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## Graduate School's Transformative Awakening: An arts-based autoethnography

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GRADUATE SCHOOL: MY TRANSFORMATIVE AWAKENING

Roxanne Brown

A thesis submitted to the faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Art Education in the Department of Art Education in the School of the Arts.

Richmond, Virginia  
2022

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**Abstract**

This is an autoethnographic journey of a 30-year veteran art teacher through graduate school during the 2016 presidential campaign, election, presidency, #MeToo movement, a global pandemic, Black Lives Matter (BLM), virtual teaching and grading during a pandemic. My narrative includes an account of my transformative academic, social, and personal experiences and how they have informed my teaching practice. They include a collection of visual representations I created during my graduate school journey.

*Keywords:* Virtual teaching during a pandemic, Choice-Based Art Curriculum, Assessment during a pandemic, Inclusive secondary art, Access, Black Lives Matter (BLM), Me Too, Scribble

## **I. Introduction**

This is an autoethnographic journey of a 30-year veteran art teacher through graduate school during the 2016 presidential campaign, election, presidency, #MeToo movement, a global pandemic, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and virtual teaching and grading during a pandemic. My narrative includes an account of my transformative academic, social, and personal experiences and how they have informed my teaching practice. They include a collection of visual representations I created during my graduate school journey.

## **II. The Beginning of My Transformative Awakening**

I was a 30-year veteran art teacher when I decided to go to graduate school. My undergraduate discipline-based art education (DBAE) training of the late '80s prepared me well for my early years of teaching middle and elementary art in public schools, and I thought it sustained my teaching for 20 years. My elementary and middle-school teaching experiences were in Magnet schools with waiting lists, and they required signed student/parent contracts for admission. The elementary schools did not provide public transportation; this was never a problem, as the schools had considerable parental involvement with active PTAs, community after-school resources, and support. Fundraisers were always successful, and they translated into plenty of support for teachers' instructional and morale needs. One of the reasons I believe DBAE worked so well in these settings was because students were compliant and used to following instructions to provide exactly what the teacher and parents expected.

When it came to art shows and displays, teachers displayed student art for each class to allow critiques of the technique and the interpretation of the assignment goals. I always had 100% participation, and the artwork always looked great. In my personal experience of teaching art in elementary and middle magnet/gifted schools, DBAE worked well because in these early

years of student learning experiences, classroom teachers, parents, and administrators were reinforcing the behaviors students would need as they progressed through their school years; routine, following instructions, listening, learning, and standardized learning and testing.

My elementary and middle-school teaching experiences were exactly what I trained for in undergraduate studies. All this changed when I transferred to an urban high school with a much more diverse population of students qualifying for special services: students learning English as a second language, students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, a higher drop-out rate, gang activity, fighting among students, and lower parental involvement. My first 15 years of teaching in high school mostly focused on learning and teaching the Advanced Placement (AP) Studio, AP Art History, and International Baccalaureate Visual Arts (IBVA) curricula and methods. In addition to learning six new curricula and adjusting to teaching high-school art, I submitted and earned a National Board Certification (NBCT) in Early Adolescence Through Young Adult/Art. Five years into my high-school teaching career, my mother developed Stage IV cancer, so I took the end of the school year off to care for her. She passed away peacefully at home surrounded by loved ones in early September 2013.

The distractions of adjusting to a new school, National Board Certification, IBVA, AP training, motherhood, and a parent's illness resulted in my teaching license lapsing. In 2014, I had to enroll quickly in a college class to get the necessary professional learning hours, so I enrolled in a 2-year graduate program to earn a gifted endorsement to teach K–12 gifted learners. The class met once a week in the evenings at a neighborhood school. My son was starting middle school, and he did not need my attention as much as he had when he was younger. He was actually more interested in spending time with his father on sports and scouting, so this arrangement was a good fit for me. I loved the graduate-level course content and dialogue with

colleagues centering on student learning, and I started to think I could handle the academic demands of graduate school. During this time, my high school changed its policy on the minimum number of enrolled students to make a class available. Additionally, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program stopped allowing my school to combine AP Studio and IBVA students in the same time block.

When I was allowed to combine the handful of AP Studio and IBVA students, I never had a problem fulfilling the 15-student minimum to make a course available to students. These new rules made it difficult for me to fill my AP courses, so I volunteered to teach the very populated Art 1 classes and worked independently with the few AP Studio students who really wanted to submit a portfolio for examination each year. It was during this time that I became aware that my DBAE methods were not working with my Art 1 student population. In fact, my long-held ideas about learners started to contradict what I was experiencing in my Art 1 classes. I experienced more attendance issues, class tardiness, skipping class, sleeping, longer phone calls to parents, discipline referrals to administration, discipline reports on databases, and individualized education program (IEP) meetings, scheduled during my classes or during my planning blocks. I discovered that some senior year students were aware that they did not need the credit for the Art 1 course but enrolled in it not because they loved art, but as a place to fill their schedule so they could catch the bus home at the end of the day. I also had more colleagues in my room who specialized in a variety of student needs, like hearing interpreters and assistants for students with autism. I also experienced more class interruptions and disengaged learners. This is not to say that my AP Studio and IBVA students did not have needs beyond the work day; they did. They needed phone calls home to parents, letters of recommendation, essay mentorships, lengthy and sometimes very stressful assessments, do overs, grade adjustments, etc.

I had no problem managing through all of the new changes except for the disengaged students. After many years of trying to engage them with no success, I finally realized I was not trained to meet the learning needs of this particular population. In fact, I had never encountered this kind of learner in 25 years of teaching. This is when I decided to enroll in graduate school for an MAE in Art Education. The nearest university would require me to make a weekly 3-hour round-trip drive, but I was determined to figure out this population of art learners, so I enrolled to equip myself better with the skills I was lacking to meet the art education needs of my students.

### **III. Graduate School and Transformative Stirrings**

My first graduate class was a study of theories and literature in the field of education. This course catapulted me out of my undergraduate DBAE pedagogy training and into the realities of 21st-century art education. Long gone was the DBAE pedagogy of teaching art, and in came teaching for artistic behavior through choice-based learning (Douglas & Jaquith, 2018) and democratizing the art room (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010), studio habits of mind (Hetland et al., 2007), contemporary artists, LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and implicit and explicit bias awareness training. The literature I read in my first graduate class shifted the focus and power from the teacher-sage to the individual student, and the readings had a profound impact on my personal and professional transformation. French philosopher Michel Foucault (Mad Adam Films, 2015) spoke of power structures and how they control everything from mental health practices to education and standardized testing. He also urged his readers to question the alleged truths others presented about those power structures. Questioning power structures was at first a very scary and unnatural thing to do for a catholic, cisgender, Latinx female raised in a religious and military family with very strict and specific social and gender expectations.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000) opened my eyes to the social and psychological dynamics of oppression. This was particularly informative to my understanding of what oppression looks like and why the oppressed rise up against their oppressors, desire to become oppressors, or choose to remain oppressed. Most informative to me was how the oppressed must decide how they want to respond to oppression: others cannot influence individuals to rise up against their oppressors; individuals must come to that conclusion on their own. Again, this was a very personal realization as I examined the oppression of my youth and adulthood. American author Ta-Nehisi Coates's (2015) letter to his teenage son opened my eyes to how different growing up in America as a young Black male is from not only the experience of White males, but also my own experience. I was shocked to read about and critical of how my own sheltered upbringing shielded me from the realities of what Coates referred to as "the inescapable robbery of time," energy, and mental attention he dedicated to his existence in society because of his color (#91). I now believe that my parents most likely experienced these same realities as they grew up in their Texas border town, but they never spoke of them. It was not until my father retired and moved us to a town in Virginia that classmates confronted me, asking me to declare "What are you? Black or White?" I had no idea how to answer this question.

Educator and philosopher John Dewey's (2015) timeless observations on the integral role art education plays in optimizing student learning cemented my belief in the difference I could make in my students' learning. Art educator Dipti Desai (2002) enlightened me on how well-intended allegedly multicultural lessons can actually trivialize and perpetuate negative, cultural stereotypes. bell hooks enlightened my awareness of what she calls the "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" as cited in Harriet et al (1997) and how it perpetuates American culture and influenced my own aesthetic and pedagogy and the art I choose to share with my students. Judith



Butler's queer theory and gender identification (Das, 2016) equipped me with the skills and sensitivity to engage my LGBTQ+ students respectfully and normalize the use of preferred pronouns in my personal and professional life. Using preferred pronouns did not come easy to me. I thank my younger graduate school classmates for explaining them one evening after class on our way to our cars. It took a while for preferred pronouns to blend into my vernacular. I now use preferred pronouns for work with my students and colleagues, in my email signature line, and on my Zoom screen, just to name a few locations. American lawyer and Equal Justice Initiative founder Bryan Stevenson (2015) alerted me to the incarceration of innocent men of color sentenced to death row and how he worked to free them. Like Ta-Nehisi Coates, I was appalled to discover that I could live a separate existence from that of a Black man in America and by how unaware I was of this injustice.

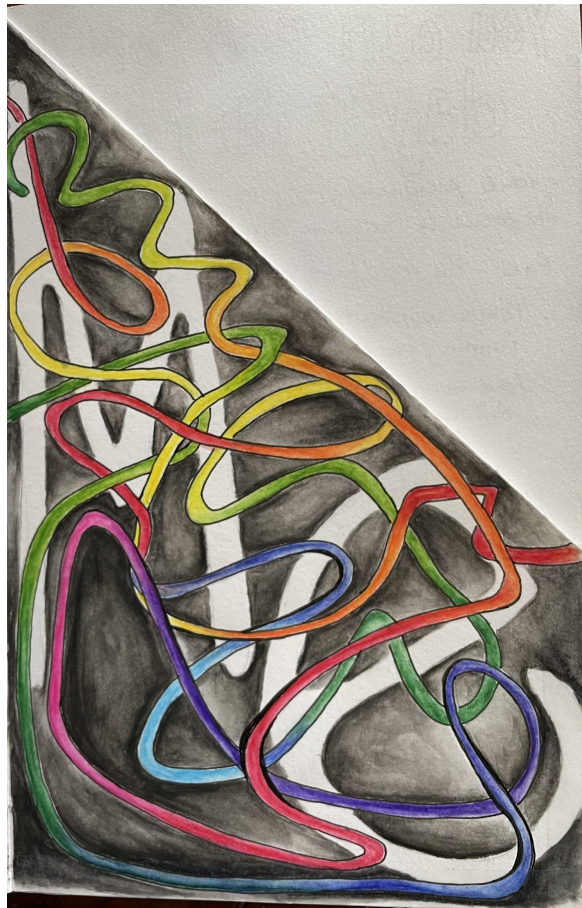
Bryan Stevenson came to my campus to speak, and he urged the audience to work to change the narrative of America's history. I believe that the students and community heard his charge, and they have made significant progress on the work to do so as we see so many confederate statues removed from their pedestals in our cities. I also could not help noticing the connections between Bryan Stevens, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the school-to-prison pipeline, and my role as a high-school art teacher. These readings began my transformation not only as an art teacher, but also personally and artistically. I started keeping a visual journal of my experiences in graduate school. This practice became embedded in all of my courses. After my Theory and Literature class, my art started to reveal a recognizable image or words overlapped or obscured by a scribbled line (Figures 1 and 2).

**Figure 1**

*Work, Family, Grad School, NBCT Journal Sketch Painting*



*Note.* 8.5" x 10.5". Red ballpoint pen and water-soluble ink on sketchbook paper. The scribbled lines became my personal symbol of all of the things I felt were getting in my way of pursuing my graduate school goals. My father became ill in my second year of graduate school, and I found myself his primary care provider and the spokesperson for my family. I eventually and reluctantly had to start dismantling my lifelong obedient child role to my father and siblings and begin taking charge of things I did not feel equipped to handle. My early illustrations visually reveal my inner struggle, my growth, and the realization that my family members were not as powerful as I had once believed them to be.

**Figure 2***Sketchbook Pocket Painting of "Me" Illustration*

*Note.* 8.5" x 5.5". Water-soluble ink on sketchbook paper. Painting the scribble line and background became a relaxing exercise for my days and evenings. It reminded me of the joy I took in my youth drawing scribble lines on paper and filling in the empty shapes with different colored crayons. This process was a little more sophisticated, but it had the same joyful effects on my mood.

**IV. Presidential Election 2016: Transformative Awakening**

The 2016 presidential campaign between Donald J. Trump and Hilary R. Clinton was unfolding simultaneously with the transformative awakenings arising from my Theory and Literature course. I could not help noticing how the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his supporters mirrored Paulo Freire's description of the characteristics of an oppressor. Donald Trump's frequent attempts to dehumanize minorities, immigrants, and women led to protests like the 2017

worldwide Women's March and the #MeToo movement that swept through working, entertainment, and learning institutions around the world. After Trump's shocking election as president, I created a pastel drawing (Figure 3) of the Statue of Liberty in the style of Pablo Picasso's 1937 *Weeping Woman* (Figure 4). The pastel drawing is a compilation of influences that ranged from contemporary Chicano artist, Judith Hernandez and Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso to the 2016 presidential campaign and the anxiety its outcome triggered about my idea of American democracy.

**Figure 3**

*My Pastel Drawing, With Liberty and Justice for All???*



*Note. With Liberty and Justice for All???* Roxanne L. Brown. 22" x 17". Pastels on black wrinkled paper.

**Figure 4***Picasso's Weeping Woman*

*Note. Weeping Woman. Pablo Picasso. 1937. Oil on canvas. 2' x 1'7". Tate Modern, London.*

My first encounter with Chicano artist Judith Hernandez's art was in early November 2016 during a field trip visit with my high-school students to the Peninsula Fine Arts Center's *Miradas* exhibit in which she was one of the featured artists. I was intrigued by the surface texture of her pastel drawings in her 2008 polyptych, *Mano Colorada, Mano de Sanger, Mano de Opression (Red Hand, Bloody Hand, Hand of Oppression)* (Figure 5). Hernandez's work inspired me to dust off my neglected pastels and put them to use. I admired how Hernandez used a black ground for her paper as part of her colorful pastel drawings. She left surfaces of the black ground exposed in her drawings by gently rubbing the pastel over her backgrounds and/or using the black paper to define the edges of her subjects. Her results mesmerized me and reminded me of the black velvet paintings I saw in the Tex-Mex homes and markets of my youth.

**Figure 5**

*Judith Hernandez. Mano Colorado, Mano de Sangre, Mano de Opression.*



*Note.* 2008. Pastel on paper. Judith Hernandez (American, b. 1945). Bank of America Collection.

The hateful rhetoric and social reactions of the 2016 presidential campaign and the political protests that followed the swearing in of Donald Trump as the 45 President of the United States led me unconsciously to repeat the last sentences of the pledge of allegiance, “with liberty and justice for all” each morning as I recited it with my public-school students. I stopped reciting the pledge after I was enlightened by the Colin Kaepernick protests, and the writings of Ta-Nehisi Coates, Bryan Stevenson, and Paulo Freire. I felt my responsibility as a public-school teacher; my ability to educate and protect access to learning for my diverse population of students was threatened. My students represent the youth of the United States, and I was and continue to be concerned for them as future adult citizens. I was concerned about what they were seeing and hearing from our political leaders and the news media. Public-school teachers are not allowed to influence students on political issues, so I never explained my actions or beliefs: I simply stood quietly during the pledge of allegiance.

I chose the image of the Statue of Liberty in the style of Pablo Picasso's Weeping Woman as inspiration for my drawing, *With Liberty and Justice for All???* (Figure 3) because I thought the contorted and fragmented features of Picasso's *Weeping Woman* captured the psychological and emotional anxiety I wanted to express in my interpretation of the mood of American Democracy after the 2016 presidential election of Donald J. Trump.

I was compelled to create my next painting (Figure 6) after reading the 2017 Time magazine Person of the Year issue. The photographic portraits taken by the Berlin photography team, Billy and Hells (Anke Linz and Andreas Oetitinger) were as powerful to me as were the printed words. I found the group portrait of the New York City Plaza Hotel workers on pages 40 and 41 particularly visually intriguing. The composition of the Time photograph reminded me of Pablo Picasso's 1907's, *Le Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (Figure 7), but the context of the hotel workers' unanswered complaints of sexual harassment contradicted Picasso's objectification and sexualization of disrobed street prostitutes of Avignon wearing abstract African masks on display for his and the world's male gaze. The contrast in contexts made Picasso's subject matter seem insulting, out of date and inappropriate for the current post-#MeToo movement.



**Figure 6**

*Les Femmes de l'Année (The Women of the Year)*



*Note. Les Femmes de l'Année (The Women of the Year). Roxanne L. Brown. 11" x 16". Mixed media.*

**Figure 7***Le Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*

*Note. Le Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.). 1907. Pablo Picasso. Oil on canvas. 8' x 7'8". Museum of Modern Art (n.d.).*

To create this image, I used the actual magazine pages to maintain a connection to the Time magazine Person of the Year article (Figure 8) and painted my own versions of abstracted *d'Avignon*-inspired masks over the faces of the hotel workers. Another element I borrowed from Picasso's painting was the curtains. Picasso's curtains are fragmented abstractions in reds and blues. The color I chose for my curtains was inspired by the bright pink "pussy hats" worn during the 2017 Women's Marches in Washington DC the day after Donald Trump's presidential inauguration and after the Access Hollywood tape recordings of him bragging to interviewer, Bill Bush on a hot mic that he "grabbed" women "by the pussy" and "they will let you do anything if you're famous." I also borrowed Picasso's abstract still life arrangement and painted my own bowl of overflowing fruit on the lap of the central, seated figure. Like Picasso, I painted African masks on the women's faces: the mask on the central figure is inspired by the Female

(*Pwo*) mask of the Chokwe peoples (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The Chokwe are a matriarchal society and the *Pwo* mask is respectfully worn by men during female initiation ceremonies. I chose not to abstract the women's bodies like Picasso's because each of their stances possessed intense, independent strength and empowerment which contrasted with the naked, fragmented bodies of Picasso's dehumanizing portrayal of women.

### Figure 8

*Original 2017 Time Magazine Person of the Year Photograph of New York City Plaza Hotel Workers*



*Note.* Original photograph taken by Berlin photography team, Billy and Hell (Anke Linz and Andreas Dettinger). 11" x 16". Time magazine.

**Figure 9***Sketchbook Paintings 2019*

*Note.* During the 2019 spring semester, I worked on my NBCT renewal and cared for my father who I moved into an assisted living facility that winter. Spring is always one of the seasons I look forward to because of the beautiful flowers that spring up in the yard after such long, cold, dark winter months. I created these paintings in my sketchbook of some of the earliest flowers that emerged in my yard. I also started overlapping my paintings with the scribble line to represent how I was unable to enjoy my personal joys fully because I was so distracted by graduate school, NBCT, work deadlines, and the new responsibilities to my father now that he was in an assisted living facility.

**Figure 10**

*Sketches from my Graduate Thesis Fall Semester*



*Note.* I created these drawings as I was preparing to write my thesis during the 2019–20 fall semester. I used iconic symbols of schools (the schoolhouse, apple, stick figure) in the background and covered them with white scribbles in the foreground. I was attempting to simulate the look of a black chalkboard drawing with white chalk overlapping scribble lines. These drawings were my early attempts to represent my rethinking all I was taught about education, teaching, and assessment.

**Figure 11***My Pandemic Quarantine Sketches*

*Note.* Roxanne L. Brown. *Social Distancing, COVID-19, and Wash Your Hands*. Each painting is 5½” x 8½”. 2020. Water-soluble ink and black permanent marker on sketchbook paper. I created these sketches after reading a 2017 Arts and Activities Magazine article about the historic practice of using the outline of a hand to compose hand-drawn typography within its contours (Osterer, 2017). I found this exercise very relaxing in the early days of quarantine.

## V. Assessment During a Pandemic (Spring 2020): Transformative Shift Engaged

I enthusiastically accepted the invitation to contribute a chapter for a National Art Education Association (NAEA) book on assessment in 2018. I chose to write the chapter on my 2017 high-school Art 1 classes' Peace Rally Poster Assignment, which we do at the beginning of each school year in conjunction with the September 20th International Day of Peace (Gilley, n.d.) My assessment policy included daily progress grades, written reflection, final assignments (projects), and exhibition grades. Students attended my 90-minute art class every other day, where they accessed all their supplies and resources. September 20, 2017 was a very important date to hold our peace rally because it followed the August 2017 Unite the Right White nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (Action News, WPVI-TV Philadelphia, PA, n.d.).

The Unite the Right rally was organized to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate war hero Robert E. Lee from a city park. Sadly, the rally/protest resulted in the deaths of one 32-year-old female protester and two state police officers. I was concerned for the social-emotional needs of my high-school's students as they returned to school just one month after viewing the disturbing imagery and language of that rally on national television, so I planned a bigger rally than ever before to include student speakers and the marching band and chorus. The news media were also informed of our peace rally. I completed my chapter and submitted it for publication.

In the spring of 2020, however, the pandemic delayed publication, so the editors invited the contributing authors to submit any final thoughts on assessment in the wake of the pandemic and teaching under quarantine. I was so grateful that the editors provided us an opportunity to add our final thoughts on assessment in the wake of the pandemic and teaching virtually under quarantine because so much changed that spring. The 2020 pandemic/quarantine revealed so many cultural injustices on national television that changed my views on assessment and teaching. The tragic and televised death of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers sparked Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements around the world that brought attention to America's long history of racial injustice. As the BLM movement was unfolding around the world, I was teaching and submitting final grades from my home to my students while realizing that many of my students had family members sick and dying from the COVID-19 virus. Students were also unprepared to access classes virtually because of a lack of internet access or family/work priorities, and my school district was not equipped to provide equitable internet access to students, even though it had been providing each middle- and high-school student with a Chromebook for years. I realized during that final marking period that I was not able to assess student learning the same way as I had for 33 years of teaching. Additionally, I realized my 33

years of assessment practices were not taking into account equal access to art education as a result of historic educational and social systemic racist practices.

Prior to the pandemic and the BLM movement, I was clueless about these injustices and inequalities. I truly believed all students had the same access to education as I did. As a Latinx, cisgender female, catholic raised and military dependent, I had always believed in the American Dream. I was becoming aware of many uncontrollable variables involved in my students' learning. Thankfully, my school system adopted and encouraged the practice of grace for that final grading period, which I practiced in abundance.

I did not return to in-person teaching until the spring of 2021. On the weekends during the quarantine pandemic, I took a lot of walks on a local beach collecting pebbles and broken beach glass. When I returned home I would empty my pockets on my kitchen table. The afternoon sun shines bright through my kitchen window and on the white Formica table top of my kitchen table. I started arranging my random collections of found glass and rocks into compositions that would fit the proportions of an Instagram photo (Figure 12). I even incorporated some poppy seeds I collected from my garden that had just popped from the dried pod I placed on my table earlier in the week.

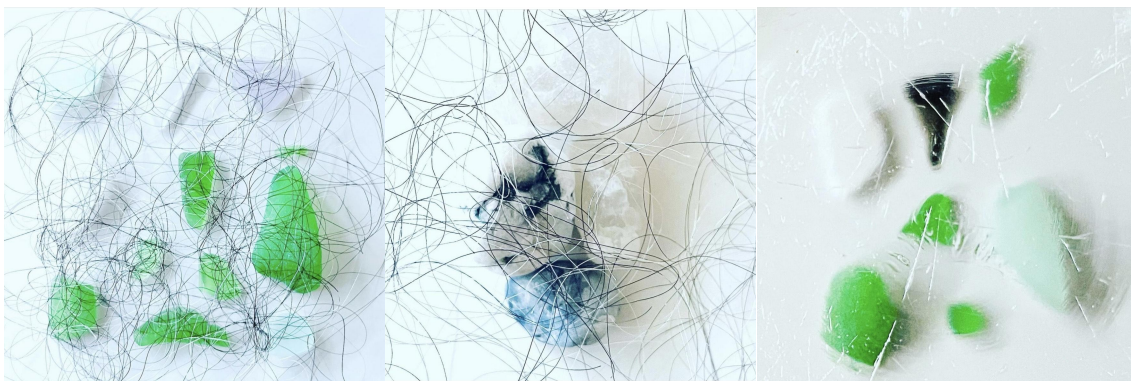


**Figure 12**

*Photos from My Walks on the Beach, Spring–Summer 2020*

**Figure 13**

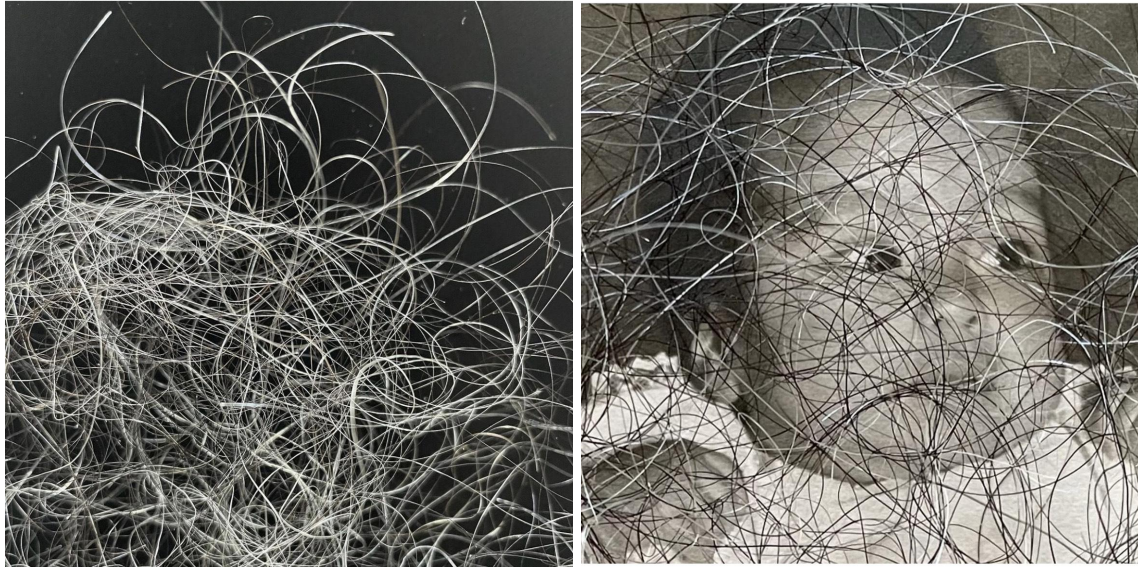
*Experiments with Hairbrained compositions, Spring 2021*



*Note.* I started experimenting with the scribble line with the hair I collected on my hairbrush. I have lived with the lines and scribbles of my hair my whole life. I recall imagining images in the random strands of hair on the bathtub porcelain as I showered, so I embraced this medium. I seem to have an endless supply of hair for my artmaking practice. I thought of my hair strands as relics of my thoughts and ideas, so I started experimenting with my hair. I even experimented with the scratched lines at the bottom of my water glass as a filter over some of my beach finds compositions.

**Figure 14**

*More Hairbrained Experiments, June 2021*



*Note.* My father passed on June 6, 2021, and I became too sick to return to work in September 2021. Soon after my father's death, I used my hair in a series of photos of my baptism. I overlapped the blobs of my hair on top of a piece of scrap black velvet cloth, and over my baptism photograph.

**Figure 15**

*My Baptism Photo, circa 1965*



**Figure 16**

*Sketchbook Printmaking Experiments, Fall 2021*



*Note.* 2" x 2½" prints. I experimented in printing with yarn, string, and my own hair. I found that dipping my own hair in acrylic paint worked best. I liked the thin consistency of the red line it created, but because of the thinness of a single strand of hair, I was limited to printmaking on a small scale.

**VI. Rethinking Everything (Fall 2020) (Transformation/Seismic Shift IV)**

When civil and voting rights activist, congressman John Lewis died on July 17, 2020, I discovered and read his three graphic novel series, the *March trilogy*. I was once again shocked by my limited knowledge of the Civil and Voting Rights Movements in the United States. I could not understand how I could graduate from high school after receiving a K–5th-grade

private and 6–12th-grade public education and not know the full stories of the Civil and Voting Rights Movements in my country. John Lewis understood the limitations of the education system when it came to of civil and voting rights, and he took a cue from Martin Luther King, Jr. by writing a graphic novel series on his experiences as a civil and voting rights activist. He recalled reading King's (1957) comic book, *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. Like King, John Lewis understood the valuable communication media of the comic book/graphic novel (Lewis et al., 2013). I also read John Lewis's postmortem op-ed, *Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation*, which he wrote for the *New York Times* to be published on the day of his funeral. In it, he reminded us of our moral obligation to stand up, speak up, and speak out: "When you see something that is not right you must say something, you must do something. Democracy is not a state it is an act." I also read the book *How To Be an Antiracist* by Ibrim X. Kendi (2019) that summer, and I learned that being antiracist is being and promoting equality for all people, and that I can do this by voting for politicians who support policies that are fair and equal to all people.


On July 3, 2020, the television streaming service Disney+ made available the live production of Lin Manuel Miranda's Broadway Production of *Hamilton*. That summer, after watching the musical, I started reading the novel that inspired the musical by Ron Chernow. Chernow provided a very thorough education on the politics and personal lives of America's founding fathers and how they navigated their way through all the different interests of those in power as they formed a new nation. I also discovered that many of the 245-year-old divisive issues are still with us today. My graduate studies, summer readings, the 2016 presidential campaign and presidency, a global pandemic, quarantine, the BLM movement, the #MeToo movement, and virtual teaching all combined to create a perfect storm for my personal and

professional transformation. I began changing and rethinking everything I knew and practiced to fit a more inclusive, sensitive, realistic, and most importantly fair, democratic, and anti-racist method of teaching.

The pandemic quarantine forced all graduate courses online, which worked out perfectly for the Technology in Art Education graduate course in which I was enrolled. This asynchronous course offered a valuable opportunity not only to learn very relevant content on how to use technology in art education, but also to witness how my professor and classmates used technology in an asynchronous art education learning environment. The course introduced me to the history, ethics, and theories of technology. We viewed videos and movies, listened to podcasts, used hyperlinks, created collaborative art, and designed games on online websites. I used the skills I learned in my technology class to create a choice-based art curriculum for my virtual Art 1 students of 3-dimensional art. My school uses Google Classroom, so I created slideshows in the style of an interactive choice board (Figure 17).

**Figure 17**

*Example of the Art 1, 3D Design Choice Board*

<b>(Museum) Art Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 3</a>	<b>Found Object Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 8</a>	<b>Interior Design Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 10</a>
<b>Laundry Art Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 4</a>	<b>Paper Plate Sculpture Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 9</a>	<b>3D Paper Craft</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 11</a>
<b>Paper Cup Art</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 5</a>		<b>Social Media Design</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 12</a>
<b>Fashion Design Met Gala Fashion Challenge</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 6</a>		<b>3D Design in my yard/neighborhood</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 13</a>
<b>Product / Image Design</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 7</a>		<b>Monumental Illusions</b> Click to <a href="#">Slide 14</a>
	<b>Your 3-D Design Choice</b> Click to <a href="#">Last Slide</a>	

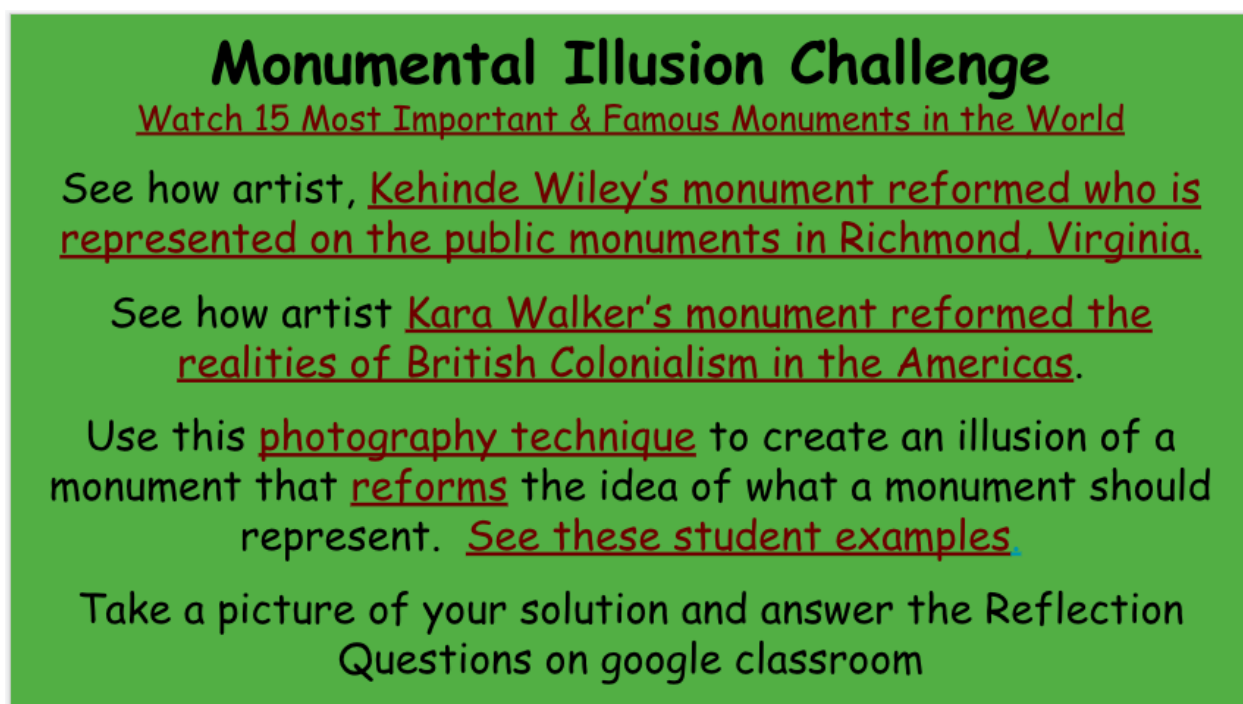
*Note.* This is an example of the choice board I created for my students during the quarantine. Since I had to provide instruction to students with unknown art supply access, I tried to create art-making experiences using items to which most students had access. I also provided a Your Choice option. The red underlined text contains hyperlinks that take students to the instruction slides for each choice.

Since my Art 1 classes consist of students with a variety of skills, access to supplies and the internet, learning/physical disabilities, and English language skills, I wanted to offer a variety of art experiences and levels of difficulty. Students were responsible for completing one assignment every 2 weeks. They were allowed to use their virtual class time to work and share their assignments. In an effort to keep things routine, I kept the criteria and method of access the same for each assignment. I highlighted one choice board assignment each week in person, and I posted a video of myself highlighting the assignment for students to access for each week's assignment link. Students could pick which assignment they wanted to do from the choice board. They could submit work using the same choice over and over, move around the board, or make

up their own choice as long as it met the course's 3D design criteria. Each choice on the board linked students to a slide that gave them more instruction on the assignment with links to videos, articles, examples, and demonstration handouts (Figure 18).

### Figure 18

*Example of a Hyperlinked Instructional Slide from the Monumental Illusion Challenge on the Choice Board*



**Monumental Illusion Challenge**  
Watch 15 Most Important & Famous Monuments in the World  
See how artist, Kehinde Wiley's monument reformed who is represented on the public monuments in Richmond, Virginia.  
See how artist Kara Walker's monument reformed the realities of British Colonialism in the Americas.  
Use this photography technique to create an illusion of a monument that reforms the idea of what a monument should represent. See these student examples.  
Take a picture of your solution and answer the Reflection Questions on google classroom

*Note.* Each underlined section of text is a hyperlink to a YouTube video, slide show, definition, or student example.

At the end of each assignment, students answered seven reflection questions about their work. I created a Google Form for the reflection questions for each assignment. Google Forms allow students to upload video or audio answers to each question instead of written responses for increased accessibility. Google Forms also allowed students to engage with the course vocabulary by selecting responses from lists for questions about vocabulary, critiques, the

creative process, exhibiting/sharing their work, and choice assignments. The reflection questions asked students to:

1. Identify from a list which choice board assignment they used.
2. Identify and define from a list the element(s) of art and the principle of design they used.
3. Answer with a written, video, photo, or audio description of how they used the element(s) and principle of design.
4. Explain why they chose the assignments they chose.
5. Share the work with a classmate, friend, or family member and ask this person to respond to the work and record (in writing, audio or video) a response.
6. Identify the parts of the creative process they engaged with in the creation of their assignment from a list.
7. Provide a reflective statement, in writing, audio, or video, on how the creative process reformed their ideas, their viewers' ideas, or both about creative expression, art-making materials, art techniques, or 3D design.

My choice board evolved throughout the semester to include more options for students. I hope to continue using this format when students return to in-person school. There were many things I liked about this method of teaching my Art 1 classes:

1. Because of the frequent absences from and tardiness to Art 1 classes, the choice board format works well for students who may be working from home, come to class late, need special education services, or be on suspension from school.



2. I also liked how the choice board format allowed for consistency of the main components of the course: elements of art and principles of design, the creative process, reflection, sharing/exhibiting, and most importantly, choice.
3. I experienced more student engagement with the choice board method.
4. I was able to learn from students and to get to know them better.

Their solutions and reflections on their work informed and enriched my edits to the choice board to make it more relevant to their lives. Some of their favorite choices were the fashion and interior design challenges. I also learned a lot about the video games my students were playing. One student made a series of 3D construction paper replicas of the objects he saw on his video games. His 3D models always inspired discussion and responses from his classmates. One student rearranged her extensive anime figurine collections into thematic and visually appealing sculptural installations in her room.

Overall, the level of visual and written dialogue in Google Classroom, the choice board method, and Google Forms created between my Art 1 students and me was transformative in getting to know and understand my students.

## **VII. Steps Moving Forward**

As I think about moving forward after graduate school, I am looking forward to exploring more information about the Modern Classrooms Project (Modern Classrooms Project, n.d.; Modern Classrooms Project Podcast, n.d.). I learned about the Modern Classrooms Project through my Technology in Art Education Course. I am interested in learning more about how to make elements of this model work for an Art 1 course. Teachers who join the Modern Classrooms Project receive training on how to create course content designed to provide students with agency to interact with content at their own pace. The teacher provides guidance and

assessment based on exit tickets assigned for each task. The Modern Classrooms Project sounds very similar to what I am trying to achieve in my Art 1 courses. I am very interested in learning how I can create meaningful course content in a manageable format that meets the variety of unique living and learning needs of my students and that will empower them to become more successful, independent, and confident learners. I am also very interested in exploring more alternative, non-Western traditional aesthetics and methods for teaching secondary Art 1 courses and exploring ways for advocating, educating, and exhibiting to the public how the art room has changed its approach to teaching and learning art.

### **VIII. Implications for the Field**

I see a need for research on how to reform how we teach crowded Art 1 classes on the secondary level. I feel that there are plenty of examples of exemplary student art work in publications, online, in local and national exhibitions, and on social media, but there are very few if any resources for the majority of the students most high-school teachers teach; Art 1 students who did not “elect” to be in the class but were “put in” the art class for an elective credit with very little prior knowledge or access to art resources and who therefore lack confidence in the content. I would also like to see more resources for teachers to use in their Art 1 secondary courses that encourage students to develop art they can create for income. My school district has adopted an academies approach to preparing students for careers after high school. I would like to see more resources on high-school art programs doing the same for their students. There is plenty of art to be made within the school community, which has the potential to empower Art 1 students with the autonomy and confidence to contribute to their high-school communities and beyond. I also think that we need to reconsider assessing student success in the Art 1 course. I think there are better ways of assessing Art 1 students. I would like to see these methods more

readily available as resources for teachers to use. Finally, I would like to continue developing technology that is user friendly for art students and teachers like Google Classroom. Google Classroom works very well for me, but there is room for improvement. I would like to have a format for students to turn in electronic portfolios. I like the audio/video uploading options available on Google Forms for students to upload art statements instead of typing them out on a keyboard. I am very excited about the changes I am witnessing in my art courses, and I am honored to have had an opportunity to share my experiences and thoughts on implementing them. I also have a lot of confidence in the creative process, and I look forward to where the collective creative minds of the art education community reform our practice.

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