The Experience of Visual Artists in Western Culture

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Abstract

Visual artists and other creative people face many stereotypes that have been prevalent in Western Culture for centuries. It has been posited that artists are prone to mental illness, or are creative because of mental illness. In the more recent past, studies have compared creative thinking and personality to “normal” thinking and personality. To better understand how this cultural perception of “differentness” affects the visual artist, three self-identified artists were interviewed, and those interviews were analyzed with thematic analysis, a qualitative research method. The results of the analysis consisted of four major themes and 17 subthemes that describe the experience of being a visual artist in western culture. The four major themes are: Theme 1: Experiences of feeling or perceiving self as different from others; Theme 2: Making choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging; Theme 3: Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances and Theme 4: Internal experiences related to being an artist. These findings are discussed from an Adlerian perspective, as are the implications for mental health professionals and suggestions for future research.
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The Experience of Visual Artists in Western Culture

Throughout history, artists have been perceived as unusual, noticeably thinking and behaving in ways that do not conform to the social norms of their communities. With the rise of psychology in the late 19th century, attempts have been made to define, measure, and explain the nature of creativity, and creative people, but little research has been done to explore how the cultural perceptions or misperceptions of the “differentness” of visual artists actually impact the artists themselves. This research study seeks to describe the experience of being a visual artist within Western culture. Three visual artists were interviewed and their experiences were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this analysis are presented and discussed, as well as the implications of these insights.

To lay the foundation for the analysis of the experience of visual artists in western culture, the first part of this paper will explore the history of the problem from antiquity to enlightenment and then will highlight the role of psychology in pathologizing creativity. Contemporary psychological research studies will be examined that seek to explain the creative personality. Finally, the motivation to create and the experience of being a visual artist will be placed in the context of Adlerian psychology.

History of the Problem

From Antiquity to Enlightenment

The perception of artists as “different” from the rest of humanity has been present in some cultures since early biblical time. In the book of Exodus, God tells Moses that he has selected a man to build and decorate the temple, a man named Bezalel. In verse 31:3 God states “I have filled him with the divine spirit” (New Revised, 1989, p.77). The next
three verses list the wisdom, understanding, and artistic skills God had given to this artist (New Revised, 1989). This is the first human in the bible said to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the author of Exodus believed that inspiration and artistic skills were divine.

Plato also believed that artists are divinely inspired, which he referred to as divine madness. At the time, inspired madness was considered to be a virtue that was very desirable (Becker, 2000). It has been argued that creativity and madness were linked by Aristotle’s position that “extraordinary talent is characterized by a melancholic temperament” (Becker, 2000, p.46). However, Becker (2000) points out that Aristotle identified the melancholic temperament as a personality type, not an observation of insanity.

Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) note that historical observation regarding the nature of artists occurs only in times and places where it is customary to link the artwork with the name of the artists. They found that this custom has been seen in the history of the Mediterranean basin and in the Far East. In the introduction to their book Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist, Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) state:

Our thesis is that from the moment when the artist made his appearance in historical records, certain stereotyped notions were linked with his work and his person – preconceptions that have never entirely lost their significance and that still influence our view of what an artist is. (p. 4)

Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) identified these stereotypes when they found a pattern in the biographical accounts of artists in Western civilization dating back to the ancient Greeks. Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) recognize three components of the mythology of the
artist: the artist is self-taught, there are anecdotes about unique childhood artistic expressions, and images found in the artworks (for example, a spider in the corner of a painting) where so perfectly rendered that they could be mistaken for reality. Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) found that these components appeared in the biographies of artists from ancient Greece to artists popular at the time of the publication of their book.

It is important to note that while artists might be thought of as “different”, throughout most of western history this difference was considered a positive attribute. Kris and Kurz (1934/1979) termed this phenomenon “the heroization of the artist” (p.13). During the Roman and Medieval eras there was little interest in creative individuals (Becker, 2000). The term “genio” was first associated with highly creative people during the Italian Renaissance, and melancholia was considered to be characteristic of a genio (Becker, 2000). Artistic originality was not valued at that time, states Becker, so creative talent was considered the ability to imitate nature. Later, during the period known as the Enlightenment, the word genius became a reference to highly creative and imaginative individuals (Becker, 2000). However, to be a genius also required the capacity for good judgment, which tempered the imagination (Becker, 2000). During this period genius was not connected to madness, and Wittkower notes that “none of the great seventeenth-century masters – Rubens and Bernini, Rembrandt and Velasquez – was ever described as melancholic … It was not until the romantic era … that melancholy appears once again as a condition of mental and emotional catharsis” (as cited in Becker, 2000, p 47).
The Effects of Romanticism

It is likely that contemporary ideas regarding creativity began with concepts that developed during 19th century European Romanticism (Becker, 2000; Ludwig, 1992b; Sass, 2000). For centuries artists had been constrained by the rules of religion, cultural standards, and the limited market for their work (Ludwig, 1992b). As Becker (2000) noted, in Europe, the sociopolitical aftermath of the French Revolution eliminated the aristocratic “sponsor” class, allowing artists unprecedented creative freedom and a need to put forth a new idea of genius to differentiate themselves from the masses. Becker (2000) writes “The romantic artists and men of letters, in particular, revived the classical notion of divine mania or inspiration and established it as a defining mark of the extraordinary individual” (p. 48). Tossing aside the Enlightenment philosophy that true genius was balanced by taste and judgment, the romantics emphasized that genius (in creative endeavors) was a process of tapping into spontaneous, primitive emotions, instincts, and sensory experience (Sass, 2000). These notions are the foundation for the modern day explorations of the link between creativity and madness.

The History of Creativity and Psychology

Becker (2000) identified the French psychiatrist Lelut as the first medical professional to study genius as a medical problem. Lelut analyzed Socrates, and reported that since Socrates took the voice of his conscience as the voice of a supernatural agent, it was proof of a “most undeniable form of madness” (as cited in Becker, 2000, p. 51). As the field of psychology developed, Freud and his followers offered their own opinions. Freud saw the artist as an individual who avoided reality, placing all libido into a fantasy life to fulfill frustrated wishes (Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953). Hanns Sachs, a student of
Freud, argued that artists are motivated in their work by strong feelings of guilt because they are, in general, “sons in protest against their fathers” (as cited in Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953, p. 457).

As interest in psychology and mental health continued to grow, the real or perceived “differentness” of artists in our cultural setting began to be scientifically explored. There is no shortage of information on this topic, and researchers have taken a variety of approaches to examine the link – if such a link exists - between creativity and madness. The studies generally fall into five categories: creativity as connected to general psychopathology, creativity as connected to schizophrenic disorders, creativity as connected to mood disorders, creativity as an aspect of personality traits, and creativity as a way of thinking. These categories examine creativity from many perspectives, with each area reporting some success in attaining a better understanding of creative and artistic people. To obtain a holistic overview of the creative individual, selections from each of these categories will be reviewed.

**Literature Review**

**Creativity and Psychopathology**

A well-known scholar in the area of the psychology of creativity, Arnold Ludwig, conducted a landmark study of the biographies of 1005 individuals who had been famous for their creative achievements (1992a). The criteria for inclusion in the study were stringent, and Ludwig (1992a) did not include “notorious” individuals. The selected subjects were scored on their creative achievements, and the presence of symptom clusters were rated as “definite”, “probable”, or “absent” (Ludwig, 1992a). Given the breadth of the data, Ludwig (1992a) sought only to reject the null hypotheses that:
1. No significant differences in psychopathology should be found between professions, and the creative professions should not have more emotional problems.

2. No significant differences in creative achievement should be seen between professions, and the creative professions should not have more creative achievement than others.

3. No form of psychopathology should be related to creative achievement regardless of profession.

Analysis demonstrated that all three of the nulls were rejected (Ludwig, 1992a). Differences were found between professions for both psychopathology and creative achievement, with creative arts professions scoring higher on both measures (Ludwig, 1992a). Also, Ludwig (1992a) reported that “a significant relationship was found between measures of psychopathology and creative achievement” (p. 349). Ludwig (1992a) discusses the implications for future research, and concludes that research should be broken down to study specific psychopathologies and specific professions.

**Creativity and Schizophrenia**

Keefe and Magaro (1980), when reviewing previous research, noted that findings had indicated similarities between creative cognitive processes and the cognitive processes of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. To study this hypothesis, Keefe and Magaro (1980) selected 10 paranoid and 10 non-paranoid schizophrenics, 10 non-psychotic psychiatric controls, and 10 “normal” subjects from an unidentified psychiatric hospital. They predicted that the schizophrenic patients would score higher on tests of creativity than other subjects in the study (Keefe & Magaro, 1980). As measurements of
creativity Keefe and Magaro (1980) chose the Alternate Uses Test, in which subjects viewed images of familiar objects and then asked to suggest an alternative use for each object, and the Revised Art Scale of the Barron-Welsh Figure Preference Test. In this test the subjects looked at drawings and answered yes or no as to whether they liked each drawing (Keefe & Magaro, 1980). Creativity was judged as higher if the subject liked asymmetrical drawings and did not like symmetrical drawings (Keefe & Magaro, 1980). Although the data did not support the hypothesis, Keefe and Magaro (1980) did point out that the non-paranoid schizophrenics were rated as more creative than any other group.

Sass, (2000) laid out a historical view of the association of creativity with madness, which reveals how both concepts have repeatedly changed over time. His thoughts about current research on this topic are stated:

I am particularly concerned with how the recent research can be used, indeed to some extent already has been used, to support a purely deficit view of schizophrenia, a condescending, sometimes denigrating attitude that sees schizophrenia, the prototypical form of madness, entirely in terms of the loss of higher or more quintessentially human capacities of mind and spirit (Sass, 2000, p. 56).

Sass (2000) argues that there is too much focus on the “so-called negative symptoms” (p. 61) of schizophrenia. He points out that while schizophrenics tend to perform poorly on tests of cognitive functioning it would be a mistake to believe this reflects any intellectual deficit, and suggests what is observed is actually “indifference, negativity, or a reluctance to think” (Sass, 2000, p. 62). He introduces seven features of modernist and
postmodernist artistic attitudes that are similar to the experiences of typical of schizophrenia-spectrum individuals; those features are:

1. An adversarial stance.
2. Perspectivism and relativism.
3. Fragmentation and passivization of the ego.
4. Loss of the “worldhood of the world”.
5. Rejection or loss of the sense of temporal flow or narrative unity.
7. Extreme and pervasive detachment or emotional distancing.

(Sass, 2000, p. 62-63).

Sass (2000) finishes with the observation that individuals on the schizophrenic-spectrum may be more successful as creatives in modernist and postmodernist contexts than in previous times. The implication seems to be that any connection between schizophrenics and creativity may be a cultural rather than a clinical observation.

Kinney, et al. (2000) assert that there are positive features of schizophrenia that can be found in the offspring of diagnosed schizophrenics, and may be connected to creativity in the offspring. In this adoption study participating adoptees had at least one schizophrenic parent and had been separated from their biological parents at an early age, and control subjects were then matched for age, sex, and socioeconomic status of the adoptive parents (Kinney et al., 2000). All subjects were given a 3 to 5 hour structured interview by a psychiatrist, who was blind to the biological parents’ diagnoses (Kinney et al., 2000). These interviews covered the participants’ psychological, social, and medical characteristics and histories, as well as their vocational and avocational histories (Kinney
et al., 2000). Kinney et al. (2000) then had a team of independent reviewers from the mental health field assess the interview transcripts and diagnose the interviewees based on criteria found in the DSM-III. They found a “significant excess of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders in the index adoptees” (Kinney, et al., 2000, p. 20). Taking a further step, Kinney et al. (2000) identified a subgroup of subjects who were likely to carry a genetic predisposition for schizophrenia. Kinney et al. (2000) then rated all subjects for creativity using the Lifetime Creativity Scales (LCS). Kinney et al. (2000) found that there was no significant difference between the index and control groups on the creativity measure, but within the identified subgroup with schizophrenic-spectrum characteristics there was a “noteworthy trend…to be more creative” (p. 21) than the controls. Data also revealed that the strongest predictors of high creativity were the schizophrenic traits of magical thinking, odd speech, and recurrent illusions (Kinney et al., 2000).

Schuldberg (2000) agrees that understanding any link between creativity and schizophrenia will be found by a closer examination of specific schizophrenic-spectrum traits as they occur in creative people. He points out that divergent thinking (a factor in creative intelligence) and thought disorder (a characteristic of schizophrenia) have very similar definitions (Schuldberg, 2000). In this study, Schuldberg (2000) identified six schizophrenic-spectrum traits to be measured and compared to creativity scores: positive symptom schizotypal cognitive traits, negative symptom schizotypal cognitive traits, flat affect, hypomania, depression, and impulsivity. The subjects were drawn from several large samples of a college student population (Schuldberg, 2000) He tested for creativity in subjects using eight separate measurements, and each spectrum trait was measured separately using tests Schuldberg (2000) had determined would best measure the single
trait. The results showed that creativity scores were positively correlated with positive schizotypal cognitive symptoms, hypomania, and impulsivity (Schuldberg, 2000).

Schuldberg (2000) also noted that creativity scores were generally negatively correlated with negative schizotypal cognitive symptoms and depression.

While many studies have further explored the link between specific schizophrenic-spectrum traits and divergent thinking (recognized as a characteristic of creativity), one study is particularly interesting. Burch, Pavelis, Hemsley, and Corr (2006) recognized that cognitive patterns may differ across types of creativity, so they selected visual artists to compare with non-artists in their study. Burch et al. (2006) chose to measure positive schizotypy, asocial schizotypy, neuroticism, creativity, and openness to experience. Once again, several different measures were used to specifically target each trait (Burch et al., 2006). When the data was processed, visual artists scored higher than non-artists on cognitive disorganization, impulsive non-conformity, neuroticism, openness, and divergent thinking (Burch et al., 2006). Non-artists scored higher on agreeability (Burch et al., 2006).

**Creativity and Mood Disorders**

There is a historical lack of clarity as to what type of “madness” artists may suffer from. Several researchers have argued that the mental health issue among creative individuals is in the spectrum of mood disorders. Richards, Kinney, Lunde, Benet, and Merzel (1988) examined levels of creativity of diagnosed manic-depressives and cyclothymes compared to their relatives and control subjects. The measurement used was the Lifetime Creativity Scale (LCS), which had been developed by Richards, Kinney, Benet, and Merzel in 1986 to measure both vocational and avocational creativity (as cited
by Richards, et al., 1988). One of their hypotheses was that the relatives of creative bipolar patients should demonstrate higher creativity than the control subjects or the relatives of bipolar patients who did not score high on creativity (Richards, et al., 1988). After analyzing the data, the relatives of creative patients scored highest on creativity overall (Richards, et al., 1988). Also, the bipolar and cyclothymic subjects with their relatives scored higher in creativity than the controls; although the cyclothymic patients had significantly lower creativity scores (Richards et al., 1988).

Silvia and Kimbrel (2010) tested 189 students of General Psychology at the University of North Carolina. The students were given tests to determine their level of divergent thinking, creative self-concepts, everyday creativity, and creative achievement (Silvia & Kimbrel, 2010). Afterwards, subjects were tested for mood disorder symptoms using the Depression and Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), a measurement designed to identify symptoms of depression and anxiety, which Silvia and Kimbrel (2010) view as a continuum. Unfortunately for Silvia and Kimbrel (2010) there were no significant variances in the results, which they explain as problems with the measurements used in this study.

After a lengthy review of studies on the link between bipolar disorder and creativity, Rothenberg (2001) concluded that “overall… there is little evidence for an association between bipolar or manic-depressive illness and creativity” (p.135). He was concerned, however, about the serious detrimental effects when bipolar disorder occurs in highly creative individuals (Rothenberg, 2001). Rothenberg (2001) explored the lives of two such individuals, Edvard Munch and Jackson Pollack. In outlining the progression of these artists’ illnesses and careers, Rothenberg (2001) points out that the artists’ creative
output increased during times of lower symptom activity. Even Munch’s most known painting, “The Scream”, which was conceived from an experience of visual hallucination, was not created until Munch was in a period of lowered symptoms of his disorder (Rothenberg, 2001). In conclusion, Rothenberg (2001) makes a case that some artists and even some doctors may believe (mistakenly) that treatment of the disorder may rob the artist of some of their creative ability. Rothenberg (2001) argues that some effective treatments for bipolar disorder can result in cognitive impairment, which then inhibits creative activity, so he advises clinicians to treat creative patients with anticonvulsants rather than risk lowered cognitive ability.

Creativity and Cognition

The nature of creative cognition has become a thriving area of research. Many researchers (Burch et al., 2006; Ludwig, 1989; Silvia & Kimbrel, 2010; Schuldberg, 2001) have noted that among creative people there is a higher ability for divergent thinking, which is defined by The Free Dictionary (2011) as: “thinking that moves away in diverging directions so as to involve a variety of aspects and which sometimes lead to novel ideas and solutions; associated with creativity.” Other specific “thinking” traits have been identified and measured. In a study of 114 members of an artist’s guild, Simon collected Myers-Briggs Type Indicators and found creativity was connected to intuitive orientation (as cited in Gridley, 2006). Amabile, Phillips, and Collins studied 23 professional artists and found the sample to be significantly higher than the general population on an “openness” scale of the NEO Five Factor Inventory (as cited in Gridley, 2006). An idea-oriented preference was observed by Jung, who also noted a predilection for turning inward (as cited by Gridley, 2006). Sternberg found that artists prefer
thinking about inventing and developing new ideas of their own, they prefer change to the status quo, and finally, that artists prefer “viewing goals in hierarchies when problem solving” (as cited in Gridley, 2006, p.248). Most notably, Rothenberg (1993) has identified and defined two types of thinking that occur with creativity. The Janusian process described as “actively and simultaneously conceiving multiple opposites or antitheses” (Rothenberg, 1993, p.218). The other type of thinking Rothenberg (1993) describes is the Homospatial process, which involves “modes of manipulation of mental imagery that result in metaphor formations and other types of unification” (p.219). Rothenberg (1993) argues that these are complex mental processes, and since mental health problems would interfere with these abilities it is likely that creative thinking is not facilitated by mental or emotional illness.

Creativity and Personality Factors

The field of study regarding personality factors has generated new ideas for examining what makes artists seem “different.” One of the first to research the topic, Eiduson (1953), hypothesized that individuals working in an art vocation are different from persons working in other fields in thinking, perception, personality, and motivation. Her second hypothesis was that people working in art fields and have sought professional help for psychological problems are not sufficiently different in thinking, perception, personality, and motivation than artists who have not sought psychological help (Eiduson, 1953). For this study, Eiduson (1953) began with individuals who had sought help at a mental health clinic. The subjects from the clinic were 25 artists and 25 non-artists (as defined by vocation) and the two groups were homogeneously matched (Eiduson, 1953). A group of 15 artists who had not sought psychological help were
added as a control (Eiduson, 1953). The subjects were administered the Rorschach test and selected cards from the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Eiduson, 1953). The subjects were then given a 50 item rating scale that Eiduson (1953) had developed based on existing literature from several theoretic positions. The data collected supported both of Eiduson’s (1953) hypotheses, and the factor that stood out most significantly was that artists tended to have “early recognition of artistic talents which subsequently led to many gratifying experiences and relationships” (p. 22). In her summary, Eiduson (1953) also mentions that artists are original, unusual, and novel in their thinking, prefer the theoretical and abstract interests to the realistic or practical, have elaborate fantasy, intellectualize their aggression, are driven by curiosity about the world, and their ego-involvement in their work is high.

In the same year, Munsterberg and Mussen (1953) conducted a study of the personalities of artists from a psychoanalytic perspective, with seven hypotheses representing items would be predicted by this theoretical approach. The subjects were 30 “outstanding” art students, and 30 matched non-art students from Ohio State University (Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953). Selections of TAT cards were administered to both groups, as well as a questionnaire to obtain information regarding the subjects’ interest and involvement in creative activities (Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953). In the discussion of the results, Munsterberg and Mussen (1953) report that, in accordance with psychoanalytic theories, artists are more likely to have quiet, introverted personalities and suffer from intense feelings of guilt. They also found that artists are more concerned about approval of their work than with personal acceptance (Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953).
As personality research progressed, Cattell (1956) designed a scale of personality factors that could be utilized to make comparisons in large standardized groups and specialized sub-groups. The Cattell Sixteen Personality Factor test (16PF) has been widely accepted and is often used in studies of personality. In a study that investigated personality and creativity in artists and writers, Drevdahl and Cattell (1958) sent the 16PF to 212 professionally recognized artists and extensively published writers. When the test materials were completed and returned by 153 participants, Drevdahl and Cattell (1958) compared the data from the experimental group to data about the general population. In their findings they report that the artists’ and writers’ creative ability was decidedly related to high intelligence (Drevdahl & Cattell, 1958). While creative people are both introverted and bold, Drevdahl and Cattell (1958) stipulate that their other findings “are not characteristic of a ‘pleasant’ personality” (p.110), and that a creative person “does not seem to be the sort of person that one might describe as well adjusted in its more inclusive sense” (p.111). Finally, Drevdahl and Cattell (1958) end by suggesting - in a comment that has nothing to do with their study - that therapists may not want to help creative patients to find a peaceful but unproductive comfortable existence.

One recent researcher, Roy (1996) used the 16PF to compare 51 fine artists with 51 non-artists. Her objective was to determine which personality traits would best differentiate artists from non-artists (Roy, 1996). To accomplish this goal Roy (1996) used a stepwise discriminant analysis of the data. In a brief discussion, Roy (1996) reports finding three discriminating personality factors: artists are more in-going, dominant, and tender-minded than non-artists. Roy (1996) summarizes with the observation that these factors are likely related to the artists’ working styles.
The creative individual’s success in an artistic profession became a criterion that was measured in a study conducted by Amos (1978). The visual artists who participated in the research were categorized by Amos (1978) as either “established” or “less established” (p. 375). Noting that previous research had tended to focus on men more than women, Amos (1978) selected 60 male and 60 female artists. The participants were divided into four groups: established male, less established male, established female, less established female (Amos, 1978). The subjects were given the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and Amos (1978) used multiple discriminant analysis to study the data. Significant differences between male and female artists occurred in only two scales of the CPI: the femininity scale and the tolerance scale (Amos, 1978). These results were not unexpected, but Amos (1978) did not expect the finding that female artists did not differ from their male counterparts on the scales that would normally have revealed a difference between the sexes. Amos (1978) found no significant differences between established and less established artists, which he explains may indicate that cultural influences as defined by societal position are not important to the personality development of an artist.

Gelade (1997) hypothesized that the personalities of creative individuals are influenced by their creative development. Psychologist Otto Rank defined three stages of creative development (as cited by Gelade, 1997). The first stage is adapting to social norms, and Rank believed that the majority of people remain in this stage because they do not have a strong need for individuation (as cited in Gelade, 1997). In the second stage of creative development, the creative person’s ideals, goals, and attitudes are in conflict with social norms (Gelade, 1997). The final stage of the process is a resolution of the conflict, a realization of individuation, and a sense of harmony with the self and society (Gelade,
Recognizing that the conflict between creativity and socialization was similar to the tension of creative professionals who must tailor their creative ideas and output to the needs of the marketplace, Gelade (1997) designed his study. Using the revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) Gelade (1997) examined 58 individuals working in the creative departments of advertising and design firms, and 70 managers and professionals of mainstream corporations in positions that were not obviously creative. The personality traits measured were neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Gelade, 1997). The results revealed that creatives scored higher on neuroticism and openness to experience, there was no significant differences between groups on extraversion, and creatives scored lower on agreeableness and conscientiousness (Gelade, 1997). Gelade (1997) concluded that the scores reveal that commercial creative professionals experience “the psychological conflict and the psychological richness” (p.69) characteristic of Rank’s second stage of creative development.

Psychological conflicts may in fact be characteristic of the creative personality (Haller & Courvoisier, 2010). McMullan argued that the creative personality has polarities between: openness and the need to complete gestalts; high fantasy and a strong sense of reality; destructive and constructive attitudes; neutrality and passion; self-centeredness and altruism; self-doubt and self-confidence; and finally, tension and relaxedness (as cited in Haller & Courvoisier, 2010). In their study, Haller and Courvoisier (2010) tested visual art students, music students, and psychology students from universities in Bern, Switzerland for levels of differences of various personality traits and complexity of answers. The measurements utilized were the NEO FFI and the
Heuristic questionnaire (Haller & Courvoisier, 2010). The results disclosed an unexpected higher level of complexity for visual artists, as well as distinct differences in thinking styles and personality traits between all three groups (Haller & Courvoisier, 2010). After studying the distinctions between the creative domains of visual and musical arts, Haller and Courvoisier (2010) suggest that future research should separate types of artists “because there are differences” (p.156).

For one prominent researcher, there are notable differences among creative people regardless of the form of their creativity. Ludwig (1996), based on his multiple historical and biographical studies on creativity, asserted that he has identified 8 characteristics of “creative superstars” (p. 2-3):

1. Early signs of giftedness.
2. Special parenting and mentoring.
3. Contrariness.
4. Capacity for solitude (unless they are in charge).
5. Physical vulnerability (to illness).
6. A personal seal on their work (such as a symbol or signature).
7. Drive for dominance (boundless self-confidence).
8. Psychological unease, a tendency to be restless, impatient, and driven.

The research discussed in this study demonstrates that there are certain recognizable traits that create the impression of the artist as being “different” in our society. There is, however, a distinct lack of evidence suggesting that thinking or behaving differently is an indication of mental illness. I would argue that research on this topic should be approached from the viewpoint that artists are typically healthy individuals with an
underlying logic for their thoughts and behaviors. The current study is designed from the viewpoint of Adlerian Individual psychology.

**The Adlerian Perspective**

After collaborating with Freud in the development of psychoanalysis, Alfred Adler separated himself from the psychoanalytic movement and advanced his theory of Individual Psychology. Adlerian theory views the person as a whole, and takes the position that all behavior is purposeful and directed by the individual’s experiences and private logic. Adler’s initial theory suggested that two factors motivate people, the first being a striving for power and superiority, which was caused by feelings of inferiority that are present from birth (Ferguson, 1989). The second motivator, the need to belong, came to be combined with the need to feel like a contributing member of the human community (Ferguson, 1989). Adler’s term for this motivation is Gemeinschaftsgefühl, which is somewhat inadequately translated as social interest (Ferguson, 1989).

Pointing out that these two motivations seem contradictory, Ferguson (1989) describes how Adler continued to work toward a unified theory of motivation. By 1930, Adler reconciled these opposing ideas - superiority and belonging - as a desire for affirmation and clarified the striving for superiority as “a dynamic urge to assert one’s self” (as cited in Ferguson, 1989, p.356). Ferguson (1989) explains that in his last years Adler emphasized that the striving for superiority did not indicate a desire for power over other people, but rather over circumstances, tasks, and achievements. This new definition of striving for superiority is synonymous with Jung’s theory of individuation, described as coming to selfhood or self-realization (Huber, 2000). Although Adler never discussed artists or creative people specifically, it seems likely that for an artist the need to create is
an important aspect of the self that needs to be affirmed and developed. Ultimately,
Adler stated that “there is no doubt that the social feeling is superior to individualistic
striving” as individuation is a “superficial viewpoint” (as cited in Ferguson, 1989, p.356).
That may not be true for all individuals, however, and Adler himself is noted for making
the absolute statement that “everything can always be different.”

Individual psychology contains many important beliefs about motivation and
personality that have been carried forward by Adler’s followers and incorporated into
subsequent psychological theories. For the purposes of this study, it is important to
identify another of Adler’s theories which may be experienced differently by artists in the
Western culture. Adler put forth the idea that all individuals have three life tasks: the
social task, the love/marriage task, and the work task (Bitter, 2007). Adler saw all of
these tasks as being necessary to the development and survival of the human race (Bitter,
2007). As Adlerian theory has progressed, there have been suggestions of adding more
tasks, or redefining the tasks (Bitter, 2007). The work task is expanded by some
therapists to include hobbies or volunteer work, because of the observation that in
Western culture, “work” is valued primarily for earning potential and does not take into
account any intrinsic value that an individual may find in performing specific types of
work that they enjoy (Bitter, 2007). For artists in our society, the work task is uniquely
challenging for two reasons: 1) the lack of certainty that creating art will ever be a source
of income, and 2) the need for creative expression is not a job or a hobby; it is a vital part
of the individual’s sense of self.

As a future Adlerian therapist, I elected to utilize qualitative research rather than
quantitative research. As Nicholls (2009) explains, quantitative research generally
examines data that are not experiential or socially constructed. Nicholls (2009) goes on to say that qualitative research “is concerned with the way people give meaning to the world, and it assumes that everyone is different in this regard” (p.639). This approach aligns with the Adlerian perspective, and provides a richer understanding of how visual artists experience being an artist in Western culture.

**Method**

**Methodology**

The methodology used to conduct this research was interviewing self-identified artists and conducting a thematic analysis of the data. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method, and should be considered “as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). It is defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

The thematic analysis was carried out using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) step-by-step guide. These six steps include:

1. The researcher becomes familiar with the data by transcribing the interviews and making notes on any initial ideas.
2. The researcher codes or identifies interesting aspects systematically across the data set, organizing data as it relates to codes.
3. The researcher organizes the coded data into potential themes.
4. The researcher inspects the themes in relation to coded extracts and the complete data set.
5. The researcher refines the details of each theme, creating understandable definitions and names for the themes.
6. The researcher produces a report using lucid, compelling examples of extracts and analyzing them, relating the analysis back to the initial question and literature.

**Subject Selection and Data Collection**

To locate self-identified visual artists, I contacted Springboard for the Arts, a non-profit organization with a mission of connecting artists with resources and services. The organization posted my request for research interviews on Facebook and Twitter. Three self-identified artists responded, two male and one female. I arranged to meet with each one individually and recorded the interviews using a digital voice recorder.

To thoroughly capture the experience of the participants, the subjects were asked the following four open-ended questions:

1. Tell me about your experience being an artist?
2. Tell me about the first time you identified yourself as an artist?
3. How do people perceive you as an artist?
4. How do people’s perceptions of you affect you as an artist?

Clarifying questions were asked whenever part or all of the answer was unclear or needed further explanation. Follow up questions were asked to expand and deepen the responses when subjects gave a brief or partial response. All data was combined and analyzed for recurrent themes.
Results

Identified Themes

Four major themes became apparent in the data analysis. Seventeen sub-themes were identified that further defined each of these major themes. The four major themes that emerged from the data are: Theme 1: Experiences of feeling or perceiving self as different from others; Theme 2: Making choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging; Theme 3: Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances and Theme 4: Internal experiences related to being an artist. Each of major themes categories along with their corresponding sub-themes will be discussed below using the original words of the participants.

Theme 1: Experience of feeling or perceiving self as different from others. All three participants described experiences of feeling or perceiving themselves as different from others. These experiences were further distinguished by four subthemes: (1) childhood experiences, (2) a recognition of artistic skill by oneself or others, (3) a compelling urge for creative expression, and (4) a strong need for individuation.

Each participant spoke of (1) childhood experiences of feeling different because of some aspect of their creative nature. This perception of being different could be either positive or negative. Ironically, both P1 and P2 told of instances when the experience of difference occurred while being taught art in school. P1 told me: “my remembrance of art class in school did the opposite of promoting my creativity.” To put this remark in context, P1 was being criticized by the teacher for choosing not to render an assignment realistically. For P2, the recollection is similar: “when I first started really getting into
painting, is when I went, ‘Okay, we’re doing a still life. Try to make it as perfect as possible.’ Well, why can’t I take a picture? It really got to me.” From his point of view, making a realistic painting was nonsensical. Having these thoughts was frightening for P2: “I think that is a big thing, too, when you’re little- you think you’re alone and you have these big, creative ideas and that’s kind of scary.” Although P3 also had situations when he felt different at school, one recollection came from his family life: “I also believe, though I had brothers, a lot of it is the idea of being alone, I create my own world through art.”

All the participants have recognizable artistic ability that differentiates them from non-artists. The examples of this sub-theme (2) a recognition of skill by oneself or others, are typically affirming moments. P3 recalls recognizing his own abilities as a child: “I’d always sit in the house and draw, and then they’d come in and try to figure out what that was, how do I do that and all this kind of stuff, so, that was my little special thing that they didn’t- couldn’t do.” P2 also recognized his own evolving skills while describing drawing with a pencil as a child: “I think creating and seeing things as 3D or 2D, ya know, it evolves into shadow and light and depth and perception.” Recognition from other people is revealed for P1 when she notes: “My photography took off” shortly after leaving a corporate job. Being paid for being creative is one form of affirmation from the community, and there are others as well. P2 entered some photos in a contest with positive results: “Congratulations, that’s awesome! You got published!”

The (3) compelling urge for creative expression is a strong characteristic of all three participants. P3 had been bequeathed art supplies from his Grandma at the age of six, and he responded in a way that was surprising for his age: “I didn’t know what all
this stuff was, so I kind of took it on myself to learn all this stuff that I would copy what
she had done and stuff.” P2 recalls that as a small child: “I really started making things
just to make things and trying to put a function to them later”, he didn’t really even have
a purpose for the things he made. This inner urging is taken very seriously by each
participant; it is a motivation that is very valued in themselves. At times it is
empowering, as demonstrated by this statement made by P1, who always wants: “to find
a new way to do it- a revolutionary way and I think that is the job of an artist.” This urge
first experienced as a child becomes a driving factor the participant’s lives, as P3 said:
“I’ve gotten to this thing where I go, ‘This is what I can do very well and really practice
it when I do.’ And, so, I live and breathe it.”

Across the set of data is a prevailing subtheme of (4) a strong need for
individuation. For clarity, the term individuation refers to the need for self-realization, a
process of developing as a unique individual, building up one’s strengths, abilities, and
coloracter. When a person has this drive, it is a defining factor in their choices. P1 told me
that: “you wouldn’t be able to look at someone else’s drawing, reproduce it and call that
art.” As with all three participants, having the skill to render things as they appear simply
has no appeal. For example, P2 explains: “I don’t want to do what he’s doing, but I want
to do something of my own, I want to capture some sort of my own.” All three are
inspired by the practice of making something their own, as P1 said: “as a photographer
one of the greatest challenges for me is that photography, by its’ nature, is a very realistic
art form and so to come up with something that somebody hasn’t already done yet is very
challenging!” For P3, the need to keep his creativity completely his own has always been
apparent: “I couldn’t draw you a dog if you wanted me to because it’d be purple and blue and gray, that’s how I’d want the dog, so I’ve never done a commission of art in my life.”

**Theme 2: Making choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging.** The three subthemes in this category are (5) decision making, (6) non-conformity, and (7) the “work task”. The experience of being an artist does have an effect on the individual’s decision making in daily life. While considering her daughter’s future, P1 seems to be influenced by what she herself really wants: “What I want for my daughter is for her to be-fulfilled and for her to express herself creatively - whatever that means- in her life.” For P2, there are many things he considers from the point of view of being an artist: “I think it’s just an important mechanism of who I am and what I do and even decisions I make that aren’t even artistic decisions of everyday life, what it means to me to teach my children or make a conscious decision about who I donate money to. Causes I support. It affects every day decisions that you make in your life, just like if you were to be a politician: You’d think of things the same way. ‘How does this affect me in that way?’ So, yeah- it’s a conscious decision and effort.” Being an artist may affect how to take care of oneself, as P3 shares: “you know, I wear glasses all the time, because, ‘don’t get your eyes poked and don’t mess up your fingers, or else you can’t draw,’ so I kind of kept that in mind and I don’t do anything that will jeopardize my hands.” For P3, being an artist has been the focus of his retirement: “Picasso, he did 293 pieces of artwork in ninety-one years, and I think he was painting until he died, and I’d like to go out that way.”
The subtheme of (6) non-conformity in P1’s diplomatic description of her successful but conflicted corporate career: “I did run into some, what we might call, ‘political problems’ at work, because I saw things differently. I was very successful—always the top sales person wherever I was… you know, the way that I saw things and the way that I’d do things didn’t necessarily match the order process that the corporation had in mind.” Clearly, P1 was aware of the expectations of her employers, but experienced success by deliberately doing things her own way. In his college experience, P3 was pressured to try sculpture instead of the drawing class he was enrolled in, and he recalls: “I’d look around the room and I had thirty beautiful women in the room and I was the only male and I’d go, ‘I’m not going downstairs,’ and I go, ‘Look around’.” Although in this example P3 communicated by making a joke to the male sculpture teacher, in his artistic development he is decidedly non-conformist: “And the first time somebody compliments me, I’ll just stop. I feel like, ‘Oh, I must be done’.”

The most important subtheme in this category is decisions made in pursuit of (7) the work task. This was a major theme in the lives of all the participants. For P1, the dilemma of how to earn a comfortable income while remaining true to her creative nature has been challenging, with movement back and forth in her employment history. The need to earn money even affected her choices creatively: “I left the corporate world to become a writer and I started to take pictures to support that dream.” In her case, the photography for others has become a passion and has now led to a different type of earning decision: “If I’m this busy and I’m not rich, that must mean I’m not charging enough. My prices are going up today.” P2 reports: “I cannot honestly say I’m making a living at being an artist.” This has led to comments from well-intentioned friends: “You
should just go get a job over night at a warehouse, you know, make some money.”

Earning money is not a motivation but a necessary chore for P3: “I’ve been an administrator and a curator for museums and stuff but I’ve always thought those were the jobs that could pay the bills, so I could do my artwork and I’ve always used work (let’s just say it’s work) as a way for me to pay for me to be able to not compromise my artwork at all, so I could do it.” He confided: “I’ve had really weird jobs over my life.”

**Theme 3: Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances.** The examples are wide-ranging, and several of the subthemes are ambiguous with regard to being a positive or negative type of experience. The experience of (8) *encouragement* is the largest subtheme of the entire data set, with nineteen separate examples from the artist’s interviews. For P2 the encouragement began in childhood after declaring to his mother that he was an artist: “She goes, ‘Okay, good. Just keep on practicing; that’s what it takes’.” This was also the case for P3, whose grandmother was an artist: “she gave me a lot of money, put it away for me, and gave me all these art supplies when I was six years old.” P3 was fortunate to have many encouraging experiences in his childhood. In school a drawing about the JFK assassination was noticed by his teacher, and he was pulled out of class regularly to participate in a small creative group: “and they’d just throw out different ideas, or they’d play music and um… I’d sit in there and draw for like half an hour to forty-five minutes.”

For the other participants, encouragement has been something experienced mostly as an adult. P1 did not identify herself as an artist until her thirties, and says this about the positive responses she received: “I’m amazed by that because that’s virtually how everyone identifies me, as an artist” and “So, I guess they think that I’m talented.” P2 has
found encouragement in his experience of submitting work in a national contest: “my instructor emails me back and says, ‘Congratulations! You got in, you’re published!’ I said, ‘Wow. Published’.”

Two of the artists have also met with (9) discouragement along the way. P1 enjoyed being creative as a child but told me: “art wasn’t really- admired, in my family.” Later, P1 internalized something she had read about all children thinking of themselves as artists until: “they reach a certain age of discernment when they’re able to look at their artwork and say, ‘Oh, that’s not good enough to be an artist’.” P2 has experienced discouragement as an adult, even from people who love and accept him: “even brothers, or a dad who was an engineer for thirty-five years at 3M, to have someone that’s so hard core… ‘work, get a job!’.” When asked about how he was affected by other’s perceptions of him, P2 told me: “I think when I was younger, they affected me a lot. I think I let it over-affect how I thought of myself.”

The responses of others are not always received as encouraging or discouraging. The experience of being (10) questioned was a common theme. Being questioned can arouse a certain defensiveness, or a sense of frustration. P2 had this childhood recollection: “I remember hearing that distinctly hearing that a couple times in second grade, ‘What are you drawing? Why are you making that?’.” The questions can come in response to different aspects of being an artist, as P2 related: “From family it’s more of a, ‘What are you doing now? Are you taking your photography thing seriously? Have you incorporated yet?’.” P3 recalls a time when he was with some landscape painters, who assumed he was doing the same thing: “and they’ll say, ‘Where are you seeing that?’ And I’ll go, ‘Right there!’.”
Realizing that they are being (11) stereotyped was something all three participants have experienced. Some examples are even found in print, as P1 remembered: “those pictures in the backs of magazines, you know, ‘Draw Tippy- Send it in! Are you an artist?’ I’ve been thinking a lot about this; that I remember doing that and there were a-lot of people doing that. Almost everybody could draw those and we thought of those as tests to see whether you were an artist or not.” Of course the technical skills to copy may have value, but that is not all there is to being an artist. When asked what he does for work, P2 answers: “‘I’m a freelance photographer, artist, painter…’, ‘Oh.’ Like there is some sort of stigma attached to being an artist, that you are some sort of loafer.” In P3’s life, he has experienced stereotyping because being an artist of his size: “I’m six-two, my brothers are six-nine, six-seven, and six-four- there’s this weird thing where they actually meet me, if they’ve seen my artwork before they’ve met me, then they meet me and they don’t believe that I did it, ‘cause I’m a big man.” More recently, age has become a factor for P3: “An example was I was in New York and I was there from the NEA, and the young kid never looked at my slides, just looked at me, looked at my grey hair and looked at my grey fa-beard, and said, ‘Oh, you’re work is not appropriate.’ I go, ‘Wow.’ And he never looked at my slides once and I go, ‘’You should probably look at my slides.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, no, I know it’s not appropriate’.”

The experience of being (12) judged, whether implicitly or explicitly, is another theme that arose in the interviews. In P1’s art class experience, her departure from realism ad this result: “I got a failing grade on it and the teacher said it was because she knew I could make it look more realistic than that.” P2 consciously tries to avoid being judged when meeting people by talking to them about their own picture taking: “So you
try to break into a sort of conversation about your own art before you tell them you’re an artist.” Another form of judgment can come from comparison, as P3 reports: “everybody always says, ‘Oh, Jerry’s a little lazy,’ or ‘He’s not as ambitious as his brothers.’ ‘Cause I was never into sports.”

Sometimes, the artists described times when their experience seemed to be a feeling of being (13) not understood. When P1 told me that her parents were relieved that she was an artist, she said: “because they thought I was just crazy up until then”, it was clear that her parents had not understood much about her. When P2 is socializing, he tries to lead into an explanation of his art: “‘Well, have you gone to the Walker Art Center? Have you been to any art shows or anything lately?’ If you saw the looks on their faces when they say, ‘Oh, nope… haven’t been anywhere.’” Also, when P2 had a photo published, some of the responses he received were awkward: “Other people would tell me, ‘I really like how they’re grouped and stuff, dead chickens and took a shot of their heads. I played with some contrast and a little bit of color but tried to keep it as realistic as possible.’ ‘Well, you got the realism down’.‘” For P3: “It’s hard for me to explain sometimes what these drawings are about!”

With all of these external influences, it can be very positive to know that others share similar experiences, to know that one is (14) not alone. In her opinion, P1 believes: “Really, everyone is creative. It’s just that the artist identifies that way, people sort of shut it down in themselves, I think.” When asked about first identifying himself as an artist, P2 remembered a special about artists that he watched as a child: “The first, really, jogging thing was the television saying, ‘Yeah! There’s a lot of people doing that out there already- its okay! It’s not just you, or your mom, you’re not alone’. “ P2 also talks
about showing his work, and he is hopeful that some people understand: “Does my statement make sense to the general public or to someone who has a trained eye in art, who’s been in art longer, do they see something? Can they talk to me about it? Do I talk to them about it?” It seems that the need to have a community that understands and accepts you is life-long. P3 recalls: “my experience being an artist is kind of inbred; I was born to a father who was an artist, his mother was an artist. I learned a lot from my grandmother when I was a little boy- she was a landscape painter and my dad was more of an illustrator.” Yet he continues: “I look for people in the arts, especially poets, and I just…they were big men! And I’ve really gone to them and found out that they have those same things that I’ve dealt with, where people just don’t understand.”

**Theme 4: Internal experiences related to being an artist.** The first sub-theme in this theme is (15) self-doubt, and as P1 recalls, even adopting the title of “artist” was difficult: “Because to me that seems so special or, what if I said, ‘I’m an artist,’ and they just laughed at me or said, ‘You’re not an artist!’ I can’t prove that I’m an artist.” It is also the case that other people’s opinions do matter, particularly if the artwork is personal, as P2 describes: “I think I was stuck there for a long time, with the internal, you know, always… worried about how people perceived me as an artist.” P2 also reveals that judging one’s own abilities is uncomfortable: “That’s where a lot of self doubt comes in, ‘Am I good enough?’.” Even P3, in his current pursuit of art-making after retirement, remembers: “I walked away…, it was scary!”

In spite of self-doubt, artists seem to be compelled to become self-actualized by engaging in (16) risk taking. For P1, one example is making an open declaration: “It was very difficult for me to open up my mouth and force myself to say, ‘I’m an artist.’”
Following that, P1 made a goal for herself: “So I want to finally have the best-of-both-worlds and that is the scientific experiment I am conducting at this moment.” P2 reported that entering his work in shows was: “a competition, sometimes, and juried exhibitions and stuff like that, and it’s also good for you in a way, too, because you have to put yourself out there to say, “This is my statement.”

The final subtheme of the coded data was (17) self-acceptance or approval. The participant who identified as an artist latest in life, P1, shared that it was through parenting that she found her buried creativity: “when you’re helping those little ones to fulfill their creativity, something happens- and I realized that I could nurture that in myself, as well.” Later, after her return to the corporate world did not feel fulfilling, P1 recalls: “I realized that it really isn’t ‘this corporate job’, or, ‘that corporate job’. It’s that I am artistic and entrepreneurial by nature.” P2 had experienced more self-doubt when he was younger, but: “now that I’ve matured a little more, yes, it still affects me, but not to the same percentage.” In retirement, P3 has found that his artwork is still evolving: “I’m looking at these drawings, going, ‘Wow. I’ve never drawn like this anytime in my life.’ And so I’m happy that I’m drawing them!”

Discussion

The major themes and sub-themes inherent in the data suggest that the artists understand that they have different ways of thinking and behaving from an early age (childhood experiences, recognition of creative skills, and the need for creative expression). Artists, by the very nature of their creativity, do not want to be like anyone else (urge for individuation). This observation may explain the finding that visual artists are impulsively non-conformist, while non-artists are considered more agreeable (Burch
et al., 2006). While Western culture prizes free thinking and innovation, there exists an expectation of conformity in the contexts of systems. Sometimes it begins with the family system, and certainly this expectation occurs in the school system. Deviations from behavioral norms are noted and often challenged (*discouragement, questioned, judged*).

As an artist matures, the need for individuation trumps the need to belong. The artist’s personal attitudes, behaviors, and values are more likely to guide choices than cultural norms, and all three artists interviewed spoke of an aversion to conformity. This non-conformity is not antisocial, it is pro-artistic, as demonstrated by sub-theme (3) a *compelling urge for creative expression*. Gridley (2006) may have been referring to this urge when he noted that artists prefer to come up with their own ideas. P1 expressed this drive to create something new when she said, “To come up with a new way to look at it, I see that specifically as my job as an artist.”

One area of life that holds challenges and conflict for an artist is what Adler referred to as “the work task.” In Western culture, we tend to ask people “what do you do?” (meaning most specifically: what is your occupation?) when we meet them, and very often the answer to that question guides other people’s opinion of the individual. As noted in Gelade’s (1997) study of commercial creative people, finding regular employment as an artist may be viewed by society as successful, but it creates tension for the artists because their creative urges must be confined to the dictates of the business or the market. Marketing usually requires targeting your product to meet some type of taste or need, which can also inhibit creative output for the freelance artist attempting to earn a living wage by selling their artwork. For all three artists interviewed, taking a passionless job just to earn some money has often been the means to the end result of creative
freedom. Because materialism is a significant value of the Western culture, it is often assumed that individuals should want to pursue higher income as a main goal of occupational choices. Therefore, artists are generally misunderstood in this area and (11) stereotyped as lazy or lacking in ambition.

None of the artists I interviewed was asked about their mental health history, as an Adlerian I am more interested in examining purposeful behavior than searching for signs of pathology. However, taking into account the pressure for systemic conformity and the societal value of materialism, it is clear that our cultural environment contains many stressors for the artist. The initial experience of feeling different develops into a conscious choice to be different, ignoring those expectations and values, and that choice is not often externally rewarded. Yet, in each interview I was heartened to find that the artists had all had encouragement along the way, and that they had all achieved a sense of self-acceptance or approval. This finding supports Eiduson’s (1953) declaration that artists tended to have received recognition for artistic ability in their youth, which led to positive experiences and supportive relationships as an adult. Also, it may be the case that each of the artists has reached Rank’s third stage of creative development: a sense of harmony with the self and society (as cited in Gelade, 1997).

In my review of the literature about creativity and how it is manifested, I was pleased to find that not all researchers are beginning from the point of view that creativity is a cause or a factor of mental health issues or personality disorders, but certain stereotypes in the research do exist. One consistent finding in the research has been that artists are introverts (Drewdahl & Cattell, 1958; Munsterberg & Mussen, 1953; Roy, 1996), this conclusion is not supported by my data. It is likely that artists will exhibit
introverted behavior, however, as a part of the creative process. P3 told me: “I’ve always had when I was younger and stuff, the thing where you have to think and think about things and take time to study things.” Rothenberg (1993) observes that researchers continue to look for a clear link between creativity and psychopathology in part because “studies indicating that creative people are introverted, unconventional, or rebellious, for example, are cited as providing supporting evidence for the theory” (p.219). Rothenberg (1993) states further that “in spite of common stereotypes, there is little evidence for a consistent connection between rebelliousness and creativity (p.219). The problem may be one of interpretation: if one considers non-conformity to be an aspect of rebellion, then the artists interviewed for this study are rebels. In a later article titled “Creativity – the Healthy Muse” Rothenberg (2006) states “given the magnitude of creative achievement, I am often perplexed about the recurring tendency in Western history to connect creativity with mental disability and illness” (p. 58).

This theoretical connection is not supported by the research reviewed in this study. In every quantitative study I reviewed the authors complained of problems with subject pools, measurements, and methodologies. Researchers point out that there are not even clear definitions of creativity or mental illness. While researchers have published some significant findings, based on reading summaries it is clear that none of the reviewed authors would argue that these findings are conclusive. The inability to connect the cultural observation that artists are “different” to a measurable psychological deviation has even led to some circular reasoning. In 1931 Kretschmer argued that cultural references to artists possessing strange qualities or divine madness “are confirmation of the fact that many men of genius themselves prize madness and insanity
as the highest distinction of the exceptional man” (as cited in Becker, 2000, p.52). The prominent researcher Arnold Ludwig (1989) asked “how much of the publicized drug use, unconventionality, or angst of writers or artists is influenced by role expectations and traditions within Western society rather than a manifestation of personal conflicts or basic personality flaws?” (p.12). In reflecting on the interview data, I believe that a desire to live up to other people’s assumptions about artists is unlikely to be a motivation for an artist’s lifestyle choices. On the other hand, it is highly likely that artists are not motivated to dispel these stereotypes in an effort to gain societal approval. Finally, although Ludwig (1992) declared that it is “likely that artists and their ilk behave as they do largely because that is the way society expects, allows, and rewards them to behave” (p.465), my data indicates that the truth is actually the other way around: artists and “their ilk” behave as they do because they do not wish to conform to societal expectations, and this is rarely rewarded.

Implications and Suggestions for the Adlerian Therapist

Adlerian therapy, with its optimistic and holistic view of the individual, is well suited to helping creative people who are experiencing problems related to being an artist. This optimistic view is often challenged by the fact that “we now operate in a professional world dominated by an emphasis on diagnosis, dysfunction, pathology, and outside interventions designed to attack (or overcome) dysfunction in the briefest possible time” (Bitter, 2007, p.7-8). It is important that artists are not seen by their therapist as potentially pathological because they chose not to conform to certain societal values and norms. I believe that an Adlerian therapist is uniquely qualified to understand
the artist’s struggles, because it is a basic Adlerian concept that “personality is the individual’s creative exercise” (Bitter, 2007, p.5).

Specifically, it is important to recognize that for the artist, striving for individuation is not superficial, and it may override the need to belong for the artist’s entire life. This would be unfortunate, because feeling a constant conflict with society or culture would likely diminish social interest, and as Dreikurs (1976) points out “the individual with diminished social interest is vulnerable to discouragement, and in extreme situations is subject to withdrawal and isolation leading to an inability to function, and finally to breakdown” (p.70).

Additionally, Huber (2000) recognizes that on the journey toward individuation, people can become stuck. Based on my research, encouragement (another basic Adlerian tenet) is a strong antidote to potential withdrawal when an individual’s striving puts them at odds with their societal surroundings. Group therapy with other creative people may be used to foster a genuine sense of belonging, which can be “won by being involved in life, and by cooperating and being useful to others” (Sutherland, Waldman, & Collins, 2010, p.69).

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Given the wide array of challenges presented by defining and measuring such abstract traits such as creativity, not to mention the impediments inherent in trying to make generalizable statements about a group of individuals sharing a main life goal of being unique, I would suggest that there is a need for more qualitative research on this topic. In my interviews several interesting topics were hinted at, such as reflections on the experience of divergent thinking or a discussion of the creative process. These comments
were not followed up within the interviews because the topics were incidental to the questions being asked in this study. Future thematic analysis interviews could focus on other aspects of being an artist, particularly a study of the creative process.

**Conclusion**

Artists in the Western culture face many unsupported assumptions. Artists have been stereotyped as mentally ill, delusional, introverted, and disagreeable. Research has failed to demonstrate that being creative predisposes the individual to any identified mental health diagnostic category.

In an effort to understand the personal experiences of visual artists in our society, three artists were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes and 17 sub-themes of the artist’s experiences. The major themes are: (1) Experiences of feeling or perceiving self as different from others; (2) Making choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging; (3) Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances; and (4) Internal experiences related to being an artist.

Interpreting the data from an Adlerian perspective, the artists are individuals with a strong need for individuation that leads to a conscious effort to avoid conformity. Visual artists will also experience challenges with the work task, because it is rare to find employment in a creative field without some sacrifice of the need for creative individuation. Some suggestions for Adlerian therapists are discussed. Future research using qualitative methods is suggested, particularly focusing on the creative urge, divergent thinking, and the process of creating.
References


Appendix A: Data Analysis

Question 1: Tell me about your experience of being an artist?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Narrative Text</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of feeling or perceiving themselves as different from others.</td>
<td>(1) Childhood Experiences of difference</td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> when I first started really getting into painting, is when I went, “Okay, we’re doing a still life. Try to make it as perfect as possible.” Well, why can’t I take a picture? It really got to me.</td>
<td>Bucking the conventional</td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> I also believe, though I had brothers, a lot of it is the idea of being alone, I create my own world through art.</td>
<td>Different “world” than brothers</td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> So I would draw and draw and draw and they’re not necessarily the images that you’ve seen, they’re not necessarily something that you see in a still life- it’s something in my head.</td>
<td>Others don’t see what I see</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> I’ve always had when I was younger and stuff, the thing where you have to think and think about things and take time to study things</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Recognition of skill by self or others</td>
<td><strong>P1)</strong> My photography took off</td>
<td>Commercial success</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>P2)</strong> I think creating and seeing things as 3D or 2D, ya know, it evolves into shadow and light and depth and perception</td>
<td>Thinking through evolution of skills</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>P2)</strong> “M’s really good at doing this. Your paintings are just incredible!”</td>
<td>Others</td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> it’s always been something that I’ve been able to sit down and do,</td>
<td>Recognition of being “able”</td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> I’d always sit in the house and draw, and then they’d come in and try to figure out what that was, how do I do that and all this kind of stuff, so, that was my little special thing that they didn’t-</td>
<td>Brothers couldn’t do this, special skill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main theme</td>
<td>Subtheme</td>
<td>Narrative text</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) Need for creative expression</td>
<td>P1)</td>
<td>I missed controlling my own time &amp; my own creative life, so I have just recently left the corporate world again</td>
<td>Need: time for pursuing creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Need for creative expression</td>
<td>P2)</td>
<td>some days you are creative and some days you aren’t but I think that the process of trying to find something to do creatively…</td>
<td>P2 tapered off, contextual implication of part of daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Need for creative expression</td>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>I didn’t know what all this stuff was, so I kind of took it on myself to learn all this stuff that I would copy what she had done and stuff,</td>
<td>Compelled to use Grandma’s art supplies</td>
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<td>I’ve always thought of it as the most important thing in my life,</td>
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<td>I’ve just always done art, I can’t explain way it’s just- it’s just always been there</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I really believe that practice does make perfect; the idea of progression and stuff, but I’ve always felt, as an adult, I’ve always done artwork</td>
<td>Continued into adulthood</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve gotten to this thing</td>
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**P3)** So, if I have any qualities as an artist, I have a great imagination. I don’t have all the skill in the world, but I can draw things that are not in front of people. I feel that’s kind of important… for me, anyway. So, I can create my own little world when my grandmother died, it was very strange but I inherited everything that she had…she gave it all to me because I was an artist. It’s a point of pride, you know, that you’re very proud of what you do, um… so it’s kind of like, “Well, I can’t do this and this in life, but I can do this very well.”

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P3) when my grandmother died, it was very strange but I inherited everything that she had…she gave it all to me because I was an artist. Grandma recognized skills. Skill recognition is self-affirming.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(4) Need for individuation</th>
<th>P3) I walked away from it because I was getting older and I wanted to be able to do my own artwork.</th>
<th>Left good job</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1) now I’m in a place where I am creating a new artistic career for myself that includes storytelling performances, writing, photography &amp; teaching among other things.</td>
<td>Keep trying new things</td>
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<tr>
<td>P1) To be a fully functioning artist who is in control of my own time &amp; creativity</td>
<td>Do what I think is best</td>
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<td>P1) It’s that I am artistic and entrepreneurial by nature, and I really need to do things my way.</td>
<td>Recognizing authentic self</td>
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<td>P1) So, now my goal is to go back and pick up the pieces of my own business and recreate that in a way.</td>
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<td>P2) Well, I think like any kid I just picked up a pen or pencil and began to just explore. ..when you get to a certain point of being able to draw stuff that is realistic, that’s where I got, where you start thinking, “What else is there?”</td>
<td>Self-taught</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2) Everyone’s just taking a fine art picture, the appeal of painting realism just never got to me.</td>
<td>Establishing personal taste/values</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2) I don’t want to do what he’s doing, but I want to do something of my own, I want to capture some sort of my own.</td>
<td>Originality</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2) If that style is what everyone’s really clamoring over then you start to want to go into something else, or change.</td>
<td>“No” to the finding that artists need acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3) I couldn’t draw you a dog if you wanted me to because it’d be purple and blue and gray, that’s how I’d want the dog, so I’ve</td>
<td>I draw what I want</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
never done a commission of art in my life,

P3) read a book! And all of a sudden you illustrate that book, you know it’s almost like you rewrite the book, actually, so I’ve always been able to… see something and then go to the table and draw what I think my interpretation of that was, which is totally different from probably what I just read, but I always want it to be that way, too

Other media generates new, original ideas

P3) I used to teach still life drawing and stuff and I always found it very boring that everybody drew the same thing

Main theme | Sub theme
---|---
Choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging. | Affects decisions
P1) I missed controlling my own time & my own creative life, so I have just recently left the corporate world again

P1) my goal now is to be able to have the best of both worlds- that’s where I’m at now.

Goal setting requires decisions

P1) What I want for my daughter is for her to be-fulfilled and for her to express herself creatively - whatever that means- in her life. And so what I realized is that if I truly wanted that for my daughter, I had to have it for myself or I couldn’t have even believed that it existed so that I could continue to want it for my daughter.

Decisions about what is important

P1) I want to destroy- or oh, that sounds so negative… I want to transcend that myth of the starving artist.

Goal

P2) I think it’s just an important
mechanism of who I am and what I do and even decisions I make that aren’t even artistic decisions of everyday life, what it means to me to teach my children or make a conscious decision about who I donate money to. Causes I support. It affects every day decisions that you make in your life, just like if you were to be a politician: You’d think of things the same way. “How does this affect me in that way?” So, yeah—it’s a conscious decision and effort

<table>
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<tr>
<th>P3)</th>
<th>but you have to do things to contemplate what you’re going to do or even build up your imagination-</th>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>I wanted to walk away and finish these things about my own work before time runs out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>came up here to continue to do my artwork, and… just keep going and going and going and…</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>Picasso, he did 293 pieces of artwork in ninety-one years, and I think he was painting until he died, and I’d like to go out that way</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>Retirement plan!</td>
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<td>P3)</td>
<td>but I was frustrated that I was so exhausted that I didn’t have time to do my own work so I made a decision when I was fifty-five years old, when I retired was the first person to retire from the city of A ever, at fifty-five, and they were startled and I did it.</td>
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<td>P3)</td>
<td>I just said, “You know, I’m going to do something for myself for a while,” And, um… I’m actually very glad that I did it, it was scary! It is scary, but um… I had to do it for my own good, do it before “time runs out”, so to speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-conformity</td>
<td>P1) I was-I worked in sales and marketing, before I had kids, I did run into some, what we might call, “political problems” at work, because I saw things differently. I was very successful-always the top sales person wherever I was… you know, the way that I saw things and the way that I’d do things didn’t necessarily match the order process that the corporation had in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “work task”</td>
<td>P1) when my daughter was born, I asked myself What do I want for my daughter? Do I want her to grow up, get a good job... to make a lot of money and be successful- that’s what I’m doing. Is that what I want for my daughter? And the answer was a resounding No.</td>
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<td>P1) I left the corporate world to become a writer &amp; I started to take pictures to support that dream.</td>
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<td>P1) I tried the corporate world again, I took a job travelling. I enjoyed my paycheck very much- I’d been living as a starving artist (not starving, just a simple lifestyle) it was fun to jet set around &amp; to start to have more money coming in &amp; having more of that freedom.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>P1) I was kind of doing that whole starving artist thing. Basically I became-I had some different odd jobs, but eventually I ended up being a portrait/wedding photographer, I had my own business, I made enough money to support my family as a single mom and pay my bills -but not much more than that- and doing that starving artist</td>
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<td>Less money was more fulfilling</td>
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<td>thing but very happy and fulfilled.</td>
<td>P1) And, then when my kids grew up, this corporation made me an offer that was too good to refuse… to try the corporate world again. And so I decided to do it and I became a National Trainer and teaching photography and sales, so it seemed like a perfect match- things that I’m passionate about and good at, that I had made more in the first year doing that than I had in the last five years put together as a photographer. And, so… that was fun.</td>
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<td>P3) I’ve been an administrator and a curator for museums and stuff but I’ve always thought those were the jobs that could pay the bills, so I could do my artwork and I’ve always used work (let’s just say it’s work) as a way for me to pay for me to be able to not compromise my artwork at all, so I could do it.</td>
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<td>P3) I used to be a curator at the <em>C</em> which was a wonderful job with an incredible amount of money, I walked away from it because I was getting older and I wanted to be able to do my own artwork.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances.</td>
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<td>P2) once you get to a certain point, if you’ve already been accepted, you know.</td>
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<td>P3) I learned a lot from my grandmother when I was a little boy</td>
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<td>P3) she gave me a lot of money, put it away for me, and gave me ongoing encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main themes</td>
<td>Subthemes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discouragement</td>
<td>No examples from question 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioned</td>
<td>P2) you start to want to go into something else, or change, people go, “What? What’re you doing? That’s not your stuff.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>P1) I’d been living as a starving artist (not starving, just a simple lifestyle)</td>
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<td>P1) being a corporate slave.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judged</td>
<td>P1) I did run into some, what we might call, “political problems” at work, because I saw things differently.</td>
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<td>P3) everybody always says, “Oh, Jerry’s a little lazy,” or, “He’s not as ambitious as his brothers.” ‘Cause I was never into sports…</td>
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<td>P3) just the idea that they were all drawing the same thing at the same time, because then it’s also very competitive, where, “Oh, well this is a better drawing than this drawing.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not understood</td>
<td>P3) It’s hard for me to explain sometimes what these drawings are about!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not alone</td>
<td>P2) Being already influenced by Jackson Pollack slapping paint around,</td>
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<td>P3) My experience being an artist is kind of inbred; I was born to a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal experiences related to being an artist</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk-taking / vulnerability in art making / showing</td>
<td>P1) I am creating a new artistic career for myself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-acceptance or approval</td>
<td>P1) So I want to finally have the best-of-both-worlds and that is the scientific experiment I am conducting at this moment.</td>
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<td>P2) If that style is what everyone’s really clamoring over then you start to want to go into something else, or change,</td>
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<td>P1) I realized is that if I truly wanted that for my daughter, I had to have it for myself or I couldn’t have even believed that it existed so that I could continue to want it for my daughter.</td>
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<td>P1) it was through the process, really, of bringing out- drawing out their creative expression that I came into my own creative expression.</td>
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<td>P1) because I realized that it really isn’t ‘this corporate job’, or, ‘that corporate job’. It’s that I am artistic and entrepreneurial by nature</td>
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<td>P2) I think it’s just an important</td>
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Question 2: Tell me about the first time you identified yourself as an artist?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Narrative Text</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of feeling or perceiving themselves as different from others.</td>
<td>Childhood Experiences</td>
<td>P1) my remembrance of art class in school did the opposite of promoting my creativity.</td>
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<td>P2) That kind of discovery, but it also put me in a different position of discovery at school &amp; then thinking because I wasn’t in the same thinking mode as some of the other kids.</td>
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<td>P2) it was a Nova special on channel two with my dad about creative artists and what not, it was a philosophical journey into Picasso and it was Pollack and I remember watching Pollack &amp; they had black and white short uh, I don’t know… the film rolling, I was engrossed.</td>
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<td>P2) I think that is a big thing, too, when you’re little- you think you’re alone &amp; you have these big, creative ideas &amp; that’s kind of scary.</td>
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<td>P3) in the fifth grade, I did a drawing of- JFK was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, I did a drawing of a car going</td>
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P3) I’ve always been able to draw and talk about art and I was always around art

P3) I’ve always thought of it as the most important thing in my life

P3) I’m actually very glad that I did it… I had to do it for my own good
down the road empty and we were listening to the Kennedy Assassination on the radio and she took it from me, just a little pencil drawing, she took it from me and said, “I have to keep this for a while.”

**Recognition of skills by self or others**

**P1)** I was the best drawer in my family and maybe in my class at school, from the time I was very young and

**P3)** and they put me in a special class- to draw!

**P3)** they started talking about it, you know, like, “Jerry’s this artist.” And my mom’s goes, “Oh, yeah, of course he is.

**Need for Creative Expression**

**P1)** To come up with a new way to look at it: I see that specifically as my job as an artist.

**P1)** to find a new way to do it- a revolutionary way and I think that is the job of an artist.

**P2)** I really started making things just to make things & trying to put a function to them later

**P3)** it wasn’t much of a little drawing but at the time it was just what I did

**P3)** but I’ve always drawn

**Individuation**

**P1)** art is a different way of looking at the world

**P1)** you wouldn’t be able to look at someone else’s drawing, reproduce it and call that art

**P1)** That wouldn’t be a different way of looking at the world- that’d be the same way of looking at the world

**P1)** as a photographer one of the greatest challenges for me is that photography, by its’ nature, is a very realistic art form and so to come up with something
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging.</th>
<th>Decision Making</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>P2</em> I remember telling her, “I’m an artist, mom. This is what I want to do.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Conformity</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>P1</em> I have a distinct memory in one art class at the public school that I went to, we were doing a still life and I had drawn it with Cray-Pa’s or pastels or something and… but instead of making it realistic, it was a little more creative interpretation.</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Work Task</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>P3</em> I worked at nursing homes and stuff, I did it because I wanted to talk to people and then I’d go home and draw.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances.</th>
<th>Encouragement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>P1</em> when I teach photography… I specifically tell them- I’m not going to teach you how your camera works, don’t ask me about lenses, features, mechanics</td>
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<th>Encouragement</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>P1</em> But my parents were relieved</td>
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<th>Encouragement</th>
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<td><em>P1</em> I’m amazed by that because that’s virtually how everyone identifies me, as an artist</td>
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<th>Encouragement</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>P2</em> She goes, “Okay, good. Just keep on practicing; that’s what it takes.” “Okay.”</td>
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<th>Encouragement</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>P3</em> and they’d just throw out different ideas, or they’d play</td>
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music and um… I’d sit in there and draw for like half an hour to forty-five minutes

**P3** My mom has that drawing to this day

**P3** the first time that she accepted that and I heard it… um was when I accepted it, because it’s wonderful when your mother can tell you “You’re an artist.”

**P3** She goes, “You don’t need to do that- you’re an artist.” I kept thinking, “Wow.” It’s really nice to have that reinforcement

**Discouragement**

**P1** when other people’s parents find out they’re an artist they go, “Oh, no!”

**P1** art wasn’t really- admired, in my family.

**P1** not only did I not consider myself an artist, I didn’t like art, because that’s what I thought it was- that’s the way it was presented to me

**P1** they reach a certain age of discernment when they’re able to look at their artwork and say, “Oh, that’s not good enough to be an artist”

**Questioned**

**P2** I remember hearing that distinctly hearing that a couple times in second grade, “What are you drawing? Why are you making that?”

**P3** They went to the principal and all this stuff and they kind of pulled me out of class and said, “Well, what is that about?”

**Stereotyped**

**P1** I’ve read that this is very common- is that all children think they’re artists

**P1** those pictures in the backs of magazines, you know, “Draw Tippy- Send it in! Are you an
artist?” I’ve been thinking a lot about this; that I remember doing that and there were *a-lot* of people doing that. Almost everybody could draw those and we thought of those as tests to see whether you were an artist or not

| Judged | P1) I got a failing grade on it and the teacher said it was because she knew I could make it look more realistic than that |
| Not Understood | P1) because they thought I was just crazy up until then. |
| P1) And I think that that is at the *core* of the misunderstanding that most people have about art- is that it’s not just about reproducing something. |
| Not Alone | P2) “Because I can? Because it’s creative, it’s cool, what do you want to know? What is it? Does it make you nervous that I’m making something you cannot understand?” |
| P2) I remember my mom doing a lot of painting, too, when she was younger, I remember watching or looking at some of her paintings hanging around the house |
| P2) The first, really, jogging thing was the television saying, “Yeah! There’s a lot of people doing that out there already- its okay! It’s not just you, or your mom, you’re not alone.” |
| P2) But it’s comforting later on to know that you’re not alone |
| P3) With maybe two or three other people and there’d be a |
period when they’d take me out of my regular classroom to just draw

P3) His dad’s an artist, his grandmother is an artist.

Internal experiences related to being an artist

Self-doubt

P1) Because to me that seems so ‘special’ or, what if I said, “I’m an artist,” & they just laughed at me or said, “You’re not an artist!” I can’t prove that I’m an artist

Risk Taking

P1) It was very difficult for me to open up my mouth and force myself to say, “I’m an artist.”

Self-Acceptance or Approval

P1) when you’re helping those little ones to fulfill their creativity, something happens- & I realized that I could nurture that in myself, as well

P1) I remember practicing saying, “I’m an artist.”

P1) You’ll be seeing it through new eyes- you’ll be seeing it through the eyes of an artist.

P3) it’s kind of a nice title. If that’s what I’m labeled as, that’s a nice thing.

P3) I draw differently than other people but I can appreciate that’s done in art

Question 3: How do people perceive you as an artist?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Narrative Text</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of feeling or perceiving themselves as different from others</td>
<td>Childhood Experiences</td>
<td>P1) I think, in general, people think of me as, more ‘creative’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P1) They just go, “Oh, she’s so creative all the time!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P2) “Congratulations, that’s</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
awesome! You got published!"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need for Creative Expression</th>
<th>So, that’s what I do; I walk around in the world looking for beauty and then when it catches my eye, I capture it</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>because during that time I was really internalizing some of my paintings, they were graphic – to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>I said, “That was the intention.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>I said, “I’m trying to evoke an emotion.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>That’s, you know, what we’re all attracted to: Sharing your work with other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuation</td>
<td>I’ve been on watercolor expeditions with these guys who do watercolor landscapes and you know… I can’t do that. So I’ll put little blue dogs and stuff in my water color</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>this is what I call my own, “Visual Language,” and that’s just the way I speak ‘til the day I die. I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging.</td>
<td>I try not to be too much in the business of business of worrying how people perceive me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>you know, I wear glasses all the time, because, “Don’t get your eyes poked and don’t mess up your fingers, or else you can’t draw.” So I kind of kept that in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Conformity</strong></td>
<td><strong>P3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Work Task</strong></td>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encouragement</strong></td>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
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and he goes, “I don’t even know where you get this whole thing about negativity- I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

**P1)** I just recently took one of those vocational-strength assessment tests and my number one strength was appreciation of beauty.

**P1)** well, I’ll say that when I put word out that I was about to do portrait sessions, the phone just rang off the hook.

**P1)** I think there is a lot of people who have been wanting to take a portrait with me, I guess, for a long time.

**P1)** So, I guess they think that I’m talented.

**P2)** Then, all of a sudden, they finally got it.

**P2)** my instructor emails me back and says, “Congratulations! You got in, you’re published!” I said, “Wow. Published.”

**P3)** I’ve been an artist in my mind and it was reinforced when I was a little boy.

**Discouragement**

**P2)** that’s not the focus right now in my life, that’s probably family so it’s like, “Yeah, sometimes creatively it’s difficult that way.”

**P2)** That’s also a challenge, you know, to stay focused even when you have outside opinions.

**P2)** There are lots of people who encourage me along with my wife, Chris, it helps a lot to have the focused family.

**P2)** even brothers, or a dad who was an engineer for thirty-five years at 3M, to have someone that’s so hard core… “work, get a job!”
THE EXPERIENCE OF VISUAL ARTISTS

Questioned

P2) From family it’s more of a, “What are you doing now? Are you taking your photography thing seriously? Have you incorporated yet?”

P2) you meet people at a gathering & they say, “What do you do?”

P2) “Well, if you’re painting, don’t you want people to look at them?”

P3) and they’ll say, “Where are you seeing that?” And I’ll go, “Right there!”

Stereotyped

P2) “I’m a freelance photographer, artist, painter…” “Oh.” Like there is some sort of stigma attached to being an artist that you are some sort of loafer

P3) and I’m six-two, my brothers are six-nine, six-seven, and six-four- there’s this weird thing where they actually meet me, if they’ve seen my artwork before they’ve met me, then they meet me and they don’t believe that I did it, ‘cause I’m a big man.

P3) I think that’s the weird thing is that people go, “Well, you didn’t draw these! They’re these little things”

P3) because people don’t believe you can do something because you don’t look the part. I always look the part that I “should have been” like a football player or something, and I’ve never been able to be that so…

P3) … it’s a stereotype that people have to be this or that in the corner is the artist or the poet and it’s just not true.

Judged

P2) So you try to break into a sort of conversation about your own art before you tell them
<p>| | |</p>
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<tr>
<td><strong>you’re an artist.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P3)</strong> that when someone sees me, they don’t believe I can do this, they don’t believe you can write a piece of poetry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Understood</td>
<td><strong>P1)</strong> I suspect that most of the people from my corporate life, who I don’t really associate with that much - they’re on the periphery - and I’m pretty sure most of them just think I’m crazy.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> Business oriented as most of them are; very into sales, or engineers or accountants you know they’re like hard, factual things so it’s hard sometimes to tell them, “Well, I’m working on stuff, but I haven’t really sold a whole lot of stuff.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> The conversation dulls somewhat after that.</td>
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<td><strong>P2)</strong> “Well, have you gone to the walker art center? Have you been to any art shows or anything lately?” If you saw the looks on their faces when they say, “Oh, nope… haven’t been anywhere.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> the kids told me that, “These aren’t comfortable. They’re harsh, the colors are harsh and they are very hard to look at!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> people just walk around your stuff, no one really says anything</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>P2)</strong> all they say is, “Oh, I like your work.”</td>
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|   | **P2)** Other people would tell me, “I really like how they’re grouped and stuff, so did you physically move stuff or…” I said, “No, I just stuck my head in a bucket of dead chickens and took a shot of their heads. I played with some contrast and a
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<td>little bit of color but tried to keep it as realistic as possible.” “Well, you got the realism down.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>when I was in school, the sculpture teacher used to come up (I have a five year degree) the sculpture teacher would come up to me and say, “Come downstairs with me, Jerry, and bend steel.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Alone</td>
<td>P1) Really, everyone is creative. It’s just that the artist identifies that way, people sort of shut it down in themselves, I think</td>
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<td></td>
<td>P2) after I was all done my friend who helped me get into the show walked up to me and said, “Are you okay?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2)</td>
<td>immediately the photography group- there’s only three or four photography teachers’ there- all came right away</td>
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<td></td>
<td>P3) But my father was six-foot-four, and he was a huge man he- he actually, worked on the Space Needle in Seattle did all the construction and parking work for it but he also sat and drew every night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>I look for people in the arts, especially poets, and I just…they were big men! And I’ve really gone to them and found out that they have those same things that I’ve dealt with, where people just don’t understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>Charles Berkowsky, the poet, I’m really drawn to him- I saw him live at the University in Bellingham. Just a big man…and just- man, just a scary looking guy, too, you know like six-four and always drinkin’ and- but I was so drawn to him</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3)</td>
<td>My dad was six-four and</td>
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maybe 250 pounds and a solid man and… he did these little drawings at night.

but I appreciate the fact that people do that, and I actually appreciate what they call, “Sunday Painters”

the kids are covered in clay and stuff and you know, they’re looking at their little bowls on the wheel and stuff, I admire anyone that can do it, and I think it’s kept me going

all these people that I’ve read about and stuff, I mean usually if they’re going to pass, they pass away in their studio or whatever but you can never grow old and never grow out of style in art…

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Internal experiences related to being an artist</th>
<th>Self-doubt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk Taking</td>
<td>P2) one of my friends, she was starting a show, I said, “I got seven finished pieces, want ‘em?”</td>
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<td>P2) So I walked piece to piece, answering questions and it really… it was difficult to talk about some of the subject matter,</td>
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<td>P2) they were suggestive in some ways and they were meant to be uncomfortable.</td>
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<td>P2) and emotionally I was already attached to the paintings, but very disturbed with myself talking about it</td>
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<td>P2) I was like, having therapy in front of about twenty kids and also their teachers,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>P2) when you have your final presentation of your portfolio, having people and judges and other artistic minds walk through</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Themes</td>
<td>Subthemes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiences of feeling or perceiving themselves as different from others.</td>
<td>Childhood Experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognition of skills by self or others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Need for Creative Expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging.</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
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<td>Non-Conformity</td>
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| P2) I had a wild hair and I wanted to put these pictures into a national magazine |
| P1) I, as a photographer, am not creating what I am taking pictures of, I’m capturing it. |
| P2) “I didn’t realize I had to talk about it, but I feel better about it now.” |
| P3) and you can grow graceful and old in the arts, you know, like blues musicians (the older guys that just play and play) it’s just a wonderful way to grow old, I think, a very graceful way to grow old. |

Question 4: How do other people’s perceptions affect you as an artist?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Narrative Text</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Childhood Experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognition of skills by self or others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Need for Creative Expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choices about behavior, daily living, and earning money based on the need for individuation over the need for belonging.</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non-Conformity</td>
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<p>| P1) to really thoughtfully going through my day creating I really consider my greatest work of art my day-to-day living; the way I dress, the way I spend my day, it’s all one big work of art. |
| P1) It gives my life meaning to not just live on a treadmill or be a walking zombie, |
| P3) And the first time somebody |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Work Task</th>
<th>compliments me, I’ll just stop. I feel like, “Oh, I must be done.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Being influenced or impacted by external sources such as other people or circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouragement</td>
<td>P2) I think when I was younger, they affected me a lot. I think I let it over-affect how I thought of myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioned</td>
<td>Stereotyped</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3) Well, you can get stereotyped as an artist if you get into one medium or one idea, you know, a lot of artists will take that one abstract painting and they’ll take up one life, they’ll use up their whole life to make that one abstract painting.</td>
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<td>P3) An example was I was in New York and I was there from the NEA, and the young kid never looked at my slides, just looked at me, looked at my grey hair and looked at my grey face-beard, and said, “Oh, you’re work is not appropriate.” I go, “Wow.” And he never looked at my slides once and I go, “You should probably look at my slides.” And he goes, “Oh, no, I know it’s not appropriate.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judged</td>
<td>Not Understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3) … it’s hard for them to accept that I do this</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Alone</td>
<td>P2) Does my statement make sense to the general public or to someone who has a trained eye in art, who’s been in art longer, do they see something? Can they talk to me about it? Do I talk to them about it?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal experiences related to being an artist</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Taking</td>
<td>P2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Acceptance or Approval</td>
<td>P1)</td>
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Appendix B: Raw Data

Interview Number One

Q: Can you tell me about your experience with being an artist?

A: I wanted to write, so… But I had a knack for photography, so- about ten years ago, I left the corporate world to become a writer & I started to take pictures to support that dream. My photography took off & I forgot that I had meant to be a writer, & I became Linda Lee the Photographer, which is how most people know me. About four years ago, my kids flew the coop – they grew up and moved out- I tried the corporate world again, I took a job travelling. I enjoyed my paycheck very much- I’d been living as a starving artist (Not starving, just a simple lifestyle) it was fun to jet set around & to start to have more money coming in & having more of that freedom. I missed controlling my own time & my own creative life, so I have just recently left the corporate world again and now I’m in a place where I am creating a new artistic career for myself that includes story-telling performances, writing, photography & teaching among other things. & my goal now is to be able to have the best of both worlds- that’s where I’m at now.

Q: What would the best of both worlds be?

A: To be a fully functioning artist who is in control of my own time & creativity without being a corporate slave.

Q: Could you tell me about the first time you identified yourself as an artist?

A: I was close to thirty and I just remember is that I actually became an art teacher before I became an artist. I encouraged my kids with their art and creativity, of course the first time I picked up a camera was when my first daughter was born- she was my first subject- So… that evolved to a point where I became very involved in their school & I started teaching art at my kids school. That sort of evolved into –when you’re helping those little ones to fulfill their creativity, something happens- & I realized that I could nurture that in myself, as well. I think I always was an artist, when other people’s parents find out they’re an artist they go, “Oh, no!” But my parents were relieved because they thought I was just crazy up until then. Now it all made sense! That was around when I was thirty, I remember practicing saying, “I’m an artist.” You know how people say, “You know, what do you do?” which they always say in our culture. It was very difficult for me to open up my mouth and force myself to say, “I’m an artist.” Because to me that seems so ‘special” or, what if I said, “I’m an artist,” & they just laughed at me or said, “You’re not an artist!” I can’t prove that I’m an artist, but now I look back at that and I’m amazed by that because that’s virtually how everyone identifies me, as an artist. So.

Q: How do other people perceive you as an artist?

A: Most people think of me still as, “The photographer.” I’ll meet people at parties and introduce myself, “Linda Lee” and they’ll say, “The photographer?!!” There are people,
though, who know me for my storytelling, & I think, in general, people think of me as, more ‘creative’, I think that’s the way that it manifests more than anything else, than a profession or anything else. They just go, “Oh, she’s so creative all the time!” In fact, that’s the blog that I just finished creating this morning: that people see artists and think, “Oh, you’re so creative!” Really, everyone is creative. It’s just that the artist identifies that way, people sort of shut it down in themselves, I think.

Q: How do the experiences or perceptions of other people affect you as an artist?

A: What they think of me as an artist? I like it. I like it a lot, actually & I like to encourage people to turn that mirror on themselves and start to see themselves that way, because like I said, I didn’t think of myself that way until I was thirty! So, I like being a little different & I like to encourage other people to be a little different- it is fun! It gives my life meaning to not just live on a treadmill or be a walking zombie, but to really thoughtfully going through my day creating I really consider my greatest work of art my day-to-day living; the way I dress, the way I spend my day, it’s all one big work of art.

Follow up questions:

Q: The first question I had was just regarding your transition from being in the corporate world, doing some photography and then you said went back to the corporate world for a while, but you’re no longer there, could you tell me a little bit about that?

A: Yeah, sure. When I was a young woman, I was-I worked in sales and marketing, before I had kids, and then it was actually… I did run into some, what we might call, “Political Problems” at work, because I saw things differently. I was very successful- always the top sales person wherever I was… you know, the way that I saw things and the way that I’d do things didn’t necessarily match the order process that the corporation had in mind. When I had kids, that really came- push kind of came to shove, because I wasn’t necessarily able to stand up for myself when I had kids, then as a mother, the way that I saw things differently was that when my child was sick and needed me, I needed to leave. And, then I was able to stand up for my kids, in a way I could not stand up for myself; and, so that’s when I left the corporate world, and went home to become a mom. As I was nurturing my children’s creativity-I mean, actually, I’ll say specifically, when my daughter was born, I asked myself What do I want for my daughter? Do I want her to grow up, get a good job... to make a lot of money and be successful- that’s what I’m doing. Is that what I want for my daughter? And the answer was a resounding No. What I want for my daughter is for her to be-fulfilled and for her to express herself creatively - whatever that means- in her life. And so what I realized is that if I truly wanted that for my daughter, I had to have it for myself or I couldn’t have even believed that it existed so that I could continue to want it for my daughter. So, I quit my corporate job to stay home with my kids –and then I had another one, a son- and it was through the process, really, of… bringing out- drawing out their creative expression, that I came into my own creative expression. And… So, I did that for about twenty-one years, until… oh, actually it was more than that, it wasn’t until the younger one… was in college, and then- I was kind of doing that whole starving artist thing. Basically I became-I had some different
odd jobs, but eventually I ended up being a portrait/wedding photographer, I had my own business. I made enough money to support my family as a single mom and pay my bills - but not much more than that- and doing that starving artist thing but very happy and fulfilled. And, then when my kids grew up, this corporation made me an offer that was too good to refuse… to try the corporate world again. And so I decided to do it and I became a National Trainer and teaching photography and sales, so it seemed like a perfect match- things that I’m passionate about and good at, that I had made more in the first year doing that than I had in the last five years put together as a photographer. And, so… that was fun. I traveled constantly; I got on a plane every Monday morning and I came home on Friday if I was lucky. So, if the plane was delayed… or sometimes I didn’t come home for weeks and then, I got tired of that and I missed my family even though my kids were grown- I missed them and I also have a boyfriend that I like a lot, and I missed him, too. So… then I found another corporate job that was closer to home and I thought, well, maybe it was just that corporate job: I’ll give this a try, and I didn’t last very long at all, that lasted for about six months, because I realized that it really isn’t ‘this corporate job’, or, ‘that corporate job’. It’s that I am artistic and entrepreneurial by nature, and I really need to do things my way. So, now, what I had mentioned before in previous questions, my goal is to go back and pick up my… the pieces of my own business and recreate that in a way. I want to destroy- or oh, that sounds so negative… I want to- transcend that myth of the starving artist. I want to be an artist and I want to fully-embrace my ability to make money that I proved that I -can- do working for other people, but I want to do it working for myself. So I wan’ a finally have the best-of-both-worlds and that is the scientific experiment I am conducting at this moment.

Q: You had mentioned before that you really didn’t realize that you were an artist until you were thirty and I was just wondering if you had any experience with art as a child?

A: I was the best drawer in my family and maybe in my class at school, from the time I was very young and… but art wasn’t really- admired, in my family. And, so… that was something that I just sort of did with my friends and- Actually, my remembrance of art class in school did the opposite of promoting my creativity. I have a distinct memory in one art class at the public school that I went to, we were doing a still life and I had drawn it with Cray-Pa’s or pastels or something and… but instead of making it realistic, it was a little more creative interpretation. I was probably in about third grade and I got a failing grade on it and the teacher said it was because she knew I could make it look more realistic than that and I just decided I didn’t like art. So not only did I not consider myself an artist, I didn’t like art, because that’s what I thought it was- that’s the way it was presented to me. And, then of course… I thought one of the things I wanted to do- If you asked me what I wanted to do when I grow up, I wanted to be a fashion designer. And, so that’s what I drew with my girlfriends. Different, you know, fashions and that sort of thing, but I reached probably about sixteen-years-old- and I’ve read that this is very common- is that all children think they’re artists; And they reach a certain age of discernment when they’re able to look at their artwork and say, “Oh, that’s not good enough to be an artist.” They throw it away and find other things to do that are more sensible or more logical… and actually, I was just having a conversation with my boyfriend before I came over here about this: We were talking about those pictures in the
backs of magazines, you know, “Draw Tippy- Send it in! Are you an artist?” Some of this really has come out of the conversations I’ve had with you. I’ve been thinking a lot about this; that I remember doing that and there were a-lot-of people doing that. Almost everybody could draw those and we thought of those as tests to see whether you were an artist or not, but really, I can look at that now and realize that. And I can see that what that really is, is a test of technical skills… which… is not really art at all, because what art is, is a different way of looking at the world. And so by definition, you wouldn’t be able to look at someone else’s drawing, reproduce it and call that art; That wouldn’t be a different way of looking at the world- that’d be the same way of looking at the world.

And I think that that is at the core of the misunderstanding that most people have about art- is that it’s not just about reproducing something (well, of course, that was what my art teacher in third grade also thought) it’s not just about reproducing something. In fact, as a photographer one of the greatest challenges for me is that photography, by its’ nature, is a very realistic art form and so to come up with something that somebody hasn’t already done yet is very challenging! To come up with a new way to look at it: I see that specifically as my job as an artist. It’s not to reproduce, but to find a new way to do it- a revolutionary way and I think that is the job of an artist.

Q: You had said that when you said you were an artist your parents were not surprised, they had before just kind of thought that you were crazy and I’m just wondering if you could share more about that thought?

A: I think they were surprised, I think what I said was they- that in most families if you’d say that you were an artist, your parents would be very disappointed. My parents, I think, weren’t disappointed because they were relieved, because prior to that they just thought I was crazy. But they, you know, that comes back to what I was just saying- Is the whole idea that I have always looked at the world differently, I really think that is… at the crux of being an artist. And when I teach photography, well, one of the classes that I taught that I find the most fulfilling and has been the most successful is the TAO photography and it’s based on the book by the same name. And I specifically tell them- I’m not going to teach you how your camera works, don’t ask me about lenses, features, mechanics- No. We are not going to talk about that at all. What we’re going to talk about is a different way of seeing the world. That brings me back –and I might have said this in our first interview- my favorite quote from a photographer is from Dorothea Lang, who said, “The camera is an instrument that teaches people to see without a cam.” And to me that is what it’s all about, is that… when you really learn how to look through the camera and see art, then suddenly even when you don’t have a camera, everywhere you look, the world will be more beautiful. You’ll be seeing it through new eyes- you’ll be seeing it through the eyes of an artist.

Q: So, now as you’ve continued to work on pulling your business back together and creating that place where you can kind of monetary success as well as fulfilling your artist vision… Do you have any thoughts about how people perceive you as things are going right now?

A: In general, let’s see… I try not to be too much in the business of business of worrying
how people perceive me. That is kind of a rocky-road and, also what I’ve learned is that I’m always wrong about how people perceive me. This, again, just came in on conversation with my boyfriend and I asked him, because I was kind of talking about some of the challenges that I’ve run into with some of the photo-shoots I’d been doing recently, and then I turned to him and I said, “Do you think that I’m too negative and complaining?” And he just started to laugh and said, “The word that comes to mind to me, if I had to pick one word to describe you, the word that comes to me is: Appreciative,” and he goes, “I don’t even know where you get this whole thing about negativity- I don’t even know what you’re talking about.” Which, actually I just recently took one of those vocational-strength assessment tests and my number one strength was appreciation of beauty. Again that ties in with everything we’re talking about, because, and this might be different as a photographer than for a painter- I see them more as to create, almost more going out. I, as a photographer, am not creating what I am taking pictures of, I’m capturing it. So, that’s what I do; I walk around in the world looking for beauty and then when it catches my eye, I capture it, and so… I suspect that most of the people from my corporate life, who I don’t really associate with that much- they’re on the periphery- and I’m pretty sure most of them just think I’m crazy. The people that I’m working with now for my photography, I think they… well, I’ll say that when I put word out that I was about to do portrait sessions, the phone just rang off the hook. I think there is a lot of people who have been wanting to take a portrait with me, I guess, for a long time and I’ve been so busy that… it blows my mind. So, I guess they think that I’m talented and… that’s- I guess that’s all I know about what people think about me. The one thing that I do know, though, getting back to the making money part of it, is that when I came home the other night, I said, “I remember… I’m just remembering something from when I was in business before: If I’m this busy and I’m not rich, that must mean I’m not charging enough. My prices are going up today.”

**Interview Number Two**

Q: Can you tell me about your life experience being an artist?

A: What I’ve done, or what I like to do?

Q: What it’s like to be an artist.

A: My daughter asked me that same question since she was getting into art and I think what it is to be an artist… it’s an every day thing, some days you are creative and some days you aren’t but I think that the process of trying to find something to do creatively… it’s almost like a… many level of art classes I’ve taken always ask, “What does it mean to be an artist?” Like, a philosophy question, like, “Is there a God?” Yes, there is, or, No, there isn’t, but… I guess that’s too broad to find an answer to specify.

Q: You live as an artist in your being, so what does that look like over the coarse of your life, or in your day to day?
A: It’s so broad, to me… I guess I can just, is art a part of my every day life? Yes. Does that make me an artist? Yes, it does. I think it’s just an important mechanic of who I am and what I do and even decisions I make that aren’t even artistic decisions of every day life, what it means to me to teach my children or make a conscious decision about who I donate money to. Causes I support. It affects every day decisions that you make in your life, just like if you were to be a politician: You’d think of things the same way. “How does this affect me in that way?” So, yeah- it’s a conscious decision and effort. So.

Q: Can you tell me about the first time you identified yourself as an artist?

A: Probably around the same age as my daughter, five years old or so. I really started making things just to make things & trying to put a function to them later, gradually escalating into wanting to do more things, three or four things, destroy things after I made them, seeing what made them different. That kind of discovery, but it also put me in a different position of discovery at school & then thinking because I wasn’t in the same thinking mode as some of the other kids. Right away you become a little more of an outcast, in a way… outcast is kind of a harsh word, more, “You think weird.” I remember hearing that distinctively hearing that a couple times in second grade, “What are you drawing? Why are you making that?” I’d be like, “Because I can? Because it’s creative, it’s cool, what do you want to know? What is it? Does it make you nervous that I’m making something you cannot understand?” Those are just some of the experiences I had when I was young.

Q: In identifying yourself as an artist, was there any criteria you had to meet where you said, “I am an artist.”?

A: I think what really made a difference to me was when I watched , actually uh, it was a Nova special on channel two with my dad about creative artists and what not, it was a philosophical journey into Picasso and Br.. and it was Pollack and I remember watching Pollack & they had black and white short uh, I don’t know… the film rolling, I was engrossed. I was thinking really hard, I remember my mom doing a lot of painting, too, when she was younger, I remember watching or looking at some of her paintings hanging around the house and I remember telling her, “I’m an artist, mom. This is what I want to do.” She goes, “Okay, good. Just keep on practicing; that’s what it takes.” “Okay.” The first, really, jogging thing was the television saying, “Yeah! There’s a lot of people doing that out there already- its okay! It’s not just you, or your mom, you’re not alone.” I think that is a big thing, too, when you’re little- you think you’re alone & you have these big, creative ideas & that’s kind of scary. But it’s comforting later on to know that you’re not alone, so.

Q: How do people perceive you as an artist?

A: You want a factual what I’ve heard from people or…?

Q: All of it!
A: Okay. From family it’s more of a, “What are you doing now? Are you taking your photography thing seriously? Have you incorporated yet?” Business oriented as most of them are; very into sales, or engineers or accountants you know they’re like hard, factual things so it’s hard sometimes to tell them, “Well, I’m working on stuff, but I haven’t really sold a whole lot of stuff.” I cannot honestly say I’m making a living at being an artist. Kind of sad- I wish I could put myself out there more, but that’s not the focus right now in my life, that’s probably family so it’s like, “Yeah, sometimes creatively it’s difficult that way.” But people look at it and think, “Oh, so you’re staying home with the kids. That’s great, good for you.” That’s also a challenge, you know, to stay focused even when you have outside opinions, “You should just go get a job over night at a warehouse, you know, make some money.” That type of thing. There are quite a few friends who also support me, “Well, I’d like to see you make a book, or go publish something!” There are lots of people who encourage me along with my wife, Chris, it helps a lot to have the focused family- even brothers, or a dad who was an engineer for thirty-five years at 3M, to have someone that’s so hard core… “work, get a job!” Sometimes when you meet people at a gathering & they say, “What do you do?” “I’m a freelance photographer, artist, painter…” “Oh.” Like there is some sort of stigma attached to being an artist that you are some sort of loafer or … you know, I don’t know what they think sometimes. (Laughter) The conversation dulls somewhat after that. “What do you do?” “Well, what do you know about art?” I have to start with, “Well, have you gone to the walker art center? Have you been to any art shows or anything lately?” If you saw the looks on their faces when they say, “Oh, nope… haven’t been anywhere.” So, I try to go back to the basics, “Do you know who Picasso is?” “Oh, YEAH, we studied him in school!” So you try to break into a sort of conversation about your own art before you tell them you’re an artist. It usually works, after you get them into the ‘technology’ of things instead of the actual art, you can bring it back to art, talking about art that way. With computers now, you know like photography or fine art photography, people like to hear about pictures because almost everybody owns a camera; good icebreaker that way, too, take it from there and maybe go on to painting, “That’s something else I do.”

Q: How do the perceptions of other people affect you as an artist?

A: Hmm. I think when I was younger, they affected me a lot. I think I let it over-affect how I thought of myself and, you know, when you study Art History they talk about how artists used to talk about the ‘outside world’ in their paintings- to describe things and it moves into artists and what they felt inside, & it slowly got more selfish to where we are exploring more and more internal rather than external. I think I was stuck there for a long time, with the internal, you know, always… worried about how people perceived me as an artist. That’s where a lot of self doubt comes in, “Am I good enough?” And if you go and enter pieces into a show locally and you know everyone else who’s there and you don’t get in, that’s kind of a… that’s where it starts. A competition, sometimes, and juried exhibitions and stuff like that, and it’s also good for you in a way, too, because you have to put yourself out there to say, “This is my statement. Does my statement make sense to the general public or to someone who has a trained eye in art, who’s been in art longer, do they see something? Can they talk to me about it? Do I talk to them about it?”
Just that singular or two dimensional or three dimensional or whatever you have in front of them. At a younger age, yes. I was very moved by what other people thought. Now that I’ve matured a little more, yes, it still affects me, but not to the same percentage. I think I’m more focused on what I am; it’s a more comfortable place and I don’t have to worry about what they think… or… my work isn’t affected by them, although, sometimes it can fall through or you have to keep yourself in check before you can start. Write down ideas and frustrations but… Don’t leave it on the canvas, don’t leave it in your pictures, leave it somewhere else. Not on your work.

Q: Can you talk about the process of your work evolving?

A: Um. From the very beginning?

Q: Yeah, sure!

A: Well, I think like any kid I just picked up a pen or pencil and began to just explore. I think creating and seeing things as 3D or 2D, ya know, it evolves into shadow and light and depth and perception and… when you get to a certain point of being able to draw stuff that is realistic, that’s where I got, where you start thinking, “What else is there?” Because there are a lot of people doing, you know, for me when I first started really getting into painting, is when I went, “Okay, we’re doing a still life. Try to make it as perfect as possible.” Well, why can’t I take a picture? It really got to me. Everyone’s just taking a fine art picture, the appeal of painting realism just never got to me. Being already influenced by Jackson Pollack slapping paint around, and I’m like, “I don’t want to do what he’s doing, but I want to do something of my own, I want to capture some sort of my own.” I guess the evolution is slow, I think. I think you’re scared of something out of something you know once you get to a certain point. If you’ve already been accepted, you know… “Matt’s really good at doing this. You’re paintings are just incredible!” If that style is what everyone’s really clamoring over than you start to want to go into something else, or change, people go, “What? What’re you doing? That’s not your stuff.” Other people’s perception… self doubt… leave it, take it, accept it… I guess most times have been when I first started out in the fine arts and first attempted college, it was… I let that rendezvous rail me a little more than I would have liked it to. Now, it’s more… seems like one big loop of a question! Or an answer, rather… I think I lost my train of thought. Long day, went for a long run today.

Q: When we were talking about how people perceive you as an artist, it was a lot about your family and a little bit about socially… have you had other types of people where you understood what they perceived you as being an artist? Public showing or places where you’ve seen people respond to your art?

A: I had a showing in Mankato a long time ago with seven different pieces of my paintings and one of my friends, she was starting a show, I said, “I got seven finished pieces, want ‘em?” “Yes, I need to fill space!” I didn’t know I had to do this later but they wanted me there and it was a thing for kids! I didn’t know it was for kids, it was I believe at the public library, so I walked in and a few of the artists didn’t show up, so all
of the sudden, “Oh, Matt, here! Come discuss your art with some of the kids!” So I walked piece to piece, answering questions and it really… it was difficult to talk about some of the subject matter, because during that time I was really internalizing some of my paintings, they were graphic—to me- they were suggestive in some ways and they were meant to be uncomfortable. Some of the kids told me that, “These aren’t comfortable. They’re harsh, the colors are harsh and they are very hard to look at!” I said, “That was the intention.” “Well, if you’re painting, don’t you want people to look at them?” I said, “I’m trying to evoke an emotion.” Then, all of a sudden, they finally got it. I think, kids being kids, they already felt my uncomfortability and emotionally I was already attached to the paintings, but very disturbed with myself talking about it, they keyed in on that right away, as kids can do, and I remember after I was all done my friend who helped me get into the show walked up to me and said, “Are you okay?” “I didn’t realize I had to talk about it, but I feel better about it now.” I was like, having therapy in front of about twenty kids and also their teachers, “Well, can you come back tomorrow and talk about it again?” I was like, “Ahaha, I don’t know… If you want me to, yes, I will.” It ended up that they just wanted a regular, open to the public show, with people coming in to look at it, they didn’t let more kids come through… it was one of the more memorable experiences about having a shows. I’ve gotten into a few other shows and I think… the other shows have never really been the same, people just walk around your stuff, no one really says anything, even graduating from college, when you have your final presentation of your portfolio, having people and judges and other artistic minds walk through and all they say is, “Oh, I like your work,” no one really ever asking you questions about anything at your show, kind of difficult to take when you’re looking for some sort of feedback. They take your card or your resume at the end, or your chocolate or the candy in your bowl… that’s what they’re there for, I guess. (Laughter) You hope to get some sort of response! During my last quarter in photography school, I had a wild care and I wanted to put these pictures into a national magazine and I went up to my instructor, “I need to have an instructor’s name on this if I hand on it, I wondered if you’d sign off on it and say, yeah, you know, you’re my teacher, basically. You’re my instructor.” So I sent in about seven pictures, it was $35 for seven pictures to go in & all of sudden my instructor emails me back and says, “Congratulations! You got in, you’re published!” I said, “Wow. Published,” For a school that doesn’t get a whole lot of people published, immediately the photography group- there’s only three or four photography teachers’ there- all came right away and said, “Congratulations, that’s awesome! You got published!” It was interesting because… at the very end of, at the final critique, the President of the College was at the final portfolio showing and he came up and had the same picture- it was a picture of chicken heads, I don’t know if you’ve ever seen that one. “Oh, so you’re the one that did that one. Interesting…” Okay. Nice feedback. Other people would tell me, “I really like how they’re grouped and stuff, so did you physically move stuff or…” I said, “No, I just stuck my head in a bucket of dead chickens and took a shot of their heads. I played with some contrast and a little bit of color but tried to keep it as realistic as possible.” “Well, you got the realism down.” It was interesting to have something published that way and later on have a photograph, not a painting, 2D. I still think there is a correlation between the two, but just… it was an interesting experience, how people react like, “Oh you got published nationally…” (Laughter)
Q: So, is that a different standard?

A: What?

Q: To be published?

A: Well, yeah, it is. All of a sudden it’s, you know, not just a local thing anymore, it’s other people seeing this- it’s actually in something that people will buy… a magazine, with other stuff in it. That’s, you know, what we’re all attracted to: Sharing your work with other people.

Q: Do you think your peers or teachers responded to your work differently because it had been published than they might have otherwise?

A: I don’t think so. I think most of my photography professors were genuine. When they thought stuff was good, they stood behind it and when I showed the work I was going to put into the contest they liked all of them before, so it was very genuine, they were very matter-of-fact about everything. That’s one thing I really enjoyed about them. Their backgrounds were good, too, have a dynamic of… one professor being someone from the fine art field, the other from a very commercial field, having them both like it was, you know, “Okay, I can’t go wrong.” It was kind of like… I felt it was genuinely truthful, I think other people thought different, outside of the photography group, “Oh, okay, you’re a photographer.”

Q: When we started talking you had about realism in painting, being something that you weren’t as interested in because of the possibilities in photography… and now you do a lot of work in photography. When did your opinion of photography change?

A: I think it has changed but I still, you know, I look at it more as digital art now. It’s not just photography- I think the whole meaning of photography has changed. Photography was very different; you could do a little bit of change, you can cut pictures up and move stuff around and try to make them look seamless, & you had to spend hours and hours blending and coloring stuff with crayons right on the unfinished pieces of film and stuff but, now it’s come around to a whole different age of what photography is, because it’s more about ones and zeros than it is creating something from silver. It’s not the same process at all anymore, ink jet printers verses being in a dark room, moving from one bath to the next- the developer, the water, the stop and you keep going… it’s a whole different animal, I think. They both have their creative… film has a creative essence to it that I think digital lost out on… it has it’s very own thing. It’s hard to describe, because when I did take pictures with film, it felt like it had to be more exact. You had to be on top of your game to get it right… now with digital, there’s a lot of bad photography right on a computer than getting it right on the camera.

**Interview Number Three:**

Q: Can you tell me about your experience being an artist?
A: My experience being an artist is kind of inbred; I was born to a father who was an artist, his mother was an artist... I learned a lot from my grand mother when I was a little boy- she was a landscape painter and my dad was more of an illustrator- it’s kind of always been there in my family. I’m one of four boys, I’m the only one who has that ability to draw, my brothers are basically wonderful guys, but they’re athletes and they couldn’t draw a stick figure to save their life. But, I just kind of inherited that from my dad and stuff, and it’s always been something that I’ve been able to sit down and do, and I also believe, though I had brothers, a lot of it is the idea of being alone, I create my own world through art. So I would draw and draw and draw and they’re not necessarily the images that you’ve seen, they’re not necessarily something that you see in a still life- it’s something in my head. So, if I have any qualities as an artist, I have a great imagination. I don’t have all the skill in the world, but I can draw things that are not in front of people. I feel that’s kind of important... for me, anyway. So, I can create my own little world... so, but I’ve always been able to draw and talk about art and I was always around art, when my grandmother died, it was very strange but I inherited everything that she had. And I was not the only person in the family to inherit things, but she gave it all to me because I was an artist and she gave me a lot of money, put it away for me, and gave me all these art supplies when I was six years old... I didn’t know what all this stuff was, so I kind of took it on myself to learn all this stuff that I would copy what she had done and stuff, so I did it not in a sense for my grandmother, but really for her, the idea that she helped me. It started a long-long time ago, so um... Go ahead, ask, I might ramble...

Q: No! Don’t be afraid of rambling. I’m just trying to think, uh... as an adult, how have you experienced being an artist?

A: Oh, you know, I’ve always thought of it as the most important thing in my life, I’ve been an administrator and a curator for museums and stuff but I’ve always thought those were the jobs that could pay the bills, so I could do my artwork and I’ve always used work (let’s just say it’s work) as a way for me to pay for me to be able to not compromise my artwork at all, so I could do it. I couldn’t draw you a dog if you wanted me to because it’d be purple and blue and gray, that’s how I’d want the dog, so I’ve never done a commission of art in my life, so I’ve always had my jobs as the way to pay for everything else. But, I’ve just always done art, I can’t explain way it’s just- it’s just always been there but... and it just set me apart from my brothers and stuff that I would always... they were wonderful, you know, incredible athletes but you know, I’d always sit in the house and draw, and then they’d come in and try to figure out what that was, how do I do that and all this kind of stuff, so, that was my little special thing that they didn’t- couldn’t do but I could, I couldn’t do the sports but they could, so it kind of reinforces to want to do it more and more and more. I really believe that practice does make perfect; the idea of progression and stuff, but I’ve always felt, as an adult, I’ve always done artwork, I think it’s... um... It’s a point of pride, you know, that you’re very proud of what you do, um... so it’s kind of like, “Well, I can’t do this and this in life, but I can do this very well.” So, it’s like, I’ve gotten to this thing where I go, “This is what I can do very well and really practice it when I do.” And, so, I live and breathe it. I used to be a curator at the (Something center in Colorado...?) which was a wonderful job with an incredible amount
of money, I walked away from it because I was getting older and I wanted to be able to do my own artwork, which I’ve had very… The way to say it is that I’ve had very good success, or that very good things have happened to me in the art world, so I wanted to walk away and finish these things about my own work before time runs out. So, I walked away from a really great job, I met a wonderful woman in Saint Louis, came up here and continued to do my artwork, and… just keep going and going and going and uh… Picasso, he did 293 pieces of artwork in ninety-one years, and I think he was painting until he died, and I’d like to go out that way so…I just, it’s just a weird thing that’s always been a part of my life. I’ve always had to- um, when I was younger and stuff, the thing where you have to think and think about things and take time to study things, and everybody always says, “Oh, Jerry’s a little lazy,” or, “He’s not as ambitious as his brothers.” ‘Cause I was never into sports… but you have to do things to contemplate what you’re going to do or even build up your imagination- read a book! And all of a sudden you illustrate that book, you know it’s almost like you rewrite the book, actually, so I’ve always been able to… see something and then go to the table and draw what I think my interpretation of that was, which is totally different from probably what I just read, but I always want it to be that way, too- I want to draw anything that if we were in that, I mean… I used to teach still life drawing and stuff and I always found it very boring that everybody drew the same thing instead of still life-s for everybody, instead of four people like thirty people draw the same still life and these guys and these guys were different- they’d move around within a few minutes, just the idea that they were all drawing the same thing at the same time, because then it’s also very competitive, where, “Oh, well this is a better drawing than this drawing.” Like I said, I’m not the best artist in the world, but I have a really great confidence that what I draw is… unique. So that’s why… I kind of… you know, it’s like, I get into it a lot and really delve into it, research it. It’s hard for me to explain sometimes what these drawings are about! But it could be very innocent that you said, “Oh, Gee, someone really liked your work!” I just go, “Oh, well that gives you a big head!” So I went and did a whole bunch of drawings about people with big heads and your head gets so big that you can’t get out the door! I take everything that people say… you know, I’ll listen to somebody’s conversation and I’ll hear something and write it down and then I’ll go home and illustrate that word or sentence and stuff. I’m also into creative writing- I have a minor in creative writing, so everything that is said to me, done to me, kind of goes back into my drawings. So I kind of, uh, I have to absorb for a while and I’ll walk around and I look like I’m mad at the world but I’m just absorbing everything and then I’ll sit down and it just comes out in a rush and I have to just draw and I’ve always been that way. When I was working as an adult, to get back to your original question, when I was working as an adult I did all these things 24/7 but I was frustrated that I was so exhausted that I didn’t have time to do my own work so… um… I made a decision when I was fifty-five years old, when I retired was the first person to retire from the city of (Arvada? What?)…ever, at fifty-five, and they were startled and I did it and I’m set up and I have benefit packets that pay for me to live the rest of my life, it’s a really nice package that I- that they did for me and I walked away and I just said, “You know, I’m going to do something for myself for a while,“ And, um… I’m actually very glad that I did it, it was scary! It is scary, but um…I had to do it for my own good, do it before “time runs out”, so to speak.
Q: When was the first time you identified yourself as an artist?

A: Um, when a teacher told me in the fifth grade, I did a drawing of JFK being assassinated in Dallas, Texas. I did a drawing of a car going down the road empty and we were listening to the Kennedy Assassination on the radio and she took it from me, just a little pencil drawing, she took it from me and said, “I have to keep this for a while.” They went to the principal and all this stuff and they kind of pulled me out of class and said, “Well, what is that about?” And I said, “When I was listening on the radio and that guy got killed,” I didn’t know his name and stuff, and they said, “Well you need to— and they put me in a special class— to draw! With maybe two or three other people and there’d be a period when they’d take me out of my regular classroom to just draw and they’d just throw out different ideas, or they’d play music and um… I’d sit in there and draw for like half an hour to forty-five minutes and they’d come back and say, “Go back to class.” I enjoyed it a lot, but I’d want to go do other things and they’d say, “Well, why don’t you want to do this?” So I’d do that, and they asked my mom… My mom has that drawing to this day and um… it’s just a car rolling down the road with buildings around it and it’s empty and that was my drawing for the assassination of JFK and now I know all that stuff now, it sounds like it wasn’t much of a little drawing but at the time it was just what I did and they started talking about it, you know, like, “Jerry’s this artist.” And my mom’s goes, “Oh, yeah, of course he is. His dad’s an artist, his grandmother is an artist.” You know, and all this stuff and she never… the first time that she accepted that and I heard it… um was when I accepted it, because it’s wonderful when your mother can tell you “You’re an artist.” And I’ve had really weird jobs over my life and my mom would go, “Well, don’t do that.” I worked at nursing homes and stuff, I did it because I wanted to talk to people and then I’d go home and draw. She goes, “Don’t do that.” She was afraid we’d put her in a nursing home someday. I tell her, “You know, this is really hard. You go in there and the lady’s done. She passed away.” She goes, “You don’t need to do that—you’re an artist.” I kept thinking, “Wow.” It’s really nice to have that reinforcement, and it came from her, but I’ve always drawn… it’s kind of a nice title. If that’s what I’m labeled as, that’s a nice thing. I do like to draw and help people and I work with kids and stuff um… I draw differently than other people but I can appreciate that’s done in art I just think it’s a wonderful medium and a wonderful release for people, and I think if people did more drawing and painting or whatever, maybe there’d be a lot less of a lot of things going on that are bad… that’s why I wanted to interview with you because of Art Therapy and I looked this thing up and… I think it’s great what you guys do. I just think it’s wonderful because it’s a hidden treasure that you can bring out of people and the things that come out of people sometimes when they’re drawing and stuff… so… next?

Q: How do people perceive you as an artist?

A: Um… there’s a really weird thing, because I’m so compe- I’ve got to tell you, I’m the smallest of my brother’s and I’m six-two, my brother’s are six-nine, six-seven, and six-four- there’s this weird thing where they actually meet me, if they’ve seen my artwork before they’ve met me, then they meet me and they don’t believe that I did it, ‘cause I’m a big man. But my father was six-foot-four, and he was a huge man he-he actually, worked on the Space Needle in Seattle did all the construction and parking work for it but
he also sat and drew every night. I mean, I used to be able to swing on his arms and he was strong, he was a construction guy, but uh… I think that’s the weird thing is that people go, “Well, you didn’t draw these!” There’re these little things… I’ve had good and bad thoughts about that over the years, because people don’t believe you can do something because you don’t look the part. I always look the part that I “should have been” like a football player or something, and I’ve never been able to be that so… I never tried to be this big or whatever so… it’s just part of our genes! So it’s this perception that I, I kind of have a chuckle when people… “Oh, you drew these?” You know, it’s like… “Yeah,” I just always have this… it’s a stereotype that people have to be this or that in the corner is the artist or the poet and it’s just not true. Over the coarse of my life I look for people in the arts, especially poets, and I just…they were big men! And I’ve really gone to them and found out that they have those same things that I’ve dealt with, where people just don’t understand- I mean, I used to have, when I was in school, the sculpture teacher used to come up (I have a five year degree) the sculpture teacher would come up to me and say, “Come downstairs with me, Jerry, and bend steel.” I’d look around the room and I had thirty beautiful women in the room and I was the only male and I’d go, “I’m not going downstairs,” and I go, “Look around.” I mean, there’s this perception that when someone sees me, they don’t believe I can do this, they don’t believe you can write a piece of poetry. And I’ve always been, Charles Berkowsky(sp?), the poet, I’m really drawn to him- I saw him live at the University in Bellingham. Just a big man…and just-man, just a scary looking guy, too, you know like six-four and always drinkin’ and- but I was so drawn to him and you know he was actually a sweet little guy and very alone in his life even though he’s surrounded by people. My dad was six-four and maybe 250 pounds and a solid man and… he did these little drawings at night, but you know- his hands were all busted up from concrete and stuff so he always told me, “Never fight with your hands. Don’t do anything- don’t break your hands up.” And so I don’t…you know, I wear glasses all the time, because, “Don’t get your eyes poked and don’t mess up your fingers, or else you can’t draw.” So I kind of kept that in mind and I don’t do anything that will jeopardize my hands, because that’s… even the idea that I’m aging, I do little things for arthritis so I don’t get that but… It’s always been there that I’ve been an artist in my mind and it was reinforced when I was a little boy and was in grade school and the wonderful thing that did happen later on in life, when my dad passed away I did a show about him and it was like an Irish wake up in Bellingham, Washington and I invited all these people from all through my life that didn’t quite know each other and they all sat in this big room and my mother made dinner for almost two hundred people and she walked around and she would listen to people talk about my work… and she goes, “Yeah,” She just got real proud, “My son, he’s always been an artist.” It’s still… it goes back to the idea that she… you know, your family has to reinforce that, too… my mom raised us, my parents separated when I was nine, but I always felt that she was my toughest critic, because my father was an artist and they divorced and I was going to art school and everything and she was like, “Well, are you going to be like your dad?” And I said, “No. Not at all,” and… so finally I think it broke through that I would do these crappy jobs to survive while going to school especially and she’d go, “Well, don’t do that. Just quit- you’re an artist.” Like, “Well, send me a check!” You know, there’s a vice that I love dearly and I- it’s always been there, I’ve always… I enjoy it. I just enjoy it… watching people… and you know, I’ve been a curator and um… I’ve been on watercolor
expeditions with these guys who do watercolor landscapes and you know… I can’t do that. So I’ll put little blue dogs and stuff in my water color and they’ll say, “Where are you seeing that?” And I’ll go, “Right there!” So… but I appreciate the fact that people do that, and I actually appreciate what they call, “Sunday Painters” because I think there is a wonderful thing that they do-do, they’re enjoying themselves and why not? And…um…I don’t dismiss any art form and if they get dirty and that’s all the process is for them, to get dirty, and…it’s still- they did the process. So they tried, whatever, uh… my new wife, I met Kate in St. Louis, she teaches Ceramics at Wisconsin Stout and they get dirty. I love the idea that they get dirty and the kids are covered in clay and stuff and you know, they’re looking at their little bowls on the wheel and stuff, I admire anyone that can do it, and I think it’s kept me going that, where, you know, I would have loved to play sports like my brother’s did- I always admired my brother’s, but now we’re all older and they can’t play anymore and there’s a short window of opportunity in sports… that window doesn’t close in art and you know, all these people that I’ve read about and stuff, I mean usually if they’re going to pass, they pass away in their studio or whatever but you can never grow old and never grow out of style in art… it goes in cycles where, you know, realism goes round and round and abstract… but, if you just continue to do what you’re doing, and…this is what I call my own, “Visual Language,” and that’s just the way I speak ‘til the day I die. I feel that’s a wonderful and graceful way to grow old. And if you look at the world- especially in the arts, especially here in Minnesota- there’s this guy named Warren McKenzie, he’s a ceramic potter- he makes the most simple pots in the world- but, just… praised by all these young ceramic people and stuff and you can grow graceful and old in the arts, you know, like blues musicians (the older guys that just play and play) it’s just a wonderful way to grow old, I think, a very graceful way to grow old. Lots of things you can’t do: Construction, you’ve got to stop at a certain age, ‘cause you’re all busted up, you know, things like that and um… As long as you take care of your hands, I guess, and your eyes… and your mind, you know (laughter) you can do art for a while.

Q: How do people’s perceptions of you affect you as an artist?

A: Well, going back to this idea that, and you know, this is always good for me because it’s always been a part of me…because I’m this big man, people… it’s hard for them to accept that I do this. Like I said before, at Grad School there was this big problem with a go who was doing artwork that was pretty graphic, and they weren’t going to show his work, to get his graduate degree… and they were full of… he was a wonderful artist, from Chicago and a Gay artist and they were full of Gay imagery and they weren’t going to graduate him, and… we were all very upset and they told him about three days before his graduation thesis, and they weren’t going to graduate him, so he tore all of his paintings up. Well, then they changed their minds as soon as he tore them up and so I went with him and we stapled them all back together, these large arch drawings, and I went as representing the graduate students… the chair, and I said, “Well, here’s… We all want him to graduate, we all support him and stuff,” and so the Chair said, “I have a great idea.” Looked at me and did a measuring thing and he was smaller than me, “Whatever you want, Jerry. I don’t want to argue with you.” And I just… lost it. The fact is that he didn’t have a valid reason… because of my size and I’ve always held that against people
who automatically judge somebody based on shapes and all that stuff. So, again it goes back to the idea that I’ve always looked— I’ve always tried to find out, if I’m going to read about an artist or a poet, I try to find out how they grew up, because it’s one thing… you just don’t start making artwork, and you don’t… if you look at resumes and stuff, when I work with young people, and they’ve got the Café Latte as a show where they’ve had an exhibition, where they go, “Well, I’m going to take that off this.” And I go, no; If I have a show there, it’d be the last thing on my resume, but it’d still be on my resume, because you have to show progression. I mean, nobody starts off in the Louvre… you know, nobody starts off in the art museum the Walker here in Minneapolis, which is fabulous, but you have to progress to it. I’ve always held that against people, when they just immediately stereotype people, you know—most of the guys that I know that are metal works and sculptors are as rock solid as any construction guy I’ve ever met, because you have to; the materials make you that way. So, I’ve always held that against people when people, you know, stereotype me as, “Well, you’re bigger than me, so we’re not going to argue about it. We’re not going to discuss this.” And I remember that guy very specifically, the Chair, and years later I saw him and… he knew that it really bothered me; ‘Cause I had a very wonderful point and valid point and I was representing everybody, and he just wrote me off based on the fact that I was bigger than him. So I try to stay away from… I actually smile more than anybody, but I’m just a big guy and I turn red because I get embarrassed, so, people go, “Oh, Jeez! What’s wrong with Jerry?” I try to really, really… work with people in that and I really like to work with young kids… because I love the idea that they’re not stereotyping. They’re just trying to have a good time. And for me artwork, if we were to draw right now, it’s the idea of just drawing: It’s not that I’m going to draw better than you or anything like that, it’s the idea of just drawing and when I used to teach at an Elementary School and such, it was the idea that… it wasn’t just an art class, for one hour a day, I was allowed by the principal to draw anything. We’d make up stuff and draw on the board and draw on the paper but boy those kids wanted to draw so much that they would do everything else to get to that point, all their studies and stuff. But I’ve always felt that when people hold something and I mean, everyone has a right to form an opinion regardless of size and all that stuff, but I dismiss people that really kinda label me ‘cause of my size… I’ll have people label me here! I just moved here a year ago and am just starting to get to know people in the arts. I’ve had great luck, success, whatever you want to call it… in visual arts, and stuff. I moved here because I fell in love with somebody and I left Denver, put my home up for sale and brought my dogs… (Laughter) My dogs are like, in shock because there’s snow everyday but… You know, I’ll have that problem a little bit, but that’s okay; it takes a little time for people to see through that and… oh, well, you know, Jerry’s this and that… so… but, that’s a tough one for me… I’ve always felt that… And I’ve studied art and I’ve studied Art History and all that stuff and I have a valid opinion on a lot of things, but, it’s always like, “Oh, Jeez! Look at the size of that guy!” I’m a lot bigger than most of the curators you’ll ever meet in your life, but, you know what… So what? Ya’ know… to me, it’s like, I also enjoy sports, but I was never as good as my brother’s so… I found something in my life that I could really be good at, and that was art and I’ve always been able to do it from the word ‘Go!’ I love sports and I’ll go watch sports and I’ll take my art friends and then they actually find out why it’s enjoyable and stuff… we’ll go watch baseball, and then go home and draw or something you know. It’s just like, when you’re
watching a sporting event you can talk to somebody sitting next to you and never look at them because you’re watching this sport event but you can talk about art and life and all that… And, also, I think art is life. It is for me and it is for everybody in a sense, but… art is life and you’re talking about it, but you can’t just do it 24/7. You see this and you see that but you’re still thinking, “Oh, God, when I get home, I’m going to draw that whole sentence that woman said.” This wonderful woman in college said, “I feel like I’m surrounded by wolves.” So I went home and painted horse’s breasts, nude horses with breasts, surrounded by wolves and I was so… just… very abstracted but it’s just this idea of, “Wow. What a great sentence.” You know? What a great thing… I did like, three or four drawings of the things and showed it to her and she goes, “That’s so familiar to me.” “Heh, well, you’re the one that said that!” She goes, “Oh, no, I didn’t say that!” “Sure you said that, you said, ‘I feel like I’m surrounded by wolves!’” and it was just an off the cuff thing and … but that’s good and bad because I will also absorb the fact that people dismiss me because of my size… that also affects you, too, you know it’s…

Q: So you are very aware of the stereotypes regarding your size?

A: Yes, I’m very aware of the stereotypes regarding my size.

Q: How about as an artist? Do you feel stereotyped as an artist?

A: Well, you can get stereotyped as an artist if you get into one medium or one idea, you know, a lot of artists will take that one abstract painting and they’ll take up one life, they’ll use up their whole life to make that one abstract painting. People can be stereotyped that way, that’s one way I was thinking of what you said, but what I tried was… I’ll go and I’ll draw something for 100 drawings, then I stop. And the first time somebody compliments me, I’ll just stop. I feel like, “Oh, I must be done.” Like she said, “Oh, well, those are great!” “Okay, then I’m done.” And then I’ll start something else. But even though I said that, the whole idea that I’m looking at is the long term and progression. “Am I getting better as an artist? Am I getting better as a speaker about art? Am I really learning about other people, exploring other art and listening to other people?” Yes. So… these little… so to speak, series of art drawings or whatever, are one thing, but it’s the idea that I’m still progressing and… that’s what’s important to me, is progression, you know, as a person and all that stuff. My forte is art, visual art, things like that, talking to people… and then explaining what I’ve learned about something to a younger student or something, so… But I like the idea of taking something to it’s limit that I can, for me, and then I have to stop ‘cause I’m burned out… and then I’ll start something else, based on something I’ve read or somebody’s idea or a poem I’ve written, then I’ll take it again, but it’s the underlying current under all that is progression. If I’m not progressing, then I’ll be angry with myself, in a sense. You know, go to the museum, walk around and stomp my feet, you know, but… That’s the thing, I think, when I first got to Minnesota, I had no idea the winters were like this. I didn’t get my studios done… they’re not insulated, the one studio I had, so there was a point that I had to stop drawing out there, because I had too many jackets on… but I have a basement that I’m converting, too. Now, this next summer… I realize why people sit out in the sun, here, to get the vitamin D drainage they’ve lost… But I’m getting ready for next winter already, because
I know now all the things that I didn’t do right. I didn’t know the cold would be that extensive, that long… now I know that, so I have to insolate or move my drawings into the house or out of the studios or whatever. So, I’ve learned that… So, I’ve adapted to it as an artist. Drawings will change, too, they’ve already changed… I’m now doing drawings of my new wife, and she’s not happy with it, but I’m doing drawings of her… and she’s full of jewelry, she has nose rings and all this stuff, and… I’m doing all these drawings and she goes, “That’s me, isn’t it?” and I’m, “No, it’s not you.” She goes, “Well, what’s that?” but you know… I’m just kind of adapting again, but it’s progression and… I’m sorry to bring it up, but I’m really happy with ‘em, I’ve never drawn like that before. So, for me, at my age, it’s… I’m looking at these drawings, going, “Wow. I’ve never drawn like this anytime in my life.” And so I’m happy that I’m drawing them, they’re really like… you might do a quiz or a crossword puzzle, I started drawing and it’s a crossword puzzle for me. I’ll start something and I’ll go, “Wow.” And then I’ll have a corner and I’ll do something, change that corner over and over and over, so it’s like, I’ll sit and draw and Kate will have some game on her laptop open, a game that’s good for her, and I’ll draw a problem and I’ve never done that before and… so… even though they’re small, my drawings are usually pretty big, even though they’re smaller, it’s still something I’ve ever done before. So, the whole thing… I mean, I’m trying to progress even through the fact of stereotyping, you know… how to disarm people or you know, that kind of stuff… you know, I interviewed at a University for a job and they thought I was interviewing for the football coach. You know, so I mean it was really weird, you know, I met these guys at the airport from the art department and they go, “Woah, do you know which job you got? You’re here for the Gallery Director. Oh… you’re a big guy!” It’s just hilarious, you know, and I mean, they were tiny little guys, and I thought, “Wow. Did your mom not feed you or something?” You know, and you go to Ireland and I’m a normal size for a man in Ireland, so… but I still deal with that a lot, and that’s okay, it just… it’s weird to be dismissed because of what you look like, regardless of what you look like. So it’s weird. And the ageism now… you know, I used to have red hair and a red beard and all that stuff and you’ll see young curators and stuff and they’ll… I still have to deal with those guys and they’ll look at my work and… An example was I was in New York and I was there from the NEA, and the young kid never looked at my slides, just looked at me, looked at my grey hair and looked at my grey fa-beard, and said, “Oh, you’re work is not appropriate.” I go, “Wow.” And he never looked at my slides once and I go, “You should probably look at my slides.” And he goes, “Oh, no, I know it’s not appropriate.” And I just… this is something that happened to me, I was chosen for Lalapalooza, I was the first visual artist chosen for Lalapalooza and my artwork was on MTV for a full year and it was really a wonderful blessing, a little thing that happened, and this young kid would have been at Lalapalooza, but he didn’t want to look at my drawings! He was just fascinated with… I just cut my hair, but he was fascinated with my grey hair and my grey beard and he just thought, “Wow. I just don’t think your work is appropriate.” And I just kept thinking, “Wow. You better look at it pretty soon.” You know, he never did look at it… I just went back and the NEA say, “How’d it go?” And I said, “He just stared at me.” And that, again, is an ageism kind of thing. More than anything now, I think I’m facing that as a visual artist, because… I don’t believe- in visual arts, I don’t believe your time has come, so to speak…. You know, I’m not a seventy-year-old rock musician: I’m an artist, so… I don’t believe that should be… you
know, if you’re a good artist, you’re a good artist and people will appreciate stuff but, here, it’s different. It’s a little more conservative… I’m just trying to meet people and find out… the Hopkins Center for the Arts, I applied for shows there and stuff and just get to know people, slowly get into that, and then… Good things have happened wherever I’ve lived, they’ll happen again. This is just a little longer because it’s so cold here. I believe you can be good at anything in Minnesota ‘cause there’s six months of hibernation. If you don’t have anything to do inside, oh, well, you will go nuts. So I think there’s wonderful musicians here because, lots of practice time! And you have a studio set up for visual arts, you should be very good. At the end of the- at the thaw, you know, but I think there’s a wonderful thing- and also, I believe that the museums here and all that stuff are beautiful, and they’re taken care of, this state has a lot more money than a lot of states have for the arts, but I also think there’s a reason why: Because you have to entertain people here, ‘cause that six months can be brutal, you know, and… one of the reasons I agreed to do the interview with you was because I just had to get out of the house! That’s not true.

Q: Are you done with that one?

A: Yes.
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to investigate the experience of being a visual artist within western culture. This project is being conducted by Bambi Johnson, who is a student at Adler Graduate School.

Principal Researcher:
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Procedures:
[1] This study involves an extensive “in person” recorded interview on the topic of your experience being a visual artist in western culture.
[2] Completion of this interview will require approximately 90 minutes of your time.

Possible Risks and Safeguards:
This study is designed to minimize as much as possible any potential physical, psychological, and social risks to you. Although very unlikely, there are always risks in research, which you are entitled to know in advance of giving your consent, as well as the safeguards to be taken by those who conduct the project to minimize the risks. Those risks include possible loss of anonymity. Since the sample size of this study is small, even when names are removed from the text, there is the possibility that friends, co-workers or relatives may recognize you through your stories or demographics if published, even in part, in a research article. I will seek to safeguard your privacy by removing identifying information at the time of transcription. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions asked of you, and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time for any reason.

I understand that:
[1] My participation shall in no way have any bearing on my employment status or alter or deprive me of any or all services presently received in the institution and setting in which I participate.
[2] Although my identity shall be known to the Principal Researcher, all identifying information shall be removed at the time of transcription of the tape recordings.
[3] This informed consent form will be kept separate from the data I provide, in a safety deposit box for five years, known only to the Principal, after which it will be destroyed.
The data collected in their raw and transcribed forms are to be kept anonymous, stored in a locked container accessible only to the Principal for five years, after which it shall be destroyed.

There is to be no individual feedback regarding interpretations of my responses. Only general findings will be presented in a Summary Report of which I am entitled a copy, and my individual responses are to remain anonymous.

None of the personal information I provide associated with my identity will be released to any other party without my explicit written permission.

If quotes of my responses are used in the research and all future publications of these quotations, my identity shall remain anonymous, and at most the researcher will make use of a fictitious name.

I have the right to refuse to answer any question asked of me.

I have the right to withdraw from participation at any time for any reason without stating my reason.

I have the right to participate without prejudice on the part of the Principal Researcher and other persons assisting the Principal Researcher.

It is possible that the procedures may bring to my mind thoughts of an emotional nature that may upset me. In the unlikely event that I should experience emotional distress from my participation, the Principal Researcher shall be available to me. She will make every effort to minimize such an occurrence. However, should an upset occur and become sufficiently serious to warrant professional attention, as a condition of my participation in this study, I understand that a licensed mental health professional will be made available to me. If I do not have such a person, the Principal Researcher will refer me and reasonable costs up to the first two visits will be paid by the Principal Researcher.

By my consent, I understand I am required to notify the Principal Researcher at the time of any serious emotional upset that may cause me to seek therapy and compensation for this upset.

I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my records.

Regarding any concern and serious upset, you may contact the Principal Researcher at: 952-250-5841. Should you have any concerns regarding the conduct and procedures of this research project that are not addressed to your satisfaction by the Principal Researcher, you may report and discuss them with Dan Haugen, Vice President of Adler Graduate School (haugen@alfredadler.edu).

Possible Benefits:
I understand that my participation in this study may have possible and potential benefits.
[1] I may obtain a greater personal awareness, knowledge, and understanding of my own and other’s experience of being a visual artist in western culture.
[2] Through future communications and possible applications of the findings of the research, indirectly my participation may bring future benefits to others who are also visual artists in western culture.
[3] My participation may enable the Principal Researcher and others working in the topic area to contribute to knowledge and theory of the phenomenon to be studied.

**Summary Report:**
Upon conclusion of this study, a summary report of the general findings will become available. If you would like a copy of the report, please check the box below and provide the address to which you would like it sent (your email or postal address):

☐ I would like to receive a copy of the Summary Report

Postal or Email Address: