# IMAG :: issue 19 CROSSROADS



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# CROSSROADS

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# WELCOME TO IMAG #19: CROSSROADS

Editorial



Art educators live and thrive in and on the Crossroads. We continually find ourselves within planned and unplanned circumstances that lead from one place, style, pedagogy, medium and/or interaction with another. Whether for ourselves or with our work with others crossroads at times can be intentional, shaking up our routines, and at other times a surprise, a serendipitous event that can lead to a new direction.

The following visual essays offer a wide perspective on how crossroads have influenced the authors' practices. In each case there has been movement from one starting point to another that invariably leads to keen insight.

We begin with the crossroads of multimedia arts in Theodora Salti's *Sympoiesis of drama pedagogy, visuals, pedagogical scenography, stories, material, and peoples.* Salti creates a vibrant curriculum in Theaters as Teaching Environments where students bring to life stories rooted in forests, gardens, and characters/puppets using visual props, sounds, and lighting. Immersing with such materials as fabric, drawings, and natural and everyday objects, students enhanced empathy to the environment, stretched their conception of creativity, and learned of the transformative power of drama.

Xiaowei Zhang invites us to witness the cross- cultural value of blueberry picking in Finland in her visual essay *Blueberries meet art: an interdisciplinary exploration at the crossroads of culture and education.* Zhang explores the contrasts of Chinese and Finnish perspectives on learning and art making through engaging students to use natural pigments from "bilberries," experimenting with the creative process, and reflecting on their relationship with nature.

Nina Luostarinen offers us insight on the intersection of environmental challenges, cultural understanding, nature artistic creations, and community engagement in *Drawing lines to land to shift perspective and perception*. By envisioning habitat corridors, revitalization, and climate challenges and using materials as stones, soil, and vegetation Luostarinen guides participants to create large-scale landscapes of animals such as a bumblebee, a wood sandpiper, and a salamander.

Joshua Graham takes us on a visual journey through *The Tangled Desert* showcasing how curriculum is practiced as a creative act. Drawing provides the mapping of the physical and emotional world where intersecting lines are "blurring any distinction between research, art, and play." Walking leads to a visual communication with Nevada's landscape and "the gift of making art."

Mapping is also the key component of Crossroads in the Environment of Visual Education: An Exploration where Viola Rekvényi looks beyond the what and how of curriculum and reminds us of the critical importance of the space in which children engage in learning. Using an "Art Page" for visual research to note their different impressions Portuguese and Hungarian kindergarten teachers examine and reflect on the designing of educational spaces.

Artistic inquiry often leads to the crossroads of discovery, as artist, researcher, and educator. This is illustrated in Jennifer Ruth Hoyden's *Discovering Hidden Landscapes: Research as Art* which describes the author's acceptance and excitement to innovatively hold and interact with a camera. Through the photographic examining of familiar terrain of wool in unfamiliar ways Hoyden learns to inspire her graduate students in research seminar to be guided by curiosity and openness, and the willingness to be provoked by the element of surprise.

In Illustrating the Town Stories: A Crossover Framework Adaptation for Community Narrative Yu-Ching Chiu demonstrates the value of collaboration and the scaffolding of knowledge. In this case community members with the help of prompts create their own visual perspectives of one town in Taiwan with different illustrations and juxtapositions of the town's historical buildings, religious decorations, and people's everyday life. Chiu sought and discovered a teaching process that empowers student participation.

Mapping is also the key component of Crossroads in the *Environment of* It appears that the intersections of creative art making, pedagogy, and *Visual Education: An Exploration* where Viola Rekvényi looks beyond the what and how of curriculum and reminds us of the critical importance of the devoted to Crossroads.

We hope they offer practical and inspiring examples of how to perceive crossroads as art educators and ideally be a spark for you to respond to the question: When, how, and where did two "lines" cross in your life that influenced your path as an art educator, artist, and community member?

A big thanks to our authors, reviewers, and readers,

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Silverman on behalf of the Quartet, Co-Principal editors of IMAG

# Sympoiesis of Drama pedagogy, Visuals, Pedagogical Scenography, Stories, Materials, and People

Keywords: transdisciplinary teaching, drama pedagogy, visualization, pedagogical scenography, filming



Theodora SALTI is a doctoral candidate at the University of Lapland's Faculty of Art and Design, where she previously completed her traineeship as a research assistant. She holds a master's degree in educational research from the University of Gothenburg. She is trained as a preschool teacher. drama educator, atelierista, and pedagogista, with further training in theater (directing, set design, acting), film, and photography. Additionally, she is an author of both academic and pedagogical literature. thsalti@ulapland.fi

Waking from a dream on a summer day in Greece, I decided to pursue my aspirations, exploring expressive languages and expanding my communicative repertoire. Drama pedagogy, storytelling, and theaterencompassing acting, scenography, and directing-became central to my preschool teaching work. Inspired by Reggio Emilia's pedagogical philosophy of the "hundred languages" and the environment as the "third educator," I envisioned a crossroads where drama pedagogy, pedagogical scenography, and visuals could intersect and flourish to create magical teaching worlds. Theaters as Teaching Environments is a sympolesis of materials, visuals, lighting, sounds, stories, and people, all coexisting within drama pedagogy. It is an innovative research project bridging disciplines and institutions to offer university students and teachers immersive, multisensory, and transdisciplinary experiences. Addressing research gaps, my research examines how environments and materials enhance drama pedagogy, fostering engagement, learning, and expression. Drawing on my filmmaking and photography background, I created visuals for this project, inviting participants into stories rooted in forests, gardens, and seas.

### Theaters as Teaching Environments

Theaters as Teaching Environments, a university course I designed and taught at the University of Lapland as part of my action research study, was conducted at the Visual Arenas Residency for Innovators in Art and employed Arts-Based Educational Action Research (Salti, 2023). The project comprised five 3-hour sessions over five weeks, with all eight students consenting to participate, agreeing to the use of recordings and photographs as research data, and receiving acknowledgement for their participation.

The participants had professional backgrounds and studies in preschool or primary school education, with little to no experience in drama pedagogy. The combination of drama pedagogy with pedagogical scenography—set design with an educational purpose—was new to all. Participants engaged with drama pedagogy, particularly process drama, expressing themselves through writing, drawing, dancing, puppetmaking, and improvisation. Beyond impacts on participants' personal and professional dimensions, the project explored how materials and staged environments influence thoughts and actions within a drama pedagogy framework.

Grounded in posthumanism (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016), materials were seen as active collaborators, shaping us as we shape them. This dynamic co-creation unfolded as a choreography where human and more-than-human actors influence one another in oneness and mutual dance, allowing new "becomings" to arise. This visual essay illustrates the journey from the material collection (Figures 1–4) to their synthesis and the five arts-based educational sessions.



Figures 1-4. Materials collection. Photographed by Theodora Salti and Maria Rapti, 2024

For each environment, I wrote the stories, and designed and crafted props and characters/puppets to bring the settings to life:

- In the forest, Ifandra the clothmaker spider, and the birch tree (Figures 5,6) are central characters.

- In the garden, flowers, bees, and other insects (Figures 7,8,9) take the spotlight.

- In the sea, Nafi the sea troll, and various sea creatures guide us on an underwater journey (Figures, 10,11,12).

These characters, made from clay, wire, plaster, glass, wood, threads, and recyclable materials, add depth to the story and emphasize creativity and sustainability.



Figures 5-6.

Forest characters. Photographed by Andreas Skoras and Theodora Salti, 2024



Figures 7-9. Garden characters. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024



Figures 10-12. Sea characters. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

I created the visuals, filming at various locations to enhance the storytelling and atmosphere of the project. These were Botaniska trädgården, Trädgårdsföreningen, Sjöfartsmuseet's underwater world (Figures 13-14), and parks like Ramberget in Gothenburg. Macro photos of little objects offered participants a new perspective on everyday items, sparking creativity and their use in storytelling and drama pedagogy.



Figures 13-14. Sjöfartsmuseet's underwater world and Trädgårdsföreningen. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

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When the filmed footage wasn't sufficient, I used Freepik images (Figures 15, 22, 25), transforming them into background films with Adobe Premiere 2024 and Suno AI to create fitting background music. Pixabay and Mixkit provided sound effects, while QLab aligned visuals and audio with the narrative's emotional flow, enhancing immersion and the overall theatrical environment. Visual Arena features a versatile setup, including a large back-projected video wall (3.2 x 6 meters), a 4K large venue projector, and stage lighting such as redheads, RGB tube lights, and spotlights, enabling dynamic visual and atmospheric effects. The first session, *Rainbow Clouds*, introduced bonding drama games to ease participants into drama pedagogy. They improvised with a mix of little personal, everyday materials, imagined objects, fabrics, lighting, and darkness to spark creativity and foster their understanding of drama pedagogy (Figures 15-16).

"The atmosphere was magical! It created safety for everyone, encouraging us to explore the different moments freely" - Lisa, preschool teacher.

The Little Sound is a story of a musical note, teased for its sharp sound, embarking on a journey beyond the forest (Figure 17). Participants reflected on diversity, belonging, self-acceptance, empathy, and collaboration, exploring various aesthetic languages while improvising with natural materials and fruits (Figures 18-19).

"The surrounding environment, with bird sounds, lighting, and the natural staging, enhanced my ability to immerse myself in the story." -Yolanda, university student in early childhood education.





Figure 15. Rainbow clouds. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

Figure 16. Improvisations with little objects. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

Figure 17. Forest. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

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Figures 20-21. Garden. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

Figures 18-19. Exploring natural materials through various aesthetic languages. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

> "I chose a stone...it was dark and glittery and felt good in my hand. Since my stone was black, charcoal was perfect for capturing its image." - Maria, preschool teacher.

"The feather became a magical pen that could...paint doors that led to other worlds" - Kontantina, primary school teacher.

How does our perspective shift when we embody more-than-human beings? The Life of Bees in a Garden explores bees and other creatures coexisting in a garden disrupted when humans cut many flowers, affecting the ecosystem's balance (Figures 20-22). The story addresses sustainable coexistence and unity with nature.

> "I became a savior of the garden..." - Mihaela, preschool teacher.



Figure 22. Writing-in-role of the last remaining flower. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

"Writing a letter as the last flower under the starlight evoked a profound sense... As humans, we usually don't take on these roles—we hold power." - Danai, special education teacher in primary school education.

In The Stories of the Waves, Booboo Sharky and Nafi the Sea Troll tell the story of a young shark searching for its injured mother in a polluted ocean. With help from Nafi and other sea creatures, the journey explores whether humans and sea life can unite to save the sharks and the ocean. The story fosters empathy and highlights coexistence and unity with the ocean (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Sea. Photographed by Theodora Salti, 2024

"I had never taken on the role of a turtle before, but it felt wonderful to slow down and take it easy." - Birgitta, preschool teacher.

"The detailed setup helped me embrace this new environment. I became a jellyfish because I saw a glass figure... Without props, I might have chosen a fish, dolphin, or shark...". - Lisa, preschool teacher.

### Conclusion

Through this journey, I observed participants' growth as they became more aware of ecological matters, improvised with materials, and transformed their understanding of pedagogical environments and drama pedagogy. Combining materials, visuals, sounds, and lighting, and stepping into morethan-human roles made concepts tangible, expanded creativity, inspired action, and broadened their perspectives. Materials, like fabrics, enabled transformations in the drama process. As Danai, a special education teacher, shared, fabrics extended her hands into wings. Participants reflected through texts, drawings, and objects, and collaboratively built stories and statues using fabrics (Figures 24–25). They highlighted the project's immersive nature, in which drama pedagogy, visuals, sounds, and sensory exploration deepened connections to the story, emotions, and one another.

Anna, a preschool teacher, described: "All my senses were triggered, and for a moment, I forgot everything else, just being in these worlds with my friends."

In this project, materials shaped me as much as I shaped them, becoming part of the sympoiesis between humans, materials, stories, visuals, sounds, and imagination. These crossroads influenced both my personal expression and profession as an artist, teacher, and researcher.

"I am a stone. I am a flower growing on this stone. I am a tree behind the flower... I am a dove; I am the sun shining over everything, I am the rain..." participants stated.





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Blueberries Meet Art: An Interdisciplinary Exploration at the Crossroads of Culture and Education

Keywords: art education, art-based action research, Finland, natural pigments, primary school

Introduction



Xiaowei ZHANG is a doctoral candidate in art education at the University of Lapland. Her research explores the integration of art and science, using chemistry-based experiments in art-making to foster creativity, critical thinking, and ecological awareness. She emphasizes environmental responsibility and promotes the use of natural materials in education. Xiaowei.Zhang@ulapland.fi The integration of Finnish and Chinese cultures strongly influences my research. Particularly, my interests are the Finnish education model of ecological sustainability and practicality and the use of natural materials in Chinese art. I aim to integrate art and science in teaching to foster creativity and ecological awareness. This article adopts Räsänen's (2008) theory of contemporary art as a platform for integrating ecological themes. Utilizing an art-based action research method (Jokela et al., 2019) I explore the integration of ecology and arts in different cultural contexts, focusing on art education at the crossroads of cultures.

# Process

For my doctoral research, I used an art-based action research (ABAR) approach to design a bilberry experiment for 7-year-old students. "Bilberry" refers to the wild blueberries that people in Finland commonly call blueberries. The experiment aims to develop students' ecological awareness and creativity through creation and experimentation. This experiment was inspired by my experience at the crossroads of Finnish and Chinese cultures. In Finland, bilberries are part of everyday life and cultural symbols for nature and ecological sustainability. In China, blueberries are a rare and precious fruit, symbolising the gift of nature. This cultural contrast inspired me to consider how art education integrates scarcity

and abundance, tradition and modern ecological awareness. Similarly, I stand at the intersection of traditional and contemporary art education. Contemporary Finnish education emphasises students' individual expression and critical thinking. Traditional Chinese art education focuses on imitation, reverence for nature and natural materials such as mineral pigments and rice paper. These materials embody ecological values consistent with sustainable art practices. My research combines art and science by engaging students in colour creation using natural pigments extracted from bilberries. I hope to inspire students to think critically about their relationship with nature and how cultural traditions guide sustainable practices in a contemporary context.



Figure 1-3. My bilberry picking experience in Mikkeli, Finland. (Xiaowei Zhang, 2019)

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I remembered my own experiences of bilberry picking in Finland. Bilberry picking is an experience of being at one with nature, symbolising "everyone's rights" (Huhmarniemi, 2024). In China, manual cultivation and careful management highlight the preciousness of natural resources and the need for human intervention. These perspectives guided students to reflect on the cultural meanings of natural resources and explore ecological sustainability through creative experimentation.



Figure 4. My blueberry picking experience in China. (Photograph: Feiping Zhao, 2021)

I conducted the Bilberry research experiment in a primary school in Rovaniemi, Finland, with the participation of 22 first-grade students, including 17 students with Finnish roots and 5 students from international backgrounds. Students worked in small groups of three or four. They created art using natural pigments on paper. They painted using bilberry soup: a thick drink made by adding flour to bilberry juice. Many students shared their own experiences of berry picking, which helped them connect the activity to their everyday lives. The course focused on the contextualisation of bilberries in culture, creative experimentation, and reflection session. During the experimentation phase, they used vinegar and baking soda to explore how bilberry pigment reacted with different substances. By observing the reaction of bilberry soup with different chemicals, students recorded the colour changes and used them as inspiration for their artwork.



Figure 5. Classroom in Progress. (Photograph: Seija Härkönen, 2024)



Figure 6. Creative painting phase in bilberry experiment. (Photograph: Xiaowei Zhang, 2024)

During the creation phase, students were immersed in the mixing and use of colours and showed great concentration. One student mentioned, "The colours became very special during the experiment, and it made me think of more fun things I could paint." The contemplative qualities of the bilberry experiments created a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom while enhancing students' observational skills and creative thinking. The course also established an inclusive learning environment through group work. One student said, "Making paintings with the group, I could see what they were painting. It also gives me good ideas." Although cultural references to bilberries were introduced, no specific theme was assigned. Students were free to explore materials and express their ideas through open-ended and self-directed artistic creation. By demonstrating the symbolism of bilberries in different cultural contexts, students engaged in cross-cultural dialogue and explored the diversity of natural resources. The creative outcomes of the bilberry experiment demonstrated students' abilities to paint inspiration from their experiments, with works in a variety of styles.



Figure 7. The warm spring sunshine. (Photograph: Xiaowei Zhang, 2024)





Figure 10. Northern Lights. (Photograph: Xiaowei Zhang, 2024)

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#### Reflection

The Bilberry Experiment fostered a relaxed, collaborative environment in which students explored natural phenomena through group-based scientific and artistic inquiry. When Chinese cultural elements were introduced, students asked questions, showing interest in how materials are used in different cultures. The impact extended beyond the classroom, For example, a Chinese student living in Finland shared that he tasted blueberries and made traditional Finnish blueberry pie with his family. Afterschool activities like this deepened students' understanding of blueberries as a natural resource in daily life, revealing how interdisciplinary learning can connect art, science, and culture. These findings suggest that creative practice is enriched through a multidimensional educational experience by integrating cultural and ecological perspectives. Despite varied levels of response, students from both Finnish and Chinese cultural backgrounds engaged in emerging forms of reciprocal cross-cultural dialogue.







Figure 11-14. From Blueberries to Pies: A Tasty Journey. Rovaniemi, Finland. (Photograph: Xiaowei Zhang, 2024)



My approach to art education has become a crossroads where cultural differences meet. By combining the Chinese emphasis on natural materials with the Finnish values of experimentation, I created a space where students explored ecological ideas through both discipline and freedom. The bilberry's colour reactions enabled scientific observation alongside artistic interpretation. It illustrates that natural pigments integrate technical processes with cultural heritage, bridging tradition and scientific exploration. This integration also marks a crossroads between art and science. Aesthetic inquiry and empirical methods enrich each other, fostering a holistic learning experience.

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Drawing Lines to Land to Shift Perspective and Perception

Keywords: participatory land art, eco-anxiety, endemic species conservation, environmental education, postindustrial landscapes

#### Introduction



Nina LUOSTARINEN has a background in puppetry, animation, and cultural management. She works at Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland) on research projects combining art with diverse industries. Her 2023 doctoral of arts dissertation at the University of Lapland explored empathy and placemaking. Both her artistic work and research examine adult playfulness, serendipity, and place attachment. nluostarinen@gmail.com

Environmental challenges, such as habitat loss and species decline, profoundly affect both the natural world and human society. These issues are not only ecological but also deeply cultural, shaping how communities interact with their environment and each other. In response, my work as an artist and educator explores solutions through participatory land artcreating large-scale, seen-from-satellite artworks that connect communities to landscapes. This essay examines the intersection of environmental art and community engagement, reflecting on how creative processes can address ecological concerns while fostering a sense of place and collective action. It draws from experiences of working with post-industrial landscapes and endemic species conservation, connecting these practices to art education pedagogy. My research and activity described in this essay responds to eco-anxiety described by Pihkala (2020), as a psychological response characterized by distress and challenging emotions that arise from environmental knowledge about ecological threats and the inadequacy of responses to them.

#### Process

These projects began each time with an investigation into the ways environmental art could engage communities in understanding and addressing local ecological challenges. The focus was on creating temporary, large-scale land art installations in post-industrial or otherwise



marginalized areas, spaces often overlooked but rich in ecological and cultural potential. The core questions were: How can participatory art practices amplify community voices about environmental issues? How might drawing lines on land shift perspectives and perceptions?

#### Materials and Methods

The creative process employed natural materials sourced from the landscapes themselves: stones, soil, and vegetation. These materials were chosen for their accessibility and symbolic resonance, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human activity and natural cycles. Workshops were organized to engage local participants in co-creating the artworks. Activities included site visits, discussions on eco-anxiety and conservation, and collaborative design sessions. The drawing lines to land approach involved physically marking the terrain, using ribbon to outline the forms before laying natural materials in place.

#### Structured and Open Elements

The structured elements included predetermined themes for each site, such as habitat corridors, postindustrial revitalization or climate adaptation. These themes guided the creative process, ensuring that the artworks resonated with local ecological and cultural narratives. At the same time, the workshops allowed for open exploration, inviting participants to contribute their interpretations and ideas. This balance of structure and openness was key to fostering a sense of ownership and connection among participants.



#### Image 1.

In 2021, participants in Punkaharju, Finland, created a large-scale (approx. 20 m) bumblebee artwork using natural materials like stones and gravel. This workshop, conducted with Savonlinna Art College students, fostered eco-empathy and addressed eco-anxiety by symbolically transforming participants into bumblebees, highlighting the critical role of pollinators in our ecosystems.





In 2021, at Lake Sierijärvi in Finnish Lapland, a dried bog was restored through the creation of a wood sandpiper land art piece (approx. 25 m). Participants used natural materials like wood chips and birch leaves to connect deeply with ecological restoration efforts, promoting collective responsibility, and addressing eco-anxiety. 19

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#### Image 4.

In 2024, at the Miyanohara Coal Mine in Ōmuta, Japan, a UNESCO heritage site, participants created a land art piece (approx. 70 m total) depicting the Katsuma salamander using stones, bamboo, and leaves. This project reflected on the region's industrial past and fostered resilience and ecological harmony, linking participants with the site's natural and cultural heritage.

#### Outcomes

The resulting artworks were a series of large-scale local fauna: a bumblebee, some herrings, a wood sandpiper, and a series of a salamander. Photographs and drone footage documented these ephemeral pieces, creating a visual archive that could be shared widely to raise awareness about the sites and issues addressed. Additionally, participants reported a deeper understanding of the environmental challenges facing their communities and a renewed sense of agency in addressing them.

#### Reflection

The project underscored the transformative potential of participatory art in addressing complex ecological and cultural issues. Participants often remarked on how the act of creating land art fostered a sense of connection to the landscape and to each other. One community member noted, "Drawing these lines feels like we're mending something that was broken."

As an educator, this experience highlighted the importance of combining artistic and pedagogical practices to navigate the crossroads of ecological and cultural challenges. The workshops served as a model for integrating environmental education with creative expression, offering a replicable approach for other educators and artists. Looking ahead, I aim to expand this work to enhance community engagement and amplify the impact of these temporary installations.

In conclusion, drawing lines to land provides a tangible, participatory approach to addressing eco-anxiety and fostering ecological awareness. By crossing the boundaries between art, education, and environmental science, this method offers a roadmap for creative responses to the urgent challenges of our time. By transforming into different species, participants experience a symbolic metamorphosis that merges their identities with those of endangered species, evoking emotional empathy and collaborative action. This process is enriched by the concept of adult play, which encourages participants to engage in creative expression and physical closeness. As noted by Deterding (2017), adult play can help manage social embarrassment and create a space for creative expression. By setting aside their controlling minds and embracing free play, participants can construct new dimensions in their perceptions of place. References

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# The Tangled Desert

Keywords: Conceptual Art, Education as creative practice, Great Basin Desert Ecology, Artist-in-Residence, Site-specific sculpture



As seen while driving through the Basin and Range Desert en route to the Montello artistin-residence cabin. You are adrift on the sagebrush ocean.

Joshua GRAHAM is a Salt Lake City, Utah based artist and educator. He is best known for his site-specific artwork and community-based artistic interventions. He is currently a professor in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Utah in the United States, where he works in the Department of Art and Art History. josh.graham@utah.edu

# Preamble

The question of what lies at the crossroads of an art practice and a pedagogical practice was highlighted recently during my residency at the Montello Foundation, located in a remote corner of Nevada, at the edge of the Great Basin Desert in the Western United States. This question is increasingly relevant as cultural institutions embrace an educational turn in contemporary art (Bishop, 2012). The following visual essay is an "unspooling" of my curricula as I intentionally twist it around my creative practice. It is a reflection on how my creative work curls in and out of the classroom, tangling people and ideas in a collective effort to reconsider education as a creative act (Lucero 2018).

# The Tangled Desert

"The land knows you, even when you are lost." That's from Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013). You can find it on the bookshelf of a thoughtfully curated library, inside the Montello Foundation Artist-in-Residence cabin.

Let me ask you, when you're lost what do you do?



The Montello Foundation cabin is ecologically sustainable. Rainwater is collected from the roof, funneled through drains and purified for use. Heat is provided by a wood burning stove and the toilet is compostable.

Kimmerer suggests we look to the land for help. I wonder though, how do How do you introduce yourself to a place you've never been to before? we ask?

They say art doesn't have the answers - that its job is to ask the tough questions. I don't know... but I think this time art has an answer: the gift of observational drawing. Drawing on-site, in-response to the natural world, moves you closer to what's around you - both physically and emotionally; it's reciprocity through proximity.

The result? A map. And, a drawing. A page from your psychic field guide. The record of a conversation between you and the physical world. You're no longer lost. The rich detail highlights new paths. Overlapping and intersecting lines trouble the waters, blurring any distinction between research, art, and play.

A drawing of "nothing" that communicates everything.

In May 2024 I was an artist-in-residence at the Montello Foundation in Northeastern Nevada. It was great. But on that first day, as I drove out into the middle of nowhere, it felt like I was starting a drawing...a drawing on a page I couldn't see.



Students using felt to obstruct their view of their drawings at the UMFA. This workshop, titled Mindfully Wandering was created for university students to encourage meaningful connection with artworks of their choice. It evolved from research done while I was in residence at the Montello Foundation.

Or, start a drawing, for that matter?

Thankfully, there's lots of ways! I start by walking - a lot. And that's what I did in Montello. Every day I wadded out into the sagebrush, looking for stuff. Stopping to draw. I was saying hello. Hello to a thriving community no taller than my socks; an ankle-high ecosystem.



Cryptobiotic soil - community of living organisms found on the surface of soils in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. These crusts are vital for maintaining healthy desert ecosystems, supporting plant growth, and preventing soil degradation. It supports biodiversity by providing a habitat for various microorganisms, including rare species, which is essential for desert ecosystem health. Additionally, they help prevent the establishment of invasive plant species by stabilizing the soil and maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

and drawn machine-tight. The thin-as-yarn strands buoy an oblique sense of permeability. Naturally, bits and pieces of errant wire get caught up in the sagebrush. I picked up the snarled leftovers - tangled and rusty - and took them back to the cabin with me.

I walked along fence-line. Miles and miles of barbed wire; deadly straight Considered anew, against the gallery-white backdrop of the studio wall, the salvaged wire took on added meaning. An invitation is bestowed: is there anything you would like to offer, it asks?

A walk is a fence is a drawing is a sculpture is wire.



barbed wire is used to mark boundaries between publicly owned land and private land. Often bits and pieces of stray wire gets caught up in juniper trees and sagebrush along the fence line.

The most commonly used barbed wire in the Western United States is known as Glidden's Barbed Wire. It was patented by Joseph Glidden in 1874 and became widely adopted due to its effectiveness in containing livestock and its relatively low cost. (Netz 2004)

Kinked up and thorny, the poky barbs leapt off the wall, then curled back again in and around themselves. Lit from eight overhead spotlights, duplicitous shadows echo in all directions. Was it a drawing? A map? A record of a conversation?

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In this iteration of The Tangled Desert, the state lines were later removed, offering additional entry points for the viewer. It is a poetic gesture, providing additional possibilities for more-than-human stories to be told. The potential use of an overhead projector to overlay narratives further extends the scope of the work.

I ask, what gets caught up? What are the methods we use to interrogate these complex knots? What happens if we resist the urge to straighten out (or up?) and embrace the idiosyncratic methods that bend and twist in an interwoven gesture of reciprocity?

The gift of making art.

The Tangled Desert installation, Montello, NV, United States. May 2025. The barbed wire indicates the boundaries of the Great Basin Desert (Fox 2000). Four spotlights above the installation create shadows, urging the viewer to consider the flux state of ecological regions. The fluid boundaries of nature are contrasted by the stark lines indicating Nevada, Utah, and the surrounding states. The "x" marks the location of the Montello Artist-in-Residence.



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Crossroads in the Environment of Visual Education - An Experiment

Keywords: early childhood, built environment education, visual education, environment

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What are the optimal conditions for teaching visual culture and design, considering contemporary spatial and object culture? What should a pedagogical space look like that responds to current issues and phenomena (Dúll et al. 2021)?



Traditional environment of artist education. Paper and ink, Rekvényi Viola, 2011.

In Hungary, visual education, even in early childhood, does not receive sufficient emphasis and usually appears in an unstructured, unplanned form of activity. Meanwhile, visual literacy is a crucial cornerstone of early childhood development. However, the development of visual competencies takes place in a targeted manner only during specialized visual culture lessons.

The conditions for the new approach to teaching visual culture are being clearly outlined in teacher training programs, particularly in primary education and specialized research. Since the late 1990s, discussions have revolved around what should be learned and how teaching methods should function for optimal success. However, research findings on the development of students' (children's and young people's) visual competencies in recent years, we find a drastic decline in their skill levels (Pataky, 2017). Analysis of the background variables of diagnostic studies reveals that one of the major obstacles to visual literacy development is the environment in which the visual education takes place (Keszei et al., 2019).

The visual education environment is imperceptible compared to the focus on what or why (Wagner & Schönau, 2016) and how to teach (Kárpáti & Pataky, 2016). By drawing on relevant research in educational spaces and environmental psychology (Dúll, 2009; Sallay & Dúll, 2006), I aim to contribute to the exploration of the specific characteristics of learning environments through the examination of visual and design education spaces (Hercz & Sántha, 2009; Réti, 2011).

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#### EXPERIMENT

The reality of visual education can only be mapped and subsequently developed by staying grounded in real-world conditions. I began exploring the educational spaces of visual education with a visual experiment, involving four teacher-training groups, aiming to explore future visual education teachers' personal experiences of their preschool environments. Their tool was the ART PAGE, a concept I developed to collect data solely through visual language, and to provide participants with a specialized tool for practicing a universal language. The ART PAGE is a visually adaptive worksheet whose framework changes depending on data collection conditions, though this does not affect its reliability as a measurement tool. It is versatile and can be used in various situations, including experiments, museum visits, and visual note-taking.

The students received a lightly marked sheet of paper, leaving 90% of the space blank for their input. To ensure coherence, each ART PAGE was titled and included the location and date to contextualize each exercise. Additionally, some inspirational visual prompts (such as small visual elements that reflect the specific topic or environment) were placed along the edges of the sheet.

For this specific experiment, several groups of teacher-training students participated: two groups from the Kindergarten Education Programme at ELTE (a mix of international students), the first-year pedagogy group from UCP (Portuguese students), and the first-year MA teacher training students from MOME (Hungarian students). The task for all participants was the same: visually represent your preschool environment.

A distinct ART PAGE was created for each group, with minor differences tailored to their geographical context. Each group had one hour to complete their work, followed by a discussion session where students could share experiences and explain their visual representations.







Figure 7 and 8 The different versions of the Art Page prepared for this task.

### CROSSROADS

I had to account for differences in the university settings and any environmental norms students have gained. The Hungarian groups worked in a studio environment, using colored tools consistent with the practical teaching approach of visual education. In contrast, the Portuguese group worked in a lecture hall, using foldable desk surfaces and their own tools.



Figure 9 ELTE students in their environment (Image by the author)

Figure 10 Portuguese students in their environment (Image by Gabriella Pataky)

Our initial work was with the ELTE TÓK KIDE groups. In the discussion phase of the experiment, it emerged that many participants found the greatest joy in reminiscing about childhood memories—stories about their mothers or personal childhood objects. Since my primary interest was in their environment, I took extra care in the subsequent session with the Portuguese group to ensure the task was not misinterpreted.



### Reflections

My emphasis was an ongoing pilot study in a new approach of gathering data on the theme of how a pedagogical environment of visual education is perceived. These prompts should become a starting point and used as guidance in order to better educate students about their built environment, from kindergarten age all the way to practising professionals.

The first data analysis reveals the following insights:

Portuguese students approached the drawing task in a much more organized and structured manner. Some used rulers or available objects for precision, and unlike their Hungarian peers, they paid little to no attention to the personal introduction section. (Figures 12 and 13) However, their pages were just as full and eventful. An obvious common element was the appearance of a hopscotch (a popular jumping game involving drawing the course on concrete with chalk) in almost every work!



Figure 12 and 13 Methods of Portuguese students' (Image by Gabriella Pataky)

Figure 11 Student example of showing environment as well as some personal mementos, animals, memories.



Figure 14 Overview of the Portuguese student's work

Cultural differences were evident: the Portuguese participants emphasized technique and geometry, whereas the groups studying in Hungary leaned towards artistic expression and creative freedom, reflecting the differences in educational approaches between the two countries. As mentioned, there were two groups participating in the experiment from Hungary next to our group from ELTE, a smaller group from MOME took part, as well. This is a fine art university, and despite the group being a part of the teacher training programme, the effects of a more free and artistically liberating environment, was obvious the sketches of these students were carefree, by overcoming any uncertainties arising from drawing, they organically expressed their memories on paper.

Figure 15 Overview of the Hungarian student's work

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Discovering Hidden Landscapes: Research as Art

Keywords: art education, art research, methodology, qualitative research, fiber art, arts-based research

#### Introduction



Jennifer Ruth HOYDEN is an educator, gallery coordinator, artist, and doctoral candidate in Art and Art Education at Teachers College. I have an MA in Cognitive Science in Education. My research focuses on ways we can activate and be activated by materials to support a pedagogy of material responsiveness. Jennifer.Hoyden@gmail.com

While arts-based research is a known qualitative method to probe and explore a situation or process using aesthetic and artistic practices as explicit forms of investigation (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2020), I have always regarded conventional research as holding untapped potential as a space for personal expression and discovery. I teach a research seminar for Masters students in Art Education. At the start of the semester, their faces reflect the dread they feel about this required class. In the course, they must develop a formal research study to meet the accreditation requirements for the program. Along the way they will have to learn vocabulary, concepts, and writing formats that are unfamiliar and awkward. They regard research as something dry and boring. The task is, admittedly, an imposed one, but their assumptions about research are the bigger challenge. My goal is to help them view academic research as a process of discovery that can be powerful and transformative, much like their artistic practice. I have always maintained that, as artists, they are already researchers and, as researchers, they can become artists. This past year I learned first-hand just how true this can be. During my doctoral research into the different ways artists encounter and respond to their materials, I developed a side investigation on the material itself that, to my surprise, transformed into art. Pursuing my research question with dedication and passion led me to a new artistic practice.



Figure 1.

A mirrorless digital camera with a super macro lens, 4 mini LCD light boxes, a flexible tripod

#### Process

For my dissertation in the Art & Art Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, I am focusing on fiber and textile artists. To improve my photography skills documenting hands at work, I registered for an independent study in the photography studio. This was my first experience with photography, and I was strictly viewing the camera as a research aid. In designing my goals for the semester, I explained that I wanted to get closer to the material, and that I was trying to understand what my hands "see" when they handle materials that I am drawn to. My photography instructor proposed the possibility of using a macro lens (see Figure 1).

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Figure 2. The setup of how I work with the camera and the mini light boxes



Figure 3. Viewing the material on the electronic viewfinder

#### My materials

Working with a super macro lens that magnifies objects up to 4.5 times requires sharp lighting. Because I am solely interested in unedited images, I surround the material I am photographing with three LCD mini light boxes and a tripod holding a fourth light box overhead to help me capture accurate color representation (see Figure 2). The lens is manual focus, requiring a very steady hand. In fact, when I invested in my own supplies, the sales associate insisted that I should use a rail or tripod to stabilize the camera. However, through experimentation, I found that I instinctively traveled the camera, my "eye," all over and around the material, discovering what I could observe asan excited spectator. I did not want to be restricted by a tool that held the camera in place, dictating what I might see, which things that stabilize us often do. As I look at the electronic viewfinder, my body moves forward and back, one hand holding the camera, sometimes one hand holding the material, or holding a light box closer (see Figure 3). I have noticed that my hands reach for what they need. In this way, the camera becomes part of my body, allowing me to take in the material in a new way (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Intuitively coordinating the camera and the materials

# The results

Almost immediately I began encountering my familiar materials as revelations. My wool was an otherworldly terrain of colors and energy. My cottons revealed a landscape that felt simultaneously nostalgic and thrilling. The images confronted me with a new way of looking at something I thought I already knew. I shifted from investigator to participant, provoked, by the materials, to respond with new questions. I combined materials with different background colors to offset their vibrancy (see Figure 5). I explored surfaces and edges. I allowed my research question to blur the line between knowing and creating. Unintentionally, through my work, I became an artist, and my research became art. My photography work continues to evolve, and I have allowed myself to view it as art. One photograph, "The Connection," was recently selected for a juried exhibition and is now part of the permanent collection of art in my program (see Figure 6).

#### Reflection

It was through my question - What do my hands see? - that I became open, not only to my materials, but also to what I could know about them, and through them. Art, like research, can take us in unexpected directions if we are guided by curiosity, openness, and a willingness to look closely. I always tell my students, if you are not surprised by what you discover, you have not finished looking.

In keeping with the pedagogy that I bring to my own teaching, I allowed myself to look closer at the thing I thought I already knew in order to discover what it is, what I can know about it, and what I can know through it. I can hold a roll of silk chiffon in my hand. I can feel it. I can know its color (see Figure 7). Is that enough? Is that the whole story? My research allows me to understand material, and my relationship to it, in new ways (see Figure 8). By listening to our materials, according to Anni Albers (1982), "the closer we come to art." I have come to understand that listening, like learning, is an intensely active engagement requiring curiosity and guided attention, whether we are artists or researchers.



Cotton Cloth Edge, Unedited (2024)



Figure 6. The Connection (2024)



### CROSSROADS



Figure 8. Held (2025)

> It is my teaching strategy to guide my students to look closely and to actively listen to all sources of information involved in the issue they are investigating; includes listening to themselves. I am still exploring why I respond to my materials the way I do. I am fascinated by the appetite that I feel in my fingers to hold and work with them. I also notice that I hold my breath to steady my hand just when I become interested in something I see in my viewfinder. Once we identify that which holds our attention – the material, or issue, that we care about, respond to, and find meaningful – that is the moment to set aside everything we believe and understand about it, so that we can learn through it.

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My ongoing research on fiber art is supported, in part, through scholarship from the Handweavers Guild of America, Inc. (HGA). Figures 2–4, photo assistance provided by Vivian N. Hoyden Illustrating the Town Stories: A Crossover Framework Adaptation for Community Narrative

Keywords: sequential illustration, collaboration, narrative, eco-museum, community

Crossing Dual Capacities: The Framework



Yu-Ching CHIU is an illustrator and artist-teacher with an MA in Illustration from Anglia Ruskin University, the UK, and an MA in Arts and Humanities Education from Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan. Her practice focuses on visual storytelling through sequential art, and its implementation in educational contexts. yuchingchiu.art@gmail.com This visual essay explains my crossover practice in sequential illustration as well as visual art education, taking a collaborative art workshop that I designed and led as an example. Being an artist with a focus on visual storytelling, I've found illustrating stories an effective and meaningful way towards constructing knowledge. I was looking for a teaching model that can empower the learners with such experience, in which they can take part in producing the knowledge instead of merely receiving it. These influences inspired me to develop a framework that contextualises the shifting agency for both the teacher and the learner with the facilitation of a designated key activity, as diagrammed in Figure 1. Illustrating stories through collaboration, which I define as when the teacher and the learner working together in giving meaning to the illustrated story, serves as the key activity that carries out the dual capacities which every partaker holds artistically and educationally.



To further explain the grounding of this crossover model and the rationale of collaborative illustrating being the key activity, I mention the implementation of Scaffolding pedagogy in my practice. Originating from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), Scaffolding teaching facilitates a student's ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information (Van Der Stuyf, 2002). Although Scaffolding does not provide educators with a definite guideline (Verenikina, 2004), I find the metaphorical nature of the term depicts my own art teaching philosophy precisely, as illustrated in Figure 2. Every individual builds their unique houses although starting with the identical scaffold, and that denotes a structured yet flexible education method, in which every learner constructs knowledge of a distinctive form despite being given the same guidance from the teacher. The learning outcome is therefore demonstrated through the learner's particular creation rather than a standardised examination. Based upon my interpretation of Scaffolding pedagogy, collaborative illustrating in the Framework offers the scope for individualised narrative, realising the learning environment I aim for.



Figure 2: Illustration depicting my interpretation of Scaffolding pedagogy

Adaptation of the Framework: "Illustrating the Town Stories" Workshop

In 2024, I had the opportunity to bring this framework to the setting of an "eco-museum" when I had my solo exhibition of sequential illustration at Yuejin Art Museum in Tainan, Taiwan. Differing from the mainstream museums where visitors come for the displayed items, Yuejin Art Museum aims at applying artistic approaches with the local community across its geographic area, the town of Yanshui. Therefore, I planned a workshop for local residents to engage in a sequential illustration activity, particularly based on and in response to Yanshui's attributes.



Figure 3: Art installation by Yuejin Art Museum within the neighbourhood

The workshop, titled "Illustrating the Town Stories", was run for 90 minutes and open to all local residents of any ages or backgrounds. I aspired to give any member of this community the space for their own stories. I set up the teaching content based on the knowledge structure outlined in Figure 4, which led to such questions: How do the participants obtain the knowledge in sequential illustration, while and through making sequential illustration? How do I facilitate the *learning/creating* journey?



Knowledge structure

There were several key points that shaped the adaptation of the Framework at Yuejin Art Museum and addressed the questions above.

Teacher/author Initiated Work as Starting Point

Reflecting the dual capacities the Framework regards, the partial creation by the author, performs equivalently as the teaching material developed by the teacher; when the learners receive and interact with the teaching material, synchronously they are creating the other part of the work as the collaborators.

For this logic, the initial work I made was a series of photos taken from a stroll around the town of Yanshui, and these photos were later used in the workshop to support the participants' learning. What I intended to capture through photography were the historical buildings, religious decorations, and people's everyday life in the old-time habitats, which together made the starting point for the collaborative storytelling. When I invited the participants to use one of the photos as the "scene" (referring to the knowledge structure from Figure 4) in their illustration, many of them felt confident in laying out the rest of the story, because these scenes were within their everyday experience.



Figure 5: A series of photos that I took around Yanshui town



Figure 6: Every participant received one photo as the starting point for their own creation.



Figure 7: Participants used the photo as the "scene" in their illustration

# Illustrating with Prompts as Scaffolding

The principle of the workshop was to enable everyone taking part to create their own sequential illustration with ease, disregarding their levels of skills. Considering that the participants we had recruited had no prior knowledge in making sequential illustration, I applied Scaffolding strategy by breaking down the teaching content (referring to Figure 4) into small units, and placing them as prompts for the participants to respond throughout the illustrating activity. The diagram in Figure 8 describes the prompts, and explains how they mirror each component from the teaching content.

|   | Prompts   | Teaching content   |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | "Following the 'scene', pick one toy randomly and use it as the 'character' in your illustration.<br>Place the character anywhere and in any way you like in front of the scene, and see how that inspires your story. Draw the story down. This is your first illustration."   | $(\text{Scene + Character}) \longrightarrow Illustration 1$<br>Story |
|   | (Supporting image: Figure 9)  |  |
|   | +   | +  |
| 2 | "Pass the 'scene' you have right now to the person on your right,<br>so everyone gets a new 'scene'- but keep your 'character'.<br>Now you have your character in a different scene, draw down the<br>story on another piece of paper. This is your <b>second illustration</b> ."   | Illustration 2   |
|   | (Supporting image: Figure 10)   |  |
|   | +   | +  |
| 3 | "Take a look at the two illustrations you just created.<br>Ask: Which one happens first in your story? It doesn't have to<br>be the same as the order of how we make them.<br>Now think about: What happens in between the two<br>illustrations? What is missing in the story? Take another piece<br>of paper and draw or write the missing bits down." | Illustration 3<br>Placed as<br>a sequence                            |
|   | (Supporting image: Figure 11)   |  |
|   | +   | +  |
| 4 | "Now you have three illustrations placed in an order-<br>you have created a ' <b>sequence</b> '!"   | Sequential illustration  |
| F | igure 8:  |  |

Prompts mirroring each component from the teaching content.



Figure 9: Supporting image for Prompt 1 in Figure 8, "Scene" and "Character" that makes the first illustration



Figure 11: Supporting image for Prompt 3 in Figure 8, completing the third illustration that makes a sequence



Figure 10: Supporting image for Prompt 2 in Figure 8, the same character in a different scene that makes the second illustration

# Sharing Stories as Opening Dialogues

To conclude the workshop, all participants sat side by side and each presented their final work of sequential illustration. Despite different expectations set in varied adaptations of the Framework, sharing work has proved to be a crucial finalising step. It is not only where and when I assess the learning outcome, but also the equal space to have everyone's work being seen and narrative being heard.

While most participants had known each other from the same community before the workshop, new dialogues were sparked when they were all empowered to narrate individual stories based around the town of Yanshui. Figure 12 and 13 present two local school teachers in different subjects exchanging feedback, besides parent-child co-production, which is demonstrated in Figure 14 with notes.

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Figure 12 & 13: Participants exchanging feedback







A parent enrolled only her child for the workshop, and later engaged in creating the story herself as well.

Child: The story is the deer is home and decides to get on a ride for a trip.

- Parent: I can see the story to be the other way round- the deer comes back home after a day out, if you switch the order of the first and last illustrations.
- Me: You could try rolling up your drawings, so the last illustration attaches to the first illustration, and the sequence becomes a cycle. In this way, both of your stories work.

Figure 14: Notes from the workshop

#### Reflection

The Framework has been a pivot that bridges my crossover practice in both illustration and art education. This methodology succeeded to sustain my exploration through flexibility and adaptability; every new project called for new inputs and tactics. Instead of duplicating a rigid lesson plan, I emphasised a model that can be tailored to support various contexts. There is no specified path for the participants to arrive at the same outcome. Every individual's journey is equally important. This open and fair practice is what makes the learning also a creation, and how everyone's story is being written into the collaborative narrative. ••

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