

A REFLECTIVE INVESTIGATION OF PIVOTAL MOMENTS
THAT OPEN NEW WAYS OF THINKING FOR ARTISTS
LEADING TO CREATIVE CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

A REFLECTIVE INVESTIGATION OF PIVOTAL MOMENTS THAT OPEN NEW WAYS OF THINKING FOR ARTISTS LEADING TO CREATIVE CHANGE

Natalie Alarcón

An integration of the researcher's own experience as a creative professional with that of other artists suggested that there are occasions in a creative practice that are experienced as pivotal, moments when something opens up and an apparent change takes place.

Looking beyond art practice, researchers such as Land et al. (2010), Mezirow (1997), and Cranton (2016) have addressed the concept and importance of transformational learning in adults, leading toward a significant shift in the perception of a subject.

In order to understand the moments that trigger pivotal experiences for artists, two qualitative studies took place: a pilot study (Alarcón, 2012) and the present study, which includes the narrative accounts of three women painters residing in Tacoma, United States; Paris, France; and Cape Town, South Africa. The research question assumes that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work and asks what the narrative accounts of three artists reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of creative change or transformation; (b) the nature of these pivotal moments; and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself.

Analysis of the interview data suggests that moments of change are revealed in terms of a set of four Pivots or turning points. In Chapter V, the Pivots are examined as they emerged within the artists as a group, then explored as experienced by each artist individually. The nature of these moments of change is revealed through preparation, location, process, and disruption, and a set of Sub-Pivots housed under each of the main ones. The thematic analysis in Chapter V also revealed the characteristics of these pivotal moments as ritualistic, interconnected, and dynamic. It was also unveiled that they express an inherent dynamic in the ability to turn things around in a creative practice such as painting. Pivotal Moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act through the ongoing development of the artist's work.

Finally, this study reveals multiple perspectives on content and suggestions on how we can support the richness of Pivotal Moments as related to Art Education.

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DEDICATION

A special *dankeschön* is reserved for my mother, whose support has been a source of encouragement not only during the dissertation process but my entire life. Her presence and kindness made all the difference, especially since I was working a demanding full-time job and moved between three countries in parallel to writing. Her support was instrumental during these challenging times, and it is safe to say that I couldn't have done it without her; thus, my doctorate is wholeheartedly dedicated to her.

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N. A.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Personal Introduction to the Concept of Pivotal Moments

Chapter I sculpts the pathway of how the idea of Pivotal Moments became the core of this dissertation. It all started with a sense that there were occasions in my own creative practice I experienced as pivotal in that an apparent change was taking place, as opposed to other times when I wasn't able to paint or even do much creative work at all. I had a sense that those occasions that opened new ways of thinking on multiple levels, creating more profound levels of creative knowledge, were an integral part of my development; however, I wasn't able to identify or name them.

The word *transformation* is usually associated with the work of researchers such as Land, Meyer, and Baillie (2010) and Mezirow (1991a). In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) argue that transformation is literally going beyond one's extant form and that it will be determined by context. Ricketts (in Land et al., 2010) writes that "transformation occurs when a student finally grasps a key concept within the discipline's view of the world and in the process experiences a change of worldview themselves" (p. 45). Mezirow (1997), from Columbia University's Teachers College, introduced the theory of Transformational Learning as a change process that transforms frames of reference (Imel, 1998), defined as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Transformative Learning is a theory about making meaning and "making sense of or

giving coherence to our experiences” (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 11). Land et al. (2010) also write that as a result of Transformative Learning the contents of the field of consciousness change, “the mechanism remains mysterious and corresponds to reflectiveness” (p. 40), and they discuss the idea of the threshold as related to passing through a portal that permits a new way of thinking, a conceptual gateway that is transformative in nature. Finally, in the field of psychology, Kegan (1994) argued that it is imperative to return to that darkest region for transformation to occur, bringing to mind Schwartzman’s theory that real learning requires stepping into the unknown and initiates a rupture with the knowing (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010, p. 38).

In this dissertation, the word *transformation* is used in the context of creative change following the experience of a Pivotal Moment. Thus, the dissertation will develop the concept that in some instances, creative change, or transformation, is the result of experiencing a Pivotal Moment. The word *transformation* is used descriptively in this document rather than analytically and is not to be confused with the term *Pivotal Moment*. Creative change or transformation is a temporal concept that plays out of time, versus Pivotal Moments, which occur at specific junctures within the creative process itself. And in some instances, transformation will give rise to Pivotal Moments.

I became more and more interested in the idea that there were moments/occasions that as artists we experience as transformational, and questions emerged such as: What are those? Where do they come from? When do they happen? What needs to happen for them to occur? And can they be triggered? Informal conversations with other artists suggested that this was not an isolated experience but rather a thread or pattern in the development of a creative practice.

The first step was to find a name for these moments/occasions, and an apparently simple task turned into a journey that shaped the title and the research question of my dissertation. Back in 2012, I saw *ritual* as a fitting concept to convey the elusive moment of creative change I was seeking to name and study. Furthermore, I saw rituals not just as

patterns of meaning but also as forms of social interaction enhancing and refreshing social ties (Geertz, 1977). Moreover, I was interested in the relationship between ritual and the pattern I saw emerge throughout a creative practice; therefore, the term *Ritualistic Practices* became an integral part of my writing and research question. However, as I deepened my research, confusion arose among my doctoral cohorts regarding the word *ritual*, and clarification was often required. Moreover, in spending time reading about ritual, idea of transformation started to emerge, and I shifted the focus. I decided to change the name from *Ritualistic Practices* to *Pivotal Moments*.

Looking beyond art practice, researchers such as Land et al. (2010) have addressed the concept and importance of transformational learning in adults, suggesting conceptual gateways that are transformative, occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject.

A preliminary integration of personal experiences with those of other artists, informed by contemporary research, suggested that life and a creative practice thus become a series of changes, and we are confronted with continual shifting and tensions, deconstructing and then constructing our identities over and over. Based on that idea, in 2012, I put together a formal questionnaire and designed and carried out a pilot study examining the work of three female artists: Anita Boeninger, Katy Alonza Hamer, and Linda Meo. I employed four qualitative data collection procedures: interviews, observation, focus group interviews, and retrieval of documents and archival data, such as photos, bios, and articles. Throughout the dissertation seminars at Teachers College and in preparation for my doctoral certification, I also initiated the preliminary sampling process, began studio visits, and performed multiple interviews during the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012 that would be included in the pilot study. Analysis of data from this study suggested that, indeed, the artist subjects spoke to experiences where change was taking place during their creative practice, but linked these to activities such as the organization of their working space (ID, KH, LM, 2011) or physical and spiritual

exercises, such as stretching and breathing in a specific manner (ID, AB, 2012). The pilot study gave me some ideas of activities artists engaged in to help the creative process, but did not give me specifics or an understanding of if and how change emerged. Moreover, the study confirmed my assumption that there is *something* that triggers an experience of transformation in a creative practice, and it laid the groundwork for the formal dissertation research. Furthermore, the pilot study made an assumption that there are practices that open spaces of change, but I didn't know what those practices, activities, or concepts were.

The present study seeks to build on the prior pilot study in order to identify and investigate more deeply the pivots around which Pivotal Moments occur for three female artists: Leeorah Hursky, Elise Richman, and Carolina Alfonso, whose portraits will be sketched in Chapter IV and thematically analyzed in Chapter V.

Given that artists experience moments of change opening a space during the creative process, the assumption to be explored has to do with defining those Pivotal Moments. I realized that change or a shift was the outcome I was looking for and started to assume that these actions and concepts that lead to it can be examined as pivots. Thus, I finally named these actions and concepts "Pivots." I also started giving a *form* to what I am referring to as Pivots: I visualize them as round, they have movement, they have a dynamic, and they turn things around and energize each other. Thus, the discovery, analysis, and examination of these Pivots as related to the three female artists in my study have become the core of my research. Finally, the goal to be explored in this dissertation has to do with defining these Pivots or turning points that are both ritualistic and open possibilities for change. In summary, the occasions in my own creative practice that I experienced as leading to a possible transformation are called Pivotal Moments. The how, when, and why of this process are the journey to be deconstructed in the following chapters.

Problem Statement

As mentioned above, this journey began when I started asking myself questions about the occasions when something opens up and leads artists to experience moments of change. An integration of my personal experiences with those of other artists, informed by a pilot study that took place in 2012, brought forward the idea that indeed the artist subjects spoke to experiences of transformation during, or as a result of, a creative practice. The pilot study made an assumption that there are moments of change that open creative spaces, but what we didn't know is what they were or how they are triggered. Thus, the problem this inquiry seeks to address is to define those Pivotal Moments through the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters, and to identify what triggers the experience of transformation.

Moments that trigger a creative change became a key area of my investigation, and I started asking myself additional questions: What are those moments? What triggers them? How do they coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself? Finally, informed by contemporary research on Transformational Learning (Cranton, 2016; Land et al., 2010; Mezirow, 1997), creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hanson, 2010), and imagination (Jung, 1923; Lewis-Williams, 2002), coupled with my own experience as an artist and the data stemming from my study, the how, when, and why Pivotal Moments occur crystallized as the bricks that sculpt this dissertation and lead us to the research question.

Research Question

Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, what would the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of creative change or transformation,

(b) the nature of these pivotal moments, and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself?

Assumptions

Assumptions not to be Debated

My research study will take for granted:

1. That I will accept the images that are provided by the artists and will not debate the relevance of their practice to the larger art world. This study contains the narratives of the selected artists based on their personal reflections of past experiences, and the researcher will respect the accounts offered by the artist/storytellers. It is not my intention to debate the truth but to try to convey the intention of the narratives through the eyes of the researcher/interpreter.
2. It is assumed that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work.

Assumptions to be Debated

Through the process of this dissertation I argue about:

1. The identification of the Pivotal Moments that might trigger the artist's experiences of creative change or transformation.
2. The nature of these Pivotal Moments that artists experience in the ongoing development of their work.
3. The connection between Pivotal Moments and a creative activity such as painting.
4. The role of spirituality as a significant repercussion of the creative process.

Limits of the Study

Conceptual Limits

Several conceptual and methodological limits frame this study. Although the literature review that will be presented in Chapter II examines literature from the fields of psychology, education, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, this interdisciplinary journey was conducted to help me circumscribe a not-well-delineated area of investigation of Pivotal Moments as related to visual art. Furthermore, the proposed study was limited to the Pivotal Moments that the three artists in the study engage in while pursuing an artistic activity such as painting.

Finally, the limits of this study include the theoretical insights I chose to frame my research, as outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework

Domain	Authors
Aesthetics and Transformation	(1) Patricia Cranton (2) Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (3) John Daloz (4) John Dewey (5) Meyer et al (6) Wassily Kandinsky (7) Lucy Lippard (8) Peter London (9) Jack Mezirow
Anthropology Concepts	(1) Clifford Geertz (2) Joan Halifax (3) Bradford Keeney (4) Victor Turner
Philosophy Concepts	(1) Gaston Bachelard (2) Michel Foucault (3) Bruno Latour (4) Friedrich Nietzsche

Table 1 (continued)

Psychology Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Erik Erikson (2) Robert Kegan (3) Carl Jung (4) John Weir Perry (5) Anthony Storr
Research Methods Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) John W. Creswell (2) Steinar Kvale (3) Joseph A. Maxwell (4) Robert K. Yin

Practical Limits

This is not to be a comparative study but seeks to envision the Pivotal Moments of three women painters living in different locations as a set of rich examples, which, while not generalizable, may have broader significance for women artists.

Chapter III offers a detailed description (see pp. 40-41) of how I identified and why I chose the three artists; however, in order to provide clarity and a point of reference, here is a short summary. I had known Carolina from our time at New York University, where we earned our masters' degrees in Visual Arts. I thought of her as a perfect match for my research, given her dedicated painting practice and international background. Furthermore, our close friendship nurtured ongoing conversations about our art practice that went well beyond the formal interviews. I met Leeorah through a work colleague's mother from Madrid. Her background in the arts and healing practice made her an interesting candidate for this study. Elise and I met ten years ago through a common friend while I was a visiting artist at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. As a painter-academic, she seemed to represent the perfect balance between Carolina—a highly organized and goal oriented young mother-wife-artist, and Leeorah—a free-spirited healer and artist with a colorful life.

I limited my study to English-speaking artists because of potential problems with translations. I chose artists who spoke English either as a first or second language. My own participation in the study was an active involvement. For example, I was vigilant in preserving the interviews' flow in English, though on occasion words and even sentences were used in French or Spanish in order to facilitate the flow of the discussion during the interview process with native speakers. This happened rarely, and the text was carefully translated during the formal transcription phase.

The Methodology chapter (Chapter III) discusses in detail the limitations of the study and the nationality and geographic location of the artists. For example, while for a prior study (Alarcón, 2012) I chose women of North American residence, for this study I extended my sample to artists that have built a life in different countries.

Furthermore, my sample represents a variety of artistic practices. The three artists represent diverse levels of professional achievement in painting, ranging from an academic who has shown her work widely in the United States, to an accomplished international painter who has achieved great recognition in her country of origin, and a self-trained artist who values art for its therapeutic and cathartic properties. The sample represents diverse media, and, although the main visual arts expression of the three artists in the study is painting, I chose artists who also expand their creative practice to other expressions of creativity, such as dance, design, and writing. Finally, the interviews were designed to gather rich and in-depth verbal responses, which, together with examples of visual works, formed robust case studies of each artist.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of researcher, observer, interviewer, and data analyst. As a researcher and observer, I have no personal involvement in the three women's art practices and was dedicated to obtaining and analyzing data in the most

objective manner. As an interviewer, I designed and conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews that led to rich and insightful data. Kvale (1996) describes the differing roles of the interviewee and the interviewer as storytellers to different audiences, and in in-depth interviews, the interviewee is the narrator while the interviewer is the listener. The researcher-participant relationship is a key element in the interview process, and my role as a researcher was to build this relationship over time in a steady and effective manner through trust and open communication. Furthermore, in Chapter IV, I engage in deep and meaningful conversations with the three women painters, assuming the role of a storyteller. I craft a story that is carefully narrated and focused on each artist's background, personal views, and artistic practices.

Finally, through an organic and free-flowing questioning process, portraits are revealed that explore different angles and seek to address the connection between Pivotal Moments and a creative activity such as painting.

Justification: Genealogy of the Project

There are many roots that connect to the genealogy of this project. The first root has a professional source. My interest in what as artists we experience as moments of change arises from my background as a creative professional. I have been painting and working in the creative field (creative brand design) for over 20 years and have taught digital photography and abstract painting at various institutions. In all those years, I have observed, experienced, and developed a fascination for the practices artists engage in before, during, and after the creative process.

A second root is my deep passion for art, which led me to embark upon this study. My own work as a visual artist has led me to assume that transitional spaces are part of a creative practice, and that nothing ever feels finished or set in stone. For example, I am working on a "mind wall" or "mental framework" that is a combination of words, images,

and textures on a big, white canvas that stands quietly against the wall in my living room. This “creative thinking map” serves as a “transitional space” that traces my impressions and guides me in the creative process. I see it as a roadmap that clarifies my thinking. Furthermore, I have experienced moments of change in the ongoing development of my personal work, and this has led me to explore the defining of those Pivotal Moments. In a way, my painting practice and my dissertation are interconnected and constantly influencing each other, without my knowing nor seeking to understand the exact outcome.

A third root of this research project is connected to my international background. I was raised bilingual in a bicultural family, which impacted who I am and how I see the world. In brief, I was born in Hamburg, Germany, where I lived as an infant before moving to Munich and Paderborn. We moved to Madrid, Spain, where I was raised by a German mother and a Spanish father, and went back and forth between the two countries and rather opposing cultures. I knew from a young age that I wanted to work in the artistic field, and that love for the arts led me to attend Parsons School of Design in Paris, France, where I lived for almost four years as a young art student, first studying fashion/textile design, then fine arts and graphic design. I completed my senior college year in New York, and upon graduation, I took a job as a graphic designer for a jewelry company in Greenwich Village. A few years later, I experienced the corporate design environment while maintaining a private studio practice in painting in Manhattan. My graduate studies in visual art were completed in Italy and New York through New York University. After freelancing in graphic design for a few years, in 2012, I accepted a brand design manager job that took me back to Paris, and in 2014, I was transferred to Basel, Switzerland. Finally, after three years in Basel, I relocated back to France, however this time to the northeast part of the country where French and German cultures merged: Alsace. I will go into more detail in Chapter III regarding how my own story has informed the methodology of this study.

Aim of Dissertation

Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, this dissertation attempts to define the Pivots or turning points that are both ritualistic and open possibilities for creative change or transformation. In order to achieve this, the researcher thematically analyzes the life stories of three artists who reside in South Africa, France, and the United States. In seeking the participation of lifelong practicing artists, the present study seeks to build on the prior pilot study in order to identify and investigate more deeply the artistic practices and concepts, or Pivots.

Type of Study

The selection of my data collection procedures was informed by Creswell (2007), in drawing from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and archival data; and by Yin (2003), who recommends six types of information: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and participant-observations. For my research, I designed and conducted a qualitative case study of a bounded unit, involving one main data collection procedure—interviews, supported by observations and the study of documents. This documents study assembled information about the artists' work, including personal communications and supporting literature such as group exhibition catalogues and websites.

Why a Qualitative Case Study?

The qualitative case study method seemed suitable to my research, as “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). This decision was informed by Creswell, who describes qualitative case study research as a “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over

time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 73). The qualitative case study method provided the flexibility needed to illuminate the unique perspectives and personal experiences of the three artists in the study.

Finally, an important consideration for this study was that I personally know two of the three artists, making it easier to facilitate arrangements for the research and gain access to their work.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter I sculpted the pathway of how the ideas of Pivotal Moments became the core of this dissertation. Given that artists experience moments of change, the assumption to be explored has to do with defining those Pivotal Moments. The chapter included a brief overview of the previous study (Alarcón, 2012), building up to the problem statement and research question. It proceeded with the limits of the study and an introduction to the methodology, to be expanded in Chapter III. The chapter concluded with the researcher’s journey as connected to the genealogy of this project.

Chapter II contains a review of the literature from the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. Using an integrative approach, it covers the topics of creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality. These topics provide the scholarly context and analytical tools for the study.

Chapter III elaborates on the methodology proposed for the study. The chapter first addresses an overview of the study, including a data chart and a circular framework illustrating the proposed research. The circular framework depicts the four central Pivots or turning points that impact an artistic practice. The goal is to show that these Pivots have a dynamic, that they turn things around and energize each other. Furthermore, Chapter III describes the method of inquiry, data collection, and the selection of the

participants in more detail. The chapter concludes by bringing forward the methodology in the context of the researcher's experiences through a reflective piece.

Chapter IV sketches the portraits that emerged from in-depth conversations with three artists living in North America, Europe, and South Africa/Australia. The conversations featured the constructed portraits of three artists—Leeorah Hursky, Elise Richman, and Carolina Alfonso—based on their life narratives and focused on their background, personal views, and artistic practice. In this chapter, the researcher assumes the role of storyteller, carefully assembling the portraits from recorded interview sessions, studio visits, subsequent electronic communications, and curatorial statements. Finally, the narratives weave the storytelling that becomes the basis for the thematic analysis in Chapter V.

Chapter V brings forward the major findings of Chapter IV and investigates them in light of the practices of the three women artist subjects of this study. It analyzes how, based on the interview data, Pivotal Moments can be understood in terms of a set of four Pivots consisting of preparation, location, process, and disruption, each with a set of identifying criteria. Thus, the chapter addresses and analyzes the Pivots, identifying common themes that emerged from the stories. Finally, the themes in Chapter V have been constructed with the research question in mind and are based on the similarities as well as contextual references found in the narratives.

Chapter VI serves as a review of the study's educational implications, reflecting on the prior study (Alarcón, 2012) and the current study's interviews. It merges some of the proposed concepts from the study with the observations made during the prior pilot study. The chapter draws parallels between learning and the topics of archetypes, Transformational Learning, a creative environment, and a sense of community.

Chapter VII comprises a summary of the objectives and learnings from the dissertation. It is also a reflection on questions raised during the dissertation process.

The Bibliography lists books and all other documents that were consulted and referenced during the writing of this dissertation.

The Appendices comprise website addresses of the artists, interview questions, the signed consent forms, and a short version of the researcher's curriculum vitae.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Using an integrative approach, I will first present a review of the relevant literature from the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy.

To create a strong structural base, the literature review will comprise seven different topics: creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality. These topics will be divided into four tiers: (1) the concepts of creativity and ritual; (2) transformation and consciousness, which discusses the concepts of archetypes and liminality; (3) psychological identity and creativity; and (4) spirituality and the quest for meaning in making art.

The first part of the literature review will ground the concepts of creativity and ritual through an examination of current theories from psychology and philosophy. I will analyze Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) five stages of creativity and how they relate to ritual practices while exploring the notion that art is a necessity.

Given that creative change, or transformation, follows the experience of certain moments that open up a space during the creative process, the second section of the literature review will explore the idea of transformation. In order to sculpt this idea, the section will tap into the concept of archetypes, specifically investigating how the archetype of the wounded healer is related to a creative practice. Furthermore, the

literature illuminates how the exploration of consciousness and untapped areas of the mind may help an artistic practice.

The concept of psychological transformation will lead us to the third section of the literature review. Based on a psychological approach, I will present relevant theories of identity, especially current research that reflects identity as non-linear and in continuous flux, and analyze how identity is influenced by circumstances (both inner and outer). I am interested in analyzing how identity shifts and regenerates over a lifetime influencing the artistic practice.

Given that the way we interact with the world around us is reflective of our belief system, the fourth tier of my literature review concerns the topic of spirituality. I will examine how belief systems and spirituality develop into tools for the quest of meaning, transforming into fertile areas for an artistic practice such as painting.

The literature review, which follows below, was launched by an investigation of sources that provided a broader spectrum of what constitutes the relationship between pivotal experiences, or moments of change, and creative work. The bibliographies of these sources directed me to new data. I subsequently examined resources such as theoretical texts, online and print-based journals, researcher chronicles, and documents from this researcher's personal collection.

Concepts of Creativity and Ritual

The enigmatic word *creativity* stems from the Latin term *creō* and means to create. There is an association with active movement, bringing something forth, and even giving it life. Multiple theories have been developed over the last century and used in myriad disciplines, including education, psychology, philosophy, sociology, business, linguistics, and economics. The Eastern view regards creation as a sort of discovery rather than the making of something new, while in Western culture, especially up to the Renaissance,

creativity was seen as coming from divine inspiration. For example, the Muses in Greek culture were standing between humans and the Gods. In poetry and literature, the Muses were considered the goddesses who inspired the creation of the arts and the source of knowledge; interestingly, in Greek, *mousa* is a common noun as well as a type of goddess meaning poetry or art. In his epic poem about the travels of the hero Odysseus after the fall of Troy, Homer calls in the Muses at the beginning of his masterpiece to tell the story through them. More recently, Hanson (2010) noted that the Western concept of creativity developed in the 19th century as the role of the individual in society blossomed; and the word “creativity” didn’t appear in most English dictionaries until after World War II.

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen two definitions of creativity that resonate with me. The reason I chose these two definitions is their emphasis on constant movement, transformation, and making connections, which are themes relevant to my research: Csikszentmihalyi (1996) says creativity is “any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one” (p. 27), and for author Morris Isaac Stein (1984), creativity suggests a process “that results in novelty which is accepted as useful, tenable, or satisfying by a significant group of others at the same point in time” (p. 1). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that there are five stages of creativity: preparation, becoming interested in concepts or ideas; incubation, subconsciously making connections; insight, the moment an understanding is realized; evaluation, analyzing the merit of a problem; and elaboration, the physical realization.

According to anthropologist Geertz (1977), art—amongst other things, such as tools, hunting, family organization, religion, and science—molded man somatically and is “necessary not merely for his survival but to his existential realization” (p. 83). I am fascinated by the notion that art is a necessity and by how it influences human interaction on a daily basis, reinforcing the ties between individuals. Anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake (1988) believes creativity and art are biological necessities that have an

intrinsic survival value, and according to Wellesley College psychology professor Beth Hennessey (cited in Wilson, 2010), creativity is what drives us forward in the world. This action or intention to move forward is what holds the space for creativity to unfold and, as we have seen, is related to theories of identity, where an ongoing psychological process that is in flux opens a space for transformation to take place over different stages of a lifetime, thus encouraging creativity to flow.

Theories on creativity have evolved over time, building and nourishing our civic, economic, and cultural health while creating a tapestry of meaning. Geertz (1977) argues that culture “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 88). Given that the origin of this dissertation was sparked by a sense that there were occasions in my own creative practice I experienced where an apparent change was taking place, and that for a large portion of the research I saw “ritual” as a fitting concept to convey the transformative moment I was seeking to name and research, I am providing a definition of ritual to provide a clear context to the evolution of the dissertation. Furthermore, although I changed the term *Ritualistic Practices* to *Pivotal Moments*, the meaning and symbolic value of ritual remain relevant to the dissertation. Moreover, there is a connection between ritual and culture, the former becoming a core aspect of many societies and a symbol of social interaction (Geertz, 1977).

The word *ritual* can be described as a group of actions performed for their symbolic value; it may be performed on specific occasions by a single individual, by a group, or by the entire community. For the purpose of my research, I chose a definition of ritual from the domain of anthropology that illuminates the meaning I am interested in. As discussed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) in his work, *The Forest of Symbols*, the term *ritual* is applied to social transitions, while *ceremony* is more closely associated with social states, therefore while “ritual is transformative, ceremony [is] confirmatory”

(p. 95). As cited by Geertz (1977), Singer defines ritual as “cultural performances” (p. 113) that are a part of the everyday experiences of many societies. Ritual should be studied in terms of the socio-structural environment regardless of references to the supernatural (Douglas, 1978), and as an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies (Wilson, 1954). Furthermore, ritual is not just a pattern of meaning but also a form of social interaction enhancing and refreshing social ties (Geertz, 1977). For example, in ancient societies, artists replicated symbols and ceremonies to make rituals special, making the value of art to solidify and enhance social cohesion (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Dissanayake, 1988).

In psychology, the term *ritual* is used for a repetitive behavior systematically used by a person to neutralize anxiety, and in religion, the definition of *ritual* can vary remarkably from organized religion to de-institutionalized spirituality.

Moreover, the rituals inherent in what I am calling *Pivotal Practices* have formed a part of human communities for thousands of years, becoming deeply engrained into the fabric of our societies. Belief and ritual reinforce the ties between the individuals (Durkheim, 1947; Geertz, 1977; Robertson Smith, 1894), becoming a way to create meaning, which in turn opens the door for change to occur in a creative practice such as painting.

Ritual strengthens community bonds by enhancing social relationships and bonding, and according to composer and music scholar George E. Lewis (cited in Wilson, 2010), “you need a forum, a community, an atmosphere to foster creativity. You need to encourage introspection, and you need to encourage people to range more widely, to listen to more voices, to not be afraid to encounter ideas they might not agree with” (n.p.). Communities offer this forum and atmosphere for artists to be receptive to the voices of creation.

Anthropologist Monica Wilson (1954) wrote, “Rituals reveal values at their deepest level ... men express in ritual what moves them most and since the form of

expression is conventionalized and obligatory it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies” (p. 241). This makes me think about connections between groups, the bonds and kinship ties as well as the possibility for creativity to unfold. How is a community influenced by ritual, and what is the cascading effect on the art making/creative process of such a group? To answer this question, and given that community is a part of the cultural tapestry, it is necessary to briefly analyze the definition of culture and its relationship to ritual.

Welsh academic, novelist, and critic Raymond Williams (2009) talks about three types of culture: ideal (a state of human perfection), a documentary record (texts and practices), and a social definition of culture (as a way of life). The third type introduces the concept that the theory of culture is the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life and is directly applicable to the social and cultural construct of ritual. I will analyze how pivotal experiences can be manifested through rituals that become a part of our everyday life, creating a structure and pattern that opens the door for change and for creativity to develop and prosper. Geertz (1977) argued,

Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena. (p. 145)

This balance between the “meaning” and the “action” involved in a ritual may form the identity of a community within a cultural setting. The next section of the literature review will expand on these ideas through the concepts of the wounded healer and the artist as outsider linked to the in-between concept of liminality. Furthermore, the link between the shifting of identity, regeneration, and untapped or dark areas of the mind will be analyzed.

Transformation and Consciousness in the Context of Making Art

Archetypes

Archetypes represent universal patterns of human nature and could have a recurring representation in a particular human culture. In traditional societies, artists often replicated imagery and archetypal symbols to make ceremonies and rituals meaningful. In this specific context, the contribution of art lies in its ability to solidify and enhance the social cohesion (Dissanayake, 1988). Furthermore, archetypes help readers understand and identify with characters and situations. For example, most creative people will identify with the concept of a fresh start and rebirth as one of the pillars for any creative practice. Moreover, anyone who has undertaken any type of creative project may relate to the symbolic journey that starts with the moment a decision is taken to create something new. Staring at a blank canvas or paper can reveal fears and uncertainty otherwise hidden; this is coupled with an inner necessity to let go of preconceived ideas and start fresh, almost rebirthing ourselves through the act of creation. Part of the experience is letting go of the past as well as harnessing the knowledge gained from experiences in order to create anew. As we will learn in the portrait section in Chapter IV and the themes analyzed in Chapter V, the three artists in the study have gone through a process of rebirth and renewal, becoming the hero of their stories. The hero archetype is a well-travelled model in personal narratives as favored by Carl Jung and Campbell after him with a journey filled with hurdles, serendipitous events, and ultimate achievements that the student might encounter. This model can be traced back in several ways; for example, in the Middle Ages, the view of romance was a chronicle of the hero's journey on a quest with a structure resembling the events in the life of the three artists in the study, as we will discover in Chapter IV.

In the following sub-section of the literature review, we will discover how the archetypal concept of the wounded healer creates opportunities for healing through

change and transformation. Moreover, the concept of the wounded healer has a long history found in anthropological, psychological, and literary sources and is deeply rooted to the idea of transformation. According to medical anthropologist Joan Halifax (1979), who specializes in religion and psychiatry, the shaman is the quintessential wounded healer that goes through a debilitating illness or accident during the initiation and is healed in the process; thus, the illness becomes the vehicle to a higher state of consciousness. Moreover, the archetypal concept of the wounded healer was deeply explored by psychologist Carl Jung and based on the Greek myth of the wounded physician, whose own personal wounds and vulnerable manner improve his power to heal (perhaps in an unconscious manner). T. S. Eliot (1985), arguably the most important English-language poet of the 20th century, wrote, “The wounded surgeon plies the steel/That questions the distempered part;/beneath the bleeding hands we feel/The sharp compassion of the healer’s art” (p. 181). I see the wounded healer as a metaphor for the artist who shapes her creative work and perhaps her identity over a lifespan with multiple transitions, which might include the internalization of traumatically intense experiences that become an integral part of the creative process. This concept and how it relates to the dark side of the mind will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter V.

The Artist as Outsider and the Meaning of Liminality

Sometimes artists struggle with the issue of not belonging in the society at large; training and degrees in art do not always bring social and financial recognition and lack a clear prescription of rules that exist in careers such as law, medicine, and business. Furthermore, artistic work has an inherent degree of ambiguity and uncertainty. Moreover, the anthropological term *liminality* represents a transitory and in-between space that many artists experience, thus creating a perception of being an outsider. Victor Turner (1967) writes about this concept of outsiderhood that exemplifies transition including marginal or liminal phases as a condition of ambiguity, paradox, and confusion

(p. 97). Taking into account Turner's concept of liminality as a state of uncertainty and outsiderhood, one could argue there are strong similarities to the artist.

In *The Evolving Self*, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1982) writes, "Growth always involves a process of differentiation, thus creating out of the former subject a new object to be taken by the new subjectivity" (p. 31). Kegan also writes about the ways in which individuals experience shifts of consciousness through recurring phases of stability and change during their lives. Furthermore, the literature (Boyd, 1989, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1988) brings attention to the stages of transformation as receptivity, recognition, and a final stage of "grieving," recognizing that an established pattern of meaning is gone. In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) write about conceptual gateways that are transformative, occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject (p. ix). Moreover, Threshold Concepts as an analytical educational framework was originated by Meyer and Land (2005) during the "Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses" conference. Life thus becomes a series of changes and transformations, and we are confronted with continual shifting and tensions, deconstructing and then constructing our identities over and over. This destruction of the ego could also be equated with the idea of ignorance and the role it plays for the artist. To borrow Foucault's (1963) terminology, the "wisdom of fools" is a forbidden form of wisdom that presages ultimate bliss as well as supreme punishment (p. 22), and Halifax (1982) argues that a deep process of psychic turbulence (sometimes associated with mental illness) may awaken the images of the mythic imagination, arming the shaman (or artist) with insight and understanding.

It could be argued that, from a creative perspective, identity can be seen as a self-entity that has to be destroyed, penetrating deeply into a deep psychological maze in order to extract order out of chaos. In the next sub-section, we will see how this journey might take an unexpected turn into untapped psychological areas of the mind.

Transformation as Related to Deep, Untapped Areas of the Mind

As described in the previous section, the liminal or in-between state described by Turner (1967) can be related to the artistic process where the artist finds herself during the process of creation, where the journey into darkness and uncertainty might stimulate the artistic activity to oftentimes more profound levels of creative knowledge.

Interestingly, Foucault (1963), in his book *Madness and Civilization*, describes how madness is related to knowledge. Furthermore, modern psychiatry has found parallels between the psychological combustion of certain archaic spiritual practices such as *Shamanism*, an anthropological term identifying healers that act as intermediaries between the human and the spirit worlds, and the process symptoms experienced by individuals diagnosed as schizophrenic. Moreover, the term *shaman*, derived from the Vedic *sram*, has influences from Paleo-Oriental civilizations perhaps going back to Neanderthal times, weaving together the ordinary world and the philosophical image of the cosmos (Halifax, 1979). According to Lewis-Williams (2002), “madness is culturally defined: what counts as insanity in one society may be valued in another” (p. 130) and might be described as psychosis, post-traumatic stress disorder with psychotic features, death of the ego, awakening of the kundalini, mysticism, gnosis, the dark night of the soul, etc. All these terms share the theme of change and transformation, which might be spiritual at times and encompass a sense of renewal or rebirth after a traumatic experience is overcome.

Furthermore, the literature shows that an experience of non-ordinary realities is sometimes induced by a personal crisis, and psychiatrist John Weir Perry (1974) describes this process as “the renewal of the self.” Perry acknowledges the acceptance of extremes in his work, *The Far Side of Madness*, where psychosis is regarded as a phase in a developmental process that holds a visionary state of consciousness and elevates the individual to experience a positive evolution of the self that goes beyond health or

disease. In *The Politics of Experience*, Scottish psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (1967) writes,

From the point of view of a man alienated from his source, creation arises from despair and ends in failure. But such a man has not trodden the path to the end of time, the end of space, the end of darkness, and the end of light. He does not know that where it all ends, there it all begins.... (p. 38)

The artist is a seeker of knowledge that has to embark on a journey to discover the “jewel” or “grail” of creativity; as cited by Foucault (1963), in Jérôme Cardan’s words, “wisdom, like other precious substances, must be torn from the bowels of the earth” (p. 22); thus the artist/shaman undergoes a deep change or transformation that might take her through dark and unknown waters to unravel the hidden portions of the psyche. For Foucault, the treasure of wisdom is hidden like an inaccessible truth or even a secret, and “when man deploys the arbitrary nature of his madness, he confronts the dark necessity of the world” (p. 23). I wonder if as artists we are drawn to explore this “dark necessity” of our own psyches and if the process of acquainting ourselves with the darkness has an effect on our creativity: does the exploration of our dark side assist in our creative endeavors or block our intentions to create? In the following subsection of the literature review, we will learn more about the concepts of consciousness and imagination and how they relate to what artists experience as moments of change.

Spectrum of Consciousness and Guided Imagination

Research backs up the idea that there is more than one consciousness. American psychologist William James (1902), who taught philosophy, psychology, and physiology at Harvard University, noted that there are several types of consciousness in addition to the normal or waking consciousness, and cognitive psychologist Colin Martindale (1981) argued the importance of understanding the irrational thought (of the poet) as well as the rational thought (of the laboratory), inquiring about the emotional effect on cognition. Waking consciousness is concerned with problem solving, and Laughlin, McManus, and

d'Aquili (1992) write about fragmented consciousness and how we constantly shift between outward-directed to inward-directed states. Specifically, inward-directed consciousness is characterized by dream-like states and can be induced by sensorial deprivation that may be induced by a reduction of external stimuli, a method adopted by Eastern meditation techniques. An example of reducing external stimuli by the use of ritual through a model of pattern and repetition is the practice of Nadi Suddhi, also called alternate nostril breathing or nerve purification. I first learned the technique at an Integral Yoga Institute meditation and yoga retreat in New York City's West Village center in 1998 and can personally vouch for its ability to increase a balanced state of mind. During Nadi Suddhi, the air gradually moves in and out of alternating right and left nostrils, creating a physical change through this very specific breathing pattern, generating a peaceful mental state that results in a quiet and steady state of mind, allowing the artist to better concentrate on the creative task. The yogi/ni usually engages in this practice before meditation practice, and it can be used at any time to calm and steady the mind. In fact, I use it frequently as a part of my own work to induce a more flowing artistic practice. Nadi Suddhi can be seen as an example of a pivotal experience or moment of change, facilitating the flow of creativity by enabling a calm and balanced state of mind. This is just one example of a Pivotal Moment that has a ritualistic component generating change, then turning things around and energizing an artistic activity. An example of inward-directed consciousness (metaphorically speaking) with the creative process is the artist who withdraws into her studio, reducing external stimuli to fully focus on her work.

A reduction of stimuli coupled with rhythmic drumming is used in several spiritual traditions to induce a trance-like state. A parallel between the trance-like states and creativity can be traced back to Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) five stages of creativity: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and elaboration. Specifically, the phase *comprising insight* could also be described as inspiration, a "wholly inexplicable

satisfaction or excitement” (Ghiselin, 1952, pp. 24-25) or “divine frenzy” (Jung, 1923, p. 122).

Guided imagination goes beyond what we normally understand by the word *imagination*. In anthropologist Anna-Leena Siikala’s (1992) phrase, it consists in “setting aside the critical faculty and allowing emotions, fantasies and images to surface into awareness” (pp. 105-106). This term brings to mind a spiritual dream, or what Tibetans call *dreams of clarity*, where we enter the imagination of a Mind that is greater than the one circumscribed by our self (Keeney, 1996). Cranton (2016), one of the foremost thinkers in the area of Transformative Learning, wrote about extrarational perspectives that include ways of knowing through imagination, affect, metaphor, the arts, symbol, spiritual experiences, etc. Guided imagination can be successfully engaged during the process of making art in order to birth fresh and unusual ideas, unencumbered by outer restrictions. Lewis-Williams (2002) writes that hallucinations are mostly culture-specific, and I would like to add that the complex interweaving of mental images and sensations that is generated displays close similarities to the process of creation that the artist experiences. I would like to argue that the creative process has an important element of motion/fluidity, tying in with current theories of identity as being in constant motion (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982), as will be discussed in the next section of this literature review.

Psychological Identity and Creativity

In *The Dynamics of Creation*, English psychiatrist and author Anthony Storr (1972) argues that creative/artistic identity is an amalgam of a combination of qualities rather than one specific attribute, and most theorists agree that artists are individuals who do not exist independently from society; culture as a social construction is thus integrated with a

person's identity. Cranton (2016) summarized the relationship between the individual and the social process:

We see the world through a lens constructed in our interaction with our social context. We also make decisions related to our perceptions in our own way. We are individuals living in and influenced by our social world, and we are individuals with important differences among us in the way we live, learn, work and develop. (pp. 61-62)

Identity is influenced by environment as well as surrounding circumstances; therefore, by altering an individual's space, we have the capacity to make the environment (for example, a specific geographic location) more conducive to deepening a creative practice. An environment conducive for creative work requires a combination of qualities that might merge social, psychological, and spiritual aspects, such that the artist can freely express herself without any societal concerns or restricting rules. In Chapter V, as a part of the common themes, we will analyze the impact of geography and environment on the artistic practice.

A review of the literature suggests that there are multiple definitions of identity, but one that resonates with me is developmental psychologists Robert Kegan (1982) and Erik Erikson's (1968) view of identity as shaped over a lifespan with multiple cycles and transitions. The idea of an artistic practice as expanded and flexible, that is in permanent flux, is directly related to current theories on identity and development of the self (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982; Perry, 1974). Erikson (1968) describes the stages of development as marked by a conflict, then resolution, resulting in a favorable outcome—for example, intimacy versus isolation, coupled by an important event that resolves this conflict. According to Erikson's research, it is each person's role to live both extremes of each life stage, holding the tension without rejecting the challenge it encompasses. Once these extremes are accepted and understood as required and useful, the lesson of that stage can be realized and assimilated. I see a similarity between this concept and the process the artist goes through; sometimes it is necessary to explore different and even

extreme ways of creating—or not creating—in order to achieve a favorable result. In Chapter V, we will analyze the impact of “not creating,” or taking an extended break from an artistic practice.

Kegan (1982) argues that identity is something that continually renews itself over and over, and Erikson (1968) locates the self or individual identity between the daily experience in society and the historical moment, offering a view of identity that is in continuous flux. Therefore, it seems that an artistic practice is developed over the different stages of our lives, implying that flux, change, and flexibility are integral parts of the process. Moreover, for psychologist Michael Hanchett Hanson (2010), creativity is a distinctly modern concept that helps us engage and manage change, and change is part of the cycle that develops our identity. Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that creativity is not linear and that its various stages are in permanent motion, this idea of constant change becoming an integral part of artistic expression. Finally, the concept of a generative identity is linked to the spiritual concepts of rebirth and renewal, leading to the next section of the literature review, where I will explore the connection of spirituality to a personal and artistic quest.

Spirituality and the Quest for Meaning in Making Art

The aforementioned idea of creativity as non-linear and fluid is directly linked to the concept of a formation of identity that is in constant motion over the course of a lifetime. This idea of identity as generative and in flux is also linked to psychological and spiritual theories of renewal and rebirth. Land et al. (2010) cite Cross (1999), saying that “the periods of greatest personal growth are thought to lie in the unnamed and poorly-defined periods between stages” (p. 262). Furthermore, Jungian psychiatrist John Weir Perry’s (1974) concept of the “renewal of the self” displays some parallels to the imagery of shamanic rituals, especially the ceremonial pattern of sacral kingship during the New

Year festivals found in the Mediterranean region, the Near and Far East, and Europe. Moreover, in *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner (1967) argues that during the rituals there is an “undoing, dissolution, decomposition ... accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” (p. 99).

Spirituality is sometimes profoundly misunderstood and is always a controversial term. How does one determine its connection to pivotal experiences, or moments of change, in the context of an artistic practice? I would like to argue that there are certain experiences that resemble passing through a portal, from which a new experience opens up (Land et al., 2010). Furthermore, in *Reassembling the Social*, Bruno Latour (2005) argues that there is nothing more difficult to grasp than social ties. His “it’s traceable only when it’s being modified” (p. 159) is similar to the concept of spirituality in the context of artistic work. The connection between Pivotal Moments and spirituality can only be traced through the modifications that occur in the inner domains of our being while immersed in the creative process. The challenge for a researcher is to measure these shifts in a manner that is objective, yet doesn’t compromise the process of the subject in the study. I would like to use Latour’s metaphor of drawing a map with an itinerary meant to unravel the connection between Pivotal Moments and spirituality and translate it to our journey to discover a unique treasure. In order to do this, we need to understand the spiritual by non-traditional means, whereby a much wider notion of the term has to be developed, one that allows it to trace connections perhaps through the steps the artist takes while embarking on the journey of creation.

It can be argued that there is a distinction between spirituality and religion, and to outline the distinction, I gathered data from pertinent sources and identified literature to analyze the difference: according to contemporary holistic theories, spirituality is differentiated from religion and viewed as an awareness of the interconnectedness of everyone and everything, and associated with existential concerns such as the search for the ultimate meaning and purpose in our lives (Wright, 2000). In addition, recent

understandings about spirituality have been derived from the sciences and the deep ecology movement (Bowers, 2005; Capra & Apfel-Marglin, 2002; Laszlo & Seidel, 2006), addressing a deep connection between nature and humans as a way to attend to the environmental crisis, providing a link between personal and social contexts. Latour (2005) establishes this link between the personal and the social with what he calls “actors” (anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference) and “networks”—the work, the movement, the flow, and the changes. A network is not a thing but the recorded movement of a thing, a tool to help describe something, not what is being described. For example, in a drawing the lines are not what is to be rendered but what has allowed the artist to give the impression of depth before being erased, creating no in-formation, only trans-formation.

Finally, over the course of history, artists have embodied an intimate relationship between creativity and the search for meaning. Some examples are the 13th-century poet Rumi, the ancient Chinese Buddhist poet, painter, and musician Wang Wei, St. John of the Cross, Leo Tolstoy, Vincent Van Gogh, Emily Dickinson, Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, and more recently Joseph Beuys. In his seminal work, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Russian painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky (2009) compared spiritual life to a triangle where artists have an important mission to lead others to the top of this mysterious pyramid. He described the language and properties of form and color as starting with the physical realm and leading into a spiritual dimension that originates from an “inner necessity” or the place where all great art emerges. At a panel at Emory University (2010) that was part of the initiative “Creativity: Arts and Innovation,” the XIV Dalai Lama, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker, and actor Richard Gere discussed how East and West hold differing views on the creative process. The panelists observed how in the West there is a belief that creativity originates from a place of torment, while in the East creativity and great art stem from balance.

Summary

In this chapter, we have seen how the concepts of creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality have enabled one another to become active players in a creative practice. Furthermore, there is an association between the word *creativity* and active movement or the idea of bringing something forth and even giving it life. I am interested in this idea of active movement as related to an artistic practice and have created a structural frame, naming it a Pivot, and I am assuming that these actions and concepts can be examined in the context of pivotal practices or moments of change. In Chapter IV, we will understand the pivotal dynamic in the process of painting through the narrative accounts of three bicultural women, and the thematic analysis in Chapter V will help us understand what those practices, activities, and concepts are.

Moreover, in the quest for meaning in art, we are not creating new theories or material with informative value but rather transforming our inner landscape. According to Land et al. (2010), “meaning-making takes place under an orienting frame of reference, a structure of assumptions within which one’s past experience assimilates and transforms new experiences” (p. 30). It can be argued that there is a shift in consciousness, and Kegan (1982) writes that these shifts are experienced by individuals through recurring patterns or phases of stability and change.

Finally, I presented a review of the relevant literature illuminating the aforementioned concepts of creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality, layering them in a systematic relationship. The contents of this study are also grounded by the experience and outcome of my personal, lifelong experience as an artist. This motivation is coupled with a desire to engage in a collaborative and co-creative research project with the artists I interviewed, a process that

will be discussed in Chapter III as I elaborate on the methodology used for the present study.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter II, the review of the literature constructed a strong structural base covering the topics of creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality. Chapter III is a multi-dimensional construct that elaborates on the methodology. First, the chapter presents an overview of the study, including a circular visual data chart; then, it proceeds with the method of inquiry, data collection, and the selection of the participants. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection piece to illuminate the context and thinking that helped inform this dissertation.

Methodological Design

Overview of the Study

In order to understand the research question: *Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, what would the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of creative change or transformation, (b) the nature of these pivotal moments, and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself?*, a qualitative case study was designed and conducted.

First, to refine the research design and data collection skills, I engaged in a pilot study in New York City in 2012. Second, I engaged in a qualitative case study of a

bounded unit, including three main data collection procedures: interviews, observations, and the study of documents. Furthermore, an important consideration for the research is that I personally know two of the three artists I selected, thus making it easier to facilitate arrangements and gain access to their work. Finally, I find qualitative research provides the flexibility needed to answer questions regarding the perspectives and experiences of my subjects, while accommodating the artists' specific situations.

Table 2. Data Chart

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA SOURCE	DATA TYPE	DATA USE / PURPOSE	TREATMENT
<i>Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, what would the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of transformation, (b) the nature of these pivotal moments, and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself?</i>	(1) Interviews (2) Observations (3) Study of documents, physical artifacts, and archival data, including personal communications and supporting literature such as group exhibition catalogues and websites	(1) Accounts of PM in the context of an artistic activity such as painting (2) Accounts of PM in opening up transitional spaces (3) Accounts of PM in creating transformation in the context of making art	(1) Interviews will allow me to identify potential themes in PM (2) Observations will allow me to examine firsthand how PM inform creative work (3) Documents will provide in-depth background information to understand and describe the role of PM	(1) Color-coding data as labels (2) Color-coding data as descriptors (3) Color-coding data as indicators (4) Isolate themes in interviews

Field Setting and Consent Procedures: Interview Data Collection

Pilot Study

In order to refine my research design and data collection skills, I worked on a pilot study in New York City that was completed in the spring of 2012. I selected three female artists—Anita Boeninger, Katy Alonza Hamer, and Linda Meo—and tested four qualitative data collection procedures: interviews, observation, focus group interviews, and collection and use of documents and archival data. I conducted a total of three in-depth interviews and transcribed two of them. I then participated in and transcribed two observations. Lastly, I organized, designed, and conducted a focus group. In addition, I simultaneously collected relevant documents, such as online and print-based journals, theoretical texts, and exhibition catalogues.

The two observations took place at the artists' studios: Anita Boeninger's studio is located in Harlem (Manhattan), and Katy Alonza Hamer's studio is located in Williamsburg (Brooklyn). The observations took place on October 30, 2011, and on March 9, 2012, and included a group of six women.

The third data collection procedure was the organization, design, and analysis of a focus group. For practical reasons, I decided to test this data collection procedure at my work place in New York and enlisted colleagues that were willing to donate their time and insights. In order to maintain confidentiality, I am withholding the real name of the company and people involved, as well as specific details that would compromise the classified aspect of the project.

The fourth data collection procedure I tested included the artists' work and archival data, including personal communications and supporting literature, such as group exhibition catalogues and the artists' websites.

After my experience conducting the pilot study, I realized that a wealth of information could be obtained from conversation; thus, after careful evaluation of all four

methods, I decided to use interviews as a primary method for data collection, supported by observations. Finally, I also learned that to achieve optimum results, some of the methodological steps could be adjusted, and the measures I took will be discussed below.

Data Collection Steps

Throughout the data collection process, I have been referring to Maxwell's (2005) respondent validation method: (1) asking for continuous feedback about the data I collect from my advisor Dr. Judith M. Burton, my doctoral cohorts in the Art and Art Education Program, and the three artists in my study; and (2) revising my interview protocol based on feedback from my advisor, doctoral cohorts, and the flow of the interview process.

In addition to the interviews, the case studies have been constructed from each person's personal communications and supporting literature, such as group exhibition catalogues and the artists' websites. I have been updating the data periodically since the three women in my study have been going through life transitions and I have moved countries several times, adding new perspectives and insights to the research.

Furthermore, I adjusted my research question several times based on feedback from my advisor Dr. Burton, and found that these revisions have impacted my interview protocol and observation guidelines. One of the main changes was the transition from *Ritual Practices* to *Pivotal Practices*. I learned that while the role and concept of ritual remains an important aspect of this research and the creative process, Pivotal Moments have become the main component of this study. Furthermore, in *Threshold Concept and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) argue that transformation is literally going beyond one's extant form and that it will be determined by context, and according to Kelly and Cranton (2009), transformative learning is not independent of content, context, or a discipline. Moreover, for the purposes of this study, the content, context, or a discipline are reflected in the transitional or liminal space that may lead to space of change; thus, liminality has become another key aspect of this dissertation.

Changes in sampling and selection criteria. In the early conceptualization of my research, it seemed essential to work with artists that were geographically close by and led fully independent lives devoted to their creative practice. Based on these criteria, I had selected three female artists for the pilot study—Anita Boeninger, Katy Alonza Hamer, and Linda Meo. All American citizens and New York residents, they ranged from ages 32 to 55, were single, and had no children at the time the research was conducted. Furthermore, based on the work completed for my doctoral certification, dissertation seminars, and research classes, I implemented several changes as I continued my investigation. First, I opened up the sampling to women who have a family, since the literature showed environment and context are key factors for transformational learning (Kelly & Cranton, 2009). To clarify, by *family* is meant not only partner and children but anyone close to the artist, for example, meaningful individuals such as Leeorah’s dancing mentor. This is not to say that the artists in the past pilot study didn’t have close relationships, but rather, based on the learnings, for the current research, I regarded those relationships as an integral part of the construction of the artists’ portraits in Chapter IV and thematic analysis in Chapter V.

Second, an additional change in my sampling process was the expansion of the geographic area of the subjects. For the pilot study, I focused on three American artists living and working in New York, and although all three women had temporarily lived abroad—Anita lived in Germany as a young child, Katy spent limited periods of time in Germany, Italy, and Ghana for her university studies, and Linda in Italy—it was limited to a restricted time and mostly focused on a specific experience. I chose to open the study to artists that had built a life as adults in a different culture, where these life transitions became meaningful events, even leading to new identities. This is aligned with Kegan’s (1982) theory that identity is something that continually renews itself over and over and Hanson’s (2010) statement that creativity is a distinctly modern concept that helps us engage and manage change. Furthermore, anyone who has relocated to different countries

understands what it means to start over and the effort it takes to establish a network of friends, colleagues, and family, as well as show how moving to a different culture changes one's outlook on life and often forces a break in an activity, for example, a creative practice. Given that in December 2012 I relocated back to Europe, I thought that limiting my interviews to North American, New York-based artists would create a methodological constraint, confining the results.

After a lengthy search in different countries, I selected and interviewed artists with the following characteristics: accomplished artistic careers, work that is inspired/created from the synergy of at least two different cultures, carries a positive message, and has a social conscience. It was not important that artists were self-taught or had university degrees in art. I did not define "accomplished artistic careers" in terms of financial gain, given that, for me, the pursuit is more of a research and passion activity rather than a breadwinning one. Nor was part of the criteria to have had many exhibitions, although some of the artists that are part of my study have an extensive record. Finally, an important consideration in my sampling process that didn't change from the pilot study is the previous relationship I had with the artists. Two of the three artists I selected for the research are known to me personally, thus making it easier to facilitate arrangements for the research and gain access to their work.

I met Carolina in Venice, Italy, in 2007, while we were pursuing graduate work in painting, and have become thoroughly acquainted with her art, as we have painted in the same space and exhibited our work together on several occasions. Furthermore, we were living at the same time in Venice, New York, and Paris, experiencing moments of change that proved to be impactful for our creative practice. In his seminal work, *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner (1967) wrote that there is an "in-between" time and place in social transformation and relocation that he termed "liminality," and the review of the literature in Chapter II revealed that this "in-between" period is full of ambiguity and tension, a time when "old configurations of social reality are increasingly seen to be in jeopardy,

but new alternatives are not yet at hand” (Brueggemann, 1995. pp. 319-320). When I left New York and relocated to Paris at the end of 2012, Carolina was an invaluable support system. Over the course of 2013, while we were both living in Paris, we saw each other on a weekly basis and nurtured conversations about our creative practice and the challenges we faced, and reflected on the journey ahead. During this transitional time, our friendship matured through immediacy and trust, a time that proved invaluable for the research and data collection process a couple of years later. To this day, the communication continues to flow, creating an atmosphere for our conversations that is colored by the deep friendship that has united us for over a decade.

I have known Elise since 2007, when I was a visiting artist at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, where she now heads the Art Department. Although we were not in touch, I thought highly of her process, hearing about her progress through a common friend who now heads the Philosophy Department at the University of Puget Sound. Elise is an academic whose life and career are devoted to the arts; she teaches painting wholeheartedly and maintains a successful private painting practice, having been recognized widely in the United States. I thought of her as a perfect match for my research, given her grounded and authentic personality, and dedicated artistic practice.

I met Leeorah through a work colleague in Basel, Switzerland, and the moment my colleague sent me her profile and I looked at her website, I knew that she would be a perfect fit, providing a good balance to the other two artists. Leeorah is the quintessential free spirit that left behind a “normal” life for one filled with adventure. She is the archetype of the adventurer who is not afraid to break the rules and to find her own path. At 61 at the time of the interviews, she had accomplished all the expected, conventional milestones in life—marriage, kids, career—and had given everything up to start anew and find her true calling: a life devoted to healing through body work, art, and writing. In

Chapter IV, we will learn about her many adventures and struggles along the way to becoming a mature, successful, and independent healer-artist-writer.

Leeorah represents the free spirit, the untamed creative energy who exudes passion and color; Carolina is a devoted painter deeply connected to her roots and family, always seeking to improve while leaving a legacy for her children; and Elise is an academic who successfully balances teaching with her own art practice, is grounded, and works well within the system. I feel fortunate that these three women painters living in different countries and with such different personalities and backgrounds agreed to work with me. While not generalizable, they represent rich examples, providing a broader significance for women artists across different cultures.

Changes in approaches to data collection and conduct in the field. Throughout the dissertation seminars at Teachers College and in preparation for my doctoral certification, I developed a preliminary interview questionnaire, initiated the preliminary sampling process, began studio visits, and performed multiple interviews during the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012, which were included in the pilot study. The goal of this exercise was to test each of the four primary data collection techniques—interviews, observation, focus groups, and collection of documentation and archival data. It was an invaluable experience that helped facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the methodology and its application to field-related problems. Furthermore, I learned that for the purpose of my study and area of interest, interviews are the preferred data collection procedure, followed by observation.

Sampling and confidentiality. The qualitative case studies for the research documented the work of three women artists living and working in South Africa/Australia, Tacoma, Washington, and Paris, France. Leeorah Hursky, Elise Richman, and Carolina Alfonso share several characteristics, range from ages 35 to 61, and have lived and worked in several continents. As noted in the literature review, Turner (1967) described the term *ritual* as applied to social transitions, and moving to a different

country can be considered an important social transition. Furthermore, I am interested in art as a global practice and from a multicultural perspective; thus, I selected artists that have international experiences and/or mindset. Moreover, geography is a Pivot or a turning point, and as we will see in Chapter V, it becomes a key pivotal experience for the three artists in the study.

I consciously selected artists whose primary medium is painting but that expand their creative practice to other areas, such as healing and writing, as I am interested in multi-creative experiences crossing disciplines and encompassing art in many forms. The thematic analysis of the data in Chapter V will show how what I am calling Pivotal Moments can be expressed through different creative outlets, for example, painting, writing, and dancing.

Furthermore, to ensure confidentiality, at the end of each interview, I gave each artist a chance to comment on anything that occurred to them that they want to keep off the record. Moreover, they had the opportunity to edit the data, ensuring complete accuracy of the information.

Finally, all responses were supported in a positive manner, inviting the artists to interpret their work and creative process without restrictions, establishing and encouraging a safe environment. Throughout the entire process, the goal has been open and honest communication, leading to reciprocal dialogue and resulting in rich and insightful data.

Data Organization and Analysis

After having tested the four primary data collection techniques in the pilot study, I decided the research would be primarily based on oral history interviews that were transcribed, color-coded, and structured into patterns and themes. The interviews were supported by observation, and a collection of documents and archival data. Interviews

are the method of oral historians, and by looking at oral history interview methods, there is the possibility of merging the private with an historical perspective. From these patterns, the themes emerged, and three distinct qualitative case studies were written.

The structure and sequence of the interview questions were carefully developed to obtain maximum engagement from the three subjects, encouraging deep, thoughtful reflection relevant to the study. The interview questions were crafted around the concepts of creativity, ritual, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality to understand how they have enabled one another to become active players in a creative practice. Furthermore, the goal was for the interview protocol to encourage an active dialogue, resulting in personal connections to be established between researcher and artists; transcripts of each interview session were created in a word processing program, then filed under the artist's name and date. After reviewing and organizing the data from the three case studies, transcripts were thematically color-coded.

To improve my data collection guides, I referred to Maxwell's (2005) respondent validation method, implementing the following steps: (1) ask for continuous feedback about the data I collect from the three artists in my study; and (2) revise my interview questions to have a complete, detailed, and objective interview protocol that translates into rich and insightful data.

Moreover, I used Maxwell's (2005) rich data strategy through long-term involvement with the three artists in my study and careful transcription of interviews and observation notes in order to provide a solid grounding to test my research ideas.

Limitations/Validity Issues of this Study

While preparing the research, I gave some serious thought to possible validity concerns. I was inspired by Geertz's (1973) story of a British gentleman in colonial India who, after learning that the world rested on the back of four elephants who rested on a

giant turtle, asked what the turtle stood on. The answer was “It is turtles all the way down” (p. 29), meaning there is no end, or no bottom turtle. Maxwell (2005) argued, “You do not have to get to the bottom turtle to get a valid conclusion. You only have to get to a turtle you can stand on” (p. 106). Due to the subjectivity inherent in art, I had to remember this concept and deal with my validity concerns to identify “a turtle that I can stand on.”

Latour’s (2005) previously mentioned concept of “tracing” social ties serves as inspiration to embark on my own journey to trace connections; thus, I have encountered the following validity concerns:

(1) Researcher bias: Although I have studied and practiced art most of my adult life and am fully aware of the necessity as a researcher to keep my personal experience separate from any critical findings, my possible subjectivity due to my closeness to the arts could be considered a validity concern.

(2) Due to the small number of artists I interviewed and the limited number of sessions, a validity concern preventing an in-depth analysis arose.

(3) A third and final validity concern is a misunderstanding of the concept of “ritual,” since it is a complex term with multiple definitions.

To ensure fact-based results, I gave a lot of thought to the above validity concerns and implemented the following strategy throughout the research:

(1) My background as a creative professional provides an important context to better understand the subject, and I have used my knowledge and experience to ensure results based on productive and insightful data. Therefore, to address my first validity concern, I used Maxwell’s (2005) intensive, long-term involvement strategy. Through repeated observations and interviews, I ruled out premature theories and allowed for more accurate data. Long-term participant observation coupled with follow-up interviews and conversations ensured complete data. Even after the formal interviews were completed, I kept in touch with artists and added data as they seemed relevant.

(2) To address the second validity concern, I used Maxwell's (2005) rich data strategy through long-term involvement and interviews. I kept refining the interview questions in order to have a detailed, complete, and objective interview protocol that led to descriptive and rich data. Moreover, I took great care and spent large amounts of time ensuring a detailed and accurate transcription of interviews and observation notes, providing a solid grounding to test my research ideas. To further address this validity concern, I chose three artists who live and work in different countries and used Maxwell's comparison strategy, drawing on and comparing their experiences to identify crucial factors. Finally, the literature in Chapter II described how art is necessary to humans for existential realization (Geertz, 1977) and that it drives us forward in the world (Hennessey cited in Wilson, 2010); thus, I chose to work with artists that reinforced this belief in order to provide deep and meaningful insights about the creative process.

(3) To address the third and final validity concern, I used the triangulation and comparison methods, collecting information from several domains and comparing their validity. Furthermore, I used an integrative approach and presented a review of the relevant literature from the fields of psychology, anthropology, and philosophy as related to creativity, ritual, archetypes, liminality, identity, transformation, and spirituality. Moreover, I regularly expanded and reworked my literature review to increase my understanding of existing theories and research as related to how these concepts have become active players to enhance a creative practice such as painting. Given that this research project took place over several years, I kept expanding my bibliography and re-read several books, discovering and assigning new meaning to "old" ideas that I was then able to incorporate into the research. Kegan (1982) writes that individuals' abilities to construct meaning evolve through regular periods of stability and change throughout their lifespan, bringing to mind the meaning-making journey that was reflected in this research project and how it evolved throughout the years. For example, there was an evolution regarding the terminology I used,

and at the beginning of the process, the concept of ritual was at the core of the study; however, as my reading, learning, interviews, and subsequent analysis progressed, I realized that the research question is really centered around the concept of pivotal moments. Thus, as noted on page 2, I changed the name from *Ritualistic Practices* to *Pivotal Moments*.

Finally, I used Maxwell's (2005) respondent validation method in asking for feedback about my data. Given that all interpretation of data is a projection of myself, I also used a sophisticated barbarian to ask questions and apply a different lens to my research. In order to rule out any misinterpretation and identify my own biases as a researcher, while writing the dissertation I solicited regular feedback from my advisor, Dr. Judith M. Burton, the artists in the study, and my doctoral cohorts at Teachers College.

Other Methodological Considerations

Qualitative case study seemed suitable to my research, as it is about understanding each individual artist as a distinct case with specific conditions. Qualitative research methods are fitting to answer questions regarding the subjective views and experiences of the three women in my study. Moreover, a qualitative research method seems well suited to understanding the personal and professional experience of artists and allowed for powerful immediacy through their oral histories. Notably, the majority of the knowledge created through this research is based primarily on the interviews of the three selected artists and the many conversations that followed.

Finally, qualitative research is a particularly valuable tool for exploring artistic practices and gathering reactions to a range of ideas. It is important to note that, as a method, it is exploratory in nature, seeking to provide direction and develop insight. Therefore, in reviewing the findings of this study, it should be understood that they consist of insights to guide future research decisions, rather than definitive conclusions.

Personal Reflection

This dissertation is the story of the three artists intertwined with my own experiences as I personally keep navigating the concepts I write about: creativity, liminality, transformation, and spirituality. The research process has become a pivotal moment in itself, and in the following reflection piece, I will bring forward the “story” of the dissertation’s methodological journey, including the struggles that became an integral part of the research. Thus, I will conclude Chapter III by bringing forward the methodology in the context of the researcher’s experiences.

I started the master’s program in Art and Art Education at Teachers College in 2009 and a year later was admitted to the doctoral program. At the time, I was a freelance graphic designer, and three years into the program I was offered a full-time staff position in Paris by my main client. Given that I am European and had wanted to go back and be closer to my aging mother and family, I decided to leave New York after the certification exam in December 2012 and continue the dissertation process overseas. Without knowing it, the move from New York to Paris immersed me in a transitional or liminal period, interrupting my research and painting practice. Turner (1967) writes about the interstructural character of the liminal, and how the neophytes are sometimes said to “be in another place.” I had underestimated the difficulties of a liminal period and found myself having a physical but not a social reality, spending about four years in an “in-between” space, encountering multiple organizational difficulties that delayed work on the dissertation and interrupted my artistic practice. Those “in-between” years were a rich learning experience, stimulating critical reflection and steering a pivotal dynamic. Those years also slowly sculpted the goal to be explored in this dissertation: defining these Pivots or turning points that are both ritualistic and open possibilities for change. What follows is a short description of the journey that took me toward this realization.

As described in Chapter II, the word *creativity* stems from the Latin term *creō* and means to create; there is an association with “active movement” or bringing something forth. When I moved to Paris, I thought I was following my path and “creating” a new life; however, it soon became evident that the job situation contributed to the feeling of “structural invisibility,” ambiguity, and neutrality that Turner (1967) writes about. Furthermore, I was caught in a bureaucratic nightmare and stayed over one year in Paris without proper paperwork, resulting in a constant state of anxiety, adding to an already difficult financial and family situation. I was in Paris working as a designer, and everything seemed wonderful, yet my reality was rather terrifying. In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner describes the symbolism surrounding the liminal persona as “complex and bizarre” (p. 96), and that is exactly how I felt; the liminal phase was “a troubling experience, not always characterized by positive emotions” (Land et al., 2010, p. xxxvii). Nonetheless, despite multiple logistical difficulties, I was able to make observations and take several online classes in psychology at Teachers College that helped refine my ideas in regard to the interview protocol and research question. During this time, one of the artists in this study, Carolina Alfonso, provided invaluable support. Our friendship, meaningful conversations, and artistic exchanges during that time solidified the groundwork for the research completed between 2014 and 2016. As I write this in 2018, I am realizing that this liminal time was a confirmation of my assumption that there is “something” that triggers an experience of transformation in a creative practice, which laid the groundwork for the research.

When I was just starting to feel at home, I was asked to leave Paris due to a major corporate restructuring, initiating another bureaucratic problem, but this time in obtaining my visa for Switzerland. I went back to the United States for a few months, and since I had no home, I “bounced around” among friends in Manhattan, Queens, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. I was a woman in her early 40s without a stable home, traveling with two suitcases and my dog Picasso, who has become quite a jetsetter and dissertation

mascot. When my visa came through, I relocated to Basel in the spring of 2014, and throughout 2015 my interview candidates were confirmed. Turner (1967) describes liminality partly “as a stage of reflection” (p. 105), “and the liminal group can be described as a community of comrades that transcend distinctions” (p. 100), bringing to mind the camaraderie and cathartic time I experienced with the artists during the interview process. Furthermore, during this liminal phase, I was fortunate to take an online class with one of North America’s foremost thinkers in the area of Transformative Learning, the late Dr. Patricia Cranton. Transformative Learning was an engaging and insightful class that greatly informed my research and the course of my research. The class also informed the interview and transcribing process, which took place in 2016 and half of 2017.

Finally, my European citizenship came through, and I moved back to France after residing three years in the neutrality of Switzerland, and in a surprising turn of events, my mother, who at that point had been diagnosed with a serious, irreversible, and deteriorating eye condition, joined me and my by-then two rescued dogs in Alsace, France. I had exited the liminal stage and crossed the “portal,” a metaphoric description of saying that I was going from one stage in life to another. I could finally “breathe,” and as a result the analysis of the data advanced smoothly. Land et al. (2010) describe a threshold as demarcating that which belongs within, “the place of familiarity and relative security, from what lies beyond that, the unfamiliar, the unknown, the potentially dangerous” (p. ix). Furthermore, the entire research process became an act of learning and identity formation (Land et al., 2010), aligned with the literature that identity is shaped over a lifespan with multiple cycles and transitions (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982).

I hope that the chapters that follow convey something of the engagement and vibrancy that characterized the research and analytical process. For the researcher, it was a challenging and insightful journey that “transformed an internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, and even world view” (Land et al., 2010, p. ix). Finally, the writing of

this dissertation has become a “living metaphor” of what I describe as a Pivotal Practice, namely, a trigger of change on multiple levels that opens possibilities for transformation.

Summary

Several factors sculpted the pathway of how the ideas of Pivotal Moments became the core of this dissertation: (1) the researcher’s work as an artist; (2) the researcher’s journey as described above, with the realization that there were occasions in which an apparent change was taking place, and the artistic practice temporarily stopped; (3) the three women painters in this study; and (4) the theoretical work described in Chapter II.

Chapter III elaborates on the methodology proposed for the study, including an overview of the pilot study that took place in New York City and the data collection process. The chapter also includes the selection criteria for the three artists and biographical sketches justifying the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes by bringing forward the methodology in the context of the researcher’s experiences through a reflective piece.

Chapter IV

PORTRAITS

Introduction

The portraits in this chapter have emerged from in-depth conversations with three artists living in North America, Europe, and South Africa in the second decade of the 21st century. The narratives they offered were constructed with this research project in mind and are focused on their background, personal views, and artistic practices.

My research interest concerns how and in what way Pivotal Moments open up transitional spaces in which transformation might occur in the context of a creative activity such as painting. By Pivotal Moments, I mean a dynamic that opens up psychological spaces, new ways of thinking for the artists. During the formal interviews, I addressed my research interest through a specifically crafted questionnaire. Furthermore, to craft the portraits, I distilled parts of the interviews based on color coding and the subsequent themes that arose. In Chapter V, themes are set into categories, and the relationships amongst the parts will be examined within those research categories. Moreover, to prepare the reader for the analysis in Chapter V, I conclude Chapter IV with a roadmap that has a written as well as a visual component. This roadmap helps illuminate the concept of Pivots.

While speaking with the artists, I was interested in unearthing reflections on their lives and art practice in order to discover if and how they experience moments of change in which space happens, the assumption to be explored has to do with defining those

Pivotal Moments. The organic and free-flowing questioning process led to sometimes unexpected narratives, resulting in portraits that will appear, at times, lightly sketched. Furthermore, when the artists deviated into other areas, I took this as an opportunity to explore a different angle and found a way to integrate the data while steering them back toward the problem, which seeks to define those Pivotal Moments.

Purposeful Sampling

Three female artists will be introduced in this chapter. This number was chosen according to the qualitative pilot study findings from 2012 and Creswell's (2007) argument that the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less depth in any single case. Therefore, three diversifies my potential findings without diluting the data. The participants were selected according to the following criteria: (1) age: three artists between the ages of 35 and 61 at the time the study started; (2) cultural background: participants represent different cultural backgrounds in order to allow a look into Pivotal Moments from a multicultural perspective. The three artists selected for the research live on different continents, and two of the three are familiar with a multicultural lifestyle becoming a part of their creative work processes; and (3) medium: the artists' primary medium is painting. However, the artists expand their creative practice to other art forms such as dance, writing, and design. Finally, an important consideration is that two of the three artists I know personally, thus facilitating arrangements for the research and easing access to their work.

Leeorah Hursky is originally from Cape Town, South Africa, and resided in Byron Bay, Australia at the time of the interviews. I was introduced to her in 2016 through a work colleague in Switzerland. Elise Richman is originally from Seattle and lives in Tacoma, Washington, in the United States. I met Elise in 2008 when I was a visiting

artist at the University of Puget Sound. Carolina Alfonso is an Ecuadorian artist based in Paris. I have known Carolina since 2007, when we met in graduate school in Italy. All formal interviews took place in 2016 and early 2017 in various locations, including Basel, Paris, New York, and Alsace (France) from my end, and Paris, Byron Bay, and Tacoma from the artists' end. The dialogues with the three women continued even after the formal interviews were completed, adding depth and richness to the data. Furthermore, the interview data were analyzed using color coding to define the themes that fall within the research categories that will be analyzed in Chapter V. I opted for color coding because, even though it is time-consuming, it makes it simple to see which parts of the text belong to which category and of the importance they have had to the interviewee, establishing the relationships amongst the parts. Moreover, given that I am a visually-minded researcher, this particular method is of relevance due to its focus on color. Finally, I find color coding to be an effective way of coding and analyzing interview data, as codes become keywords and short sentences that are assigned to statements in the interview transcript.

The interview questions were designed to be fluid and engaging, sometimes navigating in different directions as inspired by the flow of the conversation. This resulted in a rich and deep journey that provided insightful data covering varied subjects, such as childhood and art school memories, career changes, relationships, family, hurdles, and spiritual awakening.

Given that the questions were meant to unearth reflections, the narratives do not always start with family and origin. In some cases, the artists focused first on the painting process itself, for example, how color studies and texture inform their work. Or the focus was on the artist's self-discovery journey, channeling, through their work, trapped emotional energy and generating a sense of release and freedom. The conversations and topics were meant to reveal deep reflections according to the personalities and lives of the three participating women, resulting in a colorful and insightful tapestry of portraits.

Chapter IV presents three consecutive portraits: Leeorah Hursky, Elise Richman, and Carolina Alfonso. The data have been distilled, creating portraits that are drawn out of selected parts of the interviews based on the color coding. Furthermore, the subsequent themes that arose from the color coding will be developed and set into research categories in Chapter V. Moreover, after each written section, I have supplemented the written portraits with images to add a fuller and more evocative visual presence. I am calling this section a “Visual Portrait,” as it adds a rich visual layer to the written portrait through images of the artist’s world. Moreover, the three women are working visual artists, and the provided images give a more holistic and visual perspective than words alone can. The images are of the artists, their homes, studios, artwork, and meaningful environments that contributed to their creative practice.

Leeorah Hursky

Written Portrait

I was introduced to Leeorah through a work colleague in Switzerland in 2016, and at the time of the interviews, she was residing in Byron Bay, Australia. Leeorah generously shared her story over the course of three interviews during the summer of 2016. It kept unfolding and revealing insightful data about her journey from mother-housewife to healer-painter. I draw a portrait of her story intertwined with her own words in an attempt to give the flavor of her experience and gradual transformation.

Leeorah was born in South Africa in 1955 and comes from a privileged, middle-class family. She was well-loved and had a good upbringing; she was supported financially and didn’t have to struggle. Everything about her life was “normal” (Hursky, 2008, p. 22)—at least on the surface:

I was an average person who had no idea that there was a spiritual world, nor that I had latent abilities in me that connected to spirit. It wasn’t until my late twenties that my world changed. (Hursky, 2008, p. 12)

Leeorah was successfully working as a dental hygienist in Johannesburg and married to her first love, Karel, with whom she had two daughters. Although from the outside she seemed to have a normal life, she started having unusual experiences that didn't fit with her and her family's scientifically oriented background.

People would come to me and open their mouths, and I would look at their gums and go ... whoaahhh ... she's pregnant, or she's got leukemia.... Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, but somehow I just knew when the person I was working on had a more serious problem.... This amazed me, and I wondered how it was possible. I was medically trained at dental school; I had a medical background, my family were all in the medical field—one uncle was a famous surgeon in South Africa and my father was himself a dentist, but I couldn't tell them what was going on—they just wouldn't believe me. No one in my family spoke about spiritual issues, and there was nothing scientific that was happening here. (Hursky, 2008, pp. 12-13)

Leeorah moved on to work with difficult children in the dental practice, developing a system where dental instruments became friendly characters, giving funny names, for example, to the instruments or creating a painting with flying toothbrushes. She was invited by the dental school at the university to lecture to up to 500 students at a time on how to work with difficult children and wrote medical papers on how to deal with children in a dental environment (Hursky, 2008). To process her new experiences, Leeorah started attending an art class about once a week.

[I would] paint enormous canvases of what looked like tortured souls in rich oil colours. They were monsters, really, their faces traumatised with pain and sadness. At first I just thought it was a bit unusual, but maybe that was art – how was I to know? (Hursky, 2008, p. 12)

Interviews suggest that painting opened a transitional space for Leeorah where she was able to release her tension and process her new experiences. While Leeorah had extraordinary teachers from such diverse backgrounds as Hawaiian Shamanism and African dance—"I have had very good teachers in my life ... and just I see this as my University in life..." (ID, LH, 8-10-16)—she didn't formally study fine art.

I am actually an untrained artist and I have insisted on remaining untrained. I have come from a line of artists, my mother was an artist, my grandmother was an artist and I only discovered my own talent as an artist around about the age of 20. Ehmmm ... until that point it was my mother's and grandmother's story and at the age of 20 it was the first time I discovered oils. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

Leeorah was busy working, raising her two young daughters, and basically just surviving while the monsters in the paintings grew heavier and heavier. “[I] did four paintings that were so traumatized, and at that point I was like, oh my gosh, I am not just the average woman I have some deep problems inside of me” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

Art became a powerful outlet, leading to the writing and publishing of a book.

The art was just that I had this outlet to let go of what these monsters were, and at a point, I mean I had no idea what they were but need to be buried with these ... what are these scary things that are coming out ... so actually at that point in my life I published this book called *I used to paint monsters*. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

Leeorah's life was rapidly changing, and it had an effect on her marriage:

And the other very interesting thing was at the point when all the monsters were coming out, all I did was blame my ex-husband, like he was the reason of my misery, but in hindsight, of course, he wasn't. It was all my personal can of worms that had to be opened. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

The discovery of the “can of worms” triggered hidden and unexpected emotions. Leeorah grew depressed and started seeing a psychiatrist once a week who advised that she was having a spiritual awakening (Hursky, 2008, p. 13). Moreover, during her path to self-discovery, Leeorah had what she describes as her first spiritual experience during a shiatsu-style massage in Johannesburg.

When Leeorah moved with her husband to Australia, it proved to be significant for her self-growth and artistic practice. It was a country she didn't know much about, but by the moment they landed, she felt “a shift” in her life (Hursky, 2008 p. 14). Leeorah felt free and in Australia: “The layers of old fashionedness just fell off me and I was free to be the me that was inside me all along” (p. 14). As she was deepening her sense of self, Leeorah's painting process developed a sensitivity to the land and environment.

A few years after emigrating, her next act of renewal came with her divorce from Karel. After separating from her husband, Leeorah's journey was an archetypal one of self-acceptance and getting to know who she truly was.

Leeorah started seeing another psychiatrist, who uncovered trauma from her past: as an infant, she was in a car accident where she was thrown out onto a thorn bush, leaving life-long scars: "Still to this day, any big emotional traumas I go through are usually connected to the motor accident. I can become like a wounded child" (Hursky, 2008, p. 15). Her mom broke her spine, her dad was in severe shock, and the maid who was Leeorah's primary caretaker was instantly killed. Leeorah attributes her father's emotional distance and strained relationship with her mother to this accident. Furthermore, through therapy, Leeorah uncovered that she had been sexually abused as a child: "South Africa was such a troubled country to grow up in: The whites were misusing the blacks and the blacks were abusing the white children—and their parents never knew it" (p. 16).

Through these turbulent times, art became Leeorah's sanity and a powerful tool to help her let go of what these monsters were (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Art making and writing became practices that opened a space for healing in Leeorah's life: "I realized that for my own health's sake I need to be painting" (ID, LH, 8-10-16), and it can be argued that writing also became an indispensable therapeutic tool for the artist, who is a published author.

Research data suggest that painting and dancing opened the door to a transitional thinking space, a place where the South African artist was able to release her tension and work through hidden trauma, ultimately transforming her monsters into something meaningful. Moreover, although both painting and healing work became integral parts of Leeorah's journey of transformation, she does see them as two completely different things:

In both processes in the healing work and in the art, I am transcending normal reality. In the healing work, there is a big responsibility of first of all

making sure the person is safe and comfortable and being very aware of another's safety in whatever I am unveiling for the person.... So there is a big responsibility when I am working. When I am painting, there is NO responsibility at all. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

As previously mentioned, Leorah was formally trained as a dental hygienist and during the first three decades of her life was regarded as a "normal down to earth housewife/mother" and "basically saw things in black and white" (ID, LH, 8-16-16). When Leorah failed to renew her dental examination, she decided to change professional directions and engage in a holistic healing career. While studying Naturopathy in Sydney at Nature Care College, she encountered the Hawaiian Kahunas who came to do a demonstration of Hawaiian massage. The actual word *Kahuna* is sacred and reserved for one of the Hawaiian lineage, and it carries the deep respect that would be associated with a Rabbi or Priest in other belief systems (Hursky, 2008, p. 18). "I saw this body work demonstrated, and something inside of me just went 'YES,' that's for me" (ID, LH, 8-16-16), "it was like remembering an essential part of myself that I'd forgotten my whole life, something that I had done before" (Hursky, 2008, p. 19). Leorah trained with the Kahunas for several years on and off in Hawaii and Australia:

A lot of the training I did on Lanai was all about my own release.... Sometimes our energy level collapses and our energetic grids become entangled. When I do my healing work I blow away the energetic cobwebs, and smash any blockages apart. Even though I do bodywork on my clients, what that really means is that I'm working with their energy fields, so I'm an energy worker. (p. 26)

The profound experience with the Kahunas opened Leorah up to further subtleties of healing. For example, she developed the Akalani system with 28 symbols, "together with the symbols [these] vibrations are used to bring the body, soul, ancestors, and emotions into balance" (Hursky, 2008, p. 28). Furthermore, she describes her work with Akalani as connected to Hawaiian massage, or a big healing wave:

The purpose of Akalani is always to release what is blocked, just as water will always move sand that is blocking its way. In my work Akalani is

also like the waves, and my voice is like a wave that is getting the rhythm back into the client's body. (p. 42)

Over time, Leeorah's role as an energy worker evolved into a successful private healing practice in Australia and Europe, where she is often invited to lead workshops and private sessions. At the Sonnenstrahl Hotel in Kissberg, Southern Germany, her sessions are booked out the moment she arrives.

Leeorah feels that her soul's work is to bring others to their joy and beauty, and feels very honored by these gifts (Hursky, 2008, p. 35). Painting remains her personal friend, "the type of painting where you're releasing all of that energy and all of that rage" (ID, LH, 8-16-16). and a tool to transform her pain into something beautiful: "My frustration or my anger or my rage is great fuel for great work" (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Painting is a practice that opens a transitional thinking space of possibility and change. "So the canvas is what takes this darkness ... it can take the rage, it can take the frustration, it can take any other feeling without anyone being hurt upset ... there is such a freedom in that" (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

Moreover, as part of her journey of self-discovery, Leeorah enrolled in a dance workshop unearthing a freedom and abandonment she never imagined possible (Hursky, 2008) and unveiling the relationship between dance and healing work.

I can see now that dancing is like the flipside to my energy work because when I heal I have to be fully present, and when I dance it's all about the abandonment. One is about focus and the other passion and release. (p. 44)

This sense of freedom permeates Leeorah's life. "I can let everything out and that freedom is ... I think that is what I love most about creating (giggle). I have total freedom" (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Moreover, dance became a constant thread in Leeorah's life and a tool to heal and transform. Through dance, Leeorah gains access to an "in between" or transitional space where anything is possible. Leeorah wasn't always confident about dance; when at the age of six her mother took her to a ballet class, she refused to move. "I was this fat, redheaded, pudgy little kid and I had a lot of negativity put on me by my

mother because of my weight. Because of this I struggled for many years to accept myself for who I was” (Hursky, 2008, p. 44).

The transformational journey has helped Leeorah evolve from a scared child in a dance class where she felt out of place to a confident and strong healer that is proud of her body. Furthermore, Leeorah was deeply influenced by her South African background and the “rhythm” of the people and the land:

It’s a land of the most amazing rhythm. You see black people singing and dancing there all the time, chanting as they work. There’s always music around them, a tribal rhythm that runs through Africa. It’s the same rhythm in my blood, and it comes out when I dance” (Hursky, 2008, p. 47)

When Leeorah was introduced to the African dance kizomba, she felt an immediate connection. The word *kizomba* means “party” in the national language of Angola, and historians believe that the music from this dance is taken from zouk music originally from the French Caribbean. When tango spread through Europe, it influenced the kizomba; hence it is sometimes called the African tango. Coming from the salsa dance scene where the environment is highly competitive, Leeorah found with kizomba a safe place for self-expression:

I am not your average dancer, I am overweight, sixty whatever ... the desire to dance is strengthening me, sometimes it’s a struggle ... like men wouldn’t ask me to dance ... and I feel fat ... all the personal aspects that go along with a story. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

Leeorah had found her dance, both off and on the canvas: “I actually found my dance, it’s the dance that I do on the canvas” (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Moreover, she had found a way to channel her energy. Leeorah’s dance school in Cape Town profoundly affected her relationship with Angolans.

They all look after me, I am usually the only white one around, I am incredibly safe there, ehmmm ... so yes, that’s my preferred place; I am very at home there with Angolan men ehmmm ... and women. They are just delightful people, and it has been a wonderful experience for me. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

Dance is also a tool that helps Leeorah manage her childhood traumas. Through movement, the artist is immersed in a transitional space that becomes a therapeutic healing force leading to transforming her traumas into learning experiences. Furthermore, this healing force is enhanced due to the powerful connection she has with her dance teacher: “I moved to the point of just melting with him” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

He was healing me through his pure presence of being there.... Because he has no judgment, therefore I feel safe with him, therefore I feel loved in his presence, and he does that with everyone he dances with ... fat, old, young, it doesn't matter. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

For Leeorah, dance and painting are interconnected: “I am dancing with the paintbrush” (ID, LH, 8-8-16), creating performance art. “ It's mostly dancing and painting in one word (giggles). It's almost as if I am dancing with him when I am painting him, although he is with another [dance] partner” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

In her early 60s, Leeorah expresses gratefulness for her life and her painting. “Yeah, I am actually grateful at this point of my life at 61 years, and it serves me in life you know, so ... it serves me with the work that I do ... yeah, I am grateful” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

Moreover, Leeorah is thankful to have found painting as a way to overcome her internal struggles and sees it as a powerful tool of change: “I thank God for painting ... especially for having gotten rid of my own personal monsters ... to me it's a therapy” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

When asked about her vision for her future work, Leeorah anticipates more performance art projects that include dance, healing, and painting. The artist argues that art is a powerful tool that could potentially help many others work through their anger and transform it into something creative: “Personally I think everybody should be painting in rage” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Analysis of the interview data suggests that painting is a transformational tool for Leeorah. “I think the world would be so much such a better place, without the rage and without the sadness and all this nonsense” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

Furthermore, Leeorah has worked with a theater director in London who shares her interest in Shamanism, and together they have produced a one-woman show called “For Them,” where she tells the story of her life through her paintings. She talks about further collaboration with the London director: “I would like to take it further with her and actually marry the art and the Shamanism,” creating “a beautiful major number, and then end it with a seductive dance” (ID, LH, 8-16-16).

Finally, given that Leeorah is a visual person, in order to provide a more holistic view of her story, a visual portrait follows. This includes select images of Leeorah’s home, gallery, the kizomba dance scene and dance teacher, her books depicting original illustrations, Leeorah painting, dancing, and pictures of recent work created during and after the interview process.

Visual Portrait

Studio and home in Cape Town, South Africa, and Australia.



Figure 1. Leeorah Hursky’s home in Byron Bay



Figure 2. Leeorah Hursky's gallery space in Cape Town, South Africa

Kizomba and Art Gallery in South Africa.



Figure 3. Leeorah Hursky with dancers in the gallery in Cape Town

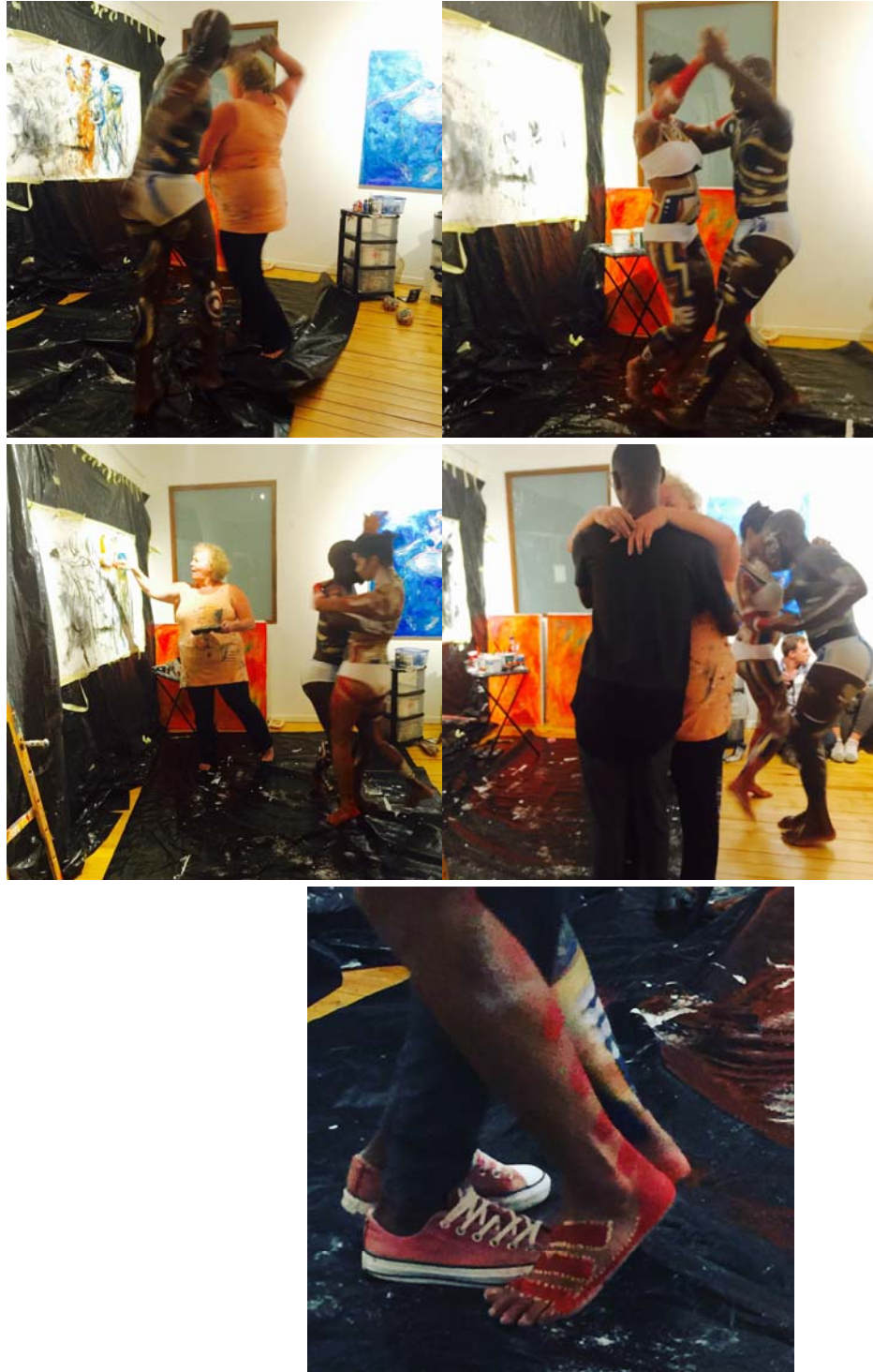


Figure 4. “Off the Wall” night dance event with Leeorah Hursky, acrylic on canvas paintings, Cape Town, 2016



Figure 5. Leeorah Hursky with dancer in the gallery painting during “Gallery Night” in Cape Town

Book illustrations.

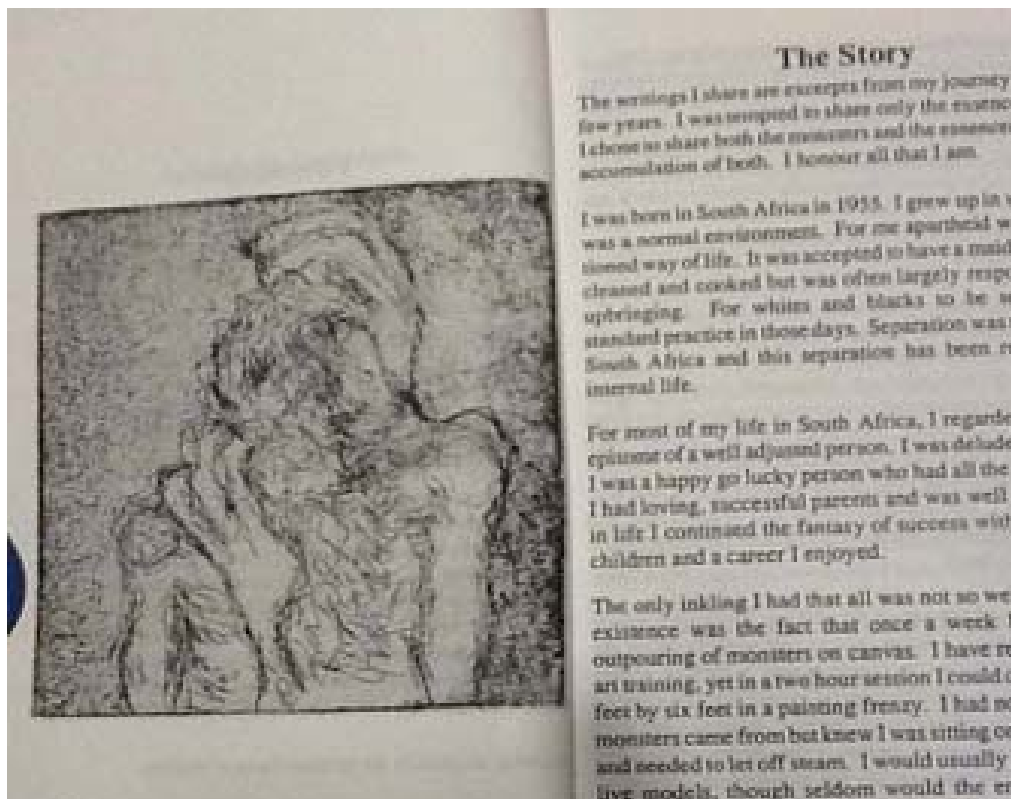


Figure 6. Etching from the book, *I Used to Paint Monsters*, by Leeorah Hursky



Figure 7. Cover from book, *I Used to Paint Monsters*, by Leeorah Hursky

Select paintings.

along lines of love
 11th September
 2pm - 9pm

Howie Cooke Marie-France Rose Leeorah

4 Orara Crt, Byron Bay
 tel 045 227 5141

 The poster features three distinct artworks. On the left is a painting of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow top, holding a large blue fish. In the center is a dark, curved sculpture that resembles a whale's tail or a similar organic form. On the right is a painting of a woman in a red dress, sitting or crouching, with a dark, abstract figure behind her. The background of the poster is black, and the text is in white.

Figure 8. Exhibition poster with original work, September 2016



Figure 9. "After the Dark" by Leeorah Hursky, Cape Town



Figure 10. Life paint event in 2017 by Leeorah Hursky



Figure 11. Gallery opening and “Pink Painting” (on the right) by Leeorah Hursky, Cape Town

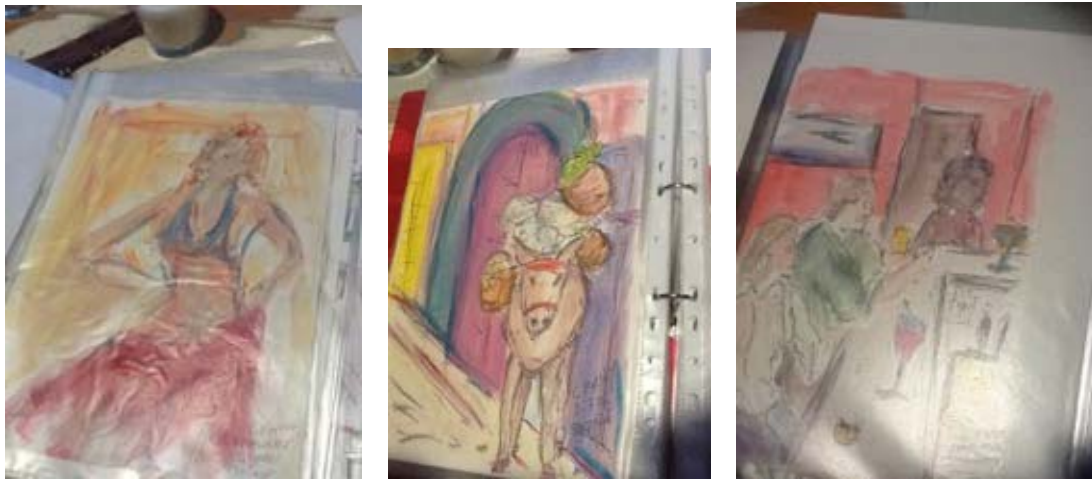


Figure 12. Examples of travel paintings from the Mediterranean region: Italy, Israel, Greece: gouache on paper, 20cm x 30cm, 2000

Summary

The narrative constructed by the conversations with Leeorah provides a clear sense of the type of life she built over time and her journey toward self-acceptance.

Furthermore, rich insight was provided for themes that fall within the research categories that will be examined in Chapter V.

The self-awareness of the narrator bursts forth with the story of a newfound spirituality and connection to her physical self through healing, painting, dance, and writing. Analysis of the interview data suggests that her journey toward self-acceptance was enhanced by the Pivotal Moments, opening psychological spaces through practices such as dance and painting.

The research insights stemming from her close relationship with South Africa and Australia, her bond with the Angolan dance kizomba, and her changing identity as she rediscovered herself through healing and art were important factors informing her journey toward self-acceptance. Furthermore, the concepts that come into being and play spiritual roles or change can be characterized as expressing her deepest emotions on the canvas. Moreover, the artist's symbiotic relationship between painting and dancing led to a deep metamorphosis and will provide a strong testimony in the elaboration of the analytical process in Chapter V. Finally, the realization that dance and painting immerse the artist in Pivotal Moments that have the potential to turn things around will be further examined through the lens of the common themes in Chapter V.

Elise Richman

Written Portrait

It was late February of 2017, and I had just moved to Alsace, Northern France, when I was scheduled to be in New York City for a business trip. Given that I am always delighted to visit the city where I spent 20 years of my life, I decided to take a couple of

days off, and I arranged my first phone interview with Elise Richman while I was staying at a friend's house in Queens. Although there is a three-hour time difference between the East and West Coasts, the fact that I was on United States soil made me feel closer to the artist and her work. Elise and I have been acquainted with each other's work since we met in 2008, when I was a visiting artist at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. I gave a lecture and painting demonstration to the fine art students followed by insightful discussions about art and what it means to be a working artist in the 21st century. We kept in touch sporadically through a long-time friend who currently serves as chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of Puget Sound. Elise had made a strong impression on me with her delightful personality and her innovative process-driven paintings. When I was choosing artists to participate in my research project, she seemed a perfect fit. When I formally reconnected with Elise in 2016, she was working full-time as associate professor, and given her busy schedule, I was delighted when she agreed to work with me.

Elise was born in Seattle, Washington, on September 19, 1971, and while growing up on the West Coast, she didn't see a lot of "famous paintings" (ID, ER, 3-6-17). She went on to attend art school, and the spiritual dimension permeated through her work when she was painting birds and seeing them as a testament of something divine, finding the subject matter to have a meaningful context (ID, ER, 2-27-17). Elise obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Washington. It was not until her second year of graduate school at American University that Elise experienced a turning point in her creative practice. She began to question the figure ground division in the paintings, what to paint in the backgrounds, and how to make the image come alive. Elise realized that she was not connected to the painting of the birds or figurative painting altogether (ID, ER, 2-27-17). The artist started to break down that division by doing little dots that eventually just took over, leading in an organic and unexpected way to abstraction. The journey from representational painting to abstraction was unexpected. "I was trained as

an undergrad to paint from observation, so the shift to abstraction was a surprise” (ID, ER, 2-27-17) and a moment of change in itself. Furthermore, interviews suggest that the journey from representation to abstraction initiated a meaningful journey in her thinking and painting process. Moreover, the transitional space opened up new ways of thinking for the artist and was the beginning of a new way of working characterized by a desire for each mark to have a kind of identity, but then to be consumed into the whole. Finally, the outcome of these changes was establishing the foundation for the dimensional dot paintings that would become an integral part of Elise’s career as a painter (ID, ER, 2-27-17).

Elise’s narrative is not chronological and tends to be more abstract, making it arduous to delineate her life events in a linear manner. Furthermore, when asked about her preference for abstraction, Elise stated that she tends to think more abstractly and to respond to more abstract relationships in her own and other people’s work. She finds abstraction to be “an extremely emotionally charged endeavor” (ID, ER, 3-1-17) that allows her to connect more directly with the medium, “so this is a very different mental space” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Through abstraction, Elise engages in a practice that opens new ways of thinking for the artist, leading to a dynamic and non-judgmental state of mind where she feels more connected to her work.

After graduating in 2001 with a Master of Fine Arts from American University in Washington, DC, Elise worked “very part-time” at various jobs, and when the offer to teach full-time came, “it was a necessary and good change” (ID, ER, 3-6-17). At the same time, it was the one thing that dramatically changed the balance of her creative process; it was “the biggest kind of de-centering of my process to focusing on other people’s creative processes” (ID, ER, 3-6-17). Elise experienced negative emotions when she couldn’t spend as much time in her studio. She had less and less time and energy to devote to her personal creative artistic process, resulting in conflicting and sometimes negative emotions: “I felt a huge amount of anxiety. And guilt” (ID, ER, 3-6-17).

When diving deeper into what might have caused that sense of de-centering, Elise revealed how her experience in art school was that “your practice is THE most important use of your time, and if you’re not, you know, making that the number one priority, there is a sense that you’re, you know, failing ... as an artist” (ID, ER, 3-6-17). We spoke about the myth and disconnect with reality of the “romantic genius who just has this kind of urgent need to make art” (ID, ER, 3-6-17) at all hours, making it a priority above all other parts of life. Furthermore, the values Elise had been taught about what it meant to be an artist, for example, that “if you are to prioritize things outside of your creative process, you’re doing a disservice to it and you’re not a serious artist” (ID, ER, 3-6-17), were diametrically opposed to her belief in building relationships and collective enterprises. These clashing belief systems forced her to analyze her own values.

It took a while to do an evaluation of my own value system in order to really accept and to ... celebrate the opportunity to work with students, and to foster and nurture their growth, as artists, while maintaining ... my process. (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

Becoming a full-time educator at the University of Puget Sound guided Elise toward a transitional thinking time and rather forcefully opened a space of self-evaluation and self-inquiry regarding her values system. Furthermore, teaching full-time helped Elise transition out of the value system she had internalized from her professors during her art school years. Elise had gone through a personal evolution finding peace and joy in teaching full-time and sharing her knowledge. Moreover, Elise gradually got to know “what teaching is” and feel more of a sense of community in the university as a whole while “building relationships over time, and those relationships leading to a sense of community that feels more kind of collective and that I know matters” (ID, ER, 3-6-17). Furthermore, after evaluating her own value system, Elise figured out how to teach in ways that felt more attuned to her values, developing a teaching philosophy regarding students that is centered on inclusion. “I want them to think about art as being really connected to the rest of the world. I don’t want them to feel isolated as artists” (ID, ER,

3-6-17). At the time of the interview, Elise had been teaching full-time for 11 years and currently serves as chair of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Puget Sound. Moreover, Elise has found her balance through an ebb-and-flow working rhythm based on the academic year that has allowed her to deepen her private studio practice and exhibit her work in a range of venues, including university galleries as well as commercial and non-profit galleries. Her paintings are included in private collections throughout the United States, in New York, Washington, DC, Baltimore, San Francisco, and Seattle, as well as at the Hallie Ford Museum, King County, the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, and the City of Tacoma. “Finally I realized well, you know it all matters, and you just find ways to ... create space or to give space to all of these different endeavors, and, you know, there are breaks, it’s an ebb and flow” (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

Teaching full-time immersed Elise in a reflective time, allowing for the shaping of her teaching and personal art practice. Moreover, aligned with her value system “that all matters” and her inclusive teaching philosophy (ID, ER, 3-6-17), Elise discovered a new and deeper connection to her process, her immersion in the academic environment informing her thinking and work. For example, she was impacted by Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and Social Hope*, specifically a passage that was about looking for a way to “foster truly multicultural societies that are non-hierarchical and that are more horizontal in terms of the structure” (ID, ER, 2-27-17).

Moral progress is a matter of wider and wider sympathy.... This switch from metaphors of vertical distance to metaphors of horizontal extent ties in with the pragmatists’ insistence on replacing traditional distinctions of kind with distinctions of degree of complexity. (email communication with artist on 7-10-17 where she cites Rorty, 1999)

Rorty’s philosophy on horizontal societies impacted the artist’s thinking, leading toward her abstractions becoming “colonies.”

I mean part of landscape, and part of it was kind of a sense of creating a community, ... some of the early paintings were called “colony” or “cityscape,” so thinking about this non-hierarchical space where all of the

different parts had their own identity and were contributing to a whole. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

Furthermore, the pragmatist philosopher and his vision to foster multicultural societies that are non-hierarchical and that are more horizontal in terms of the structure informed Elise's work with repetition. The topic of repetition, also described as "immediacy of things" by the artist (ID, ER, 2-27-17), led to Elise's personal version of change, leading to transformation in her creative practice: "Repetition is something that comes to mind, kind of restricting variables, so that I am more attuned to ... identities, and I guess color" (ID, ER, 2-27-17).

Elise's connection to process found a new meaning and was intensified through her methods of working, which over time became repetitive and even meditative. Furthermore, in Elise's work, "each part has integrity but is part of a whole" (ID, ER, 2-27-17), becoming a visual community through shapes, colors, and lines. For example, the scale of the brush and the marks were controlled with a direct pressure through a "repetitive and meditative" pattern; the marks became integral parts of the entire piece, engaging the artist in a way of working that she had never experienced before.

Moving back to Seattle proved to be significant for Elise's artistic practice. It heralded a series of pivotal experiences that would set in motion new methods. Pivotal Moments have a dynamic, and they turn things around. Therefore, Elise's relocation to the Pacific Northwest can be considered a Pivotal Moment, as it opened a thinking space leading to a deep dialogue with subject matter and color. For example, Elise re-connected with the marine scape, "a landscape that is kind of imprinted in me ... that is kind of home" (ID, ER, 2-27-17). Moreover, based on her affinity with the Pacific Northwest landscape, Elise started to develop "topographies rather than color fields," going outside to look at colors, then pre-mixing them and storing them in airtight containers (ID, ER, 2-27-17). The artist's connection with nature intensified as she actively sought experiences in natural and sometimes wild environments, for example, a trip to "the

‘untrammled’ character of a western wilderness area,” such as the Middle Fork Salmon River. This is the longest river free of dams and roads in the continental United States and was one of the first eight rivers designated as Wild and Scenic in 1968. Elise experienced a Pivotal Moment when she joined a guided rafting trip with Idaho River Adventures. She describes the experience as “the manifestation of geological time, the intricate interdependence of biological life, and the sparkling, meandering motion of a healthy river system” (Richman, Artist’s statement, 2015).

As our group passed subalpine forests, blocky basalt rock faces, sinuous metamorphic rock intrusions, and spiky, cinnamon-barked Ponderosas we encountered the “untrammled” character of a western wilderness area. The word untrammled was carefully selected and applied in the Wilderness Act, which was signed into law in 1964. The act’s purpose is to defend and define what it means to be a wilderness area, a place that’s allowed to become and remain liberated of human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces.

The aforementioned free play of natural forces was seen by Elise as a testament to the natural world, informing her work with textured and puddling surfaces in the “Spill” series.

Aerial images of glaciers, fjords, and islands inform the Spill series. Each painting begins with a single pour. The poured paint dries into forms that evoke elements of the material world such as the contours of islands, water bodies, and/or fluid dynamics. Such contours act as boundaries that are emphasized, softened or transgressed in subsequent layers.

In 2014, Elise experienced a Pivotal Moment in her art practice when she started working on a new series to try to connect more with the particularities of different pigments. Her work became almost graphic, spiraling ripple paintings inspired by photographs that she took.

The emanating circles that expand from a single drop of water inspire the Ripple series. I photograph water droplets hitting a shallow pool of water in a ripple tank, observing and capturing the concentric, spiraling and linear effect of rippling water. I am inspired by the metaphorical content that this simple act evokes by manifesting ripple effects. The width of the Ripple paintings’ striating lines is determined by the width of the various brushes

that I use to apply handmade oil paint. Scumbled (i.e., semitransparent dry brush paint application) layers create atmospheric near white color shifts, which matte, dense applications of vibrant dry pigment mixed with linseed oil contrast and accent. (Richman, Artist's statement, 2015)

Elise's creative process went through a deep change as the artist went from creating textured, organic, topographic, and Google Earth-like paintings to more graphic ripple effect paintings.

The 2014 "Ripple" series is another world completely. Here, water doesn't flow organically, blending with whatever other elements come along. Instead it eddies out from a single drop in a series of mesmerizing, concentric rings—paint imitating the form of water, rather than the element itself. As with her previous series though, Richman does her research: Working with a ripple tank in her studio, she drops water in and quickly photographs the results before reproducing in paint. (Ponnekanti, 2014)

The "ripple" series, or concentric circles that are in perspective to their ellipses, led Elise to her more current work called "ripple ellipse paintings," with concentric circles that are in perspective to their ellipses, creating a sense of depth.

While each series is in conversation with abstract traditions, both embrace contemporary conceptual issues. A fundamental concern drives my work as it continues to evolve. I'm interested in creating paintings that embody an integral connection between process and form. (Richman, Artist's statement, 2015)

With the "Ellipse" series, there is a more philosophical reason for that action. "The ellipse is allowing each, each immediate drawn line to contribute to the whole, contribute to the overall composition" (ID, ER, 3-6-17).

As recently as the summer of 2016, Elise started moving toward what she describes as a new way of working, where "every color matters and is essential to the dynamic, to the visual dynamic of the painting" (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Her quest for visual meaning is coupled with a deep connection to color: "I am very emotionally connected to color!" (ID, ER, 3-1-17). This way of working led Elise to create a painting that she considers special. It is called "Ripple Ellipse" and can be viewed in the visual portrait that follows. When asked what is different about this piece, she said that the painting is allowing

distinct colors to have a unique voice, and that this painting felt much more intentional in terms of the character of each ellipse (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Furthermore, this is “a painting that in some way visualizes the complexity and interdisciplinarity and uniqueness of color and feels meaningful” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Her process has become more reflective, incorporating regular pauses and breaks: “I was engaging in more of a kind of a dialogue with the work in a way that required physically stepping back, ehm, and changing my proximity to the painting” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Analysis of the interview data suggests that pausing and reflecting open new ways of thinking for the artist. For example, Elise seeks to actively engage in a dialogue with the work that deepens her understanding of color. Elise is also expanding her palette, using more contrast of hue rather than simply a dark value relationship, interestingly getting back to what drove her during the “dot paintings,” “because I have always had a somehow limited palette, and I just haven’t sat down and really compared different hues in a really kind of careful way” (ID, ER, 2-27-17). The practice of observing and reflecting is creating a way to expand how the artist feels about interaction—not just with colors and materials, but also with people. This expansion, which includes color and taking breaks to reflect, is leading Elise to nourish an intention to “really be present” (ID, ER, 3-1-17), cascading to all aspects of Elise’s life as she is “trying to shut off certain kinds of ... judging, editing, analyzing parts of my brain” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Finally, the intention to “really be present” (ID, ER, 3-1-17) is deeply connected to what Elise most enjoys most about being an artist (ID, ER, 3-6-17). “[The] ability to be able to improvise in certain ways with how parts fit into a whole, and that requires such a kind of alert, receptive, responsiveness and that’s what I am trying to cultivate” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Visual Portrait

The following visual section supplements the written portrait with images of the artist's world. The goal is to provide a more holistic view of Elise's creative universe. For example, the pictures of Elise's art studios and original oil paintings offer a visual insight into her work environment. Furthermore, given Elise's attunement to the unique landscape of the Northwest and that in her work the material of paint acts as a metaphor for distinct aspects of the material world, some of the images include natural landscapes.

Finally, the goal of the visual portrait is to add a rich visual layer to obtain a deeper understanding of what influenced Elise's thinking and work, supporting the common themes that will be analyzed in Chapter V.

Artist and studio.



Figure 13. Elise Richman with her dog



Figure 14. Elise Richman's dog in her office studio at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington

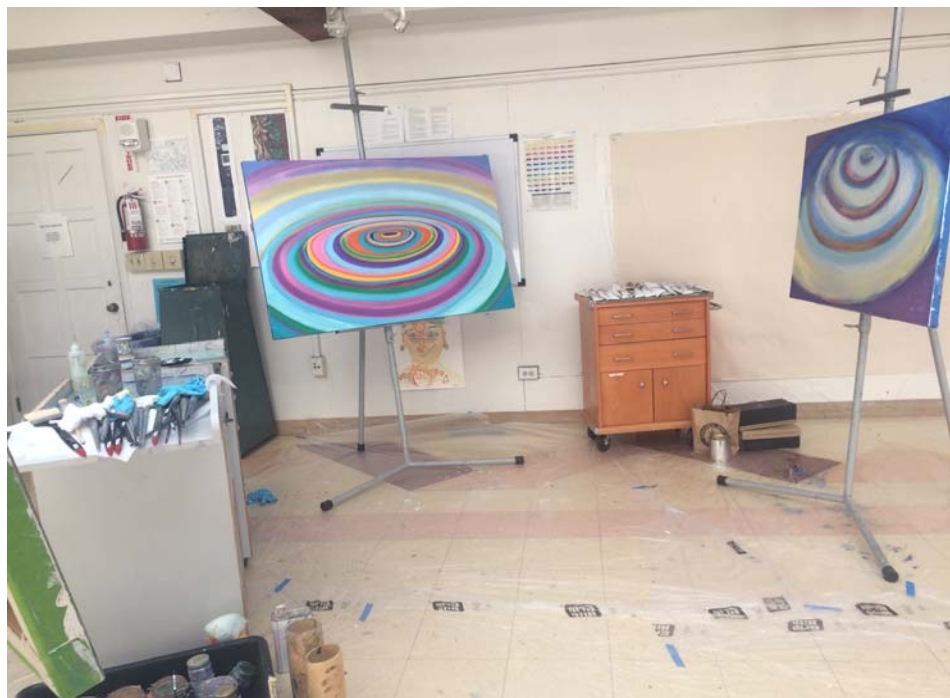


Figure 15. Elise Richman's oil painting studio at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington

Select paintings.

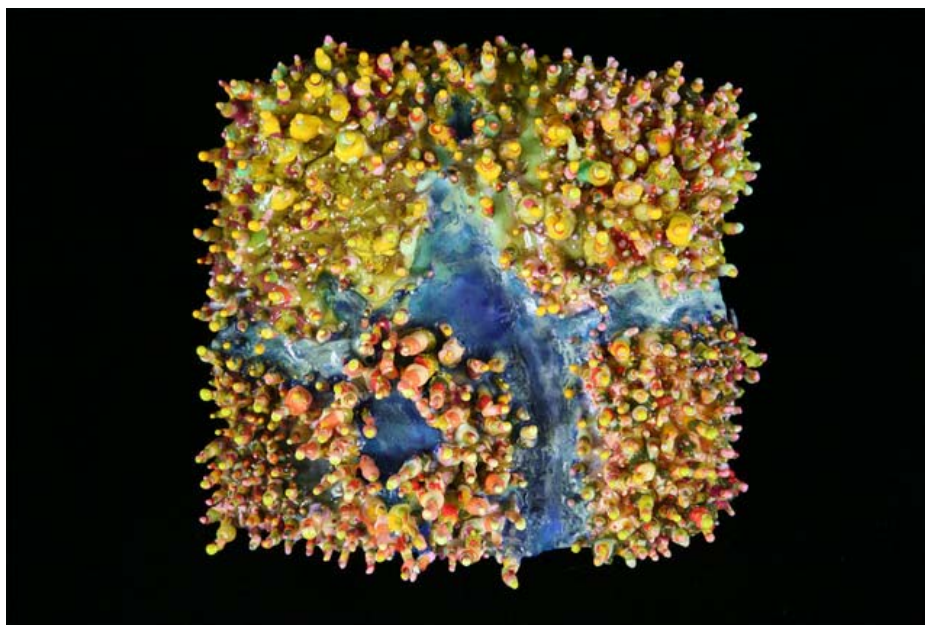


Figure 16. "Meadow" by Elise Richman, Oil on canvas 6" x 6", 2006



Figure 17. "Horizon: Dawn" by Elise Richman, Oil on canvas 6" x 6", 2016



Figure 18. "Ripple Ellipse" by Elise Richman, Oil on canvas 31" x 48", 2016

Inspirational landscape.



Figure 19. Mount Tahoma



Figure 20. Point Defiance Park Water Currents

Summary

The narrative from the conversations with Elise provides rich insights for the themes that will be examined in Chapter V. Her attunement to the landscape in the Northwest, the value system she had internalized from her professors in art school and after deep self-inquiry found to be opposed to her own, and her evolving connection to process and color will provide strong testimony in the elaboration of the analytical process.

Elise's narrative provides a clear sense of the painting series she built over time. Her subjects, like water or landscape, are consistent, but her work is embodying different sensations and ideas. The portrait uncovers Elise's inner life as she evolved from a young art student to a mature artist through a journey that informed her roles as a painter and art educator. Furthermore, analysis of the interview data suggests that practices related to her art making practice, such as repetition, pausing, and reflecting, represent Pivotal Moments that have opened fresh ways of thinking in the artist's process.

The conversation with Elise covered specific moments of her artistic development, beginning with some swift information from her early years; then the narrative widens and moves directly to the graduate school years, focusing on her painting process and

creative evolution. The artist bursts forth with her story of becoming an abstract painter through a narrative that was delivered in a truthful voice. An example of how her transformation can be characterized is the way she creates a visual assertiveness with her representative sculptural dot, spill, and ellipse painting series. Finally, perseverance and determination help the artist to find creative freedom through the immediacy of nature and the Pacific Northwest marine landscape that she considers home.

Carolina Alfonso

Written Portrait

I met Carolina in 2007 when we were both graduate students in visual arts at New York University. We spent a memorable summer semester in Venice, Italy, and forged a lasting friendship while we shared and evolved our painting practice. We engaged in meaningful conversations about art and life while going for walks in the intricate canal-filled streets of Venice and enjoying gelatos at the local piazza. The time in graduate school was experienced by the artist as a Pivotal Moment, leading to new ways of working. Years later at Teachers College in New York, when I was starting the process that would lead to the present dissertation and was considering artists to interview, Carolina was the first person that came to mind to be part of the research. To this date, our collaboration on the dissertation has spanned over a few years. Our journey started with casual conversations about the topic in 2013 when I was living in Paris, then continued with the formal interview process during the first half of 2016 and 2017, and keeps evolving to this day through an open dialogue over the phone, electronic communications, and in person when I am in Paris, which is a few times each year. Given that we have nurtured a close friendship for over a decade and that visual art is one of our common threads and passions in life, the interviews evolved with a sense of ease and naturalness. I was surprised by the intensity and energy involved in the process. It took a

lot more effort than we had both anticipated, leaving us in an exhausted state of mind after each interview. In hindsight, it was an intense, yet rewarding experience that made us deeply reflect on our life and creative activity, such as painting. Furthermore, Carolina confided that the interviews were making her go quite deep. She said, “You are making me think!” and that it was putting her in a state of mind ready to work: “I want to start working! [painting]” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). Analysis of the data suggests that the interviews triggered Pivotal Moments that turned things around for both the artist and the researcher. The characteristic outcomes will be examined in greater detail in Chapter V.

Among our multiple conversations and various meetings, I vividly remember the third formal recording session at her Parisian family home. It was a winterly cold, early March afternoon as we sat in Carolina’s living room, while her two children, Céline and Cyprian, surrounded us with great curiosity. There was a thunderstorm rumbling outside that provided an atmospheric backdrop for our conversation, and Carolina put on the TV so the kids would concentrate on their favorite show. Céline and Cyprian thought otherwise and were quite intrigued with our dialogue, demanding their mother’s attention in any way they could. This was perhaps triggered by the fact that we were deeply immersed in the dialogue, creating an aura of mystery that the children intuitively wanted to be part of. We had the sensation that time stood still: “You are a little far away, you are still here but you are still a little far away, in your own zone” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

When asked about her beginnings as an artist, Carolina replied, “As a child I always dreamed about being a painter, I felt very close to the medium” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). She knew what she wanted early on: “I had always wanted to be an artist,” but it wasn’t until her late teens that the possibility of becoming a painter became real. “I didn’t realize until I was 18 that I could actually become a painter. I started six months in a painter’s atelier [studio] and then realized my call was to become a painter” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1980 and raised in Quito, Ecuador, in 2001 Carolina went all the way from South America to Italy to study art in Perugia at the Scuola Libera

del Nudo, Academia dei Belli Arti Pietro Vanucci. She also became fluent in Italian during this time. She went on to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration and marketing in 2004 from the San Francisco University in Quito, Ecuador. In 2007, she returned to Europe and the United States and earned her Master of Arts in visual art from New York University; that is when we first met.

Carolina's first exhibition took place at the Fundación Guayasamín in Quito in 2001. Oswaldo Guayasamín was a renowned master painter, sculptor, graphic artist, and muralist from Ecuador and was of Quechua and mestizo heritage. Together with his family, he created the Fundación Guayasamín, and their goal was to preserve Ecuador's cultural heritage with works donated by the artist himself. The Foundation had a deep meaning for Carolina, "a place that I really wanted to have there my first exhibition" (ID, CA, 3-4-16), as it brought back childhood memories in Ecuador.

My grandmother when I was a child she took me to the taller of the Maestro Guayasamín and I took some brushes from his atelier [studio], and I started to put some brushes on his canvases, and it was really a child's play [studio]. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

The feeling of playfulness connected to childhood memories evolved into a sense of nervousness when the actual exhibition opened in Quito.

I was really, for this first exhibition I was really nervous and I had all these feelings. While I was a kid I was in the "taller" [studio] with this master and I was free to be doing this with his canvas and now ... it was the complete opposite that I really wanted to feel when I had my first exhibition. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Furthermore, the exhibition, which was called "Cambio de Piel" (Changing Skin), took place during a time in Carolina's life when she felt that her world was changing.

The series was called "Cambio de Piel" [Changing Skin] because I was, I was going through a process ... the whole message of the exhibition was changing skin, it was meant to change your skin, to go through a process of transformation, ahmmm ... where you ... take your own skin like a serpent, you left your skin with other things that you don't want any more or the things that have done good in your past but you really need to evaluate and

you need to acquire new skin to be a new one for yourself and you really need to ahmmm ... have a new beginning. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

With “Changing Skin,” the artist let go of old aspects about herself and went through a moment of change with her very first exhibition in Ecuador, Quito. She literally and metaphorically changed her skin—”you need to acquire new skin” (ID, CA, 3-4-16)—starting her journey toward becoming the visual artist that she is today.

The topic of change came up early and regularly in Carolina’s narrative as expressed through the interview process and subsequent conversations. For example, the transitional spaces that she has opened ... and the changes that have emerged can be characterized by the way she seamlessly shifts between different roles or characters in her daily life: “My life is divided between the different roles and activities, such as mother, wife, and artist” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Moreover, “Cambio de Piel” (Changing Skin) was an important experience for the young artist. When asked about her process of painting as related to transformation, Carolina described a wave of emotions that emerge during a creative activity such as painting.

And the moment when you start to paint is a conversation, when you start the conversation that’s the moment when you start to have all these feelings, you can have a few feelings before this conversation but it is really the moment that you are IN the conversation with painting that you are having all these feelings, all these feelings and it is really important because you are living the moment when you are painting and it is really hmmm ... the moment that all the colors are coming through, the gestures, the brushstrokes while you are feeling or while you are having this conversation while you are enjoying your paint. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Furthermore, Carolina talks about “cambios de fondo” (important changes in life) in order for transformation to occur:

I think when you have transformative practice, you really need to have like ehmmm ... “cambios de fondo” [important changes in life], “cambios de fondo” ... like, for example, when you need to shift something, you really in your life to have a change in your transformative practice as well. It’s a matter of really a change in your life ... from the beginning till now. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

The exhibition “Cambio de Piel” (Changing Skin) was a major shift in Carolina’s life and can be considered a “cambio de fondo” (important change in life) or a practice that led the artist to “a new beginning” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). The experience with “Changing Skin” was so intense and complete that it took ten years until Carolina was ready for her next major exhibition, and during this time, the young artist went full circle, accomplishing her mission from that first exhibition at the Fundación Guayasamín in Quito back in 2001, “to take all your baggage and really take the basics so you can really be your own” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). “Becoming her own” meant that she travelled the world, perfected her painting methods, and went to graduate school abroad in New York and Italy. While on a family trip in Brazil, she met a French businessman in the hotel’s elevator. They fell in love, got married, and are raising a family in Paris.

A decade after “Cambio de Piel,” Carolina decided to mount another important exhibition in her home country, Ecuador. While her first exhibition was about her own process of transformation and “was meant to change your skin, to go through a process of transformation” (ID, CA, 3-4-16), her last major exhibition was focused on “the nature and the power of creation of nature and also the miracle of giving birth and being a mother” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Furthermore, one of the most memorable events from the “Creative Nature” exhibition in Quito was the collaboration with the Ecuadorian organization “adolescent and pregnant mothers,” with whom Carolina organized a workshop. The message that Carolina was aiming to transmit to her students was one of hope and how to manifest “a space, a possibility.” Moreover, this possibility to create opens a universe of opportunity to grow and evolve. The artist was aiming to give her students a mission and the understanding that “it’s important to have something to ... to fight for” and “not to give up.” Carolina believes that “hope it’s ... it’s an upper ... and upper ... an upper experience” and entered a space of possibility and hope through the workshops (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Children loved the workshops! ... los niños se sienten como que están en una zona de confort, algo que les hace bien, les reconforta, no se sienten aislados con el arte. Los adultos se sienten aislados, dicen ... “no sé pintar,” “no sé dibujar,” los niños se sienten super a gusto. En los talleres en Ecuador, los niños pequeños con ojitos abiertos creaban cualquier cosa mientras que los adolescentes no sabían lo que hacer y yo les decía ¿qué música te gusta? ¡bueno píntalo!.. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

...the children feel like they are in a safe zone ... they feel good when they make art. Adults on the other hand feel isolated, they say ... “I don’t know how to paint,” “I don’t know how to draw,” the kids feel safe. When I taught the workshops in Ecuador, I found that the small children created anything with a wide-eyed expression full of wonder while the adolescents didn’t know what to do and I encouraged them with questions such as “what music do you like? ... then paint it!” (Researcher’s translation of above passage)

These workshops were a source of joy and happiness for Carolina. She “was receiving all the energy they [the children] are giving” and keeping her creative child safe (ID, CA, 2-11-16) while making other children happy.

Another day we did a workshop with children that have cancer. We did a great mural with recycled materials, they brought birds home that were assembled with different recycled materials. They were so proud and happy. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Carolina felt that in the process of giving joy to others, her own creative child was safe: “The small child in me has been protected by all the children I have been working with at school” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

The artist has adapted her working methods and message to the current time. Reflecting on the passage of time, Carolina finds that her physical working process has evolved with her materials adjusting to the new thematic content of her work.

The last series I used gold leaf as a material, that has a lot of significance in my work, a lot of investigation about feelings, materials to create an artwork ... (pause) ... very specific for this series, it was the “element-clé” [key element], putting together everything that makes sense in the series. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Furthermore, she recognizes that she has less freedom due to more responsibility in her personal life, and her lack of time is making her highly organized—”maybe the

reason I have to be organized like this is my limited time” (ID, CA, 2-11-16)—and she has found creative ways to work in a more productive manner:

For example my last exhibition, “Naturaleza Creadora” [Creative Nature], I produced it while my children were taking naps, my children were small then. I was really focused when they napped and I had two to three hours to work. *Un trabajo de hormiga, todos los días un poquito, trabajando for your goal (A painstaking task, everyday a little, working step by step towards your goal.)* (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Moreover, interview data suggest that her preparation to engage in creative work went through its own cycle of change. An example can be seen in “Creative Nature,” the result of a decade of creative output, which the artist describes as a “wonderful exhibition.” The process of putting the exhibition together with the logistical and administrative work that usually is done by a gallery was challenging for Carolina. It was a stressful time with deadlines and time pressure. “The book had to be published, the work [paintings] had to be done before so the designer could work on the images and the layout, all had to go to the printer, it was everything, it was a matter of time sequence” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

The exhibition reflected “ten years of career” (ID, CA, 3-4-16) and was a success. The Mayor congratulated the artist personally, and social events were organized, including a posh after party. “Creative Nature” was an important experience for Carolina on many levels, and she had given it her all creatively and emotionally. Furthermore, when asked about the emotions that were triggered when working, she replied: “[It] is something that blocks you, the fear, and then there is this love of art that is going to make it bigger” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). These emotions, including the necessity to create, required a strong emotional investment, and after the exhaustive experience of “Creative Nature,” the artist needed a break and was wondering what to do after such a “full” experience. The feeling of exhaustion coincided with an illness and death in her immediate family, and Carolina ended up taking a long break from making art: “For family problems I had to stop 2.5 years. I needed a pause” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). The pause was a challenge for

Carolina: “When you stop a creative process, you doubt about your work, you doubt about what’s coming next” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

I think that now it is more difficult to get back, I haven’t been painting, I don’t know what will come. Maybe I am just leaving the painting for a while so that everything is organized. Yes, I think a pause was necessary but now, ok, the stop is over. It is taking me a hard time to start again to a creative process. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

During the time that Carolina wasn’t actively painting, her connection to art continued through the work she was occasionally doing at her children’s school in Paris. “I speak with the teacher, she tells me the topic, then I adapt an activity and I propose a project. I also bring all the materials for the workshop” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

The mural I have been working at school is part of my small child.... I think I stopped a creative process but my love for art ... (pause) ... I have been living my art through the workshops for my kids. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

After the long break, Carolina’s sense of artistic direction is taking a new turn. There was a glimpse at a possible new direction at the end of that third interview, which took place on a cold and rainy March afternoon in her Parisian living room. The long break Carolina took from her creative/generative practice led her to an open “in-between” space of new possibilities. When we were almost done with the formal interviews (I believe I had already turned off the recorder), the artist received a text message regarding her acceptance to an exhibition. The show was scheduled at “La Maison de l’Artisanat et des Métiers d’Art” (House of Arts and Craftsmanship) in Marseille in 2016. Carolina had submitted a portfolio to the Embassy of Ecuador in France, including both a painting and a “foulard” (scarf, painting on silk) and was expecting the curators to pick one or the other.

They have accepted one painting that is called “Dans le chemin de lumière” and a “foulard” [scarf] that is called “Celebration” {Celebration}. What is interesting about it is that it was either a painting or “artisanat” [craft], and they chose them both. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

The exhibition in Marseille was meaningful, as it symbolized a “re-entry” into the exhibition world for the artist. Carolina is slowly exiting her transitional “in between” space and opening to possibilities that give her hope. “It’s good because when you make a path you see the way to go through your work and it’s ... it’s important to have this like ... this ... this exhibition so you can say: ok, I can go again and start creating” (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Based on the success of the exhibition in Marseille, Carolina was invited to participate in another show in France in 2017. Paintings from the “Creative Nature” series were masterfully printed on high quality silk. The collection of “Peintures imprimées sur Soie” (paintings printed on silk) was hosted by the “La Maison de l’Amérique Latine” (Latin American House) in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, in Lyon, in the North of France.

Les oeuvres qui seront présentées appartiennent à la série intitulée «Nature Créatrice.»... «Nature Créatrice» est une série d’oeuvres réalisées au cours d’années d’investigations et de recherches afin de célébrer la vie et la sagesse qui émanent de la nature. Il s’agit de rendre hommage à la fertilité, aux cycles de la culture (semence, croissance et récolte), au soleil, à la lune et à ses relations avec l’être humain et surtout à la féminité, en contact direct avec la vie. (retrieved from <http://maison-latine-rhone-alpes.com/fr/malra/exposition-soie-peinte-de-carolina-alfonso-equateur/>)

The works shown stem from the series titled “Creative Nature.” Creative Nature is a series of paintings developed during years of research with the goal to celebrate life and nature’s wisdom. It is about honoring fertility, the cycles in nature (planting, growing, harvesting), the sun, the moon and their relationship with people and above all to fertility, in direct contact with life. (Researcher’s translation of above passage)

The dialogue with Carolina has been continuing even after the formal interview process was completed and has proven to be particularly intense for both of us. Furthermore, the dialogue has laid the groundwork for Pivotal Moments such as reflection on our artistic practice. For example, we acknowledged to each other that the process and the questions were opening a space ripe for reflection: “After we spoke I

took a moment for myself, a quiet moment, a quiet space, to organize my ideas, my thoughts, and I am asking myself where I want to go” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Moreover, it is important for the Ecuadorian artist to make art that has “a meaning and a message” (ID, CA, 3-4-16) while exploring new creative universes.

It’s a ... a space, a possibility, but it’s also like you get into this ... it’s difficult to explain with a, maybe with a cinematic image, something like when you are in a film, and then you are in a state, in some type of tunnel that opens up and you go to a different place. Like for example you are in a station and then, it opens up a door and you go to a beach for example in a pretty landscape ... it’s like that, a different place, a different universe opens up. And you are really in a ... kind of a levitation state. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Visual Portrait

The goal of this visual section is to provide a glimpse into Carolina’s creative universe. Given that Carolina’s work is colored through her experiences and “the environment, the space” (ID, CA, 3-4-6), the images will provide a more holistic perspective on the artist. Through the photographs of her home studio and the “Fundación Guayasamín” in Quito, which had such an impact on the artist while she was a child and later hosted her first major exhibition, we get a view into the artist’s life and memories. Furthermore, by showing selected original paintings, we aim to provide the reader with an authentic view into Carolina’s creative world.

Finally, the goal of what I’m calling a “Visual Portrait” is to add deeper layers of meaning to the written portrait and to provide visual insight into Carolina’s identity as an artist and as a woman. This deeper understanding that stems from a visual perspective will support the common themes to be analyzed in Chapter V.

Artist and studio.

Figure 21. Artist in studio at 62, rue de Spontini, Paris 75016



Figure 22. Home studio at 62, rue de Spontini, Paris 75016



Figure 23. Fundación Guayasamín, Quito, Ecuador

Select paintings.

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Vous invite au vernissage
de l'exposition de l'Artiste Peintre
Carolina ALFONSO DE LA PAZ

NATURE CREATRICE
Peintures sur Soie

Judi 23 mars 2017
De 18h30 à 21h
En présence de l'Artiste

A la Maison de l'Amérique latine en Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
2 rue Lainerie 69005 Lyon

Exposition du jeudi 23 mars au vendredi 28 avril 2017

Merci de confirmer votre présence par mail :
contact@maison-latine-rhone-alpes.com
ou par téléphone 04.78.30.14.09

Embajada del Ecuador en Francia
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
y Movilidad Humana

Figure 24. Exhibition opening invitation



Figure 25. “Cambio de Piel – Cambio de Piel” triptych by Carolina Alfonso, Acrylic on canvas 39” x 48”, 2003



Figure 26. “Cambio de Piel - Icaro” by Carolina Alfonso, Acrylic on canvas 24” x 32”, 2003



Figure 27. "Cambio de Piel - Bahia" by Carolina Alfonso, Acrylic on canvas 24" x 40", 2004



Figure 28. "Naturaleza Creadora - Andares V" by Carolina Alfonso, Acrylic, pigments and gold leaf on canvas 25,5" x 36,2", 2010



Figure 29. “Naturaleza Creadora—Caminando” by Carolina Alfonso, Acrylic, pigments and gold leaf on canvas 35,4” x 39,3”, 2010

Summary

Growing-up in South America gave Carolina a unique perspective and a sense of inventiveness as she presented her life story through colors, textures, and emotions. The conversation covered key moments of her artistic development as she remembered creative experiences from childhood. Carolina recalled her excitement upon realizing that she could actually become a painter, and she marveled at becoming an art student, remembering with a special fondness her time in graduate school. Furthermore, her first exhibition, “Changing Skin,” represents what for the purposes of this dissertation I am calling a Pivotal Moment. Moreover, Carolina’s artistic explorations and lateral thinking are expressed through the narrative, such as in discreet elaborations on the challenges of taking a long break in producing art.

Her commitment to painting is ongoing as she engages in new ways to display her work. For example, the self-awareness of the narrator bursts forth with the story of her

last exhibition in Lyon, France, which led to her showing her work on silk, a new medium for the artist. Carolina's current evolution as an artist stems from a prolonged break she took after illness and death in her family. The transitional spaces she has opened through the extended break keep evolving, and within this, the changes that have emerged can be described as more mindfulness and a desire to keep exploring new ways to express herself through a creative/generative practice. Furthermore, frequent correspondence with Carolina has provided insight into the artist's thoughts about balancing motherhood and her role as an artist.

Finally, the ongoing dialogue with Carolina keeps illuminating the artist's deepening sense of the passage of time and connection to the cycles of life and nature, weaving a narrative that provides rich insights for the themes that will be examined in Chapter V.

Roadmap for Chapter V

The following roadmap is meant to help the reader understand the analytical journey that will be undertaken in Chapter V. Given that I am a visual person and a creative professional, and that this investigation is about artists and their practice, I created both a written and a visual roadmap to help the reader gain deeper understanding of my research interest.

Written Framework

The following chart displays the different themes that emerged from the portraits. Data were analyzed using color coding, and common themes were established that will be analyzed in Chapter V. The graphic below is meant to create a pathwork for the reader.

	PREPARATION:	LOCATION:	PROCESS:	DISRUPTION:
SPIRITUALITY:	Preparation in the studio: Organizing the space Organizing brushes (E) Changing into work clothes Time alone	Geography: Connection to a specific geographic location: Pacific North West (E), South Africa (L), Quito (C) Wok changes with location	The dark side: Transforming dark (L) Personal development through pain (L) Art absorbs the dark (L) Changing roles (C)	Breaks/pauses in art-making: Breaks & pausing Reflecting Decentering (E)
	Other forms of preparation: mental and spiritual Repetition (E) Dialogue with color (E) Research/study (C,E) Focus (C)	Environment/nature: Pacific NWest landscape (E) Nature as home (E) Nature as inspiration (E) Heart beat of the land (L) Free play of natural forces	Discovery: Dance/Painting (L) Teaching TP (E) Interviews Exhibition (C) Visual meaning (E)	Anxiety and fear: Emotions as trigger Anxiety as TP Fear as TP Art as sanity (L)
				Crisis and trauma: Uncertainty (C) Doubt (C) Crisis as a trigger Can of worms (L)
	Spiritual layer during the preparation process Self-discovery journey Time alone leads to reflection	Self-discovery journey	Self-discovery journey Community Miracle of life Art as a tool to transform Color as energy Darkness evolves into freedom	Self-discovery journey More present

Figure 30. Written Framework

Visual Framework

The above chart is meant to introduce the reader to the analytical section in Chapter V and led to the visual framework below, providing a holistic overview of the study. In Chapter V, the visual framework will be used to discuss the four different turning points, or Pivots, in each section.

The term *Pivotal Moments* is at the core of the dissertation and thus represented with a star at the center of the circular chart. Creative practice is represented by a vertical gray oval shape, intersecting four red circles that are meant to visualize “turning points,” as they are the “triggers” that might lead for transformation to occur. The four pivots have a dynamic, they can be visualized as round, they turn things around and energize each other. Finally, spirituality is not a definitive category but rather a set of ideas and feelings that creep into the rest, becoming a common thread that is represented by the big light blue circle in the background.

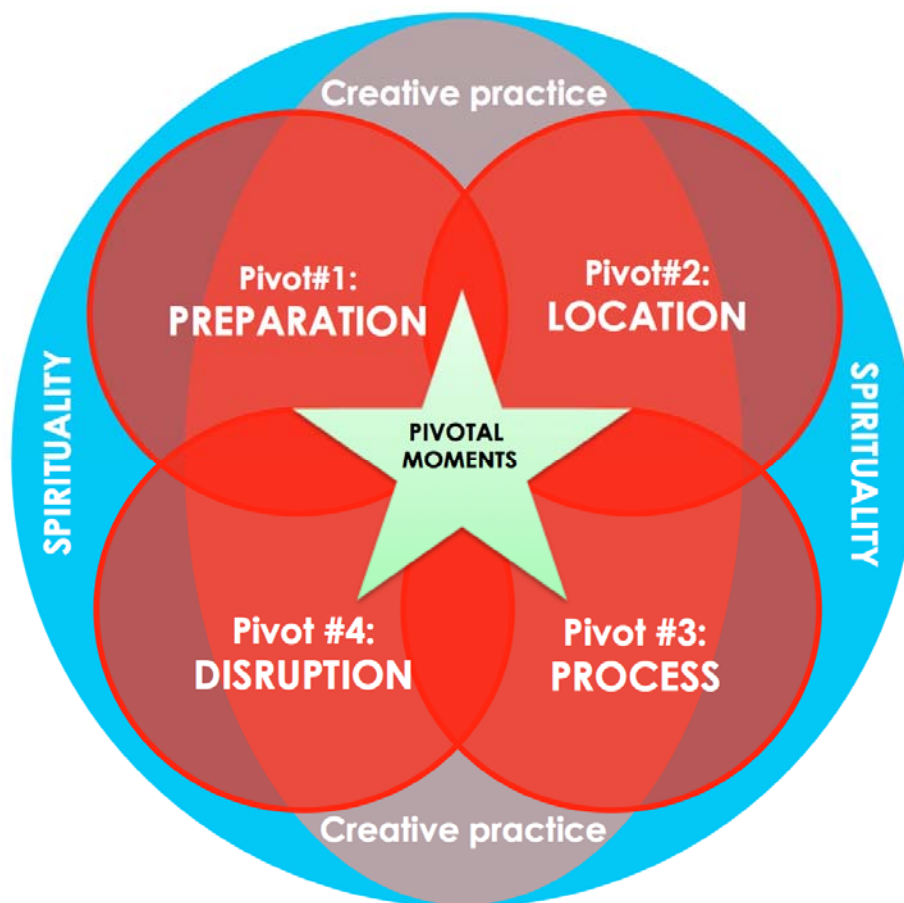


Figure 31. Visual Framework

Chapter V

THEMES

Introduction

Chapter IV featured portraits of three artists—Leeorah Hursky, Elise Richman, and Carolina Alfonso—based on narratives of their lives. The portraits were carefully assembled from recorded interview sessions, studio visits, subsequent electronic communications, and curatorial statements.

Chapter V brings forward the major findings of Chapter IV and investigates them in light of the practices of the three women artist subjects of this study. Analysis of the interview data suggests that Pivotal Moments are revealed in terms of a set of four Pivots or turning points that are both ritualistic and open possibilities for change. These pivotal turning points involve preparation, location, process, and disruption, each with a set of identifying practices or sub-pivots. The analysis makes clear that while the Pivots and their practices emerge within the experiences of all three artists, they are enacted somewhat differently by each artist, and the outcomes for each artist are characteristically individual. Thus, this chapter first addresses the Pivots as they emerge within the artists as a group, then explores the practices and outcomes in terms of each artist individually. The chapter concludes by returning the analysis to the context of the research question.

Pivots

As indicated earlier, the interview data were color-coded, the outcome of which produced four thematic groupings or what was named *Pivots*. They best indicate moments that triggered a dynamic change in the artists' work. I spent large amounts of time ensuring detailed and accurate transcriptions of each interview session that were created in a word processing program, then filed under the artist's name and date. As also pointed out previously, the goal was for the interview protocol to encourage an active dialogue resulting in personal connections to be established between researcher and artists. I read the interview data three or four times, organizing the data from the three case studies transcripts and then thematically color-coding the themes that emerged as more salient. I used color-coding to identify these patterns from which the themes emerged, and these themes were then reconceptualized as Pivots.

Based on my own experience, the pilot study, and the review of the literature, I expected certain themes to emerge; however, I kept an open mind for fresh and new data. There were significant aspects of the data that were surprising to me, for example, the role of crisis for the artists in the study, the confirmation that location plays such a big role in a creative practice, and the importance of a liminal period as a trigger toward a significant experience of change in a creative practice. The entire research process became an act of learning and identity formation, stimulating critical reflection and steering a pivotal dynamic in my own practice.

This section will identify commonalities across the life stories of the three participating artists while remaining attentive to the subtleties and variations of each artist's narrative. In this section, we will identify the common elements referencing the unique areas the artists generously shared during the interview process as important themes in their life stories. The aim is to look at the stories in a comparative manner while being sensitive to each artist's narrative strategy and personal style.

In Chapter IV, I introduced a visual framework for the four Pivots or turning points that are the basis of the analytical thinking. In this chapter, I am deconstructing the visual framework starting with the first Pivot—Preparation—represented by a bright red circle.

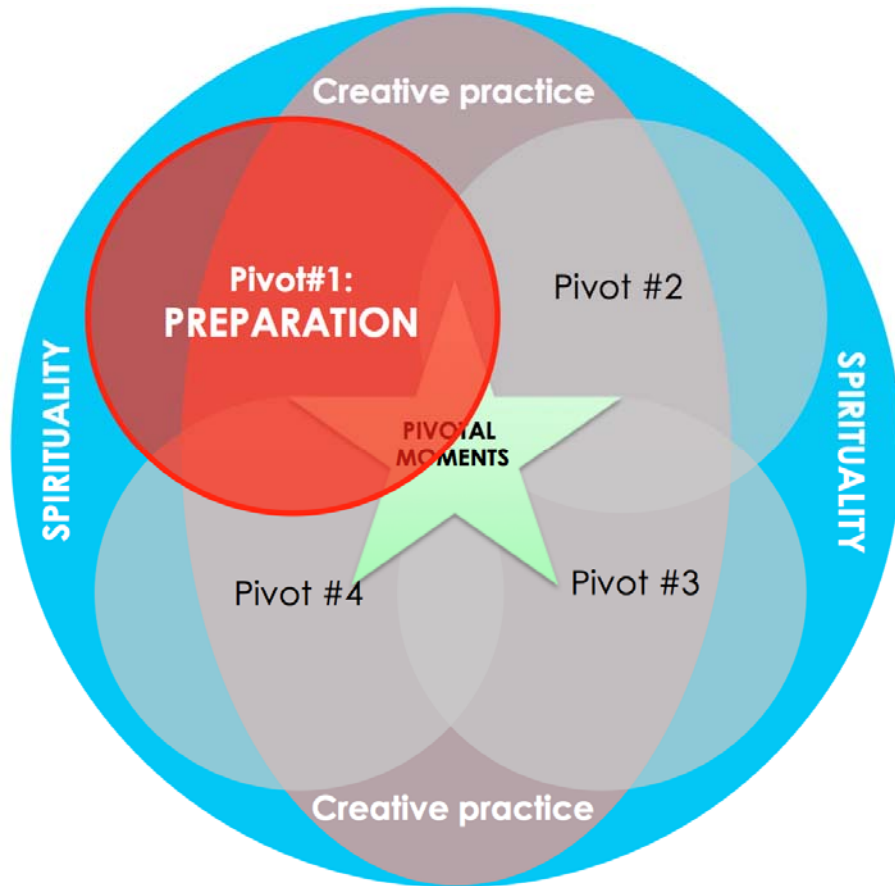


Figure 32. Pivot 1: Preparation

In the following sections, I will analyze each of the four Pivots and how they develop into practices or Sub-Pivots that open up spaces of change that enhance creativity. Finally, the Pivots or turning points suggest responses to the dissertation's research question.

Pivot One: Preparation

Pivot I sets forth how the three artists in the current study prepare themselves to engage in creative/generative work. Furthermore, *preparation* here is understood as a transitional space, in terms of physical and mental activity.

The first Sub-Pivot—*preparation in the studio*—explores the physical and mental preparation that mostly takes place in the studio and examines if and how it opens a transitional space for the artists in which to explore new thinking. The second Sub-Pivot—*other forms of preparation*—focuses on alternate forms of preparation that do not necessarily take place in the studio, but may take place outside or at home and are more mental and spiritual in nature. This creative/generative work can take place briefly before or even months in advance of the actual art-making process. Finally, such alternate forms of preparation appear to develop into rituals that open up spaces of change that enhance creativity.

Preparation in the Studio

The three artists in the study spoke of the importance of preparing their physical space before starting to work. The data that emerged from the interviews revealed that the three women show marked differences as well as similarities regarding their preparation for engaging in creative work. For example, for Carolina and Elise, a Pivotal Moment is set in motion by the preparation that takes place before they actually start to paint. For Leeorah, the Pivotal Moment is initiated during the preparation process and deepens while she is painting: “It is in the process of painting that the transformation then starts to happen” (ID, LH, 10-8-16).

Carolina’s Pivotal Moment begins when she puts on the painting clothes and leaves her daily character behind; she changes into her “clothes for working, like jeans,” that “already have paint” so that she is not thinking about the clothes and can concentrate on making art (ID, CA, 3-4-16). In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner (1967) writes that

“structural ‘invisibility’ of liminal personae has a twofold character,” (p. 96), bringing to mind a technique that Carolina uses from her training as an actor to swiftly change characters or roles. The artist calls her time of preparation “the temple for creating” (ID, CA, 3-3-16) and once she has left the roles of her daily life behind, Carolina uses a predetermined system to organize her materials: “If I am trying new materials, I like to organize them, mix them, what I am trying, what materials I am going to use” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Furthermore, although Carolina likes to have some control during the preparatory phase in the studio, when she starts painting, that is when she feels she becomes spontaneous. Turner’s (1967) description of the liminal “personae” as “becoming themselves,” when they are not acting institutionalized roles suggests that Carolina’s “letting go” of control is her way of becoming her creative self.

Similar to Carolina’s desire to experience “all there is” connected to the materials and her urge to work in a controlled environment, Elise’s preparation lies in seamless organization. When asked how she prepares before starting to paint, Elise responded that her sense of organization and order are of a logistical nature.

So the things that I can think of are just arranging my materials, so getting out all of the pigments, putting them in a kind of special order, arranging select brushes according to size and sometimes pre-mixing colors, and knowing where everything is and establishing some sense of order allows me to let go during the process. So I always arrange my pigments in this same order and I always have, or at first I have my brushes in a certain kind of order so I know where they are so that I can sort of immerse myself more in the flow of the actual painting process. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

Moreover, Elise’s preparation is directed to the physical properties of the medium and her working materials.

So I would go outside and look at colors, ehm ... I would mix them and put them in little airtight containers so I was capturing nature ... the natural world, through color ... ehm, and then I used dedicated brushes for specific colors so that they would not become unpure ... and I started to develop sort of what I thought as topographies rather than color fields. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

The Seattle-born artist doesn't lose her sense of humor when she refers to her methods of organization, "...now who is working with brushes like that...? (laughs)" (ID, ER, 1-3-17). It may be argued that both Carolina's and Elise's heightened sense of organization is a part of their preparation ritual, and it reminds me of Turner's (1967) description when writing about the disproportion of "sacra": when the "outstandingly exaggerated feature is made into an object of reflection" (p. 103) during ritual practices. Furthermore, Elise's organizational rituals can take months before she starts the actual paintings. For example, she received a grant and hired a student assistant six hours a week to "sit and [we] mix four tints for each hue, so the hue, a light, a middle value, and then a value that is between the middle and its lightest value" (ID, ER, 2-27-17). They engaged in color research mixing colors during the 2017 spring semester.

What I am doing now during this semester I am mixing tints to create a color chart, and a pigment-based color wheel that involves 83 different pigments. Right now I am just doing color research so I can see how hues change when, you know when you add white to them, how I can see subtle changes between, you know, a host of yellows and a host of different reds and can understand some of the kind of innate properties of different pigments.... (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

Leeorah engages in a rather simple form of preparation that consists of "putting plastic down as much as I can, getting into my own artist clothes and that alone is enough preparation for me" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Furthermore, throughout the interview process, the South African artist described herself as "an extremely messy painter." This self-proclaimed messiness springs to mind Turner's (1967) description of the neophytes during the liminal phase of a ritual as "allowed to go filthy and identified with the earth" (p. 96), and I'd like to argue that not worrying about paint stains metaphorically infuses Leeorah with a sense of creative freedom. Moreover, the simple act of changing clothes is a transitional moment in the creative/generative process and reminds one of Meyer and Land's (2005) writing about liminality as denoting "externally defined change" (p. 376) as if entering and later on exiting the in-between, or preparatory space of making art. In

addition to changing into her work clothes, Leeorah's physical preparation in her studio includes "an insatiable desire to have an unlimited amount of canvas," admitting she needs "more canvases than less so that I can work literally incredibly fast off this energy that I had inside of me and put it on the canvas" (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

Finally, the interview data revealed that of the three artists that I interviewed, Leeorah has the most spontaneous processes to painting and that her creative process starts when she is getting ready to work.

I would say the whole transformational process virtually starts when I am preparing the space, even putting the plastic down I feel the energy building-up in me, and then there is this absolute freedom on the canvas. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

Every artist has spoken at some point or another about their favorite way to prepare before engaging in creative/generative work. This includes preparatory rituals that eventually lead the artists to a transitional space where transformation might occur. For example, Carolina organizes her materials and changes into her work clothes, transforming into her "painter self" while leaving her "mother and wife self" behind. Elise has a methodical way of arranging her art materials that includes dozens of brushes of the same size (ID, ER, 2-27-17), and Leeorah has a rather flowing system where initial preparation consists of putting the plastic down on the floor and ensuring she has sufficient canvas available. Finally, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of preparation, the next section examines forms of preparation that go beyond the physical realm.

Other Forms of Preparation

The research data revealed that the three artists in the study devote a great amount of time to preparing themselves and their space in order to start creative/generative work. This preparation is not restricted to physical tasks in the studio, such as organizing the art

materials in a specific manner or putting down plastic to protect the floors. In this section, I will examine the preparatory rituals that involve a mental and spiritual dimension.

Elise, who is extremely precise in the way she organizes and uses her brushes, found her preparation to be of a ritualistic nature: “It is ritualistic, it’s a way of kind of preparing and giving into kind of the right mental framework to begin” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

By *ritual*, I mean “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine” (Turner, 1967, p. 19). Furthermore, as examined in Chapter II, the word *ritual* can be described as a group of actions performed for their symbolic value and may be performed on specific occasions. Elise engages in her ritualistic experience by creating restrictive variables in her work that help create a dialogue with the materials. For example: “I am finding that a transformative practice is also a way for me to open up a dialogue with materials, so the process provides an opportunity to ehm ... collaborate in a sense with the materials” (ID, ER, 2-27-17).

In order to prepare and better connect with the materials, Elise finds great value in minimizing everything around her:

I realized I really need to minimize, I need to have a kind of way of working that is kind of directed, be it the dots, which were very meditative, be it the spill which gave me something, ehm, to respond to, or now with the more gestural ellipses.... I need those sorts of compositional or process-driven restrictions in order to really feel that I am connecting with the material. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

Laughlin et al. (1992) suggest that we constantly shift between outward-directed and inward-directed states of consciousness and that inward-directed consciousness can be induced by sensorial deprivation through a reduction of external stimuli. For example, Elise’s Pivotal Moment appears as a shift toward a more inward state of consciousness and is achieved by minimizing her variables during her creative practice. That means minimizing the variables during her painting process in order to better connect with the materials, for example, reducing the shapes she works with and concentrating on the “dots.”

Carolina has an equal predilection for the organization of her art materials: “I like to have everything in place, I would like to be organized, to experience everything that I want ... that’s about the materials...” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). Moreover, the South American painter uses a method she learned during her time as an actor to quickly transition into her creative role:

When I enter the art space I am ready to work, when I am standing in front of the painting I am ready to work. My preparation comes before, when I go in I am ready to paint, I am open. I give myself a moment of reflection before I enter the space.... I don’t know if that makes sense. I also have training as an actor, all the work is done before, you are prepared for painting. Like in acting the same in painting. (ID, CA, 2-8-16)

The transitional character that Carolina engages in brings me back to Turner’s (1967) stage of liminality where “distinctions and gradations tend to be eliminated” (p. 99). For Carolina, her daily character is gone and she immerses herself in her “painter role.”

Two, three minutes before when I put on my painting clothes, I am leaving my daily character behind, I put on my painting costume and I am there, everything stops over there, there is no time, nothing can take me away from my creative moment ... pause ... my character is changing, my mood is changing, I am leaving one character to embracing another one, I am getting ready for a role. (ID, CA, 2-8-16)

The interview data also revealed that for Carolina a preparatory practice has to be very focused: “When I get into the work, I really focus on what’s coming, I am opening up” (ID, CA, 2-8-16), and that to attain this focus, the artist engages in mindfulness practices: “I also meditate, to see what ideas will come, to be in the moment and see what’s coming” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). Carolina provides an example of inward-directed consciousness, as an artist who withdraws into her studio reducing external stimuli to fully focus on her work, and to meditate, which enables a calm state of mind. In his 1994 introduction to Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, Stilgoe writes about “poetic reverie” as a state where “the mind is able to relax ... the soul keeps watch, with no tension, calmed and active” (p. xxii), and I see similarities between “poetic reverie” and an inward-

directed consciousness or meditative state. Moreover, the preparation stage before engaging in a creative/generative practice has an elevating component for Carolina.

All the things are opening up the way for you to create, and as you do them you're getting excited, you're getting more motivated, and more excited with the whole process. Like you're getting to a different place, you're getting to a different grade for your emotions getting upper, getting higher. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

This feeling of excitement brings to mind the insight phase of the creative process, when an understanding is realized and all possibilities seem open (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Furthermore, by focusing deeply during the preparatory phase, Carolina is able to open up and enter a transitional thinking space that allows her to project her vision beyond the present experience.

You really get to notice how important it is to focus your feelings, your thoughts, and organizing yourself and your ideas ... and what are you doing, what are you doing today, and what are you going to be doing from today until 10 years, 20 years, and what the message from your work will be as well. (ID, CA, 3-3-16)

I see a parallel between how Carolina projects herself into the future and “guided imagination,” in anthropologist Anna-Leena Siikala’s (1992) phrase, guided imagination consists of “setting aside the critical faculty and allowing emotions, fantasies and images to surface into awareness” (pp. 105-106).

For Carolina, part of the preparation process is to create a safe place and “something that you can rely on afterwards” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

It is giving you some freedom, yeah, because you have the tools to create after, after you have done ... after you have put your materials, you have your clothes on, you have done your investigation as we said before ... hmmm ... all of this is putting-up together then you feel like ok, right now I am ready I am prepared and I am allowing myself to work and ... and to live the creative process. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

This sense of creating a safe place is termed by the artist “controlled freedom,” and it can be argued that it becomes a liminal or in-between space before the possibility of transformation opens up. Given the complexity and ambiguity of transformation,

Brueggemann's (1995) statement that "what we need for such liminality is a safe place in which to host such ambiguity" (pp. 319-320 TBC) assumes relevance. Moreover, the artist refers to the play of childhood to elaborate on the meaning of "controlled freedom": "It's interesting because, for example, for kids for them to really play and enjoy, the parents have to give them like rules so they can feel that they are really... in a sure place they can play" (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Finally, the way Carolina prepares to engage creatively has changed over the years. For example, she used to be more "experience"-based, meaning that the artist mostly relied on feelings and direct experience, while now she undertakes more research and considers her ideas more developed.

Before it was more intuitive, it was more like a ... in the moment it was more like ... casual ... right now it has to be more, more investigation and I have to read more about certain topics.... I need, I need to know more about certain things, before it was more "experience," right now I can experience as well ... but I have to as well, for example, if it's materials ... I have to ... work with a few more materials before doing what I want to experience. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

In contrast, for Leorah, the experience of preparation is more focused on an energetic level: "I feel the energy building up in me, and then there is this absolute freedom on the canvas" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Furthermore, for the South African artist, the preparation process has a spiritual component that goes beyond the physical arrangement of the art materials.

It's really not about my brushes, it's about this wild energy that has a venue to go to, that has a place to land, and that alone I think, that is a gift that any artist has is that we CAN create with no boundary, I certainly believe that. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

Given that for Leorah the actual painting process is "very cathartic, it's extremely cathartic for me" (ID, LH, 8-8-16), it can be argued that this sense of release is a break "with the cake of custom," where "there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence" (Turner, 1967, p. 106).

The second section of the preparatory period reveals how the three artists have identified ways to prepare before engaging in creative/generative work that go beyond the physical preparation in the studio. The preparatory rituals appear to be of a mental and spiritual nature and take place before beginning practice. For example, for Elise, the preparation lies in getting into the right state of mind by establishing restrictive variables or repetition; she calls it “ritualistic.” For Carolina, it is mostly about focus that can be achieved by organization and meditation, and for Leeorah, the experience of preparation is on a more energetic level: “I feel the energy building-up in me, and then there is this absolute freedom on the canvas” (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Finally, all three artists state that they experience freedom as a result of engaging in preparatory rituals before engaging in a creative practice such as painting.

Summary

The first Pivot identified in the life stories examined is that of “preparation,” during which the three artists experience a variety of Pivotal Moments that shape their creative work.

Taking a close look at Pivotal Moments highlights the professional and practical differences between how the three artists prepare, and what unfolds reveals unique and sometimes surprising sets of rituals. Furthermore, these preparative actions, or rituals, exemplify transitional practices and thinking that open up spaces for creative/generative work.

Pivotal Moments can also be experienced in or outside the studio, becoming key elements that inspire mental and physical space for work.

Pivot Two: Location

Pivot two suggests that “location” for the three artists in this study informs their creative/generative work. This section concentrates on two Sub-Pivots that are part of location: Place and Environment. Factors such as atmosphere, light conditions, and tranquility impact creative work.

All three artists in the study have strong multicultural awareness, and two of the three lead international lifestyles. An example of what I mean by leading an international life is that both Leeorah and Carolina have built a life on more than one continent, and traveling back and forth has become a part of who they are as people and as artists. Moreover, Leeorah has her home base in Cape Town, South Africa, and spends extended periods in her house in Byron Bay, Australia, and Carolina has her home base in Paris and travels for extended periods to visit her family and friends in Ecuador and Panama.

The visual framework below emphasizes the second Pivot: Location. A large blue circle in the background that permeates the other categories is a graphic representation of spirituality. The remaining three Pivots are represented by gray circles and develop into rituals that open up spaces that enhance creativity.

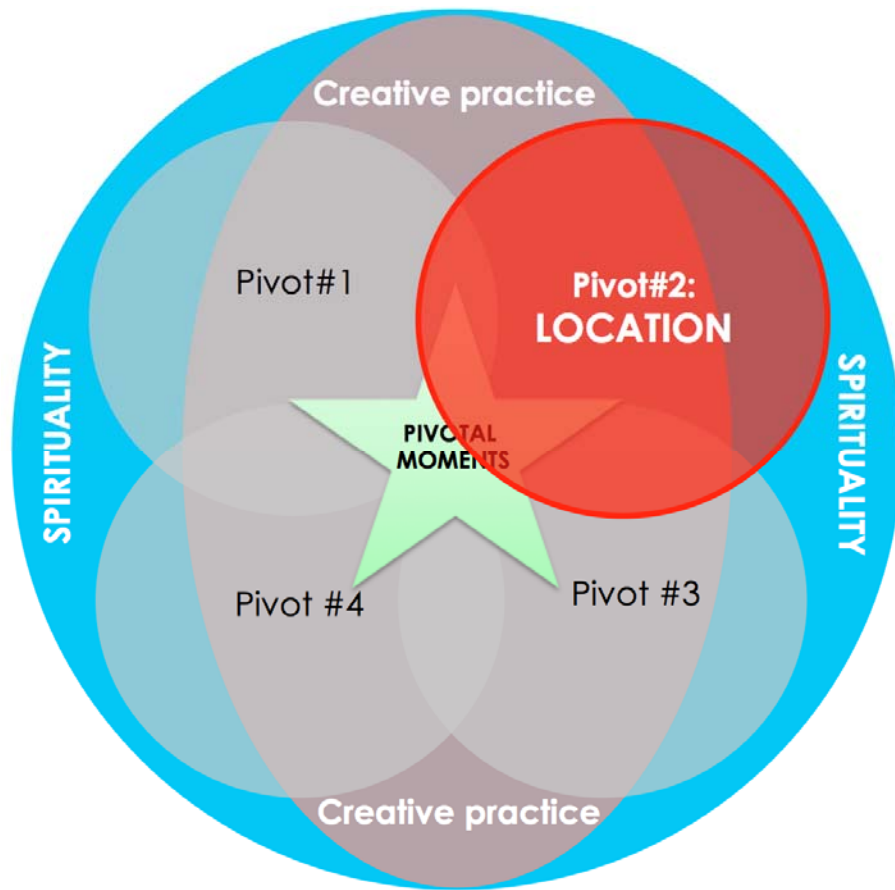


Figure 33. Pivot 2: Location

Place

As the interviews were progressing during the course of 2016 and 2017, the theme of location and geography kept emerging as relevant for the three artists in the study.

Leorah was the first artist I formally interviewed, and from the outset, it was clear that geography had a tremendous impact on her creative output. Moreover, as she stated, her work changed dramatically when created in one country versus another.

My work changes one hundred percent [100%] with each country. In Australia, where I am in now, the work that I produce is kind of more textured and heavy, in Cape Town it is more light ... and in Italy I was producing the lightest, almost watercolor softest paintings.... [I]n Australia the work feels denser, it doesn't feel as light and as spontaneous. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

When one looks at Leeorah's paintings, color treatment, texture, and feel are different depending on where in the world they were created. For example, the Mediterranean paintings referenced in Chapter IV have a lighter and more spontaneous feel: "The Italian and also the Greek range ... they are also very, very light work"(ID, LH, 8-8-16), meaning that the paintings Leeorah created while staying in the Mediterranean region have a more spontaneous look to them: the color palette is lighter, the brushstrokes are smoother, and the overall feel is freer than in the paintings Leeorah created, for example, in Australia.

While the work created in Italy displays "an incredible lightness and spark in joy," in Australia, Leeorah's experience appears different: "In Australia I struggle again, I am here now in Australia and I struggle again" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). During her interview, Leeorah wondered why there is such a difference from one country to another in terms of her creative output, specifically between the paintings created in Australia and South Africa. Throughout the interviews, I invited her to go deeper into what might have caused the staggering difference and invited her to consider different aspects of her creative/generative process.

Because I am travelling, I have to work smaller and I have to work in a different medium. Gouache and pen is what I am using when I am travelling, and it's just because of logistics that I am forced into another medium.... In Australia the work feels denser, it doesn't feel as light and as spontaneous. I actually just recently bought the paints that I use in South Africa just to see if something else emerges while I am in Australia. And because I am sensitive and do feel the land.... (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

However, logistics was not a satisfying answer for the artist: "I am not sure why there is such a change in the work" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Upon further reflection, Leeorah tapped into her experience with dance, suggesting that painting, writing, and dancing triggered Pivotal Moments that opened the door to a transitional thinking space, which she characterized as stepping stones in her journey to self-acceptance. In fact, when asked about the practices she considers the most important, the South African artist replied, "I

think the dance is the biggest one because it is such a big journey for me ... you know, it's not like I was born a dancer" (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

The interview data also suggest that Leeorah has a strong emotional connection with her dance club in Cape Town: it "feeds me so much and it gives me so much energy" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Furthermore, it is in her dance club that Leeorah feels the most nurtured and "very home."

So this particular place where I dance in Cape Town is very strong.... I was instrumental there three years ago ... with the kizomba music ... and so they started a night club there ... and in a way it's like my second home. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

From her interview, it appears that Leeorah literally fell in love with dance in South Africa: "I found this kizomba, and it was like an instant love affair that this dance suited my body and my soul and my spirit" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Moreover, the vibrant South African artist had found the perfect teacher, a young Angolan man who accepted her with no judgment: "He always makes sure I am looked after." She developed a special bond with this dance instructor: "He was healing me through dance.... He was able to take me to such a depth in the dance that I could surrender and allow him to lose me" (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Kizomba, a type of dance that originated in Angola and means "party," became "her" dance, immersing the artist in a transitional space full of possibility on and off the canvas: "When men refuse to dance with me, I have the beauty of being able to put it on the canvas" (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

In South Africa, Leeorah feels at home on the dance floor, while in Italy, she enjoys the freedom and ease of going to nightclubs; the artist acknowledged that in Australia people have more difficulties understanding what dance is really about. Toward the end of the first interview, the artist had an insight as to why her art felt and looked so different when she is in Australia. Leeorah called to mind the difference in her emotional experience when she is dancing with Angolans, who "dance with a deeper intimacy" (Hursky, 2008, p. 47), versus dancing with Westerners, who have a structured and more

constricted way of moving, leading Leeorah to a state where “the anxiety in my head could come.... So the art changes in Australia because I cannot dance.... It becomes heavier, OK BINGO!” (ID, LH, 8-8-16). “That is a brilliant insight, that is such a brilliant insight! So this is the answer of why my art changes, because in Australia, I cannot be met on the dance floor, so I put that energy onto the canvases...” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

On these grounds, it is possible to argue that geographic location plays a substantial role not only in the quality of Leeorah’s paintings, but in the frequency of her dancing experience, specifically in Australia: “Western people have learned they just dance from Youtube and they have no idea what it’s really about ... so if I am dancing, it’s a very big struggle for me” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

Dance is a practice that immerses Leeorah in a space of possibility, opening the door to change and a possible transformation. Moreover, the transitional spaces that Leeorah has opened within this process have led toward self-acceptance and self-love. Evidence is found throughout the interview process where Leeorah expressed self-acceptance through deep gratitude, for example, when she compared to the present pictures of herself from 35 years ago and seemed very unhappy, while “today I certainly don’t [feel unhappy]” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

We were both quite excited about this discovery, that in Australia her energy has to be diverted from dancing to art, and confirmation that geography is one of the key Pivots that allow Leeorah’s creative/generative practice to lead her to a space where transformation occurs. In their book *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) write that, as a result of transformative learning, the contents of the field of consciousness change; “the mechanism remains mysterious and corresponds to reflectiveness” (p. 40). Perhaps, in this context, the interview process itself opened up a transitional space both for the artist and the researcher to reflect on the power of an honest dialogue and reflective moments: “When I am calm, something

emerges ... something emerges from the dark ... like the Phoenix rising in a way” (ID, LH, 8-16-16).

The interview data revealed a parallel between Leeorah’s and Carolina’s deep bond with a specific geographic location: Leeorah’s emotional affinity with the land and South Africans as an embodiment of “the heartbeat of the earth” (Hursky, 2008, p. 47), and Carolina’s love for Ecuador stemming from childhood memories and close family. The data also suggest that the Ecuadorian artist’s emotional link to her culture of origin deeply informed her art, for example, the artist’s first exhibition. The research data suggest that it was this first exhibition that opened the door to a transitional thinking space. “The whole thing was about changing skin and really focusing on what you want to be, ... to take all your baggage and really take the basics so you can really be your own” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

According to Turner (1967), “undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns.” As a symbolic reference, “the snake appears to die but only to shed its old skin and appear in the new one” (p. 99). Furthermore, Halifax (1982) describes how in shamanic rituals, particularly in the Americas, the serpent is seen as a guardian of springs and represents the forces of nature: “It is a potent manifestation of the energy of birth and rebirth, sex, and death” (p. 80). Through metaphorically shedding her old skin, it can be argued that Carolina’s creative development opened up: “When you are into it, you feel a whole world of possibility is coming, a whole world to be expressed on canvas” (ID, CA, 2-8-16).

Although Carolina has been living in Paris with her family for over a decade, her last major exhibition, “Creative Nature,” also took place in Quito, a city she considers home. During the interview process, the artist described the success of that exhibition while delicately weaving in her love for Ecuador: “After that experience ... (sigh) ...

where should I start again? and it was all in my home country in Ecuador” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

The symbols of motherhood and giving birth as a cycle in creation are recurrent themes that emerged through the interview, bringing to mind the “symbolism of the procreative, rather than the nutritive, aspect of motherhood” (Turner, 1967, p. 41). “Creative Nature” was about the cycles of nature and transformative moments like giving birth, “that even though you just have to be in the process to, to ... create and to see what’s going to come through” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

The exhibition was a source of pride for Carolina: “Everything was great ... a wonderful exhibition” (ID, CA, 2-11-16), creating meaningful memories for the artist. In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) state that “meaning arises out of experience, it cannot arbitrarily imposed” (p. 30), and it is possible to argue that Carolina’s first exhibition, “Creative Nature,” opened the door to a meaning-making experience for the artist: “To see the work together in an exhibit, seven years of work, I was very attached to it. It was coming from the inner part of part myself” (ID, CA, 2-11-1).

Finally, stemming from my long-standing friendship with Carolina, I have firsthand knowledge of the bond she shares with her home country, Ecuador. She actively seeks to bridge her past memories and family life between Paris and Quito, and in the decade that I have known the Ecuadorian artist, she delights in exposing her Parisian-born children and husband to Latin America. Carolina travels with them every summer to Ecuador and Panama for a couple of months during her children’s summer holidays and reconnects with her large family, friends, and professional network. These yearly stays with large family and community gatherings are a highlight for Carolina, and every time she returns to Paris, she is re-energized and ready to engage in creative/generative work. When back in Europe, she recalls with enthusiasm the experience of living in larger and more open homes than in Paris, of engaging in a more interconnected family lifestyle,

and how the children enjoy family gatherings when they play with their cousins in the *fincas* (country homes). Williams (2009) writes that the theory of culture is the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life, and Carolina's life and work are informed by these cultural relationships in South America. These "family rituals," or as Singer calls rituals, "cultural performances" (Geertz, 1977, p. 113), are a part of the everyday experiences of many societies, and it could be argued that these travels become Pivotal Moments, opening the door to a transitional thinking space for Carolina. Finally, the travel back and forth can also be considered a ritualistic experience, as applied to a form of "social transition" (Turner, 1967, p. 95).

For Elise, born and raised in Seattle, the connection to geography is aligned to her deep affinity with the Pacific Northwest, specifically with its lush marine landscape. Analysis of the interview data suggests that being in nature opens the door to a transitional thinking space for Elise. An example is when she moved back to the Northwest from Washington, DC:

Then I moved back to Seattle to the Pacific Northwest and I started to connect more with the marine scape ... so I started to see these paintings more as topography, so the color field became more varied ... and I started to reference more natural processes and water and islands. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

The moments where something opens up and leads artists to a change and a possible experience of transformation imply alteration and fluidity, and on these grounds, it is possible to argue that for Elise a Pivotal Moment is triggered by moving to a geographic location that is closer to nature. Furthermore, the changes that have emerged can be characterized as her process opening up and ultimately shaping her work.

This section of the Pivot Two discussion examined the Sub-Pivot Place—how geographic location informs the artist's life and creative work. For example, Leorah lived abroad for over ten years, and she considers her art distinctly shaped by geographic location, citing marked differences among works she created in South Africa, Australia, and Europe. For Carolina, the connection to her home country, Ecuador, has been vital,

and her yearly stays in South America can be considered a ritual, immersing her in a transitional thinking space. Elise is deeply connected to the Northwest marine landscape, a richly textured geography that has strongly informed her creative practice. Finally, the chapter continues by setting the analysis in the context of location as related to environment.

Environment: Atmosphere, Light, Tranquility

We will examine the importance of environment as related to the creative/generative practice of the three artists in the study. Several factors will be examined to determine their impact on the artists' creative practice: atmosphere, light conditions, and the need of a calm environment when working.

George E. Lewis (cited in Wilson, 2010) writes that “you need a forum, a community, an atmosphere to foster creativity” (n.p.), and all three artists state that they need a specific environment to enhance their artistic practice. The Ecuadorian artist states that she prefers “to be surrounded by a creative environment.... Or even it has to be a creative space that inspires you” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). Sometimes she might “have music, or no ... this will depend on the, on the moment” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). The artist called to mind the time that she was a graduate art student at New York University and how the *ambiance* (atmosphere in French) of an *atelier* (studio in French) helped to inform and transform her practice: “When I really feel the *ambiance* of ... of an *atelier* ... people working together, studios together” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). An example of the *ambiance* Carolina referred to is the learning environment she experienced, a collaborative, open loft-style space with airy art studios located in the art department's six-story Beaux Arts Building at 34 Stuyvesant Street in Manhattan's East Village. It provided a spacious and team-oriented working space. Furthermore, students had the opportunity to exhibit their work both during “Open Studios” as well as in solo and group shows at the art department's 80WSE Gallery, adding to the holistic creative experience. In *Threshold*

Concepts and Transformational Learning, Ricketts (in Land et al., 2010) writes that “transformation occurs when a student finally grasps a key concept within the discipline’s view of the world and in the process experiences a change of worldview themselves” (p. 45). This brings to mind how an interdisciplinary team environment created a shift in Carolina’s working methods, which are still current over a decade later. On these grounds, it is possible to argue that Carolina’s practice and worldview changed. In the introduction of *The Poetics of Space*, Stigoe (1994) writes how the house serves Bachelard “as the portal to metaphors of imagination” (p. viii), alluding to the importance of space in inviting the imagination, and I see parallels with Carolina’s experience in graduate school. When asked if the catalyst to start working in a different way was the studio set-up during graduate school, the artist answered, “I think unconsciously yes” (ID, CA, 2-8-16), and from her interview, it appears that the environment and working atmosphere introduced her to a new way of working. Examples of such include shared best practices with like-minded creative individuals, community building, and exploring different techniques. Jerry Mead and Simon Gray (in Land et al., 2010) define threshold concepts as “conceptual gateways or portals that lead to previously inaccessible ways of thinking in a discipline” (p. 97), and it is possible to argue that during her time as a graduate student, Carolina’s art practice went through a transformational learning process as she metaphorically crossed the portal toward a new way of thinking and painting. For example, instead of working on the floor or at an easel, she shifted to a vertical way of painting where she would staple or tape her canvases onto the wall. This simple gesture gave her the impression of showing her work in a gallery setting right when she was working on it: “and like putting your work up like it really will be on a wall like in a gallery or in an apartment, the exhibit” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). From her interview, it appears that Carolina interrupts her vertical manner of working for certain mediums: “When I work with resin, I have to work horizontally” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). Furthermore, Carolina’s time in graduate school confirmed her total involvement with colors and materials. To

this day, the artist is vividly interested in the composition of the pigments, “where they come from ... if they are natural, if they are vegetable, if they are mineral so ... what was the history of the pigment, really interesting to me the beginning of it” (ID, CA, 4-3-16). Given her commitment to color, Schwartzman’s (in Land et al., 2010) statement that one of the characteristics of Threshold Concepts is that it is irreversible and integrative, as “no structural integrity attaches to a former meaning frame” (p. 42), assumes relevance.

From her interview, it appears that Leeorah has an affinity for physical environments that are close to the water, for example, Cape Town, Byron Bay, and Hawaii. References to water resurface throughout the interview data; for example, when asked to describe her work with the Akalani healing system, Leeorah stated: “My work with Akalani could be described as reconnecting you to the wave of life. The Hawaiian massage is like a big wave cleansing the body, and Akalani is a more refined wave” (Hursky, 2008, p. 42).

Given that the connection to water is recurrent in Leeorah’s narrative and that water is a symbol for emotions, it can possibly be argued that the environments she chose to live in reflect the fluid and ever-changing characteristics of her emotional sensibility and growth. Elise’s connection to environment is also linked to watery landscapes; for example, the Seattle-born painter stated that her process really opened up when she reconnected to the marine landscape after moving back to the Pacific Northwest:

I was still thinking about marine scapes, but then I was also thinking about borders and boundaries and pours ... environmental contour boundaries ... global warming and climate changes.... I was reading about in the news about the glaciers melting. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

Elise’s connection with the natural world stems from her childhood, and when asked about what early life memories she felt were most connected to her artistic practice, she answered:

The most salient childhood memories that relate most directly to my artistic practice are of childhood visits to San Juan Island. My mother had a

very primitive cabin built on my great-grandma's property on San Juan Island when I was five or six. We had no electricity or plumbing, so it was like camping but with solid walls. We cooked on a campfire behind the cabin. My family visited the island for around a month during the summer pretty consistently while I was growing up. What I remember most were days on my great grandma's beach, which was across the road from the cabin. I would spend hours observing. Looking at tide pools, which host stacked teeming life. These childhood memories of tide pools deeply influenced my dimensional dot paintings. I found the interconnected, abundant life in these small marine microcosms. I also felt incredibly independent on the island, able to direct my activities and imagine that rocks, driftwood, and sticks were magical implements and practical tools. My sister and I built rafts out of logs and floated into the bay where the beach was located. I also picked edible plants and pretended to be a self-sufficient. I felt so connected to the natural world during these summer trips and developed a sense of imagination and autonomy. (Personal email communication, Elise Richman, 8-24-17)

Finally, Elise's feelings of self-sufficiency and interconnectedness with "all there is," her experience in watery and fluid natural environments, created an almost magical atmosphere early in her life that she metaphorically went back to as an adult, strongly informing her life and work as a painter.

From the interviews, it appears that the light conditions of the working environment have informed the practice of the three artists in the study. While both Leorah and Carolina prefer to work with natural light, Elise is the most flexible of the three artists in the study in regard to the best time to work.

[I] really love evenings, because it's kind of quiet. But I also have become more of a morning person, I feel that I am the most alert in the mornings, but then there are times when I need to warm up and maybe go for a run or read in the mornings so ... I do not actually have a preferred time, it varies. (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

The interviews revealed that the creative practice of the three artists in the study is influenced by lifestyle. Interviews also showed that both Elise and Carolina have busy lifestyles that take up most of their productive time. Both women's hectic and full lives make them appreciate the tranquil moments that are rarely available to them. Elise prefers a meditative environment where she is able to work in a reflective manner: "It is helpful

for me to be alone” (ID, ER, 2-27-17). The aforementioned shift between outward-directed to inward-directed states of consciousness (Laughlin et al., 1992) backs up the idea that there is more than one consciousness. Examples of inward-directed consciousness are Eastern meditation techniques, and as a seasoned meditator with over 20 years’ experience, I can vouch for the results of a meditative practice. For example, I do a 20-minute meditation before starting to paint, and there is a remarkable de-cluttering of the mind that takes place; thus, a relatively short meditation practice allows me to be fully present and focused. I would like to argue that meditation immersed the artist in a Pivotal Moment that generated a mental transformation and helped Elise to be more focused.

Carolina also needs time alone and to know that she has a few hours with no interruption. When asked what type of environment is conducive to engaging in her artistic practice, she answered that “it has to be quiet, calm,” and that she can work for at least an hour without interruption (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Compared to Carolina and Elise, who are in their late 30s and 40s, respectively, Leeorah is in her early 60s, enjoying a time when she claims to have “total freedom” (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Although the South African artist is a highly social individual, she sometimes experiences the need to be alone.

Usually afterwards I need time for myself, and also can be quite exhausting because I am working with so much energy, ... most people will leave me while I am in the actual creative phase, they won’t try to talk to me at that point. (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

All three artists state the importance of working in the proper environment. Carolina places great importance on working in an inspiring atmosphere; Elise finds her moment of calm when she is connected to nature; and Leeorah sometimes needs to be alone. All three artists agree that, given the important energetic and emotional investment required during an artistic practice, a proper environment requires a certain level of calmness, a place that is propitious for concentration and reflection.

Summary

The second Pivot explores how Location informs the artist's practice. The Sub-Pivots Place and Environment were analyzed through factors such as geography, atmosphere, light conditions, and the need for a tranquil environment.

The first Sub-Pivot examined was Place, allowing Leeorah's creative/generative practice to evolve into a space where significant changes occur. For example, Leeorah "lived abroad for about ten years on and off" (ID, LH, 8-10-16), resulting in her art being distinctly shaped by place. For Carolina, the connection to her home country, Ecuador, has been vital throughout her life as a painter. The significant changes that have emerged in Carolina's life can be characterized as adapting the learnings from her external environment (Quito, Paris) in order to immerse herself in a state of self-inquiry. Thus, Turner's (1967) statement that "performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes and adapted to their external environment" (p. 20) becomes relevant.

The second Sub-Pivot examined was Environment. Factors such as atmosphere, light conditions, and tranquility impact creative work. The environment the artists work in becomes the transitional physical space that leads to transformation and an elevated artistic practice. For Elise, the connection to environment is more related to marine landscape, as her process blossomed and "opened-up" when she moved back to "my Northwest sort of marine ... that is so lush" (ID, ER, 3-6-17) and was surrounded by the wild natural environment that nurtures her creative process. In *Reassembling the Social*, Bruno Latour (2005) writes about the difficulty to grasp social ties and how "it's traceable only when it's being modified" (p. 159); thus, it is possible to argue that Elise traced her own creative and social ties through the environment of her childhood memories from San Juan Island.

Aligned with Elise, Leeorah also has a preference for environments that are close to the water, such as Cape Town, Byron Bay, and Hawaii. For Carolina, the *ambiance* is

of capital importance for focusing and relates to the space and conditions such as light and tranquility.

Finally, all three artists stated they experience the need to be alone when they are working, and sometimes after their creative practice, in order to be in a space that they feel safe in and that offers the possibility to reflect.

Pivot Three: Process

Pivot three suggests that Process informs the artist's creative/generative work. This section concentrates on two Sub-Pivots that are part of the process: The Dark Side and Discovery.

The first Sub-Pivot, or The Dark Side, refers to the negative and sometimes hidden parts of a person's personality and the difficult past experiences that led to them. Moreover, in order to provide a deep understanding of the dark side, this Sub-Pivot concentrates on Leeorah's experiences, as the interview data revealed that the South African artist offered the best examples.

The proposed task of the discussion of the second Sub-Pivot, Discovery, is to extract from the narratives the role of discovery as a vital part of the creative/generative process. We will examine how the process of accessing and moving through the dark side can help the artist dive into a transitional thinking space leading to discovery, and ultimately to a space where transformation occurs, elevating the artistic practice.

Below is the third visual framework of the Pivots: a colorful chart that visually highlights the location of Process, the third pivotal point. Thus, Process is a turning point that develops into Sub-Pivots and opens up spaces where changes leading to possible transformations occur, elevating the artist's creative practices.

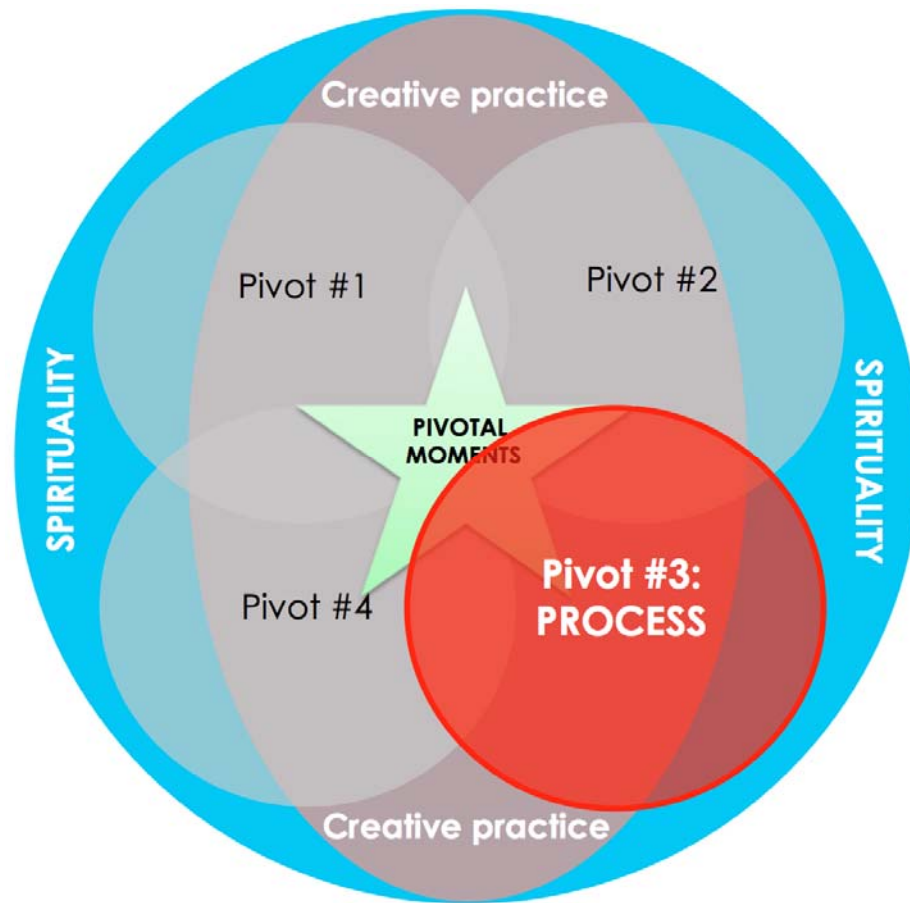


Figure 34. Pivot 3: Process

The Dark Side

This section examines the dark side as part of the process that becomes a catalyst toward more profound levels of creative knowledge. In mainstream media or select literature, the dark side is described as a shadowy aspect of the personality. For example, in 1973, the experimental rock band Pink Floyd released the album *The Dark Side of the Moon*, one of the best-selling albums of all time. As a concept album named after a metaphor of “darkness,” it revealed lyrical themes that included insanity, conflict, and the passage of time. The lyrics explored the concept of the dark side as related to the different stages of human life, examining the shadowy aspect of human experience through madness and gloom. For the purpose of this investigation, the dark side has no association with evil or gloom but refers to the more difficult and even traumatic

experiences the artists in the study went through over the course of their lives.

Furthermore, the dark side is also meant as the more negative and sometimes hidden aspects of a human personality.

From the interviews, it appears that Leeorah has the most visible relationship with what I am referring to as the dark side. The South African artist experienced a gradual transformation and in the process discovered hidden layers of her past. By transformation is meant literally going beyond one's extant form (Land et al., 2010), and from the interviews, it appeared that for Leeorah this was a lengthy and at times painful process.

In her 20s, the South African artist was leading "what can be considered a normal life" with a successful job as a dental hygienist in Johannesburg, married to her first love and raising two young daughters (Hursky, 2008, p. 22). At least on the surface, everything seemed "normal," when she suddenly started having unusual experiences that included being able to "see" people's health condition. For example, during the interview process, Leeorah described how she looked at people's gums and was able to identify health issues and situations that were unrelated to the teeth; for example, she was able to "see" if a client had cancer or if she was pregnant. It is interesting to note that these psychic abilities surfaced before Leeorah trained as a shaman in Hawaii and can be considered the beginning of her journey as a healer. Moreover, after the realization of her newly discovered abilities, Leeorah needed a safe outlet to process her emotions and started painting, with interesting and unexpected results, thus directing attention to a cosmos that is barely revealed to the ordinary individual (Halifax, 1982). As a self-described untrained artist, when she decided to take a class in oil painting, surprising results were unveiled: "There was something emerging inside of me that hadn't been uncovered. I call it 'the can of worms'" (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

The artist discovered dark hidden layers of herself that she didn't even know existed and started working on a series that she called the "monster paintings." Turner (1967) references monsters as part of the communication of "sacra" during ritual

practices in Africa, describing how the “outstandingly exaggerated feature is made into an object of reflection” (p. 103). By “sacra” is meant the cultural component of the liminal situation that can be found in three forms: exhibitions (what is shown), actions (what is done), and instructions (what is said). He argues that “monsters are manufactured precisely to teach neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality” (p. 105). On these grounds, I consider it legitimate to propose that Leeorah’s “monsters” were the equivalent of Turner’s “sacra” to help her face and grow new aspects of herself: “There were disturbances inside of me, and art was a way that I could actually bring out these disturbances” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Given that “monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted” (Turner, 1967, p. 105), it is possible to argue that Leeorah’s “monsters” opened a space of self-inquiry and initiated a transformational journey for the artist: “It is such a transformative experience ... that I have let this go ... but then I also continue, also I paint over the paintings over the canvases and see what in that moment will emerge” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). It can also be argued that the “release” of the monsters was a way for Leeorah to “purge” her demons and make peace with her past, through what can be described as a cathartic and ritualistic painting practice. It is interesting to note that Turner (1967) writes that “personality is shaped at the forge of ritual, especially where the ritual deals with life-crisis, serious illness” (p. 143), reminding one of Leeorah’s positive sense of self being forged through a powerful therapeutic tool such as painting: “I am extremely grateful that I have this outlet.... I don’t know what people do that don’t have an outlet like this!” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

Leeorah has a positive outlook on what she describes as her dark side, and with a hint of dark humor, she confirms that “yeah, I had a strong journey” that she sees as a rich learning experience in “the university of life” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). In *What Do We Know about Students’ Learning and How Do We Know It?*, Cross (1999) states that “in

developmental theory, the periods of greatest personal growth are thought to lie in the unnamed and poorly-defined periods between stages” (p. 262), and Kegan (1982) writes “growth always involves a process of differentiation, thus creating out of the former subject a new object to be taken by the new subjectivity” (p. 31). On these grounds, it can be argued that part of the cathartic process is moving through the darkness, taking the artist to “another space.”

The greatest art ... once that energy is out there is actually a peace, that is the transformation. The work is sending me to another space, the work is allowing me to bring out what is possibly hidden, what maybe I am not aware of ... yeah ehmmm ... yeah, the work is allowing me to bring it out. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

The second Sub-Pivot, Discovery, leads to a space where change occurs. For example, Leeorah welcomes the dark side and the “letting go” of her trauma, immersing the artist in a peaceful state where her best work stems from, a state where creative energy leads to possibility and discovery.

Discovery

By Discovery is meant the process of unveiling or finding information about oneself or others for the very first time. In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) write about learning thresholds as points at which students experience difficulty as they evolve toward a transformed worldview, and I see a parallel to the three artists’ journeys as they gradually evolved their world perspectives—for example, Leeorah’s drastic change after her “normal life,” or Elise’s struggle with her schedule when she first started teaching full-time. The process of discovery unveiled new information about the artists and their work, leading them to a space where change occurred.

For example, for Leeorah a Pivotal Moment was when she started studying naturopathy at the University of Sydney and was introduced to Hawaiian massage and Shamanic healing. The South African artist was initiated and trained by Hawaiian

Shamans on the island of Lanai, leading to the discovery of hidden emotions and healing abilities.

The Kahuna ... he saw the amount of energy that I had ... and he took this energy ... you know the force that I talk about now ... he took it and he hold it that it became a healing force ... and ... and I trained with him for many years.... I trained in Hawaii. (ID, LH, 8-16-16)

Author and teacher Serge Kahili King (2008) wrote that Kahunas were “the experts of old Hawaii—experts in religion, health, crafts, science, psychology, and magical practices of various kinds” (p. xi). In ancient Hawaiian thought, wording was highly symbolic, and the word “Kahuna” meant to take care of the cooking, and this meaning is associated with “taking care” or simply being a “caretaker.” A Kahuna is a Shaman, a term defined by Halifax (1979) as “healers, seers, and visionaries who have mastered death” (p. 3); they are also psychologists and masters of ecstasy that work with energy.

Leeorah’s journey of discovery was unveiled through her shamanic training in massage with the Kahunas and with “Akalani,” an energetic healing system that she received through a Kulani. The Hawaiian word “ku” means “to be like,” and “lani” means “heaven,” exemplifying the otherworldly aura of these Hawaiian shamans/healers. The healing system “Akalani” can be described as “a totally different vibrational symbol ... and that’s just using hands and sounds” (ID, LH, 8-16-16), bringing to mind Turner’s (1967) reference to “sacra” communication during ritual practices in Africa when neophytes are given “instructions.” These guiding principles or instructions might include “the revelation of the real, but secularly secret, names of the deities or spirits ... they are also taught the main outlines of the theogony, cosmogony, and mythical history of their societies” (p. 103), making Leeorah highly skilled in reading energy: “After a few years of training with the Kahuna, I could now see the whole world as energy, and all of us energy beings just wearing our skins like clothes” (Hursky, 2008, p. 26). Medical anthropologist Joan Halifax (1982) writes about energy, referencing the !Kung in South Africa. Their concept of energy is a “supernatural potency that makes healing possible,”

as well as clairvoyance, prophecy, and soul travels (p. 80). Moreover, analysis of the interview data suggests that part of reading energy is the ability to tap into psychological negative patterns or “trapped energy.”

In my work as a Shaman or whatever you actually want to call me ... I could touch in the darkness of the person and be able to release that ... and that’s why the dark does not upset me ... because, ehmmm ... it’s trapped energy ... and I have an ability to be able to move that trapped energy ... so ... that’s it in a nutshell. (ID, LH, 8-16-16)

Leeorah also works with energy during her painting process. She admits that there is “not much thinking that is happening at that time” and that she will paint over and over until she has “released the heavy rage,” or energy, and gets to the point that she will “pick up another canvas and go another level” (ID, LH, 8-16-16). In *The Diary of Anaïs Nin 1944-1947*, the American-French writer Anaïs Nin (1971) wrote that “to change skins, evolve into new cycles, I feel one has to learn to discard. If one changes internally one should not continue to live with the same objects” (p. 26). From her interview, it appears that Leeorah’s actual art-making process goes through layers of rage, anger, and pain that need to be discarded and evolve into a new cycle. I see a parallel with Land et al.’s (2010) writings about how the journey toward the acquisition of a threshold theory involves the integration of new knowledge and requires a reconfiguring of the prior conceptual schema “and a letting go or discarding of any earlier conceptual stance” (p. xi). For example, when Leeorah lets go of the negativity and explodes with rage onto the canvas, she experiences a deep sense of discovery: “Once that energy is out, there is actually a peace, that is the transformation” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). The outcome of that “peace after the storm” is what Leeorah considers her best work, beautiful paintings that arise out of her experience of moving through the darkness. In her book, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry (1999) seeks to unite beauty and morality, describing the loving attention that beautiful objects provoke; perhaps there is a parallel between Scarry’s desire to “locate what is true” (p. 31) and Leeorah’s view of what she considers her most

beautiful paintings. It can be argued that they are a truthful representation of her transformed self. Moreover, Danto (2008) references Motherwell's *Elegies for the Spanish Republic* and writes that "the elegy is intended to transform pain into something durable" (p.13); on these grounds, I would like to argue that in Leorah's work the darkness evolves into discovery, generating a sense of freedom and possibility: "I just really let it out.... So it is transformative to let the monsters out on the canvas ... and then something beautiful emerges" (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

The interviews also suggest that Elise has a deep relationship with process.

I have gone through ... cause I have gone through a couple of big transitions in my work in the last you know.... But I've been working with processes that I am not familiar so I've been needing to spend time building a new relationship with process. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

This transitional or liminal time between processes recalls Land et al.'s (2010) concept that the learner might be stuck in a suspended state. They describe how "difficulty in understanding threshold concepts may leave the learner in a state of 'liminality,' a suspended state of partial understanding, or 'stuck place'" (p. x). From her interview, it appears that Elise's process allows her to move her stuck energy by stepping back: "So I was engaging in more of a kind of a dialogue with the work in a way that required physically stepping back, ehm, and changing my proximity to the painting" (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Given that the Seattle-born artist believes that "the discovery is really important to the sense of transformation," Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) idea that creativity is not linear and that the various stages are in permanent motion becomes relevant: "There is a physical transition that is absolutely necessary for that sense of immediacy and discovery to feel vital, ehm, and renewed" (ID, ER, 2-27-17). Furthermore, as examined in Chapter II, the concept that an artistic practice is in permanent flux, expandable, and flexible is directly related to current theories on identity and development of the self (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982; Perry, 1974). Elise's "expandable and fluid" practice is

determined by rhythms as defined by the ebb and flow of the academic year, and when she feels too familiar with a process, she moves on: “So when something becomes too ... when a process becomes too familiar and I feel that I know what I am doing (laugh), ehm, it’s time for me to transition” (ID, ER, 2-27-17). Elise strives to maintain the freshness and excitement, and to harness the “insight/inspiration” or the peak emotional experience of a creative project (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This sense of discovery is vital for the artist and appears to develop into rituals that open possibilities for change. An example is Elise’s goal to “achieve a state where I am open and receptive in order to be responsive” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Abstraction, combined with a mindful way of working, has helped the artist achieve her goal.

Abstraction allowed me to connect more directly with materials and process in achieving a state of mind that feels more ... where I really feel immersed, ehm rather than judging and asking more analytical questions. (ID, ER, 2-27-17)

The idea of “discovery” as seen through the eyes of a child can be found extensively in the literature. For example, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the German/Swiss philosopher Nietzsche (1978) writes about the evolution of the spirit: it becomes a camel, then a lion, and finally a child (p. 25); “the child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes’” (p. 27).

It is this “Yes” to life and creation that propels the three artists in the study to engage in discovery. For Carolina, discovery arises out of her connection with children: “When my kids see my books, much more than an adult they discover things in the book that adults can’t see” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). Carolina’s view of children as not influenced by conditioning reminds me of London’s (1989) idea that art may be used as a vehicle of personal transformation by freeing individuals from their second-hand beliefs and conditioned behaviors.

From her interview, it appears that Carolina feels her work is a spiritual legacy for her children, an energy that will live on and inform future generations free from

pre-conditioned behaviors. For example, discovery immerses Carolina in a space of possibility. Finally, in this context, energy and spirituality can be viewed as “an awareness of the interconnectedness of everyone and everything” (Campbell, 2011), a way to stay connected, even after we have departed this life. “Maybe you will not be here, but your work will be here, and this unique piece of work that will be part of yourself; it will stay after you will have passed away, after you will stop creating” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

The discussion of the second Sub-Pivot examined how it impacts the artists’ practice. For example, Leeorah experiences discovery after she has overcome the dark side and is led to a peaceful state where beautiful work emerges. For Elise, discovery is linked with transition and keeping the process fresh. And Carolina’s sense of discovery is revealed through the eyes of her children, radiating the newness and even uncertainty that become a vital component of the creative process: “As Picasso once said: if you are sure of the result of the painting, why do it?” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Summary

The third Pivot focused on Process, triggering Sub-Pivots that allow the artists in the study to navigate the dark areas of the mind, then enter a transitional or liminal space that leads to discovery.

The discussion of the first Sub-Pivot examined The Dark Side as related to the negative side of a person’s personality and how their traumatic experiences inform their work. Kegan’s (1994) statement that it is imperative to return to that darkest region for transformation to occur recalls Leeorah’s journey to unveil her personal “can of worms” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). We have examined how Leeorah is not afraid of the dark and welcomes it into her life as an opportunity to tap into the unknown areas of the mind, thus opening a space of discovery while facing her “monsters.” Turner (1967) writes about the exaggeration of “sacra” to invite reflection and suggests that being “monstrous” is to

encourage neophytes to “distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality, as it is conceived in their culture” (p. 52), and think about the world they have taken for granted. In this context, it can be argued that the monster paintings took the role of a “wake-up” call in the life of the South African artist, a call to reflection and awareness. An example is Leeorah’s fresh perspective and transformed view of the world, becoming a confident healer that uses her powerful energy to affect positive change in others.

In Chapter II, we examined how the “wounded healer” is a metaphor for the artist who shapes her creative work with the internalization of traumatically intense experiences that become an integral part of the creative process. I would like to argue that Leeorah represents the archetype of the “wounded healer”: “a healer who has healed himself or herself; and as a healed healer, only he or she can truly know the territory of disease and death” (Halifax, 1979, p. 11). A “wounded healer” ultimately leads to transformation for the self and others, based on an archetype of the Greek myth of the wounded physician whose own personal wounds and vulnerable manner improve his power to heal. Finally, for the South African artist to let go of the dark “is a powerful thing,” and a healthy outlet such as painting or writing has the potential to generate great work and propel the discovery of hidden gems. “What I learned was extremely simple, yet I had to burn through my personal demons to be able to see it: there is such a great happiness available for all to tap into once you move past the shadows” (Hursky, 2008, p. 17).

For Elise, discovery is an integral element of her artistic process, bringing to mind Kegan’s (1982) and Erikson’s (1968) views of identity as shaped over a lifespan with multiple cycles and transitions, leading to an opening of possibility, a space where creativity blossoms.

Carolina also enjoys the inherent sense of discovery in painting: “When you’re painting, you’re not sure what result is coming.... You don’t have that in other professions” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). The workshops that she organizes, both at her children’s

school in Paris and in South America, keep her own sense of discovery and inner child alive. Medical anthropologist Bradford Keeney (1996) wrote that “when the energy of play is respected, we are able to be more creative and playful in every aspect of our daily life” (p. 49), and on the grounds of this, it can be argued that the component of play and discovery in Carolina’s workshops keeps her creatively energized. Finally, Dewey’s (1934) belief that as educators we need to tap into the imagination and art as a means to transform society is aligned with the Ecuadorian painter’s desire to do a social mission through her workshops with children.

Pivot Four: Disruption

The fourth Pivot addresses how Disruption of a creative practice can take different forms. This section concentrates on two Sub-Pivots that are part of Disruption: Breaks and Pauses in Art-making, and Anxiety and Fear.

Analysis of the interview data suggests that the artists in the study take breaks and pauses in their creative-generative practice depending on various circumstances that include travelling, work, family commitments, and health issues. Moreover, the analysis also makes clear that anxiety and fear are part of the creative process and can be triggered by disruption and/or trauma/crisis.

The visual framework below graphically highlights the fourth Pivot, Disruption.

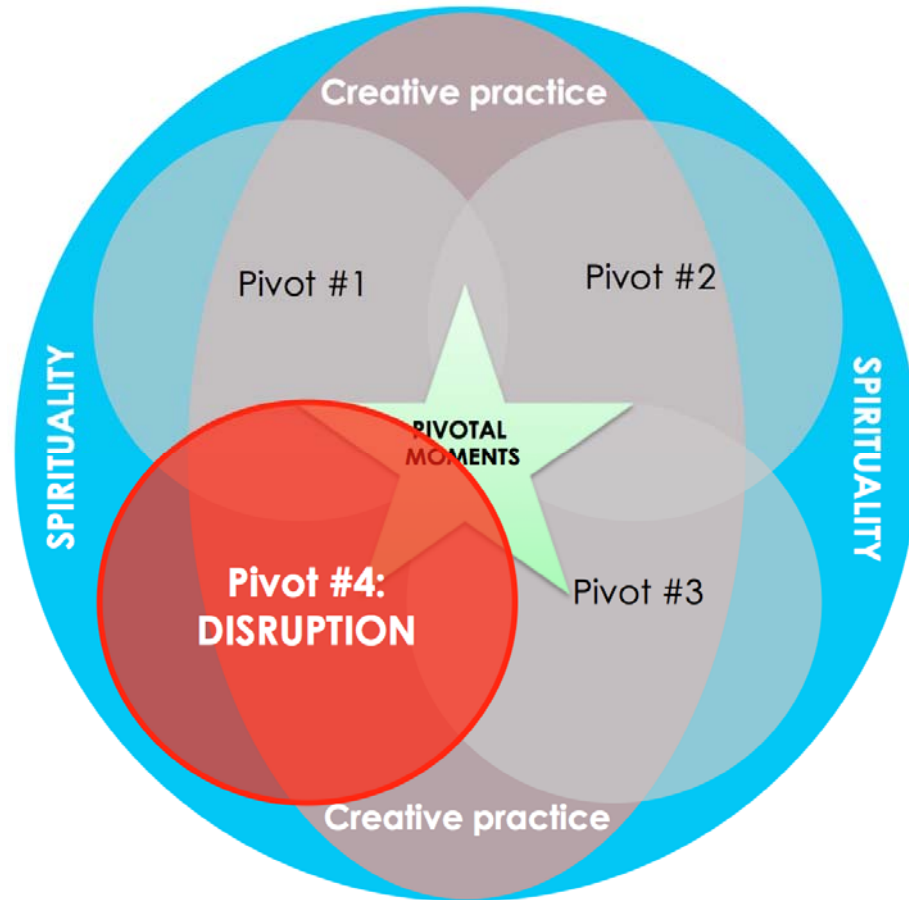


Figure 35. Pivot 4: Disruption

Breaks and Pauses in Art-making

The discussion of the first Sub-Pivot, Breaks and Pauses in Art-making, analyzes if and how the three artists in the study take breaks and, if so, what impact it has on their creative practice. Analysis of the interview data suggests that the breaks that the three artists take depend on their life's circumstances.

For Leeorah, an active woman with multiple interests and an international lifestyle, her art practice slows down due to the intensity of life: “It’s usually that life happens so painting just gets thrown out of our conscious minds” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Moreover, her travel schedule and having lived abroad have affected the continuity of her creative output, and “the art would only happen occasionally because I was working most of the time” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). The South African artist has mixed feelings regarding taking

extended breaks/pauses in her art-making practice. For example, she appreciates the positive effects, such as the opportunity to achieve more depth in her work: “There is a deepening that happens in the pause,” and she understands that pauses are part of a process that cannot be forced: “I am in a creative space and it needs pauses.... I’m at a point when I do take a break and I actually don’t force it” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). On the other hand, too much energy is pent up when the artist takes too long breaks, creating an undesirable state of mind for Leeorah: “I actually don’t like it” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

Keeney (1996) writes about “spiritual energy,” referencing the Kalahari Bushmen and how they call this energy *num*. The Kalahari Bushmen believe that *num* can be aroused, heated, and moved around. For Leeorah, taking too long pauses during her creative practice has a strong impact on her “energy” or *num*: “If I go through a pause for too long, I feel an energy build-up in me almost like a madness, and I am disrupted; it takes me out of a trance” (ID, LH, 8-8-16).

In contrast, for Elise, the experience of taking breaks and pauses is more focused on her academic responsibilities, and she experiences “a sort of an ebb and flow every year.” “So I do have moments, I mean extended periods I should say where I am very immersed in you know in teaching, ehm, and administration and, and different, ehm, different responsibilities that really take over” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

During her first year of teaching, Elise experienced an internal conflict when she realized that she had to take extended time away from her studio practice. The artist had less time and energy to devote to her personal artistic practice and felt out of balance.

My first year I really resisted that de-centering and I spent as much time as I could still working in my studio and finally I realized that I couldn’t ... I don’t know that I really couldn’t do justice to my students and teaching, unless I did engage in that de-centering. (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

Having limited time to paint led Elise to understand that she wasn’t able to “fully immerse myself in two incredibly demanding, ehm, endeavors concurrently” (ID, ER, 3-1-17) and to re-evaluate how and when she was able to engage in a creative practice

such as painting. Furthermore, during the academic year, the artist has less free time, and her creative/generative practice is focused on research and mixing colors or creating drawings, or she prepares canvases and concentrates on activities “in shorter, in a more interspaced moment” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Over time, Elise has accepted that she cannot always be a productive artist: “Sometimes I am more productive and sometimes less” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). This acceptance has allowed the artist to deepen her private studio practice while being in sync with the seasons of the year. For example, during the winter break, Elise has about one week of time to focus on creative work, and during the summer, she can potentially concentrate on making paintings for an extended period of time.

And then it’s the summer, when I just go in and am able to, painting is more my primary focus and kind of my daily practice. So I have pauses every year, ehm, I kind of pull away and come back to it and my move is to try to set myself up in order to prepare for the summer time or even to a much lesser extent winter break. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner (1967) refers to Van Gennep when defining *rites de passage* (rites of transition in French) as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (p. 94). He also writes that rites of transition have a well-marked marginal or liminal phase, and it is possible to argue that there is a parallel between this concept and Elise’s transitory or liminal summers. “There are summers when the whole summer is more about ... transitional summers. When the whole summer ends up being about experimentation and kind of finding my way through, ehm, the next, kind of series” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Elise’s “liminal summers” can be described as being in “the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (Turner, 1967, p. 106), becoming a part of the bigger process without necessarily producing paintings. Summertime becomes a part of Elise’s ebb and flow where she adjusts her practice to accommodate this yearly rhythm. Moreover, as a result of Elise’s

frequent breaks during the academic year, since the summer of 2016, she has “discovered” a new way of working that involves taking more frequent breaks.

There was something really different about last summer, the process, in that I took a pause a lot more.... I stepped back each time, and looked at how the decisions I made, how the color I applied was affecting the whole, and then waited until I felt like I had a sort of sense of insight into what the next color needed to be. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

I would like to propose that the pauses in Elise’s practice became Pivotal Moments that triggered a space conducive to reflection. The Aboriginal word *dadirri* refers to the quiet and still awareness that arises from the deep spiritual spring that is within every person (Keeney, 1996), and in this place of stillness, we learn to be patient and listen to our work: “Sometimes it’s just the pausing and the hearing is much more powerful than, ehm, the willing or the, ehm, or the doing” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). On these grounds, it is possible to argue that pauses have led to reflection, helping Elise access *dadirri*, that still awareness, engaging in what can be considered a more mindful art practice. Thus, her *rites de passage* have allowed her to enhance her creative practice.

Carolina has recently taken an extended break from her art-making practice due to illness and death in her immediate family. For the Ecuadorian artist, the break has opened a transitional space leading to feelings of uncertainty: “I think that now it is more difficult to get back; I haven’t been painting, I don’t know what will come” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). While the Ecuadorian artist acknowledged that a break in her own art practice was necessary, her view is that the path ahead is strenuous: “Now I have to go up the hill again, again” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). “When you haven’t been working [my own work] in a while, you feel, at some point it all stopped because it was very full, it had to pause. It was good that way and had to happen” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Carolina’s “in between projects” phase makes her feel anxious and confronted with what she considers to be an uncertain future as a painter, bringing to mind that socio-cultural properties of the liminal period are ambiguity and paradox as well as confusion

(Turner, 1967). Furthermore, when considering Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) five stages of creativity and that insight or inspiration is the peak moment of a creative experience, the time after a creative task has been completed can be infused with deep feelings of self-doubt. It can thus be argued that Carolina's long pause has opened a transitional or liminal space, a territory that is uncomfortable for the artist. Moreover, Carolina's last major exhibition, "Creative Nature," was an exhausting experience for which the artist had prepared for over a decade. And now that it is over and the exhibition was a big success, she feels empty and faced with the realization that "each time it has to be better than the last one; that's why it is so difficult to start again" (ID, CA, 2-11-16). Probably glad to be done with the work, Carolina exemplifies creative people's behavior, expressing both self-doubt and longing to be re-immersed in the creative process (Gnezda-Smith, 1994). Finally, during this challenging "in between projects" period that may seem empty, a creator may already be starting anew (Arieti, 1976), even without perceiving it consciously. For example, Carolina is already planting the seed for new projects. When I saw her in Paris in July, 2018, she showed me a new idea of applying her painting technique to an acrylic side table; it was a work in progress "model" that needed reworking. However, I could see her starting the creative process with a brand new perspective.

From the interviews, it appears that the three artists in the study have taken breaks and interrupted their creative/generative practice for various reasons, such as family illness, work commitments, travel, or simply needing an extended pause after an exhausting art-making period. Moreover, these breaks have the potential of being positive and generating a fresh perspective or can sometimes arouse feelings of anxiety due to self-imposed expectations to be productive and uncertainty about the future. These feelings of anxiety and fear are Sub-Pivots that will be analyzed in the next section.

Anxiety and Fear

This discussion of the second Sub-Pivot—Anxiety and Fear—examines if and how the artists in the study encounter anxiety and fear as part of their artistic journey and, if so, the role of these emotions in providing a space that opens up new ways of thinking. As discussed in the previous section, Carolina took an almost three-year break from her creative/generative practice, arousing strong feelings in the artist: “You are also relentless of what’s coming, you have fear, you are excited, you have to push your own boundaries” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). The mixed emotions that Carolina describes are related to the uncertainty that might arise when staring at a blank canvas for the first time.

I think the first fear an artist has is to see the white canvas before, because you’re going to start your creation and you don’t know what’s going to come through out of it, and it’s scary.... (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

From her interview, it appears that the artist does not necessarily perceive fear as a negative emotion but a trigger into a space of inquiry—“you start questioning yourself” (ID, CA, 2-11-16)—pushing her to become the best possible version of herself. Carolina also believes that a strong emotion like fear is part of the creative process: “part of the creation is ‘fear’ ... in a sense that you don’t know exactly what you’re going to do” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). Based on this, I would like to suggest that confrontation with fear and uncertainty opens a transitional space of not-knowing and possibility, “because you are confronted with your work and that’s the moment the work starts to speak with when it’s done and when it takes life of itself. It becomes alive” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). Thus, it can be argued that fear triggers the artist toward opening new ways of thinking.

Fear is making me organize my place, put things in order, making me wake up in the morning to exercise, to go to openings, to look for conferences about creative people. It’s making me open up for other things, I want to do my best. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Elise serves as an academic, and most of the year she is immersed in university duties. When the artist started teaching full-time, she was plunged into a transitional space that led to feelings of anxiety and fear: “It was very, very, very difficult that

transition” (ID, ER, 3-6-17). These feelings were the result of changing her work rhythm after realizing that she didn’t have as much time as before to dedicate to her personal studio practice. Moreover, the change in her work schedule was amplified when the academic responsibilities were increased at the University of Puget Sound and she wasn’t able to paint with the same intensity and dedication as before. The “decentering” experience Elise described immersed her in a rough transitional time riddled with anxiety and guilt, forcing her to re-evaluate her professional commitments. In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Schwartzman (in Land et al., 2010) describes “troublesome knowledge” (p. 42) as an anomaly that cannot be avoided, leading to a rupture in knowing. On these grounds, it is possible to argue that Elise’s “decentering” symbolizes a rupture with her previous experience and became a moment of change or turning point, opening possibilities for change and transformation.

When Elise is finally able to make paintings during the summer break, there is excitement and anticipation: “I feel really excited (more laughs) when I am able to have more time to paint and there is a lot of anticipation towards that time I will be able to really explore” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). However, this excitement to be able to finally paint leads to a self-imposed expectation to be productive and to the “pressure that can lead to a sense of anxiety” (ID, ER, 3-1-17), making the artist feel even more pressured: “... to, you know, complete paintings that I am not there, I am not ready” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Over time, Elise has found a way to balance her work schedule with her personal artistic practice; however, this equilibrium didn’t come overnight and is “something I had to work through” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Finally, in the previous section, we learned how fear helps Carolina welcome inquiry, propelling her toward excellence, and when I asked Elise if pressure has positive effects, the artist replied that “sometimes it does help” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

In contrast, for Leeorah, the experience of emotions such as anxiety and fear comes from a different perspective. For the South African artist, one of the benefits of painting

is the release of large amounts of energy that have built up inside her over time. Given that Leeorah identifies a link between her creativity and her sexuality, this build-up of energy can originate from extended periods of celibacy: “Maybe this is personal I don’t know ..., my sexuality is very much related to my, uhmmm ... creativity ... and if I go through a celibate period and then again energy builds up in me” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) describes how certain societies in China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo Moslem world endowed themselves with an “ars erotica,” where truth is drawn from pleasure itself. The privileges are “an absolute mastery of the body, singular bliss, obliviousness to time and limits, the elixir of life, the exile of death and its threats” (p. 58). The interviews and *Naked Soul: A Spicy Spiritual Adventure* (Hursky, 2008) suggest similarities between Leeorah’s view on sexuality and Foucault’s (1978) description of societies where there is a link between truth and pleasure. For example, Leeorah views her sexuality as creative energy that releases pain and blockages, leading to an uncluttered and perhaps more truthful perspective.

The energy build-up that the South African artist refers to can also be the result of not being able to dance, ultimately leading to anxiety. The interviews suggest that there are several reasons that Leeorah’s dance practice is restricted; as examined, the Sub-Pivots of Place and Environment are key. Moreover, in South Africa, Leeorah’s experience with dance and painting is more comfortable and less anxious than in Australia, especially due to the close relationship she has with her dance teacher and the Angolan dance: “... there is no more anxiety ...” (ID, LH, 8-8-16). Furthermore, Leeorah feels limited in her dance practice due to the negativity in the dance environment.

Because there is so much negativity in the salsa dancing scene and other dance scenes, ehmmm ... there was anxiety ... will any man dance with me? Will I be able to be? Will I be able to do what he asks of me?... (ID, LH, 8-8-16)

Every artist has spoken at some point or another about experiencing feelings of anxiety and fear as related to an artistic practice. For Carolina, the negative emotions

emerge after a long break in making art and become an opportunity to trigger growth. Elise experiences anxiety and fear as a result of having less time to paint due to her academic schedule. And for Leeorah, anxiety and fear arise from an internal energy build-up due to limited painting, dancing, or a celibate period, until this energy explodes onto the canvas. Finally, given the uniqueness of each artist's emotions, they are experienced differently and exert varied levels of impact on their creative practices.

Summary

The discussion of the fourth Pivot examined Disruption and its impact on the creative/generative practice of the three artists in the study. In his book, *On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art*, Jung (1923) described a withdrawal of conscious energy that leads to “apathetic inactivity” (p. 123) during the ideation phase of a creative project; this brings to mind the breaks and pauses the three women take in their artistic practice. Thus, the first Sub-Pivot—Breaks and Pauses in Art-making—concerns how the artists admit they have learned to respect that’s “what needs to happen” (ID, LH, 8-10-16) and that breaks are part of the creative process. For example, for Elise, the pauses are synchronized with the ebb and flow of the academic year, and although from the outside it seemed that Elise wasn’t productive when she wasn’t actively engaged in making paintings, in fact thoughts were starting to generate in search of the next great idea. Pauses have led to reflection and a deepening of her artistic practice.

After an extended break, Leeorah experiences “this build-up of pressure” and finds emotional and physical relief when she is finally able to paint: “My art will remove all that energy and at that point I created amazing works, so it gets even more intense” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Furthermore, Deloz (2000) writes that learning is “not about escape from but rather about a deeper immersion into the rough-and-tumble of human relationship” (p. 120), cathartic and revealing experiences where the work is uncovering hidden layers of the subconscious mind. That’s where transformation takes place. Finally, art has the

inherent potential to leave a deep “trace” or mark on our life, echoing leading art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto’s (2003) statement in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* that “everyone can talk about how his or her life was changed by a movie or a play or even simple a piece of visual art” (p. 133).

Carolina’s extended break makes her anxious about the future and disrupts her balance: “When you stop a creative process, you doubt about your work, you doubt about what’s coming next” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). In *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, Jung (1959) writes about the uneasiness and unsettled feeling when this happens and how disturbing the resulting “crises” or “disequilibrium” become. For Carolina, this “disequilibrium” induces feelings of anxiety and fear, especially when she contemplates her future as an artist. Thus, the second Sub-Pivot—Anxiety and Fear—concerns these sometimes difficult emotions and how they have the potential to become Pivotal Moments that are both ritualistic and open possibilities for change. For example, the Ecuadorian artist said that fear can become a fierce motivating force that leads to breaking established limitations: “it’s making you move forward” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

Every artist in the study has spoken about disrupting her creative practice at some point or another. Disruption is an experiential activity with multiple contexts that creates a dynamic force triggering deep change that might lead toward transformation. The transitional spaces the artists opened within this process and the changes that have emerged can be characterized as observing their work from a different perspective, providing an ongoing opportunity for growth and self-development, and an understanding that “the pauses somehow then take you to a different level in your painting” (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

The next section of Chapter V examines the significance across the group, then addresses the characteristic outcome for each artist. Finally, the chapter concludes by setting the analysis in the context of the research question.

Review: Significance Across the Group

The researcher has examined the narratives of the three artists separately, and a common thread is the concept of “spirituality.” Wright (2000) argues that spirituality is associated with major existential concerns, for example, to identify the purpose and meaning in our lives. Spirituality is interspersed throughout all the pivots, creating a multilayered category that occurs at different points within different subjects. Furthermore, spirituality can be described as a set of ideas and feelings that symbolize a connection to something outside their physical selves, leading toward awareness and transformation. Below is a diagram that visualizes the concept of “spirituality”:



Figure 36. Spirituality

Spirituality is evolving continuously, just like the artists' creative practices. This continuous motion brings to mind Danto's (1997) reference to Hegel's "Bildungsroman," a German novel of the journey of self-discovery. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's early masterpiece, the Geist (Mind) "goes through a sequence of stages in order to achieve knowledge not merely of what it itself is, but that without the history of mishaps and misplaced enthusiasms, its knowledge would be empty" (p. 5). The three artists in this study go through their own "Bildungsroman," learning to grow into their mature and spiritual selves through a series of Pivotal Moments. Moreover, in the introduction to Gaston Bachelard's (1994) *The Poetry of Space*, Stilgoe describes how in French contemporary philosophy and psychology the dual meaning of the words *mind* and *soul* is hardly used, while in German philosophy, the distinction is so clear: *der Geist und die Seele*. He also explains that the word *soul* "possesses an inner light, the light that an inner vision knows and expresses in the world" (pp. xx-xxi).

In regard to the relationship between spirituality, art, and culture, I would like to draw back to Danto's (2003) reference to Hegel as he writes about the German philosopher's notion of "Absolute Spirit": "Art made palpable the highest values of the human spirit, and in a sense showed human beings what it meant for them to be bearers of these values" (p. 136). Hegel felt that art could no longer perform a philosophical function, and "no culture is without a way of dealing with death, or a strategy for handling suffering. And that I feel is what the concept of Absolute Spirit is about. It connects the art of a given culture with humanity in the largest sense of the term" (p. 137). It can possibly be argued that the three artists in this study experienced Pivotal Moments that connect them to their culture and humanity in a more holistic sense. Finally, all three artists can be described as the "passionate knower" (p. 141), becoming those women that "want to embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 137). As Maxine Greene (1995) wrote:

The reading of literature may nurture all kinds of understanding of lived structures of meaning, although not chronologically necessarily, not in any particular order. But imagination may be released through the reading, and when it is, meanings derived from previous experiences often find their way through the gateway of imagination to interact with present-day experiences. (p. 76)

Characteristic Outcomes of Pivotal Moments for Each Artist

This section acts as the culminating discussion of the analytical process and will establish the guiding lights for the next chapter. In this section, we will focus on each artist individually and examine the characteristic and main outcomes of Pivotal Moments as related to their creative practice.

While it has been established that the four Pivots emerge within the life stories of all three artists, they are experienced differently by each woman, and the outcomes for each artist are characteristically individual. Thus, this section addresses the outcomes of Pivotal Moments in terms of each artist's individual meaning and how they open spaces where new thinking occurs.

Elise: A Mindful Practice

Elise wants the quality of color to lead her (ID, ER, 2-27-17), bringing relevance to Georgia O'Keeffe's (1960) statement that colors and shapes make a more definite statement than words. Aligned with this idea, the interview suggests that a more mindful practice means a way of working that is deeply attuned to the subtleties of the medium, specifically color, identifying what is true to the artist. This brings to mind Scarry's (1999) desire to find beauty that locates what is true.

Furthermore, this perceptual relationship with color has led the artist to raise awareness during the painting process (ID, ER, 2-27-17), and it is possible that this more meaningful and "present" way of working leads to Transformative Learning. TL is a theory about making meaning and "making sense of or giving coherence to our

experiences” (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 11). For example, when Elise created the “dot paintings,” she discovered the subtleties of movement and gesture while applying the paint to the canvas, “making meaning” of her experience through “light pressure, little dots, bigger dots bigger pressure” (ID, ER, 2-27-17). This resulted in a new and “very meaningful” (ID, ER, 2-27-17) connection to process. Interview data also reveal that Elise’s transformative journey toward a more mindful practice has heightened her emotional connection to color.

I cry when the colors are right sometimes ... because it feels so meaningful.... When I see color together that makes me have a different experience that was unexpected, or that feels right in some way even though I never would have thought that the colors belong together I find that to be a very, very poignant, ehm, testament to some kind of connection and interaction and relationships. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

Mezirow (1991a) argues that “it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance” (p. xiii). For Elise, the discovery of an emotional bond with color is interpreted through a spiritual lens.

Being aware, cause I think you know again words are very challenging, ehm, but being aware that something that you might want to call the spiritual or the divine is present in all things (laughs), so that awareness is just a kind of way of recognizing that. Cause I believe so much in the ... in the sort of holiness of all beings. (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

Another characteristic result of Elise’s journey is “to really be present” (ID, ER, 3-1-17), a way of painting and being that is not without challenges, as echoed by Nietzsche (1978) when he writes that “to stand with relaxed muscles and unharnessed will: that is most difficult for all of you who are sublime” (p. 118). The artist achieves this relaxed and present state of mind by making a conscious effort to become a good listener and by being more attentive.

Wanting to trust more the sort of direct experience rather than intellectually or mediated ways of engaging, and really wanting to kind of peel away some of the ideas and concepts that may seem very important but

sometimes get in the way of just the direct attentiveness and responsiveness. This is something I am working on in the way that I interact with people (laughs) ... really trying to be more consciously present with people, really trying to listen better. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

The “direct experience” that Elise is talking about involves letting go of preconceived ideas of how the paintings should look; the experience can be related to crossing a portal, leading the artist to leave a conceptual boundary into a new conceptual space that enters a postliminal stage (Land et al., 2010), thus releasing a part of herself in order to be more present. Nietzsche (1978) metaphorically described this sensation of letting go and releasing what is no longer needed in order to become “full” in these two sentences: “For this is the soul’s secret: only when the hero has abandoned her, she is approached in a dream by the superhero” (p. 119). “Only when he turns away from himself, will he jump over his shadow—and verily, into *his* sun” (p. 117).

It can be argued that when Elise lets go of her perceived “hero,” turning away from herself, the “superhero” or “sun” will appear, enabling the “direct experience” that the artist talks about. This results in being a better listener, being present and engaging in a more meaningful and focused creative practice.

Kandinsky (2009) described the language and properties of form and color as starting with the material or physical realm and then moving toward a spiritual dimension. Elise has intuitively experienced this transition from the physical to the spiritual since her first encounter with a Van Gogh painting as a teenager.

I grew up in the West Coast and didn’t see a lot of famous paintings just because of where I grew-up but when I was nineteen I went to, or no I was eighteen I went to the East Coast to visit some relatives and saw for the first time I encountered a Van Gogh painting and that was what I think people would characterize as a kind of religious experience, ehm, the marks felt alive, I felt like there was a spirit in this work, and there was this model for like the interconnectedness of all of all these different marks, which each had a life to them, contributing to some sort of sense of faith and light and expressive content. (ID, ER, 3-6-17)

It can be argued that Elise experienced a Pivotal Moment that led to new thinking, triggering an experience of transformation through her first encounter with a painting by

the Dutch Impressionist, bringing to life the philosopher and art critic Danto's (2003) writing that "it is undeniable that transformation or something like transformation is occasionally an effect that art has on those that encounter it" (p. 131). Furthermore, in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Danto (2003) talks about the transformative power of art and refers to an image by Barbara Kruger installed in the lobby of the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University.

A woman is shown holding her hands to her head, like the screaming figure in Munch's celebrated painting. White letters on a red banner ask: Why are you here? Kruger's questions always throw us off balance, especially when she follows them up.... It would be wonderful if we could in honesty respond to Kruger's questions by saying: We are here to be transformed. We have come here to become different persons. (pp. 130-131)

Inspired by that first Van Gogh painting that she saw early in life, Elise finds meaning and interconnectedness through art.

I intuitively know that there is ... a connection to be searching for meaning that is part of the world of color and paint and representation and abstract relationships, I believe in that very much, and I am moved by that in other peoples work, it is something that makes me feel connected to experience in a way. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

Elise experienced Transformative Learning through taking ownership of her career and engaging in a reflecting practice, and to circle back to Mezirow (1991a), through "an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of one's assumptions, and particularly premises, and an assessment of alternative perspectives" (p. 161).

What I need to psychologically do is just be present instead of anticipating what I am going to produce and accomplish to allow the creative process to be responsive and organic. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

In summary, Elise's characteristic outcome of her transformational or Pivotal Moments is an ongoing "mindful way of working" where "every color matters and is essential to the dynamic, to the visual dynamic of the painting" (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Leeorah: Freedom and Hegel's "Absolute Spirit"

As explored during the common themes section earlier in this chapter, the South African artist went through a lifelong journey that took her from being a housewife with a regular job toward a career in body work and healing, navigating an adventurous path that included studying with Hawaiian Shamans and the discovery of artistic talents such as writing, dancing, and painting.

Gilligan (1977) and later Belenky et al. (1986) suggest that women's self-image was developed through relationships in a more interdependent manner than was men's. Leeorah's story is populated with key people that are significant in her life. For example, when asked about a piece that was meaningful to her, the artist referenced her "Pink Painting" (see Chapter IV), created after releasing all of her negative energy following a fight with her ex-boyfriend.

My ex-boyfriend tells me ... oh this is a good story by the way ... so he told me that he was going to marry his current girlfriend and I EXPLODED onto my canvas. What does that mean?... I think I did twelve canvases that day (NA: wow), not only did I do twelve canvases that day, but that day I decided I was opening a gallery.... So I did these paintings and I filled a full gallery ... and I opened it up for the first time ever. There were about sixty people attend ... and the very painting that came after the explosion.... I could have sold that six times over ... (NA: that's amazing) so that's why I gave myself permission.... (ID, LH, 8-16-16)

Interviews revealed that it was after letting go of her frustration and pain on several discarded canvases that Leeorah was able to create her most powerful work, "So the art I make after the dark is actually really beautiful ... I just found the most wonderful therapy" (ID, LH, 8-16-16). Leeorah's "beautiful" work brings to mind Danto's (2003) citation of Hegel that artistic beauty seems superior to natural beauty because it is "born of the Spirit and born again" (p. 12). *Aus den Geistens geborene und widergeborene* reminds me of Leeorah's practice "where beautiful work emerges" from the depth of her soul or what Hegel would describe as "spirit." Furthermore, circling back to Hegel's concept of "Absolute Spirit" as a strategy for handling suffering, it can be argued that

Leeorah tapped into the notion of “Absolute Spirit” to create her best work after releasing the negative energy and emotions that arose from the disappointment and grief that her former boyfriend was going to marry another woman. After the dark has been released, the beautiful paintings that will arise provide Leeorah a sense of freedom, giving the experience of beauty a starting place of education (Scarry, 1999), and, I would like to propose, deep change that can lead to transformation.

Kegan (1994) states that for transformation to occur, it is imperative to return to that darkest region, and Leeorah embarked on that journey with her “monster” paintings when she discovered that “there was something emerging inside of me that hadn’t been uncovered.” Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991a) is about meaning making, and Leeorah is a good example of reinterpreting an old experience (e.g., the monster paintings) from a new set of expectations.

In *The Evolving Self*, Kegan (1982) writes that “growth always involves a process of differentiation, thus creating out of the former subject a new object to be taken by the new subjectivity” (p. 31), and I see a parallel with Leeorah’s journey of self-renewal, deconstructing and then constructing her identities again and again “like the Phoenix rising” (ID, LH, 8-16-16) through a series of Pivotal Moments, literally transforming her foundational frames of reference (Mezirow, 1997) from “mother-housewife” to “healer-writer-painter.” These shifts in identity are related to the threshold concept, where the learner leaves a familiar place and crosses over to the unknown in a journey through preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states (Land et al., 2010). Furthermore, embarking on a task to identify the dark side of her soul and express multiple layers of anger onto the canvas was a Pivotal Moment for the South African artist.

In a way it’s like an onion and it’s layered onto the canvas ... like the saying you peel the onion and get to the core ... you add onto the onion and then you get to the core at the end ... so it’s the end result ... when all is released that is quite an exciting piece.... (ID, LH, 8-16-16)

The literature review illuminates that an experience of non-ordinary realities is sometimes induced by a personal crisis. For example, psychiatrist John Weir Perry (1974) describes this process as “the renewal of the self.” Furthermore, in *The Politics of Experience*, Laing (1967) writes: “From the point of view of a man alienated from his source, creation arises from despair” (p. 38), and it could be argued that loss as the crossing of a threshold can be an uncomfortable and unsettling experience (Land et al., 2010). Moreover, Leeorah’s transformational journey exploring her dark side manifested through different creative outlets such as dance, painting, and writing: “The writing was also a transformational process” (ID, LH, 8-16-16).

Leeorah’s free spiritedness and carefree nature are metaphorically echoed through dance in Nietzsche’s (1978) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the philosopher argues that a free spirit will not be weighed down by any seriousness, being able to dance with a lightness of spirit. Dance can be described as a trigger toward change for the artist, immersing her in a space of possibility, bringing to mind Nietzsche’s metaphors of those who are too serious, and too bogged down by absolutes, such as God, truth, or morality, being unable to dance. According to Nietzsche, an “overman” or a free spirit who has freed himself from these absolutes will not be weighed down by any seriousness, and will be able to dance. Dancing also metaphorically suggests a kind of mental flexibility and agility that allows a creative spirit to think freely and for himself. In addition to dancing, laughter is related to freedom and thus praised by Leeorah, and also considered by Nietzsche as the activity of someone looking down on someone or something else. As such, dancing and laughter denote superiority to the Swiss-German philosopher and are assets of what he refers to as the “overman” in his writings, someone that has risen above everything and everybody, so there is nothing, including himself, that he does not laugh at.

The changes that have emerged through her Pivotal Moments are multi-fold. For example, she has ideas for live actions or performances where regular people, and not

necessarily artists, could use creative expression to release anger through a ritualistic event.

I had this idea in Cape Town ... it's kind of crazy but I'll say it anyway ... to create a "rage wall" ... there is a lot of rage in South Africa and to just let people paint their rage ... maybe there will be less wars ... if people were allowed to let their rage out. (ID, LH, 8-10-16)

Wilson (1954) wrote that rituals reveal values at their deepest level, and I see a parallel to these live art ideas as expressions of values that give depth and meaning in a public way. Furthermore, according to Hanson (cited in Wilson, 2010), creativity is a distinctly modern concept that helps us engage and manage change, and given that the uncertain environment of South Africa experiences continuous change, these creative actions or performances could potentially help South Africans process their volatile environment in a healthy manner. Moreover, given that interviews revealed dance to open the possibility for transformation for Leeorah, her idea of a "rage wall" includes music and dance: "Also at the raging wall I'll have musicians ... and then once the rage is over you dance. First you 'rage,' then you 'dance!'" This dance/paint/therapy event is aligned with Leeorah's vision of a peaceful and free world, stating that "quite honestly guns should be transformed to paintbrushes" (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Finally, this "rage wall" is an example of the type of art that Danto (2003) considers "a means to knowledge of a culture" (p. 105) and how "art helps us understand the cultures to which it belongs" (p. 106). Especially the combination of dancing and painting became triggers for new thinking that led to a pivotal dynamic during life art performances: "This big canvas on a stage ... somehow ... use it as a transformative tool" (ID, LH, 8-16-16).

As examined earlier, the transformation that led to healing in Leeorah's life was achieved in part by releasing the energy she had accumulated from emotional blockages or when she stopped dancing. As a result of her experience with body work and Shamanic healing practices, the South African artist said, "People get sick because they are not releasing all these emotions.... We have the PERFECT place to release ...

anything and everything ... and yeah, I think it's such a blessing!" (ID, LH, 8-10-16).

Through this process, Leeorah is transforming problematic frames of reference, making them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow, 2003).

Finally, the outcome of Pivotal Moments experienced through dancing and painting can be characterized as new ideas of how to express freedom through her "Absolute Spirit," with characteristics represented in spirituality: "When I am calm, something emerges ... something emerges from the dark" (ID, LH, 8-16-16).

I would say it's the way my soul often speaks through me. Ehmmm ... my spiritual life and my life are very connected ... so yeah, I would say it's the way my soul would speak through me through the art. And again there is no holding back whatever needs to come through. (ID, LH, 8-16-16)

Carolina: Hope in the Future

In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Land et al. (2010) write about the idea of the threshold as related to passing through a portal that permits a new way of thinking, a conceptual gateway that is transformative in nature. Interview data revealed that Carolina has been undergoing a deep transformation for a number of years and that her two major exhibitions, "Changing Skin" and "Creative Nature," represented a threshold or transformed way of understanding and possibly interpreting the world (Land et al, 2010.). This new way of thinking, or seeing, is metaphorically opening a creative door for the artist: "You open up a door to a different place ... and you're having all these feelings because you're opening the door and you have the possibility to create, to explore, to find a new universe" (ID, CA, 3-4-16). An example is her last important exhibition in Quito, "Creative Nature," when Carolina realized a new way to share and find joy and fulfillment in the process.

The night of the opening, it was put together beautifully, even the City Hall gave me a personal welcome with the Mayor, a wonderful exhibition. After we had a social meeting, an after party, it was made for the kids, it was

from the idea creation, of being born, that was the theme of the exhibition. We teamed-up with some Ecuadorian organizations “*madres adolescentes y embarazadas*” vinieron a hacer un taller (*a workshop for the organization “adolescent and pregnant mothers”*). (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Based on this, I would like to argue that one of Carolina’s characteristic outcomes of her Pivotal Moments is a critical awareness of social issues in her country of origin, aligned with Freire’s (2000) idea of conscientization, “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions,” which led the artist to “take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35) through workshops that raise awareness.

The message was that art was a tool, even though they are very young, I wanted them to know that art is a tool to educate their kids instead of screaming at them, instead of pushing to the kids the negative things, they should start making art with the kids ... pause ... even if they are poor they can recycle materials. This specific workshop was about recycling materials. (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

These workshops in Ecuador have opened the door to new possibilities for Carolina. The artist feels full and energized when sharing her knowledge about art and bringing hope.

I want to do work that is very ... que tenga una misión social con los niños, es una reflexión que estoy teniendo, porque veo lo fáciles y abiertos que son para el arte. ¡Tienen una energía increíble! (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

I want to do art with a social mission for children, something I am reflecting about, because I see how easy and open kids are with art. They have an amazing energy! (Researcher’s translation from above passage)

From Carolina’s interview, it appears that her exhibition “Creative Nature” represented a Pivotal Moment for the artist, revealing a fresh perspective and meaning. This notion of meaning is aligned with Kandinsky’s (2009) theories as put forth in his seminal work, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, in which he compared spiritual life to a triangle where artists have an important mission or, it can be argued, a special “meaning” that comes through their work. For example, the workshops unleashed for Carolina a new way of thinking, opening a space of possibility that unveiled her mission to raise awareness and help children.

Carolina is currently taking a break from painting after an illness and death in her immediate family. This break is solidifying her bond with children and informs her creative/generative process—”the small child in me has been protected by all the children I have been working with at school” (ID, CA, 2-11-16)—keeping her creative vision fresh and linked to a sense of discovery. For example, she is getting involved in designing silk scarves and creating workshops at her children’s school in Paris, keeping her connected to art making in that way.

It has been keeping me ... how do I say? ... ocupada en el arte sin que sea un proyecto personal ... (*making art while not my personal work...*) ... well it is personal because it has to do with the school of my kids ... it is an art de partage ... (*shared art...*) ... How do you say?... un arte que es compartido ... (*art that is shared ...*). (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Aligned with Kegan’s (1982) theory that identity is something that continually renews itself, Carolina has re-invented herself several times. An example can be seen in the artist’s latest work, where she is experimenting with applying her painting technique to furniture and building an original brand for herself. The result is a Pivotal Moment or a shift in how Carolina views art and her relationship to process. For example, she argues that art has the inherent possibility to become a tool in helping others, and she finds great joy in sharing her work with children: “As an artist you are just a tool, for all the things to come through your work” (ID, CA, 2-8-16). This reminds me of Nietzsche’s (1978) statement, “let your kindness be your final self-conquest” (p. 118), a poetic metaphor that reflects the artist’s goal to inform social change, especially through children.

Circling back to Freire (2000), the purpose of education is liberation from unjust social structures and empowering students to transform their culture, as Carolina is doing through her workshops. Furthermore, Carolina sees her gradual transformation from young artist, to mother, to creative workshop leader and designer as an opportunity for further personal expansion and deep inquiry: “Sí, quizás es un nuevo camino para lo que venga después, ... y para hacerme las preguntas necesarias. (*Yes, perhaps it’s a new path*

for what's coming, and for self-reflection, and to pose myself important questions). (ID, CA, 2-11-16)

Finally, like Leeorah and Elise, Carolina reveals a spiritual component in her work, emphasizing her faith and hope for what is to come. Campbell (2011) describes spirituality as “an awareness of the interconnectedness of everyone and everything,” aligned with the idea that transformation is both at the individual and the social level, and that transformative learning is for the common good (Daloz, 2000).

Also if you are an artist, you have to develop in the viewer a way to see your art as well, so you have this faith that they will get used to your work and will be able to recognize your work from the beginning till the end even though your work is different and it has evolved it will have consistency with time. So you have faith on yourself, faith on your work and you have faith on that. The spirituality will come that way through your work. (ID, CA, 3-4-16)

Revisiting the Research Question

Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, what would the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of transformation, (b) the nature of these pivotal moments, and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself?

The idea of Pivotal Moments has been sculpted throughout this dissertation to address the above research question. An integration of my own experience as a creative professional with that of other artists, a prior study (Alarcón, 2012) informed by contemporary research, and the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters thematically analyzed in Chapter V suggested responses to the dissertation's research question:

(a) The past pilot study made an assumption that there are practices that open spaces of change that are conducive to new thinking, but what we didn't know is what those practices, activities, and concepts were. The portraits of the artists in the study crafted in Chapter IV allowed me to identify the actions and content, and the analytical propositions of Chapter V allowed me to analyze them. The research revealed that the moments of change that are experienced by the artists in the study are triggered by four main Pivots. I identified the main Pivots as Preparation, Location, Process, and Disruption. I also found that these Pivots cascade into a set of Sub-Pivots around which Pivotal Moments occur. For example, (1) Preparation unfolds into the Sub-Pivots of Preparing in the Studio and Other Forms of Preparation that are of a more mental and spiritual nature; (2) Location is examined through the Sub-Pivots of Place and Environment; (3) Process is analyzed by tapping into the Sub-Pivots of The Dark Side and Discovery; and finally, (4) Disruption manifests through the Sub-Pivots of Taking Breaks in Making Art and experiencing Anxiety and Fear. Finally, the Pivots were revealed as turning points that develop into a set of rituals, opening spaces where new thinking leading to possible transformations occurs.

(b) The thematic analysis in Chapter V revealed the characteristics of these Pivotal Moments as: ritualistic, interconnected, and dynamic. I also learned that these elusive moments that have become the core of my dissertation are ever-changing, expandable, and fluid. It can be argued that these characteristics make them directly related to current theories on identity and development of the self (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982; Perry, 1974). I also discovered that these Pivotal Moments express an inherent dynamic in the ability to turn things around in a creative practice such as painting with characteristic outcomes for Elise, Leeorah, and Carolina.

(c) These Pivotal Moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act through the ongoing development of the artist's work. As examined in Chapter II, *creativity* stems from the Latin term *creō*, meaning "to create," bringing forward an

association with “active movement.” Thus, the characteristic outcome for each artist has an active/creative component. For example, as Elise engaged in a dialogue with color, her art practice became more aligned with her personal goal to become more present and a better listener. Pivotal Moments have generated a transformation where she and her painting practice have become open and receptive, in order to be responsive. Leeorah’s experience of a journey of healing and awareness that was mentored by Hawaiian shamans and coached by her Angolan dance teacher led to a fulfilling and exciting life where art-making became a therapeutic and necessary tool. The Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of her work resulted in a more balanced, joyful life where she can help others. And Carolina’s Pivotal Moments have coalesced within the dynamics of the creative act, leading her toward a fluid, ongoing journey that is filled with questions and with hope for an evolving and meaningful creative/generative practice. She is in a transitional time, a space of hope and possibility where she is exploring new and meaningful ways to express her creativity.

Summary

This chapter has brought forward the major findings of Chapter IV and analyzed them in light of the Pivotal Moments experienced by the three women artist subjects of this study. The themes in Chapter V have been constructed with the research question in mind and are based on the similarities as well as contextual references found in the narratives. The thematic discussion was informed by the original goals elaborated through the research question but at the same time expanded in ways that could not be predicted at the beginning stages of the research. The chapter observed the narrative of the three artists in this study, seeking to hear their feelings for and understanding of the role of the four Pivots: Preparation, Location, Process, and Disruption. Chapter V then revealed the cascading Sub-Pivots as they emerged within the artists as a group, then

explored the Pivotal Moments and outcomes as experienced by each artist individually. The chapter concluded by returning the analysis to the context of the research question.

Chapter VI

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The Latin word for education is *educare*, meaning “to lead out.” This interpretation of leading out into the open guided me throughout the previous chapters as I introduced the research, navigated my personal experience, and thematically analyzed what artists said. The findings in Chapter V suggested the importance of Pivotal Moments, and in response to this, this chapter makes suggestions on how art education can support the richness of these moments. The question that comes to mind is: How can the Pivots transform into pedagogical practice, and how can we use them as a guide to create pedagogical challenges to the people we teach? The answer to this question comes from theoretical texts, an interpretation of my own findings, my personal experience as an artist, and the narratives of the three artists in this study.

Oposing the trend for education based solely on academic skills, holistic education is based on cultivating and balancing all dimensions of the individual. I am interested in a holistic approach to art education that includes self-inquiry and self-expression, rather than a technique of methodical teaching and learning methods. Thus, Chapter VI provides a holistic approach to art education through new possibilities that shape the students’ creative process, inviting them to birth fresh ideas. Educators can use the Pivots as underlying propositions, or “tools” for the students to learn about themselves and their creative practice. For example, Pivot 1—Preparation—encourages

students to think about the most efficient ways to prepare for their practice, both physically and on more subtle levels. Pivot 2—Location—has the potential to dive into ideas about space and the representation of their work. Pivot 3—Process—is an opportunity to navigate the psychological journey of the student and relate it to their process of working, specifically how difficult experiences might open up a space of discovery. Finally, Pivot 4—Disruption—invites the student to reflect about moments when she got lost, when her practice was interrupted, and what she learned from taking extended breaks. Essentially, Pivots 1 and 2 focus on more physical areas, such as preparing the space and geography, while Pivots 3 and 4 have a more subtle and psychological approach, diving into past traumas and experiences that led to disruptions in the creative practice. All four Pivots are part of a “toolbox” and occupy specific junctures within the creative process, having the potential to lead the student toward creative change or transformation.

While the themes of the Pivots are used as underlying propositions of dialogue, teachers can find their own style to engage the students’ practice. Thus, multiple perspectives on content could be used in conjunction with the Pivots. Examples to be provided in Chapter VI are the concepts of archetypes, guided imagination, play, and transformational learning. In my view, understanding how learning shifts and regenerates over a lifetime is related to “play.” Thus, play is examined and offered as another tool and is an integral part of the generative learning journey.

The chapter then examines the concept of psychological transformation as related to education. I will draw on relevant theories of transformation, especially Transformational Learning and Threshold Concepts.

Finally, a sense of community is vital for artists. Thus, Chapter VI concludes with observations based on the role of community in enhancing an artistic practice and recommendations for applying the findings to an educational setting.

Educational Aims and Learnings Emerging from Pilot Study

This chapter introduces educational implications based on the narratives, the analysis of the data, and relevant insights from the prior study (Alarcón, 2012). They may serve the field of art education by illuminating the role and relevance of Pivotal Moments and their implications in an educational setting.

The pilot study (Alarcón, 2012) concentrated on artists that were primarily figurative painters, and from the interviews with the three artist participants, I was able to elaborate a series of appreciative observations about specific activities that help the creative process. For example, Anita Teresa Boeninger's are related to exercises such as stretching and breathing in a specific manner:

I start by putting on sacred music of some kind and lying down on the floor—I do a Taoist breathing practice and rock my pelvis. Then I stand up, circle my hips, sense the area of my pelvis alive. The quality and energy of that area permeates my whole body. (ID, AB, 2012)

For artists Katy Alonza Hamer and Linda Vivenzio Meo, the activities are more related to the organization of their working space:

Regarding rituals or habitual practice in process, I would have to say that I organize my space a certain way before making a painting. I specifically measure and hang the canvas on the wall before working. Commencing with a Raw Siena under-painting, I spend most of my time thinking. (ID, KH, 2011)

My pre-working rituals are basically just getting the space ready to work in and laying out the materials I need. That usually involves shifting stuff around to make room for my easel, or throwing whatever is on top of my desk into a box or something so I can have the surface free to work on. (ID, LM, 2011)

The findings in Chapter V suggest that the moments where something opens up and leads artists to experience a change in their practice are called Pivotal Moments, and in response to this, Chapter VI makes suggestions on how, in order to foster a deep educational exchange, art students can be encouraged to experiment with alternative kinds of practices to deepen their creative process. I recommend including a teaching

philosophy that carefully navigates the human landscape, addressing a “mind-body-heart” experience, and incorporating spiritual practices into the curriculum. This is grounded in my own study, as the four Pivots and corresponding Sub-Pivots analyzed in Chapter V are expressed through different forms, taking organizational, physical, and spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, entire departments and institutions have committed themselves to transformative and spiritual learning. Examples include the Psychology Department at the State University of West Georgia, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and Naropa University. Moreover, grounded on the four Pivots analyzed in Chapter V, I recommend that students experiment with the organization of the art studio/materials, engage in physical practices such as stretching, or learn relaxation methods such as breathing practices and/or meditation in order to be able to focus and to relax in preparation for their creative practice. To summarize, students are encouraged to engage in any practice that helps them attain a specific state of mind conducive to turning things around and energizing their creative practice.

Archetypes and Guided Imagination as Related to Learning

As an educator, I strive to enable someone’s practice so their ideas are given shape and their thinking is opened up. As human beings, we can talk to each other across time and space and connect with artists from the past, and given that the four Pivots occupy different junctures in the creative process, they offer underlying propositions for a fertile dialogue. Based on my experience as an artist, the interpretations in Chapter V, and readings in the context of psychology and education, it is my interpretation that there is a connection between archetypes and Pivotal Moments, offering an opportunity to enhance the process of learning and enriching the educational journey. Clifford Mayes (2010) writes about what he describes as archetypal pedagogy; his theory stems from the Jungian tradition and is aimed at fostering psycho-spiritual growth in the teacher and the student,

probing the spiritual dimensions of teaching and education in non-dogmatic ways. Awareness of archetypes dates back to Plato, whose belief was that the eternal “forms” were reflected in material objects; and as discussed in Chapter II, archetypes are a component of the collective unconscious informing human thought and behavior.

Holistic education seeks to encompass the “whole” person, addressing their mind, body, and heart, both in the learning process and environment. Thus, these moments that trigger change on multiple levels can be relevant from an educational perspective and help craft a curriculum that encompasses the student in a holistic way while triggering an authentic practice through reflection. Given that the important thing is how Pivots transform into pedagogical practice and in an art classroom, I suggest that teachers give assignments that dive into the four Pivots. For example, the educator can propose to analyze the first Pivot, Preparation, using it as a way to initiate the thinking process before engaging in a creative activity; students can then be invited to use their own ideas to develop preparatory rituals. The educator can use references that can be found throughout the literature and art history, and tie them to their students’ backgrounds and life stories, providing a space that opens thinking and fosters a dialogue. As artists and as makers, we participate in a long tradition—we can engage with work of other artists in the past, with values that are in sympathy with us today. As indicated in this chapter’s introduction, I see the four Pivots as a “toolbox,” and the archetype theme is one of many references to draw upon. While students are encouraged to develop their own ideas, the archetype theme is one way of working with a Pivot, a “tool” for the educator. Some examples that can potentially be used in a classroom are Navajo and Tibetan sand paintings, the Mandala, Medieval European alchemy drawings, and prehistoric pictographs, to invite unconscious, cross-cultural feelings into the learning space.

Archetypal symbols appeared throughout the past pilot study (Alarcón, 2012), as well as the research interviews. Examples follow of how the three artists in the study engaged in their own “archetypal” journeys of discovery.

Leeorah's story is based on setbacks and gains, struggles and trials, providing a fitting resemblance to the journey of the hero and, it can be argued, the art student. In an attempt to match Leeorah's narrative to a model, the fitting archetype that stands out is that of the unwilling or anti-hero. This often reluctant (anti) hero, who does not consider himself capable of accomplishing the goal, by the end of the journey typically transforms into a fuller, happier, or more complete person due to the struggles that he or she has to endure (Kayne, 2010). I see a parallel to the student's call to adventure, when the learner is beginning the individuation quest, for example, when she leaves her home to attend college. From her interview, it appears that Leeorah initiated her individuation quest when she abandoned her career as a dental hygienist, embarking on a journey of discovery that led her to study naturopathy in Sydney and shamanism with the Kahunas in Hawaii. The artist encountered her first thresholds after divorcing her husband of 19 years and developing a new relationship to her body. Atonement with the father can be imagined through the separation and consequent divorce from her husband, initiating an archetypal journey of self-acceptance and discovery. Furthermore, in Leeorah's case, her guides are represented by the Kahunas and her Kizomba dance instructor in South Africa. Moreover, the meeting with the goddess can be traced to her moment of finding her femininity, for example, a vision she had while experiencing her first Shiatsu session.

I saw myself as some type of Japanese queen. That's what it felt like. I saw this woman in Asian clothes embalmed on a funeral altar, with a cool, regal, porcelain visage. And at the same time this vision was unfolding I could feel myself bursting with energy, so much energy that it lifted me up, off the massage table. I was levitating, and the masseur swears he saw it too. (Hursky, 2008, p. 14)

Embarking on a task to identify an archetype for Carolina's narrative, the model that reveals itself is that of the Child. The connection with the artist's childhood memories of playing with the brushes of a master show a link with the Magical/Innocent/Child: "I started to put some brushes on his canvases and it was really a child's play" (ID, CA, 4-3-16). The narratives in Chapter IV revealed that, both from Carolina and Elise,

there is an omission of details about their childhood, and it can be argued that we find the importance and connection of the Wounded Child and the Orphan Child. We are not made aware of conscious omissions or memories that the artist is unwilling to discuss; rather, the narrator shows reluctance in sharing confidences, creating a portrait that lacks personal and family details. For example, Elise focuses her story on professional milestones, reducing the role of intimate life feelings. In an art education setting, we might encounter the same vulnerable moments and difficult feelings when sorting through the memories of deeply internalized beliefs about what it means to be an artist. Elise's struggle with the beliefs she had internalized through art school come to mind, specifically her struggle to accommodate her own ideas about art as being inclusive, to her art professors' ideas of the romantic and lonely genius that is rather isolated and makes art at all times (ID, ER, 3-6-17). These clashing belief systems forced her to analyze her own values. Furthermore, the literature review in Chapter II illuminated the difficulties the artist and the art student face in today's society. Sometimes art students struggle with the issue of not belonging in the society at large; not having the social and financial recognition and/or clear prescription of rules that exist in more commercial courses of study. This raises doubt and uncertainty; an example is Elise's moment of doubt about being an abstract painter and her role in society at large:

I do feel concerned that abstraction seems sort of elitist in some way, or unaccessible. I definitely worry, I do! And I know that what is motivating my work is not necessarily and is often not going to be communicated to my fellow humans and so, yeah ... at the same time when I think about ... when I want a world without such abstract thinking or without more sort of indirect ways of communicating relationships and values.... I don't want that world, that world feels very superficial in a certain way. And sometimes I do feel like "my god, what should I be doing with my time" ... "should I be engaged in more direct action?" that has sort of a humanitarian purpose hmmm ... yes, there is this covert ... yeah ... but I also really believe in what I am doing. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

I see parallels with Leorah's and Anita's narratives and the archetype of the guide as well as crucial moments in life, such as meeting with the goddess: for example, when

Leorah described her alternate state of consciousness during a Shiatsu session: “I saw this woman in Asian clothes embalmed on a funeral altar, with a cool, regal, porcelain visage” (Hursky, 2008, p. 14); when Anita described how she applies practices that were done by priestesses in ancient times to cultivate creative energy: “...I have done a make-up ritual.... Different ways of putting on make-up have different meanings that originate from ancient priestesses” (ID, AB, 2012). Were these experiences imagined or real?

Another “tool” the educator can potentially use is the concept of guided imagination. Circling back to the literature review in Chapter II and the concept of guided imagination, I would like to argue that guided imagination provides an opportunity for real learning to be applied in an art education setting. It could be a way to leverage the first Pivot, Preparation, and transform it into pedagogical practice. For example, the educator could guide the students into a guided meditation so they ask themselves: What will I paint?, generating insights that help them “prepare” more efficiently for their art-making practice. Drawing from the insights generated by the Pivots, the preparation can be physical or psychological, or both, for example, engaging in a meditative, purposeful organization of the materials. This way, as educators, we are enabling the students’ practice and opening up their ideas, encouraging them to use their own style of repertoire while helping them to navigate the options. In *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, Cranton (2016) wrote on extra-rational perspectives that include ways of knowing through imagination, metaphor, symbol, and spiritual experiences, and it can possibly be argued that there are parallels to the concept of guided imagination. This type of imagination can be successfully engaged during the teaching process in order to birth fresh and unusual ideas, unencumbered by outer restrictions. It can open up spaces where creativity expands and finds new expression, unleashing the unexpected, sometimes through play.

Play and Creativity

Play is important, as it opens up artists to being imaginative and being open to serendipitous moments. That is how we learn and how a process of learning is initiated. Furthermore, play is sensory and generative and a way to introduce divergent thinking involving unusual association of ideas and changing perspectives (Csikzentmihalyi, 2003). Furthermore, play is fluid, generative, and dynamic and can be directly related to current theories on identity and development of the self (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982; Perry, 1974). I would like to propose that play can enhance the learning experience, inducing a deep, transformative learning process. Although the review of the literature does not directly link play with creativity, in light of the stories of the artists in the study, I would like to argue that play is an effective way to bring back a sense of curiosity that is necessary to engage in an artistic activity such as painting. Moreover, the lack of pressure inherent in play allows for even greater rediscovery of the pleasures of artistic endeavors. Play is another “tool” that I recommend be used in conjunction with the Pivots. Given that the nature of play is fluid, generative, and dynamic, the educator can encourage the students to dive deeper into the third Pivot, Process, asking questions such as: How are you thinking about your materials? How can you create a fluid process through your materials? Play, as part of the third Pivot, can open up a new thinking space for the student, giving a new and unexpected shape to their creative process. It is an invaluable underlying theme with potential to open the door of change in a creative practice such as painting.

As examined earlier in this chapter, archetypes are a component of the collective unconscious informing human thought and behavior. Play can be associated with children and to an archetype termed the Child. According to Caroline Myss,¹ the Child is an archetype of survival: “It establishes our perceptions of life, safety, nurture, loyalty and

¹Myss is listed in the References under the Other Online Resources.

family” (n.p.). I would like to recommend that educators bring the Child archetype into the classroom, tapping into the lighthearted and innocent aspects of the students. In *The Four Archetypes of Survival*, Myss states:

The mature personality of the Child archetype nurtures what part of us that yearns to be lighthearted and innocent, expecting the wonders of tomorrow, regardless of age. This part of our nature contributes greatly to our ability to sense playfulness in our lives. (n.p.)

Making art is an emotional journey and, when coupled with play, gives students more opportunities to actualize their creativity and be guided toward future development. The neural actions involved in creativity tend to be accompanied by a range of emotions that need the freedom to be explored in a safe environment. Students need freedom to explore ideas, and I would argue that play is a way to reconnect to one’s creativity freely. My observations and research suggest that artists establish a sense of belonging through the expression of play, and I recommend that the creative decision making not be controlled by the teacher, so that the students don’t miss out on the experience of coming up with innovative ideas. We need to let go of preconceived notions of what the student is feeling and how the artwork will turn out to be. Rather than seeing education as a transaction, the teacher becomes a mentor-facilitator, and the art room a place for open communication and growth. Lessons can be designed to engage the students in their own inspirational process, through play and reflectiveness. Finally, art educators and general education teachers might use the findings from this study to inform their teaching by illuminating the role and relevance of play, the art room becoming the place that creativity spreads and helps students strive for a successful, and playful, painting practice.

Transformational Learning and Education

There are so many layers to the concept of transformation that underlies the narratives of the three artists in the research, and as such, this dissertation also adopts the notion that life changes continuously. As examined in Chapter II, life thus becomes a series of changes, and a deep transformative process becomes a vital part of the creative, and it can be argued, learning process. Furthermore, in spending time reading about transformation as related to education, I discovered the theory of Transformative Learning and how it informs the students' learning process. Briefly discussed in Chapter V, the term has historically referred to the movement established through the research and writing of Jack Mezirow of Teachers College, Columbia University. Mezirow (1997) introduced the theory as a change process that transforms frames of reference (Imel, 1998). Frames of reference selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) that are an integral part of the learning process, bringing to mind the four Pivots discussed in Chapter V: Preparation, Location, Process, and Disruption. Given that behaviors are changed based on a changed perspective (Cranton, 1994, p. 730) and that the four Pivots described and analyzed in Chapter V are turning points in the creative practice, it can be argued that Pivots play a role in the changing of perspective, thus in the learning process and creative practice. It can also be argued that this change in perspective is triggered by what has been described in this dissertation as the liminal stage, derived from the Latin *limen*. Furthermore, the in-between concept of liminality is based on Turner's (1967) writings, describing it as a state of uncertainty and outsiderhood, exemplifying transitional phases as a condition of ambiguity, paradox, and confusion. In *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*, Meyer and Land (2005) wrote about the ontological shift associated with liminality and how it appears to denote externally defined change (p. 376), and they follow Turner's (1969) metaphor, focusing on identity transformation. It is argued that students

experience confusion, defensiveness, and reflectiveness, bringing to mind the feelings that all three artists in the study experienced at some point or another. For example, Leeorah felt insecure due to her body size when she started dancing, especially when she was immersed in the salsa scene, arousing feelings of rejection and doubt. Elise entered an anxiety-riddled liminal period when she started teaching full-time and her private studio practice took the backseat, and Carolina experienced insecurity and fear of the unknown after her long break in painting. Schwartzman (in Meyer et al., 2010) writes that real learning requires stepping into the unknown and initiates a rupture with the knowing (p. 38); thus, feelings of insecurity, confusion, and fear can be translated to the student who is confronted with a new discipline, challenging material, or what in the literature is termed *Threshold Concepts*. Concerned with encountering the unknown, the term *Threshold Concepts* was discussed during the literature review in Chapter II and refers to the content of a discipline that poses challenges to the student. Schwartzman understands Threshold Concepts as “an orientation in teaching, for any discipline, that is concerned with how to support students’ learning particularly challenging material, aka threshold concepts” (p. 23). Schwartzman describes how Meyer and Land (2005) speak of Threshold Concepts as

conceptual gateways or portals to an otherwise inaccessible—and unknown—conceptual space or way of understanding. Such conceptual gateways are characterized as transformative, irreversible, and integrative. Transition through the portal to the new space often poses difficulty and is experienced as troublesome. (Meyer & Land, 2005, pp. 373-374)

From their interviews, it appears that Leeorah, Carolina, and Elise experienced Pivotal Moments that reflect these conceptual gateways. As a result, Elise engaged in a more mindful artistic practice and became a better listener, Leeorah manifested new creative projects and the role of art as a therapy and energetic release, and for Carolina it’s about facing an unknown creative future with hope and exciting projects. A striking similarity for all three artists is the role of emotions, such as fear or anxiety, as a trigger

to create. The interviews revealed that, for Leorah, this is manifested in the anxiety before a dance (e.g., the salsa scene), and for Carolina, the emotion and or fear that accumulates before starting a new series, especially after she has taken a long break from painting. This fear makes her seek a way to move forward. For Elise, emotion is connected to nature, the luscious colors of the Pacific Northwest landscape, and abstraction in general. All three artists “channel” the energy of their emotions to create and feel the flow or dialogue when creating: Elise’s characteristic outcome is revealed through her connection with color; Leorah’s through the dance of the brushes; and Carolina’s through the movement of the colors coming alive. As educators, it is important to understand the students’ emotional waves, including the scattered and low periods when they ponder, including the above-mentioned Sub-Pivots, “anxiety and fear.” I suggest a pedagogy that is nurturing and authentic, considering the students’ emotional being as an important part of an integrated whole, with an intuitive and imaginative process as a part of learning. Mezirow’s view of transformative learning has been criticized for its emphasis on the role of rational reflection in promoting a change in perspective (Cranton, 1994). Instead of compartmentalizing the emotional part of the student’s personality, it can be integrated into the learning process to achieve intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, and spiritual potential. Finally, Transformative Learning can be used in the classroom as a way to apply conceptual gateways that are transformative, occasioning a significant shift in the perception of the learner. This can be applied to an art education environment, dealing with the whole person and stimulating their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional selves.

The Importance of Social Ties and Learning

Some creative endeavors lend themselves to collaboration and others to silent introspection. A sense of community is an integral part of holistic education, and the classroom is often seen as a community and a place to foster social ties.

As seen throughout the narratives and the thematic analysis in Chapters IV and V, social ties are important for the three artists in the study. I am defining social ties as a way to connect, exchange, or interact with other artists and/or meaningful people. For example, Leeorah defines herself in the context of relationships (Gilligan, 1982). Her expression of self is described as experiential and relational: she becomes a dental hygienist because her family is in the medical field, she moves to Australia because of her husband, she ends a relationship with a lover relying on her daughter's advice: "Again, it was my daughter that helped me break free of this karmic loop I was stuck in" (Hursky, 2008, p. 8). Elise referenced the importance of community throughout the interviews; for example, her early paintings, such as "colony" and "cityscape," were grounded in a way of thinking about a non-hierarchical space where all of the different parts had their own identity and were contributing to a whole (ID, ER, 2-27-17), this idea of a "visual community" becoming an integral part of her thinking and work process (ID, 2-27-17). And Carolina is a social being by nature and has enjoyed multiple art and social events. Furthermore, the sense of community and social ties experienced during her graduate studies at New York University have deeply informed her work and artistic thinking processes. On a personal level, for Carolina, community involves mostly her children and husband in Paris.

Furthermore, data from the prior study (Alarcón, 2012) also suggested that in the context of making art, social interaction, such as the connection, exchange, or interaction the artists have with people, was a key element for the artists. This is supported by the literature, illuminating the importance of a forum, a community, an atmosphere to foster

creativity (Lewis, 2010), and the concept of ritual as a form of social interaction (Geertz, 1977).

The following examples from the past pilot study illuminate the importance of community or social ties. Anita Teresa Boeninger sometimes engages in a practice that involves ritualistic make-up as part of her creative routine, revealing that the results of her artistic work are elevated when in a group setting. During her practice, Anita applies vibrantly colored and elaborately designed make-up to her face and sometimes her body. This is done in a manner she learned from a master of feminine arts, who purports that these practices were done by priestesses in ancient times to cultivate creative energy. These practices were done alone or with other women and became both the practice and the art, and she describes the profound effect experienced by being in a group setting versus working by herself.

I think the strongest transformations have occurred in a group setting with women. When I have done a make-up ritual by myself at home it felt different than in a group. Different ways of putting on make-up have different meanings that originate from ancient priestesses. In terms of transformation rituals done in a group setting engage me deeper on physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental levels. (ID, AB, 2012)

For artist Linda Vivenzio Meo, social interaction is related to working with other artists in a studio setting. It becomes a key ingredient in her creative process, particularly being part of an artistic community. Her preparations before engaging in artistic practice are, for example, getting the space ready and laying out the materials, and are influenced by the people around her.

For about three years (back in the late '80s, early '90s), I had a studio at Central School Project.... I had a spacious room that was totally devoted to my creative endeavors from painting to string quartet rehearsals and my rent was only \$75/ month.... I was part of a community of artists that in turn was a vital part of the larger community. (ID, LM, 2011)

Finally, according to Lippard (1999), making art is more than expressing one's self as part of a broader community, and insights from both the past pilot study as well as the

research interviews revealed that a sense of community is a vital component for creative individuals. I encourage educators to leverage the second Pivot, Location, and open a dialogue about place as related to social ties, inviting the students to reflect on the importance of the space they work in and how it impacts their practice and their relationships within a social environment. I recommend a collaborative learning environment, for example, cohorts, learning communities, where sharing best practices stimulates the art students.

Summary

Grounded in an integration of my own experience as a creative professional, those of other artists, the previous pilot study (Alarcón, 2012), the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters, and writings such as those of adult education professor Stephen Brookfield (2009) on how discussions are enhanced when multiple perspectives on content are included; Chapter VI has revealed multiple perspectives on content with the goal to enable the students' ideas. The findings in Chapter V suggested that Pivotal Moments can be understood in terms of a set of four Pivots consisting of Preparation, Location, Process, and Disruption; and in response to this, the chapter makes suggestions on how we can support the richness of Pivotal Moments as related to Art Education. I use my themes as underlying propositions of dialogue, out of which students can develop their own ideas. Thus, the four main Pivots give the educator access to a set of "tools" that engage in pedagogical challenge and initiate a rich dialogue about topics that might include but are not limited to: archetypes, guided imagination, and play. Furthermore, the idea of the "tool box" provides the educator with a set of mechanisms that encourage students to use their own style of repertoire, navigating the options through the imagination. For example, students can be encouraged to experiment with alternative kinds of practices such as exercises that foster guided imagination, and encourage a sense

of play and community through shared projects such as bookmaking, recording their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. As a result, the practicing art educator will have a deeper understanding of the possibilities offered to learning and be equipped to incorporate her insights into the curriculum. The “toolbox” becomes a part of the curriculum, enabling students to find their own style. For example, this curriculum has the potential to open a “space” for students and generate more profound levels of creative knowledge. Finally, art educators can provide meaningful and appropriate support while integrating the visual arts in the general education classroom in a way that fluidity leads to play, and then be incorporated in the classroom as a way to reconnect to one’s creativity.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I am interested in researching holistic theory as related to art education. The principles of holistic education were established by philosophers such as Plato and Rousseau, arguing that education had to address multiple dimensions of the individual while relating the person to society. The roots of holism can be seen in the work of such educational theorists as John Dewey, Howard Gardner, Friedrich Froebel, and Maria Montessori. According to J.P. Miller (2007), there are three core principles that define holistic education: balance, inclusion, and connection. By balance is meant the relationship between the different aspects as well as the whole person, by inclusion the bringing together of different educational orientations, and connection means the bond between humans and all living beings. As mentioned during the literature review in Chapter II, the ecology movement identifies a deep spiritual connectedness between humans and all living beings, including nature, as a way to address the environmental crisis. Furthermore, I am interested in learning that involves the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human existence, and the relationship between the concept of spirituality and education. To use author Andrew Wright’s (2000) description, in a pedagogical “communal spirituality,” students articulate their spiritual thoughts about relationships with nature, with others, and the environment. Spirituality is distinguished from religion (Emmons, 2006) and defined by most

contemporary theories as an awareness of the interconnectedness of everyone and everything (Campbell, 2011). Moreover, the research shows spirituality as a set of ideas and feelings that occur at different points within different subjects, and art students can be encouraged to incorporate a spiritual component, for example, stretching and yoga practices, to relax in preparation to make art, ensuring focus and alignment before engaging in an artistic practice. When spirituality is regarded as something open and dynamic, it has the potential of becoming a vessel of transformation for the artist; its inherent quality of metamorphosis allows creativity to flow without restrictions. Based on the thematic analysis in Chapter V, it is possible to argue that a spiritual component such as meditation in the classroom can deepen and even elevate an artistic practice by providing focus and alignment.

I view holistic art education as an approach to teaching and learning that can bring together important educational concerns such as diversity of perspectives and respect for the individual. Furthermore, holistic art education brings together elements from various theories, addressing goals such as encouraging intellectual inquiry, promoting social change, and embracing the imagination. These goals lead to self-understanding, providing the foundation for self-transformation, a journey that can be initiated by identifying the Pivotal Moments that artists experience in the ongoing development of their work.

To summarize, students are encouraged to engage in any practice that helps them attain a specific state of mind conducive for creative work, promoting an authentic experience. My goal is to provide deeper insight into the subject and for this study to become the starting point for future investigation that will offer sharper understanding of the role Pivotal Moments play within the creative art-making context on a broader front.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Summary of Research

This dissertation focused on the Pivotal Moments that artists experience as opening their thinking, the nature of these moments of change, and how they coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself. The idea for this dissertation stemmed from my own sense that as an artist there are moments or experiences that trigger a creative change and have an impact on a practice such as painting. There was a stark contrast between all the other moments where “nothing seems to happen,” creatively speaking, and those moments that lead to an enhanced artistic practice. As a creative individual, I couldn’t help but ask, why, as artists, sometimes our creative practice seems to flow, and other times, we feel “stuck,” for example, when we interrupt it for no apparent reason other than “life happening.” I was keen on understanding in more depth the origin and nature of those elusive moments of creative change that have an impact on an artistic practice such as painting, infusing it with new energy.

A preliminary integration of personal experiences with those of other artists, informed by contemporary research, suggested that there are moments that open spaces of creative change in the context of an artistic practice, and that it wasn’t an isolated experience. Based on the above, I designed and carried out a pilot study in 2012, wherein I interviewed three New York-based artists and gathered data on what at that time I called “Ritualistic Practices.” The name “Ritualistic Practices” seemed fitting for what I was

aiming to research, and ritual can be described as a group of actions performed for their symbolic value. Furthermore, the term *ritual* is applied to social transitions, and while “ritual is transformative, ceremony [is] confirmatory” (Turner, 1967, p. 95). The term “stuck” for a while and was instrumental during the pilot study (Alarcón, 2012) and early stages of the research. As a result of the pilot study, I was able to elaborate a series of observations about activities that help the creative process, and to link these to specific practices such as the organization of the artist’s working space, and stretching and breathing in a specific manner.

As my research evolved, I realized that, while “ritual” was still a relevant concept, the main research idea was about those moments where artists experience a creative change, and I changed the name to “Pivotal Moments.” Thus, Pivotal Moments that lead to a possible transformation, and what triggers it, became a key area of interest. Beyond art practice, researchers such as Cranton (2016) and Land et al. (2010) have addressed the concept and importance of transformational learning in adults, writing about conceptual gateways that are transformative, occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject. Furthermore, the literature (Boyd, 1989, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1988) brings attention to the stages of transformation.

The present study has built on the prior pilot study (Alarcón, 2012) in order to identify and investigate more deeply the Pivotal Moments, through the narrative accounts of three women painters. The identification and analysis of Pivotal Moments was examined in Chapter V, and stemmed from: (1) my own practice as an artist; (2) the three women subjects in the study; and (3) theoretical work.

Finally, an example of a Pivotal Moment in my personal practice was a week-long meditation and art workshop this past summer. In July of 2018, I attended an “art and meditation” week at a hotel by the Brienz Lake, in a small town in central Switzerland, with a group of 11 people. Two instructors, one for painting and the other for meditation, guided us from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m. through a series of 30- to 45-minute meditations, and

20- to 40-minute painting sessions, repeated throughout the day. We had a couple of short 15- to 20-minute breaks and a longer one for lunch. The week represents a Pivotal Moment for me and illustrates a number of Pivots combined. The first Pivot, Preparation, emerged as we religiously prepared before engaging in our painting practice every morning. The space was set up in a specific way, and each person had her table and painting utensils ready according to personal preference. The meditation was an important “preparatory ritual,” and the more we got acquainted with it, the smoother the transition to painting seemed to be. In fact, the painting became an extension of the meditation practice. The second Pivot, Location, was instrumental to the experience. The geographic location, an idyllic small town by a turquoise lake surrounded by mountains in Switzerland, was the perfect setting to feel calm and cocooned. And the environment was conducive to engaging in an artistic practice such as painting: a group of creative individuals fully devoted to their practice for a week, good light conditions, and a tranquil atmosphere that led to reflection. In the evenings, we went for walks around the lake after dinner, engaging in conversations about our painting and meditation practices, which stimulated the process. The third Pivot, Process, also surfaced during the week. While to describe it as “the dark side” might be extreme, there was certainly an uncomfortable sensation to overcome due to several circumstances: the long hours, seating for a long time (I have hip arthrosis), being in a room inside during summertime while we were in a marvelous natural setting, and the language barrier, as the course was taught in the local Swiss dialect (though the instructor made great efforts to switch to German). Finally, the fourth Pivot, Disruption, was present for a number of the participants. In my case, I hadn’t been painting in a while and had anxiety about what I would produce. Furthermore, having degrees in art made me “think” I had to produce something “good,” which made me more anxious, especially given the fact that the course used pastels, a technique I was never fond of and hadn’t used since art school in Paris some 25 years earlier. After some initial resistance, I let go of my fears, thought that I had nothing to

lose, and literally “let loose.” To my surprise, something was “de-blocked” during that week in Brienz; the best way I can describe it is that a “switch” went off. The workshop became what I describe as a Pivotal Moment, with a series of Pivots that triggered me towards a space of “not-knowing,” opening a space where creative change became possible. The outcome? I engage in a meditation-painting “ritual” an average of three times a week, I am discovering a new way of working, and, most importantly, it feels like I am finally doing what I am meant to do—it feels “right.”

Revisiting the Research Question

I would like to revisit the research question to see what we may have learned conclusively.

Given that artists experience Pivotal Moments in the ongoing development of their work, what would the narrative accounts of three bicultural women painters reveal about: (a) the moments that trigger their experiences of creative change or transformation, (b) the nature of these pivotal moments, and (c) how the moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself?

(a) In order to understand the moments that trigger creative change for artists, I engaged in two qualitative studies: a pilot study completed in New York in 2012 and the present study. Both studies concentrated on artists that were primarily painters but who also worked in other creative fields, such as dance and writing. The past pilot study (Alarcón, 2012) made an assumption that there are practices that open spaces of creative change and lead to an enhanced creative practice. The current study expanded on the pilot study and adjusted the sampling to include international artists. It included formal interviews of three female painters residing in Paris, South Africa, and the Pacific Northwestern United States. The present study built on the prior pilot study and sculpted clearly how practices open up psychological spaces, actioning and bringing into being

spiritual roles or change. Chapter IV introduced the Pivots, or moments of change, that trigger experiences of transformation for artists, as well as a circular visual framework meant to be the basis of the analytical thinking. Finally, the nature of Pivots was thematically analyzed in Chapter V.

(b) The “nature” of the Pivots and Sub-Pivots was revealed through the thematic analysis in Chapter V. The nature of these moments of change is revealed through four main Pivots: Preparation, Location, Process, and Disruption, and a set of Sub-Pivots housed under each of the main ones. The interviews revealed they have an inherent dynamic that turns things around and energizes each other. We also learned that the nature of the Pivots can be described as fluid, ritualistic, interconnected, and dynamic, and expressed through physical, mental, and spiritual lenses. For example, as examined during the first Pivot, Preparation, they take a “ritualistic” form: “a way of kind of preparing and giving into kind of the right mental framework to begin” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). Furthermore, through the third Pivot, Location, we learned about the importance of environment as part of the “nature” of Pivots that trigger the evolution of a creative practice. For example, the interviews revealed that Elise prefers a meditative environment where she is able to work in a reflective manner, and Carolina also needs time alone and to know that she has a few hours with no interruption. The interviews suggest that the artist called to mind the importance of reflection as an integral part of the creative process: “I think a pause was necessary” (ID, CA, 2-11-16), identifying it as a Pivotal Moment toward a space of creative change. Thus, integral parts of the Pivotal Moment’s nature are inward-directed consciousness experiences such as meditation, focus, and a calm environment. Lewis (2010) answered that “you need to encourage introspection,” when asked how to nurture creativity. Finally, the Pivot’s nature was revealed as turning points that develop into a set of rituals, opening spaces where creative changes occur.

(c) The Pivotal Moments coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act through the ongoing development of the artist’s work. Examples are found under each of the four

main Pivots and their corresponding Sub-Pivots. For example, Preparation, the first Pivot, explored how the preparatory rituals coalesce within the creative process as they take place before or even during the actual art-making process, exemplifying transitional practices and thinking. The time of preparation is experienced as “the temple for creating” (ID, CA, 3-3-16), and sometimes the most Pivotal Moments happen during the process of painting; “it is in the process of painting that the transformation then starts to happen” (ID, LH, 10-8-16). In this Pivot, the concept of guided imagination, a form of imagination that goes beyond what we normally understand by the word (Lewis-Williams, 2002), appeared for the first time, as an inward-directed consciousness that enables a calm state of mind to fully focus on creative work. By focusing deeply during the preparatory phase, the artists are able to open up and enter a transitional thinking space.

The second Pivot suggested that Location informs the artist’s creative/generative work. Location coalesces within the dynamics of the creative act itself through the understanding that place and environment have a tremendous impact on the artist’s creative output. For example, we discovered that Leeorah’s work changed dramatically when created in one country versus another, and that Carolina’s emotional link with her culture of origin deeply influenced her art. For Elise, the Pivot “location” merges with her artistic practice and becomes a trigger for a Pivotal Moment, actioned by moving to a geographic location that is closer to nature. Furthermore, factors such as atmosphere, light conditions, and the need for a calm environment proved to be crucial for the artists’ creative activity, coalescing with, and impacting, their painting practice.

The third Pivot, Process, suggested that certain experiences and emotions coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act itself. The experiences were identified through the analysis of two Sub-Pivots, named The Dark Side and Discovery. During the interview process, Leeorah referenced two traumatic events in her life. One was sexual abuse as a child and the other was a car accident when she was a baby. The artist spent a lot of time

and energy throughout her life trying to heal from this trauma, and eventually she was able to “actually bring out these disturbances, ... it was through the paintings that the trauma could start to emerge and then it did through the bodywork then came out to my conscious memory” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). The analysis of the interview data suggests that painting and bodywork are practices that helped Leeorah open the door to a transitional thinking space and ultimately healing, through a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview (Land et al., 2010, p. ix). The idea of discovery is intimately linked to the creative act itself, yielding a “wholly inexplicable satisfaction or excitement” (Ghiselin, 1952, pp. 24-25).

The fourth Pivot, Disruption, concerns how interruption of a creative practice triggers experiences that become a part of the creative process. We learned that taking breaks coalesces with the creative act, as it has the potential to make it stronger: “There is a deepening that happens in the pause” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Furthermore, the interviews suggest that taking breaks leads to reflection, proving to be an integral part of the creative process: “I think a pause was necessary” (ID, CA, 2-11-16).

The second Sub-Pivot, called Anxiety and Fear, coalesces with the creative act itself through experiences that open a space for reflection for the artists, leading toward creative change. The artists experienced anxiety and fear in different ways; for example, Leeorah’s experience is more focused on release. The artist’s emotional relationship to painting allows her to express strong feelings on the canvas, especially the negative patterns and thoughts that might be blocking her life are represented in her paintings. Carolina finds these difficult emotions as potential moments that can be a catalyst for creation. The interviews also suggest that, for Carolina, there is inherent potential in moments of crisis to foster growth and transform practice: “It’s sort of a cycle ... from one cycle to another it’s a transition and how you deal with this transition takes you to the next creative process” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). Elise has learned to take breaks through the “ebb and flow” of her academic schedule, learning to be patient and “listen” to her work.

Through the fourth Pivot, we learned that breaks in an artistic practice are part of the creative process and that difficult emotions carry the potential to open a transitional space of not-knowing and possibility. To summarize, breaks in a creative practice such as painting, and emotions such as anxiety and fear, fully coalesce within the creative act itself, becoming an integral part of the creative development of the artists.

“Mind-Body-Heart” Balance

It is the researcher’s belief that, given the researcher’s different levels of acquaintance with the three artists, the differences in narrative style were informed by the level of personal comfort the artists experienced during the time of the interviews. Furthermore, the diversity of approaches is a reflection of the heterogeneity of the three artists.

Riessman (1993) notes the contrasting effect of “purpose” versus “agency” in how a story is told. In Elise’s memory, the “how” (it happened to me) and its consequence develop into a story where her painting practice becomes the predominant subject of conversation. She is extremely eloquent and descriptive about it. The essence of her story revolves around a practice that is based on process rather than being self-referential. Her work is system-based, choosing well in advance a way to organize the surface as well as the colors. This includes methodic ways to organize her brushes and pigments: “You know I had dozens of number four round brushes, that was the only brush that I used and for a while” (ID, ER, 2-27-17). We sense a controlled sensuality in the making of the work; however, it is not a pleasure based on self-expression but rather self-extrication, “establishing some sense of order allows me to let go during the process” (ID, ER, 3-1-17). She is making an effort to establish a new relationship with process by letting go of the control of the intellect (ID, ER, 3-1-17). It can thus be argued that Elise utilizes her process as a way to find “a mind-body-heart” balance, for example, by actively seeking to

reintroduce an intuitive layer to her process: “There is a desire to not privilege my analytical thinking processes and to find ways to create mind-body connections that allow you know a more physical engagement with materials” (ID, ER, 3-1-17).

Furthermore, Elise finds that the color research she engaged in during the spring semester of 2017 is making her more observant and intuitive, leading her toward new ways of thinking that open up possibilities for transformation (ID, ER, 2-27-17).

I set-up situations where my intuition can recognize if a color is, you know, is working with the whole, ehm, cause if I don't have a kind of sense of, ehm, how the whole as a kind of organism or ecosystem, ehm, is structured or you know functions then I don't know how to recognize if the color has a place in the overall effect. (ID, ER, 3-1-17)

Aligned with Elise, Carolina favors an intuitive approach.

For me when I am in front of the painting it has to be subconscious, it has to come from the intuitive part, from my body. Before the studio it's intellectual but when you enter the studio it's the gut, it has to come right away, the feeling of the moment, whatever you feel right. (ID, CA, 3-3-16)

The Ecuadorian artist also seeks to find ways toward a “mind-body-heart” connection that create meaning and deepen her practice.

Also when I am creating a series I need to physically be voicing it out, I feel more vitality, I do sport in the morning... and also I like to stay moments with myself, thinking about ideas, thinking about myself. A lot more energy comes when I exercise in the morning and I see that when I have a [painting] session in the morning or in the afternoon as well. (ID, CA, 3-3-16)

Leeorah found her balance through her belief that art is a powerful tool for healing. Her colorful life experiences, including her navigation through what I described as “the dark side,” are seen as an integral part of her learning process, and she refuses to be labeled a victim or a “poor me” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). Dissanayake (1988) suggests that art and creative enterprises have survival value, bringing to mind Leeorah's joyful perspective that painting is “a gift that all artists have” (ID, LH, 8-10-16). And Carolina strives for more “heart” in her work, wanting it “to have a ... a meaning and a message even though it's abstract it has to have a message also” (ID, CA, 3-4-16). This brings to

mind that creativity is more than a valuable attribute and has the potential to help us celebrate life through meaning-making.

A powerful image that Kegan (1982) uses to understand the stages of “meaning-making” is “balance,” and for Jung (1959), our psyches are made of numerous opposing spheres that we attempt to unite or balance. In *Everyday Soul: Awakening the Spirit in Daily Life*, Kenney (1996) states that when you accept two contrary perspectives, you give birth to a new experience. I’d like to propose that the deep and intimate journey the three artists embarked on helped them rise above the opposing aspects inside themselves. Leeorah, Elise, and Carolina navigated through their self-imposed doubt, fear, turbulent past, lack of time for their creative practice, family crisis, etc., opening up to the possibility of reflection and deep inquiry within themselves. For example, the analysis of the interview data suggests that Carolina was trying to make sense of her contradicting emotions after she took a long break from painting due to illness and death in her immediate family. She became immersed in a challenging time of self-inquiry and reflection that lasted for about three years. The long break in her creative/generative practice unleashed a space of crisis where the artist started doubting everything: “I don’t know what will come.... It is taking me a hard time to start again to a creative process” (ID, CA, 2-11-16), and even questioning her role and path as a painter: “Is this really what I want to do?... Is my work good enough?... How is it going to be received?... How will it be different?” (ID, CA, 2-11-16). She strived to find “balance” between the staggering fear and doubt with her deep love for art. Jung (1959) describes a pair of opposites as being “one of the most fruitful sources of psychic energy” (p. 82), suggesting that in order to reap the benefits from a crisis, it is important to learn how to manage it or find the aforementioned balance: “Could be important for your work if you know how to manage them because you have to manage them and handle them” (ID, CA, 3-4-16).

Belenky et al. (1986) argue that “to speak in a unique and authentic voice, women must ‘jump outside’ the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame” (p. 134); “these women want to embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole” (p. 137). It can possibly be argued that all three women in the study shared their unique voice and inner light, “jumping outside” the frames as expressed through their artistic practice, in order to find balance. They found a way to communicate and “weave together the strands of rational and emotive thought” (p. 134) through “a mind-body-heart” process, rising to a new way of thinking (p. 135).

On Reflection

Life changes continuously, and thus identity formation becomes a “work in progress,” regenerating over a lifetime. As indicated in the literature review, current research reflects identity as non-linear and in continuous flux, and it can be argued that the activation of the Pivots is grounded in human experience and identity, influencing a creative practice such as painting in a fluid and dynamic manner. The definition of what I am calling Pivotal Moments has also changed and regenerated over the course of the dissertation. For example, in 2012, I designed and carried out a pilot study, wherein I interviewed three New York based artists and gathered data on what at that time I called “Ritualistic Practices.” Given that ritual can be described as a group of actions performed for their symbolic value, the name “Ritualistic Practices” seemed fitting at that time. As my research evolved and the theoretical data became more focused, it became evident that while “ritual” was still an important concept, the main research idea was about those rare moments that lead artists to open up their thinking and experience a creative change. Thus, I changed the name from “Ritualistic Practices” to “Pivotal Moments.” Furthermore, through (1) my own practice as an artist, (2) the three women subjects in the study, and (3) theoretical work, the nature of the Pivots revealed itself as dynamic and

causing activation, and can be metaphorically equated to the springs that get activated inside a watch. Just like inside a watch, the Pivots are like the springs that are used to drive the movement or creative change, and they can be triggered by various mechanisms. The energy stored in the spring is then released slowly to drive the watch, or activate creative change through the Pivots. Thus, Pivots have a role in energizing creative change, and as the different themes occur, one can be highlighted while another one stays more in the background. Finally, there is a sense of dynamism and movement that permeates the Pivots, and the fact that they are not all activated at the same time, and that some activate each other, makes them move back and forth in time.

Implications for Further Research

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the richness of Pivotal Moments as related to a creative practice, I recommend to continue research in these areas:

- To further examine the relationship between Pivotal Moments and a creative practice as experienced by both women and men.
- To further examine the relationship between Pivotal Moments as experienced by artists from different creative fields in addition to painting, for example, photography and design.
- To examine the relationship between Pivotal Moments and research that generates new thinking in the sciences.
- To better understand the role of spirituality and its relation to Pivotal Moments. By spirituality is meant a connection to something outside the physical self, for example, the natural world.
- To analyze the role of Pivotal Moments as a trigger toward self-awareness and enhanced creativity.

In Conclusion

In *After the End of Art*, Danto (1997) says that “life really begins when the story comes to an end” (p. 4). He references the German genre of the *Bildungsroman* discussed in Chapter V, where the story is told of the stages through which the hero or heroine progresses on the way to self-awareness.

The genre has almost become a matrix of the feminist novel in which the heroine arrives at a consciousness of who she is and what being a woman means. And that awareness, though the end of the story, is really “the first day of the rest of her life.” (p. 5)

Our three artists-heroines have experienced their own *Bildungsroman*, and it can be argued that, through the main four Pivots introduced in Chapter IV and thematically analyzed in Chapter V, they have been triggered toward places where creative change has occurred. Their journey to self-awareness keeps unfolding and coalescing with their creative act, which is richer and deeper, thanks to the Pivotal Moments they have experienced and activated through a “mind-body-heart” balance.

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Other Online Resources

<http://www.ackland.org/art/exhibitions/faff/index.html>

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Buddhism/2002/01/Whats-Creativity-Got-To-Do-With-It.aspx>

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<https://www.huna.org/html/kahuna.html>

<http://leeorahhursky.blogspot.com>

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<http://mrststarteducation.weebly.com/holistic-art-ed--artistic-development.html>

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http://www.myss.com/library/contracts/four_arch.asp

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<https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2010/december/the-state-of-play/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDKyweIVCr>

Appendix A

Artists' Website Addresses

Leeorah Hursky: <https://leeorah3.wixsite.com/mysite>

Elise Richman: <https://www.eliserichman.net>

Carolina Alfonso: <http://www.carolinaalfonso.com>

Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions

1: In order to begin please give me a brief overview of your career as an artist and what led you to your preferred medium (e.g., painting / photography / sculpture).

I'd like to give you some background information to contextualize the term "transformative practices" in the scope of my research:

My research problem lies in establishing the relationship between transformative practices and their shaping of creative/regenerative work. These transformative practices cause an opening of transitional spaces leading to reflection allowing for the shaping of creative/regenerative work.

With transformative practices I mean systems, rites or habits that exemplify transitional thinking in the context of visual art, any practice that provides a space that opens up new ways of thinking for the artist. For instance, it could be an activity, a concept of space and time, a venue for change to occur or even a state of mind. Transformative practices imply alteration, flux and change, and could occur at any point during artistic creation.

Moreover, the number of transformative practices that artists might engage in could take myriad forms depending on the person, environment, purpose, culture, and circumstances surrounding the artist. Examples of what I have observed as an artist and art educator encompass transformative practices of an organizational (artist's studio / space organization), physical (stretching and breathing), and spiritual (meditation) nature.

Finally, I am interested in what happens when these transformative practices are paused and or disrupted and how that shapes the creative/regenerative work.

Questions about transformative practices as related to art making:

2: Given the aforementioned definition of transformative practices please describe if and how you engage in such practices through your art making.

Probes:

- Complete the following sentence: an example of my transformative practice is: ...
- How did you move into this transformative practice?
- Are the transformative practices you engage in of a physical (outward = rearranging the studio) or mental (inward = meditation) nature?
- Can you say a little more on the above and give examples?

3: Describe the space / environment necessary to engage in your transformative practices.

4: At what point in time(s) does the transformative practice occur: at the beginning, during, at the end of your art making process, or is it embedded in the final product?

5: What happens when your transformative practices are interrupted or disrupted?

Spiritual, philosophical, and psychological questions about the art making:

Now I'd like to ask some specific questions about your work.

6: Please complete the following sentence: a meaningful piece that I have created is:
...

6a. Can you tell me a little about what thoughts and feelings led you to generate this piece?

7: Please complete the following sentence: the most rewarding part of being an artist is: ...

8: Think about a period of time during the last 24 months in which you felt particularly comfortable/satisfied with your process or work. What was there about this time/situation that made you feel this way?

9: Think about a period of time during the last 24 months in which you felt particularly UNcomfortable/DISsatisfied with your process or work. What was there about this time / situation that made you feel this way?

10: In what ways, if any, does personal crisis play a role in the creation of your work?

10a. And if so, how were your transformative practices disrupted during the personal crisis?

11: In what role, if any, does spirituality play in the creation of your work?

12: Is there anything else you can think of to add along the lines of what we have been talking about? Tell me more about that event and how it has affected or changed the way you engage in your art practice.

Appendix C

Consent Form Leorah Hursky

Protocol Title: A reflective investigation of Pivotal Moments that open new ways of thinking for artists leading to creative change

Interview Consent

Principal Investigator: Natalie Alarcón, Teachers College, Columbia University
00-33-681255103 natalie.alarcon@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “A reflective investigation of transformational, or Pivotal Moments as experienced through the accounts of three international women painters.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you have an accomplished artistic career, work that is inspired/created from the synergy of at least two different cultures and that carries a positive message. Approximately three people will participate in this study and it will take 3 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine and to understand the moments that trigger experiences of transformation for artists. The study also seeks to understand the nature of these moments of change and if they coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act through the ongoing development of the artist’s work.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview you will be asked to discuss your painting practice. This interview will be audio-recorded. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.**

**WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT
FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of art education to better understand the moments that trigger experiences of transformation for artists.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

Leonah HURSKY

I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

I do not consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

I consent to allow written materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Natalie Alarcón, at 00-33-6-81255103 or at natalie.alarcon@yahoo.com.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethicscommittee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.

If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.

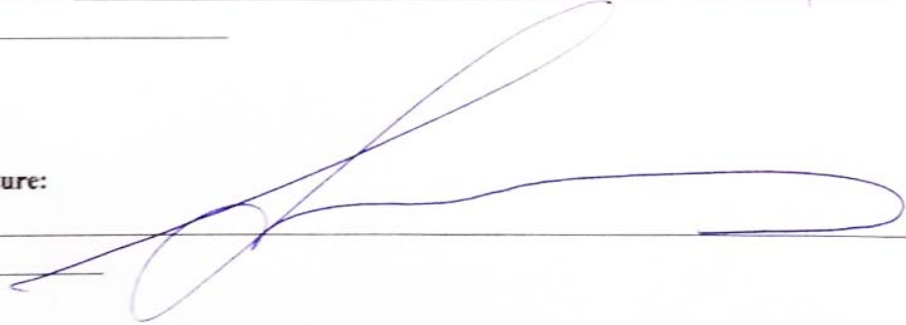
Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

Your data will not be used in further research studies.

I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: LEEORAH LYNN HURSKY Date: 5 NOV 2018

Signature: 

Appendix D

Consent Form for Elise Richman

Protocol Title: A reflective investigation of Pivotal Moments that open new ways of thinking for artists leading to creative change

Interview Consent

Principal Investigator: Natalie Alarcón, Teachers College, Columbia University
00-33-681255103 natalie.alarcon@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “A reflective investigation of transformational, or Pivotal Moments as experienced through the accounts of three international women painters.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you have an accomplished artistic career, work that is inspired/created from the synergy of at least two different cultures and that carries a positive message. Approximately three people will participate in this study and it will take 3 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine and to understand the moments that trigger experiences of transformation for artists. The study also seeks to understand the nature of these moments of change and if they coalesce within the dynamics of the creative act through the ongoing development of the artist’s work.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview you will be asked to discuss your painting practice. This interview will be audio-recorded. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.**

**WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT
FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of art education to better understand the moments that trigger experiences of transformation for artists.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

I do not consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

I consent to allow written materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes EMR No _____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes EMR No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Natalie Alarcón, at 00-33-6-81255103 or at natalie.alarcon@yahoo.com.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.

If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.

Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

Your data will not be used in further research studies.

I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: Elise Richman **Date:** 11/7/18

Signature: 

Appendix E

Consent Form from Carolina Alfonso

Protocol Title: A reflective investigation of Pivotal Moments that open new ways of thinking for artists leading to creative change

Interview Consent

Principal Investigator: Natalie Alarcón, Teachers College, Columbia University
00-33-681255103 natalie.alarcon@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

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WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview you will be asked to discuss your painting practice. This interview will be audio-recorded. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes.

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FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of art education to better understand the moments that trigger experiences of transformation for artists.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

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HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

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CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

I consent to allow written materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes C.A. No _____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes C.A. No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

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The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.

If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.

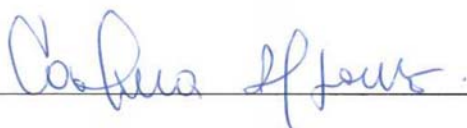
Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

Your data will not be used in further research studies.

I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: CAROLINA ALFONSO Date: 21/NOV/2018

Signature: 

Appendix F

Curriculum Vitae

Natalie Alarcón was born in Hamburg, Germany and spent her childhood traveling between Germany and Spain. She was raised bilingual Spanish-German and moved to Madrid as an infant. Knowing from a young age that she wanted to study art, she attended Esmod in Paris to study fashion design, graduated in 1994 with a B.F.A. from Parsons School of Design in New York, and obtained her Masters in Visual Arts with a concentration in painting from New York University in 2008.

A practicing visual artist, Natalie favors painting, and her work has been shown in the United States and Europe in invitational and juried solo and group exhibitions. She has also taught abstract painting and digital photography in New York. Currently, Natalie holds a position as a design team lead for Colgate-Palmolive in Basel, Switzerland, where she is responsible for driving creative change. She commutes every day from her home in Alsace, France, where she maintains a private painting practice.