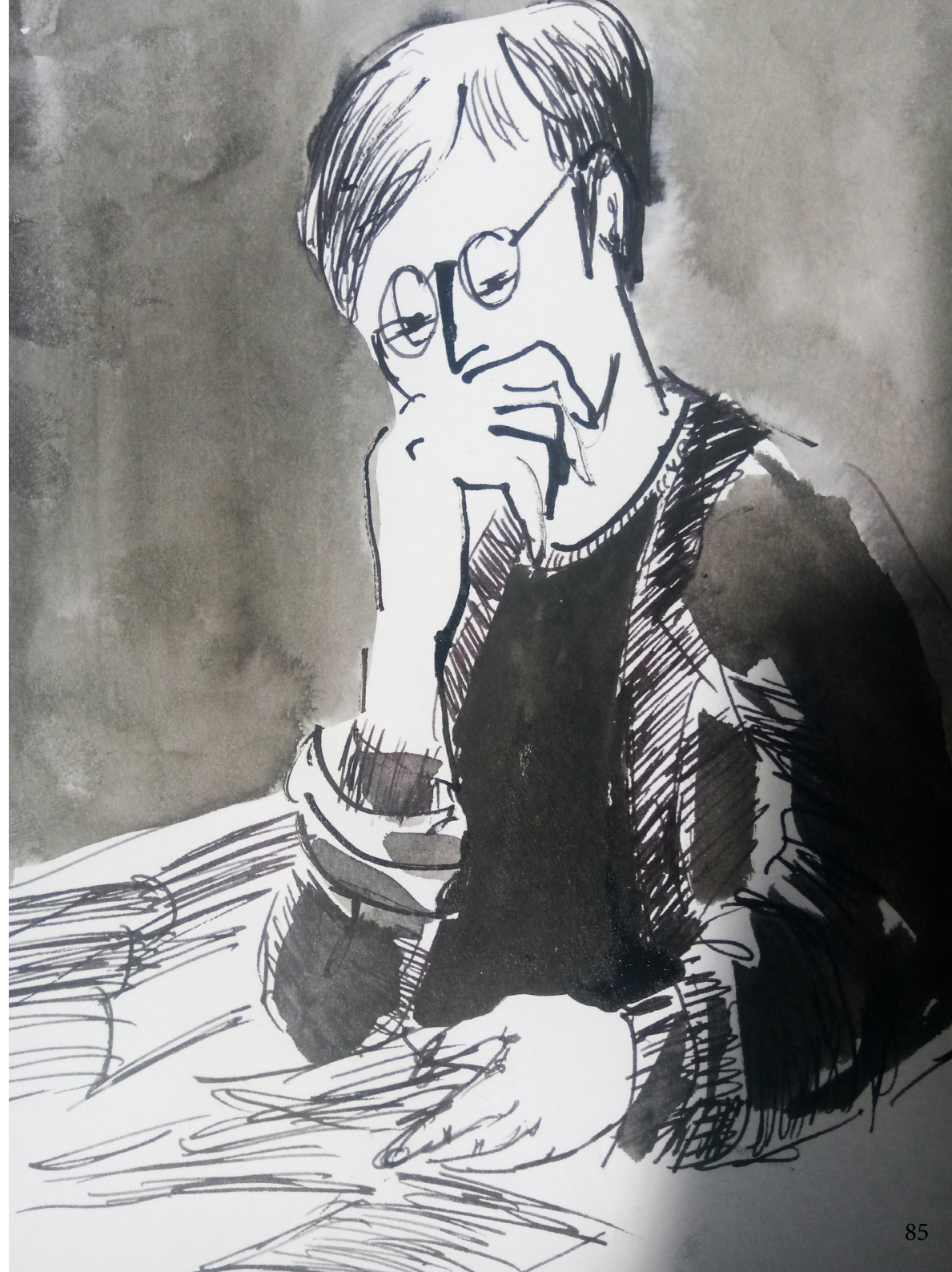




The following brief reflection on visual art education arises mainly from my personal experience and from reading a recent InSEA publication that revisited Herbert Read's philosophy of education through art.

Throughout my career I continually asked myself the question "Why teach art?" My professional history is testimony to the eclectic nature of our field and our tendency to continuously reorganise practice in response to the most recent educational trend.

When I started teaching, in the 1960s, W.D Hall's concept of education as mental health dominated British schooling. I understood art lessons as providing an emotional outlet for the individual child and a relief from cognitive concerns. My teaching encouraged free expression. Throughout the 1980s and 90s my work as an art teacher educator was orientated toward developing student teachers' cultural awareness and aligned with so-called multicultural education objectives and goals. (Broadly speaking I adopted a social reconstructionist curriculum approach in response to what I, and those around me, understood to be a pressing social concern.) A large-scale research and development initiative I directed later, from 2010-2012, investigated the contribution contemporary art might make to children's knowledge and understanding of the concept of citizenship. In doing so, it integrated art with another school discipline. Most recently my attention has focused on pedagogy and skilled knowledge, which I understand as craft.





My editorial work for InSEA throughout these years was crucial in alerting me to shifting educational priorities and goals. In the editorial to the first issue of the International Journal for Education through Art I wrote:

*This collection of papers reflects present global trends; for example, the move away from a concern with individual artistic expression and making towards developing knowledge-based curriculum content. The educational reforms associated with multiculturalism have been accompanied by a widespread concern with the role of arts in developing cultural identity and exploring egalitarian issues. As global culture advances, a need for training students to read mass media images and understand how they sell products, forms and ideas and mould behaviour has been identified. Similarly, art educators are asking, 'What are the implications of the incorporation of digital and mixed media forms into professional practice in visual arts for teaching and learning?' (Mason, 2005, pp.3-8)*

Historically, art teachers have always had diverse conceptions of art and teaching from which to choose. Some scholars view this as a strength, others as a weakness. Writing about expressivist, constructivist and scientific rationalist justifications for art education in America in 1998 Siegesmund voiced concern that art teachers mixed them up and merely took what they wanted from each one. He tentatively suggested the field might enjoy more success if it developed a clearly articulated, persuasive, and enduring educational rationale.

I served alongside Elliot Eisner as vice present of InSEA (1988-1991) and his theoretical insights into educational decision-making (which he understood as artistic) greatly increased my understanding of the complexities of pedagogy. The distinction he made between essentialist and instrumentalist educational justifications, was especially important in highlighting the fundamental difference between teaching, for want of a better





phrase, art for art's sake and using art instrumentally to further a moral, social, religious, or political point of view. His book *The Educational Imagination* (1979), served as a key text when I taught graduate courses in art education. In our deliberations about curriculum, we returned again and again to his characterization of five basic orientations in general educational practice (developmental-cognitive, academic-rationalist, personal relevance, social adaption and reconstruction and curriculum as technology ); and to his conceptions of the educational virtues that permeate them and their specific implications for art programs. For Eisner different educational contexts justify switching curriculum orientations, so no one is better than another. Thus, learning how to look at the educational situations in which one finds oneself in different ways and knowing what values shape one's practice, is vital for every art art teacher.

The concept of education through art has informed InSEA's identity and history since it was founded, shortly after the publication of Herbert Read's book of the same name. Read understood art education as an integral part of a philosophy of life and a scenario of social change. His so-called natural model of education, conceived of originally as a peace building tool after World war 11, envisioned no less than a revolution, beginning with children's self-expression through art and going on to permeate society like an organic life form.

Is his concept still relevant? I pondered this recently when reading *Learning through Art* (Coutts and Torres de Eça, 2019). Read's concept of the field, with its emphasis on self-expression, clearly still has advocates. Sinuefield-Kangas and Myllntaus, for example, understand it as timeless in acknowledging children as continuously developing individuals and challenging them to question what they learn. Moreover, his proposition that visual art education has potential to change society for the better, is a recurring theme throughout this book. As Torres de Eça points out, applying arts principles and practices to resolving the social





and cultural challenges of today's world is one of UNESCO'S major developmental goals. But Read was an anarchist and I doubt many present-day advocates of social reconstructionist curricula hold quite such a revolutionary view. The picture I get of Read from reading the book as a whole is that he was an idealist whose grasp of the intricacies of curriculum and pedagogy was unsure. Whereas Naoe, concludes that his concept of education through art offers a grand vision of the field that is useful as an imaginative model for dialogue, Wagner thinks it is time InSEA moved on. His chapter calls for a new concept that places visual arts in the service of education for sustainable development.

On reflection, whereas Wagner's proposal may be politically expedient, I am persuaded by Lars Lindström's (2012) recent analysis of four modes of aesthetic learning that InSEA needs to pay more attention to learning IN and ABOUT the arts. For Lindström. Learning through the Arts implies an intention to cultivate in students (desirable) dispositions and habits of mind; and Education with Arts implies integrating arts with other school subjects. Learning in the Arts, on the other hand, implies experimenting with art materials and techniques to achieve particular visual messages and effects; and Learning about the arts implies learning so-called art basics, such as principles of design or knowledge of art styles. Importantly, each approach implies a distinct mode of learning, teaching and assessment. I have witnessed a steep decline in teaching the skilled knowledge associated with visual arts in my lifetime . I agree there is a need for a more balanced approach.

In closing, I wish InSEA well in the search for a new educational paradigm. Reading Learning in the Arts opened up for me, once again, the recurring question, Why teach art? Additionally, I revisited my connections with InSEA – a professional association that was important to me throughout my career.









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## International Journal of Education through Art

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A new English-language journal that promotes relationships between the two disciplines. The journal comprises refereed texts in the form of critical essays, articles, exhibition reviews and image-text features. Particular emphasis is placed on articles and visual materials that critically reflect on the relationship between education and art. The editorial content proposes original ways of rethinking the status of education and art education, while addressing the role of teaching and learning in either formal or informal educational contexts – and alongside social background. The adoption of an approach of research-based analysis is also a feature of the journal's contribution's capacity to promote new forms of representing art education.

The journal is interdisciplinary in its content and also in its representation of voices. It provides a platform to questions produced, disseminated and interpreted in international contexts. The contribution covers education contexts: policy and practice, education, and transcultural issues and debates in these areas.

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