

Collaborative Painting: Exploration of Purely Visual Learning Experience

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Student Think Tank Summary

For our Think Tank project *Collaborative Painting: Exploration of Purely Visual Learning Experience* we explored a new modality of teaching and learning. Instead of communicating through verbal feedback, we were engaged in a visual dialogue that occurred as we developed our paintings and passed them back and forth once a week. Each time we responded visually to what had happened when our collaborator had worked on the painting. These works, allowed us to experience a unique visual dialogue relating to the painterly experience that also transformed the process into collaboration. To learn without verbal dialogue was an inspiring process. This is an extension of what artists do naturally, in their subconscious, while working on a piece. This enriched both the student's aesthetic response and professor's exploration for an exciting avenue of teaching about painting and is demonstrated through the excitement of our completed work.

The foundation for this project was to produce two personal translations of the abstracted nervous system. We used two eight by sixteen inch clay boards and created our own interpretation of the nervous system. Our color choices were purely non-objective and were based on visualizations of the nervous system reacting to a variety of situations. We first developed the composition through many stages of layering transparent lines, strands of nerves,

over each other to build up color. This was done to lay the foundation for our abstraction. Each time we exchanged our pieces and responded to the new layers the other had added. Towards the end of our process we brought our focus back to the aesthetic goal for this diptych and worked to emphasize or deemphasized different strokes as deemed appropriate. The process of layering and overlapping was exceedingly significant in these pieces. This is because it allowed the painting to have its voice that included a visual record of each step in the process. As we continued overlapping, the developing painting surface and texture were inspiring because the energy of line became intoxicating. This energy was produced through complex color, line variation, and imagination. The process continued until we achieved our conceptual and formal goals.

Student Reflections

I personally feel as though this process, versus the normal teaching and visual learning process was extremely valuable to me as a student. I have never done a true collaboration before. I would like to explore this method again because I have realized how powerful visual dialogue can be when you engage in it with a fellow artist. This method forced me to reflect using my own aesthetic without having the help of my professor at my disposal. The development of this project was also extremely inspiring because each of us would be constantly surprised by the changes to each piece of the diptych. The process therefore had a constant flowing energy as the pieces progressed. This is a unique experience for me as a student working with a professor because it opens a door to an innovative way of learning that I had not experienced prior to working on this. The knowledge from my professor who is also a seasoned artist allowed me to

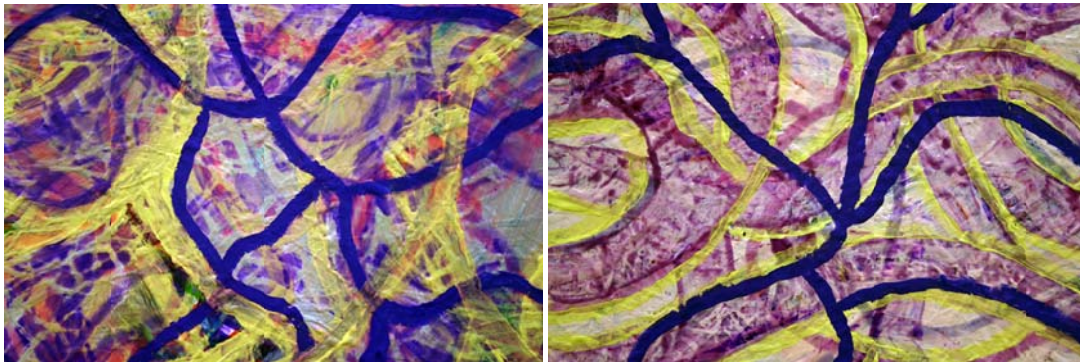
learn a great deal about how the art process actually works. This experience will help to give me the confidence to move beyond the academic environment and make aesthetic choices on my own when working as an artist.

Professor Reflections

The impetus for this project was to explore a new modality of teaching painting. Beginning this process was somewhat daunting. Without the traditional studio focus on verbal feedback, which gives the student the chance to make choices based on dialogue, I feared that I would dominate the student's process and she would defer too much to my aesthetic decisions. Because as an artist I have built up confidence over the years I was concerned that working together might be intimidating to the student who might then default to the directions I took when working on the pieces. With this in mind, I made a conscious effort to respond to her marks rather than to my own aesthetic interests. Bringing this conscious effort to the project challenged me as an artist, and created an exciting teaching experience. As we passed the panels back and forth the level of anticipation and excitement built and was reflected in the developing paintings. Only when the pieces seemed near to completion did we revert to the traditional dialogue method of studio instruction. At this point we met to discuss the formal and conceptual goals for the diptych, and then Nicole took both pieces with her to complete. What she returned with was a united diptych whose strength is the true measure of this project. While this modality of teaching would not be possible in most studio settings, with a class of fifteen students and one instructor, the collaborative painting process is an exciting academic exercise that I hope to engage in again.



Awesome Neurotic
20" x 16", Acrylic on Panel, 2011



Awesome Neurotic (Detail Shots)
20" x 16", Acrylic on Panel, 2011