Art Autobiography- Crystal Starke

Part 1: Recall

As a child, I did not consider myself to be an artist. My mother and brother were very creative and could sketch well, but I did not have that skill, nor did I enjoy it. When I think more broadly now, I see that there were many areas of art I really did enjoy- just maybe didn't perceive them as art back then. Drawing was not my thing- but generally, I found workarounds for it when it was required. I loved to write, so one memory I have was illustrating my Young Author books. I remember one year I used a Barbie© coloring book to trace the pictures into my book! In upper elementary school, our art class was a guided drawing class. I liked it and felt more success with that method. To this day, I still like the experiences like Painting with a Twist that guide you through the creation of your piece.

As a child, when drawing, I preferred art that wasn't supposed to look like anything recognizable, but instead a design. I specifically recall drawing those pictures with a few black dots scattered across the page and then colorful rings moving out from those black dots until the rings of color intersected. In Jr. High, I enjoyed a project in geometry using tessellations.

Growing up, there were other forms of art that I enjoyed. I made friendship bracelets with embroidery floss and at church camp I enjoyed making bead and leather cross necklaces and bookmarks.

As a child, I collected coloring books. As a teen, I brought my coloring books to camp where I was a counselor and actually became known as the "Coloring Book Counselor". My love of coloring books followed me to college and into adult life. I started using my coloring books to make cards of affirmation for friends, boyfriends, and eventually my husband. I have recently revived that hobby in sending words of encouragement to my 14-year-old son who is in a behavioral placement currently.

Another art form I enjoyed as a child and continue to enjoy now is fixing hair. I loved coming up with creative braids or twists. My nieces, who lived across the street from me, were my primary practice heads.

In elementary PE, we did a square dance unit each year. I was really good at square dancing and always looked forward to that time. As I got older, I enjoyed line dancing- but was never one to just break out in dance to any given song. Another creative piece of PE I enjoyed was jump rope. I loved trying to master all the tricks. Jump rope is a common element of CrossFit workouts and it continues to be one of my favorites today.

I also had positive experiences with performance-based art (music, theater, speech). I have always loved singing and participated in madrigals, musicals, and choir through school and church all the way through college. I played trombone in band from 8th grade through high school and participated in concert band as well as pep band and marching band. In college I decided

to take piano lessons and still play (for fun) today. This year I decided to learn guitar.

Other performance art that I remember was in high school I entered a speech competition. It was a recitation of literary works. I gave a monologue of poetry. On the other side of that, a specific performance art experience that I remember not enjoying was theater improv. We were randomly given a vague task/situation and less than 5 minutes to prepare a performance.

Part 2: Reflect

When I initially read the description of this assignment, I didn't think art was a very big part of who I am. However, going through this exercise has shown me that I am far more grounded in art than I initially thought. It reminds me of one of my larger "ah ha's" in the STEM Methods course. I always thought of science being fact based, logical, and somewhat linear. When we studied the nature of science, I came to understand that the heart of science is really about creativity because to push scientific thinking to a new discovery, one has to be able to think about or conceive of something that isn't yet a known truth. It takes creativity to make the leap to discover something new.

As I think about the artistic expressions I have enjoyed, an obvious characteristic rises to the top. I clearly prefer art that follows a predictable structure or is created in a systematic method. Braiding hair, making

friendship bracelets, jumping rope, creating tessellations, square dancing all follow a predictable and repetitive structure. Obviously, I like learning a basic skill and then doing it over and over again. With music, I like the concrete nature of it. Although every song is different, there are rules and predictable patterns. When playing a note on an instrument- the note is always played in the same way and represented in a standard way in the music. Similarly, a C chord is always made up of the same notes. I think I find comfort in knowing there is a process to creating. In our theatrical performances, there was no improvisation. I had a set of lines to learn and deliver at the same point in the script. I liked square dancing and line dancing because it was the same every time. I did not enjoy general dancing- because I have to think about what to do. There's not a familiar pattern to follow. As I think about it, I actually cook the same way. I love to cook but am only willing to improvise or create within a structure. The only recipes I've invented have been variations on an existing recipe or combination of recipes.

If someone were to ask me, "Are you good at art?" or "Are you artistic?" I would respond with "no." Despite this, I feel I have been successful in art. Most of the artistic endeavors I've engaged in have been to express something (in many cases to someone specific). With that as a metric, then yes, I have been successful in art. I have not created anything of monetary value, but I have enriched my own life and the lives of others with my expressions.

Part 3: Connect

So, what is art? I think about both aspects- the perception of art and the expression of art. Receptively speaking, I consider something to be art when it stirs something inside me or has a deeper meaning beyond the obvious and literal meaning. Expressively speaking, art is a physical manifestation of one's thoughts and feelings as represented visually, auditorily, or experientially. My view of art is black and white in that regard. Whether or not I like something is not a factor in if it IS art. Whether or not others view my artistic expressions as art is also irrelevant in defining art.

Looking with new eyes at what experiences influenced my view of art, I see a few contributing factors. I was privileged to experience a rich elementary curriculum in fine art and provided many low-stakes opportunities to participate in jr. high and high school. Another contributing factor was poverty. My family was very poor growing up (raised on food stamps and government cheese). I did not put two and two together as a child, but homemade gifts were treasured in my family. Making potholders, bracelets, writing poems/songs/stories, were cherished. I even watched my mom give gifts in the form of food and cooking that were considered priceless. I guess, at my core I was raised that sharing a piece of yourself that cannot be purchased holds great value. I cannot pinpoint exactly where that derives from, but is central to who I am.

So, as an educator myself, I aspire to value student expressions with the same level of worth that has blanketed me. I want to be even more mindful about providing students opportunities for expressing knowledge and understanding beyond tests and reports. Finally, I want to have eyes to see the students like me who are intimidated by creativity, who find comfort in structure, and build experiences that set up their success as well.