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OPEN HORIZONS



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Principal Editors
Gabriella PATAKY
Jonathan SILVERMAN
Graphic Design Editor
Viola REKVÉNYI

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Cover image: Yu-Hsuan Wu

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Open Horizons
Editorial

Often, the principal editors of IMAG receive inquiries and submissions that address exemplary art education programs, artistic explorations, and community engagements that do not directly attend to our chosen theme. For issue #21 we decided to have an open theme. Often, as art educators we ask students to engage in curriculum that is open ended where they chose a project, focus, and medium though still work within some parameters such as scale, documentation, and timeframe. In this IMAG open "horizon" issue our authors worked within the "scale" boundaries of a visual essay where images and text collaboratively tell the story; document intent, process, and reflection; and abide by the timeframe set by the editors. With delight we present our montage of inspiring practices, surprises, and gems.



Sušanj Cesarički, Croatia, 2026. Image by Viola Rekvényi

We begin with *Unexpected Practices in Arts Teaching: A Speculative Visual Essay on Chance and Creativity* where Mafalda Alves Carreira embraces the unknown as a pathway to the creative process. Through "different stages: observational drawing, gravity challenge, randomness, choosing, and destroy to reconstruct" students experienced an enhanced sense of curiosity and intuition in the making of art.

For Julija Pociūtė and Marija Griniuk's the somatic experience is empasized in *Listening to the Forest: An Artist's Exploration Towards Eco-Somatic Learning*. Designing encounters that linked nature and the creative process and that encouraged exploration of sculpture, installations, and digital media provided an eco-somatic experience for students to meanfully reflect on space.

The somatic experience is also key in Yu-Hsuan's *Forgetting Form* where intuition and response to movement offer participants a new form of sensing self and others. A plant life oriented movement score and subsequent "Walking, objects, butoh-based movement practice, writing, and site-responsive creation" enlivened participant perception of habits and life cycles.

Clemency Wood worked with 13–14 year olds in a state school in rural England as a background for T*he Grid as a Checkpoint of School Art Education*. Students were provided with dried peas and wooden sticks to make grids. Their conception of drawing and art was shifted through their own trial-and-error process even though they discovered that the uniformity of the materials led them to uniform grids and repetitive patterns.

The Ubiko project at Finland's University of Oulu Teacher Training School is the core for *Seeing the Invisible: Movement, Rhythm and the Transformation of Schooling* where Markku Lang focuses on "rhythms, flows, and pauses" of learning environements. Panoramic photography documenting "how activity unfolded between spaces" and converting this documentation to animation generated new perceptions of activity and spacial relations within the learning environment.

Examining environments was also a focus for Gabriella Pataky, Viola Rekvényi, and Judit Skaliczki's *Hiatus: Visualizing Absence in Educational Architecture.* The authors asked students to experience the structures and spacial text of everyday landscape and consider what is concealed. By first moving through these architectural structures and then drawing what is missing led to students' empowerment where they could shape everyday learning environments.

In *Cross -cultural partnership between villages in Japan and USA* Heather Moore and Jonathan Silverman share how they developed a series of Japanese inspired workshops and presentations as well as art residencies in Nishiawakura, Japan for 14 Vermont artist educators. This partnership has launched a mutual exchange of cross cultural experiences and enhanced understanding of the relationship between sustainability and art.

Another cross-global conversation and residency inspired American artist/educator Mark Graham and Turkish artist/educator Medine Irak in *Istanbul City Gardens meet the Great Basin Desert* as they share their intellectual and visual dialogue focused on ecology and place-based education. Through their landscape paintings they enriched their awareness of the complexities and beauty of the natural world while bridging understanding across history and culture.

Photos from travels to Japan, Uzbekistan, Türkiye, and Thailand inspired Rebecca Shipe in *Reflections on Conflict Transformation: A Visual Travel Journal.* She transformed these photos to visual respresentations that communicate how such personal experiences exemplify conflict resolution. Expressions of people, color and patterns of places, and senses provoked in events deepened her appreciation and sparked more curiosity.

When setting forth on this open issue adventure we as editors had no idea what to expect. Whether focusing on the creative process, somatic experience, learning environments or travel journals, we are thrilled with the diversity and integrity of each visual essay; we hope you will be intrigued and inspired.

With appreciation and thanks to our authors, reviewers, and readers

Jonathan Silverman
on behalf of the IMAG editorial trio :.

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Unexpected Practices in Arts Teaching: A Speculative Visual Essay on Chance and Creativity

Keywords:
unexpected practices, research workshops, creativity,
creative practice, arts teaching methodologies

INTRODUCTION

This visual essay emerges from a research process without definitive answers. The reflections offered here are not certainties, but tentative readings and openings that arise between practice, observation, and writing, an invitation to think, imagine, and remain within the generative space of not-knowing (Cocker, 2023). I present a mixed-media graphic composition developed by a student in the research workshop "Between Chance and Possibilities", part of my doctoral research, that explores arts teaching practice with pre-university students. Through a speculative approach, this essay observes the impact of unexpected practices and chance as catalysts for creativity, considering both process and outcome.

PROCESS

The research workshops were held in art classrooms of artistic schools, familiar to the participants, who entered without knowing what they would encounter. Each table held only a blank sheet of paper and a cardboard box. A stranger welcomed them, briefly introduced the activity, and explained that they would follow a game with rules and stages known only to the teacher. The proposal invited participants to inhabit moments of creative vulnerability.

The drawing was constructed in layers. Each stage was unexpected, conceived as a challenge to add new meanings, stimulate creativity, and allow participants to deal with error. Bodies moved between concentrated creation and interruptions provoked by random instructions. Thus, the work was formed within the vulnerability of "not-knowing" (Cocker, 2023), where the unknown is transformed into an opportunity for creation.

The workshop took place through a dynamic game with different stages: observational drawing, gravity challenge, randomness, choosing, and destroy to reconstruct.



Mafalda Alves Carreira
is a PhD researcher in Art Education at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto. Visual artist, photographer and art teacher, she explores relational, sensitive and experience-based art pedagogies through creative research and educational practice.
carreira.mafalda@gmail.com



Image 1. The Room



Image 2. The White Paper

Observational Drawing
Draw an object that is present in the space: tangible, perhaps banal, but open to multiple meanings.

In choosing the watch, the student may not simply have selected an object, but perhaps responded to an intuition, an impulse or a sense of familiarity. What might appear as an ordinary object could also be read as a subtle metaphor for temporality and its passing, suspension, and rhythm. The act of drawing may not be limited to representation but could open towards a tentative holding of time, a fragile contemplation traced on paper.



Image 3. The Watch

Gravity Challenge
Let gravity act. Allow the material to find its own complexity

With each drop that falls onto the paper, a stain emerges: sometimes controlled, sometimes left to the plasticity of the material as it unfolds in its own complexity. A balance between what gravity brings forth and the body and mind's urge for order and control. This stage might be seen as an experiment in letting go while negotiating resistance. Gravity becomes an active participant in the process, suggesting a dialogue between intention and chance, and raising questions about how much one creates and how much one allows to happen.



Image 4. Black Stain

Randomness
Take a sentence from the box: unknown, open, perhaps enigmatic

Randomness was introduced. From a box, each participant took a sentence from José Jorge Letria's "Corpos Celestes," (2014) a poetry book about celestial bodies. Imbued with the imagery of the cosmos, each fragment, once isolated, carried its own openness: subjective, suggestive, perhaps enigmatic. The sentences were not instructions but invitations, openings through which drawing could emerge, not as illustration, but as a way of inhabiting ambiguity and exploring meaning in transition.



Image 5. Randomness

Choosing

Choose an image. No reason required, no guidance given.

A small selection of images was provided without guidance. Each student chose one image that could be cut, represented, or reinterpreted graphically, in a gesture that added another layer of visual dialogue. This moment might be understood less as a search for meaning within the image and more as an invitation to projection. Once displaced from its original context, an image opens a field of possibilities. The act of choosing may not have been about preference but about entering a relation with what was at hand, allowing chance, intuition, or curiosity to guide the encounter.

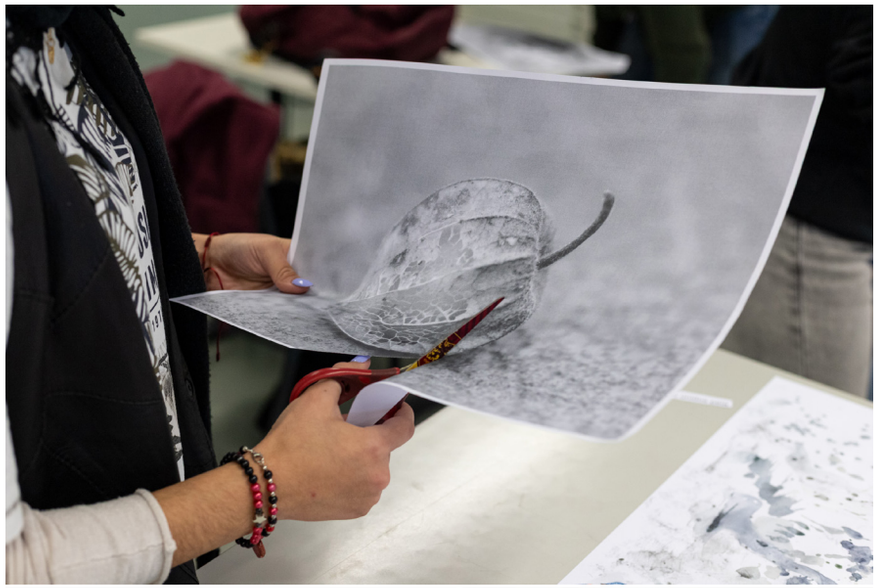


Image 6. Random Image



Image 7. Layers

Destroy to Reconstruct

What is a limit? Destroy to find out.



Image 8. Destroy



Image 9. Reconstruct

Finally came another challenging stage: "destroy to reconstruct." Some felt panic, while others dared to move beyond the limits of the sheet and expand the drawing. Questions emerged: What is a limit? Are there limits when layers overlap without cancelling one another out? Can a limit be stretched until it dissolves?

At this point, everything was possible. Some students chose to tear, transforming the once-white sheet into a surface carrying layers of dialogue and overlapping meanings. The watch came to life.

Thus, the experience unfolded as a spiral journey: from chance to control, from observation to interpretation, from construction to deconstruction. The result was both the process itself and the final composition, both carrying the memory of gestures, challenges, and unexpected choices.



Image 10. Layer

REFLECTION

In the experience of "not-knowing" (Cocker, 2023) and grounded in the idea of the teacher as cultural producer (Acaso & Megías, 2017), where a thin line exists between teacher and artist, I felt that this composition emerges from the performativity present throughout the creative process: the music, the intonation, the walking through space. Elements that were at once disruptive and influential; the words and ideas exchanged, which affected, which touched. The loss of control between what was planned and what was left deliberately uncontrolled. Stages foreseen yet shifting according to necessity.

We challenged gravity, we drew through observation, and we traced lines guided by music. We interpreted sentences and images, using the sensitivity of the senses that each of us carries. But beauty, suddenly, had to be destroyed and re-signified. Error was accepted; deconstruction began with a new meaning, a new layer that can communicate, or not, with the ones before.

The clock sounded: the workshop time was over. There was no longer time for representation, but rather a time for acceptance and reflection, which can bring both satisfaction and frustration. This experience for students was a moment in which everything was possible both in feeling and in making.



Image 11. Unnamed

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Photo credit: Mafalda Carreira

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Listening to the Forest: An Artist's Exploration Towards Eco-Somatic Learning

Keywords:
eco-somatics, university pedagogy, nature, art gallery



Marija Griniuk
is a performance artist and researcher affiliated with Nordlandsmuseet, working as Department Lead. From 2024 to 2026, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Vilnius Academy of Arts.
marijasamidaiddaguovddas.no



Julija Pociūtė
is a visual artist and doctoral researcher at the University of Lapland whose practice integrates eco-somatic and artistic approaches to develop methods for exploring human–forest interconnections as part of her doctoral project, Embodied Forests.
jpociute@ulapland.fi

INTRODUCTION

This visual essay explores how artist-led eco-somatic practices rooted in Arctic art education may inform art education at university level. Drawing on our PhD and postdoctoral artistic research, we propose speculative pedagogical possibilities for BA and MA students. Through embodied encounters with natural environments, artistic processes, material exploration, and public exhibitions, we reflect on how eco-somatic approaches may inspire future pedagogical applications.

PROCESS

Arctic art education builds on an awareness of connectivity with nature and the more-than-human aspect of co-creation, representing pluriversal creativity in which humans and non-human creators (nature) are regarded as equal participants (Jokela et al., 2025). Our artistic practices explore how attunement to more-than-human worlds generates new understandings that may inform future pedagogical possibilities. In this essay, we reflect on whether similar creative processes could be adapted to university teaching within a broader understanding of art education through the framework of eco-somatics. The concept of eco-somatics draws on Abram's (2010) explanation of an embodied way of knowing that emphasizes the deep, sensory relationship between the human body and the more-than-human world. This understanding aligns with the concept of intra-action (Barad, 2007; Griniuk, 2025), which extends beyond conventional notions of interaction between human and non-human entities. As artists and researchers, we employ an eco-somatic approach in our artistic practices. This essay draws on the authors PhD project *Embodied Forest* (Pociute) and postdoctoral project *Arctic Moss as a Symbol of Endurance* (Griniuk), both of which combine exploratory processes with the public presentation of artistic outcomes.

Pociūtė undertakes fieldwork across different Arctic forest landscapes, engaging in human–forest intra-action through an eco-somatic mode of co-creation with forest elements. During this process, she gathers materials that inform the emerging form of the installation or sculpture. The collected materials are then further developed in her studio, where she experiments with additional materials informed by the ideas and experiences generated through co-creation, while also producing video artworks based on footage filmed in the forest. In this way, eco-somatic experiences generated in the Arctic landscape are translated into studio-based practices through the materialisation of sculptures and installations, alongside the digital development of video artworks. The process culminates in a curated exhibition in a white-cube gallery space, where the materials and experiences generated through co-creation are reflected in the artistic outcomes presented (see figures 1a–f, 2a–d).



Figure 1a.b. Julija Pociūtė. Collecting materials through engagement with the landscape. Iceland, 2025. Photo by the author.



Figure 1c.d. Julija Pociūtė. Somatic interaction in the forest. Finland. 2024. Photo by the author.



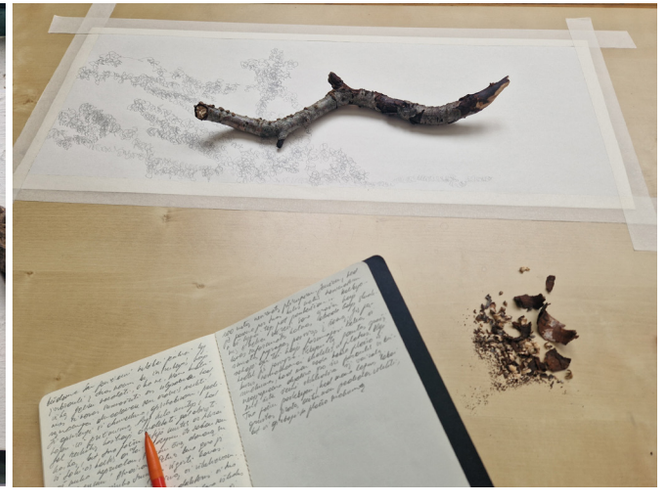


Figure 1e.f. Julija Pociūtė. Working with materials in the studio. Iceland. 2025. Photo by the author.



Figure 2a. Two-channel video installation. The Shape of Belonging, 9'17", 2025. Exhibited in Thicket, a solo exhibition by Julija Pociūtė, at Arka Gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania. Photo credit: Tomas Terekas



Figure 2b. Julija Pociūtė. Two-channel video installation. The Shape of Belonging, 9'17", 2025, video stills.



Figure 2c. Installation Birch Branch, 2025. Exhibited in Thicket, a solo exhibition by Julija Pociūtė, at Arka Gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania. Photo credit: Tomas Terekas



Figure 2d. Installation Forest Border Line, 2025. Exhibited in Thicket, a solo exhibition by Julija Pociūtė, at Arka Gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania. Photo credit: Tomas Terekas

For Griniuk, the connection to the Arctic landscape is mediated through historical narratives linked to Lithuanian history, particularly the deportations of Lithuanians to the Arctic North and the Kola Peninsula during the Soviet period. Griniuk gathered moss from Arctic forests and incorporated it into a performance artwork that also included archival photographs from the 1940s and 1950s depicting Lithuanians in Arctic environments. The performance was presented during *Performance Studies* at the Sápmi Performance Festival. In this way, local natural materials and historical narratives connected to the landscape become integral components of the artistic process, linking embodied experience, memory, and place (see Figures 3a, 3b).

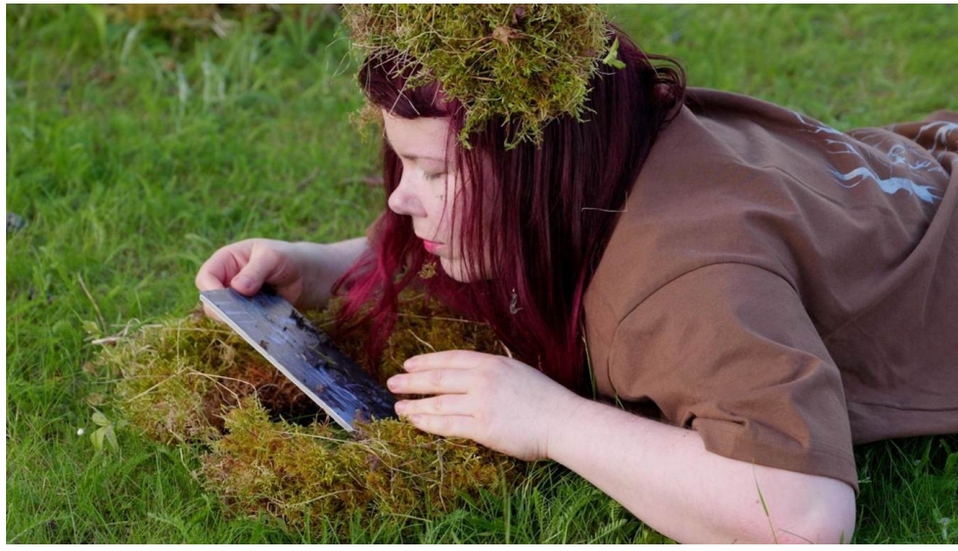


Figure 3a. Marija Griniuk. Interacting with archive photos during performance "Arctic moss as the symbol for Endurance" at Performance Studies in Sapmi festival 2024. Photo credit: Albinas Liutkus



Figure 3b. Marija Griniuk. Performance "Arctic moss as the symbol for Endurance" at Performance Studies in Sapmi festival 2024. Photo credit: Albinas Liutkus

REFLECTION

This essay presents a speculative pedagogical proposal based on the eco-somatic explorations and artistic works of authors Griniuk and Pociūtė, suggesting how these practices could inform art education through greater awareness of material choices and connections to natural environments. Rather than presenting an implemented pedagogical model, the essay explores how artist-led practices may inspire future pedagogical applications in art education.

Our understanding of eco-somatic pedagogy differs from the more generalised concept proposed by Fowler and Pyles (2025) by situating it specifically within art education, where artistic processes may culminate in a public exhibition. Drawing on their PhD and postdoctoral artistic research projects, Griniuk and Pociūtė propose speculative recommendations for integrating eco-somatic practices into art education for BA and MA students.

Applying eco-somatic body-sensing practices alongside more-than-human collaborators may enable the emergence of intuitive, embodied insights that inform students' creative processes. Combining sensory attunement with reflective decision-making can further support the development of new understandings shaped by the knowledge embedded in landscapes and natural environments. Finally, the production and public presentation of artworks within a white-cube gallery space may foster respectful and responsive relationships with different environments, encouraging students to consider how material choices emerge through embodied encounters with place.

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Forgetting Form

Keywords:
embodied pedagogy, site-responsive workshop, forgetting form



Yu-Hsuan Wu
is a Taiwanese poet, interdisciplinary artist, and doctoral researcher at the University of Lapland, Finland, whose practice brings together poetry, embodied facilitation, and site-responsive pedagogy to explore perception, relation, and artistic transformation.
yuwu@ulapland.fi



Veiling as vow, concealment, and inner space.

A white veil fell from the top of her head. What it covered was not a shy face, but a gaze so steady it seemed lit from within. She turned and saw a group of unfamiliar women wearing the same veil. There was no partner beside any of them, because this was a wedding in which each person married herself.

As officiant, I said to the twenty-nine veiled participants: *Tell all the truth but tell it slant*. This was not only my blessing, but also the title of the self-organized two-day poetry × butoh workshop that brought us together in rural Chishang, Taiwan. Borrowed from Emily Dickinson (1976), the line suggests a way of approaching truth obliquely, through detours, into places language has not fully reached.

Through walking, objects, butoh-based movement practice, writing, and site-responsive creation, participants entered an intensive process of loosening habitual form. As facilitator, I was not interested in teaching a fixed vocabulary of movement, but in asking how a person might enter another way of sensing herself, others, and the world. Their responses through movement, writing, and reflection made visible how ritual, structure, and trust enabled this form of embodied transformation.

Forming Necessity: Veil, Commitment, and Inner Space

Before I handed out the veils, I read aloud from Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* (2004). I asked: "What must you carry? What would you protect with your whole life?" Only when a participant had found her own *must* did she come forward to receive a white veil from me and place it over her head as if marrying that necessity.



A shared rite: collective withdrawal and inward turning.

I did not ask anyone to speak her answer aloud. This was not a collective confession, but a private vow. Once the face was covered, expression receded. Then another layer receded: the self accustomed to meeting others' gaze, to being recognized, and to responding quickly to the world. The veil created a blurred yet focused inner space. Transformation begins with concealment, slowness, and withdrawal.

I Am This Way: How Myth Enters Thought, and Thought Enters the Body

And then we gathered by the lake and read "Zuo Ci's Magic Arts" from the Chinese text *In Search of the Supernatural* (2025). Faced with pursuit, Zuo Ci altered the rules of reality. He turned into a ram and said, "I am this way." When others tried to seize him, all the sheep became indistinguishable. Capture failed because singular identity had dissolved. The myth did not provide information; it opened an imaginative frame of metamorphosis, unrecognizability, and release from fixed form.

I asked the participants to walk, taking everything they encountered as a chance for transformation. If they saw a tree, they silently said: "I am this way." If they felt wind, they said: "I am this way." The threshold appeared after the story fell away and only the sentence remained. Thought shifted first; only then did the body begin to change its orientation toward the world.



After myth, thought shifts into bodily orientation.

The Life of a Seed: How the Body Enters Time, and the Site Enters the Body

We arrived at an open field. There I offered a movement score drawn from plant life: seed, sprouting, blooming, interdependence, storm, solitude, farewell. The point was not performance, but to let the body pass through a condensed life cycle. Transformation was no longer a sudden deviation. It entered time.

Because of this, the site ceased to be background. Trees, wind, grassland, and distant peaks all worked on the body. What loosened form was not an effort to "express metamorphosis," but the fact that the body had entered another temporal and perceptual logic. It was no longer moving alone.



Two plants facing the storm, supporting and constraining one another.

The Large Body: How Relation Takes Form and Loosens the Former Self

Next, I gathered everyone into a single cluster and asked them to close their eyes and press close together until they formed one large body. I told them: "If you feel safe, come in; if not, you may stay outside. To withdraw would not mean failure, but sovereignty." In the end, everyone entered. My instruction was simple: "Use one part of your body to connect to another person. You could be at the center or the edge; you could connect deeply, or only with the tip of a finger touching someone else's sleeve."

There was no spoken language and no discussion. The body became the only means of sensing and response. The point was to let each person perceive her own habits through contact. Does she yield quickly, wait passively, obey the pressure around her? Or does she create space, alter direction, open a path? Once one weight met another, boundaries were no longer fixed. They became negotiable. Relation here was not just interaction, but a shared field of sensation.



The large body: shared sensation and negotiated boundary.

Returning to the Individual, but No Longer the Same Self

At the end, I asked everyone to slowly separate and return to their own bodies, to stand again as distinct individuals. This was less an ending than a necessary return. Support is always transitional. A person must eventually live inside her own body again. Yet the experience of being touched, pressed, supported, and displaced does not disappear. It remains as a changed mode of sensing. When a person stood again by the lake, she was no longer the same enclosed self who had arrived there before.

At that moment, forgetting form began to show its outline. It helped me understand artistic guidance as the placing of precise thresholds through which an abstract life-question can be felt. Rilke brought necessity into view. The veil turned it into something wearable. The myth released the imagination of unfixing identity. Plant life drew transformation into time. The large body made relation tangible as weight, distance, and trust. Only then could one return to solitude and sense that the self had shifted.



Returning to the single body, no longer quite the same.

For me, forgetting form is neither the denial of embodiment nor the erasure of self. It is the slow opening of breathable space within form itself. What changes is the rigidity of the relations among self, others, and environment. Perhaps it is precisely here that art education ceases to be transmission and begins to become transformation.

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All photographs are by Yu-Hsuan Wu.

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The Grid as a Checkpoint of School Art Education

Keywords:
curriculum design, art history, action research



Clemency Wood
is a researcher-educator and doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on secondary school Art curriculum development in England.
cw791@cam.ac.uk.

During January to April 2025, the art lessons for a group of 13–14 year olds in a state school in rural England were redesigned to follow an experimental curriculum. This operated as an intervention within an action research methodology in which I — as a practitioner-researcher — collaborated with an art teacher to investigate changes to her practice. Students were not co-researchers, keeping their focus on learning and art-making. The following is an account of one example of practice explored at the start of this intervention. The research follows the example of a limited number of existing research interventions in art education in England and contributes to this field of study (Marx, 2024; Millett, 2019; Rodgers, 2024).

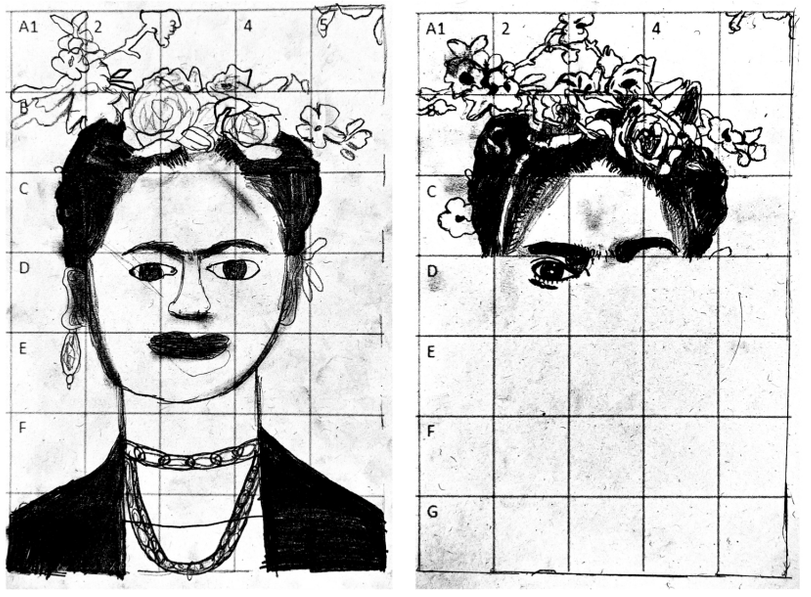


Fig. 1 Examples of students' grid-drawings

Upon entering the art classroom, students were met with a wall of pencil portraits of Frida Kahlo. Why does Kahlo appear to be in a cage? Because each portrait has been drawn on a grid. Prior to the intervention, the school's art curriculum was dominated by the use of these drawing grids; at the start of each term, each student was tested on their accuracy in completing a grid-drawing which reproduced a pre-selected reference image. This served as a repetitive checkpoint for measuring students' technical skill. A key aim of the intervention was to move students beyond reproductive practices such as this, which dominate school art curricula in England (Sowerby & Millett, 2024). Approaching the grid afresh was a means to highlight how limiting the students' accustomed use of the grid and the existing curriculum had been.

In 'The Grid as a Checkpoint of Modernity' (2009), art historian Margarita Tupitsyn positions Russian artists' use of the grid as a transgressive departure from Western modernist norms. The art teacher and I sought to mirror this transgression in using the grid as a point of departure from curriculum conventions. Following our thinking on the art-historical lineage of the grid, when planning the intervention, the art teacher and I turned to the 1970s work of German-Venezuelan visual artist Gego. We valued Gego's work for reclaiming monochrome, geometric, modernist abstraction from masculine associations and for bringing attention to the non-Western margins of the canon. During the intervention, students learnt that Gego described her sculptural works as *Drawings without Paper*. Students analysed a curatorial video and interrogated the context behind her fine-line lattices and why they are valued as art.

This art-historical study provided students with a foundation of knowledge they could then draw on when engaging in their own art-making. This followed Walton's (2023) inferentialist approach to art education, which posits that a student requires knowledge of existing concepts in art to then make reasoned inferences during their own art-making practice. With this knowledge, students 'becomes responsible' (p. 581) for the choices involved in their art-making, and they can better situate their work as art. Without this foundation, practical activity in the art classroom risks becoming educationally untethered — perhaps valuable as therapeutic sensory experience, but doing little to cement students' understanding of art.

As Gego's *Drawings without Paper* were themselves three-dimensional, students were invited to make drawings without paper of their own. Provided with dried peas, wooden sticks, and no further instructions, they were left to use trial-and-error and take responsibility for their own making. Students found that the uniformity of the materials — sticks of identical length, peas capable of holding only so many joints — exerted a structural logic pulling them back towards uniform grids and repetitive patterns. Whilst some of the students' structures resolved into satisfying geometric regularity, others sprawled irregularly to disrupt this logic.

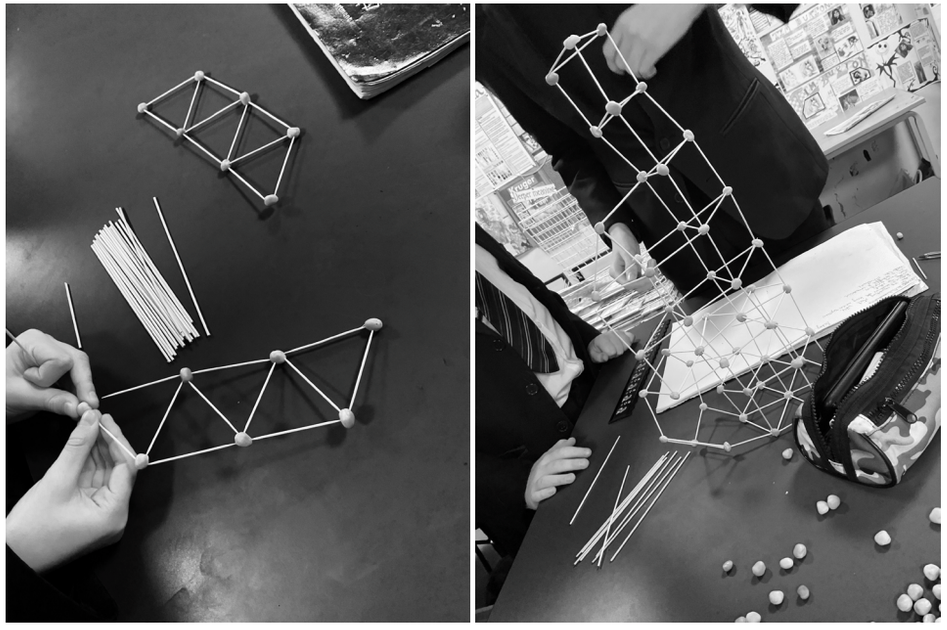


Fig. 2-3 Students making drawings without paper (examples)

Next, we asked the students to make observational drawings of their structures. Whereas students were familiar with using a regular grid to copy a prescribed image, they now abandoned fixed grids to draw their grid-like structures — reversing the typical procedure of sketching plans for a sculptural work before realising it. This was pedagogically significant, as drawing became an act of observation and attention rather than mechanical reproduction. This showed students that the active engagement they had taken up in tactile, three-dimensional making was also required in two-dimensional work. Our aim was for their experience of constructing in three dimensions to reshape their assumptions about what drawing on paper could be.

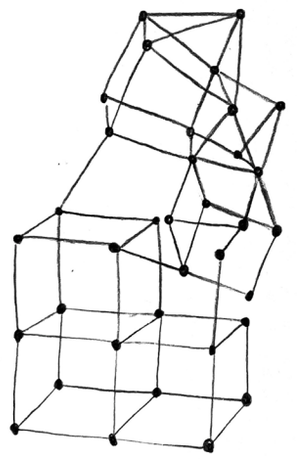


Fig. 4 Observational drawing - a new way

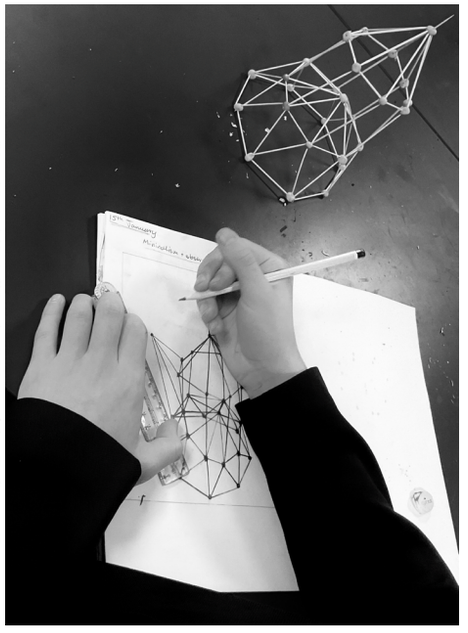
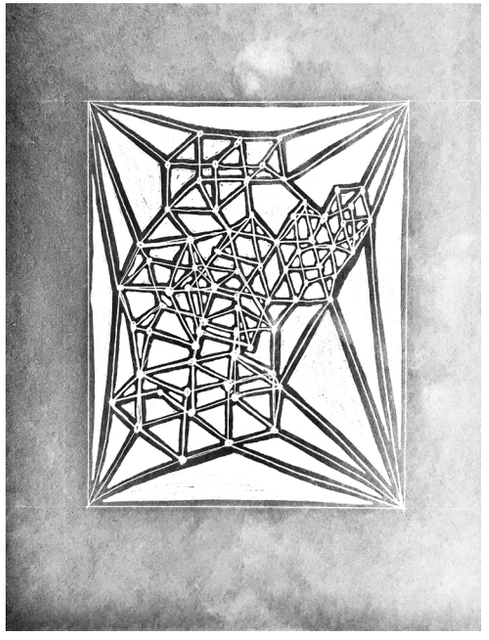


Fig. 5 Student making an observational drawing



This shift away from reproduction was furthered through the next activity, in which students were asked to move beyond observational drawings and extend their drawings following the logic of the connected lines. Forms of increasing complexity emerged.

Fig. 6 Running away with the non-grid

The students considered: why is a complex lattice satisfying to look at? We asked them to attend to their own perceptual experience to consider the aesthetic value of artworks — including their own — which employed and disrupted grid-like forms. They described the works as delicate like a spiderweb and unnatural like an electricity pylon. This aimed to develop students' inferential capacities not just as makers but as aesthetically attuned viewers and inhabitants of a visual world. The experimental curriculum privileged a comprehensive approach to art education that integrated art production, art history, and aesthetics. In doing so, it sought to depart from the conventions of school art education in England — conventions that typically prioritise practical outcomes (art production) over broader learning about art (Millett, 2019).

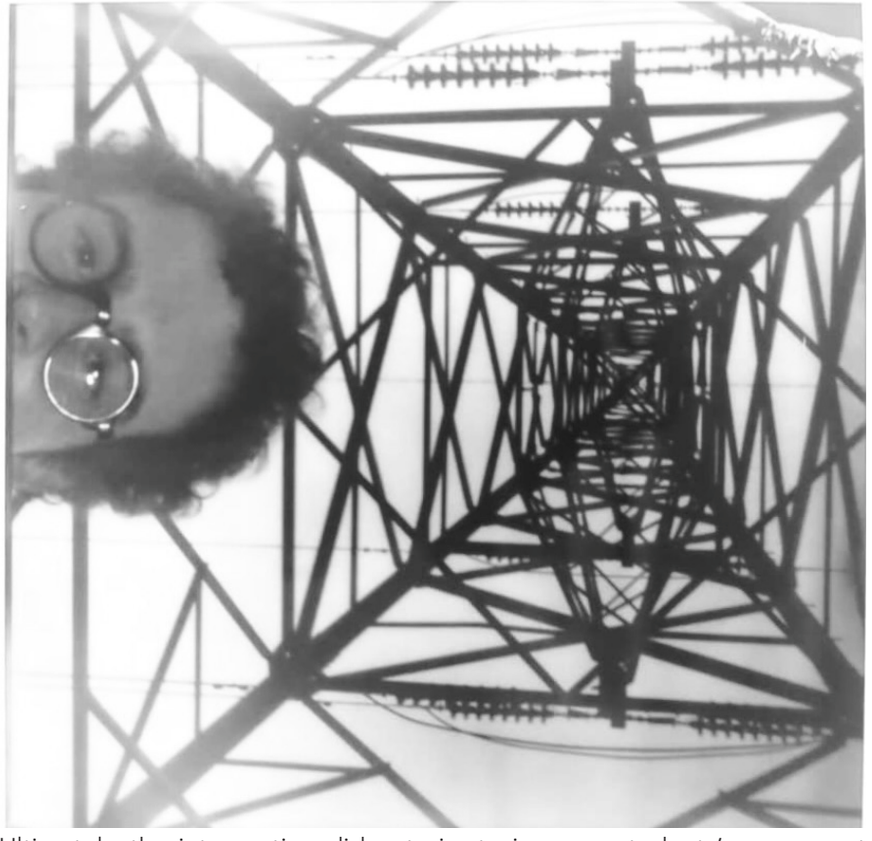


Fig. 7 Ongoing aesthetic observation

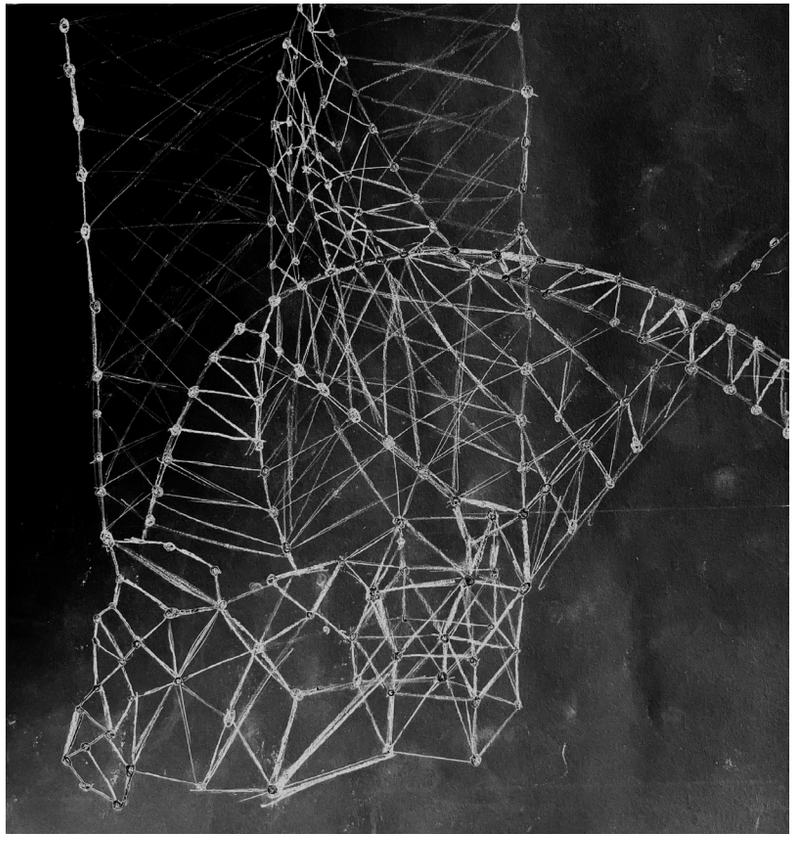


Fig. 8 Inviting the sprawl

Ultimately, the intervention did not aim to improve students' accuracy at grid-copying or technical skill; reproductive activity was set aside. What this intervention achieved was a shift in their conception of what drawing, and art, could be. I offer this example from our intervention not as a method to replicate but as an invitation for other educators to also encourage the sprawl at the margins of typical practice.

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Seeing the Invisible: Movement, Rhythm and the Transformation of Schooling
- Visualizing everyday school life through time-lapse videos

Keywords:
visual inquiry, time-lapse photography, multirhythmic learning



Markku Lang
is a doctoral researcher, art teacher, pedagogical expert, and learning landscape designer at Oppimaisema, based in Salo, Finland. His work explores relationships between space, pedagogy, visual inquiry, and learning. He is passionate about using images, time-lapse, and arts-based methods to reveal change, rhythms, and patterns of life.
markku.lang@oppimaisema.com





Figures 1–2 Experimental grain fields near my home. Each plot grows at its own pace, yet all are eventually synchronised within the same seasonal frame. Photo: Markku Lang, 2024.

This visual essay is titled Seeing the Invisible: Movement, Rhythm and the Transformation of Schooling. Yet, it begins not in a school but in the fields surrounding my home, where I photographed experimental grain plots and a murmuration of birds moving above the same landscape. As a visual arts teacher and educator, I am drawn to what these fields make visible. Each plot grows at its own pace and under slightly different conditions, yet all are eventually harvested at the same time.

For me, this image reflects a tension I have often recognised in schooling. Students learn, work and mature in different rhythms, but these differences are easily overlooked when learning is organised through shared timetables, lessons and routines. Learning, like any creative process, cannot be fully predicted or synchronised. It unfolds through variation, hesitation, attention and unexpected moments of readiness.

The murmuration suggests another quality of contemporary learning: flexibility. Flexibility gathers and disperses, changes direction and holds attention without becoming fixed. Together, these images helped me recognise what I wanted to study: the tension between multirhythmic learning and the structures that try to synchronise it.



Figure 3 A murmuration above the same field forms temporary patterns of collective movement, evoking flexibility, responsiveness and lingering attention. Frame form a video: Markku Lang, 2024.

Ubiko project

In 2011 this question came into sharper focus while I was coordinating the redesign of a learning cluster at the University of Oulu Teacher Training School, built in 1983. I asked an acoustician why classroom ceilings often lacked acoustic treatment in the centre. She explained that the reflective surface helped the teacher's voice travel to the back of the room. For me, this technical detail revealed a pedagogical assumption: one teacher speaking from the front, students listening from fixed places. Yet school life does not hold still. Learning moves across bodies, materials, spaces and moments.

The Ubiko project at Finland's University of Oulu Teacher Training School redesigned one learning cluster to support more flexible, collaborative and student-centred learning. As flooring, lighting, acoustics, furniture and spatial connections changed, I began using panoramic photography to document how activity unfolded between spaces. A single frontal image was not enough. Panoramas helped me see the cluster as a spatial continuum of openings, thresholds, furniture and movement, later leading me toward time-lapse photography and the question of how changing use of school space becomes visible.

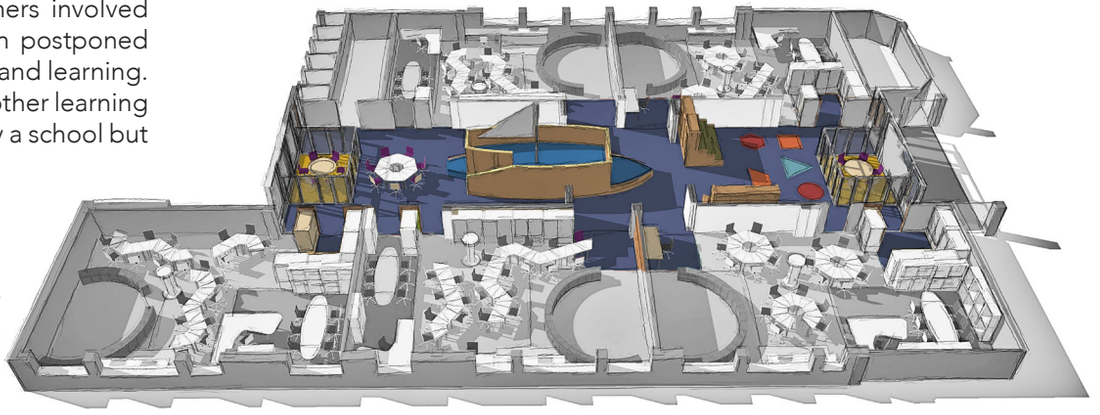


Figures 4-6 The Ubiko transformation introduced new acoustic, material and spatial affordances, including carpets, adjustable partitions and co-designed furniture. Photo: Markku Lang, 2011.

The Ubiko project created zones for different learning activities, including a "ship" at the centre of the shared area. This small, partly enclosed structure was designed for recovery, play and independent work, offering a softer counterpoint to more formal learning spaces. Teachers involved in the project reported a sense of empowerment—one even postponed retirement in response to the renewed conditions for teaching and learning. These principles were subsequently applied in the redesign of other learning clusters. The Oulu University Teacher Training School is not only a school but also a site for teacher education and educational research.

Within this context, research permissions, parental consents and ethical attention to video material form part of the school's established research practices (Derry et al., 2010). For this visual essay, all images have been reviewed from the perspective of privacy and identifiability, and permission has been obtained for the publication of every image in which a student could be identifiable.

Figure 7
Design of the Ubiko learning cluster.
Illustration: Markku Lang, 2025, edited from a 3D model by Lumiset Oy.



Seeing the invisible

Changing the temporal scale of observation alters what can be seen, but in this doctoral work the purpose is not primarily to analyse the time-lapse videos as empirical findings. Instead, I approach them as visual material that can be transformed into another medium. Each activity, event and gesture is translated into an animated visual form, and these animations are brought together into a shared composition. In this process, the time-lapse material passes through my artistic decisions—selection, simplification, rhythm, layering and abstraction—and becomes something that can be watched, sensed and later studied in new ways.

My previous studies using video and time-lapse methods in other school environments have shown how temporal observation can reveal patterns of use, movement and participation (Lang, Lehtonen, & Mäkelä, in press; Mahat & Lang, 2026). The Ubiko material, however, has not yet been fully analysed in this way. In this essay, it is treated as a field for arts-based inquiry and research-based media development. My hypothesis is that transforming long-term documentation into animation may generate new ways of perceiving learning, teaching and the changing everyday life of school over time.

Figure 8 (left) Students rearrange the space before the teacher arrives, revealing collaboration, ownership and the fragile edges of participation in everyday school life.
Visualisation: Markku Lang, 2026, based on time-lapse footage recorded in 2024.



Figure 11 (right) Time-lapse frames from upper secondary shared learning spaces and street spaces, showing patterns of use and differences in spatial provision.
Visualisation: Markku Lang, 2026, based on time-lapse footage recorded in 2024.





Figures 9–10 Time-lapse frames showing affordances for both large-group and small-group activity. Visualisation: Markku Lang, 2026, based on time-lapse footage recorded in 2016.

From Time-Lapse to Spatial Installation

In my doctoral work, the time-lapse material is translated into a spatial installation. Several learning clusters are presented simultaneously, allowing the viewer to move between focused observation and peripheral awareness. One space can be studied closely, while the school as a whole can be sensed as a field of overlapping rhythms. Through animation, projection and spatial mapping, the installation transforms documented activity into an experiential visual field. It asks the viewer to see schooling not as a static architectural plan, but as a temporal ecology of movement, pauses and changing relations.

This artistic process has become a form of inquiry (Jokela, 2019; Leavy, 2017). I work with the material analytically and experientially through selection, layering, compression and pause. The still image is not simply an illustration of the research; it becomes a way of thinking. It holds traces of movement and asks what remains invisible when school life is observed only in real time.

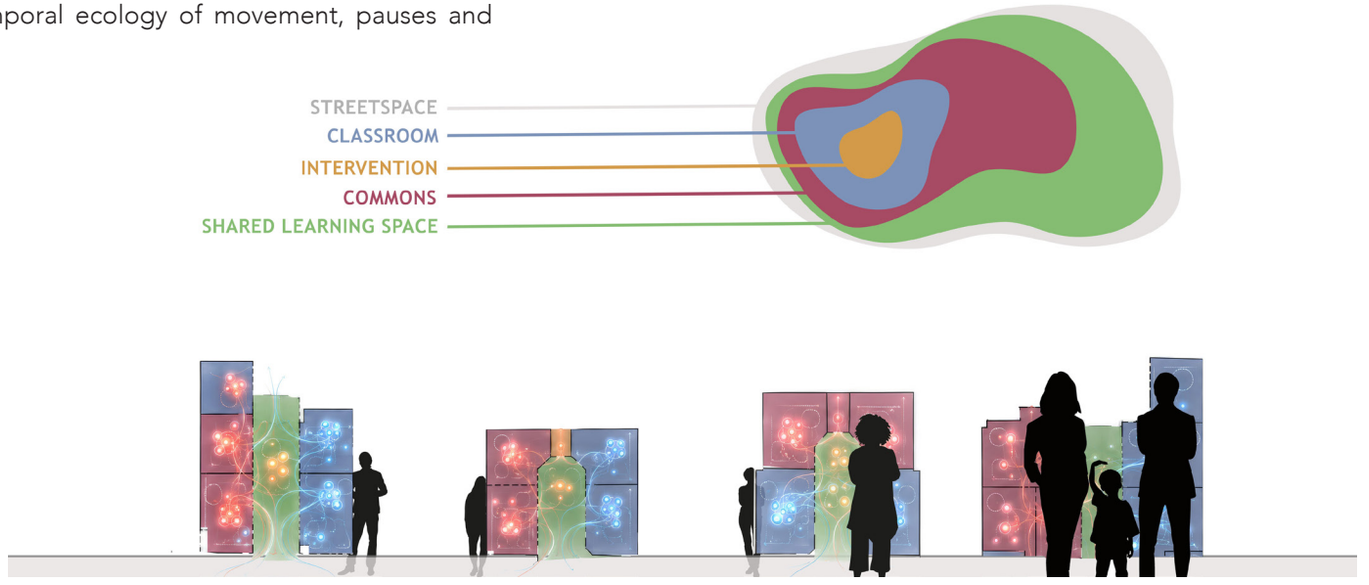


Figure 12 Draft for a spatial installation using animation and projection to translate school rhythms into an immersive visual field. The grey street space connects the learning clusters. Within each cluster, spatial privacy increases from shared learning spaces to commons, separate classrooms and, finally, small-scale learning spaces. Here, commons refers to two or more classrooms connected to support co-teaching. Illustration:MarkkuLang,2026.

Reflection

I now understand learning environments as lived systems shaped by rhythms, flows and pauses. Time-lapse material has helped me notice these slow transformations. The next step in my doctoral work is to translate this recorded activity into animation and spatial installation—not as a finished interpretation, but as a new way of working with the material.

This brings me back to the first images of the fields and the murmuration. Learning is multirhythmic, relational and partly unpredictable. It cannot be fully captured by a plan, a timetable or a single observation. As I begin to transform the time-lapse sequences into animated visual forms, I am testing whether this new medium can help me notice school life differently. The work is not only a way to represent change, but also a way to look at it more carefully.

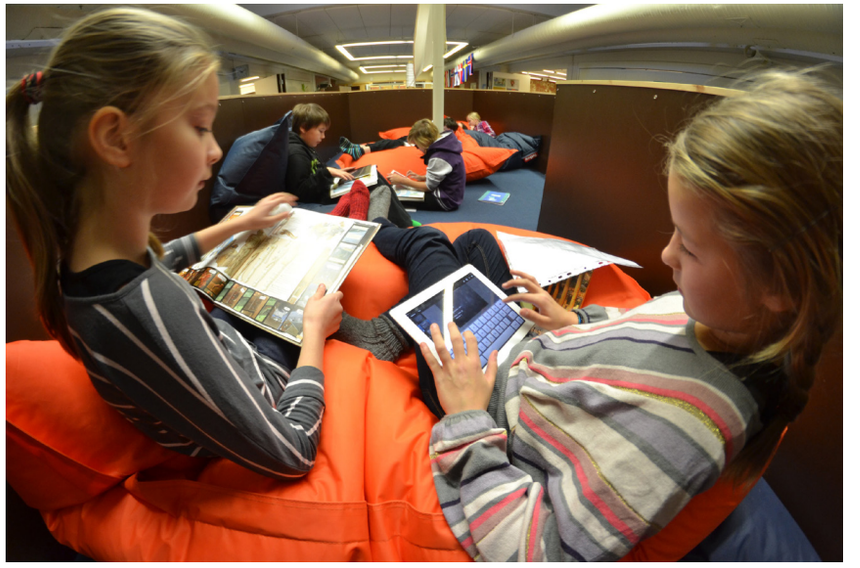


Figure 14
Students in the Ubiko "ship" reveal conditions for pedagogical activity and shared learning.
Photo: Markku Lang, 2012

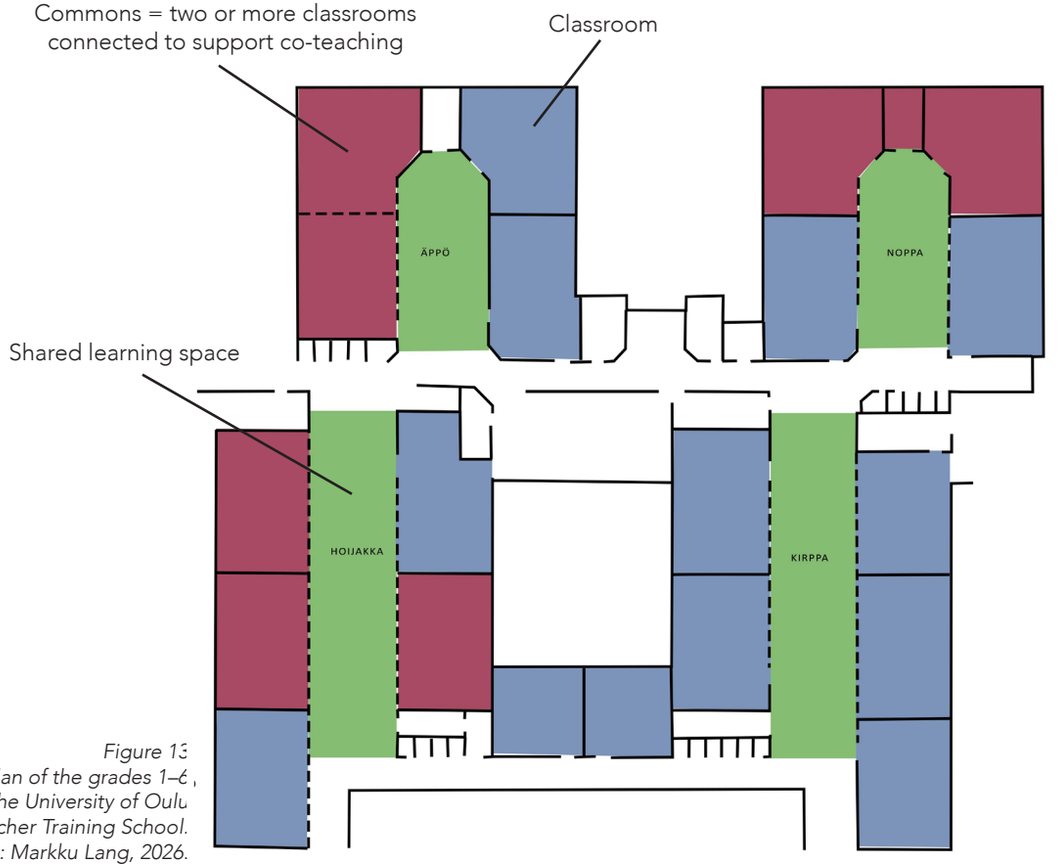


Figure 13
Floor plan of the grades 1–6 section of the University of Oulu Teacher Training School.
Illustration: Markku Lang, 2026.

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Gabriella Pataky
is an associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, head of Department of Visual Education and 3612+VisualSkillsLab, MA program director. Her fields of research are built environment education, development of plastic skills, inclusion with art. She is a Principal co-editor of InSEA's visual IMAG journal since 2021 and was a member of the InSEA World Council (2017–2023).
patakyella@gmail.com
Viola Rekvényi
is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and PhD candidate at ELTE PPK. She is Graphic Editor of the InSEA IMAG Visual Journal and teaches at ELTE TÓK. With degrees in Interaction Design (Glasgow School of Art) and Animation (MOME), her research focuses on built environment education, participatory design, inclusion, and spatial culture.
viola.rekvenyi@gmail.com
Judit Skaliczki
Assistant Professor in visual education at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She holds an MSc in Architecture from the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. She earned her doctoral degree at the Doctoral School of Architecture at BME, with a research focus on built environmental education. Since 2021, she has supported the work of the editorial board of the InSEA IMAG Magazine as a reviewer.
skaliczkij@yahoo.fr

HIATUS: Visualizing Absence in Educational Architecture

Keywords:
place-based art education, educational environments, participatory research design

Introduction

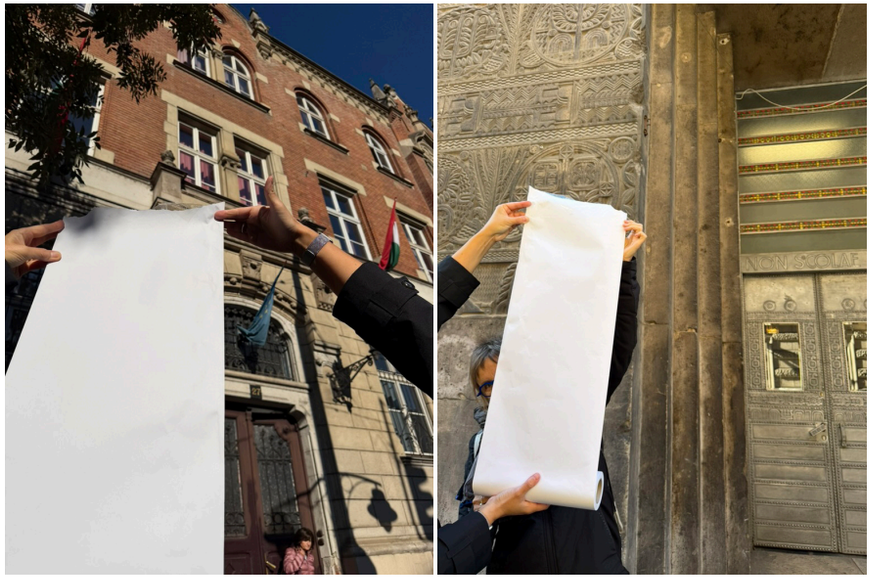
Educational environments communicate long before teaching begins. Facades, corridors, entrances, and schoolyards shape how learning is imagined and experienced. These architectural elements form part of a broader visual sign system that connects schools to their urban surroundings. Yet the most influential aspects of education often remain invisible: missing professional roles, emerging competencies, and the uncertain structures that shape the future of teaching.

This visual essay presents HIATUS, a participatory visual inquiry developed in connection with an International Architecture Exhibition. This inquiry explored absence as both a visual phenomenon and an educational condition. As art educators, we invited participants to complete partially obscured photographs of Budapest school buildings through drawing, transforming missing elements into starting points for reflection.

Inspired by architectural pattern language and environmental psychology, the workshop approached school buildings as cultural and spatial texts that communicate values across time (Alexander, 1977; Dúll, 2009). By deliberately interrupting these visual structures, we asked participants to consider not only what educational spaces show, but also what they conceal.

Performative preparation

The HIATUS workshop began in the streets of Budapest. The authors put great emphasis on the expressive act, but also the process of developing the visual materials to serve as a starting point. A curated series of visual material was generated through a performative educational walk organized along a carefully planned route with several stops at historically significant school buildings. Moving between these locations allowed the buildings to be experienced not as isolated structures but as spatial organisms in the everyday urban landscape. The approach drew on the idea of walking as a form of spatial inquiry and situated learning, where knowledge emerges through movement, observation, and embodied engagement with place (Ingold, 2011).



During the image-making process, these recognizable architectural compositions were deliberately interrupted. The act of photographing therefore became a performative intervention in the urban environment. These images became what we called hiatus-images. Each photograph contained a visible gap—an architectural element that could not be fully perceived. Such interruptions resonate with the idea of architectural pattern language, which describes built environments as systems of recurring spatial relationships that structure human experience (Alexander, 1977).

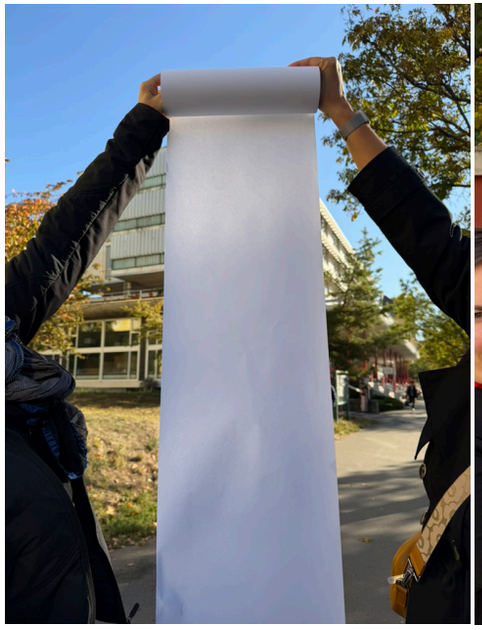




Fig. 1-4: Performative preparation: the making of the hiatus-images. Photos taken by the authors.

The HIATUS Workshop



Fig. 5: First stage of the in-person workshop: the image selection.

During the workshop session, participants received printed versions of the hiatus-images and were invited to respond through drawing. The instruction was intentionally simple: complete, reinterpret, or transform the missing parts of the photograph. Basic drawing materials—pens, pencils, and markers—were placed on the tables. The simplicity of these materials encouraged immediacy and experimentation, positioning drawing as a form of visual thinking rather than technical reconstruction. During the session, an illustrated banner was also provided of all buildings depicted in the *hiatus-photos* including minimal historical and architectural information, to help put them into context.



Fig. 6: Illustrated banner, offering context on the school buildings.

Participants approached the images in diverse ways. Some carefully extended architectural elements, reconstructing hidden window frames, rooflines, or decorative details. Others treated the gaps as opportunities for transformation, introducing imagined spatial structures, symbolic forms, or alternative architectural possibilities.

The concept of *hiatus*—derived from Latin and referring to a gap or interruption—therefore operated on several levels. First, the photographs contained literal visual gaps produced through the performative act of photographing. Second, the buildings themselves reflected historical discontinuities between past educational models and present expectations. Finally, the workshop revealed broader systemic absences within educational practice.



Results



Participants frequently connected the visual gaps in the images to less visible challenges within contemporary education. One recurring topic was the shortage of teachers within the European school system. The partially hidden buildings began to function as metaphors for institutions that appear structurally complete while essential human elements remain uncertain or absent.

Educational environments function in a comparable way. The visible architecture of a school represents only the surface layer of a much more complex system. Beneath it lie pedagogical traditions, institutional frameworks, and evolving professional competencies that shape everyday educational practice (Réti, 2019).

In visual education especially, many of these processes unfold slowly and indirectly. Teachers cultivate abilities whose impact may only become visible years later, when students carry their experiences into new contexts. Preparing educators for such uncertain futures requires developing abilities that cannot yet be fully defined.

By inviting participants to draw into the missing parts of the photographs, the workshop mirrored this condition of uncertainty. Completing the incomplete images became a visual metaphor for the ongoing process of shaping educational environments whose future forms are still emerging.

As the drawings accumulated, the workshop space gradually transformed into a temporary visual archive. Participants placed their completed images side by side, revealing a wide range of interpretations. Some drawings restored architectural continuity, while others emphasized the gap itself, turning absence into a central visual element.

Viewing the drawings together created a shared moment of reflection. The images no longer belonged to individual participants but formed a collective visual dialogue about schools, cities, and learning environments. In this way, the workshop functioned simultaneously as a creative activity and as a form of participatory image-based inquiry. The workshop served as a starting point for a collective planning process, revolving around concepts such as the lack of playfulness in educational buildings or the importance of more natural elements and green areas.



Fig. 7-9: During the workshop.

Reflection

The HIATUS workshop demonstrated how working with absence can open new perspectives on educational environments. The gaps in the photographs did not simply invite completion; they encouraged participants to imagine alternative futures for the spaces where learning takes place.

By focusing on what is missing rather than what is present, the activity shifted attention toward hidden dimensions of education—professional uncertainty, institutional transformation, and the evolving competencies required of educators.

For visual and built environment education, participatory image-based methods offer accessible ways to explore these questions. Drawing, interpretation, and collective reflection allow diverse participants to engage with architecture not only as physical structure but also as a cultural and pedagogical medium.

Future iterations of the HIATUS framework aim to extend this approach into school contexts, involving teachers and students in examining their own learning environments through similar visual interventions. Such activities may strengthen spatial awareness while also fostering dialogue about the values embedded in educational spaces.

Rather than attempting to eliminate uncertainty, the project suggests embracing it. Educational environments, much like the incomplete images used in the workshop, remain open to interpretation and transformation. Their future form depends on the collective imagination of those who inhabit them.



Fig. 10: A folded leaflet was created to accompany the workshop, offering introductory information about the Art Team. Designed to serve as a bookmark, it is pictured here with a publication on the history of Hungarian school architecture.

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Images taken by Gabrielly Pataky.

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Cross-cultural partnership between villages in Japan and USA

Keywords:
international partnership, rural, craft



Jonathan Silverman,
Arts Education Professor Emeritus from Saint Michael's College has led multiple cultural trips to Japan and was a visiting professor at Doshisha University in Kyoto. As resident ceramic artist/educator at Shelburne Craft School he is highly influenced by Japanese aesthetics. He is co-principal editor of InSEA's IMAG.
jsilverman@smcvt.edu



Heather Moore
is the Executive Director of Shelburne Craft School. She holds a doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies. She resides in Vermont with her small, sweet family and enjoys throwing pots, weaving, creating stained glass, gardening and travels internationally regularly.
director@shelburnecraftschool.org





A chance encounter along an historic kiln site in Bizen, Japan, a simple "who are you?" led to an exchange of contacts between Jonathan Silverman, art educator and ceramicist leading an art/cultural trip to Japan from Shelburne Craft School and Hiromi Charles, licensed tour operator living in Nishiawakura, a small rural village in the Okayama prefecture. Often such a brief conversation ends up forgotten, not this time.

Four months later Hiromi invited the next Shelburne Craft School trip to Nishiawakura. This invitation inspired Jonathan and Heather Moore, Director of Shelburne Craft School to write a Japan Foundation Grant to develop a global partnership. The following illuminates the impact on such a partnership.



Small villages in Japan and the United States face common challenges to preserve arts and cultural traditions. The grant's mission was to deepen knowledge of Japanese crafts, develop cross-cultural relationships, experience interplay between creativity and nature, and witness the power of community engagement. Through the grant Shelburne Craft School offered Japan inspired activities. These included workshops in Raku, Mokuhanga, Kumiko, Indigo Dying, Ikebana, and Kintsugi; the webinar *Cultural Tradition, Innovation, and Sustainability: Through the Lens of Crafts and Nature*; an on-line children's art exchange; and presentations on Japanese aesthetics, cooking, and boatbuilding.

The culminating experience were two, 2-week residencies in Nishiawakura for teaching artists from the Shelburne Craft School community. In the fall, 2025 fourteen teaching artists from Shelburne Craft School resided in homestays, worked closely with master artisans for six days, and joined culturally oriented field trips.

These teaching artists were eager to enhance their craft and see how tradition and culture is embedded. The following reflections provide insight on initial interest; artistic, educational, and cultural discoveries; and sustainability. Since the authors participated on the residencies the pronoun "we" is used. Reflections include participants direct quotes.



Initial Interest

Making art in a different culture brought excitement, curiosity, and concerns. For a ceramicist it was the reverence for hand crafts and exploring new approaches to clay while traditional Japanese joinery techniques inspired a woodworker. An environmental artist/educator was sparked to *dip my toes into a new place and devote time to being a learner!*

Participants shared some angst about being outside one's comfort zone though recognizing the value of doing so. *Uncertainty causes a bit of discomfort,* a common human reaction confessed by a fiber/textile artist. One ceramist *wondered whether she would be good enough to work with a master potter.* As she noted later: T*his concern was put to rest as soon as we started working together.* We wished to authentically connect to the community without knowing Japanese, bond with host families, and find self-regenerative time. Such plausible fears *melted away when I got to Japan and saw how kind my cohort and hosts were.*





Discoveries

Working in a new environment with a master teacher offered new ways to approach the creative process. One ceramicist made several vessels, *utilizing new techniques learned. She focused on methods for joining clay*. Another ceramicist *made a lot of wheel-thrown pots, which I then promptly destroyed* (a liberating feeling knowing unfired pots would not go home). *We cut each finished piece in half to check on our technique and figure out how to improve*. A woodworker was inspired making a *hand cut joint puzzle gaining a deeper respect for my craft.*





One fiber/textile artist valued her instructor's focus on the tension between artistic creation and society's over-consumption. Process and repetition were valued over perfection and product.





An environmental artist educator *appreciated the warm embrace of mistakes and learning moments.* There was much individualized attention. Even with reliance on google translate *the emphasis on the experience of doing/ playing/ experimenting was more impactful than any English-based course I've taken.* The encouragement to play, explore, make mistakes, and be supported minimized fears of rightness and helped participants immerse in their experience. One ceramist valued *being truly seen through his coaching.* She found joy *working together with lots of laughter and no worry about failure.* Marigold, golden rod, cosmos, logwood, and cypress produced a variety of tones for our fabric artists using natural dying techniques to create tapestries, baskets, blankets, and prayer flags.



In addition to studio time in a chosen medium we all took workshops in both metals and calligraphy and witnessed how this rural community utilizes its human, spiritual, and environmental resources to remain vibrant and sustainable. Each session ended with an exhibition and reflection.

One fiber/textile artist valued seeing *the ways that tradition and modernity interact in people's everyday lives.* Another fiber/textile artist treasured watching *the morning harvest ritual at the shrine.* Interacting with the Nishiawakura community offered deeper understanding of the interplay of nature, community, and art. *I got to experience rural life in Japan in a way that most people never will our photographer noted, seeing similar struggles in Nishiawakura as I have in Vermont…. the same joys, the same pride in craftsmanship, and strength of community.* Some wished for more time in the studio or diving deeper into a project. A ceramicist wished to have an *opportunity to work in some other mediums such as the fiber.* As a fiber/textile artist concluded: *How fast two weeks can be.*





Sustaining the Experience

Such a residency needs to live beyond two weeks. *The impact of the residency is something that, even after a couple of months since I returned, I'm continuing to discover. The gifting culture of Japanese folk is something I have tapped into in my return to the states* (fiber artist). Developing a deeper respect for one's craft, adopting new techniques, honoring the power of community engagement, and experiencing the interplay of art, culture, and nature all contributed to how this residency endures. *I dyed more fabric to bring home, and now I'm working on a series of postcards in which I'm hand-sewing a symbol I learned in our Calligraphy class in Japan* shared by a fiber/textile artist.

The perceptions gained extended to personal growth and envisioning new sense of place. A fiber/textile artist commented:

Participating in the residency made me a more confident and adventurous artist and person. I learned that you don't have to speak the same language as someone to create a meaningful and lasting relationship. I learned that getting out of your comfort zone is important to living a full and meaningful life.

Participants noticed how spaces in Nishiawakura were utilized where community members would just show up and connect with each other. *How can we bring that to our community* was a common feeling? The Japanese approach to the creative process, spirituality, and stewardship of nature expanded our imaginations of community. As a fiber/textile artist shared: *Though there were elements that felt unfamiliar or that I didn't fully understand, the foundation was rooted in our universal human experience….. we are more connected than not, and seeing the various ways that people approach a shared experience enriches us all.*

Our residency initiated what we hope to be an ongoing partnership and exchange of practices. A few artists we worked with plan to visit Shelburne Craft School next year.

The relationships formed with artists and community members, the shared desire to explore form, texture, and design in deepening artistic practice, the engagement with varied teaching techniques all indelibly enriched those of us who participated. Our hope is that the experiences shared here will inspire others to develop cross-cultural partnerships and continue to enrich their artistic and teaching practices.

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Medine Irak
holds a BFA, MA, and Proficiency in Art in Art Education from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Her artistic practice focuses on cultural heritage, ecology, migration, climate change, and human–nature relationships. In 2024, she completed postdoctoral research in the United States with TÜBİTAK support. She is currently an Associate Professor at Istanbul Atlas University.
medine.irak@atlas.edu.tr



Mark Graham
is a professor in the Art Department at Brigham Young University. Before his university appointments, he was a high school art teacher in the New York public schools. Dr. Graham is an internationally known artist and illustrator and has illustrated more than twenty children picture books. He continues to create various kinds of art objects, including paintings, mandalas and complex installations. His research interests include place-based education, spiritual dimensions of education, arts assessment, STEAM, teacher self-care, Himalayan art, and adolescent artistic development.
Mark.Graham@byu.edu

Istanbul City Gardens meet the Great Basin Desert

Keywords:
ecology, place-based education, landscape, ecology and art education. Turkish/American collaboration



Figure 1 (top): Medine Irak. Yedikule Walls and Gardens 2020, mixed media on paper 70x300cm

Figure 2 (bottom): Medine Irak. Trees. 2025, oil and acrylic on canvas, 150x160 cm (diptych). In this work, trees rooted in the earth and extending toward the sky evoke their symbolic meanings in Mesopotamian cultures as representations of life, continuity, and immortality. Through the visual and conceptual connections they establish with the Byzantine-era Yedikule Walls they suggest a mode of coexistence between nature and human-made structures.



This visual essay describes a collaboration between Turkish artist/educator, Medine Irak and American artist/educator, Mark Graham from the Western United States. Through a series of cross-global conversations and a year-long residency in the USA, they developed a visual dialogue focused on ecology and place-based education.

TÜRKİYE: The Yedikule Walls of Istanbul

The Yedikule Walls and Gardens provide a provocative example of ecological awareness within an urban space. The walls and gardens were built 1500 years ago in the Yedikule district of İstanbul (Figure 1). The vegetable gardens in front of the walls were a significant source of food for İstanbul from the Byzantine period until the second half of the twentieth century. They spread throughout the city, both in the inner space of the walls and on both sides of the Bosphorus. These gardens are unique is that they are still cultivated today, despite being threatened by urban development. Vegetable gardens within an ancient city are a tantalizing example of a future where urban living co-exists with productive gardens. Nevertheless, there is a sense of imminent danger as the small farms struggle to survive the axe of developers. Medine, who is based in Istanbul, creates landscape paintings that reflect her interest in the ecology of places, gardens, landscape, and possible futures for Istanbul (Figure 2).

Place-Based Education

Art and art education have long associations with place, ecology, and environmental challenges (Graham, 2007; Graham & Goldsberry, 2024; Bae-Dimitriadis, 2024; Bertling, 2023). Although problems related to the natural environment cannot be solved through art, a place-based, ecologically focused curriculum might influence both the artwork and critical engagement of students. Maxine Greene (1995) aptly described the power of the arts for social transformation: "For me as for many others, the arts provide new perspectives on the lived world… informed encounters with works of art often lead to a startling defamiliarization of the ordinary" (p. 4).

Artists and Ecology

Eco-art and art education remain a loosely bounded domain of ethical concern for the non-human world, united by the idea that a less anthroprocentric perspective might be vital to our sense of wholeness, creativity, and growth (Bertling, 2023; Weintraub, 2012). Ecology-based artistic production emerged from environmental art movements, especially the earth and land artworks from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Ecologically sensitive artists continue to use materials that range from planting gardens to creating earthworks to traditional mediums such as painting. Artists and educators have developed a wide variety of approaches to activist art education focused on the erosion of the natural environment erosion and climate change (Graham, 2007, Graham & Goldsberry, 2024; Bertling, 2023).



Figures 3 and 4: Mark Graham: Collections.

For example, the American artist Mark Dion uses material culture to explore ideas about nature, place, and knowledge. Dion constructs collections of objects as a kind of text that reveals the cultural layering and assumptions we make about nature and provoke questions about our relationships with the natural world. Like Dion, Graham uses collections as an artistic medium with which to comment on our assumptions about scientific objectivity, epistemology, and our relationships with the non-human world (Figures 3 and 4).

The ecological artist Jackie Brookner stated that, "... to influence values, to create desires, and to make people care about things, you have to trigger people's hearts, bodies, unconscious dreaming experiences and imaginations. And this is something that art does very well" (As quoted in Aydin & Zumrut, 2013). Art and teaching connected with ecological issues can raise students' awareness of relationships with the earth and lead them to have an active voice in changing the destructive ecological tendencies and protecting the environment (Hollis, 1997). Joy Bertling, for example, describes an ecopedagogy that is a socially engaged and hopeful strategy for understanding and engaging with critical issues of place and our relationships with the more-than-human world. Ecopedagogy emphasizes sustainability in art practice, integrating ecological and environmental content, experiencing the outdoors, and making art that engages with ecological and environmental issues (Bertling, 2023).

The Great Basin of the United States

We explored ideas about ecology and environmental awareness by cultivating what Brooke Hofsess calls a craftsmanship of attention with the world (Hofsess, et al., 2019). Our collaboration applied a craftsmanship of attention to landscape painting that engaged with the complexities of places. A visual record of this collaborative investigation is reflecting in the paintings we made together in the Great Basin of the US, which includes both deserts and montains (figures 5, 6, 7).



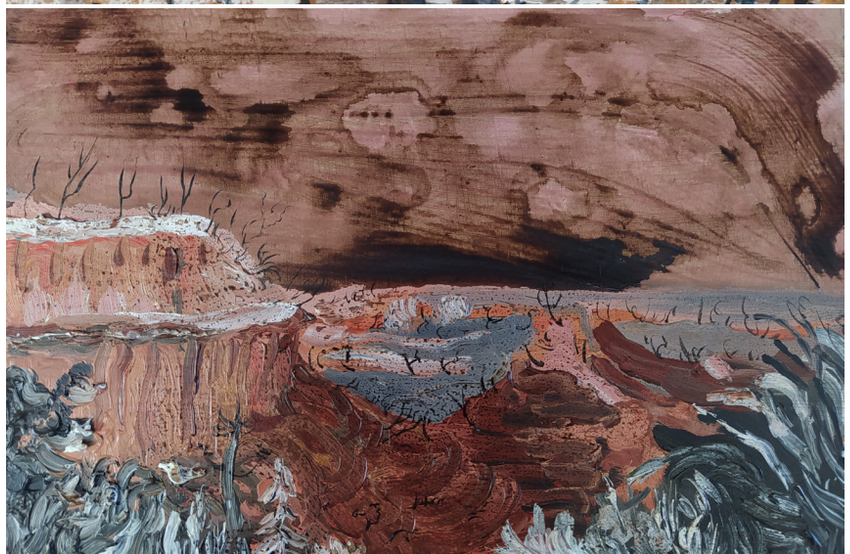


Figure 5 and 6:
Medine Irak.
Paintings from the Great Basin Desert, USA.



Figures 7.
Mark Graham.
painting from the Wasatch Mountains, USA.

Making a landscape painting can have value for students by heightening their experience of the natural world and cultivating an awareness of the complexities and beauty of the land and ecosystems that surrounds them. The conventions of landscape painting are always situated within the cultural context of their makers. Medine and I both work within a tradition of European painting, which often assumes a settler, colonialist perspective (Bae-Dimitriatis, 2024). Painters of the American West have habitually depicted the landscape as an untouched wilderness, when in fact, it is land rich in Indigenous culture. As is the case throughout the world, this land remains an arena of political and economic struggle between those who would preserve its wildness and those who would develop it.

Conclusion

Medine and I continue to question and explore the role of landscape painting within the complex histories, ecology, and cultures belonging to the land. We worked collaboratively across cultures to explore assumptions about nature and the layers of human history within places. We live a world divided by conflict and imperiled by ecological destruction and our attempts to critically examine taken-for-granted views about natural places felt particularly relevant. Our perspectives about place and landscape continue to become richer and more nuanced through cross-cultural artistic collaboration and friendship as we create bridges of understanding across history and culture.

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Reflections on Conflict Transformation: A Visual Travel Journal

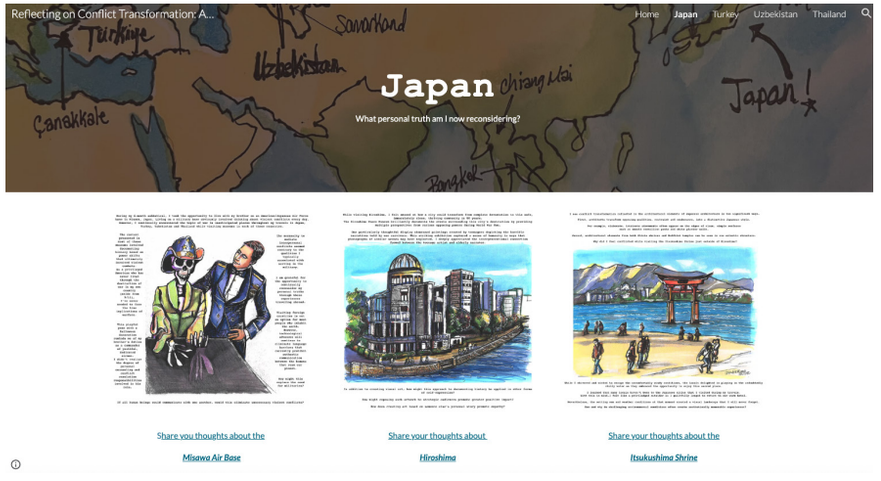
Keywords: arts-based research, conflict transformation



Rebecca Shipe
is a Professor in Art and Educational Studies at Rhode Island College. In addition to teaching, her professional and creative passions include arts-based research, international collaborations, and exploring ways that experiences with visual art can promote conflict transformation.
rshipe@ric.edu

Introduction

I am an art education professor who enjoys experiencing cultures and places that challenge my existing worldview. This collection of artwork documents an ongoing investigation into how my experiences traveling abroad relate to "conflict transformation," a concept that involves handling opposition with optimism and recognizing how disruptions can lead to productive change (Lederach, 2003). I selected specific photos from my travels to Japan, Uzbekistan, Türkiye, and Thailand that represented conflict transformation and created visual representations of these images while contemplating how they signify this theme. The resulting artworks combine both pictures and words to communicate how these personal experiences exemplify conflict transformation. With the intention of fostering an interactive dialogue among viewers, I displayed these pieces on a website that links to the original photos and provides a public space for collecting viewer feedback.



Process

During my six-month sabbatical in 2023, I used Arts-Based Research (ABR), a research methodology that applies artistic sensibilities and skills to collect, analyze, and present data (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Rolling, 2013) to broaden my understanding of the term conflict transformation. My research plan involved routinely documenting, through both photographs and words, how I experienced conflict transformation throughout each day and reviewing my journal entries to identify recurring themes. I learned that conflict transformation appeared in my journal in two primary ways. First, I documented the internal conflict transformation that inevitably occurs while traveling to new places. This ranged from the struggle to navigate public spaces where I didn't understand the language to confronting my cultural stereotypes while encountering people and places that I had previously only seen or read about on a screen. I imagine that many people experience similar internal conflicts while visiting different countries.

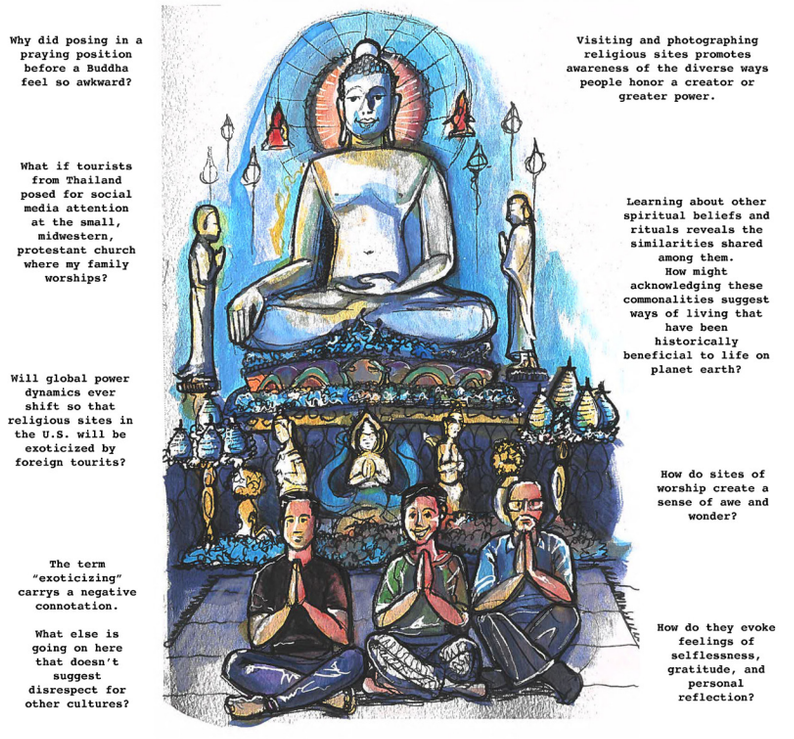


Second, my journal entries focused on the physical evidence of how conflicts over time have transformed the places I visited. I was particularly interested in how differing cultures had left their mark on cities and structures. The architectural elements found in historical buildings or places of worship reflected the various groups of people and belief systems that inhabited these places, which often involved physical battles during power transitions.

During these six months, I learned that viewing my daily activities through the lens of conflict transformation significantly shifted my approach to traveling. Intentionally channeling this concept allowed me to remain positive in the precarious and unpredictable situations that would have otherwise brought me annoyance and frustration. Additionally, I intentionally looked for evidence of conflict transformation in the ways different cultural influences appeared in the physical spaces, which inspired me to learn more about the history of these places.



After returning to the United States, I began sifting through the hundreds of photos I took to locate specific images that best captured a moment where I experienced conflict transformation. Once I identified four photos from each of the four countries, I reviewed my journal entries to recount how I experienced conflict transformation at the time the photos were taken. I wanted to create illustrations of these photos that combined pictures and words to communicate their relationship to this theme. I decided to distill pages of journal text into a series of questions that respond to the question, "What currently held truth am I now reconsidering?" Focusing on this question helped me to summarize long, complicated thoughts into a manageable amount of text for the viewer to read.



As anticipated, drawing pictures of these photos gave me the space and time to more fully appreciate the experiences documented in the photos. As I was drawing, I noticed elements in subjects that inspired curiosity and joy. For example, I wanted to learn more about the Muslim and Christian iconography in the Hagia Sophia. As shown in the final two pieces, I wanted to reconsider what the people in these photos were thinking at the time.





I thoroughly enjoyed drawing these initial sketches; however, I did not expect to feel so cautious about potentially ruining the drawings by applying color with paint. Instead of painting directly on the original drawings, I made photocopies of the drawings on heavy paper and finished each illustration with watercolors, ink, and colored charcoal. Working on a reproduction of the original allowed me to feel freer to experiment with the media rather than limit myself to the familiar materials and techniques that posed less risk. Although the finished pieces look rough and unrefined, I value the problem-solving and experimentation that occurred during the creation process.

Reflection

Throughout this experience, I learned how embracing the concept of conflict transformation on a daily basis can profoundly impact the way I respond to challenges by retaining a positive attitude. It reminds me that the absence of conflicts results in stagnation. This belief likely contributes to my continual desire to visit new places and seek out new experiences that will likely challenge my existing ways of knowing. For me, creating illustrations from photographs I've taken provides the time and space to generate new understandings of the people, places, and events depicted in the photos. Carefully observing the structures, expressions, colors, patterns, and textures captured in the photos deepens my appreciation for the subjects and inspires me to learn more about them.

I believe that art educators can position their students to enjoy similar benefits from creating artwork from photographs they have taken. Giving students the opportunity to share their artwork with others and provide one another with feedback further expands their understanding of the meaning they intended to communicate. Encouraging students to document and share the process of creating their artwork with others honors the problem-solving that occurs and supports their ability to take risks along the way. If art educators explicitly model this in their own artistic practice, they are more capable of inspiring their students to do the same. Additionally, I encourage others to consider viewing their artistic and travel journeys, as well as their daily activities through the lens of conflict transformation.



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