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This thesis writing aims to dissect the process of artistic discovery, as applied to the arts and design, as a technique and tool to repair wellbeing. The goal of the typical abstract is intended to simply state the research problem, the processes used, and the most significant findings. Explanations, along with opinions, are generally frowned upon, so one would imagine finding that an artist disguised her written story of self-reflection in the format of a thesis would raise, or furrow, many sets of surprised or critical eye brows.

The artist writing this body of research had that same reaction, in different forms, more than once. So, in keeping with the expectation that a brief summary should be all that is required of this abstract, this thesis is divided into the following: a defense of the reflective, naturalistic writing approach in keeping with the search for self-discovery, research and theories of others that have strived to understand the self, reflection on the process of using painting as a means of self-discovery, depiction of a garden not yet quite built, and mindfully considered analysis that the process of self-reflection to repair one's wellbeing means to unravel years of anxiously tangled threads that, when unwound, leads the traveler,

classically, back to where it all began: an artist's statement for an exhibition of work.

WELLBEING: THE GREAT DESIGN

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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To a sister in spirit, Julie Rhodes, "sparkle, sparkle, spin."

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As life often raises the concepts of impermanence and transition, in March, of two thousand twelve, while on an extended hiking trip in the various Canyonlands in the Southwest United States, I found myself, unexpectedly, at the end of a romantic partnership, which had spanned my late teen years completely through my twenties, and, also having fairly recently sold our house, I found myself without a home to where I could return. Eventually, I flew from the desert to my parents' home in North Carolina.

Only a week or two after my arrival in North Carolina, certain that I was handling life's uncertainty and major life changes with aplomb, I would email the Interior Architecture department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to be fast tracked into the Master's program. Gratefully, my research has aided me in not continuing to focus on whether that quick decision was discerning at that time. However, if I've also learned anything else during the past five years, it's that it is actually possible for a person to go through a rapid, continual succession of unplanned, misfortunate events and circumstances that could repeatedly

upend the healthy wellbeing, as well as other important goals, that she (or he) is diligently working towards. My past educational pursuits in design left me with enough creative problem-solving self-confidence (my mother would call it stubbornness) to make me determined to follow through no matter how many times I wanted to run screaming off a cliff when some clever, well-meaning person relayed to me the cosmic, impartial randomness of misfortune, or, for the tenth time, the Biblical story of the long-suffering Job.

So, this process began with a search to mindfully promote my own wellbeing. Despite reservations about approaching research from a subjective experience, designers often look to others' to search for new ways to approach the creative process. I've chosen to write, in a self-reflective manner, making naturalistic observations about my journey to understand wellbeing and mindfulness as concepts within the field of art and design. We are consistently on a journey, on varying paths from the days we are born, searching for ideas to create harmony and meaning within our world.

Scholastically, a first year design student is often met with a curriculum experience of design fundamentals, design vocabulary, and an introduction into the critical analysis of the design process...studying the thinking processes of other creatives. It is part of our vocation to seek

understanding and gain self-awareness by viewing through another's lens, and, in doing so, life within design becomes an empathetic journey that is endeavored and pursued through the human experience. Analyzing process is a critical choice, and, I've determined, stands as a calling for all designers.

The path has not been a straight one. Very few paths exist as lone, straight lines, and very few are uniform. Some paths are longer than initially expected. This is often a benefit, as it leaves room for growth, and also why I chose several paths to take on this journey.

In full disclosure, despite all the theories, terms, and conclusions the reader may visit in this artist's writing, rediscovering my humor or laughter in the midst of all situations was certainly beneficial to mindfully processing pain, uncertainty, and grief in order to accept the present circumstances resulting in hopefulness for the future (I may have just given the reader a conclusion, so I insincerely apologize). This writing has been carefully researched and developed to inform an artist's statement of process that accompanies a planned art installation forthcoming in May of two thousand seventeen. To this day, I am a much better version of myself than I was five years ago, but any reader is welcome to ask me again in tomorrow's present. I think, possibly, that was another conclusion. Forgive me (or not).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature was chosen carefully to construct a framework of theoretical and historical areas of thought that would allow me to have a more thorough understanding of wellbeing achieved through mindfulness. The review was not intended to be expansive and overwhelming; rather, it was to provide points of reflection to return to should I find myself struggling to remove perceived barriers that were not allowing me to proceed along my path.

The concept of wellbeing is expansive and multi-layered, however, to begin this review of literature, it is simplistically defined, and, as mindfulness is heavily ingrained into wellbeing, the attitudinal foundations of the Mindfulness Stress Based Reduction (MSBR) theory are also, briefly, explored. The Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory is referenced, as it provides another theoretical consideration to adopt as a model for mindfully thinking and operating, in particular through my methods defined in this writing. Following, examples of historical thought, on spiritual and mindful self-discovery, serve as meditative reflections for



expansion, and further the ideation necessary for the methods, painting and meditation garden design, used in the analysis of this mindfulness journey of exploring wellbeing. I will also critically assess fifteen year old writings I discovered within a sketchbook, from my first year of undergraduate design school, in order to consider the circular nature of reflection and its place within personal growth.

## **Wellbeing, Mindfulness, and CEST Theories**

### **Elements of Wellbeing**

What is wellbeing? It is not so much “what” as it is about the combination of particular elements within our lives. These elements engage, holistically, with one another to create a sense of wellbeing in each of our existences. Those elements, while not limited to, are generally: the quality of our relationships with others, our physical health, our love for our work, the security of our finances, and the satisfaction gained in contributing to our communities. Of the five aspects of wellbeing, career, physical, financial, social, and community, only 7 percent of people are thriving in all five (Rath, 2010).

Why did I choose this concept of wellbeing? This is where the subjective experience simply arises; I am not one of those 7%. My own wellbeing as an individual and as a creative was in need of repair. Before entering the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, my self-identity

and wellbeing had begun to suffer, and, eventually, I began to fully question my path in life and desired to dismantle the tangle of thoughts created from events and circumstances that led me to that place.

The choice to embark on a life as a creative is one that, stirred by self-awareness, emerges from within an individual, and calls that person to a path of inspired vision, skillful making, and harmonious acceptance of perceived successes and failures to sustain creativity. In order to re-engage myself within the field of design, I would also have to holistically assess and engage myself with the concept of wellbeing within my own frame of experience. From that self-reflective observation, I hoped to glean more understanding of how wellbeing is interwoven into the lives of creatives.

### **Mindfulness Stress-Based Reduction Theory**

Wellbeing as a theoretical concept does not exist within the frame of this research without a connection to mindfulness. Mindfulness is regarded as "the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, xxxv). The Mindfulness Stress-Based Reduction (MSBR) program ,designed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a well-developed investigation into reducing the effects of stress with approaches that direct conscious thinking into meditative practices that aid those, that practice the program, in creating awareness from a non-judgmental acceptance of experience. Mindfulness is

analogous to the idea of living with a holistic mindset, in relationship to everything around one's self, in order to achieve balance in all aspects of wellbeing (Kabat-Zinn, xxxv). Mindfulness expands the area of thought on wellbeing into more specific research on reducing stress through meditation practices. It was my hope that the concepts of wellbeing and mindfulness would also bring a connection to informing applications in creative pursuits, as well.

Recognizing that what is on our mind may have a greater influence on our sense of well-being than what we are doing in particular moments has profound implications for understanding our own humanness, and for shaping, in very practical and yet very personal, even intimate ways, our understanding of what is involved in being healthy and genuinely happy. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, xxxiv)

In his book *Full Catastrophe Living*, Kabat-Zinn outlines the practice of mindfulness and how the meditation exercises apply to the various aspects and needs of one's life. Although I incorporated exercises from the MSBR program into my life, for the purposes of this writing, I detail the seven attitudes that Kabat-Zinn identifies as necessary to create a mental foundation that promotes more long-term success for the MSBR practice to aid in continual growth and healing.

Awareness requires only that we pay attention and see things as they are. It doesn't require that we change anything. (Kabat-Zinn, 20)

Before one can truly see the impact of healing by being aware and seeing moments as they truly are, she (or he) must understand that it takes practice (which takes time) and a relaxed, open-minded, and forgiving approach. The benefits of mindfulness are not achieved through skeptical or romantic beliefs in meditation, rather through motivation that is not forced and, at the same time, resilient to the daily or momentary changes to mental states (Kabat-Zinn, 21). Attitudinal foundations of MSBR are reliant on one another, are necessary fundamentals in preparing to begin a mindfulness practice, and are useful as reminders to return to when the meditative practice feels forced or ineffective. My belief was that the seven attitudinal foundations would be beneficial considerations to continually return to in order to re-center myself when I was feeling overwhelmed or anxious with aspects of my life, impacting my ability to thrive within my creative explorations.

The non-judging attitudinal foundation requires that I recognize when my mind categorizes or labels a thought or experience during my practice (or throughout moments in life) that does not allow me to remain impartial and non-critical. The intent is to not attack myself for making a judgement, but to pass through that stream of thought while at the same time not continuing to consider it. Over time, this attitude invokes a

response that is less reactionary and automatic, and more effective for being self-aware during each passing moment in life. (Kabat-Zinn, 22)

As learning mindfulness can take practice, which takes time, a logical attitudinal foundation is patience. As I began mindfulness meditation as an exercise to clear my mind to be aware of each rising moment, I would find my mind continuously day-dreaming or thinking ahead. Often, I have found myself wandering back to past experiences, re-imagining them as I wished they had occurred, or wandering to future, imagining something as I hope or fear it may occur. Those thoughts of the past created depression, while worries of the future caused anxiety. MSBR teaches that I accept this quality of the mind, while I giving myself permission to experience these moments, more easily let them pass, and, in doing so, I become more connected to my present. (Kabat-Zinn, 23)

To see the richness of the present moment, we need to cultivate what has been called "beginner's mind," a mind that is willing to see everything as if it were for the first time. (Kabat-Zinn, 24)

Each time I am tempted to be weighed down by the tangled threads of my past experiences, I am recalled to MSBR's attitudinal foundation of a beginner's mind. As every moment is new to me, I am challenged to greet it as no other before, unweighted by judgement, and freshly unique in itself. Like a child, experiences in life are able to become simple, yet free of

preconceived emotion and opinion, and the ordinary can again become freshly astonishing. (Kabat-Zinn, 24)

The attitudinal foundation of trust operates in two measures. One, I am reminded to not push myself to conform to expectations, whether physical or mental, and to honor my feelings. Trusting myself, in turn, allows me to take responsibility for my experience in hopes to trust others, as well, in order to see their unique qualities in a positive light. (Kabat-Zinn, 26)

As mentioned, like most anyone, I've set goals in my life; yet, events and circumstances have impacted my expectations for meeting certain goals, creating adverse effects on aspects of my wellbeing. While setting goals for oneself is not necessarily a pitfall in life, when adopting meditation practices for mindfulness, setting goals can undermine the ability to accept circumstances within the present moment. The attitudinal foundation of "non-striving," asserts that, through patience and not striving for goals within meditation practice, I'm more likely to naturally meet goals within my life through the freedom presented by reducing stress that I place on myself. (Kabat-Zinn, 27)

The foundation of acceptance is innately related to the non-striving attitude. As I embrace and accept experiences, things, and realities of my present, I acknowledge those as they currently are, helping me in being

receptive to what is currently going on around me, and allowing me to move more easily to the next moment or experience in life. Kabat-Zinn states that the healing process is achieved through coming to terms, not passively resigning, with things as they are, and through removing denial or prejudices about truth resulting in better clarity of the present. (Kabat-Zinn, 28)

When my father began teaching me, as a child, to swim, he first taught me to float. If I struggled to relax my head and body, to lie still on the water, I went under. To float is to let go. The attitudinal foundation of letting-go is to consider thoughts and emotions, attempt to understand and accept them, to not struggle by prolonging and holding on to them, release them, and move to the next moment. Re-living pleasant memories prolongs the pleasure they originally brought, while the instinct to reject pain felt from a circumstance is a form of self-protection. (Kabat-Zinn, 30)

The mind can have strong-holds on habits within its thinking and processing. Those strong-holds of habit have created difficulties in letting go of pain, emotional and physical, from circumstances and events in my life. Restoring my wellbeing, through mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques and its attitudinal foundations, has offered me the opportunity to intentionally expand the practice beyond meditation into my creative

endeavors, with the hope that it could create growth in all areas of my wellbeing.

### **Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST)**

While attitudes and practices of mindfulness could create a foundational framework for my approach to repair wellbeing, I wanted to expand on those practices within the method of painting to determine if there was possibility my creative process could also be repaired. Despite the outcome of painting potentially demonstrating the positive application towards wellbeing, it is beneficial to relate the creative process, objectively, to another theory. Essentially, I needed to widen the scope of my research and determine if there was an established theory I could apply as a model to my method(s), for how to cognitively and physically operate when painting should I stumble into mental blocks or need a fresh approach.

Complementing the attitudinal foundations of the mindfulness-based stress reduction program, the Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST), suggests that individuals use two separate processes for constructive thinking and processing information (Epstein, 2003, 3). The Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST) offers a model of thinking and processing that could be explored within the method of painting. An individual's reliance on the dual system makes up the characteristics of their personalities, suggesting that intentionally activating both processes,



analytical-rational and intuitive-experiential, has the potential to increase one's emotional intelligence through learning from past experiences, correcting behavioral tendencies that create stress, and, thus, could aid in repairing a person's wellbeing. (Epstein, 43) (Norris, Epstein, 1074)

Epstein suggests that first system, cognitive processing, uses analytical-rational perception, and processes information deliberately and logically. The second, intuitive-experiential, is faster, automatic, and can be driven through intuitive instinct rather than through logic encoded in the mind over time. These systems are a dual process, run parallel to one another, but, often individuals may preference one thinking style over the other. (Epstein, 6-7)

The cognitive system uses and relies on conscious, rational thinking processes to analyze aspects, such as objects, ideas, people, and events, separately, and to relate those aspects to symbols, words, and numbers. With this reliance on pre-determined and considered logic, the cognitive self-consciously considers approaches and decisions with a system and reasoning in place. Problem-solving and conceptualization can vary in the cognitive system, because decisions can change or developed differently as arguments or challenges are presented. In doing so, information processing within the cognitive system takes more deliberate

concentration and is less rapid than within the experiential process. (Norris, Epstein, 1045)

The experiential system of self-processing is based in pre-conscious emotional intuition. Instead of a rational and logic focus towards considering what is to come in the future, experiential processing is more automatic and holistic to remaining in a present state of awareness. When one dials into the experiential system, the results are derived from emotional preferences, imagery, metaphors, stories, and more effortless, continuous actions (Norris, Epstein, 1045). Experiential thinking evolves more over time through experiences, and is reflective of a mindful state of awareness driven by intuition of the present. Importantly, Epstein suggests that as a learning process, the experiential system is the source for creativity, which could further develop and inform the creative process for designers and artists. (Epstein, 17)

Similarly, Jon Kabat-Zinn suggests using two mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques when coping with emotional pain, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, which reflect the characteristics of CEST. Emotional pain, as described through MBSR, exists with two domains: the feelings, themselves, and the root of the creation of those feelings. When overwhelmed, cognitively breaking a problem down into manageable parts, then acting on those parts to solve the root of the

emotional pain, if possible, and moving past the feelings constitutes problem-focused coping. Dually operating, just as CEST, under mindful awareness to consider present emotions with self-compassion in order to aid in moving past them is emotion-focused coping. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, 420-421)

I wanted to discover if being mindful within my thinking processes could play a role in my approach to my creative process, bringing my thought process to a healthier state, and redeveloping my ability to approach problem-solving creatively in new ways. Could purposefully using mindfulness considerations while priming and switching between the two styles of CEST be adaptive to creating for me a less anxious and stressful painting process? Having primarily done figurative painting years before, could it re-define my creative process as well as my relationship to the visual field? Would it change my work stylistically? How could I apply the mindful explorations in my painting process to other aspects of my design work?

### **The Artful Wellbeing of a Mediation Garden**

Whether cosmic, impartial randomness or divine intervention, after I chose to explore mindfulness applications in my paintings, I was asked to design a public meditation garden in my hometown of Sanford, NC. I knew this would allow me to apply the theoretical and historical mindfulness

underpinnings of my research to the design of a space, while using my painting process as a parallel path of exploration that could potentially inform my design work. I sought to uncover the history of meditation gardens, and, along the way, I would find that mindfulness was at the core of the eastern religions and ways of thought that historically informed the elements of aesthetic awareness within past and current meditation garden design.

Returning to one's roots is known as stillness  
This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny. (Tzu and Lau, 20)

Unlike Europeans, whose folklore, teachings, and cultural associations made them more adverse to the wilds of nature, it was not uncommon for eastern scholars to seek solitude in the mountains and wilds. Ancient sage writings suggest that the Taoists, who viewed their reality as being inward, sought to retreat to the simple, quiet beauty of nature (Kuck, 5). As Chinese scholars could not leave their homes, they brought the hills and mountains to their homes, depicting the landscapes into their home and surrounding courtyards. There, they could retreat, connect, and feel a harmony with the nature and universe. (Kuck, 6)

As Buddhism moved from India and into China during the first century AD, and eventually Japan, gardens would begin to depict the

qualities of the Buddhist way of thought. The T'ang Dynasty, spanning 618-906 AD, is referred to as the "golden age of China." Shortly after the first official Japanese embassy visit to China, during that age, the first landscape garden would be built in Japan (Kuck, 28). Prior, the earliest Japanese gardens were simple shrines, for the Shinto Gods and nature spirits, encased in natural groves of trees (Kuck, 26). The indigenous Shinto believed that natural objects, mountains, trees, stones, plants, house spirits. This belief in the sanctity of nature is still a foundation of contemporary Japanese garden design. (Messervy, Earle, Hibi, 7)

Soon, as Buddhism filtered into Japan, the gardens built imitated those in the T'ang capital (Kuck, 44). By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese gardens began to take their own unique form. The gardens of the Heian period were created for the Japanese aristocrats, such as Tachibana no Toshitsuna, the assumed author of the *Sakuteiki*, a book that revealed the teachings of the garden designer (Kuck, 60). The *Sakuteiki* was written to share sensible, subjective generalizations and rules about creating gardens as reproductions of nature, and details the elements, particularly the stones, waterscape, and trees, and the process to make a "successful landscape design." (Messervy, Earle, Hibi, 21). While not particularly poetic, the *Sakuteiki* is an unusual record of prose for its time.

Soon, Zen Buddhism would begin flourishing in Japan, and, with it, the concept of a Zen garden came with it (Nose', Freeman, Masuno, 8). In very simple terms, Zen's philosophies reflected that truth, sought within the self and found through introspection, might bring enlightenment (Kuck, 88). Its meditative philosophy would find a within the way within the inspiration of gardens. In the Muromachi district, during the Yoshimitsu reign (1358-1408), Yoshimitsu would build many great estates and gardens. The small, temple gardens were designed by Zen scholars, artists, and mystics, and their works were echoed into the garden design. (Kuck, 103).

The Zen painters of the Sung-Muromachi school used dry-brush landscape painting, called sumi-e, to present a picture of man's spiritual journey and the universal essential qualities of the elements of nature. Representing the same ideals and aesthetics, the gardens would possess the Zen landscape quality of the paintings. Often this resulted in a dry landscape garden referred to as "karesansui" (Locher, 14). Rocks would represent peaks, hills, boats, and bridges. Sand would be the brushstroke of the stream or ocean. White plaster walls, of which the elements could contrast, providing emptiness for the mind, was the silk surface that the painter had created his work. Connecting the planes and angles beautifully

to the painting's brush strokes, the Muromachi Zen artists were successful in translating their art to the design of space. (Kuck, 143)

The term Zen has unfairly become synonymous with the idea of minimalist design in western culture, whereas, within the Japanese culture, the aesthetic awareness of the Japanese is reflected through their unique love of subtlety, which stems from their philosophies represented in Zen Buddhism (Nose', Freeman, Masuno, 11). Formally, Zen was expressed through the arts, including painting and garden design. The journey to simplicity and inner revelation is expressed in a Zen garden, and that path is suggested through the subtle profound unity of elements.

Understanding garden design as it relates to Zen Buddhism is a disciplined practice that takes many years of study. According to the Zen monk and landscape designer, Shunmyo Masuno, only gardens created by disciplined practitioners (kunen) of Zen can be called Zen gardens (Locher, 14). With this consideration in mind, I will outline some of the philosophies and elements of Zen Buddhism that create and breathe life into the characteristics of Zen gardens, and, as well, lend themselves to other creative works.

Within *Zen Gardens: The Complete Works of Shunmyo Masuno*, seven Japanese aesthetics and states that give character to Zen gardens are outlined: fukensei (asymmetry), kanso (simplicity), kokō (austere

sublimity or loft dryness), shizen (naturalness), yūgen (subtle profundity), datsuzoko (freedom from attachment), and seijaku (tranquility) (Locher, 14). Whether a traditional or modern space, a person should experience kokoro no yutakasa (richness of spirit). This is relatable to western design concept of genius loci, in place-making, in that aesthetics in meaningful design should relate to the spirit of a space. (Norberg-Schulz, 5)

Within Zen, much emphasis is placed on mujō, impermanence and constant transformation, and this transience is integrated into their gardens through many elements (Kocher, 20). Yūgen becomes a difficult Buddhist concept to master within a space. It's the idea that tranquility can be created with profound subtlety and concealing layers of symbolism in a way that the mind and a person's own kokoro (heart/spirit) attunes to it and merges with the kokoro (spirit) of a place and its elements, through connecting with the vast richness (yutakasa) behind the subtlety of those elements. (Locher, 21)

As meditation can be one way an individual can interact with a Japanese Zen garden, it's a natural setting for one to be mindful and serene. Within a garden, nature invites a willingness to pause and embrace the present setting. This becomes an ideal setting for exploration into repairing one's wellbeing, just as the process of painting can become an exploration with similar intent. As the Muromachi Zen artists translated



their paintings into settings, there is the potential for my painting exploration to influence my garden design, as well.

### **Mindfulness in Historical Writings**

As this review of literature also functions to provide points of reflection to return to should I find myself struggling, I included several texts that I have found inspirational earlier in my life, prior to beginning this mindful journey of discovery. I have selected some brief excerpts that I have found meaningful, and, if needed, will return to the texts as foundations to bring consideration to my present awareness.

Slightly related, although less “historical” (unless in reference to my own history), during this writing, I rediscovered my first sketchbook from my first year of undergraduate design school at North Carolina State University. I have included some excerpts from those, as well, as considering my creative process at its genesis, which could be endearingly naïve, may be helpful to creating insights to how I arrived to my present ruminations.

### **The Holy Bible: Ecclesiastes**

Within the Old Testament of the Holy Bible, is the Book of Ecclesiastes. Although the author of the book of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as a teacher, traditionally, it is assumed the author is King Solomon of Israel, son of David. However, the author remains appropriately

anonymous as the text poetically moves through themes of meaning of life within the world. (Eccles. 1:1 New International Version,)

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the sun. (Eccles. 1:9 New International Version)

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night— then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it. (Eccles. 8:16-17 New International Version)

The teacher shows that no matter the circumstances individuals are placed within, and, however we choose to search for meaning in life, we are within the same common existence. That consideration allows for the freedom that impermanence presents to accept your present place in the world. For me, it brings comfort in the commonality of humanity.

### **Marcus Aurelius' Meditations**

I often felt that had the "Teacher" that wrote Ecclesiastes met the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, the wisdom shared between the two would be astounding. Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic, believing that everyone was part of the same Whole, or logos, while existing in their own smaller version of the Whole, referred to as a microcosmos (Gaarder, 130). The meditations of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius have long been

guideposts to which I return when I desire confirmation to not pursue thoughts that judge my state and create internal stress.

That in a short while you will be nobody and nowhere; and the same of all that you now see and all who are now alive. It is the nature of all things to change, to perish, and be transformed, so that in succession a different thing can come to be.

That all is as thinking makes it so – and you control your thinking. So remove your judgements whenever you wish and then there is calm – as the sailor rounding the cape finds smooth water and the welcome of a waveless bay. (Hammond and Clay, Book 12: 21-22)

The rationality and logic of the meditations of Marcus Aurelius are particularly appealing and remarkable as they were his private writings and not anticipated nor intended for publication. The entire spirit of his meditations fully reflect mindfulness attitudinal foundations that strive for peace and a sense of holistic wellbeing. The words, written in his lifespan of 121-180 AD, transcend the time between many years, making them a uniquely timeless series of spiritual reflections, despite Aurelius' assumptions that he, like all, would "fade and quickly turn to myth." (Hammond and Clay, Book 4: 33)

### **Rediscovered Creative Process Writings**

As discovery within research is a personal experience, I would find myself in dialogue with others about the concept of self-discovery and its effects on an individual's wellbeing. Dialogue fuels reflection. For myself, I

was responding to the internal disquiet and anxiety brought as personal values and self-identity became challenged throughout every area of my life, and I began to understand that this continual introspection was a commitment to personal reconfiguration in my creative vocation.

Ultimately, I would find myself reaching into my past, even into fifteen year old writings I discovered within a sketchbook from my first year of undergraduate design school, in order to consider the vulnerability that I felt at the genesis of my creative career and the vulnerability I feel, even now, as I establish value to a life in the creative arts and design as a committed journey of discovery defined and survived through intentional choices and perceived coincidences (or obstacles) in life. Understanding that these notes and writings were created while being led through studios by design instructors, I cannot, in complete conscience, take full credit for the ideas in my writing (can one ever?) as, during that time, I was directed to consider and critically reflect on the design process from my own vantage point, while still having perceptions imparted to me in some manner through instructors at the time. Still, the writing uncovers the critical rumination that a creative (myself) embarks upon when she determines that her life's personal contentment will be met through a calling marked by inspiration that emerges from within the self.

Although not typically dated, the sketchbook was used in 2002-2003, and notes are generally written from front to back in order (according to my typical sketchbook writing style at the time). Not often with context, I will list them below, as found. I will include a brief statement of reflection within the conclusion of my review of literature.

Methodology? Identify the issues or problems

When I start a project, I begin my thought process by looking for inspirations within my life for work.

When I am designing, I am constantly sketching or making lists.

I think in order to overcome an obstacle, you must first realize what it is you are really trying to overcome. When a designer realizes what it is standing in his or her way, they can only then begin to assess the barrier at hand. I feel that sharing your frame of reference on a task with colleagues can open up a "six sense" to designing.

Start up activities: program, budget, research

Design: generate solutions

Development: create variations

Employ or create, then evaluate.

Power of the brain: don't evaluate when brainstorming and designing; you may knock off an idea that leads you to a new idea. Think of alternatives and variations

Idea generator: pick an object and change the attributes (texture, shape, size, color, material)

Insights for the week:

Draw. Draw. Draw.

Elaborate on drawings

If example doesn't go for one, see if it can fit another

Math is inevitable  
Keep a ruler handy  
Black markers run out easy; keep several around  
Ideas may overlap  
Simple ideas sometimes or most often can be more effective  
Adapt something to solve another function  
Modify some part of something to do something else

Idea Generator: concept displacement  
Take anything (idea, object etc.), (in this case a tool) and list its attributes. Then take the attributes from your object and use the attributes or mechanism of function to design a second object with a different function.

Creativity takes on greater significance when it reveals patterns or information that enhances.

Establish goals purposes and needs  
Take on issue one at a time  
Clearly define problem

Favorites:  
Green  
Caught a lite sneeze  
Peter Pan  
Chocolate  
To be alone: room at parents  
To observe: tree in grandparents' yard  
Myth: Echo  
Bra  
Power wheel commercial  
Mammal: human  
Bird: Owl  
Insect: butterfly

Generator: arena search

Any field of visual information, you can search for shapes

Motivation- A+

I have really high motivation in this class. I tend to feel like I need to prove myself to myself because of my lack of training in the art field. I've had no training or classes since middle school and then I only had one class since elementary school. I am highly motivated because after being unhappy and another degree, I realize my luck it being in a discipline I really care for. Still, I tend to wish for less to do at times, not so much in studio, but overall.

Discipline-A

I feel like my discipline is sometimes too much. I push myself to do everything to my best ability, and it sometimes I push myself too hard when it's not needed. I simply cannot stand to do anything halfway and if I do it eats at me.

Skills- B+ to A

I lack in general knowledge of how to do somethings however when I do take on a task, I usually do it well. I generally think my skills go back to motivation and discipline. I have always had a natural skill base and a thirst to learn new ways at doing something

Sensitivity to Others- A to B

I feel like I'm really sensitive to others in the studio, but I don't interact with them as much. I'm not sure if it's because I live away from campus, or because I may be a little older. It's not that I'm not interested in others in the studio, but I just had a hard time in this particular studio

The tools of a craftsman are the extension of the limbs of the individual

Observe/study the work of others; let it incubate, then design

I watched these three boys play today. They were probably around the ages eight, five, and two. Lately, I've been wondering where that time went. There's a space between now and any memory I have that seem so long ago. I wish I could be a child again. I was so happy, so

naïve. It's bittersweet thinking about this--The time I had as a child was so wonderful, but too short. Those few years as a kid are so small compared to the rest of life, but are the foundation of life to come. I don't want to forget--I didn't want it to completely stop. Somehow I still feel part of that time, like I couldn't possibly be an adult. Maybe it's when life is making you grow up that you wish to be a kid again. Maybe it's only fear. I'm going to work through this; I think by trying to do things that I wanted to do or learn as a child i'm doing this already--by working in design. I always wanted to be an artist. I wanted to learn to play the piano, I wanted to sing, I wanted to travel... One day I'll do the rest. Sooner or later.

Visualization: prepare your mind

Meadow> Child with soap bubbles on the far side of the meadow> you are watching them rise out of your vision one at a time> see objects in soap bubbles/  
Keep it slow.

Papa's shop:

Kept care of how things were arranged, knew where everything was exactly.

Had private moments/also lessons

Defining times between me and him

How precision and care affects work

How important it is to care for what you do and to always work hard and do everything with your complete ability

Treat each instrument with care because it is essential in finishing a job well done

Taught me that how you handle your work, along with the care of your tools and how much pride you have in your work reflects how your work turns out

I am learning to articulate my dreams. I understand what I wish for, but reality and sometimes delayed me in achieving them. I dream to travel and see the world, but I also dream of being married and having a family. It's my desire for one dream more than another that makes the first easier to achieve.



Design itself was a dream for me--after spending two years in another major, Art and design seemed like a childhood dream--One that I would look back on in 20 years and wonder "could I have been?..." but I don't want to have to look back and regret. I want to look back with pride in my fulfillment. Design wasn't what others expected of me, most friends and family assumed medical school was in my future.

Still, I decided to step out of my box, risk failure, and apply for design. Never having any training or classes except a few in school as a child, the chances felt like a stretch to me. In the beginning of my transformation into design, I assumed the hard part would be getting into design. Without any reservation, I can easily say that I was wrong and rather naïve. I think this past year has been the hardest I've had in a while. I had heard how taxing work in design could be, but I didn't understand how hard it would be to juggle working every day, school, family, friends, my health, and somehow fit sleep in there as well.

Furniture: function and reliability are important; shown to me yesterday as the entertainment center fell over on top off Kristen

What I want:

To finish the entertainment center

To start exercising again and pick up yoga

To control my temper

To find a balance between everything in my life

To watch my spending

To assess what I want and need in the relationships in my life (BF, Friends, Family, God)

To figure out what may be wrong with my health

To start designs on new furniture

To paint

To read more

To spend more time outdoors

To not stress out

To be happy

## **Conclusion**

A review of the literature suggests that through applying Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction attitudinal foundations and practices to all aspects of my thinking that circumstances within my life may be less impacted by stress overall. Additionally, by using mindfulness applications to intentionally prime and activate the dual thinking processes, cognitive and experiential, explained in the Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory, I may find that I have more success at developing a disciplined and controlled response to problem-solving, leading to a stronger level of self-awareness during the thinking process. Applying both MBSR and CEST to my thinking may benefit my creative process for painting, while mindfulness practice may also be a great aid in better understanding how to apply Zen Buddhist elements and mindfulness-considered approaches to a meditation garden design.

When difficulties are presented in the application of those practices and theories, it will be wise to return to historical readings that reflect on my place and awareness of the world. As I approach each method with mindfulness, there is the possibility of repairing my wellbeing and creative process.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

Previously, I asked myself "Can my work as an artist become a tool to connect and assist my design explorations of wellbeing?" I chose to use the qualitative act of painting as a responsive and emotional approach to repairing my own wellbeing through the creative process. Along with using painting as a means to explore wellbeing theory, I applied, experientially, wellbeing and mindfulness theoretical and historical concepts to a design of a physical space: a public meditation garden. Should the goal be to create a sense of wellbeing within a creative endeavor (and within myself), analyzing and exploring more about the creative process, its elements, and their application is necessary.

Currently, the garden is in its design phase, as the construction is delayed until estate probate proceedings that will fund the garden are finalized. In keeping with contractual obligations, the design of the garden will be described in this writing through conceptualization that reflects on the design considerations explored through wellbeing and mindfulness theories, rather than through visual design concepts.

## **Painting and Process**

It had been well over half a decade since I had last painted. While I had studied painting in my undergraduate discipline and wished to continue, I came to a point where I no longer found the process inspiring or joyful. Instead, it was ridden with anxiety and frustration.

When I would attempt to paint, my mind would stall, the task would seem impossible to surmount, and the confusion and frustration would feel like a massive, impenetrable wall that would swell until I was unable to reach out to the surface of the canvas. The longer I waited, the larger the barrier felt, and the smaller I felt (in truth, this description applies to many circumstances when living with anxiety). With my mind preoccupied with uncertainty and pain that I was avoiding or compartmentalizing, my creative instincts felt trapped or depleted.

When I decided to paint again, I understood that my approach to the process had to be entirely different than what I had previously done if it were to become less stressful and fulfilling again. Having done more figurative subjects in paintings, I would find myself getting caught in the details of the work, and, eventually, my creative energy would stall out. While this is not uncommon, I would find myself not coming back to work on paintings because of the emotions associated with the process in the first place, or, in my case, the addition of health concerns that limited my

range of motion and physical stamina. Sometimes, I would push through the process. Whether or not I was content with the result did not outweigh the frustrations of what it took to arrive to the result.

Without placing unnecessary demands on a specific outcome, I chose to explore painting as if it were entirely new to me, with a beginner's mind. While I desired to use the creative process of painting to positively affect my wellbeing, I knew that setting specific demands and requiring certain outcomes could be self-defeating, so regarding MBSR attitudinal foundations of being patient, non-judging, and non-striving would be key in the process. The attitudes of trust, acceptance, and letting go were more difficult in my first painting exercise. With no clear mental picture or indication of an outcome or result for my work, I was finding it difficult to understand how to let go and explore the process abstractly.

### **First Exercise**

The first solution was to actively go against my pre-formed process by making choices that I would not have previously made during the painting process. I hoped that by going against the habits and approaches ingrained in me that were not allowing me to find self-actualization in painting, I would be forced to rely more on instinctual response of my experiential thinking, and, in doing so, could, over time, forge a new, more holistic and mindful painting process.

So, upon painting for the first time in over half a decade, my initial solution was to express through abstraction, although I understood it would be harder to execute than to decide. For example, I would have usually built, stretched, and primed a reasonable sized canvas. Choosing not to begin painting again by first going to a large canvas seemed less overwhelming. My choice was to start small. I chose to not stretch and prime a canvas. Instead, I cut a small piece of canvas, leaving the edges raw and not fully priming the piece.

At this point, I was analytically making distinct choices that differed from my past process. Still, within creative work, I've found that defining some parameters can help initiate a starting point to expand upon. In order to activate the experiential thinking in my painting process, I decided that for my first exercise, I would work in multiples.

I realized that I had always worked with one piece at a time, and that, through using multiple visual fields, I could potentially more easily work abstractly and instinctively through a call and response to the various pieces. In that call and response, I wouldn't feel limited to one surface, concept, process, choice of color, stroke, medium, and so on.

I cut four pieces of canvas, approximately ten inches square, and placed them flat on a table (versus on a wall or easel, as I typically worked). I applied some gesso to the raw canvas, without defining the edges of

where the gesso would end. At this point, I chose one color of paint, decided to take the plunge, trust myself, and applied a stroke of acrylic paint to each piece of canvas.

From there, I chose not to limit myself to one medium. I applied prismacolor pencils, and, with only considering the previous stroke of paint, I shortly drew strokes on each piece. I alternated between applying pencil and paint. Early in the exercise, I decided to move the pieces as I worked, turn them to different angles, or swap their places with each other in order to not become accustomed to the imagery in one frame. When responding automatically to the surface, each line, stroke, and color applied was done in an automatic, emotional response to the visual field.

As I was intentionally working at a more rapid pace, I quickly found that the pencil would create texture as it dragged across paint that had not yet dried. Enjoying the way this method revealed the layer(s) underneath, giving more complexity, I would continue penetrating the paint occasionally. Other times, I would allow a layer of paint to dry, and building on top of it.



Figure 1. First Painting Exercise Detail





Figure 2. First Painting Exercise Detail

From there, analytical-rational thinking was also applied. At intervals, I would step away from the piece(s), to pause, make certain I was breathing carefully, and observe the composition. Sometimes, I would form an opinion about what I saw, but, rather than giving myself over to a judgement, I would take some time to observe the elements of the composition. Instead, I would try to trust my instinct about what felt in keeping with the developing characteristics of the piece.

Again, I would then continue to respond experientially, attempting to respond quickly, emotionally, and repetitively to the canvas. I would apply more detailed drawing, scratch, strip away previously applied paint, or whatever response to the process felt the most instinctual to me. I continued to alternate the intuitive-experiential and analytical-rational thinking processes. As I worked, I began to respond to the composition of each piece and their elements, trusting my call and response.

I was observing that working in multiples opened me up to emotionally and experientially responding to the surfaces, and more automatically to the imagery and experience at hand. I was able to work more quickly and effortlessly at times, with less restriction, with rhythm, and with a response not derived and elicited in hopes of a particular outcome.

Prior, when I painted, I would have a difficult time covering up areas of the composition, washing out areas, and removing work I had done to the piece. Within this process, I chose to cover areas with paint, or remove them as I scraped at layers with a palette knife or pencil. Choosing to accept and be comfortable with the impermanence and transience of each piece was important to me, in order to let go during and after working, and to embrace the present state of the composition, the present state of awareness I felt as I worked, and to not form attachment and force myself to hold on to an aspect of the piece. Being able to let go, not hold tight, and know that I could still feel a positive connection to the piece and the work was freeing for me. Discovering this opened a pathway to more easily reach a resolution or resting place for each piece.

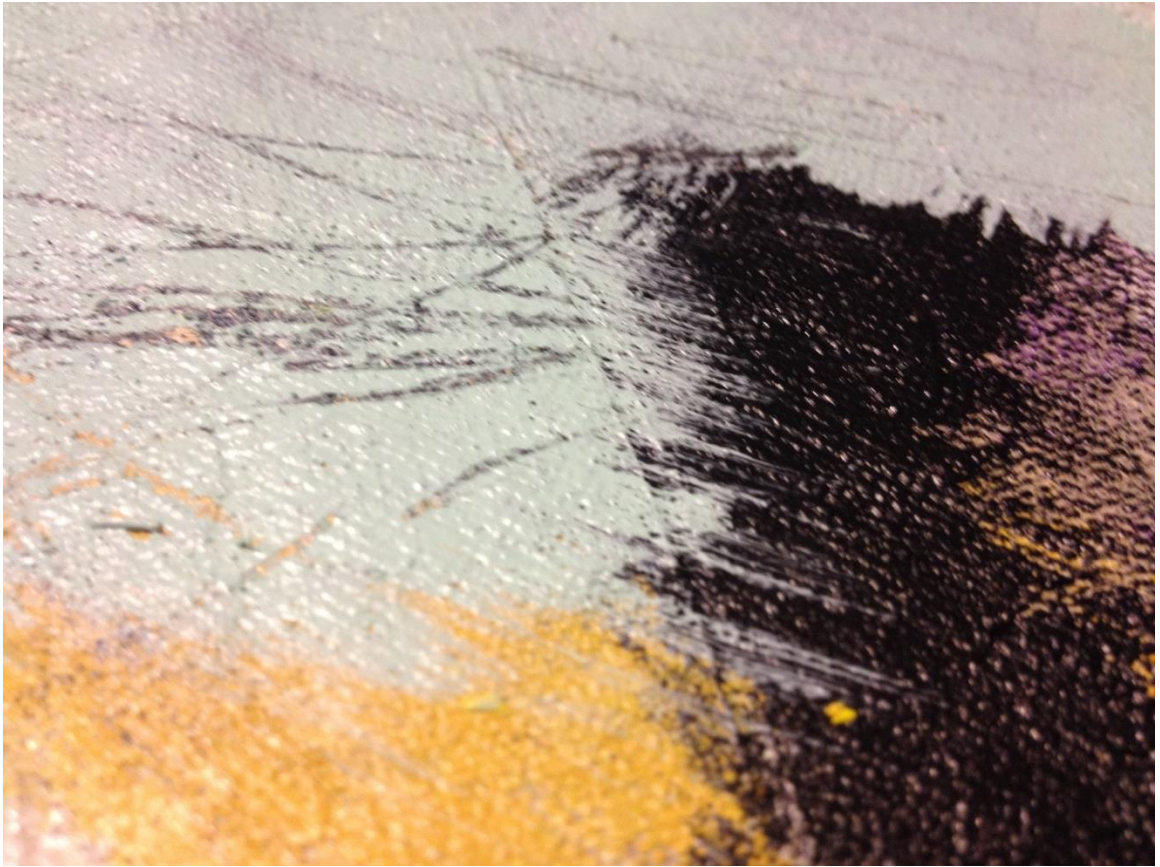


Figure 3. First Painting Exercise Detail





Figure 4. First Painting Exercise Detail

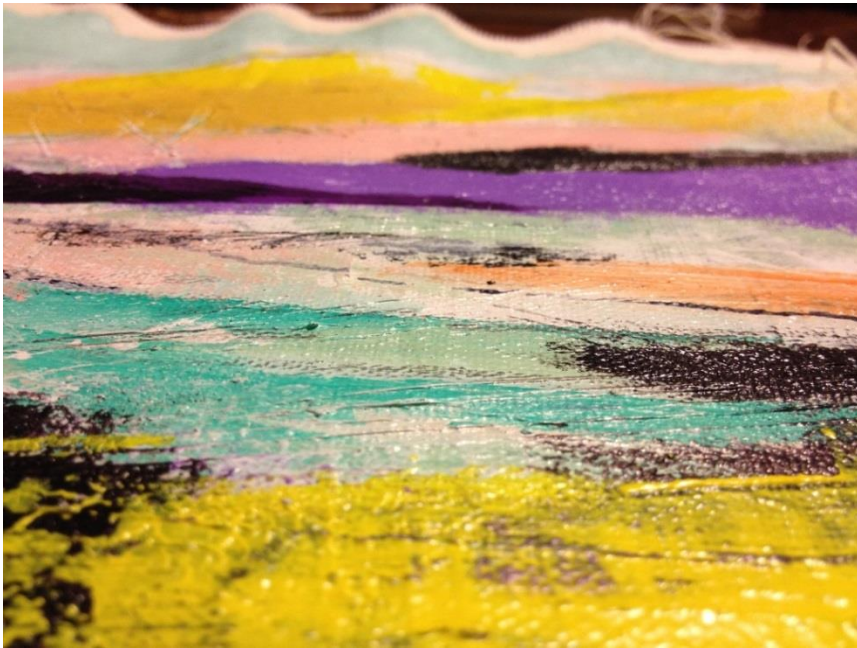


Figure 5. First Painting Exercise Detail

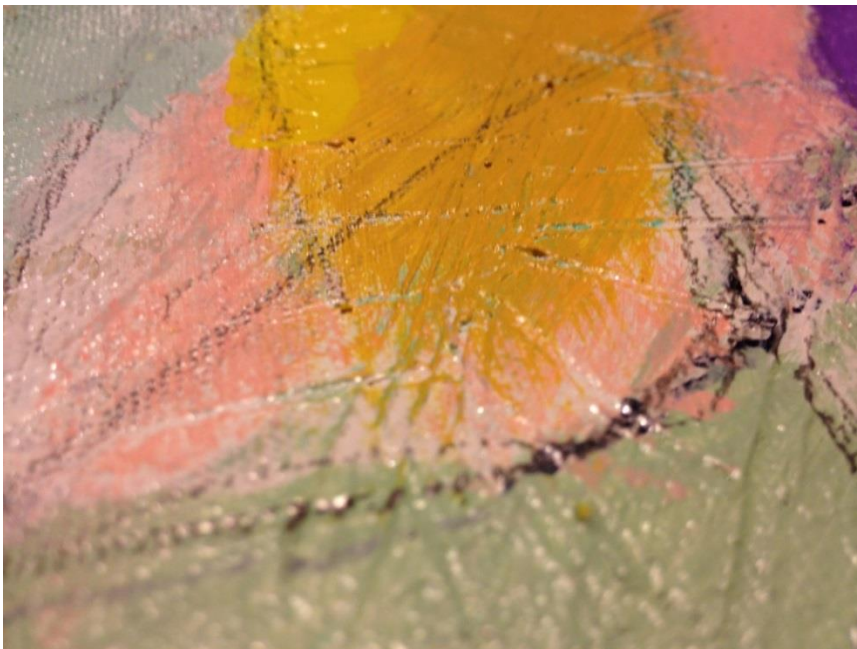


Figure 6. First Painting Exercise Detail





Figure 7. First Painting Exercise Detail



Figure 8. First Painting Exercise Detail



Figure 9. First Exercise Results

I recall my undergraduate painting professor once telling me that a painting is never complete; there is always something else that can be done to it, but, at some point, you'll find a place where you can find a resolution. For my first exercise, I intuitively chose that resolution for each



piece. Although, the resolution isn't always simple to find within a composition for me, eventually, the layers build to a state where the elements begin to feel harmonious with one another, and a formal resting place can be achieved.

### **Painting Exercise Two**

Due to the positive emotional response I felt to the first painting exercise, I applied a similar method to the second. With this exercise, I began with another un-stretched and loosely primed piece of canvas. After painting a base layer, I cut the canvas proportionally into four approximately equal pieces, and developed them in a manner that reflected the first process. In doing so, I was attempting to experience a moment that echoed unity that, after divided, allowed the original one piece to take separate paths. As the creator, I knew their birth as one, while observing each diverge from their paths distinctly from one another.



Figure 10. Second Painting Exercise Progress



Figure 11. Second Painting Exercise Progress





Figure 12. Second Painting Exercise Progress

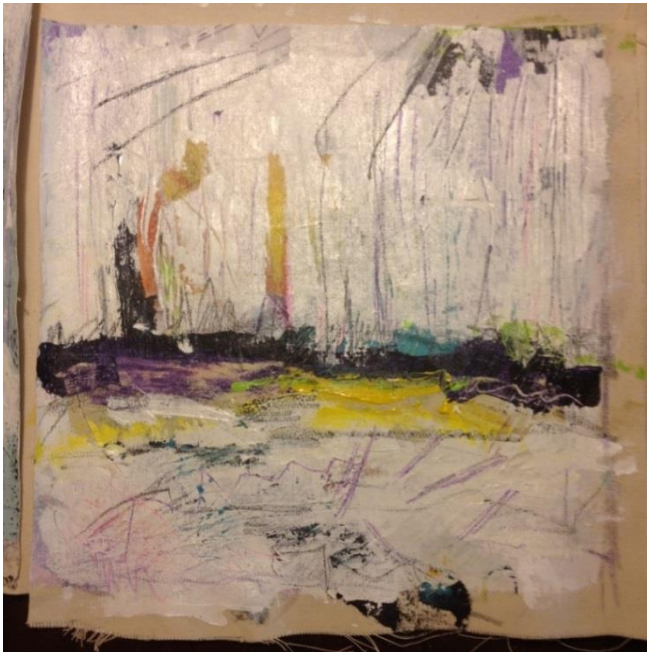


Figure 13. Second Painting Exercise Progress



Figure 14. Second Painting Exercise Detail

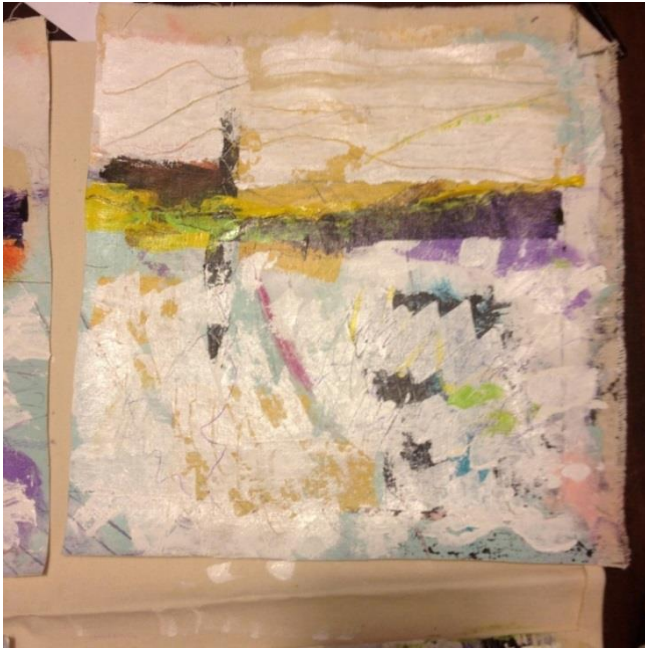


Figure 15. Second Painting Exercise Progress

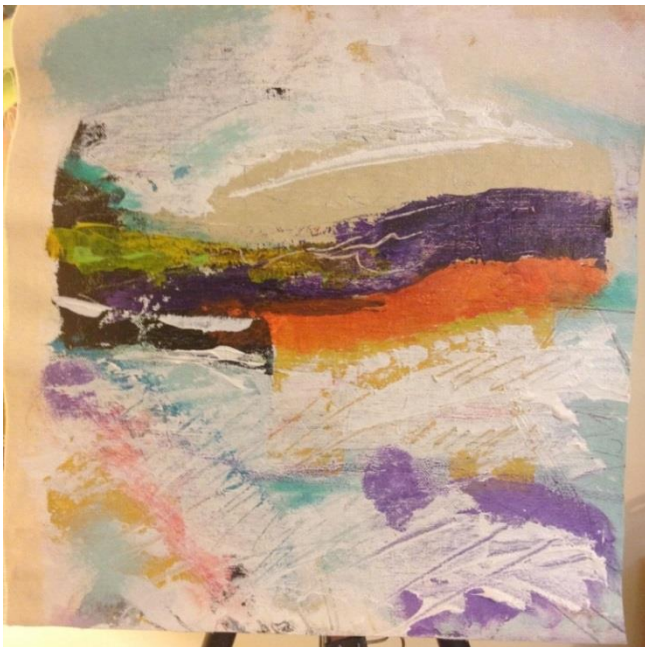


Figure 16. Second Painting Exercise Progress





Figure 17. Second Painting Exercise Result One



Figure 18. Second Painting Exercise Result Two





Figure 19. Second Painting Exercise Result Three



Figure 20. Second Painting Exercise Result Four





Figure 21. Second Painting Exercise Final End Result

From this second painting exercise, I began to trust my creative methods and rely on my intuition more easily. I also began to get a better sense of the options I had with my mediums, tools, color theory, and techniques, giving me a better sense of autonomy, and a less fearful and uncertain attitude. The lack of stress and the patience I had with the process gave me the ease to continue exploring in a meaningful way.

### **Evolution of Work**

My painting explorations have continuously evolved over the course of the past several years, and patterns in the work have emerged, retreated, and emerged again at times. In the remainder of this section, I will show a selection of work as it has developed in that time. I've explored various techniques, some intentionally and, occasionally, through accidentally stumbling into a revelation. Sometimes, my paintings become a process of excavating. When returning to a work, after some time, the conditions lend themselves to providing reflection of the previous experience. Not being afraid to push and pull, wipe something out, to start new, to layer, only to strip away the old, has allowed me to embrace the works as they unfold.

Some explorations have found more final resolutions, while others I continue to unravel new expression as I pause, return to augment, and cultivate the experience, creating opportunities for rediscovery. Still, I've discovered on this journey that when I mindfully contemplate those

memories or reflections, release them, and move forward according to the present, the aesthetic result is multi-layered, figuratively and literally, and the depth and richness of the spirit (kokoro) of the painting or work is more profound and actualized.



Figure 22. Untitled 1 Progress



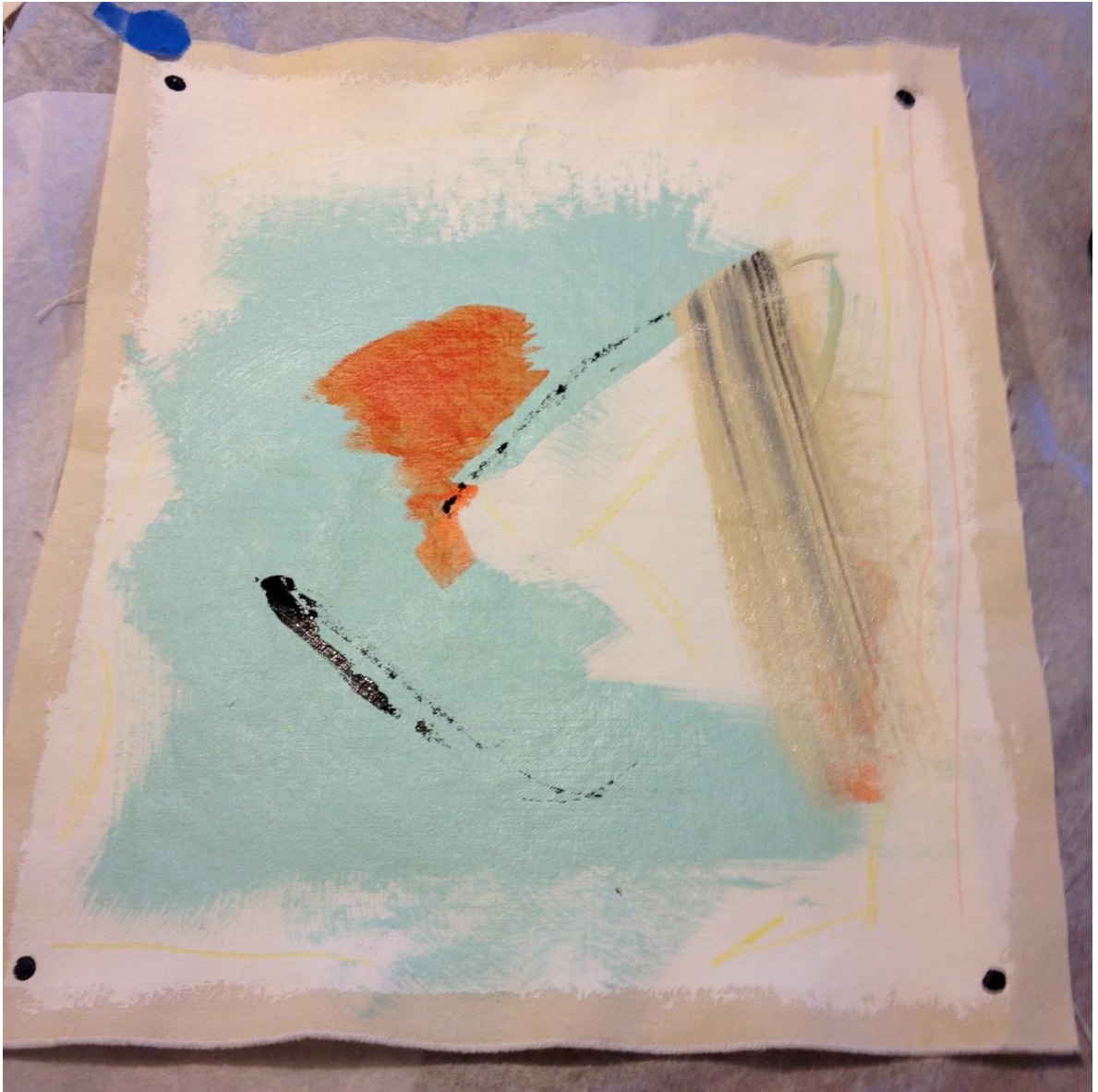


Figure 23. Untitled 1 Progress



Figure 24. Untitled 1 Result



Figure 25. Untitled 2 Progress



Figure 26. Untitled 2 Progress





Figure 27. Untitled 2 Progress

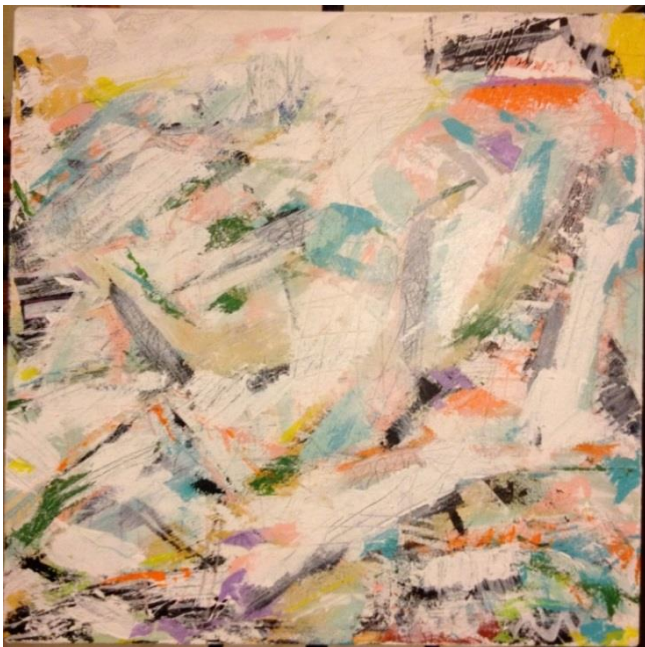


Figure 28. Untitled 2 Progress

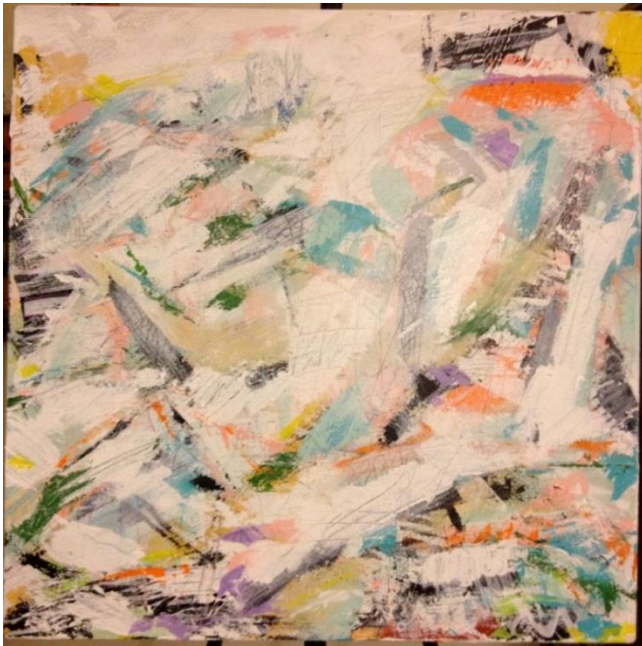


Figure 29. Untitled 2 Progress

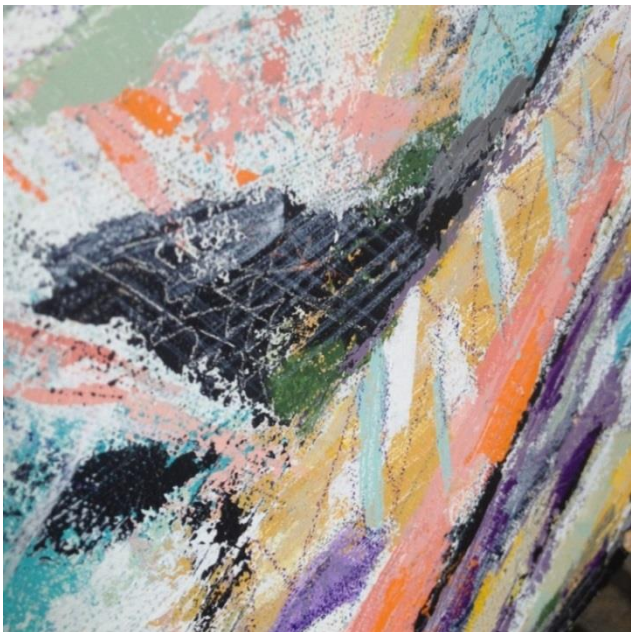


Figure 30. Untitled 2 Detail



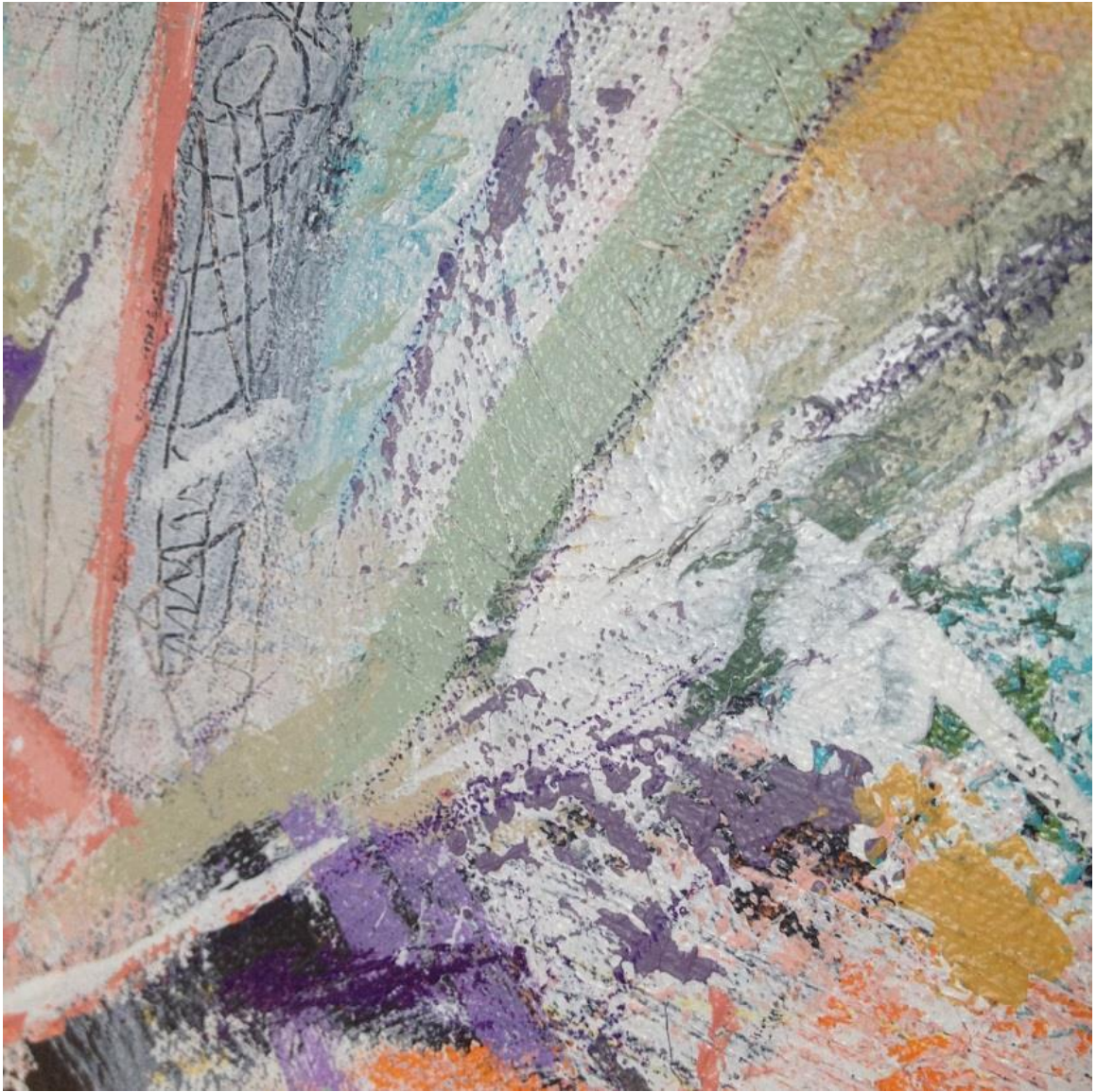


Figure 31. Untitled 2 Detail





Figure 32. Untitled 2 Result



Figure 33. Untitled 3 Progress

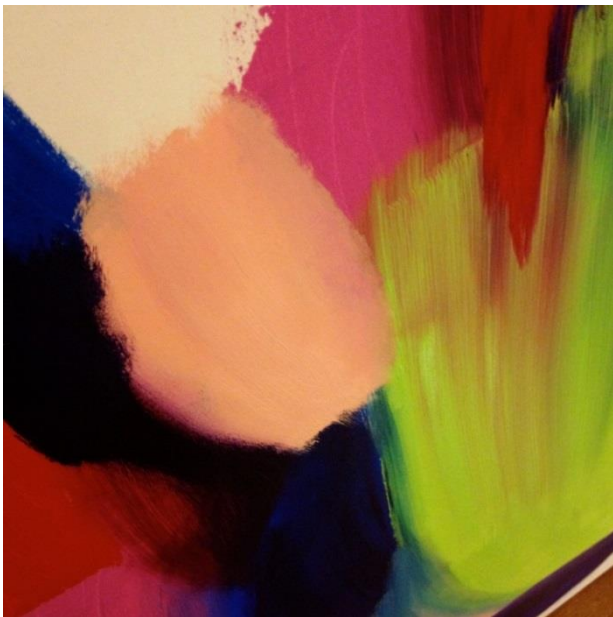


Figure 34. Untitled 3 Detail





Figure 35. Untitled 3 Detail



Figure 36. Untitled 3 Detail



Figure 37. Untitled 3 Result





Figure 38. Untitled 4 Progress





Figure 39. Untitled 4 Result

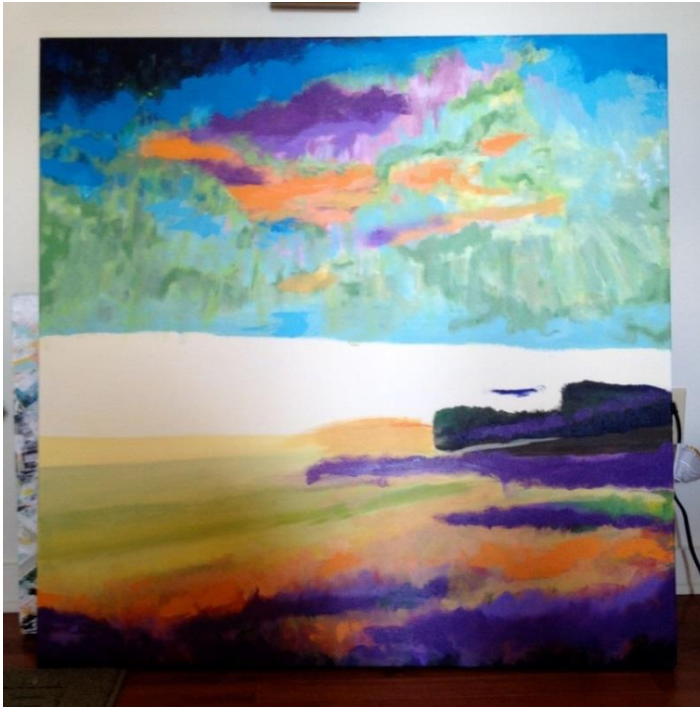


Figure 40. Untitled 4 Progress



Figure 41. Untitled 4 Detail



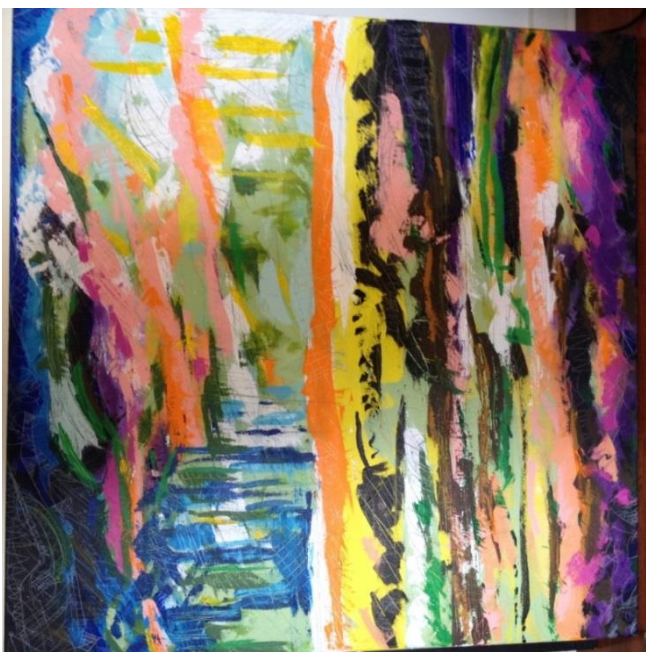


Figure 42. Untitled 4 Progress

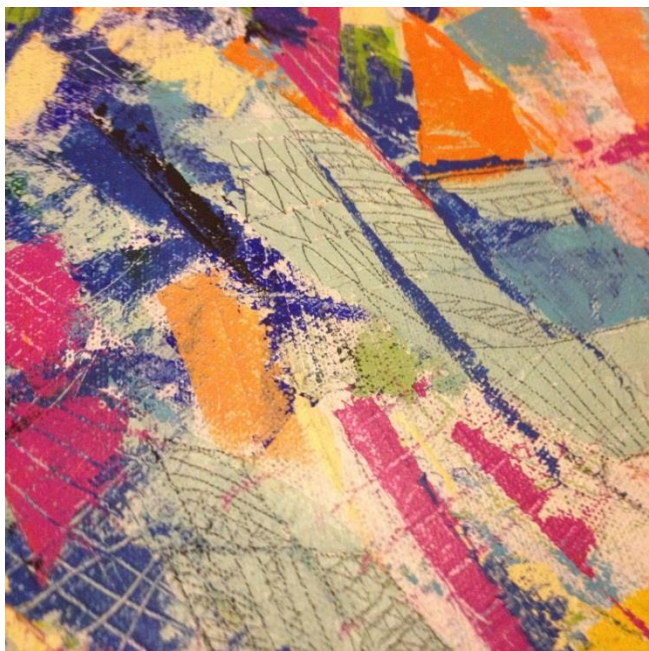


Figure 43. Untitled 4 Detail



Figure 44. Untitled 4 Progress



Figure 45. Untitled 4 Detail





Figure 46. Untitled 4 Result



Figure 47. Untitled 5 Detail



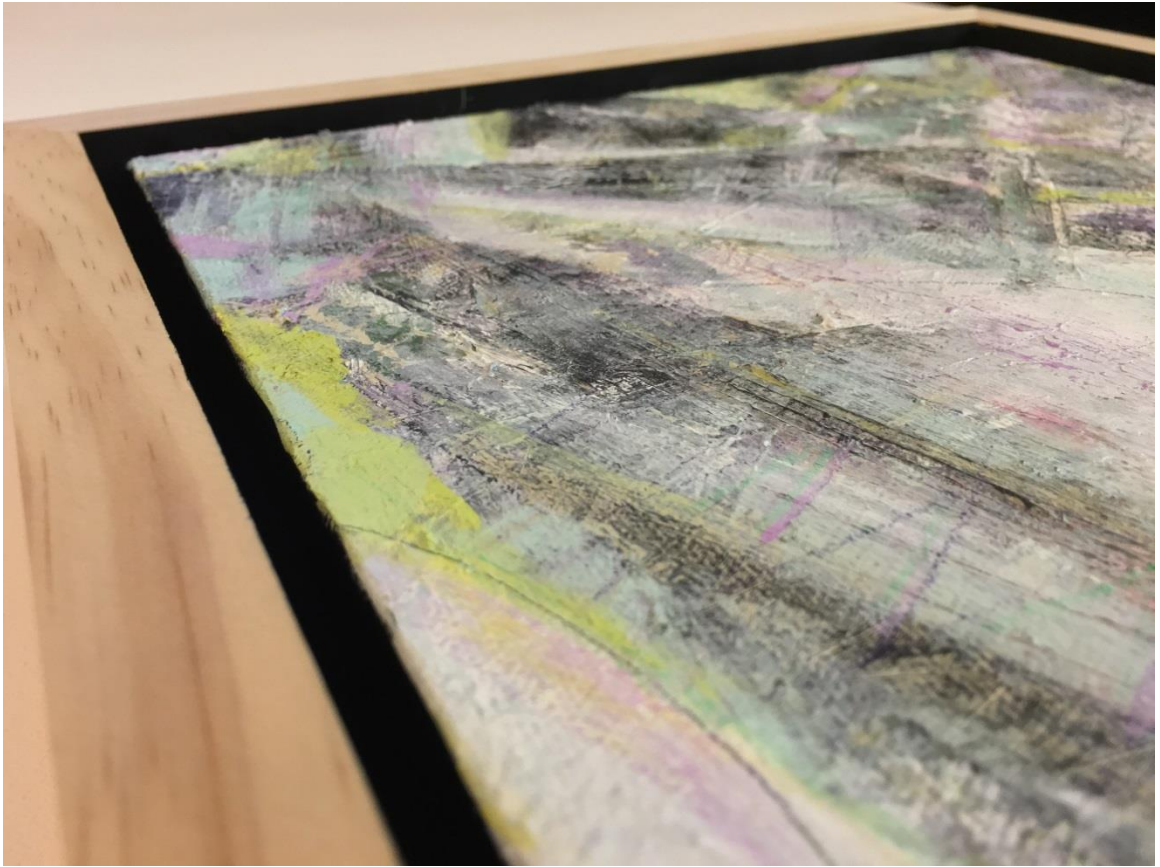


Figure 48. Untitled 5 Detail





Figure 49. Untitled 5 Result

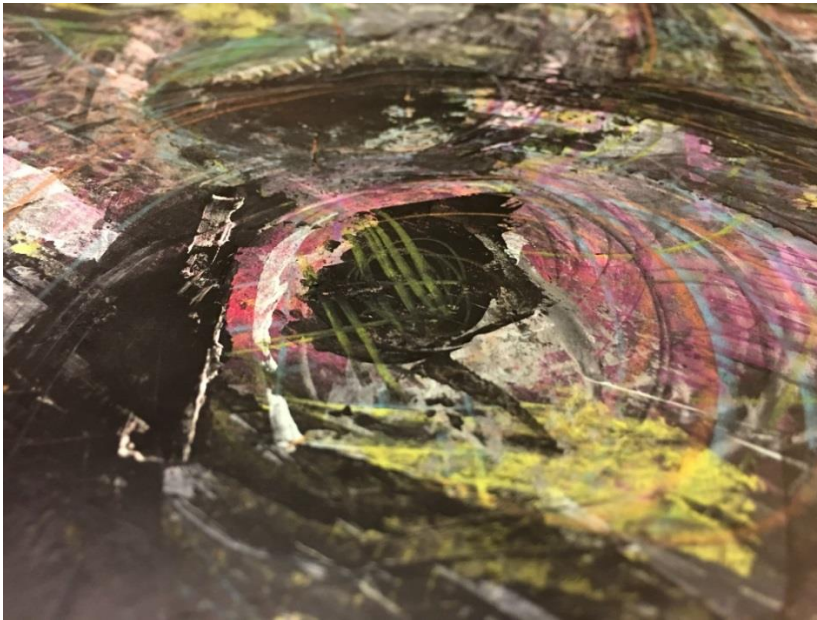


Figure 50. Untitled 6 Detail



Figure 51. Untitled 6 Detail





Figure 51. Untitled 6 Detail

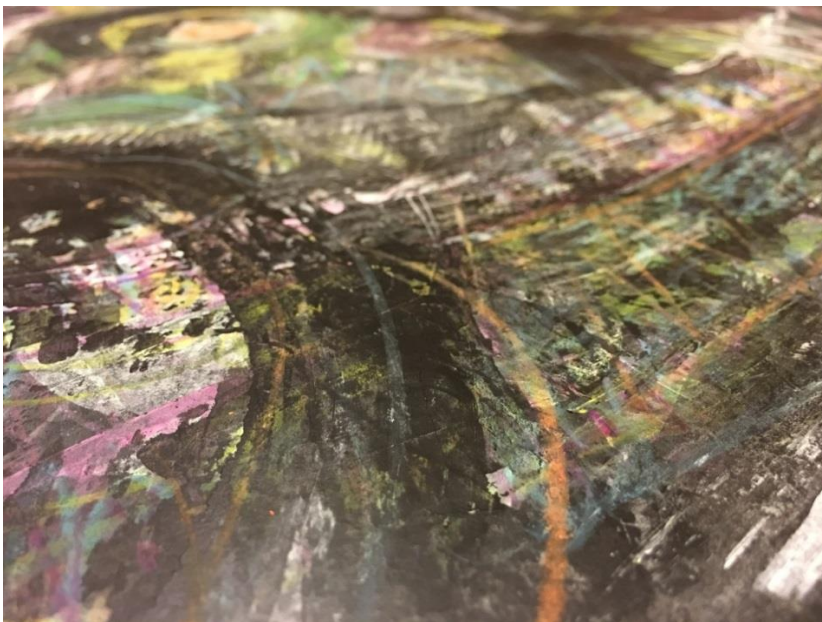


Figure 52. Untitled 6 Detail



Figure 53. Untitled 6 Result



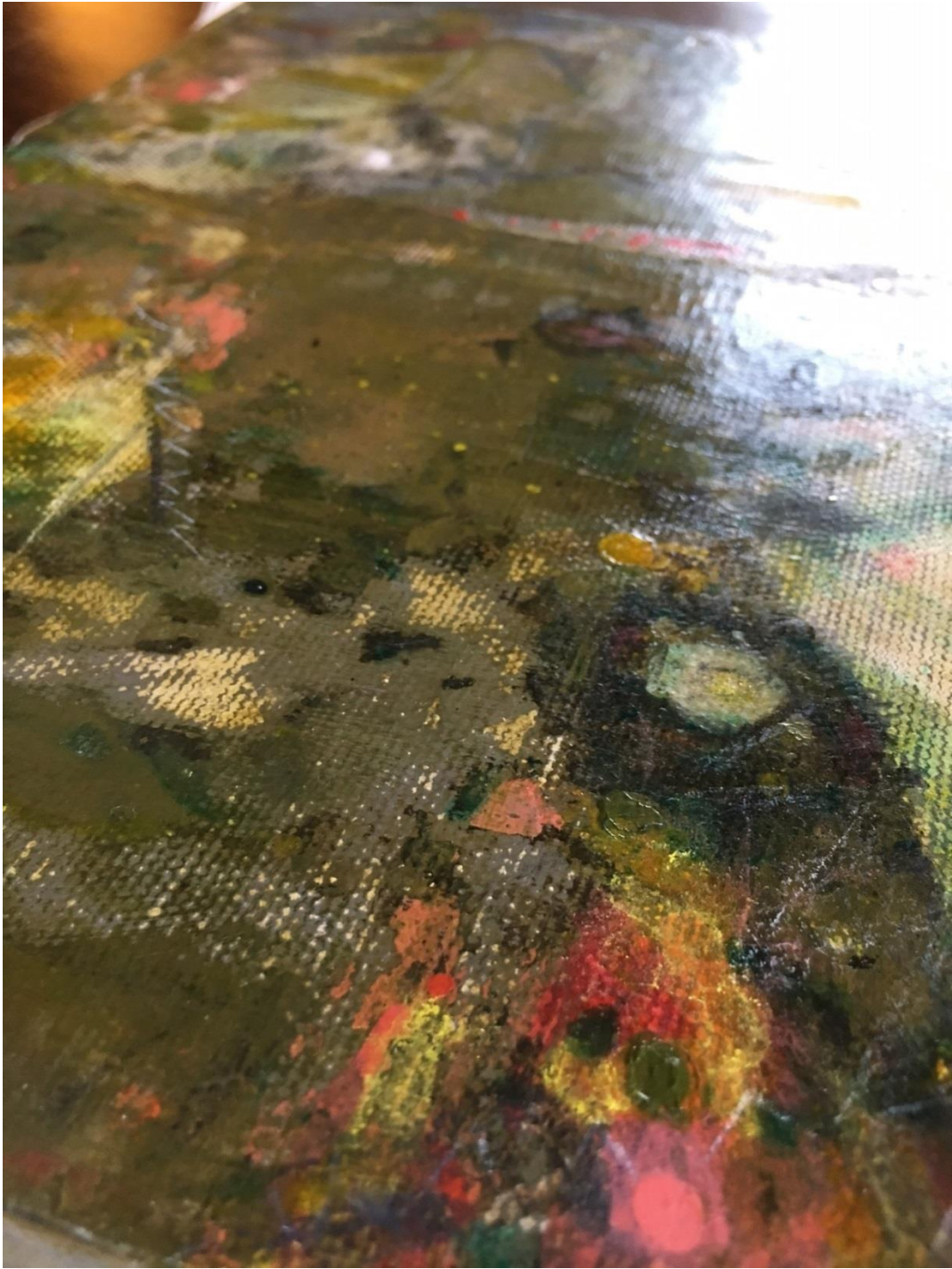


Figure 54. Untitled 7 Detail



Figure 55. Untitled 7 Result



## **A Garden of Wellbeing**

This portion examines the continuing professional work experience that I have undertaken over the course of the past several years as the design consultant for a public meditation garden. At the time I chose the direction of my research into wellbeing, I was asked to design a public meditation garden in my hometown of Sanford, NC, within a space of approximately one-third of an acre.

This garden will be privately funded, owned, and maintained, yet open to the public and in memory of Ruby C. McSwain of Sanford, who established parameters and the funding for the garden, and her husband, Ernest. This garden will fulfill Ruby C. McSwain's wishes for the people of Sanford and Lee County to have use of a space where residents can engage, with a sense of pride, within a beautiful, well-designed natural space that reflects her support and dedication to the community she had already serviced for many years. This offered a unique opportunity to directly apply wellbeing and mindfulness research and theory, that I had employed within my painting explorations, to a physical space, as well as explore an area of design that I had yet to undertake.

Large revelations often occur in very small places, sometimes as the result of a radical shift in scale and perspective. (Locher, 2012)



## **Painting A Garden**

Designing a garden involves applying a design process to an environment, similar to interior architecture, and a familiar design process for me. Just as any designer would mindfully treat an interior space, the garden and its elements are being directly addressed with wellbeing and mindfulness theory and application. As a designer, mindfully following the request of the elements within the design is to mind their kokoro, as well as my own, intuitively and holistically creating a sense of wellbeing.

(Locher, 15)

This garden will invite us to stop, breathe, observe, and connect with one's inner experience and within nature. Through this experience, the garden will promote wellbeing and foster mindfulness in the community of Sanford, North Carolina. The garden will marry shizen (naturalness) with the man made elements, and express the kokoros of the elements, surroundings, the individuals whom it commemorates, as well as the kokoro of the designer (myself). Each has their own kokoro. To respect all and mind their spirit is to create unity of atmosphere and a sense of wellbeing.

Elements, techniques, and theories explored in my painting inform the garden design. Throughout history, landscape paintings have often informed garden designs, and garden designs have often informed

paintings. I chose to connect my own painting applications, such as color, stroke, texture, line, and balance, to the garden, informing the concept and its elements. As color and texture have become important elements of my painting process, this will be addressed through the color and texture of plantings. While the colors will be rich, the selection of trees will consider the need for kanso (simplicity) through a careful, limited selection of plantings that are native, as well as Japanese.

A magnolia tree will be a feature, minding the kokoro of Ruby C. McSwain, and her love for the magnolia tree. Various grasses, large, carefully placed stones, and raked karensansui-style crushed brick gravel (a Japanese Zen style of creating a likeness of water through shirakawa-suna , dry, pea gravel) echo the natural element of water, while all still depict the texture one would see in a painting (Locher 51). The lower plantings and larger stones, mindfully chosen and placed, will give interest and ground the landscape, while other trees will elevate the viewer's eye.

Considering the fukensei (asymmetry) within my painting, I understood that this element could easily be applied to the pathways. A garden provides a perfect setting to address one's path, to be mindful, pause, embrace the natural setting, and leave behind the stresses and disquiet that can be readily found in daily life. Through making two entrances and two pathways, a formal, paved pathway and a natural,

meandering, unpaved pathway, I could introduce the man made and the natural, offering choices to a journey in the space. The paths should offer moments of repose, rest, and reflection, while engaging the imagination of the viewer. Grassy mounds will raise proportions, alluding to spaciousness in the small garden, temporarily limiting views while the user travels through, pausing and reflecting on the space, as Zen views are slowly created in the journey for the traveler.

The elements of the garden should mindfully chose to be subtle, yet add layers of richness, lending to the kokoro no yutakasa (richness of spirit) of the space. Balanced by its surroundings and mindfully considering all aspects, including the needs of the community, its users, the present conditions, the spirit of those who offered and created the space, the garden becomes one with each and all. In such conditions, a small garden can offer a retreat to honor awareness of the present and the quiet beauty of nature.

### **Garden Development**

I have rendered services related to the design phase of the meditation garden, but construction phase, which is ready to begin, and completion of the meditation garden, as well as my work as its project manager, is presently ongoing. This project has and continues to offer me

a great deal of challenges, particularly as a landscape design consultancy was a new field entirely.

This is the first project of this scale that I've worked on solely, despite working on other consultant design projects with other multi-discipline teams. I began the project by writing a contractual agreement that outlined the terms of the professional landscape design, construction observation, and administration of the project, as well as the scope of services that would be rendered, liability details, and fees associated with the project. It is understood that this garden does not exist in isolation, and that the surrounding built environment must be considered in order to further promote a holistic and mindful space. The garden must be balanced by its surroundings, and become one with them.

In short, no pattern is an isolated entity. Each pattern can exist in the world, only to the extent that is supported by other patterns : the larger patterns in which it is embedded, the patterns of the same size that surround it, and the smaller patterns which are embedded in it.

This is a fundamental view of the world. It says that when you build a thing you cannot merely build that thing in isolation, but must also repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent, and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it. (Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M., 1977, xiii)

Regulatory codes and ordinances in keeping with that surrounding environment are addressed in order to move forward with specific

considerations for the build of this garden. Those considerations include, not limited to, the construction of retaining walls, grading changes, paved and unpaved pathways, an irrigation system for plantings, an open air structure that will include electrical components, and lighting sources.

The site analysis for this garden began through photo documentation of the site and its surrounding properties, as well as visual observation to analyze the ground slopes, landforms, drainage issues, existing plants and trees, solar path, traffic patterns, noise issues, views, possible access points, and access to utilities. Some of these questions were more thoroughly answered by hiring a land surveyor, Melvin A. Graham, PLS., to survey the property at 301 West Rose Street, Sanford, NC, 27330, and clearly identify any boundaries, utilities, and to do a topography map of the lot.

The property is currently zoned as R-12, and consists of 10,810 square feet (roughly .25 acre). Residential-Mixed (R-12) permits parks that are open to the public & operated on a noncommercial basis. This would include the proposed meditation garden that would be privately owned, operated, maintained, and open to the public. The survey was filed with the register of deeds.

During this time, the city planning office was contacted, and I learned more from them directly about the city's regulatory codes, design

review, and their long range community planning goals. Also, I would discover that the town was employing Alfred Benesch & Company to analyze Sanford's park and recreational needs in order to make suggestions for a comprehensive future plan to meet the developing needs for Sanford and Lee County, NC. I used this opportunity to go to city and community meetings where residents were surveyed for their current use of recreational spaces in Lee and surrounding counties, as well as their input and suggestions for future uses of recreational space (image from a community meeting shown below). During this time, I discovered that this garden would potentially be the first, true public garden in Sanford, NC.

A neighborhood and context analysis of the site was done to identify the adjacent and nearby land use. It was determined that there was a well-distributed mixture of various types of property use within several blocks of the proposed garden site. However, there is currently no public park within this area. Photo documentation was used to map the context and adjacencies to the garden site.

As my research has involved using mixed-media painting as a means to study wellbeing and mindfulness, I employed a similar mixed media method in the design process of the garden. CAD work was employed for the site plan, along with hand-painted/rendered documentation and physical clay modelling. Weekly meetings with Tommy Lambeth, my thesis

committee chair who has a background in landscape architecture and is an artist and designer, helped guide and inform me through the design development process.

### **Further Considerations**

Currently, there is a hold on funding for the garden build. It is halted by recent trust and estate proceedings, as Ruby passed in August of 2015. As the development of the Rose St. meditation garden is still currently ongoing, the issues addressed will continue to develop and alter as the project continues into the coming years. Approval of certain aspects and changes of the design will need approval through the City of Sanford Planning & Development office. While bids for construction, landscaping, paving, irrigation, structure fabrication, and electrical work are also halted by these budget issues, I'm hopeful that estate issues will be worked through in order to efficiently construct the garden in a more timely manner very soon.

When assessing what would be additionally beneficial, I considered that applying for more travel-related assistance that would have allowed me to go to Japan, particularly Kyoto, in order to visit specific Zen meditations gardens as part of my research. Visiting several historical Japanese Zen gardens, as well as several by Zen Buddhist priest and landscape architect, Shunmyo Masuno, would be beneficial; as visiting in-



person, leading examples of Zen and Japanese gardens could aid me in greater understanding their elements and overall design development.

While, I believe it would help inform garden, I have spent time in Japanese influenced gardens including the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, CA. Additionally, North Carolina is fortunate to have some well-designed research-based gardens, including Japanese-influenced gardens at North Carolina State University's JC Raulston Arboretum and the Sarah P. Duke Gardens at Duke University; both I have spent time within and studied.

I imagine that by the time the garden is completed, I'll have more ideas about what I could do differently. I observed my grandfather, a general contractor, oversee development and construction phases. Having worked as a designer, having had a house myself, having aided my father, who manages properties as well as dealing with forestry property, and living on a farm, I'm well-aware of the stressors that can come with bidding and contracting for build projects, as well as overseeing those projects. With this being a public garden, privately owned, there is an additional level of stress, because my successful management is key to maintaining costs and good rapport within the town. Throughout this process, I'm certain that the benefits of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program will be necessary.

The most valuable aspect of this work is that it's confirmed for me my desire to work in aiding communities through holistic design, but, more importantly, I've found that it's ignited an interest toward community service through planning and development. Having worked in a design-related non-profit that was involved directly with the community, I've long missed working towards civic-related goals that impact those around me. I've enjoyed recently interacting with those working at the municipal level and within infrastructure development, because I'm seeing a great need within many communities' planning offices for strategic thinkers that approach problem solving with creativity and mindfulness.

I'm also finding more interest in reading about the various issues that can be explored in public planning: design, strategic short and long-term planning, community and infrastructure development, government, environmental and sustainable research, engineering, transportation, and other civic-related areas. Tommy Lambeth re-introduced me to the design classic *A Pattern Language* during my literature search, and I've appreciated the practical, almost poetic, way it was developed and written in order to present an alternative and mindfully-considered approach to architecture, building, and planning challenges within all sizes and types of environments. It's been extremely valuable to my understanding as a designer within an architectural design field to gain insight about the

government administrative procedures that fairly determine land use, as well as the public participation needed to determine that all citizens' needs are being met, not just a few. (Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M., 1977, xiii)

Living within Lee County (Sanford) and my hometown over the past several years, and for the first time since I was a teen, has helped me see the potential impact individuals can have on the environment and community where they are rooted. The confirmation that I desire to work, in some way, directly within any community in which I am living, has indicated that collaboration should be key for my career, whether through my art work, design work, or other endeavors. With my work with the public meditation garden and research into wellbeing, I see a need for individuals, like myself, who have a drive for mindful, problem-blockbusting and strategic, conceptual-thinking on a civic and community level.

Furthermore, over time, I've learned that working with the public isn't necessarily ideal or desirable for everyone. If I feel drawn to it, in order to impact my environment and lives of those within it, I should be mindful of the pull towards serving those needs. At this juncture, I'm becoming certain that my work will have to balance or complement my desires as a creative, along with my desires to serve. I've determined, currently, it involves me

making continual and new efforts within my own community to be an active citizen. Being informed locally can only aid me. Satisfaction within your community, however you choose to define it, is a valuable facet of a wellbeing that is thriving. To apply that to my life, would be to mindfully practice what I've observed, researched, learned, evaluated, and written.

Ruby C. McSwain , an individual that is honored by the meditation garden, anchored her life and spirit in her community in Sanford, as well as throughout North Carolina, through generous philanthropic endeavors and projects that supported her community. Through her mentorship and through designing a garden that honored her memory, I'm inspired to work and serve the needs of others. As more time passes, I feel more resolved to make certain this garden honors her spirit of generosity and love for community, and impress on others how that type of spirit in human kind can have continued impact, even after we've passed on. I hope I continue to meditate on that thought when I'm standing in Ruby's garden.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

Whether painful, shameful, heart-rending, confusing, joyful, passionate, inspiring, longingly reminiscent, or still mysteriously unilluminated in the realms of my mind, my threads are my every experience. The tangle was only the discomfort echoed by the desire for peace, healing, and a sense of belonging to this world, and more importantly, to myself. During this journey, I once wrote:

The other evening, I stood looking at the stars. I was reminded of how each star, though billions of years old, will have an eventual death. Some are burning bright, alive, but, as I stood there, looking at the sky above me, I knew our sky is filled with the light of stars that have already died.

I will never not be amazed and astounded that their energy and light is still there and traveling millions, billions of light years to where we exist here, viewing their life past, looking back in time as their light still fills the sky.

Although our lives are so much shorter than the stars', I believe we each are given a beautiful, brief time to impact our universe and world so that, when we are gone, something of us is left still here...lovely, radiating, and visible to others' left behind.

As vulnerable as confronting pain has made me feel at times, the important consequence of pain is that it will always reveal your measure in



life. I get frustrated with the breadth and scope of the nature of humankind and overwhelmed with the infinite span of what the entirety of that means, but I always end up accepting that I've been given an opportunity to use my knowledge, abilities, and experiences to understand and empathize with others.

My journey in this lifetime is not without meaning. It has been a human-led journey to create meaning. While pain led me to accept this path, I view my experiences as the framework of all that I am in this moment. They are not to limit me, but to authenticate my place and meaning in the pattern of unity, not chaos, of this world, this universe, and this space in time. As new experiences come or parts of me resurface, circling, move back into to view, some to move away again, I must embrace and find their place in the pattern of my life.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

That is my process.

My process, in all aspects of my life, is creatively and spiritually endeavored through my human experience. It is not straight, it is not easy, nor is it certain, but it is a complex and truthful call and response to everything and everyone that endeavors the same in this existence.

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