

TEACHING ART TO OLDER ADULTS:

A POSTMODERN APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT

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“The most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning” – John Dewey.

As the baby boomers enter retirement, a group known to have attained the highest level of education, theorists predict that they will be looking for experiences that challenge their way of thinking and connect them to contemporary thought. This thesis explores how art educators can prepare themselves to teach to this segment of the population and develop a curriculum that is grounded in artistic thinking and practice.

This thesis asserts that most if not all classes offered for older adults follow a traditional curriculum and whose focus is technically driven. Often when teaching art to older adults, instruction is lacking when it comes to understanding that art is a construction of meaning. This thesis argues for the necessity of art instructors to incorporate postmodern principles when teaching to older adults because they help to aid in meaning making. By drawing upon critical practice as well as formal and technical considerations, context and meaning can be created. Such an approach helps individuals move towards understand art as we come to know it in the 21st century.

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Introduction

The largest generation in U.S. history, the boomer generation, is entering their sixties. There are currently 76 million Americans who were born during the two decades after World War II. This accounts for 28 percent of the adult U.S. population. There currently are more than 36 million people age 65 and older. The average life expectancy of men is 82 years and of women, 85. In addition, throughout the developed world, people are living longer and having fewer children, so the population balance is rapidly changing. By the year 2025, one out of every five Americans is projected to be age 65 or older. (Cozma,R. & Dahmen, N.S., 2009, p.11)

The Baby Boomer generation, those born during the two decades following World War II, is now entering retirement. Education theorists predict that, as the most highly educated generation in history, Baby Boomers will be looking for enriching, post-employment activities and experiences that challenge their ways of thinking and connect them to contemporary thought (Pink, 2006). Indeed, retirees have the advantage of time to pursue interests that may have been previously set aside because of job or family responsibilities. Rediscovering those interests, however, may also mean that they have not developed or progressed very much in their thinking and views, in a particular area of interest. This thesis examines the relationship of the older adult population to the fields

of art and art education. It explores how art educators can teach older adults in meaningful and rewarding ways. Specifically, the thesis queries how art educators may develop curricula that move beyond the traditions of formal and technical training, so as to emphasize art as a construction of personal and social meaning—as understood in postmodern artistic thinking and practice.

By the year 2031, adults over fifty-five years of age will represent half of the population of the United States. Historically, older adults have renewed their education in the visual and performing arts (Hanna, & Perlstein, 2008). In anticipation of this, art educator Heta Kauppinen (1990) explains, “Art educators should anticipate an increasing need to create quality art programs for life-long learning.” (p. 99). For some retirees, taking an art class may be a way of filling up one’s day, while for others; it may represent the pursuit of a long-postponed or delayed interest. Whatever the impetus, it is often the case that the majority of older adults, who enroll in an art class, interrupted their art education after the age of twelve or thirteen. While there is a multitude of literature on the approaches of teaching art to children and teens, the literature on older adult art education, and its resumption, is scant. Where does an educator begin his or her task when intending to teach to older adults? What are the factors that educators must consider when teaching to an adult population, both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy?

Growing up, I had the good fortune of knowing my maternal grandparents, fraternal grandmother, as well as other extended family members who emigrated from Italy. It was commonplace for my family to visit a grandparent’s house for dinner or family celebrations. When my grandmother could no longer take care of herself and had

to move into an assisted living facility, we would visit her on a weekly basis. In part, I credit my Catholic upbringing for sensitizing me to the needs of the elderly. Indeed, as a part of my Catholic high school education, we were required to do service work at the local nursing home. It was during my senior year that my classmates and I were required to spend one class period, once a week, visiting a resident at the nursing facility.

Spending time with our assigned resident could mean helping them write a letter, reading to them, or possibly attending an arts and craft class to help them complete a project. I believe that because I was given the opportunity to interact with older adults from a young age, I became more sensitive to their needs.

In my own trajectory as artist and educator, it wasn't until I was in my early forties, twenty years after receiving my undergraduate degree that I decided to return to school to pursue a Master's degree in art and design education. Up to that point I had a variety of experiences teaching art and drama to children, but lacked formal teacher training. Gene Cohen, director of the Center on Aging, Washington, D.C., and psychiatrist, calls this phase "midlife re-evaluation occurring in 40's and 50's. What occurs in this first phase of midlife is a capacity for insightful reflection with a powerful desire to create meaning in life" (Cohen, 2001, p. 52). I recognize what I was experiencing as somewhat parallel to what older adults go through upon retirement. And it was with the (then-recent) death of my father that I witnessed the decisions my mother had to make with regard to her own life-choices.

What drew me to teaching art to older adults, rather than to school aged children, was my interest in diverse populations and alternative educational environments. I

discovered that I enjoyed working with older adults because of their stories, their wealth of personal history, and the life experiences they have to offer.

As a society, it seems we have lost sight of the value of our elders and the contributions they have to offer in later life. Stereotypical phrases reflect societal attitudes on aging such as, being "over the hill," or "past one's prime." Their role in society is usually misunderstood as one that is antiquated and unrelated to modern times. However, I have come to appreciate that older adults are vast resources of knowledge, experiences, and insights from which we have much to learn. Because of this, I am interested in assessing the kinds of creative activities with which older adults may be engaged, so as to establish new possibilities for what growing old can mean in the context of art education.

While most of my peers in Masters of Art Education programs were preparing for state certification to teach grades K-12, I decided to explore other options. Factors such as public school budget cuts, elimination of school art departments, and hiring freezes made me reticent about entering the schools.

Considering my affinity to older adults, and being mindful of the fact that there would be an influx of retirees with educational programming and services needs, I began to focus on the older adult population within the community-based setting. Dr. Robert Butler, a pioneer in the field of aging and geriatric medicine, explains that in life beyond retirement, "it is important to be productively engaged, to do something that's meaningful, something to get up for in the morning" (Pioneer in Aging, 2009). I believe that quality; age-specific art education can offer a variety of ways and opportunities to experience productivity, meaning and purpose in older age.

In my teaching art to older adults, I have experimented with a variety of curricular approaches, geared toward the development of studio skills, creativity and expression. Art educator Angela La Porte (2010) states, "Teaching to the adult learner has its challenges owing to a wide range of skills and abilities, making it difficult to establish specific goals and parameters" (p. 20). In addition to these challenges, I have noticed through my work with older adults that many bring a narrow view of what constitutes art. Many older adults enter the art class with a desire for technical skills that would allow them to make something that "looks real" and "as it should." Countering these preconceived ideas that many older adults have in defining art has been a challenge in my work as an art educator. Older adult students whom I have encountered can become 'stalled' somewhere in their aesthetic development, most likely as a result of minimal exposure to contemporary art. While a desire for naturalism and beauty is understandable, and even admirable, I wish to better acquaint older adults with contemporary and postmodern art, which addresses issues that may resonate with this population in particular. To provide one instance, postmodern art's emphasis on autobiographical and socio-political issues may allow adults with a vast personal history to narrate their life stories. Furthermore, the critical slant of postmodern art may empower older adults to find their critical voices. The mixed media, interdisciplinary and novel forms of postmodern art may also serve to liberate older adults from the pressures of traditional media and thus encourage novel exploration.

Aesthetic development is defined by "changes that occur in understanding and by experiences with works of art" (Kerlavage, 1998, p.30), and artistic growth as, "the capacity to create meaning and make sense of the world [through artmaking]" (Smith,

1993, p.3). Because my goal is to facilitate artistic and aesthetic growth, I view it as my responsibility to expose older adult students to a wide range of art, not solely the kind valued for its faithfulness to reality or its conventional beauty. Thus, as a result of wanting to direct my teaching energies toward older adults, I have been confronted with the following questions: How do art educators educate for artistic vision when working with adults who have had limited experience making art and/or limited exposure to contemporary art? How do art teachers develop curriculum that values and aims to cultivate artistic skills other than those of a technical nature? How may art teachers address creative thinking skills that are of a more conceptual order? Do current practices in art education regarding contemporary art, multicultural education and visual culture have a place within the art curriculum for an older adult population?

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review examines four main topics pertaining to older adult art education. First, it addresses the nature of aging from a physical perspective, presenting common characteristics of this stage of life, as well as the societal attitudes it elicits. Second, it examines the role of education in later life and the potential it holds for older adults. Third, the literature review considers older adults' interest in art, and the prevalent issues associated with art making and art learning at this stage of life. Lastly, the review offers a discussion of institutions that are interested in older adult art education and the programs that are available to them.

Psychology of Aging

Aging is defined as the, “physical, psychological, and social processes of growing older from conception to death” (Peterson, 1976, p. 7). In educational gerontology, older adults are defined as individuals 55 years of age or older (Kauppinen, 1990, p. 99). From a psychological development perspective, the first half of an individual's life is about establishing an identity, striving for success, and achieving goals. The second half of life can have a variety of direction; for most it is seen as a time of retirement,

relaxation, and permission not to punch the proverbial time clock.

Nevertheless, from a cultural perspective, there is no denying that old age is a time of decline. Physical decrepitude, as well as the loss of one's mental faculties, dominates many people's view of the aging process. Entertainment as well as print media helps to propagate such stereotyping, generally in a humorous vein. While self-deprecation may be healthy, the lack of images that depict older adults as vibrant contributors to society is strikingly disheartening. Gerontologist Robert Butler, a pioneer in the field of aging, explains, "We continue to have embedded in our culture a fear of growing old, manifest by negative stereotypes and language that belittles the very nature of growing old, its complexities and tremendous variability" (Cozma, & Dahman, 2009, p.7). Director of Academic Affairs for AARP Harry Moody (1978) likewise asserts that old age is often viewed as a liability and, as a result, ageism figures into the scholarship from, "the standpoint of losses: memory, perceptual functions, and cognitive deficiencies" (p. 32). The older adult population is thus disposed to negative imagery, encountering stereotyping which likely adds to their perception of worthlessness.

Still, shifts in thinking about the aging process are beginning to occur. Emphasis on ability instead of disability represents an evolution in attitude about what it means to be old. As Johanna Boyer, arts consultant explains,

In a shift from a deficit model to an asset model--from looking at older people as medical objects to seeing all their vitality and wisdom--we have acknowledged that no matter how frail or cognitively fit, they have something to contribute. (Boyer, 2007, p.4.)

Along these same lines, educator Marylou Kuhn seeks to view aging from an alternative viewpoint, calling for society to “get beyond the clichés of age as deterioration and see it as change with as much potential for growth as any other stage in living” (Kuhn, 1998, p.5).

Today, older people are wealthier and more educated than previous generations of Americans. According to Hanna and Perlstein (2008), "Since biomedicine is eliminating some of the more debilitating condition of old age, we can expect individuals to live longer, healthier, and more productive lives than before" (p. 2). In addition, instead of simply generalizing the population, researchers are beginning to define various stages of old age. For instance, art educator Pearl Greenberg (1987) refers to, "early old age, middle old age, and old old age, each of which has its problems and characteristics, just as in early life" (p. 26).

Psychiatrist Gene Cohen (2001) believes that learning is also a part of aging. He explains,

When we challenge the mind, the brain responds in positive ways--both physically and chemically. ‘Old dogs’ can learn, as it were; we humans are under no biological limitations. In fact, the more we think and do--regardless of age--the more we contribute to vibrant cell life in the brain. Significantly, along these same lines, research in the field of science has shown that psychological growth and creative expression can continue independent of age. (p.51)

Scientific findings are determining that the brain is more flexible and adaptable than once believed. Not only can older adults learn, but, as it turns out, there are some cognitive benefits in old age. Researchers have found that, with aging, it is typically easier for

individuals to, "define problems and envision multiple strategies to deal with them--a process described as 'postformal thought' (Sinnott, 1998, p.45). Using the language of Piaget, "postformal reasoning becomes more facile in the second half of life; it helps to integrate the subjective and the objective, feeling and thinking, the heart and the mind" (Cohen, 2001, p. 52). This facility may have enormous significance to creative undertakings. However, human potential in later life does not automatically produce growth or creative expression. This potential may be realized through a person's own concerted efforts and/or through the help of others.

Cohen (2005) has expanded on Erik Erikson's eighth stage of human development, the 'mature age,' by further dividing it into four phases of growth and development. He defines them as: "midlife re-evaluation, liberation, summing up, and encore "(p. 52-53). Each phase has its distinct challenges and yet one phase may overlap another. Midlife re-evaluation is spurred on by a sense of quest; Liberation is the need to take action, brought on by asking one's self, "if not now, when?"; Summing up is the desire to attend to unfinished business; and lastly, Encore is defined by the wish to know one has had a positive impact during their lifetime. Cohen (2005) believes that together these phases represent a, "combination of neurological, cognitive and emotional development" (p. 91).

Throughout history, and present in many cultures, is the respect that is given to older adults. This deference is based on beliefs that older adults possess wisdom and knowledge, gained from their life experience. In an educational setting, it is important to draw upon this experience, because it shows respect for and validates the opinions of older students. Another identity that older adults have assumed over the history of civilization is "keepers of their culture" (Cohen, 2001, p.54). Older adults are given the

responsibility of passing on traditions and of maintaining a connection to the past, as well as remembering ancestors for the contributions they have made for the betterment of society. All of these assumed roles serve to dignify and empower older members of society, and they have ramification for the field of education.

Adult Education

While there is ample scholarship about the current theories and practices in the field of education and child development, the field of developmental psychology lacks studies that pertain to the adult life cycle. An early study by Harry Moody (1978) delves into the phenomenon of aging and offers theoretical and philosophical approaches to education for older adults. Moody bases his theory on the life history of older adults, and on the wealth of experience that comes with old age. Moody argues that the goal of education of older people, “should be grounded in life experience: in the history and the life of the learner” (p.31). In this, Moody describes developmental growth and the need to reconcile one’s past with the realization of our mortality. Thus, the goal of the second half of life, “is a process of psychological individuation or self-realization” (p. 43). By making peace with the past, one can be fully present to the possibilities of the here and now. Moody reminds us that Jung warned of the psychopathologies of old age, which result in a failure to accept the changing development tasks of the life cycle (p. 43). Accordingly, an individual can become fixated on the past and a time when “life was better.” Instead, Moody asserts that development must and should continue.

Moody refers to the philosophy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as a useful framework to unlock older adults from internalized negative self-images and societal

pigeonholing. Freire had worked with poor, illiterate adults, attempting to free them from their powerlessness by encouraging each of them "to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his world"(Reed, & Johnson, 2000, p. 187). With this model in mind, Moody sees education as the opportunity for teachers to address and combat ageism, which will help to break barriers to empowerment in old age.

Malcolm Knowles, professor of adult education and pioneer in the field of adult learning, was the first to theorize how adults actually learn. He described adult learning as a process of self-directed inquiry. As Knowles explains,

Adults should acquire the skills necessary to achieve the potentials of their personalities. Every person has capacities that, if realized, will contribute to the well-being of himself and of society. To achieve these potentials requires skills of many kinds—vocational, social, recreational, civic, artistic, and the like. It should be a goal of education to give each individual those skills necessary for him to make full use of his capacities. (Knowles, 1950, p. 10)

Thus, Knowles does not prescribe a definite course of action when it comes to teaching adults; rather, he affirms a philosophical stance that offers a belief in the power of individualized education pertaining to adults.

While adult learners are an extremely heterogeneous group, Knowles identifies six characteristics of note. These include the adult as autonomous and self-directed, having life experiences and knowledge, goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, practical, and needing to be shown respect (Knowles, 1984). Because of this, Knowles advocates for a cooperative learning environment in which the teacher creates a climate of mutual trust and understanding of each student's expectations and goals. This kind of community of

learner led Knowles to use, “the term *andragogy*, originally used by a German teacher, Alexander Kapp, in 1833” (Smith, 1996; 1999). *Andragogy*, the theory of adult education, stands in contrast to the more familiar *pedagogy*, precisely because of the unique characteristic that distinguishes adults from children in the classroom. Because of the variances in learners described above, Knowles’ ‘andragogy’ offers a philosophical position rather than a unified theory of adult learning.

Education and engaging the imagination are generally thought of as activities reserved for the young. However, learning is a lifelong endeavor regardless of one’s age or position in life. Educational philosopher Kieran Egan (1997) sees adulthood as a time when we needlessly “develop arteriosclerosis of the imagination,” a restriction of possibility (p. 341). But this does not have to be the case. As Knowles (1984) comments, “As a person matures, he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning” (p.57). This reservoir can and should be imaginatively tapped. Learning can be a lifelong endeavor because developmental growth continues dynamically throughout the life cycle, and changes in perspective and experience are unending.

Because learning persists, it is important to identify the educational needs of the older adult in order to develop appropriate teaching practices. Like Knowles’ six learning characteristics, art educator Heta Kauppinen (1990) similarly identifies certain needs that are unique to older adult learners, “coping needs, contributory needs, influence needs, expressive needs, and transcendental needs” (p.100-101). While psychologists might rightly argue that such needs are prevalent throughout a lifetime, Moody (1985) sees the need for transcendence as something distinctively important and unique to the

later stages of life. Transcendence in this context may be defined as a process by which older people, “must transcend their own past by engagement in the present” (p.42).

Because of the heterogeneity of older adult learners and the little understanding of adult's mental processes, recognizing and addressing such needs offers a context in which to approach education for older adults.

Growing out of the need to meet the educational demands of older adults, a movement in adult education began in France in 1972 and later took hold in Britain about a decade later. In Britain, the movement came to be known as University of the Third Age (UA3), similar to Elderhostel in the U.S. In France and the United States, classes were held in institutions of higher learning, whereas in Britain, classes were held in a variety of settings. The defining feature of the UA3, as expressed by its founder Peter Laslett (1989), is a university that “consists of a body of persons who undertake to learn and to help others. Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach” (p. 179). This theory rests on the belief that people have the capacity to share the knowledge and experience that they have acquired during their lives with others. The idea of such an educational democracy also resonates with Freire's beliefs in the teacher as a temporary facilitator and not authoritative expert. Moody similarly believes that the role of educators of older adults “is to facilitate the conversion of life experience from an obstacle, into a source of strength, through education” (p. 33).

Adult Art Education

Educator and theorist Victor Lowenfeld spent years observing children and their artistic development. His book *Creative and Mental Growth* is an established reference

for elementary school teacher preparation programs and describes characteristics of child art. Thanks to his pioneering research, educators who teach children or teens are able to better surmise, by the child's age, their level of artistic, as well as aesthetic, social, physical, intellectual, and emotional growth.

However, when it comes to determining how best to approach art education for adults, we cannot rely on such a clear-cut model as Lowenfeld's. Development in later years is very nuanced and highly variable. Nevertheless, if there is one parallel to be drawn between a child's development and that of an adult who might be beginning or is re-learning their art study, it is the common characteristic of frustration. Art educator Lesley Bloom terms this "inhibiting dissonance." She explains

Students with too great a gap between their artistic skills and standards of judgment, and with diminished aesthetic sensitivity, will experience some degree of inhibition. Inhibiting dissonance between skills and standards can be a major barrier to adult participation. (Bloom, 1982, p. 122)

Because of this identified dissonance or discrepancy, one important aspect to consider in this instance is the older adult learners' past level of education. It is likely the case that for many adults, art education ceased prematurely in early adolescence. Thus, when art educators (Greenberg, 1987, Hoffman, 1992, Jones, 1980) make recommendations about teaching art to older adults, critical factors include previous art experience and confidence levels of the student. Thus, Bloom's inhibiting dissonance may be at the forefront of their minds.

Art educator Diane Barret states that it is up to the art educator to create a psychologically safe environment. Barret (1998) suggests this may be achieved by,

“developing art lessons that meet the needs of the older participant” (p. 122). Because a lack of confidence can intimidate anyone from approaching the art making process, an older adult who lacks experience in making art may feel especially intimidated to join a class with other adults who have prior experience, for fear of being judged by their peers. A teacher who is sensitive to such a student can help build their confidence by recognizing and affirming their efforts, and by consciously mediating levels of experience within the group.

Art educator Kathy James (2008) advises that “the most important element of teaching older art students is a knowledge of who your students are and a willingness to adapt your curriculum and teaching methods appropriately” (p. 163). This reiterates Knowles ideas of ‘custom tailored’ education for older adults, as discussed above. Because older adults possess various levels of artistic competence, the teacher must rise to this challenge of extreme diversity by establishing a different set of goals for each student. With the more accomplished student, James recommends specifically relying on them to assist with instructing novice students who may be struggling to understand a technique. This strategy utilizes the adult student’s expertise and makes beneficial use of in-class diversity.

But while the above recommendations mostly address *how* to teach to older adults, the question also remains *what* to teach to this population? According to the literature pertaining to art education and the older population, there seem to be some recurring and prevalent themes at this stage of life that may be of use. More than informing pedagogy, these topics may be useful when approaching the daunting task of curriculum development.

The first theme is reflection and life review. Psychiatrist Robert Butler developed the concept of life review and put it to psychotherapeutic use with individuals. Butler explains the life review process (as cited by Cohen, 2005, p.79),

Characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences and particularly the resurgence of unresolved conflicts that can be looked at again and reintegrated. If the reintegration is successful, it can give new significance and meaning to one's life. (p. 79)

Art educator Diane Barret picks up on this theme in her teaching. Barret (1998) encourages her adult students to incorporate life experiences and autobiography into their artworks, suggesting they draw upon their inner life to foster personal choices and self-reflection. Using life review from the standpoint of making art helps to create self-awareness in students, which may lead to greater self-acceptance. Moody (1978) concurs that "the process of life review constitutes the major developmental task of old age, and it is the fundamental question for any philosophy of aging" (p. 34). Accordingly, the older adult student's history and life experiences, "become the invitation into the classroom" or, by extension, the art studio (Moody, 1978, p. 31).

Narrative is a second theme. Regardless of one's age, everyone has a story to tell. But what distinguishes the older adult's story from that of their younger peers is the rich history upon which it draws. Behind every work of art there exists a story. Barret (1998) and Kerka (1999) agree that the use of narrative needs to figure prominently into the education of the older adult. "Incorporating narrative as part of the artwork is another way of helping older persons share and perhaps makes sense of their life experiences" (Barret, 1998, p. 123). There may be students who are inclined to express themselves

initially through writing, and in this case it should be encouraged. Having students write out their stories can serve as the starting point for generating ideas, which in turn can help to conjure a collection of images.

Empowerment is another theme that runs concurrently in the scholarship about art education for the elderly. Because loneliness and isolation factor into this stage of life, involvement in art making enhances an individual's quality of life by creating meaning and connections between the inner, private world and the social, outer one. The opportunity for self-expression, interactions that involve viewing and responding to works of art and developing personal relationships are critical activities that can empower the individual and link him or her to the larger community.

Creativity is the fourth theme that is important to develop in this population. Greenberg (1987) defines creativity as the "shifting around of elements in new ways to enhance their relationship to one another" (p. 80). Creative thinking is not just the domain of the arts; its marks of originality, flexibility and problem solving may be found in all human spheres and endeavors. Kerka (1999) as well as Barret (1998) likewise assert that creative thinking is a universal ability that can help older adults lead enriching and rewarding lives, and that this activity is not limited to a unique few. But as art educator Donald Hoffman observes, creative thinking is not always present in the older adult art studio. Hoffman (1992) explains that many older adult students are "content to successfully manipulate materials and develop techniques, misconstruing their mechanical performance as creative behavior" (p.34). Hoffman (1992) insists that students exercise *real* creativity, which, like Greenberg, he defines as the ability to "actively pursue alternative solutions by inventing or adapting available resources to new

uses” (p.33). The thought of having to be creative can be intimidating to the novice because of the pressure to be original. One way for a teacher to alleviate this anxiety may be to establish an empowering environment where experimentation is understood as a means of seeking new ways to work.

Needs, Obstacles and Solutions

The following section will identify the unique needs of older adults in art education, examine problems associated with such an endeavor, and lastly, review recommendations set forth in the literature surrounding this issue.

Outwardly, older adults will most often choose to enroll in an art class in order to learn something new or improve their skill---what may be termed a cognitive interest. However, they may have an underlying agenda of which they themselves are not entirely certain. Art educator Cynthia Taylor (1987) believes subconscious desires may be manifested in the need for “respect, recognition, to be valued, self-fulfillment, self-expression, intimacy through conversation, to be comforted, and to be remembered” (p.9). Those older adults who attend art classes as a leisure activity---which may represent the majority---prefer to take advantage of services and to socialize with friends and staff members. Barret (1998) states, “They want to remain connected to the community and to participate in activities that are meaningful” (p. 115). Again, because of their great variance, it is up to the teacher to examine and assess those needs, in order to determine how they may be fulfilled through art making.

Often, it is simply the case that older adults enroll in art classes because they want to gain art skills. However, what constitutes ‘art’ may be very narrow in their view. Many

students approach the endeavor with the need to represent the world in a naturalistic and realistic manner; however, they invariably lack the technical skills to articulate their vision. Art educator Lesley Bloom (1982) describes this as “their heightened need to produce what they feel as ‘successful’ work” (p.122). When realism fails, this lack of perceived success creates a sense of frustration and eventually can cause students to lose interest. In this case, it is important to identify their strengths and build upon their successes. It is also important, however, to question the value of realism in art, and to present alternative visions of expression. I will discuss this at length in Chapter 3.

Ascertaining older adults’ needs may also be achieved by considering cultural characteristics as well as educational background, socioeconomic level and occupational history. Considering participants ethnic heritage or religious affiliations can offer clues into understanding older adults. It also coincides with the themes of autobiography and narrative as described above. Barret (1998) utilizes this tactic in her teaching practice; she recollected that “such an approach enabled [me] to develop curricula that drew upon their strengths and interests” (p.121). It is through such considerations that art is made relevant to our students and their lives.

A number of problems arise from the physical limitations of senior participants, but more often, psychological barriers present a greater challenge. Barret (1998) considers the fears that surround art making and attitudinal barriers that contribute to a lack of motivation. These barriers may appear as a lack of confidence, frustration, defeatist attitude, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. Adult motivation to learn originates from within and not necessary upon external stimuli. Thus, if the desire is not present, an alternative approach may involve inviting the individual to observe as a

nonparticipant as a means of piquing their interest. Greenberg (1987) advises that it is important to start ‘where people are,’ gauging their understanding of art and then gradually, “expanding their horizon,” as opposed to offering “programs beyond their desire or willingness for involvement, and seeing the program fail” (p. 22).

One of the central research questions of this thesis involves understanding the educator’s task when intending to teach older adults. It has already been established that older adults are the most diverse of all age groups, and that we cannot pin a standard set of characteristics upon them, as we more readily may upon, say, first graders. Thus, in order to help us understand their diversity, we may look to Bloom’s categorization of adult art programs by their students’ aspirations. Bloom divides art programs into four types: professional, vocational, recreational and production-line. A student enrolled in a craft class of the production-line model will have an entirely different set of needs and considerations than one who is looking to produce serious work with an eye to gallery exhibitions. Thus, by understanding their aspirations, level of confidence and experience, the teacher may better respond to the needs of the students. Bloom calls this a “confidence/program model.”

A Postmodern Model for Adult Art Education

Much of the literature that examines teaching art to older adult populations mainly considers what it means to teach adults seventy years of age and over. The foundation for teaching art to older adults is very much based in a modernist approach, emphasizing traditional forms and ranging largely from the decorative to the naturalistic to the expressive. This leaves the art educator to wonder how current practices in contemporary

art education may be relevant to older adult students, and what a postmodern curriculum would look like for this age group. A brief review of the cultural paradigms of modernism and postmodernism will be helpful.

From a philosophical perspective, Modernism is rooted in the hopeful belief that people and society are ultimately perfectible. The ideals espoused by modernism, developed during the Enlightenment, include the glorification of science and logic, and a belief in the inevitability of human progress (Burgin, 1986). These ideas were developed and tested against the backdrop of an ever-increasing industrialized and mechanized Western culture. To achieve such perfection, one could depend on a set of universal truths and principles. Like science, art too could progress and be ‘progressive’ if it followed a certain model. In the period we call Modern proper (roughly, 1880-1960), the dominant paradigm in art was a formalist one, wherein progress was measured by art’s investigation of *form* (From Monet to Cezanne to Mondrian to Pollock, etc.). By extension, art education also developed a formalist leaning. In the early 20th century, art educator Arthur Wesley Dow developed terminology that privileged art’s form over anything else. His reduction of the visual experience into ‘elements of art’ and ‘principles of design’ had a scientific, objective and highly structural leaning, which influenced generations of arts educators. Analyzing art for its constituent form is certainly a useful starting point, but eventually, it proved insufficient. In this scientific/progressive mindset, what were left out were the content, context and meaning of the work of art. Art educator Paul Duncum (2010) states,

While the early 20th century elements and principles remain important as one way to consider the formal qualities of images, they are hopelessly inadequate as a

means to organize a curriculum commensurate with the world in which we now live. We need principles for contemporary curriculum. (p.10)

Duncum's observation underscores the paradigm shift that has occurred in Western culture, in art and in education in the last several decades. Realities such as pluralism, multiculturalism, globalism, technology and information have created a new world.

The term 'postmodern' was first introduced by historian Arnold Toynbee in 1939, referencing the end of the modern period and used as a critique of the Enlightenment (Stankiewicz, 1998). In terms of a cultural and academic movement, it may be understood as a reaction to modernism in the Humanities. Whereas modernism was primarily concerned with generalized principles such as truth, certainty, unity and progress, postmodernism is associated with specificity, relativity, skepticism, plurality and difference. Very broadly speaking, the universality and transcendence aspired to, by modernist formalism as well as other strains; gave way to an art re-infused with subject, identity and critique.

Postmodern thinking examines the 'truths' of modernism. Rather than trying to find absolute truths of its own, it seeks out multiple viewpoints and perspectives and embraces their coexistence. This critique of universal truths and grand narratives led to a re-examination of the whole process of representation, including language—both written and visual. Representation was found to be merely a reflection of ideology, and thus undermined and politicized. In cultural forms such as literature and the arts, this has led to a preference for more fractured forms, including appropriation, re-combination and interdisciplinary, over traditional, unified and authorial works. In the trajectory of

modernism, exceptions such as Duchamp may thus be seen as early postmodernism. (Huini, 2005).

Why is it important to consider a postmodern approach in older adult art education? If the system ‘isn't broken,’ and older adults are not demanding a change in the types of classes or programming that are being offered, why consider such an overhaul? How likely is it that older adults would willingly embrace postmodernism or even be inclined to investigate its implications? Hoffman (1988) acknowledges the fact that, “Superficial attitudes concerning the arts limit the depth, meaning, and quality of the creative experience. Such attitudes keep many adults from freely interacting with the arts and confine the range of experimentation to preconceived notions of what art should be” (p.54). Introducing students to the idea that the classroom is a “mirror to cultural diversity” (Clark, 1998, p.11), and thus a place for equal opportunity can be a starting point to implementing a postmodernist approach. Because older adults differ greatly in their background, knowledge, skill and need, such pluralism would be welcomed. The question remains how to help students expand their notions of art? Art educator Lillian Ball-Gish (1998) advises that we respect students’ beliefs, but that we “invite them to explore and expand their notions of what art is” (p. 62). This may open the door for updating our underlying values that guide our curricula for older adult students of art.

Because art education is a hybrid discipline, its many sources should be examined. The main source is of course contemporary art and contemporary artistic practice. By definition, art education should continuously be incorporating new artistic practices, and thus has a responsibility to keep up with those innovations. As art educator Olivia Gude (2007) notes because contemporary art is also very much informed by,

“important contemporary discourses, such as cultural studies, visual culture, material culture, critical theory, and psychoanalysis, these too should be explored” (p. 7).

For example, art education historian Arthur Efland embraces a more postmodern model of art education when he emphasizes its potential to address social and political issues. Efland (1996) remarks that art making may “cultivate [students] capacity for independent thinking as well as their imagination to express and respond to moral concerns that come to light in their lived experience, including problems encountered in other spheres” (p. 52). His approach emphasizes the student’s particular position within a society, and is thus political. Some educators might argue that making art is more than a platform to express political and social agendas (Clark, 1998) and that students need to master a technique before tackling larger issues. While there is no reason that the two cannot coexist, it is, nevertheless, an example of a modernist/postmodernist divide.

Art educator Melody Milbrandt (1998) points out that a frequent issue that appears in the literature about modernism is that the ideal of the artist—often a white male—is depicted as a “solitary maverick or hero” (p. 52). This illustrates the historical privilege and authority that was awarded to the keepers of power in society. It also illustrates how this figure was celebrated, in a very narrow sense, for their inspiration and genius. In direct opposition, postmodernism wishes to democratize the sphere. As art educator Mary Ann Stankiewicz (1998) explains, we should be “giving way to more interest in listening to previously ignored voices, to the stories of women and other minorities” (p. 5). Thus, incorporating a postmodern approach means de-emphasizing the modernist idea that art is an aesthetically unique object, viewed without considering the circumstances in which it was created. Rather, as Efland (1996) notes, a postmodern

approach understands that “art is a form of cultural production that should be studied in its culturally situated context” (p. 53).

In contrast to the antiquated and now seemingly irrelevant elements and principles of design, Gude proposes a new set of principles of possibilities that considers the students’ point of view. She explains,

A quality art curriculum does not just disseminate art historical, technical, or formal knowledge. Through a quality art education, students become familiar with, are able to use the languages of multiple art and cultural discourses, and are thus able to generate new insights into their lives and into contemporary times.

These abilities to investigate, analyze, reflect, and represent are critical skills for citizens of a participatory democracy. (Gude, 2007, p. 14)

Thus, through a postmodern lens, art education becomes a much more ambitious undertaking, overlapping with many other spheres.

By now, the modernist approach to mainstream art education has been questioned by professionals in the field. However, the literature pertaining to art education for older adults has not. Kathy James (2008) asks, “How do we make art relevant for older learners? Do we uphold ideals that are elitist that exclude older adults, and that are socially detached?” (p. 22). These questions can begin to be answered through the positions taken by educators who assume a postmodernist art pedagogy. The first understanding is that there is not just one right way or one voice to espouse. For it has been established that older adults are defined by their diversity, making it difficult to implement a universal standard. Postmodern educators call for a moving away from an elitist view of art, and thus an idealized art program. As James (2008) states, “What we

need most in older adult art education is a view that reconnects art with society and recognizes the value of art in everyday life and for everyday purposes” (p. 281). By focusing on the individual, as he or she is enmeshed in social issues, we give value to the social components of education and learning.

Considering context and meaning calls into question how we can assist older students to dig deeper and find connections to the personal in art making, so that all have a place at the table. Gude (2007) suggests, “emphasize developing students' abilities to engage in sustained inquiry without requiring a clear right answer, and enable students to utilize a number of approaches to interpret meaning from a wide variety of visual and verbal texts” (p. 15). In this way, art is viewed as a form of inquiry, rather than a rarified skill. James (2008) concurs, as she explains, “No longer passively receiving information, students learn how to think critically, how to examine their assumptions, how to democratically construct knowledge” (p. 290). Using this approach, ageist stereotyping is challenged, empowering older adult students to question, look, and create a range of cultural perspectives.

How does this translate into curriculum? One example is the framework of visual culture, an analytical approach that goes hand in hand with postmodern art education. Visual culture is “the totality of humanly designed images and artifacts that shape our existence,” (Freedman, & Stuhr, 2004, p. 816) thus reaching far beyond what was previously considered the fine arts. It is true that the populations most influenced by visual culture are children and adolescents, but when we consider the Baby Boomer generation, it is also a fact that older adults have been exposed to a media-saturated culture all their lives—from television, to film, to advertising and the Internet. Thus,

within the realm of contemporary art, and by extension contemporary art education is the challenge to broaden the domain to consider the various visual cultural forms. Are new forms of visual technology (from digital video cameras to Photoshop) being employed in adult art classes, or do we assume that older adults prefer the more traditional forms of media? Or is it possible as Gude (2007) states, “to consider contemporary as well as traditional artistic and critical practice and ask what students need to know to successfully make and understand art and culture today” (p. 12).

Successful Art Programs for Older Adults

The majority of arts programming for older adults takes place in community centers, local nursing homes, residences for the elderly, and day care centers. Much of the artwork created in these settings favors a craft-kit production and conventional themes. The most prevalent genres include landscape and still life, marked by many pleasant images of flowers, birds and butterflies. By contrast, in my research I have discovered several art education programs for older adults that strive to push the limits of art making by encouraging intellectual stimulation. In light of the discussion above, these programs may be understood to embrace a more postmodern model.

Elders Share the Arts (ESTA) is a community arts organization located in Brooklyn, New York. ESTA’s teaching methodology has come to be called “Living History Arts,” which is a synthesis of oral history and art that engages older adults in literary, visual or dramatic presentations. ESTA’s mission is to foster an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging, and to develop programs that build on this understanding.

Within their core programs of “Living History Arts,” ESTA offers two visually based programs: ‘Legacies’ and ‘Life Collage.’ The thrust of each program is to transmit the participant’s memories and life experiences into a visual presentation, usually through collage or painting. The program can run from five to forty sessions. More specifically, the Legacies workshop seeks to

Engage elders in exploring their fundamental values, ethics, and philosophy through the making of a “life book,” using a blend of both visual and written art. These works are an expression of the life lessons, personal histories, and core beliefs elders hold most dear. Their stories bear witness to a changing time in a changing America. Stories of immigration and labor, of Depression and prosperity, of war and peace, of cultures and traditions, of family and home.”

(Elders Share the Arts, Website 2011)

The strength of the program is the investigatory procedure of drawing upon the events in the student’s life as a starting point for making art. More than mere personal reminiscences, the life experiences reviewed are seen in terms of their complex social and historical contexts. In a postmodern sense, it is about seeing the world through the eyes of others—a personal journey but on a social stage. The interdisciplinary tactic of using a book format to collect their stories communicates that art is more than something that gets placed on walls.

Life Collage is a training program for individuals working with the elder population. These individuals are not necessarily trained artists or educators, but rather staff or volunteers who are working in senior centers, naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), and other community-based sites. In a series of workshops,

ranging from two days to ten weeks, an ESTA staff member demonstrates a 5-step process to create collages rooted in the participant's life experiences. One step involves reflecting on the individual's life experiences in order to create a list of memories. Another step involves participants engaging each other in what is called a 'reminiscence interview.' Guided visualizations are used as yet another way to elicit memories. The process for creating the collages has admittedly modernist underpinnings, with the elements and principles of art (color, line, form, contrast, etc) emphasized. Nevertheless, the program's strengths are rooted in the processes of exploring memories as a method for creating meaning for the specific artist in question. With the emphasis on identity and narrative within the social sphere, these exercises begin to embrace a more postmodern model of art making.

Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts (CEYA) falls under the jurisdiction of the Institute of Aging in San Francisco, California. The Center sponsors a wide variety of apprenticeship and mentorship programs connecting seniors, youth and artists to their communities through creative expression.

Working with high schools, middle schools, local arts agencies, and community centers, CEYA pairs older and younger persons in collaborative, educational programming under the instruction of professional visual and performing artists. Artists are carefully selected and trained by geriatric professionals and educators to work with older adults and youth. CEYA provides the infrastructure for planning, designing and implementing cross-generational projects and community presentations, such as local art exhibits. Many of the artists and audiences are composed of diverse populations, including Asian and Russian immigrants.

“My Story Art Exhibition” is one of the many exhibitions sponsored by CEYA. For one year, residents and members of a low-income housing development for people age 62 and older, in collaboration with the San Francisco Tenants and Owners Development Corporation, work creatively with professional artists and the Artistic Director in drawing and painting. Subsequently, participants work on self-portraits and reminiscences that are exhibited in a variety of mixed media.

Another program titled “Home Services” encourages artists to, “engage participants on a plan of constructive, challenging, and empowering creative work. Projects are created and tailored to the abilities, special interests, and talents of the participant, as well as the assigned artist (Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts, website, 2011). Activity sessions are 1.5 hours, with a minimum of one session per week. After an assessment, the participants and assigned artists develop a 12-session collaborative project that takes place in the home. The strength of the program lies in the fact that it encourages older adults to continue to be engaged in life, while developing mastery in one area of their life. It also offers older adults opportunities for social engagement, which in turn helps to produce feelings of empowerment in other aspects of their lives.

The mission of CEYA is to address the concerns of aging. The organization believes that reflection and the creative process are productive tools for exploring these issues and concerns. They believe that through art, one can creatively examine life and constructively channel such things as oral history into poetry, painting, and performance. Significantly, CEYA believes that art deters depression and facilitates healing following medical setbacks. (Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts, Website, 2011) Furthermore,

CEYA favors collaborative efforts, such as performance and art exhibits, where wisdom is shared with others, and where individuals may better tolerate many aspects of aging by staying connected to the community.

In one respect, CEYA's art program is based on a modernist model of art making in which the themes/subjects chosen reflect those typically seen when one thinks of art for older adults. Still life, cityscapes, local landmarks and self-portraits predominate, as well as abstraction-based on the elements and principles of art. To the program's credit, however, the work being done is beneficial to older adults, as it helps to change the image of aging, and promotes proven health benefits. Although instruction fails to consider art making beyond its aesthetic appeal, the emphasis on community and collaboration--reaching beyond a model of gallery art and individual style--may be seen as a partial embrace of postmodern values on CEYA's part.

Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts, along with Elders Share the Arts were subjects of a study based on creativity and aging in 2001. The study's aim was to measure the impact of professionally conducted, community-based cultural programs on the general health, mental health, and social activities of older adults aged 65 and older. As a result of the study, positive health outcomes were observed among individuals involved in participatory art programs, as they experienced meaningful social engagement and developed a sense of mastery. (Cohen, Pearlstein, Chapline, Kelly, Kirth, Simmens, 2006).

As outlined above, each program contains elements that provide the possibility of a quality art making experience, along with positive health benefits for older adults. However, from the perspective of older adult art education, there is room for

improvement. Diana Barret (1998) is helpful here when she enumerates four important questions art educators and art organizations need to consider when developing curriculum:

1. Is the Discipline-Based Art Education model incorporated in the design of the unit?
2. Do lessons take into consideration the life experiences of elderly persons, and maximize this as an important base for content?
3. Are lessons designed to promote creative thinking in individuals and to result in authentic works of art?
4. Do lessons allow for group interaction as well as opportunities for individual expression? (p.122)

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), a curricular methodology born of a postmodern era, includes the study of art history, art criticism and Aesthetics, in addition to studio practice. This allows participants to engage in expansive discussion, debate and interaction, equally valued in visual art learning. By incorporating these considerations into the planning of an art curriculum, participants are likely to receive a quality art making experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to begin to answer questions regarding how best to approach the art education of older adults, we have thus far surveyed the related literature in the field. To review, we have explored aging from a physical perspective, examined the role of education in later life, assessed older adults' interest in art and the prevalent issues associated with art making at this stage of life, and surveyed exemplary older adult art education programs.

In this chapter, I offer extensive field data on the art education of older adults. First, I present and analyze my own teaching practice with this population. Second, I present relevant interviews with fellow art educators, who likewise teach the older adult population. Lastly, I offer valuable interviews with older adult art students themselves, who openly discuss their motivations, expectations and experiences. Through these, it is my hope to glean answers as to how teachers of older adults can offer quality art programming that is built upon principles of postmodern art, in addition to more technical and formal considerations. I believe these principles will be of great value to the older adult, as they provide a complex and carefully thought out educational approach to the role of art in societies.

When I first became interested in teaching art to older adults, I began by looking

for opportunities in my own community of Washington Heights in Manhattan. There, I discovered the Seniors Together for Action and Recreation (STAR) organization. I initially began volunteering at STAR in June 2008. From that point on, my experience working with older adults grew to include two other groups, at New York Public Library branches of Fort Washington and Countee Cullen. All three of these groups were very diverse, both educationally and economically. Considering all participants at all three sites, very few students had ever taken an art class, and only one had been employed in the art field as a commercial artist. I shall now speak of my experiences as an art educator of older adults, at each of these New York City sites.

Seniors Together for Action and Recreation (STAR) Senior Center

This first site is a senior center, located in the uppermost east side of Manhattan in Washington Heights, a neighborhood predominantly populated by immigrants from the Dominican Republic. Never having taught older adults, I needed first to understand their intent in attending the class, as well as their various interests and abilities. To gain this insight, I decided the first few classes would be based on observational drawing from a still life setup. This allowed me an opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses, giving me a better idea as to how to structure the lessons. From my perspective, I was more comfortable beginning with the basic technical aspects of drawing rather than exploring expressive drawing. Additionally, I consulted with the participants themselves, inquiring about what it was that they were interested in learning. On the first day of class, a few of the students brought in images of paintings and expressed to me that they wanted to learn to paint and draw in a realistic fashion.

The Center is located in the basement of a church. The class was held in a small multipurpose room, located in the furthest corner of the basement and adjacent to the kitchen. In the room, there is one window that could not be opened and just enough room for two large banquet tables.

Over the year and a half that I taught at STAR, the attendance fluctuated between seven and eleven students. Eventually, I was left with a core of six students who attended on a regular basis. They ranged in age from sixty to eighty, and had little or no experience. Their reasons for taking the class were for self-enrichment and to improve their skills. I found that most students, with the exception of few, would work on their projects only during class time.

The following is an entry from personal reflection notes, taken on June 2nd, 2008:

The best place to begin with these students is to introduce the basics of drawing and drawing from life, using geometric shapes as a starting point. To balance this, I plan to introduce different materials with which to draw or create marks on the page.

Thus, it became my intention to address the students' levels of confidence and to help them to improve their skills. But simultaneously, I was also interested in encouraging them to experiment, with materials and with techniques. Subsequently, I alternated my approach between teaching technique-based lessons and expressive drawing. For example, in experimenting with expressive drawing, we used sumi-e ink to create chance-based inkblots, concurrently turning them into abstract landscapes. This two-fold approach, of traditional *and* experimental drawing lessons, may be seen as a balance, or compromise, between the students' expectations and my goals as an art

educator.

To encourage students to think about alternative ways to draw, rather than using mark-making, I instructed the students to use torn pieces of colored tissue paper to create a ‘drawing’ of the same still life they originally executed in pencil. I was curious to see how the students would respond to the technique of collage, which would help me to determine future lessons. A few students responded to the material in ways I had not anticipated. One student crumpled up the tissue paper and created dimensional objects and glued them to the surface of the paper, while another tore up small pieces of paper to form the objects, as in the style of a mosaic.

Taking a break from experimenting with materials and techniques, we moved into drawing portraits from photographs of Hollywood idols using a grid system. I chose this subject because I imagined that they enjoyed classic films and would take pleasure drawing actors they admired. To my surprise, they were not familiar with many of the photos I chose, as many of the students were not born in or raised in the United States. The project may have been received more enthusiastically had I brought in the book and allowed them to choose a familiar personality. All along, they had expressed interest in learning how to draw an image ‘correctly,’ so I reviewed with them ways to frame visual information using a viewfinder and a corresponding grid system, to help with proportions. It was my hope that by having these practical approaches to drawing, they would be inclined to draw outside of class. As a result, we only devoted two weeks to this project because they did not have an invested interest in the subject. I believe they became frustrated with creating detailed drawing that called for focus, preferring a project that could afford them more immediate satisfaction.

To bring closure to the eight-session course, I arranged for a fieldtrip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art with a guided tour of the Joseph Turner exhibition. At the end of my eight weeks, David Johnson, Director of the Center, pleased with the consistent attendance and aware of the importance of offering art classes, asked me to continue into the autumn, this time paying me for my services.

With the start of a new session in September 2008, I had suggested to the students that we explore sumi-e painting, which is an East Asian type of brush painting, known as ink wash painting. I devised my unit plan from a book on sumi-e painting. At the time, I believed that it was my responsibility to help them move beyond the idea of having to draw the perfect picture, beyond the notion of “getting it right.” In this instance, my rationale for choosing sumi-e style of painting was: a) its simplicity, b) it doesn't allow the student to go back in and ‘fix’ the image, c) it helps to combat the attitude of having to make things perfect and, d) the results are immediate. The book to which I referred broke the technique down into four basic brush strokes, otherwise called the “four gentlemen,” each a different flower. I accompanied each lesson with a presentation of some aspect of Japanese culture, the symbolism behind each of the four flowers, and cultural and historical facts about tea and tea ceremonies. For each class, I brought in the flower in question, from which they also observed and painted. Initially, the students were frustrated with learning how to hold the brush properly and gauging how to apply the ink, but as the weeks passed, they became more confident. As I had anticipated, they enjoyed the process and were satisfied with their painting.



Figure 1. Sumi-e ink painting lesson.



Figure 2. Abby's sumi-e ink painting.

The students preferred drawing and painting flowers, so in the autumn and spring, I arranged for the class to take a field trip to nearby Fort Tryon Park to practice drawing landscapes and the flora of the Heather Garden. It was my intent for them to use the sketches from the field trip for the next project: to design and paint on silk fabric. I chose to focus on scarves for the reason that I was working in the fashion industry at the time and decided that scarves were another means of exploring the uses of flowers in design. Depending on the outcome, I imagined that selling hand-painted scarves could be a way for them to make money to support the program.

For the scarves project, I asked the students to design floral themes referencing the drawings from our field trips to the park. I had also taken them on a field trip to the neighborhood library, where we viewed a film on fashion design. While they were at the library, they also had the opportunity to do further research. Back in the studio, I had my students paint two scarves in different styles: the first scarf was an abstract/expressive

design painted on white cotton, the second was a more detailed design painted on silk. For this project, we had to move from the small classroom into the main hall, so that we had room to work. The mere fact of being in the public eye now allowed for the other members of the center to observe the class. It was a usual occurrence for those members to praise my students in their efforts.



Figure 3. Community scarf test fabric.

The process of designing and painting on fabric was a very large undertaking and went on longer than I anticipated. Students were losing patience because they were frustrated with the unfamiliarity of this new medium, as well as the length of time the project was taking. As a preliminary step I had them draw their design on illustration board in preparation for the painting stage. Before the students began to paint on the second scarf, I stretched a piece of silk over a frame and they all experimented with the paint on this one sample fabric. They drew an assortment of leaves and lines of all varieties. This was my favorite scarf (Fig. 3); a random design where everyone contributed to the whole ---- a mini mural.

However, up until the completion of the project, more than one student had expressed to me the frustration they had felt, even to the point that they were not going to wear their

scarf because they were not pleased with the end results. I surmised that a project of this depth would probably be more appropriate for individuals who are familiar with the process or an advanced population interested in a craft oriented class. Regardless, to celebrate their accomplishments and address the disappointment, I created an exhibition of their scarves. Alongside each scarf, I encouraged students to write their artist's statement. Some passages follow:

Miriam:

I believe art is the transferring of idea and emotion on to paper, using different forms, lines, and colors. I am inspired to create art when I encounter nature, like the ocean, trees, sunrise, and sunsets.

Alma:

I have very strong likes and dislikes about all work that involves hard work and tiring efforts. I just wish I could draw something and had better perception skills.

Edith:

Art means doing something that will have a person stop and look, not just pass by. The artistic process means being able to try and learn something new.

Elaine:

I see my art progress as a source of joy and motivation. Learning new techniques is challenging, but rewarding. Having begun to paint in my "senior years" has been a great joy; discovering hidden talent. It's not being the best, nor a professional painter. Just progressing at my own pace, is rewarding. Making art means expressing myself; capturing a beautiful landscape on paper. I enjoy the

challenge of drawing a beautiful flower, learning to draw a seascape or a portrait. These things bring joy to my soul.

Cathy:

I have come to understand that everything is art. When we consider making art we should not discard anything because there is something to be learned from it and a way to create art from those objects.

Having the students write an artist's statement offers valuable insights into what they believe they had gained from participating in art classes. In one instance, it confirmed for me the satisfaction students receive from being able to express themselves. Their statements were also indicative of how they had grown in their understanding of art, and in their acknowledgement of the challenges they face in the art making process. Their reflections also proved to be beneficial in that one could gather ideas for future lessons.

New York Public Library, Fort Washington Branch

In February of 2009, I attended an art exhibition and panel discussion titled "Vital Aging in a Vital City." The exhibition was developed by Elders Share the Arts. Their mission is to foster an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging, striving to develop programs that build on this understanding.

The artwork on display was the result of a series of classes held at several senior centers in New York City, based on the theme "A Long Way Home." It was at this public colloquium that Bridget Callahan, Older Adults Services Specialist for the New York Public Library, issued a request for artists to teach classes at their branch locations,

on a *pro bono* basis. Upon approaching her, she put me in contact with the adult librarian at the Fort Washington location, in my neighborhood. I decided to take on the project and designed a four week workshop on collage. My decision for choosing to teach the medium of collage was based on my having taken a useful weekend collage workshop, offered to educators at Elders Share the Arts. The workshop was taught by a member of the ESA staff and resonated with my approach as an artist and teacher. It taught me how to lead discussions with older adults by reflecting on the topic of life experiences. With the help of then-Chair of Art and Design Education at Pratt Institute, Amy Snyder, I also arranged to receive credit for this project as an independent study. What follows is my description of the four week workshop I offered at Fort Washington Branch, titled *Life Maps*:

Maps are tools that help to guide and give direction. Life Maps can show us where we have been and where we might like to go.

Over the course of four weeks, I will teach a workshop on making collages that I call *Life Maps*. By examining the appearance of maps through the lenses of line, texture, color and point-of-view, students will be introduced to the elements of design. I will include historical maps as well as a variety of present-day maps, as they pertain to New York City (i.e. cycling map, bus and subway maps, walking tour maps, etc.) Students will reflect on the function of maps, as well as their metaphorical qualities.

We will examine the work of artists Romare Bearden and Mark Bradford in order to understand how they draw upon city life as a source of inspiration. Both artists

use collage to express their experience of city living. Each week, students will create a new collage using a variety of papers collected and images found. In the concluding class, students will use maps for making collages while drawing upon their lived experiences and memories to inspire their final project. A review of their work and an exhibition will be the culminating event.

We decided to offer this workshop in conjunction with The Uptown Arts Stroll, an annual event that occurs in Washington Heights, sponsored by Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance. I was hoping to attract participants from the neighborhood through their marketing campaign. When I designed the poster for the class, I included the byline “*Life Maps, Collages, Washington Heights, my community-mi comunidad, my people-mi gente, and my world-mi mundo* created.” My intention for adding the tagline was to communicate the idea that while art making is a personal endeavor, its relevance may extend beyond to the social/communal level.

In terms of the studio component, the materials that I brought in for the projects were maps of all types: subway, bicycle, black and white and color copies of maps from Agile Rabbit Book of Historical and Curious Maps, and others. For the first lesson, I handed out black and white copies of maps and had them choose three different maps. We studied the maps for their visual properties, identifying their textures and variety of lines and shapes. I then asked them to cut out shapes from the three different maps and rearrange them, making sure to find a way to connect the pieces by having the

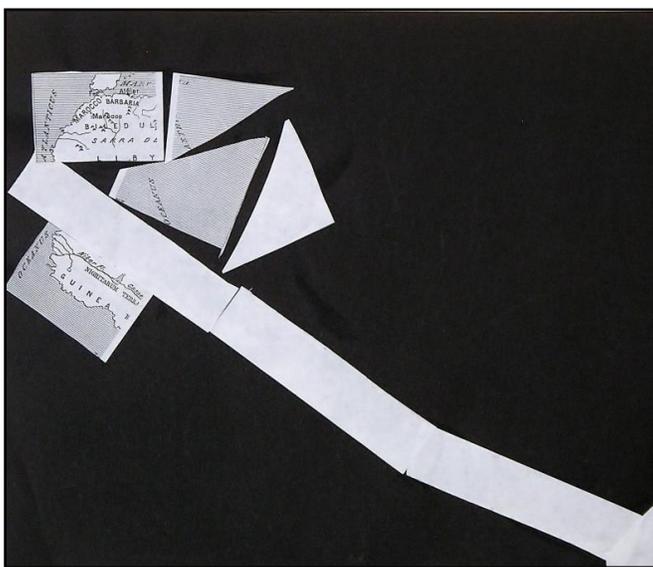


Figure 4. Mary's collage, composition lesson.



Figure 5. Alma's collage, composition lesson.

lines meet up. It was my intention to give them specific instructions and to set parameters that would help them to create a composition (Figs. 4 & 5). In the next lesson, we took a more metaphorical approach to the concept of maps. We shared a discussion about ‘special places,’ based on several poems that I had provided; one was about the George Washington Bridge, the other about the poet’s beloved bedroom. To follow up, I had them write a list of twenty places that were special to them, eventually asking them to choose one. I then had them draw this special place on white paper. Once they had completed their drawing, they cut it up into shapes and then traced those shapes onto black paper, as well as onto a map of the neighborhood of Washington Heights. Using the pieces of the black paper and the map, they would have to create a new composition. After everyone had completed their collage, I hung them on the wall next to each other. Seeing the work as one composition, as one continuous map of sorts, had a magical feel.

Everyone commented that the end-result had taken on a new meaning and that they found it interesting to consider how their lives intersected.



Figure 6. Kassandra's collage reminiscence lesson.

For most beginner drawing students, the end goal is to faithfully replicate in lines the entire object before them. On the other hand, with collage, scissors are the tools that help to delineate contour and shape form; the stakes for precision and exactness do not become barriers that inhibit or frustrate the student, the way drawing can. In such a way, the starting point becomes the often already-existing images that students collect and assemble, in order to create meaning. This lessening of the pressure on the student allowed them then to focus on the content of the project.

When I designed the curriculum, I chose to take a Disciplined Based Art Education approach, so as to include related activities in the realm of art history, art criticism and Aesthetics, as well as the studio component. Employing this method also helped me to structure and to vary my lesson plans, as well as introduce students to

various languages when discussing art, aside from the formal one. On the walls of the room, I hung various assortments of maps for the students to study. I also displayed the books that I had used for my research on a separate table within the class. On the other side of the room, I had a projector for the PowerPoint presentations I prepared, which featured images of all types of maps throughout history.

In many of the readings I encountered about teaching art to older adults, authors suggested integrating an element of life review into class discussion, as well as into the project. I heeded this advice by allowing a lot of time for sharing life stories that could help students construct personal narratives. It is by reflecting on such moments that art is made pertinent to the students and their lives. As seen in the literature review, from a psychological perspective, the work of old age involves reminiscence and making peace with the past; what Erikson calls ego-integrity. And while I am aware that older adults do not always wish to reflect on the past, it is nevertheless a great resource for subject matter.

Reading and reflecting upon the poems that I had provided helped to initiate meaningful conversations and sparked forgotten memories. This activity proved to be a very positive aspect of the class, creating an ease in which everyone got along, marked by a sense of camaraderie and willingness to share life experiences. I also believe that it helped to create a safe environment for students to respond to each other's work. All in all, these activities fulfilled the non-studio components advised by the DBAE method. The advantage of holding an art class at a library is the access one has to all sorts of equipment: laptops, projectors, televisions, portable CD players, not to mention the books and DVDs. This also strengthened my comprehensive DBAE approach. (Incidentally,

the class was held in a large, private room in the lower level of the library. This meant that we had the room to ourselves and I didn't have to compete to be heard as often as I had in the senior centers, where classes are often held in the same room where members socialize.)

Reviewing the students' evaluation of the workshop, and my own perception of the course, I observe that they gained a new insight into what collage is or could be. For instance, Janie commented that her favorite aspect of the workshop was "seeing maps in different ways and observing how different people's vision is from looking at pictures so differently." Maria enjoyed "meeting new people and expressing our own ideas, learning much more about the different ways of creating collages." These discoveries were satisfying to witness. Nevertheless, there were also challenges associated with this class. One challenge was the students' lack of experience. For all of the participants, this was their first time ever taking an art class. Thus, there was apprehension and lack of confidence. Another challenge was fluctuating attendance. Some common reasons that kept students away included health issues and inclement weather. While the size of the class ranged from eight to three students, only one student had attended all four sessions.

Reflecting on this experience, I am now aware of my own shortcomings as a teacher. Some problems included deficient design of the projects, vague instructions, and lack of clarity. While I spent much time gathering materials and creating a dynamic presentation of images for inspiration, my studio directions and lessons were not as well thought out. This self-assessment is corroborated by some of the students' negative feedback. Comments that I received regarding these lessons conveyed that some students were not inspired by the materials we were using, while others didn't feel a connection to

the neighborhood. Reviewing my own notes from the classes, I recounted that I was not excited about some of the work they had created and questioned what this said about my teaching. By the end of the experience, I had come to the realization that I needed to simplify my lessons. I also determined that four weeks was too short of a time period and that it was ambitious of me to think that inexperienced students would be able to complete a project every week.

New York Public Library: Countee Cullen Branch

In May of 2010, my colleague Celia Hart Caro and I were two of six artists awarded a grant from Lifetime Arts, a non-profit organization whose mission is to,

Encourage creative aging by promoting the inclusion of professional arts programs in organizations that serve older adults; to prepare artists to develop the creative capacity of older adult learners; and to foster lifelong learning in and through the arts by increasing opportunities for participation in intergenerational and community based programming. (Lifetime Arts Website)

The program was launched in Westchester libraries. After receiving further funding, and forming a partnership with the New York Public Library, the program was extended to six other branch libraries. In applying for the grant, Celia and I decided to expand the Life Maps collage workshop into eight weeks instead of four, revamping the curriculum so as to allot two weeks to complete each project. Two of the projects were designed around lessons on positive and negative space and symmetrical and asymmetrical design. A third lesson used mail art as an inspiration for creating collages. The fourth lesson was inspired by Romare Bearden's collage work, with a short in-class project on abstract art.

The final project was a life map. We decided to revise the curriculum because we needed to balance formal and technical lessons with lessons on conceptual imaginative play. The revisions also allowed us to further develop the life review aspect, so as to create more opportunities to investigate and engender personal and shared meaning.

Countee Cullen Library is located in Harlem, a neighborhood whose history is steeped in the African American experience. Thus, it made good sense to choose to study the work of Romare Bearden. All of the students were African American; some having grown up in the neighborhood, others having migrated to the area. On the first day of class several of the students shared with us that it was because of their familiarity with Bearden's work that they signed up for the class. One student brought in a book of his work to show that he did his research.

Lifetime Arts president, Maura O'Malley, emphasized that adults come looking for mastery so that they are empowered to continue practicing on their own. To that end, she asked that we not 'dumb down' our lessons. Her advice prompted me to investigate more rigorously the history of collage and how artists have used it as a means to comment on society and on issues of cultural importance. The final project for the class developed into an assignment wherein students used maps from their past, present, and future, and arranged them within the confines of their silhouette. Celia and I both believed that it wasn't enough to just consider one's past, but that it was necessary to reflect on the possibilities that the future holds. We wanted to know what the dreams and aspirations of older adults were, especially because some may believe that old age precludes new possibilities. It was my belief that the use of collage would help them to move beyond the constraints of conventional, representational art and make a personal

connection to the assignment.

In addition to the benefit of collage addressed earlier (as opposed to, say, drawing), collage has a familiarity because students have likely been exposed to the acts of cutting and pasting when creating photo albums or scrapbooks. In my experience, students do indeed display an ease and confidence when creating collages. The technique of collage also lends itself to incorporating principles more associated with postmodern art: appropriation, re-contextualization, layering and juxtaposition. Thus, it facilitates art making that does not strictly, or merely, adhere to the elements and principles of design.

For the introductory lesson, we chose to look at collages, first from a nostalgic perspective (Hans Christian Andersen and Victorian collages), then the modern (Picasso, Kurt Schwitter, Dada, Surrealist), early postmodern in the form of Pop, and lastly



Figure 7. Shedrick's collage, Romare Bearden lesson.



Figure 8. Tyrone's collage, Romare Bearden lesson.

contemporary artists who use maps for creating collages. This being the second time I had taught the class, and thus aware of past shortcomings, I made sure to make my

instructions succinct and to the point.

For our second class, we wanted to take time to get to know more about each of our students, including why they chose to take the class, and what they hoped to learn. Initially, we were going to have them write out the answers but we decided that it was important that they verbally share their answers with one another. We believed that this would 'take the mystery' out of the situation and help them connect and begin to form a community. We found that of the nine students, one had taken craft classes before, one was an amateur photographer, one had worked in the design field as a graphic designer, and for the remaining six, and this was their first art class.

As we were settling into the course, some problems immediately arose. For the first class, eleven adults showed up, but by the following week, the attendance dropped to nine. We surmised that the two adults who dropped out most likely were expecting a different, perhaps more traditional sort of art class. Additionally, as is the case with older adults, and as I had previously experienced, health issues played a factor in attendance. In another instance, we encountered students who lacked self-confidence and wished to leave the class. We managed to convince them not to give up by allowing them to sit and observe. One student considered herself to be a stronger writer, so I encouraged her to write about a life experience instead of drawing it.

As things settled down, this group of students got along very well. Some had known each other from other senior center programs or from living in the area. Because of my background in theatre, and experience in leading groups in opening icebreaker exercises, I introduced a name game as a way for us to remember each other names. It eased the anxiety, and established a friendly atmosphere. Subsequently, the students

loved to talk and share their experiences, as well as participate in class discussion. We also concluded that ninety minutes for the class was too short, and that we should schedule the class for a full two hours.

In terms of self-evaluation, there are a few points to be made. Thinking back on that experience, I realize that at times, we may have bombarded students with too much information. It is important to simplify and pace information, especially at the start of the session, and particularly for those students new to art class. It is often the case with new teachers that they pack a lot of material into a lesson, often as a form of self-validation. This is cause for reflection. Indeed, one student had expressed that she had felt overwhelmed. She attributed it to the fact that she had Lupus, but I also believe that we were giving them more information than was necessary for beginning level students.

There were also problems with specific lessons. The one project that most of the students had trouble with was the Negative and Positive Space exercise. Students had trouble differentiating between the two. I realize now that even seasoned students can grapple with this concept, and that this would be an example of an advanced lesson for older adults. Another lesson that they struggled with involved cutting a letter of the alphabet from a page of a map. I had taken this lesson from one of my art school classes and thought that it was appropriate for the workshop. However, because of my lack of detailed instructions, it took a while for my older students to grasp the concept. The student who was a graphic designer did not have any issues finding the letter; rather it was the beginning students who struggled with the project. If I were to do this exercise again, I would give each student the same map and we would trace the outline of the letter as a class. Afterwards, I would give them a second map to trace a new letter.

I believe one of the strongest and most valuable features of the class was leading students in a class critique. Participants found it beneficial to be able to look at each other's work. It also helped to reinforce the lesson, when students were able to witness how their classmates accomplished the assignment. One student, Fred, commented that, "he loved seeing everybody's work, how they are expressing themselves, and how the artist in everyone is developing." (Personal notes October 26, 2010). Another student, Alma, who at first was having confidence issues in expressing her ideas visually, became very engaged in the critique process. After receiving positive comments on her abstract collages, Alma took on the next assignment without hesitation.

Another realization of success came in reflecting on the content and concept of the Life Maps project. I am of the mind that older adults should not be seen in terms of



Figure 9. Joyce's collage, Life Map Silhouette.

Figure 10. Tyrone's collage, Life Map Silhouette

just their history and memories. It was through the Life Map workshop that we asked the participants not just to look at their past but to consider the present and the future.

Interviews with Art Teachers of Older Adult

To better understand how art teachers approach their classes for older adults, I conducted individual interviews with five teachers. Two of the five teachers work in museum education, the remaining three are trained artists who work part-time in senior centers. After introducing the five educators, I provide an analysis and discussion of the interviews, including selected quotes. The interviews helped me to compare my own teaching practice with that of my peers, and provided valuable insight into the field of older adult art education in general.

Melanie Adsit works as a freelance museum educator in and around New York City and at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where she teaches all age groups. She holds a Bachelor's degree in art and psychology from Boston University, and a Master's degree in art and art education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Riva Blumenfeld is a museum educator who works with adult and school groups at the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the 92nd Street Y. She holds a Master's degree in art history.

Celia Hart Caro works as a freelance teaching artist in a variety of settings, teaching all age groups from children to older adults. She earned her undergraduate in visual arts from Empire State College, and a Master's in art and design education from Pratt Institute.

Liz Curtin is a multi-media artist and crafts person. She has extensive experience teaching all age groups at such institutions as Carter Burden Center and Hudson Guild Community Center. Curtin has been teaching a variety of craft making processes to older

adults for twenty-five years.

Elisa Velazquez is an art therapist and presently teaches in a Head Start Program. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting and ceramics from Florida International University and Master's degree in art therapy from New York University.

Teaching art to older adults is not as popular as teaching to children or teens, most likely for the reason that full-time opportunities are not as plentiful as with younger populations. However, art educator Riva Blumenfeld greatly enjoys the older adults that she encounters in the senior centers where she teaches throughout New York City. In fact, Blumenfeld considers it "one of the best kept secrets of her profession" (Blumenfeld Interview, 2011). Most of her work with older adults involves leading tours in various museums, but there is the occasional workshop that takes her into senior centers. Blumenfeld stresses the fact that she is not an artist, and she believes that is why she is able to teach older adults, because it levels the playing field. As she tells her older adults students, most of who are inexperienced, "Every project we are going to do, I can do too, and I am not a practicing artist" (Blumenfeld Interview, 2011). She believes that this disclaimer, along with her use of simple materials, makes the class less intimidating and demystifies the art making process.

Melanie Adsit, also a museum educator, believes that she is, first and foremost, an educator, and that her training in education enables her to lead students in the process of inquiry. Melanie believes that by finding connections between the older adults' life experience and the work of art, "sets a foundation of 'I can do this'" (Adsit Interview, 2011).

Elisa Velazquez was awarded the position of artist-in-residence at the Hudson Guild Community Center, through an initiative from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Center for the Aging. As she explains, she prefers to take on the role of helper. Velazquez says, “I am there to be the helping hand. It is supposed to be a communication between me and them. They talk to me and tell me what they want to make. I am there to help them brainstorm and help to support their idea” (Velazquez Interview, 2011). Additionally, when making art, Elisa doesn’t believe in perfection; she tries to emphasize the process over the end product.

Celia Caro approaches the experience of teaching art to older adults as collaboration, viewing it as an ongoing learning experience. She states, “I have a philosophy of mutual respect, and I want to help them communicate and learn things they have not learned before” (Caro Interview, 2011).

Liz Curtin has worked with older adults in community and senior centers for over twenty-five years, and draws upon her extensive knowledge and experience in handcrafts. Her philosophy when teaching older adults is to create a fun atmosphere, to be encouraging, and to make the projects interesting and challenging. She finds that she needs to be the cheerleader and to offer positive reinforcement.

Lack of confidence is an issue that is prevalent in older adult students and can play out in a variety of ways. Riva views insecurity as the number one concern when working with older adults. A tactic that she employs in order to address their uncertainty is to pair up those students who have experience making art with novices who are intimidated. Confidence issues can arise when the artwork of the instructor is used as a barometer from which the students judge their own work. Liz has found that her students

will compare their work to hers' and inevitably criticizes their work because they believe it falls short. It is for that very reason some teachers will refrain from showing their work in class so as not to discourage their students or inhibit their efforts.

In the course of my interviews, I asked these five teachers about class content, and how they go about choosing topics for their lessons. Specifically, I inquired as to whether they do indeed include 'life review' as a theme within their teaching. Celia responded that she does not believe that 'life review' is of first and foremost importance in the curriculum. She explained,

Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't choose to bring in an element of life review. I did a Chagall project and they reacted very positively to it because it was about a happy memory or a dream. It was something that was a little abstract. It wasn't something that specifically happened. I believe that it shouldn't just be about memory. I think older adults do not want to be seen just for their past, they still have a present, they still have a future. (Caro Interview, 2011)

In the beginning, Elisa treated her classroom as an open studio. As she and her students got to know each other better, she was able to make clearer decisions about where to direct her lessons. Elisa knew that she wanted her students' work to be autobiographical. To that end, she had them create self-portraits. However, some could not manage the technical skills of drawing or painting a self-portrait, and others found it too personal. She explains her solution:

I made it broader and said it can be something that represents them, so someone chose to paint their favorite flower, a picture from a trip, a landscape... someone

else their summer home. It is about them and their lives but in a way that wasn't threatening." (Velazquez Interview, 2011)

Elisa shared with me that, in the beginning, she started her students off with two-dimensional lessons in order to build up their confidence. Then, once they became comfortable with one medium or technique, she introduced three-dimensional projects. On the other hand, Celia would look at her students' past projects as a means of assessing their level and interest. She would ask questions and propose certain projects, and then gauge their reaction and whether they were resistant to any of her ideas. Thus, Celia bases her lessons on what her students are interested in learning. She doesn't believe in imposing her ideas on them. Relying upon student-driven inquiry and student input exemplifies the importance of implementing learner control, elements which are paramount in adult art education. Learner control encourages the student to assume responsibility for his or her own learning and not to solely rely on the teacher for direction.

Having knowledge of an older adult student's philosophy of aging can help to anchor the lesson in a meaningful experience. Celia shared with me a conversation that she had with her student that centered on aging:

My student Helen had said to me one day 'I really want to draw the body,' and shared with me how she had the gift of not being afraid of aging and wanted to document it in some way. Her reflection helped to transform how I look at aging, and for me growing older is something I could take ownership of instead of avoid. Through our conversation it was a way for me of putting my ego to the side and

listening to a student, and for her, it made her feel validated because she was contributing to the class. I couldn't have come up with this without her input.
(Caro Interview, 2011)

The theme of aging and reflecting on the changes that occur at this stage in an individual's life may be daunting. However, there are ways to approach such a topic, and Caro has found a way to address it in a non-threatening way, by considering the body as a reflection of that change.

Liz Curtin explains that she gleans from past lessons that she has created, and that she supplements these with ongoing research on the Internet. She prefers to stay on top of different trends and keeps connected to what is happening in the craft world. Being a multi-media artist, she often plans her lessons around collage and stamping.

Like Celia, Liz also engages in dialogue with her students, asking them for their input. As for drawing upon students' life experiences, she does develop autobiographical projects. Some of these involve self-portrait collages, or other projects that she calls 'personal shrines.' For a personal touch, students might add elements or objects that they bring from home and incorporate into their piece. As Liz explains, many times, students like to make things that they can give away to family or friends, such as necklaces, greeting cards or something for the home. Useful crafts in particular bring them much enjoyment and a sense of fulfillment.

As we have seen, the technique of collage is a popular form of expression in adult art instruction. Melanie has found that in general, anybody over the age of seven is nervous about their drawing ability. With older adults especially, when presented with the

prospect of drawing, many will say, “I can’t draw,” or, “I can’t paint.” Because of this phenomenon, Melanie often resorts to collage instead. She explains, “Collage takes that pressure of handwork out of it, because with collage... people are more comfortable with craft than they are with art.” She goes on to say that “collage can go into both of those places; it gives them techniques that are more crafty which they’re comfortable with, but also allows for the freedom of expression you’d want with making art” (Adsit Interview, 2011).

In the field of art education, it is mostly understood that inquiry is for children and lecturing is for adults. However, Melanie states, “I have found that not to be the case. When you are talking to older adults about art, inquiry is incredibly successful, and using a combination of discussion and information helps them connect with a work of art and connect with the ideas behind it” (Adsit Interview, 2011). Inquiry based teaching which Adsit is referring to is an approach that invites students to explore art work by posing, investigating, and answering their own questions. Such a method is meant to provoke student’s thinking and curiosity, while giving them ownership of their own learning. Apart from handwork, Melanie also uses certain strategies to ease the approach to looking at art. For instance, when wanting to introduce abstract artwork, Melanie will start by looking at realistic work, and scaffolds it from concrete to abstract. Scaffolding instruction is a specialized teaching strategy that builds upon prior knowledge. This approach can help give older adults a context and foundation for learning new information. Scaffolding is a tactic that is usually employed with children, but she believes that it is also necessary with adults. She emphasizes:

Background information on the artwork and the reasons why the artist created the

piece is very important. It could be information about the artist or information about the context the art was made. It helps to clarify why it is so abstract and that's where the inquiry is so valuable. It is important to have an open conversations about what does this remind you of, have them generate some of the ideas about the abstract work, then you can tie that back into what is actually happening when artwork is made, and they feel ownership of the ideas. (Adsit Interview, 2011)

In essence, by using inquiry, Adsit is employing the methods of critical analysis and aesthetic interaction, which are elements of the discipline-based model of art education (DBAE).

In the teaching profession, it goes without saying that there are sometimes challenges--whether physical, behavioral or attitudinal. In the case of older adults, the challenges can be ideological. Older adults can have a fixed idea of what art is and what defines a work of art. For Blumenfeld, it means spending time in her lessons on Aesthetic debates. She explains, "With adults, I have to help re-define what art is... art is not just about beauty, art is about concept, art is about idea, about looking at things differently. The hard/fun part of working with seniors is to get them to that place to start looking at things from a different perspective" (Blumenfeld Interview, 2010). For Melanie, it is the challenge of demystifying contemporary art and making it accessible for her older adult students. The way that she addresses this challenge is to,

Introduce new ideas and techniques that they might not have been willing to try, and to connect it to their own lives. Make it personal. Once they get past the idea

[that] art has to have a purpose, I know that I am getting closer to my goal. (Adsit Interview, 2011)

Teaching art to older adults demands flexibility. Each group is different and each demographic population within the class may present its own challenges. For instance, Elisa observes that many of her students expect art to be very realistic and ‘perfect.’ As a result, such students may become very frustrated. Elisa explains,

Older adults I find have this idea of what art is, and they are very scared and timid to use new materials. There is a sense of shame that they “never did it,” or that “it is too late”—is [something] I hear a lot. For me, I always try to encourage them that it is never too late. I am going to be learning for the rest of my life.

(Velazquez Interview, 2011)

Elisa’s approach in addressing this problem is to help such students become comfortable using materials. She first introduces dry materials and then gradually progresses to a more complicated medium. She believes that experimenting with materials is a way to relieve the pressure of having to ‘get it perfect’ and persuades her older adult students to experiment and to play. At times, she will pair up students in an attempt to encourage them to help one another build up confidence. She says, “I use a soft hand because they are hard [enough] on themselves” (Velasquez Interview, 2011). It has been her experience that the students at Hudson Guild are a lot less timid about trying new things, because they have been exposed to a variety of art classes and artists. However, for those students who lack experience or exposure to other art classes, providing encouragement and positive reinforcement is an important aspect of success.

Age-related physical changes are part of the aging process. Older adults experience losses in sensory awareness, physical abilities and thought processes which hamper the execution of their artwork and affect their involvement in classes. Both Celia and Liz have had to deal with the physical limitations of their students. In Liz's experience, the big issues are diminishing eyesight and loss of fine motor skills. Older students eventually come to realize that they cannot do everything that they think they can. Very often, they will get frustrated because physical limitations will prevent them from executing a particular technique associated with a project. When they encounter these roadblocks, it is a matter of being able to offer alternatives or modifications to the lesson. For one project, Liz was using a liquid frisket to block out areas of the collages; when the solution dried, it became difficult for some students to detect it. Instead of using the liquid she had to switch to a self-adhesive paper.

Introducing new techniques and mediums is a trial and error process. Celia has discovered that her students like using pencils and paints because they can still control them mechanically, and thus do not feel a loss of dignity. But when she experimented with printmaking, it was met with mixed reviews. Printmaking can be a very physical activity. It requires standing up to properly bray the plates; it demands precision, especially when registering the print; and it requires physical strength to ink the brayer and incise the plates. She emphasized, "I wouldn't even go near linoleum block." Thus, certain mediums have built-in roadblocks which one may wish to avoid.

All of the teachers I interviewed have experienced issues with students' loss of memory. Liz lamented, "I will show them many steps of a demo and they lose it because they can't remember what I just showed them. What also shows up is not paying attention

and getting easily distracted” (Curtin Interview 2010). Celia explained that she conducts her class in a public area and that this proves to be trying because she is competing with many voices and various activities all taking place at one time. It can be very difficult to be heard even under normal circumstances; but for those older adults who have hearing loss, extraneous noise can be overwhelming. In order to make the situation more tolerable, Celia gave one student her iPod so that the music would drown out the noise. Such a situation is a challenge, for on the one hand, it is important that other members of the Center witness the art that is being created, but on the other, outsiders are distracting.

Older adults are the most diverse of all age groups and as such, it is difficult to distinguish a standard set of characteristics on which to rely for instruction. Nevertheless, to understand the diversity of older adult art means identifying some common needs, whether in terms of emotional needs or the need to master certain techniques.

One need identified by the teachers is the need for encouragement. Riva believes that the most important point about teaching older adults is to support them.

I am a very democratic person and I don't normally try to do that. I have learned that pushing is what they need. Their life has gotten narrower and narrower so they stay in their comfort zone. My job is to push them past their comfort zone.
(Blumenfeld Interview, 2011)

Melanie emphasizes that it is necessary to be aware of their needs, and as a result, “tailor teaching... as opposed to having an idea and sticking to it” (Adsit Interview, 2011). One need is to talk and be heard. Melanie recognizes that older adults love to talk and they have the desire to share their experiences. Another need she recognizes is the

need to be challenged. At the end of the day, she has been surprised at the willingness of older adults to try new things and move beyond their comfort zone. It is necessary for teachers to examine their attitudes as they pertain to older adults and misconceptions that they themselves have about aging.

All teachers agreed that older adults have the need to show a completed project, something to show for their efforts. As Liz explains

If people have something tangible at the end of the class, it just makes them really happy because they have a tremendous sense of satisfaction from having made something from start to finish. They want the experience of working with their hands, being in a group setting, to have a social experience, and to learn something new. (Curtin Interview, 2010)

Celia emphasizes the fact that older adult students of art are operating from the point of intrinsic motivation; that is, “they attend class because they want to learn” (Caro Interview, 2011). Equally as important for older adults is the need to see that they are improving and gaining mastery. It engenders a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

These educators have learned through trial and error. They share similarities in the fact that by identifying the needs and interests of their students, they have been able to develop successful approaches to teaching art to older adults.

Interviews with Older Adults

After reading about teaching art to older adults, I was curious to find out firsthand about their philosophies on growing older, and what inspires them to take art classes at this point in their lives. Specifically, I wanted to know what they are interested in

learning and what they perceive as the benefits of making art. The six students who volunteered to participate in my research also took the same collage class at the Hudson Guild Community Center, located in the neighborhood of Chelsea, in New York City. Here are their views and insights, as they pertain to the research.

In conversing with my students, I learned that they lead very active lives and possess positive outlooks on aging. Dorothy, who is in her late seventies, had never taken an art class up until a year and a half ago. She remarks, “In fact, I failed at finger painting in Kindergarten; I never liked anything connected to art. I always thought of myself as being extremely untalented” (Dorothy Interview, 2011). Although she enjoys attending museums and has favorite artists (“Matisse, Renoir, and Kandinsky”), making art was nothing Dorothy ever considered. After seeing the Romare Bearden exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art six years ago, she thought collage might be something she would like to try. It was her friend who told her about the collage class at Hudson Guild, and she decided to enroll and has “loved it ever since” (Dorothy Interview, 2011). For twenty-five years, Dorothy had taught in the New York City school system. She continues to teach at the college level today. In her experience as a teacher she has learned,

When teaching children, you have to expose them to many different things; they’re like a blank slate. But when you’re teaching adults, they bring so much because of their experiences, their emotions, their wisdom, what they’ve been through in life. And this all goes into their art. (Dorothy, Interview, 2011).

Dorothy’s remarks offer important clues and insights about what art educators ought to consider when teaching an older adult population. They underscore the need to value,

encourage and incorporate adult expertise in the classroom. Related to her thoughts about adult learning is her attitude towards aging:

My philosophy of aging is that people have to always learn something new. That's what keeps us alive. We have to be a beginner at something. So I am a beginner at this. I will keep on learning about collage. And in the future I might be a beginner at something else. This keeps one alive. We have to take aging into our own hands (Dorothy Interview, 2011).

I found this curiosity and optimism to be exemplary.

The desire to continue to learn is a common theme that is reflected in several of the interviewee's comments. Donald, who is in his mid-seventies, told me that when friends question him as to why he continues to take classes at his age, he jokes, "You know I'm such a slow learner, I have to live to be a hundred years old" (Donald Interview, 2011). Donald had a career in the theater as a stage director/producer and writes plays for enjoyment. He is proud of the fact that he was the first and only student to show up to the collage class four years ago and that in that time, has only been absent four or five times. For him, working on a project is "very, very relaxing" because he is able to escape from reality and not worry about anything (Donald Interview, 2011).

However, Donald makes an interesting observation regarding curriculum. When taking art classes, he doesn't like the fact that some centers want older students to examine the past. He explains:

The assumption is that old people only want to look at their past, so we did these little collages about our life. And I thought, my life isn't over, I still got thirty years to go. And I've seen that at other centers when I checked them out and it's

like, here I am old, and I'm going to make pictures of what it used to be. (Donald Interview, 2011)

The literature on teaching art to older adults highlights the importance of incorporating an element of life review into lesson planning because it is beneficial in maintaining good mental health. However, it is important to consider that some older students may wish not to contemplate the past, for fear it may trigger unpleasant memories. That is, some students prefer to leave the past in the past, choosing to live in the present. For those students who are wary of such activities, the teacher can help the older adult by recounting a pleasant life experience.

A reoccurring theme that runs throughout the students' responses centers on the opportunity to socialize and learn from one another. For instance, Donald has found his fellow classmates to be supportive, not just in class but outside of class, as some have attended public reading of his plays. Another student, Ruth, expresses a similar sentiment about her fellow students. A former social worker, she has always been involved in some activity, whether it was photography, crocheting, or ceramics; now she fills her days taking several different types of classes, including beading, stained glass, quilting, and collage. Taking art classes gives Ruth an opportunity to socialize; she is able to stay connected with her existing friends, as well as have the chance to meet new people with similar interests. Jane, another student who taught English as a Second Language in an intermediate school, considers herself a loner; taking an art class helps her to get out of the house. She observes of herself, "I like doing everything alone. I go to museums alone; I go to the movies alone. I do everything alone. Going to class forces me to have a

direction, I get up and out” (Jane Interview, 2011). Being in a class environment gives these students the chance to receive support from fellow students, as well as the teacher. Another student by the name of Ruth shared, “I appreciate getting my classmates’ comments because they give me ideas how to make my work better” (Ruth Interview, 2010). Jackie, a student who has been in the collage class for six months and whose profession was housewife and homemaker, finds attending art classes to be “a social affair and I’m learning something that’s keeping me busy and my mind working” (Jackie Interview, 2011). The value of social relationships brought about through art classes is its ability to strengthen the individual’s social support system. Students have the opportunity to share their emotions as they participate in art making.

Having the opportunity to be creative is a priority for all of the students. It is indicative of an individual’s need to share their unique view of life and the world. Thus, taking an art class serves as a creative outlet. A few of the students told me that art class forces them to take risks where otherwise they may be inclined to ‘go about business as usual.’ Jane explains, “I’m taking more risks, trying new things, even though it’s hard for me, but it’s good, and I like sharing my work with other people” (Jane Interview, 2011). Bonnie has been taking the collage class for the last year. She likes participating in art classes because it serves as a form of self-expression. Bonnie told me that, even from a young age, she enjoyed writing and drawing, and that if she ever had a problem and wanted to express her feelings, she would write. She concludes, “I guess I use all these arts in a therapeutic way. It’s like talking to a person; it gets out some of your feelings” (Bonnie Interview, 2011). Bonnie’s insight affirms the therapeutic benefits of the arts and their ability to fulfill emotional needs.

Bonnie worked as an elementary school teacher and taught third and fifth grade. Out of all the interviewees, she is the only one who drew on a regular basis, and who sought out a variety of art making opportunities. In her youth, Bonnie enjoyed looking at the movie section in the newspaper and copying the advertisements. As she recalls, sometimes she would go out on her own, to Central Park or to Englewood, New Jersey, and make landscape drawings. Later on in life, BS liked to use her vacations as an opportunity to learn something new and would take a weeklong painting class in another part of the United States, or another country.

Every participant expressed to me that it has been the teacher who has made all the difference in their learning experience. In speaking of her current teacher, Ruth remarks, “She’s an extremely supportive teacher and always finds something positive to say about everyone’s work. I never feel that I can’t do this. She always comes up with new ideas and new techniques” (Ruth Interview, 2011). Other students commented that they find the teacher to be very interesting, enthusiastic about teaching, and that she has different ways of looking at things. Jackie says, “She’s gotten me more inspired about looking around” (Jackie Interview, 2011). Bonnie has taken other collage classes and the difference that she finds with the class at Hudson Guild is how the teacher structures the class, with a new project and new techniques every few weeks. Thus, art teachers bear a lot of responsibility. As art educator Diane Barret (1998) points out, “it is important to create a psychologically safe environment in which older adults feel free to express their ideas and develop artistic skills” (p. 120).

Collage is a popular art form among older adults because it allows for freedom and flexibility. Jane finds that it is not “threatening” and that, as opposed to traditional

media, she does not feel the pressure to “come up with a beautiful painting” (Jane Interview, 2011). Similarly, Ruth views collage as,

A way of making something you can feel proud of, and you don't need to have a lot of talent to do it. Making a collage gives me the opportunity to make two dimensional pictures without feeling frustrated because I'm not a painter.” (Ruth Interview, 2011)

With yet another vote for collage, Dorothy told me that she loves it because,

Collage allows me to create. I am not so good at figuring out how to use paint; I am very good in terms of metaphor, adding meaning to what I do. There is no wrong or right. And what is nice about collage [is that] you can cover it up. (Dorothy Interview, 2011)

Likewise, Jackie sees the benefit of creating collages. “ [It] helps me think of different ideas, and different ways of doing things” (Jackie Interview, 2011). Thus the technique of collage helps to lower anxiety, especially for beginning level students, and engenders a feeling of possibility.

Knowing what types of art museums older adult students prefer to attend may help in discerning what sorts of art classes they may be drawn to. I found that the interviewees all favored modernist artists and museums that featured more mainstream art. All of them mentioned that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was their first choice because of the wide variety of artwork. The Museum of Modern Art was the second favorite. Some of the popular and favorite artists mentioned included Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, Renoir, Kandinsky, Warhol and Keith Haring.

The answers and reflections that the students shared mirror much of what is discussed in the literature on teaching art to older adults. The primary factors that motivate them to enroll in art classes seem to be a desire to learn a new skill, and a need for an opportunity to be social with people of similar interest. Although some of the participants had tried other types of art classes, collage was the most popular because it was the least threatening among more technical classes.

I find it interesting to consider that half of the interviewees were school teachers and would understand the value in lifelong learning. Five of the six older adults were willing to reflect on their past to inform their art making, whereas one student considered it an “activity for old people.” All believed in the importance of taking risks, but for the most part, were conventional in their risk taking, often in areas with which they were familiar. And overall, having peers to support them in their learning was of high importance as well.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Upon retirement, many older adults have the luxury of time and are faced with defining how they will make use of it. Voluntary enrollment in an art class may be one of those ways, which can satisfy a variety of conscious and unconscious needs. Those needs may include curiosity to learn or relearn a skill, a desire for self-expression, a need for socialization, as well as the simple desire to pursue relaxing and enjoyable activities. In my research, I sought to consider those older adults, specifically the Baby Boomer generation, who will be seeking post-employment activities and experiences that challenge their ways of thinking through art making opportunities. Through my research, which included a survey of literature, interviews with teachers and students, and an autobiographical case study of my own work as a teacher, I am now able to present some conclusions with respect to my inquiry, as well as make some recommendations to the field.

The research shows that art educators who teach older adults need to develop and implement curricula that move beyond the traditions of formal and technical training. They must do so in order to emphasize art as a construction of personal and social meaning—as understood in postmodern artistic thinking and practice. Designing a curriculum for older adults has its differences, than say, for children or teenagers. A chief

difference is that there are no National Visual Art Standards that need to be met, which dictate the content of lessons. Because of this, art educators are invariably left to determine on their own the best teaching practices for older adults; not only how to teach but what to teach. As a result of this greater freedom, it seems that many educators base their lessons on learning a technique or using a specific medium, and thus neglect to emphasize the construction of meaning central to content-rich art making. Art educator Jerome Hausman (1998) affirms his belief regarding teaching art to older adults, “It must be anchored in personal, meaningful experience so that we can stretch beyond fragmented incidents and reach toward inter-relationships that give the experience power and significance” (p.77). Therefore, beyond teaching token media and techniques, it is the responsibility of the teacher to foster meaning making.

When teaching art to older adults, it is essential that the artwork is examined beyond its aesthetic appearance. As this thesis has shown, the *content* of the artwork produced is equally important to the older adult student. Such a curricular emphasis may be accomplished by considering those themes that are discussed in the literature on art making for older adults: life review, narrative, empowerment, and creativity. Considering such themes can be a starting point for curriculum development that will help to foster meaning in the creation of their work.

Teaching conceptually creates an environment where older adults can construct meaning in their art making. Reflection, metaphorical representation, abstract thinking, and analysis are skills that aid in conceptual thinking and subsequent art making. With regards to viewing works of art, a critical analysis approach promotes a deeper understanding of the artist’s intent. What I am suggesting is that we need to teach art to

older adults in a thoughtful manner that moves beyond art as mere recreational activity. In order to offer a quality creative experience, where meaning making is integrated into the curriculum, we should, in the words of Hausman (1998) “Draw upon the narrative of people’s lives as a means for the interpretation and development of shared meanings and personal values. . . [thus] using introspection as a core method for developing shared meanings and values” (p.78). The use of narrative enables the teacher to explore and expand the student’s self-perceived limits, both in term of potential content and potential mediums and approaches.

Considering a postmodern approach in art education for older adults means taking a pluralistic perspective. Such a focus may mean including a range of art practices and traditions, from fine art, to popular to folk-craft. It may also mean exploring a range of artists, including the work of women and minorities. Much of postmodern art deals with raising awareness of social issues that affect society, often as authored by artists of marginalized identities. Because of their vast life experiences, older adults have the advantage of being able to interpret complex images and themes. Thus, an art class could be a platform to explore similar concerns and issues that they themselves may have.

In terms of pedagogical approaches for older adults, engaging in group discussions about historical and contemporary works of art, as well the student’s own artwork, proves to be a valuable approach that helps students construct their own knowledge. In that regard, the Discipline Based Art Education approach is the recommended method for this population. A balance of art history, art criticism and aesthetics, along with studio, seems to work well. Additionally, a student-centered approach serves older adults best because many older students tend to be more self-

directed. As we have seen, older adults often seek to create their own goals and their own strategies for accomplishing those goals. The teacher plays an important role as facilitator, helping to students to realize such aspirations. Overall, the teaching strategies that are employed need to take into consideration how to address the confidence level of the older adult and how to affirm them in their efforts. Ways to address a lack of confidence can be tackled by choosing to use simple materials, relying upon other class members to help one another, and dividing the process into small manageable steps.

Older adults possess a variety of skill sets. By assessing their level of expertise, it is possible to define their experience, confidence and aspirations. When developing a learning experience for older adults, the first step is to establish program goals, which will identify the extent of the program and its content. Second, it is necessary to develop specific objectives and define those instructional strategies that will be utilized to accomplish specified goals. Lastly, it is essential to determine those skills and concepts on which the lesson is based that will help shape the project. It is essential to develop core art making skills, which gives older adult students the means and the self-confidence to express their ideas visually.

For those older adults who are seeking art making experiences, it is highly likely that they ceased taking art classes in their early adolescence and have not advanced in their understanding of art since. I have discovered that older adults who enter a beginning level art class possess many of the same characteristics as teenagers in their artistic development. These attributes include a developed critical awareness, visual attention to reality, dissatisfaction with their visual representations, and a lack of self-confidence in their ability to produce work that meets their standards. One way to combat

these challenges is to establish an emphasis on experimentation and stress the expressive quality of their work. Such an approach helps students to understand the way in which art is produced, and at the same time develops their own sense of artistic expression. Also by encouraging them to play and experiment (beyond the desire for representational accuracy), students are able to discover the possibilities for self-expression.

In the realm of media choices, introducing the technique of collage is one manner of encouraging students to take risks and experiment. For older adults who wish to take art classes, it can be beneficial to begin by taking a collage class. I have discovered through my interviews with teachers and students, and through my own teaching practice that collage is a popular art form for older adults because it is less intimidating and allows for freedom of expression. Creating collages helps to build the student's level of confidence before moving on to more skill-based activities. Additionally, with its ability to exercise such postmodern principles as appropriation, juxtaposition and multiplicity, it is also metaphorically rich for meaning making. This is not to negate the fact that, eventually, drawing skills need to be taught to help the student develop more complex imagery.

Certainly older adults are comfortable and accustomed to a modernist approach, which emphasizes form and de-emphasizes politicized subjects. However, it has been my experience that students are willing to embrace and consider alternate approaches to art making, if introduced gradually. Because theorists in art education are calling for a curriculum that is commensurate with the world in which we now live, it is important to consider current art practices if we are to help students move beyond traditional understandings of art. I believe that contemporary art with its interdisciplinary forms,

multicultural education with its embrace of many diverse voices, and visual culture, with its democratic investigation of all things visual, have a place within an updated curriculum for an older adult population.

It is possible that by teaching older students the technique of collage, they may be more seamlessly introduced to contemporary art. This would help them to realize that art is part of a cultural dialogue and a cultural critique that concerns larger perspectives, including personal and cultural identity, family, community, and nationality. With knowledge of contemporary art and practice, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ignite discussions and challenge alternative views and approaches to art making. By drawing upon critical practice as well as formal and technical considerations, art educators are able to broaden the domain to consider various visual cultural forms when teaching art to the older adult population.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH ART TEACHERS OF OLDER ADULTS

Celia Hart Caro STAR Senior Center, March, 2011.

PF: Do you think older adults would be interested in a postmodern approach to art making?

CC: We had a course description saying this is an AB collage workshop, saying this is what we'll be covering, not specifically, but just gave a general idea. So if you weren't interested in exploring collage, and the work of artists, learning the principles of art and design, you wouldn't take that class. So I think it's how you structure it. So if you say this is going to be a class that will explore this medium and these concepts, then the people who are interested in that will sign up. And we saw the group of people that we got was really very, very involved enthusiastic people, and there were people that weren't interested and didn't come back.

PF: You come to an art class to learn the technique of collage or learn the elements of drawing. How do you bill that type of class?

CC: I think it has to be an agreement between the students and the teacher you know, this is what we're going to explore. I find certain students are extremely resistant to anything that is personal and things that have to do with...

PF: Life review?

CC: Yeah, lives review. And this is interesting because Diana Barrett makes the claim that first and foremost that's an important thing to look at in your curriculum.

Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. I did this Chagall project and they reacted very positively to it because it was about a happy memory or a dream. It was something that was a little abstract. It wasn't something that specifically happened.

PF: I remember Alma, she was rattled about looking at-

CC: Yeah she had to leave. One of the things Maura was saying is that it shouldn't just be about memory, because older adults don't want to be seen as just their past they still have a present, they still have a future. Like the life map project: the fact that you incorporated maps from the past present and future that opened up a lot of possibilities for them. I thought that was very affirming.. I think that's important to incorporate. I think that reacted very positively to that. It doesn't just have to be life review because then you're like, "well that means I'm at the end of my life." It doesn't make you that creative.

PF: What is your teaching philosophy?

CC: I think my teaching philosophy is that it's more of collaboration. I really want to base my lessons on what they're interested in learning. I don't want to impose something on them. I want them to be motivated to learn because really, they're coming for recreation, and it's a volunteer situation. There are no grades, they haven't paid. The only thing that brings them back I wanting to keep working. So that's a new situation for me, it has to be more reciprocal.

PF: So how have you gone about determining what interests them?

CC: I look at what they've done before. I ask them a lot of questions, and I also see how they react to certain projects: whether they respond to them or fight them every step of the way. I find it interesting when they resist something with their whole hearts; they actually end up doing a really good job in the end. After doing this for two years, I have more confidence. They really shook my confidence as a teacher.

PF: Why is that?

CC: Because the amount of resistance, the push back.

PF: And how was that manifested? Vocally? Or they just wouldn't engage with the project?

CC: Grumpiness disengagement, grumbling, fights with each other. Almost like a sit in.

PF: Which project can you remember in particular?

CC: Oh, it was a book making project. It had all been going so swimmingly. I had done life drawing with them in terms of how to draw flowers. We started with flowers because they told me they had worked on flowers with you and they were really very interested in it. And I felt like we had done everything we could possibly do with flowers.

PF: Did you look at Georgia O'Keeffe?

CC: We looked at Georgia O'Keeffe, we went to the Modern, we looked at Monet's Water lilies, we did still life, we did collage, we did watercolors, and we did drawings. I did gesture drawings with them with flowers, I made photocopies of their flowers, blew them up, shrank them down, had them make collages with them. You know, tried everything. And after like twelve weeks I was like, "enough with the flowers." Or maybe it was longer. Maybe it was like four months? Sixteen classes worth of flowers. You know? That's enough. And I know you did a book making project, so I was like 'great, let's do books.' And we were moved out of our conference room into the main area, and that caused a lot of consternation. And they actually did the little mini book very nicely. But it brought up a lot of stuff, because I had done my mini book like a little poem. It was about hopes and dreams and it must have opened up something in some of them that they didn't want to pursue anymore because the next project was altered books. That was very laborious because you had to make the pages and attach them together using gel medium. And then that had to dry, and then you had to gesso the pages and let that dry. And then you draw and collage on top of the pages. They hated that. They hated the gel medium, they hated that they couldn't get instant gratification out of it. That's when Abby almost quit. When Elaine gave me the book after she glued all the pages together and said, 'that's it, I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore.' And a lot of them were like, 'no, I don't want to this.' It made them really angry. Some people did a beautiful job. They really put their hearts and souls into those books, they were beautiful books.

PF: Did you ever say to them well you want to revisit this? Because I know in the end you said everyone was surprisingly pleased, except for Ellie.

CC: Ellie did a beautiful job. But I think now that I have some perspective on it, it was difficult to do. Going someplace emotional is hard. Painting a flower, that's not personal. Writing and journaling is personal. And I think also I took it too hard. I will always look at the students who aren't succeeding more than the ones that aren't. If I have a lesson with ten students and seven of them get it, I'm worried about the three that don't. Those are the ones I take to heart, because why didn't it work for them? So after that, they wanted to paint. They said, 'we want to paint. We want to do landscapes.' So I said good: do drawing outside, do landscapes. I'll let you go back to your comfort zone, and then when you're comfortable again, I'm going to bring you back to something else. So I let them do landscape painting and floral painting again.

PF: Did they do the landscapes from their imaginations?

CC: They did it from sources drawing from outside and also from their imagination. And then they were learning to paint with water based oils. They did a great job painting, and I think it was good to let them go back into something they felt comfortable with. So I let them go on with that for awhile. Then we did some

printmaking. They did a great job with the printmaking; their prints were beautiful. But man, did they hate it.

PF: New material?

CC: They hated the messiness of it. One of the things they like about drawing and painting is their hands don't get dirty. They're at a remove. There is an issue with the strength needed to brayer the plates, hand strength needed to incise the plates. They wouldn't even go near the linoleum blocks.

PF: So it's a frustration.

CC: Yes. So that's why they like pencils, they like paints. They can still control them; they don't feel a loss of dignity. There's something about printmaking: it's very physical, you have to stand up you have to brayer the plates. You have to be exact. You have to register it, and another thing is the learning curve. I've noticed there's a need for instant gratification.

PF: For most of them?

CC: Not for most of them, but they want to have something that they feel they've completed at the end of the lesson. So if they have something that's in stages- at least with a painting they can see how it's progressing. But some of them, it was very frustrating and took them a long time to get good print. Learning a new medium was very frustrating for them. But then I thought, look at art history. Let's look at the masters and I had them look at all these different masters, because I noticed they wanted to copy again. And I don't want them copying, but if they want to learn about art history I'll be happy to teach it to them. So we did that, ended with a Chagall project. Helen the one who says to me, 'I really want to learn how to draw the body. I want to learn how to draw people.' I introduced portraiture early on. That was another thing we did before we did it a couple of weeks, maybe about a month, but they weren't ready to go there. Now they're ready to go there. So I brought it back because they expressed interest in it. Today you'll see all the cabinets covered with their life drawings, and you'll see their progression, what they're learning. And I started putting the drawings up on the cabinets for the whole center to see, and my class is getting bigger.

PF: What would you do if you were to design lesson with a postmodern approach? What would that look like?

CC: I would show them people like Elizabeth Peyton who does heroes; maybe I'll do Kehinde Wiley also. Just show the heroic portrait: how it was originally painted and how contemporary artists are approaching that idea. How do we make people look noble? Portraiture: what it means today as oppose to what it meant when there wasn't photograph: the big difference between having your portrait painted and having a photograph taken especially in the digital age.

PF: Does everyone in the class get along with other?

CC: They get along very nicely. They're very supportive of each other. There are definitely cliques and they're very territorial. Don't go sitting in some one's chair. There was big issue with one student that S brought in, Y. And B and Z didn't want her anywhere near them.

PF: And she's still coming?

CC: Yeah, but I just gave her a seat and it's interesting sometimes you're back in elementary school with these guys: 'he touched my this, he took my pencil.' And they want to be kind of taken care of. They want you to give them the paper; they want you to help them sharpen their pencils.

PF: Hand holding?

CC: A little, well you know, catering sometimes. But they're also respectful of the materials. They don't just go up and take the paper; they want you to give it to them so you know how much there is and they always take really good care of things much better than younger people do. The people that were more respectful were more respectful of the materials and the space. They're very respectful of the space and the materials and the books or whatever I bring in. They get possessive though, really possessive with certain things: like if I bring in resources, sometimes one of them will monopolize a book or monopolize a

pamphlet. X especially, like she's soon to say 'can I take this with me?' Sometimes she wants to take it home I let her because-

PF: How is her progression?

CC: Great. She's really good with this portraiture. She's doing some very beautiful portraits of herself. She also really responded to the manikin draped in fabric. She obviously has a real feeling for fabric. I had this exercise where you just draw the fabric crumpled up, and then you draw it on the manikin. And she really did a great job with that because she likes abstraction. She likes pattern, so she did a great job with that. In fact her work had gotten lively. Moving it into the self and the body, they surprised me. They hated doing the eyes, and they didn't like doing faces. But they loved doing their hands, and they were very honest in the assessments of their hands. They really showed how their hands had changed over time the arthritis or the swollenness or the twisting turn. And for me, it helped me understand them more because I don't really look at their hands. And when I looked at the portraits of their hands I saw what they were doing in terms of what their hands can and can't do now. And it also helped me with my own issues about aging and looking at my own hands. Helen told me how she has a gift: that she celebrates the change that age is bringing to her body. She's interested in it; she sees it as a science experiment. And I hate the way the skin is dissolving on the middle of my hand, and the skeleton is coming through. But when I drew it, I really got into that, you know? I really enjoyed showing the tendons in the palm of my hand.

PF: And did you show them that?

CC: Yeah, and I told them the story. One day it was icy raining and the only people who showed up were X and Y and she was saying, 'I really want to draw the body.' And well I said, the best place to start is with your hands, you got them with you all the time. Start doing that and she told me how she had the gift of not being afraid of aging and wanting to document it in some way. So I showed them the drawings I had done of my palm, and it was like a gift to me because it helped me to look at all this in a very positive way instead of something I regret or was trying to avoid. It was actually something I could examine and document too. It kind of transformed it for me as something I could take ownership of instead of avoid. And she said she was glad to hear that, that 'I didn't know that I could do that for you. But I'm glad that I could.' And then they all made these really honest and portraits. So I thought this was a point of me putting my ego to the side and listening to a student and it's really taken off and for her it makes her feel really validated that's she contributing so much and she has. I couldn't have come up with this without her input.

PF: Do you think you would ever approach that as a theme of one of your projects, aging, or do you think you'd have to make that call

C: I think that would have to be a subtext of the whole thing. I don't think it would have to be upfront. But I think it's a given if you're doing portraits of a group of people who are over sixty, then aging is going to be there.

PF: Too heavy?

CC: Yeah, well that's the thing about contemporary art: contemporary art is extremely personal. Actually I was just thinking about this after I saw the Rethinking lecture at the New Museum. It's always personal, it's always political, and it's always content driven. And part of me is just like, what is so wrong with a purely aesthetic experience? One of the things people love about modernism is it creates a neutral space. If you go look at a Rothko, you enter this abstract space of color, and it's almost like a Zen experience. You're in a purely aesthetic color field: there's no political content there. And because there's no political content, you're given this like separate space to be in. It's almost like a meditative space that you enter in through your eyes, and I think that has value. I don't think it always has to be meaningful. That's a meaning too. Pure form, pure color. I think that that has value. And I don't think it always has to be personally or culturally driven. I think one of the things about modernism was that it's universal: that it moves outside of the personal. It's like a separate space: it doesn't age, it's timeless. It doesn't become dated. One of the things Amy always criticized about post modern art was its just so ugly. Where's the aesthetics? I love the theory behind it, but then when I look at, the works, I'm just like, and no I don't enjoy it. I think we're

getting to the point with contemporary art where the aesthetics are starting to come back. If you look at Kehinde Wiley or you look at Glen Ligon, they're pure. It has an aesthetic impact; it's elegant. And I think that that's important. For instance, if you look at someone like Judy Chicago: the Dinner Party, that thing is ugly. It's just hideous.

PF: It's a painting?

CC: No, it's an installation. So Judy Chicago, she was one of the Gorilla Girls, challenging the male hierarchy the museums: the first wave of multiculturalism, saying why aren't the women in the museums? So what she created was a dinner party: a triangle shaped table and it goes through history. There's a place setting for all these women in history who have been ignored. And the place, the tablecloth, everything is all done by women: all different artisans. And it's all done in the art periods of that time, and you learn about who they are, and it's just so conceptual. If I had to look at one more vagina plate, I was going to scream. It's just like bang, bang, bang!

PF: It's not this experience of a beautiful...

CC: It's not even, I don't know. Carol Walker's stuff, her stuff is seductive then you realize what you're looking at, it draws you in first aesthetically. Then it hits you over the head but it has the aesthetics it uses aesthetics as a way to actually communicate its message: surface is not everything, there's so much going on beneath the surface.

PF: I like that idea.

CC: I think for me learning how to teach adults it's an ongoing learning experience for me. I look at it as collaboration and also an experiment trying this thing or that thing. Will this work? Will that work? I don't have big visions. I guess what I have is a philosophy of mutual respect, and I want to help them communicate what they'd like to communicate and learn things they haven't learned before.

PF: Do you find that people work on the things at home or do they come just at the center?

CC: Depends on the people, but a lot of them take them home and bring them back to me. They also show me other work they're doing and ask me what I think, ask me for advice on that. I feel like we're making progress but it is incremental.

Liz Curtain

Carter Burden Center, December, 2010.

PF: We're talking about teaching to older adults. How long have you been teaching to older adults?

LC: Approximately twenty years.

PF: What philosophy have you developed over the years when you think about teaching to older adults and how that might be different than teaching to children?

LC: I think first of all I'd like to always have an atmosphere a fun atmosphere an encouraging atmosphere and have whatever the project is be interesting and challenging. I don't really know if I have a philosophy, per say: if I had a philosophy that would be it.

PF: So how do you decide what might be interesting to older adults?

LC: Often I will ask them. I have a whole arsenal of classes and techniques and types of projects that I've accumulated over the years and so I start with that and then do a variation of that project or just kind of build on that project with my collage class at Hudson Guild for instance that started with an original project we got a grant through Elder Craftsmen and I did an eight week personal ... And it was very collage, mixed-media based. And based on that I had several people ask if I could continue the class, and so I went to the director of programs at the time and talked to her about it and she said they had a budget and could pay me to do it and so that's how it continued and now I've been teaching there for almost four years which is just sort of amazing to me and it's just kind of evolved. I do a lot of research between books and Internet. I stay on top of different trends and stuff and I just present I come up with project ideas both short term and long term based on what I think they'll be interested in and then I ask for their input as well.

PF: What is guiding you?

LC: Always showing them something new and exciting something that they'll be excited to learn that it will either be a new technique a challenge for them to learn or fun for them. But I'm very technique oriented, so a lot of my classes especially that particular class are rooted in techniques and how can I apply that to a project. What's the point of learning a technique unless you can have a finished project from it? So I'm technique oriented, but I'm also goal oriented. I want them to have something finished at the end of one week or ten weeks or however long it is, and a lot of that kind of comes from my own philosophy that if people have something tangible at the end of the class it just makes them really happy. They have a tremendous sense of satisfaction from having made something from start to finish the end of a session or two sessions or whatever.

PF: How do you decide what to teach when you're developing a curriculum? Have there been projects where they have said, no they don't care for that?

LC: Sometimes we get grants to do programs, and so we've written to the people who are giving the grant and come up with a project and come up with ideas in a variety of ways. I currently had to come up with some curriculums for naturally occurring retirement community, they were asked to apply for grants to the UJA Foundation for intergenerational classes. So we gave them a list of classes but said that we could tailor it to them. And when we set those up I'm working with co op city in the Bronx, I initially gave her some ideas. We also kind of left it open so that we could restructure it based on one of the things they wanted to do was do cards for Passover. Card-making wasn't one of the things, but I said sure. So I sent her some pictures and she basically left it in my hands, come up with something it's nine two hour sessions that we're doing. Based on what she told me wanted she let me design- I emailed her the list and it was fine and often when you're working with sites who really rely on your expertise in the field, they might have some input, but often they'll just say, you know, design for us. Because they don't really have the knowledge to know what's going to work, what's not going to work. So that's what I did in that case. But I've been doing this for so long, both Diane and I that I just have a whole list of different projects to pull from. I sometimes repeat them. And I do a lot of research, I look at a lot of craft books and I go on the internet and in the last five years on the internet there's just an unbelievable amount of craft projects to pull from. Some with full instructions, everybody has a blog, a craft blog. There's a lot to pull form and then there's also my own brain that I can come up with ideas from that.

PF: Do you ever draw upon their history?

LC: Yeah we've done some autobiographical projects, personal shrines, doing self portraits in collage, or painting. Those things are much more personal I think. And sometimes they'll actually add elements of- they'll bring something from home that's very personal and incorporate it into the piece. Are you talking mostly about the project being autobiographical and incorporating parts of their life?

PF: This kind of leads me to this idea of, when you're teaching them a technique or form, how do you balance that with making just not strictly technique driven, but also something that deals with- cause we've said autobiographical, personal- cause art is so much about expression, so have you found that balance? You've learned this technique, how do you use it to mean something? Do you find students respond to that, or do they just want to learn technique?

LC: No I think they respond very well to the projects, to the technique being applied to a project. And I think that they want to have a finished product that's meaningful to them. Like last week I did in collage the jigsaw puzzle pins, I mean I wouldn't normally do something like that but people kept requesting it. A lot of what I do, like when I teach at the Carter Burden Center, that's mostly crafts, it's not really a whole lot of their personal lives go into making the project because it's very craft oriented. I did do a scrapbooking project last summer where they brought in personal photos and some of them wrote stuff in it, or came up with personal sayings. So those were very personal, but at Carter Burden it's just like making a pretty necklace or making a greeting card. So it's not directly related to their life, it's just they like to make crafts, and they enjoy that. So that's where the fulfillment comes in.

PF: So do find that true on the whole for a lot of students, what do you find their expectations are?

LC: To make something that they enjoy making and have a finished product that they're proud of. And then the ones, like my Monday craft class, most of those people I wouldn't say go home and work on stuff at home, a few of them do, but most of them don't. There are a few of them that make the item and then don't even keep it, they give it to one of their friends or give it to someone in the office, they just want to experience of working with their hands, being in a group setting and having the social experience. Just having a fun time, learning something new. Older adults are mostly giving their things rather than trying to accumulate more stuff. My Hudson class is a little different because quite a few people in class of stuff at home. I would say about half the people in the class and I would say that that's unusual, but it's more an art focused class than a crafts class and I think that might be what the difference is.

PF: When you are thinking about what they would be interested in what is guiding your decision.

LC: I show them something new and exciting, it will either be a new technique or challenge for them to learn, or fun for them. I am very technique oriented, so a lot of my classes especially that particular class are rooted in techniques and how could I apply that to a project. Other than learning technique, what is the point of learning a technique if you can have a finished project from it. I want them to have something finished after the class. It sort of comes from my own philosophy, If people have something tangible at the end of the class it just makes them really happy and have a tremendous sense of satisfaction from having made something from start to finish.

PF: What are some projects they might not have liked? How do you decide what to teach when you are developing a curriculum?

LC: Sometimes we get grants and come up with a projects, come up with ideas in a variety of different ways. I had to come up with a curriculum for a grant for NORC, We gave them a list of classes that we said we would tailor it to their needs. I have been doing this for so long that I have a whole list of projects that I done. I look at a lot of craft books.

PF: You talked about that adults bring their whole life experiences into the classroom. How do you draw upon their history and that component?

LC: We have done autobiographical projects, personal shrines, self-portraits in collage. Sometimes they will add elements or things that they bring from home and incorporate it into the piece. For the most part at the other centers it is just like making a pretty necklace, making a greeting card it is not directly related to their life. They like making crafts and that enjoy that is where the fulfillment comes in.

PF: What are the student's expectations?

LC: To make something, that they enjoy making and to have a finished project that they are proud of. The ones who attend my Monday craft class. Most of them come to the class, there are a few people who make the item, they give it to a friend, and they just want the experience of working with their hands, being in a group setting, to have a social experience, learning something new. In my collage class at Hudson Guild, there are quite a few people to do stuff at home, about half the people in the class and I think that that is unusual. That is more of an art focused class than a craft class. Conceptually that is a big thing with seniors, they just don't get it.

PF: What sort of physical problems do you encounter with older adults?

LC: For the most part I think for most of the seniors the big issues is their eyesight, can see fine details, and as they get older they lose their fine motor skills. They can't do everything that you think they can do. They can't finesse as I can do, since I am a fine artist. They get frustrated because of their physical limitations because they can't execute the project as they wish they could. They compare themselves to the teacher. They continue to put themselves down because they say that their work is not as good as mine. Some of them have issues with forgetting, that is a big issue with senior I will show them many steps of a demo and they lose it because they can't remember what I have show them. And is another issue besides not paying attention.

Melanie Adsit

Whitney Museum of American Art, January, 2011.

MA: I'm a Museum Educator here at the Whitney. I've been here since 2003. I work for school programs, I also work for access and community programs, and then I also work for senior programs, teaching to all populations essentially.

PF: Does your teaching encompass outside of the Whitney? Are you teaching art classes?

MA: Studio classes no, I do have other jobs outside of the Whitney. I also work for an organization Foster Pride, I'm the program director: we do after school programs for children in foster care and their parents. So it's kind of like family unit and I also work for the Queens museum in where i do the same sort of thing. I would do work with all populations

PF: How often do you encounter working with older adults?

MA: Fairly often these days. The demand for senior programs here has been pretty high so I would say i am doing at least probably about one program a week whether that's a slide lecture an exhibition based side lecture or a hands on art making program.

PF: The degree that you have?

MA: My undergraduate degree is in art and psychology from Boston University. Then I was teacher, I actually taught special education for three years then I moved here to New York and went to teachers college and I have a master's from Teachers College in art and art education.

PF: Are you a practicing artist?

MA: No, I'm not a practicing artist. I don't have a BFA, I don't have an MFA. I've always been interested in art, I've always been a maker of art and maybe it's because I work here at the Whitney, surrounded by artists, that I don't consider myself an artist. I make stuff, but I would never show or anything like that. My drive is to teach. I can make art, but teaching is my primary focus.

PF: So what has been your experience been teaching to older adults, maybe specifically art making? What kind of projects have you worked with?

MA: It's been incredibly rewarding. This is something I started doing, I used to work at MOMA in their access and community department, I love special needs populations, so I worked in their access department and in that program they also do work with older adults as part of their access programming. So that's when I started doing this sort of thing and there it was mostly gallery tours gallery teaching, and here at the Whitney i mostly did gallery tours and side lectures for older adults but now there's a new art making programming so now I'm doing that as well

PF: Is the four week/ six week program you're referring to?

MA: There are three different things that we do here: there's a 90 minute, one time art making workshop there's a four week program and a longer six week program. They're all exhibition specific for the most part, except the short 90 minute one which is more materials based. And again, they're always based on artwork cause this is a museum so one thing we do often if not always try to do is incorporate Whitney work in it. And I've found that to be very successful because a big part of my teaching is looking at art and talking about art. We bring in a slide projector before making anything: to show one image, to have a conversation about. It makes it a little less abstract makes the ideas a little bit concrete and gives them chance to discuss some of the ideas in art work before making it on their own. And this is not a lecture, this is a discussion. This is very inquiry based, and I think this is something that has been not addressed as much in the museum community. The general rule of thumb is that inquiry was always for kids, and adults wanted more lecture information. I have found that not to be the case. When talking to older adults, inquiry is incredibly successful. Not as pure inquiry as you would use for kids, but a combination of discussion and information helps them connect with a work of art and connect with the ideas behind it because older adults love to talk. They love to share their experiences, and they have such a rich variety of experiences. That to look at something and share their own experience that connects really kind of sets a foundation of, 'I can do this.' And they get really into it. I've done some workshops that don't start with looking and talking first,

but I find them less successful actually because then kind of every one's on a different page. If you have five or ten minutes to focus your group, everyone around one idea, they can hear each other. They have a chance to voice their opinions, and I find that to be really successful. That could be a link that's materials based, if we're doing a collage workshop it could be something more conceptual. I did a program up at Stanley Isaac's about neighborhood and community and we looked at Jacob Lawrence. We looked at some artists that were working with ideas of community, different ways they could represent things visually, different ways they could use symbols. These are things that we, as art professionals, take for granted. But older adults know about these things, but don't often connect them to something that they can do

PF: I just want to go back because you said the inquiry that you use with older adults is not maybe as pure, what's your reason for altering it?

MA: Because I feel like children- not that the information is less important, but they don't have the need to have information. With students, they all have their different opinions. My job is to encourage them to have different viewpoints. Older adults want to explore these ideas, but they also want information because it makes them more comfortable. So, I mean I definitely do encourage a discussion, but pure inquiry would be, 'what do you see? And why do you think that?' In fact, we did have a couple of programs where we used pure inquiry and they were not successful because they feel it's a little bit patronizing. I respect their opinions and I want to know what they have to say, but I don't want to them to feel like they're being treated in a way that makes them uncomfortable. So I switched it up a little bit. That was just my gut. I've been doing this a long time; you kind of just teach organically and respond the needs of the population.

PF: I know a lot of the work here is abstract, how do you find the adult population will accept that?

MA: We fight, we fight. I love to fight with them actually. I often warn them when we are going to look at things that might be confusing or disturbing, and I enjoy that fight actually. I try really hard to kind of start with something I'm sure they'll be comfortable with and scaffold it from concrete to abstract: something you would do with kids, but it works. I think it's really necessary with older adults. Also background information about the reasons why. The Jenny Holzer exhibition is a really good example because knowing what she did previously helped them access her work that was here because it's really conceptual. It's really heady, and just to look at the piece itself it's not necessarily clear. But if you do look at the ideas all along, and you can get the big ideas behind her practice and behind her art making, it makes a lot more sense. And that's where I think the information is really valuable. It could be information about the artist or information about the context the art was made. I think often it helps to clarify why it is so abstract and that's where the inquiry is so valuable because if you can have an open conversations about what does this remind you of, have them generate some of the ideas about the abstract work, then you can tie that back into what is actually happening when artwork is made, and they feel ownership of the ideas.

PF: Do you think they can take that into their own artwork? Do you see that?

MA: Absolutely, yeah I really do. It's funny you did a collage project because I think that's one of the more successful mediums for seniors.

PF: Why do you think so?

MA: Because it's less scary. People, especially adults, in general anybody over the age of seven, is a little bit nervous about their drawing ability. With older adults especially, a lot of emphasis is placed on, can you draw, and a lot of them say I can't draw, I can't paint. Collage takes that pressure of handwork out of it. It's kind of on the border of art and craft. And I think they're comfortable with craft for the most part and very uncomfortable with art. So I think collage can go into both of those places; it gives them techniques that are craftier which they're comfortable with, but also allowed for the freedom of expression you'd want with an art.

PF: I've seen that too, and I think it was my reasoning because it's accessible. It's not intimidating cause always you're going to get, 'I can't draw.' What do see as your main goal teaching them when you're going through art projects as a teacher working with this population?

MA: I think my main goal is to introduce new ideas and techniques that they might not have been willing to try, might have been comfortable with: make those ideas and techniques accessible, and to connect it to their own lives. Personalize it for them in one way or another, make it something they can really connect with and respond to in the way that an artist would. I mean, that's what art making is all about. And making them feel like this is something they can do and be proud of. That's what it's all about and demystifying it a little bit because we do so many different things here. A big part of my job is demystifying contemporary art and just making it accessible

PF: Will you be teaching a class at all in the near future?

MA: Yeah. I just finished one actually. It's too bad, you could have come along. A group of Chinese Americans, older adults downtown actually. They don't speak a word of English.

PF: How was that?

MA: It was amazing. It was wonderful.

PF: Is this your first time teaching that group?

MA: No, I've been there before, not for such an extended project. They have a staff member who interprets for me so there's a little bit of lag. It was fantastic, It was a wonderful experience.

PF: What made it so for you?

MA: I feel like they are particularly hesitant. I feel like there are a lot of cultural barriers. I did a print-making workshop with them last year. They'll try anything, but they made one print handed it to me and one of them asked me, 'what is it for?' It's something I hadn't considered. As a culture, they're very practical many of these people have just come to the United States to live with their children; the common theme: children moved here, brought them over. They're new Americans. I learned a lot about Chinese a culture and a lot about our cultural differences. We looked at Charles LeDray, have you seen his exhibition?

PF: No, I haven't.

MA: It's wonderful, it's sculpture. It's interesting: it's figurative, it is object. There a lot of little vessels, there's clothing so they're not abstract, but it's very conceptual.

PF: He did the motorcycle jacket?

MA: Yeah, little tiny ones. Yeah, one of the challenges I always find is getting older adults to think about art not in terms of the visual, but to think about something that is more idea driven, more conceptual. Especially this group because they were so practical: art is decorative. It was really interesting the first week so we looked at slides, looked at images. Then we took photographs and we talked about object and how objects can have symbolic meaning. The objects we were looking at were a little mystifying, but the fact objects could be symbols, they were cool with it. Then we took photographs of things in their senior center than were important to them that they connect with. So we had a lot of pictures goldfish, a lot of pictures of flowers and some really interesting pictures of other pictures that were in the center places they had come from. It became very personal. Then we came here and looked at the LeDray exhibition and had one of the most mind blowing conversations of my life because they made the connection between these objects and the fact they all connect to identity, and they were telling me things I had never thought about before. Once they got past this idea, art has to have a purpose; they took it to new places.

PF: I'd love to see how their art would change after seeing the exhibition. How their object might change.

MA: We went back actually and did some art making after. So basically after we were having conversations like, 'he's telling us this has bigger meaning,' 'he's telling us we all need to get along. It became a world peace message, like the United Nations in here. It was personal to them. I've had a lot of conversations about LeDray, but not like that. So then I went back to the center and we had their photographs, and had collage materials as well. We did decoupage on a vase you, now the ones where you grow your own amaryllis kit. They're at target; it's like a ceramic pot and a flower bulb and some dirt. In the LeDray exhibition he does a lot of ceramic pieces also an was what they were most drawn to, and again

I think it had to do with their culture. The clothing was one thing this idea of but they were talking about the idea of tea. They were talking about significance of tea rituals for them. So when we were talking about the little vessels in the LeDray show they were fascinated. We were talking about how each vessel represents a different person, or different kind of person. That was a really nice conversation. So then we got these vases which connected to the vessels, we took their photographs and other collage elements, and they did a collage project on this base. Essentially modge podge, three dimensional decoupage. And then when they were done, we planted our flowers because they were also gardeners. That's one of things they're doing at the center, taking care of plants, growing plants so that made it something practical because that was something necessary for them as a group. They're incredibly practical, but also could have this kind of bigger meaning. It was great, it was fantastic.

PF: How many were in the class?

MA: Nine.

PF: What was the ratio of men to women?

MA: All women, except one man. He was 97 years old that man.

PF: And none of them spoke English?

MA: Not one. Not a word, sometimes when they would leave they would say 'thank you teacher.' That was the extent of it. But I did have a staff member who spoke Cantonese and English, so she translated for both of us. She was great, wouldn't have been successful without her. I was little nervous going into that one just because the language barrier, but I really enjoyed it.

PF: When you come up with your programs, how much does the education department dictate what you're presenting?

MA: Nothing, none. There had to be some connection to the Whitney, but they give us a lot of freedom here. I mean, the people who do teach for senior programs, they trust us and I appreciate that. And the people who oversee the programs are not educators, they are arts administrators. There just has to be some exhibition or Whitney related component that directly looks at or connects to something at Whitney. Other than that, we can do whatever we want.

PF: You've done collage, what other expression have you used, much painting?

MA: I don't do much painting. Actually, no that's wrong. I do have an abstraction workshop, we do painting. It's an introduction to abstraction, a ninety minute workshop. It went through a lot of different permutations; we started out looking at stuff like Jackson Pollock and Pat Steer and things that. We're very abstract, and have the seniors make something very abstract, and that didn't work. They didn't like it. It was okay, but I felt like something was missing. What we used was watercolor paper and inks, and we ended up using droppers: something that was a little less controlled so they couldn't control it. They enjoyed it, but I don't feel like they got that much out of it. It was kind of like, okay we did it. Now what?

PF: When you think about that, how would you change it?

MA: We did change it. Rather than looking at works that were purely abstraction, we changed it to looking at works, like not totally abstract. Again in a progression. Looking at Oscar Bluemner, you know, flat areas of color, taking out details, making things look less realistic, less recognizable objects. Jacob Lawrence, that kind of abstraction and then moving onto things that were more abstract, but not having that as the entire focus. Then we changed it. to i brought in a lot of photographs of places mostly stock photos from National Geographic: beach scenes, just things that were well composed.

PF: That's a great resource.

MA: Yeah definitely. They have beautiful things. So I printed them out from the printer and we talked about how abstraction is something that starts in reality and then is transformed. So what we ended up doing, they chose a photograph that appealed to them, I have them a Sharpie marker, and I had them outline on the photograph big areas of color and again this goes back Jacob Lawrence, Oscar Bluemner reduction. Then I got Seral transfer paper, it's like a carbon paper sort of thing, then I had them put the watercolor paper, the transfer paper and their outlined photograph and had them retrace the lines that they had made so

they had a line drawing that was related to their original image, but it was fairly abstract because we didn't do a lot of fine detail. It was just kind of big areas, and then to use that as a starting point and we gave them paintbrushes and watercolors. Here's a starting point, now we're going to make a painting inspired by this. I took the photographs away because they started copying it, and I was like, 'no, no. This is going to be abstract. We're going to make this different,' and we also had some conversations about mood: how artists can use color to change the mood. That's why I think Bluemner was a really good example. We talked about how you could take a real place and make it darker by using darker colors: very basic concepts of abstraction, and that went over really well. That was a much more successful workshop because all abstraction is rooted in reality somehow, and I think that's what they need. That's that little piece that is not immediately evident in a lot of the art work they see. To have an artwork that they've created look abstract, but they know it came from something, I feel like that opened a lot of doors.

PF: So you probably saw a real difference from the droppers?

MA: Definitely, it was drastically improved. Again, it was trial and error: a bunch of us went out, did the droppers, it didn't work, we all came back and thought, 'so how can we fix it?' We did, now we're happy.

PF: Is there any discussion about what brings them to the class what they hope to get out of it?

MA: My impression is most of them, they go and just sign up for activities, something to do while they're here. Sometimes the centers tell them they have to come because we have this program and we need people to go there. I think for the most part, they're there for activities. That's why they are in these centers, another activity. But many of them do have a real interest in art.

PF: You don't know if they have any prior art making experience?

MA: Sometimes. I've had many seniors come up to me after the fact saying, 'I'm an artist, can you get me into the Whitney?' He's really sweet, unfortunately I can't.

PF: And how was his artwork, he took the class too, right? The quality of his work compared to-

MA: I think he was more challenged by the class because he was a painter and made really realistic paintings and has spent a long time working on his hand skills. So to then have me take the emphasis away from that, he was challenged. That was really interesting; it was a fight, a good fight. He was happy with the results in the end. There was some unlearning going on, which was good.

PF: What was the topic of your thesis?

MA: My thesis was on museum education techniques for students with autism. And that's always been my primary focus: special needs. I feel like a lot of the strategies are similar. Just the fact that what I learned there from my special needs practice is just being responsive to the needs of the individual. And everyone in the class is an individual and has individual needs and abilities, to really be aware, and kind of tailoring my teaching to what I see them responding to, as opposed to having an idea and sticking to it, which I never do. I always have an idea but never stick to it because it always you get in and you're like, 'oh these guys are much more sophisticated than I expected.'

PF: Do you usually do a demo? Do you show them a piece that you've made?

MA: I usually bring an extra and show them the process. I would never show a finished product because then they will copy it. And that's not the point. I'll use it to show technique and process and I think that's really important, and no matter what the process is, have one right there. So I just bring one for myself. I just join the class, and that kind of levels the playing field.

PF: You're with them in this.

MA: And I can't draw a straight line, which is true. And I tell them that, and that makes them more comfortable. 'She's the art teacher and she doesn't know how to draw?' Cause I don't draw I emphasize that point to emphasize to them: you don't have to draw to make art.

PF: Anything that comes to mind about your experience with teaching this population, maybe some surprises you might have had?

MA: I enjoyed it much more than I expected to. I've been surprised at their willingness to try new things, the fact that they're really interested in pushing their boundaries a little bit; I think as long as it's presented in

a comfortable way, they're open to anything, and I was surprised by that. I thought I'd have a lot more resistance to some of the tricky ideas that we present here. Some of the work here at the Whitney is really challenging. Adults often have a lot of trouble with it. I thought the older adults would have more trouble and that's not the case, pleasant surprise. But again, it's the approach. It's the way it's presented, not the material itself.

PF: Do you usually find that it is difficult having to shift from looking at realistic painting, maybe the first time they're experiencing this?

MA: Sometimes yeah, definitely. I think it's a shift from thinking about painting as something that needs to be realistic or decorative. They've always seen it they've always known that's art could be abstract but always kind of been oh it's not for me. I feel like there's often a shift when leave oh maybe i can understand these things, which is good. Also the technology I've had a lot of success with digital cameras there's a lot of eagerness to learn this technology which has been really great and I've learned a lot

PF: What are complications around that working around digital cameras? What challenges with an older population?

MA: An, 'I don't know how to work these things' challenge. Also again I went in there thinking I was going to teach photography and it ended up being a workshop on how to use the camera, which was great actually; because we could have these big conversations and they could learn how to do something practical. I think that's important to balance the art and craft, to balance the abstract with the practical feel like they're learning a skill and not just making something. But the challenge is just the baseline many of these people who have never used a computer at all. They steer clear of machines like that, 'my son gave me one of them for Christmas, but it's still in the box. I still use my disposable camera...' showing them how everything has a correspondent to what they already know: like this button on the digital camera is just like that button on your regular camera. So once I realized it was just making links between what they already know, then it was fine.

PF: So have you gone back and looked at the principles of art and design once they became familiar?

MA: It was only one session, but we've talked about having it be a multiple part program because that would be interesting, and that's why I incorporate them into my long collage workshops. I wonder if I would talk about the principles of art and design after the fact? That would be an interesting way to think about it. It's hard because I want them all to feel successful, not unsuccessful. That they took photographs that didn't have these things that- that would be my only concern. we did talk about what makes a good photograph more what makes an interesting photograph, and putting it in simple terms like zoom, and how sometimes getting in really close to an object makes it more intriguing, abstracting, cropping ,stuff like that. and they would they walked around center got lot of photographs of underside of the table, they were willing to try it I was great was really exciting for them really was we also got really simple digital cameras for them I think was really important Cannon Powershot because a lot of digital cameras have a lot of buttons and lot of menu options. And that's something that I take for granted: that you'll go in a menu and it tells you on the screen, and you make a choice. It's a way of thinking that you use when you're comfortable with computers, but that was not an option for many seniors because the fact the screen was changing was a little too complicated. So we ended up using cameras, point and shoot, they had a zoom and back and forth and play, instead of menu options. The Canon's were really good the Kodak was really good, but we had a Nikon: they tried to simplify it by making less buttons, but you have to go in the menu all the time, and it's not okay.

PF: And usually the longer terms end up with a little exhibition right?

MA: Oh my God, they're so happy. We try to put it in a conference room that's right off the galleries so they can be in the galleries go to the room next door have their art be on display in the Whitney for few days. A lot of friends and family, a lot of suits and ties: a lot of pride.

PF: So you feel its valuable having a background in education when teaching older adults?

MA: Necessary. Necessary, and I feel like that's why they respond to what I do, because there is inquiry involved. It depends on the population, some groups just want information. And that's fine; I do have an art history background as well. I think I feel like it's a necessary combination. And I think that it helps that I'm not only an artist but also an educator first. I feel like often times a lot of my coworkers are artists, and it becomes something that it's so natural to them it's hard to break down the steps, which I totally understand but I think that's where my education background helps. I think about my art breaking up and breaking down into little accessible bits.

PF: Anything you've come up against where they weren't responding? And how do you go about changing gears?

MA: Yeah probably, I just back track. There's been many times where they're not getting it; I think that one with droppers is the best example of that. We did it a couple of times and changed it to figured out what parts they liked from that, they liked the freedom, materials, idea, paint but didn't like the concept and I think sometimes it's too fast; if you have a group of ten people maybe one of them is on board and seven of them aren't, being really aware of that: when people are starting to glaze over. Being like okay, what's confusing to you? Ask what's confusing. I mean, I'm always happy to really work through it slowly if people aren't getting it. I tell them all the time I didn't make these works of art, if you hate it you're not going to offend me. I have no personal attachment; I want to know what you don't like about. So tell me, and I think that kind of frees it up they don't want to say anything because they're not comfortable because nobody wants to be that guy. But if we can have an intelligent conversation about what you don't like, I feel like that helps a lot of what's confusing, why is this confusing. 'I don't understand why she had to use human bone to make this artwork. It's a terrible thing to do.' then someone else in the class will pick it up and say she didn't have to make it this is way but this is why I think she did.

PF: How does it compare to same discussion with children about the human bone? How do they compare?

MA: I feel like children are more open to changing their mind because they're less set in their ways. Especially New York City public school children who are used to hearing multiple viewpoints. They know there can be many answers, whereas older adults are looking for *the* answer. But it is the same conversation that I would have with them: there is no answer, this is a work of art and it's up to us to draw our own conclusions. And that's the shift when about thinking of art as a decorative object. We have this conversation a lot: art is not something that has to hang over your couch, there are other reasons to make art rather than just to decorate your living room. I always tell them that's my opinion, take this for what it's worth: I think a work of art is something that makes you think or feel something you've never thought or felt before. Sometimes it makes you sick to your stomach, sometimes it makes you gasp in horror. Sometimes it makes you think, oh that's beautiful, but the more successful a work is, it's just powerful in some way. And I think that's a shift art doesn't have to be beautiful. It doesn't have to be perfect. So that it can be expressive.

PF: Can older adults acquire a set of visual languages later in life with an understanding of the obligations and powers inherent in that language? So I guess making that switch from something that is this beautiful object looking at it for its aesthetic beauty and then saying I didn't get it, being able to not become so rigid.

MA: Yeah, I've seen that over and over again. And I think they're grateful for it, I hear that a lot I get a lot of people leaving my classes saying 'thank you, I've never thought this way before.' So it's good it makes me feel like I'm doing something right.

Riva Blumenfeld

Brooklyn Museum of Art, January, 2011.

PF: We were talking about the fact that you like teaching in the longer residencies?

RB: Because you have continuity, so, teaching just one shots, you don't know who the people are, and the advantage of teaching adults is they generally trust you. They're generally nice people who either want to pass their time; they want to just spend an hour and a half with you so they don't have to think about something else, or something to do. The people who come to the art making by 4 or 6 times, you get to know them: who needs the attention all the time, who's shy, who's the artist, who needs to be pushed, who's the timid person who thinks he or she can't make art. That's the interesting thing and that's how it's really different than working with school groups. They're just intimidated, unless they're practicing artists or when they were younger, they come to the class thinking, they don't know how to make art. So our job is then to either juggle the few people in the class who know how to make art with the people who are intimidated. And so that's one reason why I think it's fine that the three of us are not practicing artists, because we can say every project that we're going to do, we can say I can do it, and I'm not a practicing artist. And we can level the playing field.

PF: And you think that makes them comfortable as well?

RB: I think also by having, by planning the activities carefully, using simple materials like painting. A lot of people wouldn't paint at home. It's a simple material, but it's special for them because you can start a basis. I think by using very simple materials that everyone can handle, again makes it easier. I don't know if unwrapping is the right word, rather demystifying. I tried something last year Last year when we were doing the project based on the Georgia O'Keefe show at the Whitney. They were going to be making a monochromatic, abstract painting. The first thing we did was make a drawing of objects. And to make it even easier than that it was a blind drawing. Blind drawings don't look good. So it's like, you put your pencil down and that's it. So that way, even the good artists in the class, their drawings didn't look any different than mine. From there we then went to setting up a still life that was a little more complicated that they then made a full drawing of: that's where those that had talent, it came out a little.

P: How long were they given to....

RB: That's something that we've changed a little and that the Whitney is so nice about, they're very flexible. And that's one of the things, there has to be a lot of flexibility when teaching the adult program because each group is different, and each population is different. For example, when I teach up at Riverside Goddard, where they're really high functioning, most of them are European older people. I would do a two hour class and so we could do a blind drawing and then a full drawing probably in the same class. If I were going downtown to Hamilton or Madison, I would be dead if I did a two hour class. Because these are women who don't speak English so everything has to be translated. And there is shyness to them. And it would have to be much more activity oriented than conversation oriented. So I need to have a lot of shorter activities, because generally that group doesn't get artists. So it would have to be three activities, four activities in one session. Sometimes they send us to a place and even if we call the senior coordinator, they don't answer our questions honestly. I don't know why, or they don't realize the info that we might need. They don't think to tell us, you know this is a very quiet group of people. So we get there and the class could fall flat. And you walk out of there feeling awful, because you know it really wasn't great. You brought everything that you could have brought to another group and you just couldn't connect. So you go back to the museum, send an email, share the info. This senior center, they're shy. The Chinese population is shy and you need to do less complicated programs

PF: So you come up with the curriculum for the whole 6 weeks? Where will you get your direction, from the director?

RB: To a degree, sometimes they're signing up for a program so we have to offer. Sometimes well brainstorm together at the Whitney, we've had collage, abstract painting And New York, as our three subjects and our communities are saying, you got to expand. So as a group well, the everyday object, it's

something that has to be open enough and give us flexibility. And then the three of us or however many educators are in the group we often get together and we play. Everyday objects, we know we have a budget of one hundred and fifty dollars, what projects can we do what art can we look at. We brainstorm and then sometimes we workshop the projects.

PF: Does it tie into the exhibitions that are at the museum?

RB: It has to, but obviously if you weren't at a museum you wouldn't have to coordinate. You could download images. One of the most successful programs we came up with last year with was digital photography because a lot of the people at senior centers, there's nothing wrong with them, they're just people who are retired or semi-retired, their spouses just died, or they moved, they just need a new community of people. They're really smart capable people, they just happen to be sixty, seventy years old. They have families using I phones, digital cameras, and they don't know who to use a digital camera. We tie it into art history by doing a lecture for a half hour, an hour, about photography. Then we give a very simple demonstration: they're point and shoot. The concept they can take forty pictures and not worry about it is fascinating, it's liberating then we give them an assignment some people go around in pairs you give them a half hour here's your camera here's what I want you to do, come back and we decided we're going to expand that program because one shot isn't enough.

PF: Do you look at every one's photographs and talk about them? Do you look at them from the principles of art and design?

RB: You just hit the nail on the head with that one. With only an hour and a half we'd run out of time so that's why now, last year is the first year offered to do photography and at the end of the year that's the first thing I said. I don't want to do this anymore as one shot. When we did it as one shot we would just print out the images and send it to them so we never had that follow up, like okay look what you did. That's why it would be much better. Next time you pick one from each person and you would discuss it. You took these four photos, what do you think of them. Do you like them, if you were to do it again; it's a digital camera it didn't cost anything. Again because they're older adults, what it took me a really long time to learn is my job is to push them. I'm a very democratic person so I don't normally try to do that. But I've learned with the senior program pushing is what they need because their life has gotten narrower and narrower and they stay in their comfort zone and my job is to push them out of there. Digital photography is the first step and most of them take like a fish to water. And then you take the camera away and say maybe someone you know can buy you one for your birthday or for Christmas, or borrow your grandson's. So that way, by doing it two or three times you're taking it to the next level. One of the things I learned in the subject of pushing them, is they need guidance when they go out to take a photo or else everything will be portraiture dead center, nothing really interesting. So what I would do was tell them they needed to focus on either texture, find as many different textures as possible. Or to photograph things from a different angle so you're pushing them to look at their environment in a different way.

PF: How do you find they come to class with a fixed idea about what art is. On a whole do you think they look at this landscape by the Hudson River School of Art? But what happens when you move them out of this comfort zone and show them some art that's at the Whitney?

RB: You mean like a rock covered with hair. That's actually why I can do this even though I've never, I don't have any teaching training. I don't have masters, I don't have an undergraduate. I've been doing this now for five years, maybe six, and the first year into it I kept pulling aside my bosses, do I need to go back TC? They were like no, and the reason I can do particularly seniors is because I'm friendly. So if someone says Riva, that sculpture that's a rock with hair that's not art, so that's fabulous, we then have a conversation. We know its art because it's in a museum. We don't even have to have the conversation is it art or not because it's in a museum: its art. So then we can take it to the next level, why is that art? Why is a rock covered with hair art? What does that look like to you? So then by the end of the conversation they realize what they're looking at is the portrait of a man and by the end of the conversation they can even tell you how old that man is; they might even be able to write his biography.

PF: Will you ever review with them different theories of art?

RB: The theory only goes so far. It's when you're there figuring out how to get them where they want, that's the key thing. I find most seniors are really open to it. If they like you, you can take them anywhere mentally. And that's actually where, sometimes it gets tricky because you might have someone in the class who is vociferous about his or her about but you balance that out. I don't know it's one of the reasons I love teaching the seniors.

PF: How does that same scenario balance out with children?

RB: I never think to task them it never occurs to them kids just have that same idea. Maybe high school students if you show them a surreal piece of sculpture, a teacup covered in fur you may get a kid saying. You really don't get that from kids as much, the conversation doesn't go there. I find with adults where you often have to take them is redefining what art it. Art is not just about beauty, art is about concept art is about an idea art is about making us look at things differently. It doesn't seem to come up so often. I feel where it comes up with adults like okay here's a project that's actually then again I think part of the hard slash fun part of it working with seniors is the project has to get them to that place. So for example I did a series, I guess it was a six or four part series last spring and it was everyday objects. SO we looked at things, do you know Tara Donovan's work? We looked at her, David Hammons, Judy Pfaff. We looked at work and that question didn't even come up, is this art. We just talked about what is he using, what did he think about? Then for homework they had to bring in one hundred of the same objects, one hundred napkins, one hundred cubes of sugar and they had to then make a sculpture using the one hundred objects but instead of just having them do one project I had them do two different projects, the first one was organize your hundred objects in an orderly fashion so nothing got glued down, we just did it. I took photographs of it. That's the other thing that's different about adults and kids. Kids don't care if you have a finished product. It's just like, did they have fun? They can walk out of the museum with nothing and that's fine Adults needs something I don't know if they need closure, or they're so materialistic they need something. S what they got was the documentation. And in the second piece they had to do something chaotic and in the second piece they had to figure out how you are going to do it differently. And they were shocked that they could come up with two different ideas and it was fun and it actually looked good. So that was really fun. One of the other things we learned was they need to feel like they're doing something important so what we talk about often is the materials are important. Using construction paper isn't the best. For senior programming it needs to be a step up from construction paper, because construction paper is almost too much like kids and if they get that they feel like you're belittling them. They don't want to get treated like we're infantilizing them. One of the big things is the exhibition at the end if you're doing a multipart program. Again it's a finished product but you're saying at the end what you've all done is important enough. We want to get together and look at their work and celebrate. We want to put their work if it's two dimensional behind a matte. I had this one woman, a Latino woman I think from Columbia; she had been Mrs. Whitney's cook. She loved that I was coming from the Whitney, and she said, "Do you know who I am? Do you know what I did?" We were doing a Georgia O'Keefe painting project and we could only use one color. She couldn't get the white as white as she had wanted so she stayed an extra hour and she couldn't get it right. And I knew she couldn't leave frustrated that would be bad so I said I think what you've done is fine I don't understand why you're so unhappy with it. Luckily I had a matte in my bag and I took it out and put it on top so she could see that actually it looked much better than she thought it did. Because adults are critical of themselves. Just by having the matte there it made it look finished so she could look at her work in a different way.

PF: What differences do you with experience when people come from various educational backgrounds?

RB: When the group is homogenous it's easy. I know you're so sort of asking something different, I'll get to that. If you have the same group of Upper West Siders, their backgrounds may be different but their level of sophistication is the same. Or if I go downtown their level of sophistication or lack of is

homogeneous. That's okay, it's when it's integrated that it becomes difficult. It means I can talk about Georgia O'Keefe and three of the people have a reference point and they maybe want to show off but that that alienates the ten people who have no idea who she is. You want there to be heterogeneity, but it can make it difficult to teach that?

PF: How does that play out in terms of their art making.

RB: You see it in the sophistication, the reference points. Very often the participants who are less sophisticated are more adventurous using materials. I can't say because I haven't thought about it consistently. The last part of your brain to go is the part that holds music and art so if you can trigger a person's memories, wherever they're stored in their brain of music and art. It fires their brain in a way nothing else does and keeps it fired so it means that someone who has Alzheimer's or dementia, they stay mentally active for hours if not days after they leave the museum. I have a book about it that I could lend you; you might be able to get it from MOMA.

Elisa Velasquez

Hudson Guild Community Center, April, 2011.

PF: Tell me a little bit about your background.

EV: I got my BFA in painting and ceramics and Florida International University. I graduated with a painting that was my work for graduation, but I was a dual major came to New York, got my Masters in art therapy from NYU, and worked mixed populations, worked with children worked with adults I worked for twelve years as an art therapist at senior center in China Town. I was there for a long time before I became manager and realized I wasn't going work anymore with people and that why I went into art therapy rather than the MFA track of just doing fine arts and teaching onto college I was a teaching fellow for a year with the New York Teaching Fellows. I was teaching art to special education kids and I realized it was a very unusual situation as well as literacy. I realized I didn't want to work with high school children I was interested in younger kids wanted to work in elementary school. So I've been doing that for the last four years I wanted to work in elementary school after I was a teaching fellow taught for free arts and that was an amazing program taught with them for about year and a half. It's a Lincoln Center model and so we do weekly different workshops in different schools in Harlem and the upper west side, and it's a program that's meant to be therapeutic but at same time be a way to give art experience to children who don't have it in their program. It kind of focuses for working with abuse and children in danger, so it was a perfect match: took my teaching experience that I had and mixed it with my art therapy experience and gave me a chance to work with children where I had been working with seniors much longer. I worked with free arts for one and half year then I got a full time position working at a Head Start program in Fort Greene and I've been there for the last two and half years, so I've been just teaching for the past five years. Now I applied for this residency last year and its space for art through the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council when I applied for it is specifically to work with seniors and I liked the fact it was a residency that allowed me the experience of working with seniors. I love working with children but it's a different dynamic. And so I wanted to have that experience again so that's what I've been doing for the last year here. I teach a class once a week, that's the agreement and it's a mixed media thing s like that.

PF: What brought you back to wanting to teach to older adults?

EV: I miss working with seniors there was something about working with seniors there was something wonderful about their life experiences its weird I was working with people for a long time who were at the end of their life and processing that with them was new and then when I started working with younger children fresh and new and just experiencing everything for the first time... I'm trying to think of a good way to say this I miss those kinds of relationships I had. I liked their perspective on life I think it changed the way I look at life. I'm working with now are like 70 75they have all these great experiences, they're sharing it with me, I like that experience but because they're towards the end of their life there's an

intensity with them, an excitement, and they want to share it with you once they get to trust you. You become part of the family, but I think I just missed working with it. I haven't thought about that why did I really want to be working with seniors again I enjoyed it so much the first time that missed it and I knew I didn't want to be working with them as an art therapist, I wanted to be working with them as an artist. And I know that part of what I do in these some of these groups is therapeutic I think that therapist part in me can't turn off, but it is much more about process. And it's really more exciting for me because I'm just really concerned with helping them facilitates what they need to make or say what they want to say. What I proposed to this center was really kind of focused I was like these are the themes I'm working on, these are the things I'm thinking about. The stuff I do is reflecting off my own artwork it's a lot about memory, reminiscence, self-portraiture about yourself. So that's been thematically what I've been doing with the seniors. Setting up projects and asking them if they're interested in that and they are and they're doing it too. And I have kind of fumbled in that class whereas if I was doing another class it would be a little bit more open, like it still is open, but it's really been kind of pushing them work eventually for a to a and getting them to feeling more comfortable for me so the projects that I'm working with the curriculum that I have set up here are which would be completely different than if I were teaching somewhere else and they were paying me. it about my work, my memories it's about my life who I am some of the cultural things in my work. I haven't guided that but the subject matter chosen does guide that.

PF: Do you have a teaching philosophy for working with older adults?

I think the teaching philosophy I have exemplifies the objects relations theory that I loved as an art therapist which is the idea of being the helping hand. I have a certain amount of knowledge of material and color, what a person can do, but at the same time I don't want to push my own artistic- the things that I do in my own art on a person. But I'm helping facilitate. They talk to me about what want to make. I help them brainstorm a little bit but I'm sort of supporting their idea, another philosophy i have is about independence, them being independent in the process, but when they get stuck i come in help where they're stuck then walk away again and let them do it again by themselves cause I want them to be as independent as possible. They can and make those choices. Also I don't believe in perfection I don't want anything to be perfect that's not my deals. It's not about the end product in the end its about the process of making it and that's exiting that's kind of linked to the art therapy where it's the press of sublimation where making the work in itself is the artwork and i know everyone look as at the end product but a lot of the times when you're in the process of making it and you're excited about it you get the best work. And if I could instill that in people softly, with a gentle hand I get the most amazing work and they get the most amazing work. And even today we had a painting class an there was so much energy in the room and it was cause people are experimenting and playing with stuff and they weren't worried about how it was going to turn out, and mistakes could happen and they were excited about them! I have so many different life philosophies: there are no mistakes; my painting teacher taught me that. He's often like when you get stuck in a painting take your brush to the side don't look and put the color on there and what happens. And I find myself reflecting on things he said to me like turn it upside down start looking at the light turn it upside-down and now paint it. Things I've learned from him that I'm applying now and I do it naturally but never said it.

PF: Do you find that they come to your class with a thick psyche about what art is and that they are looking for realism most of the time?

EV: Depends, okay so in the other classes I've taught in another senior center in the lower east side different economic background, different life experiences. Lower East Side a lot of factory workers lower income those people required it to be perfect and it had to be very very realistic and if it wasn't they weren't happy, and they were very frustrated. And they always said I'm not an artists and I had to get them comfortable with just using materials approach with them was using dry materials first then kind of using new materials slowly they were often scared of it and very critical of themselves because it had to be perfect whereas this population, in this Chelsea Hudson Guild Senior Center, the one thing I have to say is I've had so many great classes here. They've had the collage class they've had ceramics classes they've

had talking artists come in and do presentations they've had a Whitney collage class. Because they've had more exposure, I find they're a lot less timid about trying new things. And I had a woman come say to me today, 'I've never painted before, can I come?' and I said yeah. I suggested she bring something wants to work on were doing portrait themes. Something that's not traditional. I said I can help through I'm going to give you suggestions. I've had a few people who said they've never painted before but they're doing well. More than not this group is very comfortable with art terms with art materials not afraid of using them. It's unusual because in other places that I've worked more than not when you deal with seniors they have this idea of what art is and they're very scared and timid to use these new materials because there's either shame that they never did never got experience in school or it's too late is what I hear a lot. I always try to encourage them it's never too late; I'm going to be learning for the rest of my life. I verbally model ideas that I put out for them to hear and I think they pick it up. I do that with my kids at school and I do that here. I'm always going to be learning or this is an experiment to take the pressure off it being perfect and being, Clarisse works here she just wants to do cards she's not rally a painter she doesn't want to use a canvas because she's not good enough but she'll work on card. So to adapt for her I've made smaller on canvas paper so it's not real materials and she's not scared of wasting it, you hear that a lot I don't want to waste it. I've found ways t adapt materials so she's less timid about them and doesn't take them seriously but once she finishes them and she does them and they're beautiful and she sees other people looking at the., I use the community to encourage her I'm like look what Clarisse did and they're like that's gorgeous and she's like I was just experimenting. but no she was making a painting but didn't know it. My idea of encouraging people is soft ways: letting them do what they feel is comfortable at the time and encouraging them to just try and play and be playful with it and eventually they become much more confident with the materials and feel less scared tot do it and at the end of it they've made a painting. I guess it's a soft hand and way to encourage people that often are very discouraged. They're scared; they're very hard on themselves because it does have to be perfect

PF: How do you decide what to teach, is that dictated by the center or...

No it wasn't dictated by the center. In the beginning they did ask for certain things but I've stayed true I've done workshops in the beginning I was doing small workshops because she's like you want to get people interested you want to get people sued to you so I did the workshop with collage I did a workshop with some Sculpey stuff and then I started the painting classes and how I picked my projects here was I had three set projects I had projects that I had in mind but what came along that I didn't expect was to do painting, didn't expect to do a painting class

PF: Is this watercolor, acrylic, oils?

EV: I wanted to do acrylic because I'm an acrylic painter, but I also gave them oils and provided oil pastel and watercolor and if people are interested Ill help them instruct them in those to. I have instructed with oil pastel I have instructed with some watercolor but originally she said people are really interested in painting class would you be interested in doing it and I hadn't thought about that but that would be an interesting thing to do yeah. Oh that's where the painting came across; the people had really wanted to do it. I had planned to do a ceramic course here but their ceramic course had just started so I kind of had to change it up and I think it worked out well. I've gone from that, I did a project in the community. I thought to myself well i know i want it to be about the Highline, how I chose my curriculum here was it was supposed to be a communication between us getting to know each other, learning more about their lives that was interest in the pieces I chose to do the Highline because it's something about their community we could do sketched up there or we could use images we found and alter them. And then I moved on portraits so i could move into what I eventually want to do which is the memory boxes, but my original plan had been to do sculpture pieces about themselves and ceramics since we have the kiln and then the memory boxes and another sculpture piece. But I had to change it because of the needs of the classes and the availability of the kiln has changed. Things like that, you can make a plan but it doesn't always work out but my main goal here was about life stories about them about somehow putt their lives into their art work, reminiscence.

PF: Did you receive any resistance around that?

EV: I'm good and soft about it. I'm not doing a structured group where I'm having them do a reminiscence now. I'm interested to see what's going to happen in the next group because that's a reminiscent box that is a memory box, I did a portrait about themselves without it being too, cause some people can't handle drawing or painting themselves so I opened up the subject matter, something that represents you. It doesn't have to be a portrait. Like somebody's doing a picture of one of the trips they went to. Doing a lot of landscapes, someone's doing a flower; someone's doing a picture they took from a trip to Bermuda. Another is doing their summer home. Only two people are doing actual portraits but they are about them, they are about their lives. I was talking about a woman about her house in India and she started describing it and the plants that were there, and I said do you know what the house looks like and she's like I'm not sure and she kept talking about the banana tree and I said oh do you like bananas trees and she's like yeah and I'm like does that remind you of your home in India? And after brainstorming, she did this beautiful banana tree that she's painting. So it is about them but still in way soft enough to not be threatening. It's a gentle touch. It's taken me this long to get to know them to get to the point of even doing these boxes now. I was supposed to have a six month residency but they said after six months we'll talk to you about it see if you want to go longer. So if I had tried to fit what I'm doing now into that six months it would not have worked and I knew that and now that they know me and they've known me for 8 months. Now I can do it. But it takes a long time for them to trust you. I've found that in my previous job where I've worked and here it takes a long time for people to trust you and know you and consider you part of the community and so I waited this long to do these kind of more personal, I made a conscious choice to do soft build up for them to get to trust me and that happened in both places.

PF: In the beginning did you do any trust building exercises? How did you get to know them?

EV: I got to know them by me here in this center. I didn't actually work on trust building exercises or games, I came to their parties I hung out in their crochet classes when I didn't teach a class. It gave me an opportunity to sit and talk and chat. I came to the birthday parties, the Christmas parties I came and said hello to everyone at lunch every day. I walked up to them and showed them a sample of what I was doing in the beginning. I did extra things outside of this classroom to get them to see me as part of the community. If someone's not in my classroom or in my class I continually say hello to them. There are people who don't come to my class that know me here. I don't know if they think I work here but they know that I'm a resident here. There's been a poster up and she's been really good about this is the resident. But I think I've done community building. I did a street fair where I worked at the street fair to paint faces for them as a donation and I did that because I knew that they were going to get to see me and know me and that's where I kind of made friends too. There's other ways outside of just your classroom where people see you as part of the community. It really helps you as teacher. I used to do that too as an art therapist in my other center. How you greet people every day, just the greeting itself. Sitting down with them for a moment even if you're busy, helps. I know there must be other ways of doing it your own classroom but I kept it as an open drop in for the first few months we did not have to stay you were not required to do the class you could come when you wanted and that way the open studio setting lowered the pressure also.

PF: So that they could just bring in something that they were working on you would help them?

EV: And also since it's open structure it helped them to have a lot more personal choice and feel less pressured that they had to do that and if I did do something structured, like I did in the beginning a lot of color mixing, it kind of freaked some people out and they were scared to do the painting later. There was only one person I had lost; she went to do a computer class later. And she's going come back and to do the memory box with me, I know that. And we talked about it I said did I scare you off with the color mixing, and she said no I'm just so busy, and there hundreds of classes here that I have to compete with, there are three things scheduled sat the time of my painting class so the people who would come have so many options to go to. There's one woman I would love to have in my class but she in the writing class and she

set on that. She said oh I'm not a good painter, I said you did all this hard work and your mixing was beautiful and now the people that have done the mixing really know how to mix their colors you've missed out on that part of the experience I felt bad, you really had all that down, now the people that I've seen have done the mixing have no problem and she was laughing and talked to me about it. But you process it later, like I let her do what she needed to do and do the other classes and now she's going to come back for a project. I have about two more projects before...

PF: Leading to my next question, how do you balance form and content, you're teaching them the technical aspects of color mixing and how do you kind of teach them the more personal side, self expression of your thoughts and your ideas?

Sometimes you have to teach technique and if you don't you're doing them a disservice. And I think it's hard to balance but you have to. So sometimes the conversations you're having with someone are about technique. A lot of times I'll check in with people while we're working. They all have their own separate projects and I'll walk around the room checking on technique and sometimes I take time for the concept like ask them questions about what they're doing, check in with them about why they're doing it, what is it about? Because I find especially with this new portrait class, a lot of people were kind of scared to bring their own materials in and were a little bit nervous about like where are you in this piece. Because those conversations have started now

PF: Do you do that as a group or individually?

EV: I do it individually. I think the next class will be a s a group because I'm dealing with a social worker who wants to do memory boxes too and I told her I've been doing a lot more open studio I've been doing a lot more one on where I don't have a formal process. About what we did, why we did it and what it's about. And we do share; my sharing for my art classes now is a lot more open. And people do share, and I do, but nobody knows I'm sharing. I do it in a slick way, I'm like look guys it's so informal. But the sharing still occurs. It's not like we're stopping now, we're cleaning up, we're sharing, and I think it makes it much more natural and I've done that with group and really enjoyed it. And I am going to do it next time because it is so much about memories and is so much about them so there's going to have to be a certain processing about what we did artistically and there's going have to be a certain process about what's going on memory wise. I want to document it and I want to keep it for the future for myself. It's a five week workshop though, such a short period of time. More structured the next one, and its gotten a little more structured.

PF: You brought the idea about talking about self portraits and opening it up and saying just not an image of you, allowed them to bring in objects or take it to a place that was meaningful to them...

EV: And people are very open and sharing about it and have thought about it. I know they're going home and thinking I thought I was going do this but I've decided on that and so they're actually processing and thinking about it and being thoughtful about what they bring in. So the artistic process is happening outside of the classroom. They're starting to bring in things to collage with because I talked about being the next media and they have all these things they can or don't have to use. They don't have to do anything to that piece, but these are available and I'm encouraging them to make it more mixed media because the next phase will be very mixed media, if they want it to be. And it's going to be more sculptural so I'm trying to move them from 2-d to 3-d and I've made that conscious choice as a teacher. Because if I went straight to the 3d they couldn't have handled it would have been too much maybe some of them could but some of them might have been put off. I think about what medium I'm using so you build up

PF: For memory boxes will you look for artists who have worked with that?

EV: The one thing I've decided that I really need to afford is I need to bring in some samples that we can talk about and look at, but I don't want to give too many samples where someone thinks that they have to make it that way. That bothers me. You have to balance showing people stuff you have to be careful that you don't show them too much because that's what they'll do and I don't want everything to look the same, I would like to do some brainstorming. I would like them to look at some images but the danger is when

you do that they say that's all I can do or I can't do that. It will be mixed with the brainstorming sessions: talking about what's possible before they start.

PF: Will everyone have the same size box to work with?

Hopefully. I'm researching materials right now. I want them all to be the same size hopefully. That would be the only limitation, but what they do on it is their own. I bought canvases on sale from Blick for the portraiture, but the thing is they're about the same size. I did find though that some people now felt more comfortable using some of the canvas boards so they going to vary but the idea was they would all be the same kind of dimensions but then individual. And they were also on sale, get a bunch of them on sale so that was part of it took to be honest. But there was the nice idea of them having the same shape that they all could be different.

PF: I've found I like the uniformity because then for display purposes it can make a very nice statement, you know the same size.

EV: Right, that's what I thought about too. I'm very open about what I'm thinking; you basically say what you're thinking. The reason I've chosen these is you guys are all going to do different things on them it's all going to be about you its individual but at the same time that shape gives us a certain kind of look when we display them together. I told them that, there's nothing to hide. And even when I talk to somebody about what they're doing in their art, I'm like I notice, I see. So there's part of me talking about it but for some they're like I've noticed you are very hard on yourself when you do this piece. And that's part of the art therapist in me, but sometimes when somebody gets really frustrated with a piece and rushes through it because they want to get it over with. The way I walk to people is almost kind of joking but it sounds serious because if you do it in a softer way, they can handle it. So there's one person I have who rushes through all our paintings and I'm like you do such great work and this, you don't need to rush through it, and we're not in a hurry. She's like, 'oh I do that don't I,' and I'm like, 'I know just enjoy it it's okay. But I noticed you have a hard time looking at it and complimenting it.' I'm like, 'what do you guys think?' And again I have the processing without processing. We talked about what she enjoyed when she made it or where she found it difficult.

PF: Have you had critiques?

EV: I do it in a way sometimes now where I take a piece and they say well what you think. And I'm like well what do you think. And I'll pick up a piece and move it far away. And so I'm kind of modeling the critiquing process of what i notice and what I don't see and if I have a suggestion. So I do model that, have we had a formal critique yet? No, I think what I will do at the end of this painting class, maybe closer to then I'll have a formal critique where I put up the stuff and we talk about what we see. There is critique, is it critique between peers? That happens naturally on a table, who they're sitting with. They do critique each other, but have I had formal critiques? No, I've modeled some of the critiquing and things that I'm thinking about and things they're thinking about if they're piece and what have they felt about it. Have I had a final critique no? That would be something to add to the next one. Do I do that, have I done that in other teaching? Yeah, I did that a lot in Free Arts, because that was very structured, so it's like look at art, play a game, a board game getting to know you game, look at the art discuss the art, what do I see what do I know what questions do I have? Present a sample of what is possible based on that work, so brainstorm, make art and then clean up and share it and look at each other's work and share what you've made. So I've modeled all the different kind of steps and it was very short three hour sessions. So I've done that.

PF: With seniors?

EV: With children.

PF: Is it something you would ever do with older adults?

EV: I think it could be done but I also didn't want to structure it so tightly. I wanted it to be more organic I wanted them just to be playful with the materials. I set it up so the materials are not handed to them they come and get what they want I set it up so it's more like a drop in I also know have a combination lock on the cabinet so they can come and work when I'm not in the studios, I wanted it to be more of an open

situation but i think that the critiques do happen, but not as individually one on one with them and also with each other but I haven't really set up a time oh this is critique time. The last project we did, there could have been but I think this one there will be.

PF: Has there been an exhibition of their work?

EV: No I'm arranging that because I have a one person show here at the end of my residency in June/July. And I said to them what I really want, and what I posed to them before I started was I would like to do work inspired by my students because that's what we had talked about before and I really think even if it would be a show that kind of showed what their work has inspired in my work. Because I have considered this whole residency a conversation more than me teaching them. that's why I'm saying this is a different teaching situation it's a conversation between us. I'm working here, you're working here, and we're working together. What we do in the classroom inspires my work. I've shown them pieces, this is inspired by you guys, I'm inspired by what you did by what you've told me, how you've worked in the garment industry I'm working with fabric now I'm embroidering it because there's a lot of textile work here, I've always wanted to do that but it's that energy in the work now. So I've arranged a show for May/ June before my show. And he asked me o you want to have it before or after? I would like it before I want their work to come first and then you can see mine. And i think that that's a nice conversation seeing what we did and how my work changed because of that. i might put one piece in there just as an homage, but I think it's mostly about them I want them to be proud about the process and the hard work they've done and also have their work shown.

PF: And that would be here?

EV: It would be here.

PF: Did you ever have the idea, that even before you started your residency, to have an exhibition of your work so they could see what you're about?

I don't know. What I did was I brought pieces and I went and put it up on the table in the lunch area and I sat there and I had people look at it and touch them and talk about it and talk about working with me. I did crocheted sculpture, and I've been a painter for a long time but I haven't been painting nor doing prints or drawings. I've started doing them again since I've been here. Partially because I've had space but partially because I've been inspired to do work while I was here. They've seen my stuff because I actually did a display. I brought portfolios, I brought magazines and I showed them. This program was a pilot program this year; it's the first time they've ever done it. They've never had artists in senior centers. It's a project with Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Center for the Ageing. They're going to offer it yearly. And then I've talked to the other people that have done their centers and I've been really blessed with this center because I have more access, I have had a lot of support, I have had financial support as far as my classes, and not everyone had that opportunity. I didn't have to supply the supplies. I did have a set budget, but I didn't go crazy, I know what it's like to work in a center and not having money. I clip coupons, that's just me, they didn't ask for that. Now this memory box, she's like I've got extra money I've put aside some for you so you can do that because I know it's important to you. They've been really supportive, I didn't have to struggle to get materials for them and that's been a blessing. The Hudson Guild provided that and I've talked to people and they don't have that access.

PF: They don't have that money available?

EV: I've talked to the other residents, and they had to pay for a lot of stuff out of pocket. They didn't have the late access like I do, they could only work when they were teaching so they had to teach and work on their own stuff at the same time which is limiting. They didn't have a locked up space where they could lock things up. I was really lucky; I won the jackpot on this one. But I had asked for this center. And there is another one, I met the girl who's working there and doing ceramics, and it seems like she didn't get as much access. And she also had a harder time working on her own work and this residency is supposed to be about us making our own work as well as teaching.

PF: I remember seeing they kind of billed it as have the space to do your own work? Was that a big draw for you or was it more of a draw that you wanted to work with older adults?

For me it was because I wanted to work with older adults but I also would love to have the space, oh my god I'm in Chelsea at 17th and 9th, that's crazy. It was because it was about working with adults. It was about my experience with them, I was specifically looking for that because I loved it so much before. Not that I wasn't enjoying working with children but I missed working with seniors and it's interesting you put that question to me why did you want to work with seniors again. And that's a good question for me to ask myself, it's just I know I love working with seniors I love it I missed it, there was something missing as far as working with them I missed so much that is was good to go back to that and kind of feel at home again. I felt very much at home working here and it has now bloomed a whole new series of work that I'm working on because of it. It's been helpful. But I am excited that we're having that show, and they're excited, I know they are.

PF: Is it an incentive to have their work shown?

EV: They never knew though until recently that it was coming. It was never an incentive for them to do work. I think it's put a whole new energy into me talking about it because I have to be really clear about how long our work time is. So we've done two projects with the painting class and they're like how much longer do you think and I said I'll give it one more session and limit it to that. So I think with this one, is like you said, I have two paintings, not everything can go in so that's where the critique part is going to come. What do you think? And Looking at it together and I guess the decision will be mine but I want them to part of it too, what they feel is representative of their best work and why. So that's where we'll look at the pieces we've made and think about it. But that's the memory boxes to get in. And I think they know that too, but it depends, is it going to be too personal? I don't want them to feel like they have to and to be scared of what they're going to put in. Most of the painting class I think is interested in doing the memory boxes, they've been with me for a while. Today I had ten people, I had some drop and say I'm not going to do this painting now but I'm going to do the memory boxes with you.

PF: In our telephone conversation, we talked about maybe age difference, and how is that been a factor, or has it not been a factor at all? Them being in their seventies and you being...

EV: I'm in my forties; I'm forty three and so...

PF: Do you think that ever is an issue?

It hasn't been. But I feel comfortable in my own skin. If I wasn't someone who had worked with seniors before maybe this would be an issue especially if I was in my twenties but I think also, a lot of people take a on a motherly kind of fatherly role with you or like you know. But I think this group specifically they're very high functioning, really independent, and it's different than where I was working before. Medically compromised physically ill, it was though a hospital. But even then, I think there's like a care-taking thing, I'm the age of their daughter, maybe their grandchildren. The people that I've worked with, somebody they just turned seventy. If I didn't feel comfortable I think it would have made a big difference. I'm very respectful but I'm also very jokey. I make jokes, they make jokes. They can be blue sometimes too. I know we're not peers, but they I've shared stuff about my life I talk about what's going on with me and they do to. if you're working with somebody, to get that kind of trust you have to give part of yourself.

PF: So it's different when you're teaching children?

EV: Yeah, very different. I have to be very structured. I have to be really clear about directions. I have to think about transitions a lot of times between steps. I have to break down things so much more into simplified steps for them. We're going to first do this, then we're going to do this then we're going to move here. There's a lot of breaking down. Right now I'm working with threes and fours so it has to be kind of structured. I do try to allow a certain amount of freedom but then they're going off on their own tangent and you end up with glitter in their hair. You have to be really clear about your limits really clear on were working on this step okay let's move to the next one breaking it down. And explaining why we're doing a process. Whereas with the seniors I can kind of give examples and then say go. Also my time with the

children is much more structured about clean up. I do find myself like okay guys we have 20 more minutes and they're like you're trying to make us nervous and I'm like you know Kim's coming so we have to clean up and they're like ok task master they'll joke with me and then I'll say do you want me to or do you not, will it make you more nervous? And they're like oh no you're doing your job. I do try to give warnings because I know as a good teacher you want to clean up. But I think I'm going to allow for that processing time I'm going to have to do a lot more of that for the memory boxes. that kind of makes me nervous because I do like the open studio thing that I've done more with this But if I structure it the right way, I think also like I haven't been the task master about start time or finish time. With younger kids it's like you're sitting down now, this is where we're sitting, don't touch yet let me explain. I don't have to do those things with the adults. The kids I don't want them cutting their clothes or cutting their hair or cutting their friends. I also give them rules about how we don't paint on our friend's picture. I don't have to do that with my seniors. It's so funny I thought all day, this morning I did painting with my kids and we mixed colors and we talked about that like, "oh look its green," and them mixing the colors but then I had to also, "don't paint on your friends painting only on yours. You can paint here not on your friend's page." But I do like want to give the same kind of freedom to my kids and when they get more secure after they've worked with the materials for a while, I do the same thing but in a smaller way. I've actually shown them where the materials are and now they're bringing them back and helping me clean up and in the beginning when I worked with threes I couldn't do that I'm like here I'm putting it here now. And also I guess I do the same thing I do with the seniors too, I don't believe in perfection, some teachers are like oh it's not perfect. And I'm like they're three and it shouldn't be perfect and it i about process to. It's about learning how to cut the scissors and getting that first motor down. it can also be creative but there's motor skills processing that I'm helping them learn and fine motor with gluing and with placing. I build projects for my young kids about what I can teach them thematically and also about a skill they need to learn. How can I get them to cut with the scissors and make something with these scissors? How can I do something with glue and little objects so they can glue things on so they're practicing their fine motor skills I don't do that with the seniors I'm not even thinking about that. But they're still like and I do process in the kids like what did we make and we share it with the kids too. So there's still process but it's different. I've actually had them say what was your favorite part, what did you like the best. And I model in that for them in a simple way. It can be done. With threes and fours he uses artistic language he tells a three years about symmetry and it's like if you explain the right way, are your eyes the same? And talking about how that symmetry explaining to a child in simplified terms and I thought about that conservation and I do it in simple ways. Making it really simple.

PF: Do you talk about that with older adults?

EV: Symmetry? We talked about perspective a lot. Yeah I use the terms as far as respective wise about color and tone and I had a discussion today with someone about that like she had a house in the back, she's doing a landscape and I was like explaining to her about how often things in perspective things farther away are less in focus and things closer to you are very sharp in detail, and I think I'm using some of the terms but I'm still simplifying and so I showed her visually ways to kind of think about it and she's like oh I see that. And I'm like look and I showed her the difference between one house she did one was very much in focus and one wasn't and how it changed the picture and how that one looked farther away. And I've also done a lot with scribbling and washes and demonstrating it for the person. Today someone painted with a sponge to make a texture and we talked about texture. I don't need to define the word texture with them; they need to see how it's made. Today there was someone who wanted to work with glitter glue, I was showing her how to work with it and I had to describe it like lifting it about the page it's like cake. So I could probably give you a big fancy term, but how I dragged it and how I was working with the materials, I try to put it in life terms. But she, the sponge painting, she knows texture, I used the word texture and she's like oh. I see it's a very strong color have you thought about doing it as like, you're using it like dry where you're just scribbling. It has to be demonstrated. I'm doing a lot of one on one demonstration. And then

they get excited and then they do it themselves. I've gotten a lot of times with the seniors they need me to show them first and then they'll feel comfortable. Show me what you mean is what I'm hearing often. So I have to physically get involved and I'm like do you mind and they're like no and I do as little as possible. Or I do it on the side, art therapy thing, having a side canvas a canvas piece of paper. They need to see it, I can describe the heck out of it but until I show them it doesn't make sense. There are a lot of physical demos. Then often if someone is scared to do it on their own I'm like here here's another side piece of canvas paper or paper, try it on this, don't worry about this, Don't worry about messing it up were going to do it on this side thing. But they are learning the technique to feel confident enough to put it on their own piece. I think the one thing I'm finding a lot of time is people are frustrated about mixing your own colors and I'm a big proponent for mixing your own blacks and browns cause that's what I learned. Somebody had a mars black and I'm like okay great you have a grey now. Let's see what other grays are available. Grey-blue, grey-yellow, grey-green; now how many grays do I have, I have four different grays but I can use them like in a shadow, I can use this part. I have to demo it but once I did they got excited about it. They're like oh we can't buy green and I'm like you can mix green here.

PF: How does setting affect your teaching in a public space verse in a private room?

EV: This is a private room but it's been set up as a public space. And if I was somebody who was so structured and rigid about my practice and didn't have this kind of open studio kind of environment then maybe it would have been harder for me by the distractions but my concept was to make it more like an open studio, drop in. Some people come in late too. I've found not being so structured about it has created a structure. My class is shorter than most classes which makes me sad. Mines an hour and some of the classes are two hours so I'm missing that but that's where they can fit me in I have to be flexible I'm all about flexibility. No matter where you are it's not going to be perfect and you have to roll with the punches and as a teacher all of has to do that. I think there's a working sink I have a locked up space I've had places to dry. I've worked in places where I didn't have those things and you have to just roll with the punches. i worked in a school and we didn't have a working sink and that was horrible but today we sued the studio and my students wanted to keep working and the crochet person I've developed a great relationship with and she said if we have enough space just move to the back table and keep low so I can hear myself and you guys can keep painting. Some people stayed until like an hour ago and so I turned on some music after all the classes were off and were sitting here painting working together and I'm painting and they're painting and that's great it's exactly what I want form this position. It was made so people could come in and see my work while I was working. I said can I work while other classes are going and they said yeah you can but we want more people to see what you're doing as long as it doesn't bother the other teachers. But it's really, two classes were running at the same time and it didn't bother me and it didn't bother her because she trusts me and likes me. It does affect the way the classes are run. I've had to do classes like groups. The classes I did at the senior center didn't have a private room, there tables in a big open center and people would come to that table to work. And they could roll away or walk away from the table and come back so there wasn't like any privacy so as far as processing about personal stuff; it was all kind of out there. at least this is a closed classroom but I've gotten used to doing the small one checking with people because it was such a big open space and the conversations had to be , if they were of a private nature most of the time what I say to someone is not so private that other people can't hear, and definitely they've gotten to know each other from their work or them right next to each other, but it had to be in an open space so that kind of quite one on ones has happened because of that open space I don't close the door when I work, people come in and I'm doing ceramics and they walk out but then all those people like me and will come in and work with me at other times so I guess being that flexible has been good.

PF: What support do you receive or need when teaching to older adults?

EV: From this center here? Or from other teachers?

PF: General...

EV: I think from here, I've processed what I'm thinking about as far as themes, also I've processed them about like in the beginning how to encourage people to come and I put my ideas out there and then they also suggested things. And they've also been very supportive like promoting it to other people, announcing it, they put me in the newsletters, and then when they have meetings monthly meetings they say oh there's a brand new class. They make flyers for my groups. When there's a new subject matter we make a flyer and I've received a lot of support that way. I've also like I've said received a lot of financial support that a lot of people didn't get which is important. the only thing that I would say is that there are so many different classes here that I feel like I've lost people that might have been working with me because there are too many options but I think that's amazing for them they have those opportunities and for the short amount of time I have left who knows that those people might not work, I know there's a few people who said they want to work and do the next group. I have one friend who develops his own curriculum too, we talked about curriculum, what he's teaching how he does it, what he's thinking. A friend of mine, Matthew teaches at this center, we've had conversations about what he's doing with his children and what I do with mine at school because a lot of my, I still incorporate a lot of artwork in my class, it's not only art. I'm doing literacy and other things. But I think about how I work them and I kind of process with him outside conversations. And also my mother in law and my mom are teachers so a lot of times with my younger kids I process what I'm doing but I think me processing what I'm doing with my younger kids has affected what I do here. I do need to think about breakdowns, I do need to think about simplifying language sometimes. Like describing today to the one woman who's working with materials like it's like cake frosting. It's like when you're icing a cake and she was like oh! But I didn't know how to describe that to her until I was like how do you simplify this Elyssa? How do you describe this to your kids? The simplest way to describe it to her so she understands the process. It's cake frosting. Working with kids has taught me that, especially the really young ones, I have to make it as simple as possible. To be in two different spectrums is exciting to me but I think both have fed off each other. What I have done with the seniors has made me better with the children and what I've done with the children has made me better with seniors I have to speak different languages in both but I like that I can I like that I have the ability to work with both of them at this time right now, it's exciting for me. I have both in my life right now and especially today I start my day off all morning with the children and then I come here and so to be the same person in two different populations in one day is crazy but I love it, I think I get a lot more energy because I have to live in two worlds and I kind of like that. I would like an opportunity to be able to do this again. Be able to work with more than one population because I've only done either or

PF: I was reading different writers talking about ageing and one of the topics was two separate younger population and older adults, and that bringing that together: creating conversation whereas they might not be isolated from all of it.

EV: There's been some intergenerational work that I did when I had interns, I had interns at the senior center I worked at previously and every summer they would come and work with us and they were high school kids and they would work one on one with people when we did groups and they ran activities. So there was that. They weren't making their own artwork, often they did make their own artwork, they were working with other people and they made stuff for themselves too. They were more helpers and then would make artwork too. But it still occurred and so I've seen it the works and yeah most of the kids that volunteered for that did it because they specifically wanted to work with older people or had grandmother there or had wanted to work with that population. That was something they were thinking about so it's different than someone who had never had the experience. In my class too I have grandparents. I have grandpa who is part of my class. I work for Brooklyn child and family serves which is a Brooklyn Forte Greene Head Start, and we have grandparents who volunteer. Basically the grandparents work for a stipend, it's not really getting paid they're all retired they volunteer in the classrooms and do activities with us. So there's intergenerational there too. So there's a lot of intergenerational for me but it's different

because they're helping me run groups. It's positive exposure for them. I would like to see more of it and I think also it would be great for younger children to kind of get the experience that I have, the positive experience of talking to someone who has been on this earth longer than me, who has something to share and something to teach me. Their perspective. A lot of older people are wiser; even if they aren't something that's different from your beliefs. Everyone I've met, I've learned something amazing from. We take the resource and life experience that they've had for granted. And I know that it's been positive experience for me. The reason I was doing crocheted sculpture for such a long time was I learned crochet from my patients I'm actually showing the crocheted sculpture at Fountain Art fair, the gallery that I'm working with and it's interesting I wouldn't have been crocheting if it wasn't for the work I did with patients in the past. They taught me how to crochet and I started making my own artwork I wanted to incorporate something I had done with them as a therapist into my own artwork, so that's interesting. When I started the painting class- I just paint, and I'm thinking about how you break it down for someone I don't think about what's important to teach them. I haven't taught painting in a while, I've done groups but it's not a traditional painting class so I have to think about what's important for me to teach them what do I need to focus on so they can have a positive experience with that and what so I need to do to achieve that. There were drawing issues color issues perspective issues. But I have to think about where do I start, even if they had experience with it how do I break it down so that it makes sense. I think I'm still processing whether or not it has been affective but I think it has been I've seen people grow and become more comfortable with the materials

PF: Are you seeing them try new things?

EV: Yeah, I'm seeing them try new things they haven't tried before. Some of the ones that have a lot of skill I'm pushing them to try something new. I'm like I noticed you're doing this but have you thought about that. There was one person today, I was like you're avoiding paint, cause you're really comfortable with collage, but are you scared of paint, and he was like no and I said you have a great idea let's just do it, just try it. He's the kind of person who collages all the time so working with the paint itself he still kept it flat. I said mix it up make a mess see what happens. He's bringing collage in to work with. He's done a lot of I've also kind of helped him with the last time he wanted to do collage but still use paint, he was very interested in Miro, so we used canvas paper to collage a painting. I was working with something he felt familiar with.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH OLDER ADULTS

(The names have been changed to respect the privacy of the interviewees)

Donald **Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011**

PF: Tell me about yourself; have you always been interested in making art? Or have you taken classes before?

D: Yeah. Even as a kid I enjoyed art and I was always frustrated because I remember when I was about ten years old going on vacation and having typing paper and a bottle of cheap green paint and we were in the woods and I couldn't make what I was doing look like what I was seeing so I thought, I'm hopeless. I put it aside but I was always interested in it. And I took a few classes over the years, and then since I've been retired, which is five years, there's time to come to classes. Actually I took a class at Art Students League. I tried to do collage there and it wasn't available, so I took a class called painting with pastels which I didn't care for at all, and after I retired I took a painting with acrylics class at Parsons, and I enjoyed that. But the collage is a lot of fun I really enjoyed it.

PF: What was your profession?

D: Most of my life I was in the theater. I studied theater. I started out as an actor and became a director and then producer/director. During that time, other than designing some of the posters there, was no art involved.

PF: So this has been the most regular art class you've taken at the center?

D: Yeah, I came in here maybe four years ago. I don't remember why, and I picked up a flier about collage class starting. I signed up for it and it'll be four years. I came and I was the only person who showed up. So I met Liz who teaches this class that day, and I knew right away she was as good as any professional teacher I had come across, better. Which she continues to be.

PF: What was it that struck you about her?

D: Well it was great being the only one there the first day, having all of her attention. The attention was great. The following week a couple more people came in and there were just three of us for the ten week class and we had a showing in the little gallery here and I had twenty-five pieces because we were working with smaller pieces, but at the same time there wasn't the hassle of having a room cramped with people which can slow you down. But with Liz, she's very sensitive, and she knows her stuff too. And every week she wants to come in and show us a new idea, and that's commitment. And she'll be in the middle of doing something that she's done for the first time and she'll go, 'oh I like that. I like that.' And the enthusiasm has never left her, and you pick that up.

PF: So is this something you've continued when you're not taking class here on Fridays?

D: I've maybe missed five classes in four years. I have a studio apartment which means, if I want to work at home, the entire apartment becomes an artist studio. So I'll do that every six months: I'll take a month and then everything goes back in the closets and I only work in class. I don't take it home.

PF: Have you taken other classes since you've started taking this class?

D: Yeah. There was a couple of classes that the Whitney offered here. One in ceramics, I had not understood what it was going to be when I signed up. I didn't enjoy that very much, but I did it. I think it was six weeks. But I spend a lot of time writing too, I guess my major focus is play-writing. I've also had a lot of time to do that since I've been retired.

PF: Have your expectations been met from when you started taking classes here? Did you have any vision?

D: Well a senior center- I'd gone to a number of them before I retired because I wanted to see what they did. And a lot of the classes are really simplistic. They're for beginners, and this class is not really that. You catch up and people heard about Liz and came from other centers people who like art and collage sought her out. The group that's here now, solidly the same ten or fifteen people have been coming for years, because Liz, we know she's a pro. And the first class that she got the first little grant for here was heritage or something like that. The assumption is that old people only want to look at their past so we did these little collages about your life. And I thought my life isn't over, I still got thirty years to go. And I've seen that at other centers when I checked them out and it's like here I am old and I'm going to put down pictures of what it used to be and you don't get any of this from this after that first class she's been here steadily

PF: What do you like to explore in your art or are there certain themes?

D: Well, it's interesting. Liz will give us a project and I find somehow it will feel crafty to me. Like today's project, making a pin out of puzzle pieces, that craftiness doesn't really interest me much. I play around with it, but I'm not committed to it. And if I do then it gets very painterly. I figure what I do is more art than craft. I build with paint, paper and collage. And to me, it's more art than making a pin or making a card. When they make cards I'll do them cause they like to sell them at the center and make a few bucks, but it's not my thing: craft isn't.

PF: What differentiates art from craft to you?

D: Well crafts is like when your in kindergarten you got a glob of clay and put your hand print in it and put it on a hairpin to give to your mother or grandmother to hang on the wall. Or you make an ashtray in those days, but it's something that's utilitarian that somebody might use rather than something where you would look at it and appreciate it. The art in that piece, the use of compositions, colors and textures as oppose to the glob of clay with your hand print it, which grandma puts in a drawer and never hangs on a wall. And you can't blame her.

PF: Are there museums you like to visit in the city?

D: I don't like crowds but I've learned in a gallery you just go to wherever you can get near a picture or a sculpture. I like the Brooklyn Museum because it's quiet. I like the Museum of the City of New York which is not particularly art, but its quieter. And I like the Historical Society, and I love the Metropolitan Museum. It's just incredibly perfect. I don't go there very much because its so crowded.

PF: Is there a certain type of artist you follow?

D: Well, no. Some of the people in the class are really into it, lets go to the gallery and all that stuff. I have particular people I love, Matisse and Picasso. I think Matisse is king; Picasso I love.

PF: Do you try to emulate them through your work?

D: When I was taking learning to paint with acrylics at Parsons, I don't remember how I started but I had a book of Picasso reproductions, and I asked the teacher if I could paint a Picasso. And she said sure, so I started copying the painting. It had a lot of orange in it, and I knew I wasn't finding the right orange color. So I took it home and I redid it and found the color. And when I brought it back in with the picture of the actual Picasso next my painting, the class could not tell the difference; it turned me on. I did not have the imagination to create what Picasso did originally, but I was able to find the color and the feeling of the painting. And also some of the dancers paintings by Matisse, I took a copy of those, and while some of the figures weren't quite right, I knew that I had captured the movement that Matisse had. And the instructor

said you have gotten that sense of movement in that piece. I don't know how, but I enjoyed that. Those are the only things I've copied like that.

PF: Do you have any interest in modern art?

D: I don't keep up with that, I don't know who the popular people are.

PF: So taking art classes here, you're interested in art, what else does it provide for you?

D: Well I get to be the class clown. Some days I figure Liz is a little testy today, so I don't say as much, but I get away with murder. And the people laugh at me; and they come to my play readings. They're very supportive, which is great.

PF: So you've found a community and support among your peers through this?

D: Yeah.

PF: If you were to take another class, besides collage, what would interest you?

D: There's a memoir class, and I came in one day and I just looked at the people signing up for class, and I thought that's not for me. And I may have been very wrong, but it looked to me like another one of those projects where we go in and be old people. And that's just the feeling I got.

PF: So being an old person means what you then?

D: Well, the people in this class are very spunky people: there aren't really any people who are hard of hearing. A couple of people have come in with walkers or canes, but they're very active senior citizens. Because of medicine and so forth in the last hundred years. They're spunky. Twenty-five years ago I started saying to friends, 'you know, I'm such a slow learner I have to live to be a hundred years old.' And I was joking, but a couple years after- I don't put alcohol in my body, I go to the gym. I intend to be at least a hundred but not with a walker or a cane. So that niche of the senior, the golden years- and I joke about it when people get too serious about it. And when I see people who say, 'oh we can't come to a class at night because we're old.' There's ten of you, can't you come as a cluster?

PF: So you have a positive attitude about getting older?

D: Well yeah, you've got to. I had this play reading coming in a week, and I was sitting the other day working, and I thought, you know your seventy-one years old, why are you doing this? This is like when you started in the theater forty years ago. And I thought well who am I? This is who I am. And I still get tense like I was a kid. I'm nervous about this play reading in a week, and I'll be surrounded by supportive people.

PF: And through your plays, through your writings what themes do you explore? I know the one you're doing now has a historical reference.

D: Yeah first draft of that I wrote thirty years ago then put it in a jar and finished it. I find that I write for older people. I've written a whole series of one character pieces. I met an actress who is just wonderful, and I tend to write with her in mind. Even the piece a week from today is mostly older actors. I live in a complex which is seventy five percent people in the performing arts, and I've seen the people grow old, and I've seen the ones who just sit there and stare and the ones who get out and do things. And I don't understand the people who- in New York City, you don't have to have a lot of money to enjoy it. There's so much that's free, like these classes right here. So you just get off your butt, you don't just sit there. But in the theater profession, like a lot of professions, as you get older there's less demand for you.

PF: If I can go back to your writings, what do you write about? What have you written about in your plays? Life situations, historical-

D: History. This piece is called "American Hysteria", spelled H-Y-S-T-E-R-Y, because I came across incidents of American history that were built around hysteria so I called it "American Hysteria" and the first one is about Salem, Massachusetts, the year after the witchcraft trials. I have a great great great great great grandfather who was hung for a witch, so I got interested in it. I've written a number of plays and I've realized that people are somehow very independent, but somehow a little crippled. I wrote a play about a prostitute in London who was attacked and mutilated by Jack the Ripper, now this was a comedy. And somehow I think I've created a real human being there. Another one, "Mother

Goose goes to Washington,” which is really my feeling about gizmos taking over the world. Mother Goose’s friends is Santa Clause ,and Santa says nobody asks for a ball or a toy or a doll anymore. They all want an iPod or a Blackberry, so delivery is very easy because we don't have any bulky toys to deal with. That’s just my opinion about where the world is going. I don't call them monologues, they’re one character plays because there’s an action completed in it. And I wrote one called the blind vampire about the only vampire who’s ever gone blind, and he can’t exist anymore because he flew out the window and hit a sky scraper. And he didn’t know the skyscraper was there. And as a senior citizen, all these people are senior citizens, and I don't think I started out consciously making them that way.

PF: Any thing else you can share about your experience making art?

D: Art can be very very relaxing. A place you get into; what you see before you is your whole world, and you push back, ‘will I have the rent money in time?’ The worries. That’s one of the great things about art and there’s a point where I can complete something and I say that’s okay, that's okay. I have dozens of those, but then sometimes I'm like, I know this is good. That's a wonderful feeling.

PF: When you make your collages do you give them away? Do you hang them?

D: I'm thinking of next time I do my play reading, hanging them, but I only have the use of the hall for an hour before the audience arrived. But I'm thinking of pre-mounting them on foam board or something and putting them in there cause I’ve got a couple hundred.

PF: Do you share them with your friends or family?

D: I usually leave on two around my apartment so when people come in they say, ‘oh what’s that.’

Jane Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011

PF: You just said you’re a retired teacher.

J: Yes a retired teacher. I taught English as a second language, intermediate school. 14-15 year olds in a New York Public School.

PF: So how did you come to take the collage class here?

J: I was taking a collage class at the 92nd street Y and a friend of mine, who I know mentioned Hudson Guild and that friend of hers was taking collage class here and she thought I’d be interested, so I came down here one day and signed up.

PF: How long have you been taking classes at Hudson Guild? Here

J: At least a year.

PF: And at the 92nd street Y?

J: This has been three years already.

PF: So you have the perspective of about three different collage classes, can you talk about how are they different?

J: the 92nd street y mostly has been almost like a studio experience you go in see what other people are doing have some assignments. Here at Hudson Guild Liz, the teacher, has been showing us so many techniques every week so its lot of experimentation and learning new things.

PF: And how about at 72nd street?

J: The same. A lot of new things every week and being exposed to books, the teacher discusses shows that are going on. Liz here at the Hudson guild, very enthusiastic and she has had a show here and I was in the show and so were a lot of other people, and that was good.

PF: What were your expectations coming into the class here, to Liz’s class?

J: I didn't have any, and I was a little nervous in the beginning. It was all new to me.

PF: Has that changed for you then with this class?

J: I'm taking more risks, trying new things even though it’s hard for me but its good and I’m just sharing things with other people.

PF: Are you making art outside the class here?

J: Very little. Living in Manhattan its' hard. The papers have taken over my life. I'm really obsessed. Drawers where I used to have clothes, they're all filled with papers.

PF: What do you mean papers, art papers?

J: Oh yeah, collage papers. My closets, everywhere you look in my bedroom its just overrun with papers.

PF: But you said you don't do anything at home no? You don't use them?

J: Very little. I just feel more motivated to come to the class.

PF: Have you set any goals for yourself?

J: Just trying new things. This semester at the Y, and part of last semester I started working with collage on canvas, and I liked that.

PF: Are you interested in taking any other types of art classes?

J: Not really, no. I don't draw very well and I'm not comfortable really using paints. I do it a little but I don't like it. I do use oil pastels, which I love. Just a little bit.

PF: What is it about collage that you like?

J: Because it's not threatening, you don't have to come up with a beautiful painting.

PF: For you, is art that? What does art mean to you?

J: I have loved art forever.

PF: You have?

J: Oh always.

PF: So have you taken classes?

J: No. No, when I was in school, it wasn't a very good experience. But whenever I traveled I always went to art galleries and museums, and I've always collected papers, and that's part of what I use now: things from 40 years ago.

PF: So you like textured papers or printed patterns?

J: Printed patterns, yeah. Things that almost clash to somebody else... I'm trying to think of...Christian Lacroix, the dress designer. I love things like that.

PF: So you mean like using-

J: Just things that are different, they might look weird, that might necessarily go together.

PF: Did you like to create things outside of school?

J: No just in school, in fact I took a sabbatical when I was teaching and it was a fabulous program called visual arts, and it was drawing painting sculpture at LaGuardia Community college in Long Island City. I know that the drawing teacher hated what i was doing because i really couldn't draw and what happened was one assignment was draw something in color and something clicked, and I started drawing with markers and once or twice I went with this other teacher to the Drawing Center in Soho, and I didn't know what I was doing. But there was somebody sitting next to me who had these markers that looked like a paintbrush and they're called Tombo I think? Anyway, so I asked him what it was, and I bought them. And over the course of at least a year, I filled two or three books of drawings. I was drawing everything I could with beautiful colors, even though I can't draw. Then three or four years ago a niece of mine said, would you like to take a one day collage class with me? Anyway, it was a surprise, and she treated me to the class, and that's how I met the teacher Ellen Alden

PF: How does Ellen structure her classes, is it similar to Liz?

J: Well there a syllabus. She has a curriculum, so every week we focus on. I'll do that assignment quickly then I'll make cards and a fish.

PF: You said you like to visit art museums, do you have a favorite in the city?

J: The Metropolitan, and I don't go to the Modern that much, and I don't go the Museum of Art and Design much and I like going in and out of the galleries in Chelsea. For someone who hasn't studied art, I can have conversations with my friend who is a Fine Arts major and an artist. I know, not all of the artists, but I know a lot of them. I love it. I love fashion, I love movies, I love everything, music.

PF: What has taking this art class meant to you?

J: Well, it gets me out of the house because pretty much am a loner. I like doing everything alone. I go to museums alone, I go to the movies alone. I do everything alone. Going to the classes forces me to have a direction, I get up and out.

PF: I know you said you like Christian Lacroix, any other artists you favor?

J: I like Andy Warhol very much, Keith Herring. Modern, a lot of modern.

PF: And what is it about that?

J: It's just different. I took a silk-screening class at the School of Visual Arts and hated every minute. I respect the process, it's just its a lot of work

PF: Is that why you didn't like it?

J: Because of the work, yeah. It was just so many steps, but the colors you can get from silkscreen are magnificent, the finished product.

PF: Have you ever looked into the Art Students League as well? Do you know about them?

J: I didn't like that. I went to look a little bit not my kind of thing. I mean, this is perfect for me: collage I'm comfortable with it, I don't expect I'll become a painter or anything like that.

PF: You use fish as things. Do you ever draw upon life experiences?

J: No I don't plan anything. I don't think about anything. I have my shape of a fish. I have no plan, it just comes out. Work with anything I have, no plan. It doesn't mean anything, spontaneous.

PF: You like playing with the colors and the textures?

J: Yeah, I love color. And I like sometimes using faces, pictures, sculptures, and faces on fish that are just very strange. And when I was teaching it was always a part of my curriculum from the beginning of teaching. I would go out and take the kids on trips all the time: the Metropolitan Museum, China Town for lunch.

Ruth **Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011**

PF: How long have you been coming to Liz's collage class?

R: About three years. I retired four years ago and started coming a year after I retired.

PF: And what was your profession?

R: I was social worker.

PF: Now have you taken art classes anywhere before? What interested you?

R: What I was doing before I retired? I did some photography, and I did crocheting and a little bit in ceramics after I retired I knew I wanted to get more involved in art, and I started looking for classes, and I had heard from friends that Liz was a good teacher. And one of my friends started in the class before I did, liked it, and I decided to join

PF: What were your expectations going into the class?

R: I went because I wanted to do something a little more creative, and I had friends in the class. So it was the creativity outlet, and it was also to have some fun with friends and to socialize.

PF: Has that changed?

R: No, I still have fun, and I still feel creative.

PF: Do you do collage work outside of the class?

R: Occasionally I'll do some collage work at home, but I do other kinds of things and I take other kinds of classes. In addition to collage, I have a beading class and stained glass class, a quilting class and the collage class in different places all over the city.

PF: Mainly at senior centers?

R: Yes

PF: Or are there schools that are offering-

R: No... well I did take a ceramics class at Hunter, which is how I found out about the beading class which is at Temple Emmanuel, which is one day a week for seniors who do oil painting, watercolor and beading. The quilting class is at Riverbank State Park, and it's also a class for seniors. The stained glass class is at Council House, and that's also for seniors.

PF: Have you taken collage class anywhere else?

R: No, just here.

PF: What do you like about the class? I know you like the camaraderie and that it's a creative outlet for you. What in particular about Liz and her teaching can you talk about?

R: It's a very nice class in that she's an extremely supportive teacher. She always finds something positive to say about every one's work so nobody feels like, 'I can't do this,' and that's a nice feeling in the class. She always comes up with new ideas and new techniques. Sometimes I'll try something she taught us three months ago, and I'm like, 'oh maybe this will work.' I'm not a painter; I haven't taken any painting classes and this give me the opportunity to make two dimensional pictures without feeling frustrated because I'm not a painter.

PF: What else can you say about your experience?

R: It's really a nice way of making something you can feel proud of, and you don't need to have a lot of talent to do it. Also, because we've learned so many different techniques through Liz because each time she comes in with something new or different, you can incorporate all kinds of things: everything into one picture, and if you don't like the way it comes out, you add another technique on top of it, or rip it up and put on another work. And I've been really pleased with how things have come out, not everything, but by and large.

PF: Has this inspired you to look at other collage artists?

R: Yes, I go to galleries and get ideas from them. And Liz teaches us a technique and sometimes I look it up on the Internet and find some other ways of doing it; it's fun.

PF: Have you used it for gifts?

R: Oh yes, oh yes! A year ago we learned to make frames, so I made something like twelve frames for various family members for Christmas presents. And this year it wasn't for class but it was in an email about making puzzle pins; and two of my sisters teach young kids and my niece teaches young kids, and I thought, oh the kids will enjoy seeing a puzzle pin. So I made on two, then i though they're fun and everyone will enjoy them, so I made twelve pins. And they were Christmas presents as well. Essentially all of the cards I've been sending out and the gift enclosure cards are something I've made out of collage.

PF: What has surprised you about collage class, something about yourself?

R: It's showed me a side of myself- I sort of knew that I had some sort of talent in art but I never pursued it and I'm making nice things, and that's a good feeling.

PF: Do you go to galleries or museums on any kind of a regular basis?

R: Fairly regular, yeah and I've become a member of the Museum Modern Art and design. In the past I've been a member of MOMA. But I was taking classes at Hunter so I could get in free at MOMA, so I didn't renew that membership.

PF: Is there a certain style of art you like?

R: I like impressionism and in a way, collage can be adapted. In fact, at one point Liz asked us to do collage a homage to one of our favorite artists and I did one of Cezanne. Not exactly his work, but his style, and it's now hanging in my living room on my wall. So I also hang up my work.

PF: How do you feel about modern art?

R: It depends, there are certain things I like, but other things I don't understand; the colors don't seem to me- is that really art? I'm not really that crazy about it, but it doesn't have to representational in order for me to like it.

PF: So you can appreciate abstract art?

R: Yes, my favorite kind of art is probably Impressionism.

PF: Has your view of art changed since taking the collage class?

R: Well, one of the other things I did after I retired was I took a course at Hunter in art history but my problem with that class was that we went up to Impressionism, and it was like the last week where we covered everything from impressionism to modernism and I was a little disappointed so much of it was focused on Greek and roman art and not what i was interested in. but they has changed my focus somewhat because I look at things differently. I also took a ceramics class at hunter and we went to the met with the guy who taught that class and he pointed out all kinds of things so now when I go to museums I look at the artwork ceramics furniture and the ceramics and the stained glass differently than I would ten years ago. do you think taking art classes has changed the quality of your life cause you hear about in the field successful aging because as you get older maybe tend to stop taking risks stop learning.

PF: do you think this contributes

R: well I'm the sort of person who is always trying to do things. I go to the restaurant there's something on the me I've never eaten before that's what I'll order and that's just the way i am I've traveled to Auschwitz I've traveled to exotic places so i don't think the classes have changed it but I've taken the classes because I'm interested in trying new things and I've stuck to this class because I really like it and it's given me a lot of satisfaction

PF: anything else you'd like to say

R: Art for seniors is a really good thing many of the people in the class have done essentially nothing before and a lot of the work that is being produced in our class in really quite good and people enjoy it and the fact that many of us have stuck with Liz's class for more than a semester is a attribute to her and the fact that we get a lot out of it.

Bonnie Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011

PF: Have you taken art classes before?

B: Just here?

PF: Anywhere. Maybe in your youth?

B: I didn't really take art classes in my youth, but what I liked to do was I would get newspapers. When I was young, there was the movie section and when they advertised the movie there was, you know, a little picture or something. And I would try to reproduce it. Not copy it, but reproduce it. I'm trying to think... I liked to finger paint in kindergarten as I remember. I don't really think I took anything. What I did most of the time, I liked to draw; so I would, on my own, go to Central Park or take a little trip on a bus to Englewood and sit somewhere and draw.

PF: And this was at what age? When you were younger?

B: I would say I did those kinds of things like in my twenties, my thirties. You know, on my own really.

PF: So was taking Liz's collage class your first?

B: No, I never took a collage class until I went to another senior center. And that was maybe about two years ago, two and half years ago. And I did that for about three, probably three semesters, on and off. And somebody had mentioned this class and, I just sort of decided to try it.

PF: Do you remember what was your initial interest in taking a collage class? At what senior center?

B: Well first of all it was closer to the house, so that makes it easier. And I like that senior center. I mean it's not a free senior center; you have to pay to join. It just seems a little bit more... I don't know what to say, upscale. And I don't know, I think I met somebody in this class who told me about that class and that's how it all started.

PF: And that collage class, what senior center was this?

B: At 72nd street.

PF: And so what initially got you in there? What was your motivation?

B: I think I kind of knew that in collage there weren't really any formal rules like drawing. I had been to the Art Students League and had taken classes there in drawing and a summer landscape course and I had gone on some painting vacations in France, and I had taken some classes down in Mexico.

PF: Was this after you retired?

B: No, some of those learning vacations were while I was teaching. And I like to combine the painting with the learning vacations; it's a nice way to see a country. So I did that in three or four places. And I don't know, I just never took collage before.

PF: So you've been interested in art making?

B: Yeah, I guess on and off a little bit.

PF: What was your intention in taking painting?

B: I think my intention for everything is just for self expression. I don't really have any goals to be an artist or anything like that. I like art; I go to a lot of museums. I like to go to exhibitions and stuff like that. I think it's just a way to express yourself. You know like you write or you're in a play, it's just a way to express yourself.

PF: Do you write as well?

B: Yeah I've taken a few writing classes at Y, at the Retired Teacher Center. Another thing, I used to write as a kid to express myself. If I had a problem I'd write. I guess I use all these arts just really; it's therapeutic in a way. It's like talking to a person: it gets out some of your feelings.

PF: Do you ever enter exhibitions? Do you ever think about that?

B: Well when I was at the Art Students League at the end of the class they always have an exhibition, and you would put up your work. And when I was in France on a learning workshop we were, you know like you see in the movies, we were painting along the trees and the paths and everything, and they were looking for a painting to put in the office of this little French town. So at the end of the whole experience we all put our paintings up on the wall and they chose one. So I guess you could call that an exhibition.

PF: Is this something when you go home? Do you do art when you're at home outside of the class?

B: I don't really do it at home. I've done it a few times in this class, just a few times. Because Liz said keep all your materials close by in a place where everything is out so that if something stirs up inside of you, it's right there. I've only done it a few times at home.

PF: You mentioned you were a teacher, what did you teach and what grade level?

B: I was an elementary school teacher. I taught fifth grade, third grade, and I was a resource room teacher, which is a special education teacher. I wrote reports for learning disabled kids. I got a Psych degree; I worked in a hospital.

PF: What were your expectations when you joined the collage class here? Do you recall?

B: Did I have any expectations? I don't know. I guess I just had the other collage class, and people were telling me this is a different kind of collage class. So I wanted to see what the difference was.

PF: Can you say what the difference is now?

B: I think this is more orderly. Somehow there is more order to this class: we're keeping this book and there's something about it. Even though it's not structured, there's kind of a structure built in because you have a book and you're going page by page. And I'm the kind of person who needs a certain amount of structure in my life or else I don't what to do. On the other hand, the other class was less structured, and I kind of liked that too because it just tapped into a different place. So, to me this is more structured and more orderly even though you do your own thing. Whereas the other one was less structured and more out there in some way.

PF: What do you mean "out there"? How would you define that?

B: I don't know, the way the teacher presented it was like she would bring in like eleven different things. Whereas in this class, it's usually only one or two things that are shown to you.

PF: When you say "things", like a certain technique?

B: Yeah something like that. The other teacher would bring a lot of different things, so you'd have to go to a lot of different places to figure out what you're doing. Whereas this, I might use the technique that's shown to me cause it's more structured.

PF: Have you thought about what else you might like to learn from this class, what are your expectations going forward, if any?

B: I think eventually maybe I'd like to use a canvas or something, do some kind of... I don't know. Instead of just putting it in a book, somehow turn it into some kind of a different kind of project.

PF: How long have you been taking classes here with Liz?

B: Not that long, maybe I started last year.

PF: And you're also in Riva's class. How's that been?

B: That's really been very interesting because she shows slides: it's more like art history in a way. Even though we did do that one project that I used buttons: found objects. And yeah, I enjoyed the tour at the Whitney. I think she's very knowledgeable about what she does. It's more like art history to me.

PF: If you could choose one museum to go which one would you prefer?

B: I'd probably say the Met, only because it has a lot of exhibitions going on.

PF: Is there a certain art that you prefer: a certain time period or a certain style?

B: Well, I like the Impressionists. I recently went and saw the photography exhibit there. They have all the great masters and they have the exhibitions. You know how they give you the earphones and all that stuff, it's just interesting.

PF: Do you like abstract art?

B: Well because I never really understood abstract art and why that it's abstract. But I suppose since I've taken the collage and this little class in the afternoon, I've gotten a little more interested in abstract art because I know a little bit more about it than I did before. So, I've sort of, you know, grown or something.

Dorothy Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011

PF: Is this your first time taking art classes here?

D: I failed finger painting in Kindergarten I didn't like anything that was connected with art and I've always thought of myself as being extremely untalented. And then I saw the Romare Bearden exhibit. Collages

PF: And was that...?

D: That was at the Whitney.

PF: How long ago?

D: Four to six years ago, it was fabulous. And I said maybe I can do collage, and then my friend who was in the class, through someone else I heard about this collage class and a year and half ago I entered it and I've loved it ever since

PF: What is that you love about it?

D: I love the fact that it allows me to create, I'm not so good at figuring out paint and all that. I'm very good in terms in metaphor, having meaning to what I do. I'm still learning how to execute it but I have the ideas I know what I want.

PF: What is it you have learned though this class?

D: That there's no wrong or right. And if you feel, 'oh my god I made a mistake,' you go over your mistake. And I look at things than in an entirely different way. I'm a big museum goer, I always have been. I look at their technique their colors. And especially there was a Kandinsky and I just look at his technique his lines.

PF: So you've come to have an appreciation more for art from taking Liz's class?

D: The technique of art.

PF: What were your expectations when you came in?

D: I had none. I think I've gone from here to here and my goal is to go to there.

PF: What would that look like? How would you know you've arrived there?

D: My friends think I have improved greatly. There was an exhibit and Liz made me put something in the exhibit and my friends said I should frame it and I thought. I showed other friends the whole body of work I had done and two out of the three people there liked the same things. I can't judge my own work.

PF: Is this something you do outside of class?

D: No I'm still working, I work part time. And I teach in a collage so I have a lot of things that I have to prepare to teach at home so I don't do any artwork at home.

PF: So coming to this class...

D: It's my only creative endeavor except for teaching.

PF: Do you wish you had more time to do this at home? If you weren't teaching do you think you would be?

D: I don't know. I didn't teach during the summer and I didn't do anything. I like the camaraderie, I like the feedback from the teacher and the rest of the group. I don't know if I would do it at home alone. And there's the group process, I see something that this person has done, it's not copying but I learn from other people. You can't do that when you're alone. I like the group.

PF: The interaction.

D: The interaction I see them do something and think maybe I can do that?

PF: You don't take any other art classes now? This is your only one?

D: Ever. This is my first ever.

PF: Are you interested in other venues?

D: No. The only thing I would do is collage. I'm not as crazy about mixed media. We did it once and I didn't do it. I mean I tried it but I didn't enjoy it.

PF: What was it about it?

D: It wasn't collage. I like getting a piece of a paper, and now I see it looks pretty with the background. You get your theme, I love themes, and you look for pictures that have to do with the theme or you look through magazines and discover a theme through the pictures you find and I love doing the journal. Have you heard about our journal?

PF: Yeah I've seen some of them; what do you love about that?

D: It was my 75th birthday and I was thinking of doing a journal, I'll make it on my 75th birthday, and it will never be finished there's a lot of pages. I found something in my house, I like to write in a journal, someone had given it to me but I had never wrote in this particular journal. I had a lot because everyone gives me journals and I started using it and you know it's thick.

PF: I know you like the camaraderie of the class, and speak highly Liz. What is it about her a teacher?

D: I know she's a good teacher. I observe, I'm an administrator also and I observe.

PF: What is it about Liz as a teacher that resonates with you?

D: I like the idea of the demonstrations, but I have to tell you I do not always follow what she teaches. Like what she taught today the frisket it looks too complicated. That doesn't mean I'm not going to do it but right now I want to work on my journal and my triptych. I like that she goes around and looks at people's work and she always has a positive thing to say. If she has suggestions she'll give it to me. She might say do this or this If I ask she's there one hundred percent she thoroughly enjoys teaching she's talented herself. I invited her to my party. I just see her as a very unusual individual.

PF: Going forward is there something that you'd like to learn more about collage?

D: I never knew there were so many books. When I first started this class, I always when I want to learn something I go to the book, I went to books for children because I figured I was a beginner. Do you know how few books there are for children on collage. You ought to write one, Liz ought to write. One day then I

discovered Liz brought all these journals, do you know how many journals there are in collage? I was shocked. I spend all my money at Michaels and all these other places around town that I had never heard of and I buy books and materials. For someone who doesn't work at home I have books everywhere. I'll always continue learning about collage. My friend's sister is a collage artist. And when she invited me to her Thanksgiving dinner she said bring your collage work. She's a professional: a sculptor and a collagist. I said how can I bring something I'm just a beginner, and they loved it! Everyone at the table just loved it, either that or they're kind. They just make me feel good.

PF: I think you hit on something, taking this class makes you feel good.

D: Absolutely. My philosophy of aging is people have to learn something new. They have to be a beginner at something I'm a beginner at this. I will keep on learning this. I don't stop writing in my journal because I've started this. It's just something that keeps one alive.

PF: You've hit on something very important, this idea of successful aging.

D: My theme for my birthday was positive ageing. I believe that we have to take ageing into our hands because society isn't going to do it. And one of the things is to learn something. There are other things too.

PF: Are you interested in things other than collage. Would you take a drawing or painting class?

D: No

PF: What is it about collage that's accessible?

D: Because there's no talent. I mean there are some people in my class who are better than other but it doesn't matter because at the some point or other someone made something gorgeous. And I try not to be judgmental but in our society everyone is judgmental about art and a lot of other things. But in collage you could always find something nice. I have to learn a lot about the background paints, what kind of glue to use, what kind of materials to use, but as long as you can think up the themes, I'm going to be fine.

PF: Is there a particular museum you like to visit?

D: I was always a museum goer, but my favorite museum in New York is the Met, because of this variety. Then I do like the Whitney, I don't like Guggenheim because I don't like spiral staircase. I'm not that crazy about the MOMA unless they have a specific exhibit that I would like to see.

PF: Any reason?

D: It's a little bit too abstract for me. My favorite museum in Paris is the Museu Dorsai, with all the Impressionists and all that.

PF: Because why

D: I like colors. My favorite artists are Matisse Renoir and Kandinsky. I like their colors. I like the fact with Matisse, this was before collage, that he combined stripes and polka dots all together. I have prints of Matisse and I have prints of Kandinsky in my house. I love Renoir because his expansive colors, and the people.

PF: So you like art that you somehow have a connection with?

D: Yeah I like art that shows me anything that I can relate to

PF: Anything else you'd like to share about the class in general

D: Well I've gotten confidence in other areas of my life because of this. It just has added so many dimensions to what I do. Liz had another thing that I paid for and I went there and Liz came over and said you have really really improved. And like a 6th grade kid I was thrilled.

PF: So it has meant a lot to you?

D: It has meant a lot to me, except there is one thing I don't like. I'm not a morning person I have to be here by ten o' clock, I hate it!

Jackie **Hudson Guild Community Center, February, 2011**

PF: Tell me about your profession, a little about yourself...

J: I never had a profession. My profession was housewife and homemaker, and that's what I really enjoyed doing. Of course, I didn't live in the country, I lived in Turkey. I married years and so it was a completely different thing. We had tea parties all the time, and the ladies knew how to crochet and knit. I didn't know how to do anything like that. I tried, and they'd do it backwards from anything here. So I started embroidering, and I made a lot of things: I made embroidered frames with pictures of my friends and gave it to them, pillows. That's one thing I could do, and it kept me very happy. And when I came back to America after my husband passed away, I wanted to get into-

PF: How many years ago was that?

J: That was about fourteen years ago. It's been a long time; yeah he died when he was very young. But anyway.... cause my boys live here and I'm from here too. So one lives here and ones lives in Michigan. And I joined the senior centers when I was... actually I was young when I came back. I couldn't join the senior centers, but I did get into painting. And I did flower arranging cause my son said, "you know Mom, dad used to bring tons of flowers to you and you always made them look so pretty." So he said take a class. I took a class and the professor wanted me to work for him. So I did a lot of freelance, but then when I hurt my back I couldn't do that anymore. And then by then I was old enough to get into senior centers, and I started doing art! I learned how to do a bit of origami, and I started out with Carol in her watercolor class. She's the one that started me on this whole thing. Then they had a collage class, and then the teacher disappeared, so I started wandering around doing other things, making my own cards and selling them for a senior center over here, actually. And I do volunteer to do folding tables at the American History Museum for origami, and making people happy. And my cards, I sell them for the center and people like them, and that makes me so happy. Collage helps me think of different ideas, different ways of doing things.

PF: But you first started off painting, I guess that was-

J: Yeah with watercolor. I really enjoyed it, and I have framed quite a few pictures. And my little granddaughter that's thirteen, she's been painting. I gave her a lot of my stuff and she wants to be an artist now! I taught her origami. She makes her own origami her way. She said, "but Granny, it's not the way it is in the book," and I said, "Honey that's okay. You're an original." So yeah, I spread it around.

PF: How long have you been taking Liz's class?

J: Six months or something.

PF: What were your expectations, if any, when you came into to it?

J: To help me get some more ideas. Because I've made scrap books with my grandchildren in it, and they just love them. I think I showed you part of that. The other ones were somewhat similar, but they were about my grandchildren. Because I don't like to keep photos all over. I've moved all over the place, and I just don't have room for them. So I just make small little... and it's more fun. The kids like it better than looking at all the scrap books with a bunch of pictures, and I thought I'd get different ideas from both of the classes and I have. Now I've gone back to 73rd street where Carol is because the teacher came back for collage.

PF: And how are the two classes different, can you talk about that a little bit?

J: All the classes differ. The teachers are different. They have ideas on what they want to do. I find the one at Carol's center, she's an artist herself, and she is so full of ideas. She just kind of leaves it up to you. She brings a bunch of materials, shows pictures, and tells us to go to this gallery, this opening, that opening and everything. And sometimes we've gone together, but she just normally tells us about them and that really keeps me on my toes. I've been going just for three weeks now, and every time I go I'm going to go back and redo it, make it a little different. I think she gives ideas, but I scoot from behind from what I've learned before and then add them to what she says.

PF: In Liz's class.

J: In Liz's class, and then of course the one with the museum, she's very interesting. She's got a different way of looking at things. She's gotten me more inspired about looking around. I like to go to museums, in fact, that's what I did when I would come to visit my son in New York for years when I was living in Turkey. I would go to museums, spend the day there just looking around.

PF: Is there a type of art you like more than another, or a favorite artist?

J: A favorite artist? My little Emma.

PF: Who's that?

J: My baby, my granddaughter. She's always making such beautiful things for me. She made a big candy kiss and she writes 'I love you Granny.' And I've helped her; I've gotten her a lot of books from all my classes. But as an artist, no, I was in museums a lot in Turkey saw a lot of different things there too. There's something good in everyone, everything. And since I also lived in foreign countries where I traveled around a lot and didn't know the language, I looked at things, looked at scenery and that helps me where I was going and coming. So I notice more things than the average person, I think. So that's helped me with my painting and stuff like that. I like making cards, I really do. That's my thing.

PF: Because you can give them away?

J: Because I can give them away and make somebody else happy. In fact, I was asked to do some origami for somebody that who's not feeling well. I even learned how to make a bow out of ribbon, flower, a rose, and I'm making her a little rose to bring a smile to her face.

PF: So what has it meant to you coming to these classes?

J: Well I also like the social bit. Because I was a very social butterfly in Turkey. When my husband wasn't there, there was always somebody there. We lived in apartments there, and we always had a wonderful time. I missed that a lot when I came back here. It's also a social affair and I'm learning something that's keeping me busy so my mind is still working.

PF: Yeah, still active and engaged. Right.

J: And I think that's important for everybody. It was hard for me coming back, even though I'm an American, I lived there for almost forty something years, almost fifty. And coming back I felt like a stranger for a long time, I really did. I was in this widows group and slowly through that... they're the ones that told me about this place on 72nd street. And so I got started doing that.

PF: It's not her own center though?

J: No. It's a Jewish Center, Jewish Culture Center I think it's called. You don't have to be Jewish to be there. It's like a home because everybody is so nice, and I hadn't been there in a while and when I came back... it's like going home again.

PF: Very supportive.

J: Very supportive: the teachers, they kind of give an idea, and everybody does a good job. I mean we show our work, everybody gives a critique so you get some ideas about how you could make it better. And at home I would set it up in my kitchen and I would go in and come out and maybe add or subtract something.

PF: So you definitely work on your art outside of the class?

J: Oh definitely at home, yeah. Because I do sell for the center over at Washington Square Park there's a center there

.PF: What kind of center is that?

JT: It's a senior center, a Caring Community Senior Center.

PF: And do they offer any art classes there?

J: Yeah they do. I go to it, but he can't see very well.

PF: The instructor?

J: Yeah the instructor. He's a very kind, wonderful person. That's when I started putting my artwork into cards, and I feel I'd like to give back to them by selling my cards there. And I sell some of my pictures, my

watercolor pictures. He does watercolor, he does sketching. I'm not very good at doing the body, I'm good at making pictures: scenery and flowers.

PF: Landscapes.

J: Yeah landscapes. Yeah so it's keeping me busy, and I do enjoy it at home, and I make friends in the class. And each class is different so I'm learning something else. So, I love it

PF: That's great, another medium to use. Anything else you might want to share about your experience?

J: I just think that everyone should find something when they're by themselves that will make them happy, and I certainly have. And I think this is wonderful for seniors, I really do.

PF: Try to encourage creativity, find some type of art form.

J: Art form I think is wonderful, and when I go home and turn on the music things come out too. And when I sleep I dream about how I can make this better. I wish I had taken pictures of my plate a little bit better. I learned how to do it.

PF: And how old is she?

J: She's thirteen. She texts me and says, "okay Granny, I'm out of school now. What did you do at the senior center today?" I've learned a lot. I really have, and it's made me happy. And sharing what I've learned with other people makes me happy too. It's surprising when you volunteer how happy it makes you.

APPENDIX C

SCARVES

Abstract Designs



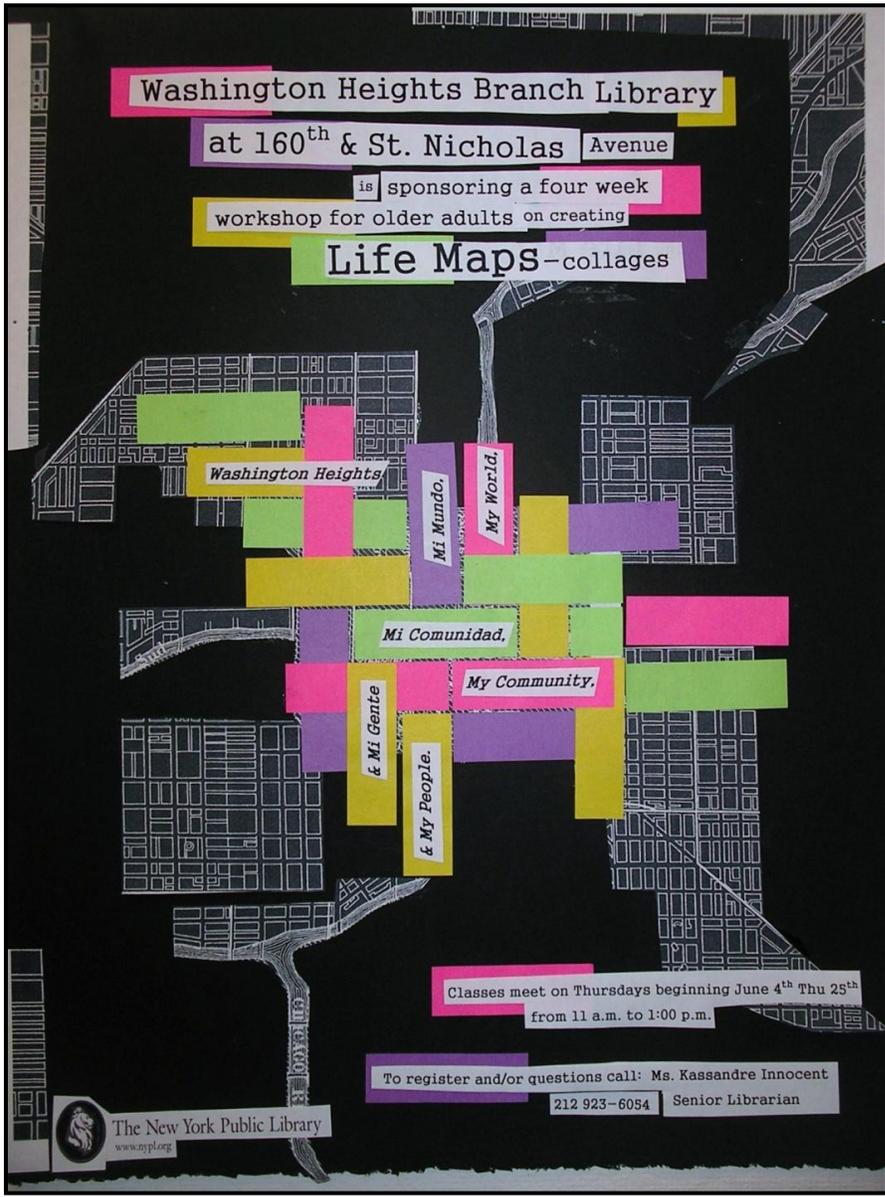
Representational Designs



APPENDIX D

LIFE MAPS WORKSHOP POSTER

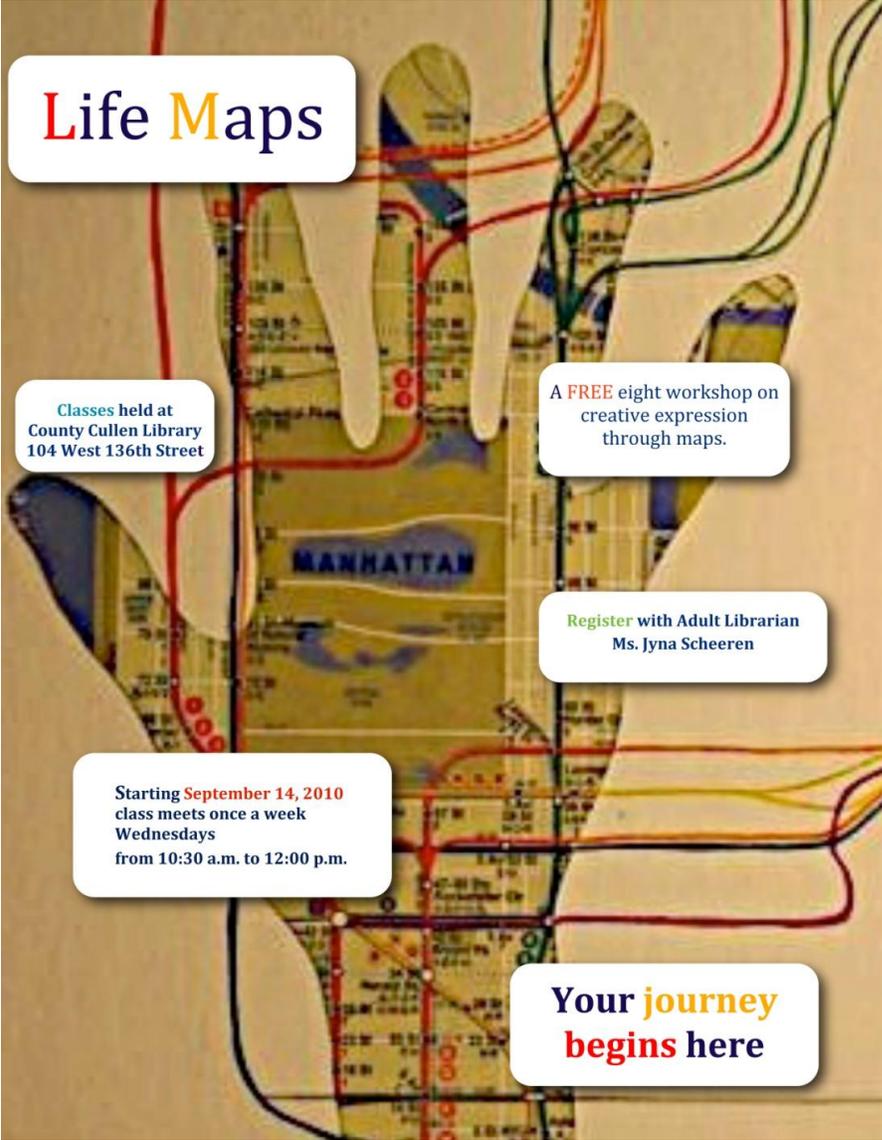
Washington Heights Library of the New York Public Library
Designed by Paul Ferrara



APPENDIX E

LIFE MAPS WORKSHOP POSTER

Countee Cullen Library of the New York Public
Designed by Celia Caro, Illustrated by Paul Ferrara



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