"Art is a way of Knowing" Pat B. Allen 1995 / Shambala

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Knowing How to Begin

Space

First, clear a space. Walk around your home and look for possibilities. An entire room dedicated to art making is not necessary to begin. A surface is necessary. It can be anywhere you feel comfortable, a basement, a front porch, a corner of the living room. Ask yourself what you need for comfort, how much privacy, how near to others feels right to you. You will eventually make a mess; where can you do this with ease? It is best if you choose a spot that won't need to be dismantled for other uses in between art-making sessions. A dedicated work space, however modest, confirms your intention and allows you to work when you have even brief moments without spending time setting up.

A second important aspect of a work space is a place to display what you do. This can simply mean taping a drawing to a wall near your work surface or it can be placing a drawing board and easel nearby. Keeping your images up and in your visual field is a way to keep the process alive even when you don't have have time to sit down and draw or paint. As you pass by an image, with no real effort, it will begin to speak to you, you will notice things about it. When you actually sit down to work, you will find it easier to know what to do. Much of the process of image work takes place this way, under the surface of everyday life. The image brings to consciousness what you know at deeper levels. You begin to develop a dialogue with your inner self. A dedicated space is a way to welcome your images. If it remains ready for you, even moments while waiting for the laundry to wash or the kettle to boil become fruitful. Think

about where you spend time. Sit in different parts of your house. Is the basement cozy? If it feels like a dungeon, go somewhere else. Do you have a room that is rarely used? A friend of mine made a corner of her living room her studio. Think about ease, safety, and comfort. If you build these considerations into your image work space, you will be more likely to use it frequently.

Music

Sound can help create containment in your space. A portable tape or CD player will enhance your work space. Consciously chosen music is preferable to the randomness of radio with its frequent commercial interruptions. Music has a powerful effect and like other aspects of this work requires attention. What sort of music pleases you? I find that instrumental music of all kinds works best for me because with songs I tend to focus strongly on the words and get distracted. Percussion is especially good when focusing on energy awareness in drawing. Unfamiliar music such as chanting, Eastern music that does not rely on familiar Western harmonics, or other world music tapes can open new pathways and spark imagery.

The important thing is to notice whether music helps relax or involve you and increases your enjoyment of the art process. Sometimes just the hum of the refrigerator, birds chirping, or a beating rainstorm is enough.

Begin to notice what pleases you. Experiment and play with sound as an aspect of your space. A source of recordings is suggested in the "Resources" section.

Materials

Before even getting to art materials, ready your space with an empty shoe box without a lid. This is your reference file. A good way to ease into the image process or to participate in it when you have little time, is to feed your reference box. This means simply to collect images that interest you. These can be from any source: magazines, newspapers, photographs, postcards. Collecting images is a way to learn what pleases you. You may use an image as a starting point for

your own art work or as a way to learn about the form of an image that interests you, to feed your eyes. These found images can be placed on your display space to instruct you. If you walk by an image of a horse on the wall day after day, you begin to take its form into yourself. When you feel stuck or uninspired, cutting out images is a way to participate in the image process without undue strain. Like weeding a garden, you are cultivating your own images to find out what belongs to you. It is a humble but effective way to begin.

You can also begin to collect small objects the same way. Take another box and drop in items you find on walks: sticks, stones, or any piece of flotsam and jetsam that interests you because of color, shape, or texture. One of my found-object boxes consists entirely of odd bits of rusty metal. I love the many colors of rust, the fact that I usually can't tell what the pieces come from, the odd shapes that smashed bits of metal create. Some are like little landscape fragments, and I have come to think of rust as a metaphor for change, the slow transformation of one substance into another.

Your box can contain absolutely anything and, like the images, becomes a reference file of starting points as well as a cache of materials and a way to get to know your own personal aesthetic.

Art Materials

If your intention is clear to use art as a way of knowing, materials will cooperate in an amazing way to serve you. I have often seen materials behave like the biblical loaves and fishes, somehow being sufficient for the task at hand when to the practical eye they seemed quite inadequate. A lot of fear and resistance gets played out in our attitude toward materials. They can become freighted with intense meaning. I used to have to work up a great sense of entitlement to buy a large box of chalks, only to be paralyzed by their voluptuous abundance. Materials is another area like space where ease and comfort are important. Get what pleases you and enables you to work. If you are a bargain hunter, buy cheap stuff or look for castaways. I know someone who gets all her paper from a billboard company's

surplus. The quantities are huge and make her feel very rich, yet the paper is free.

Go to an art supply store and open and touch things. There are always tester samples available. See what you like, and what you can afford. Check out papers. Touch them, feel them, smell them. Disregard what it says on the package. I buy a student grade of watercolor paper and use it for drawing in pastels and painting in acrylics. I like it because its cheap and heavy. If art stores seem intimidating, try a school supply store. Supply catalogues can be a good resource; you can mail-order supplies and have them delivered to your home. Several addresses are listed in the "Resources" section.

The important thing is to notice your *feelings* about supplies. What do you like? What gives you pleasure to use? Specific supplies will be suggested for certain tasks, but in general, to start, a box of twelve or twenty-four soft chalk pastels, a box of sixteen or twenty-four oil pastels, some soft charcoal and soft or medium-soft drawing pencils (2B–5B) are sufficient. Paint can be either tempera, a water-based paint that washes off most surfaces easily, or acrylic, which dries more quickly and can be painted over but must be washed out of brushes right away. Student-grade easel brushes along with inexpensive natural bristle brushes sold in hardware stores in the 1- to 3-inch size are good to have. If you can afford better brushes, that is a good place to spend money because a good brush, well cared for, will last a long time. Collect sponges, rags, and empty containers for water or mixing colors from used kitchen items.

Anything can be turned into a surface on which to paint or draw by applying a coat of gesso or flat white house paint. Gesso is a white acrylic paint that artists use to prepare a canvas for painting. Painting gesso over a piece of cardboard or wood scraps creates a nice surface that accepts paint, pastels, or even pencil. Preparing surfaces with gesso or house paint is another activity that serves the image process in uninspired moments. Having a selection of surfaces gives options and helps you know what feels right as you develop your preferred methods of working.

Time

Like any other form of practice, art making takes time. The amount of actual doing time can't be prescribed, as it will be different for each person. The image-making time, if only for one or two hours once a week, can be greatly enhanced by the incidental time of just looking at what's been done, just noticing and getting to know the fullness of the image. This looking also serves to motivate. As you look at an image over time, your looking will generate ideas for more images or changes you wish to make will become apparent. Looking is pleasurable and invites you back to create another image.

Intention

Clear intention is as important as space and materials. This is the spiritual aspect of art making. Your intention can be simply to have the courage to experiment, or it can be wanting to learn about a problem you are facing. When I enter my art space, I try to have the clearest intention possible to accept whatever comes to me. I trust that the images I need, the knowledge I need, exists within me and that I can access it through this process. If I come in an angry and agitated state, I may ask to be shown the source of these feelings. If I come in confusion, I ask to accept images that will mirror back the components of my confusion. To signal my intention, I sometimes light a candle or a stick of incense before I begin, to mark the time of direct image making. Other times I simply sit in my space or do the chores of cleaning and straightening up to make ready for the time to work. My overall intention is to come to know the source of wisdom and guidance within me. Space and materials are the outward manifestation of my intention.

Part of my intention is to become more aware of my connection to others, and so at times I invite people into my space to work along with me. I find that working in images alongside a friend or loved one is one of the most pleasurable and meaningful ways to spend time together. More about working together with others is included in the section on collaboration in chapter 22.

Attention

Once you feel comfortable with the materials, the process can be used anytime you require guidance, feelings need sorting out, or problems arise. Art making is a way of dwelling in whatever is before us that needs our attention. There is a universal tendency to turn away from difficulty. Image making allows for staying with something while making that staying bearable through the pleasure available in the use of the materials.

It isn't necessary to try to make a picture about the problem; you have only to form a clear intention to know something and then simply take up the materials and begin. Starting with just a mark, continue until the image says it is finished. Usually, I have forgotten the intention while I am immersed in working. When I sit back and look at the image, I recall the intention, and through focusing my attention I get an idea of what, if anything, I need to do next. Sometimes focusing my attention on the image evokes a great deal of feeling. I may have been avoiding some sadness or disappointment; tears may come. That is all part of the process. Feel what comes and let it go. Doubts and judgments will arise. You may at times feel silly or lost. Try simply to notice those feelings and let them pass. The important thing is to begin.

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Knowing Drawing

Knowing "how to draw," being able to represent objects with a degree of realism, is commonly assumed to be the measure of a true artist. Actually, drawing is energy made visible. Drawing is a way to contact the energy of the subject matter, whether the subject is a still life, a figure, or an inner state of being. The process of drawing is a way to play with and get to know the various forms of energy it is possible to experience.

Before drawing objects outside yourself, it helps to get acquainted with your own energy. You can do this by making marks on paper. Your intention in these initial drawings is to learn about your energy and how it manifests through different materials. Gradually you will get a sense of which material you need for the state you are in at a particular time. For now, just getting to know the possibilities is enough.

This is a point where music is helpful. I like to play percussion tapes, but you may find that other types of music are helpful. Experiment with your own favorites, and try a few of the tapes from the catalogue recommended in the "Resources" section.

Choose any size paper and either pencil or charcoal to begin. Make marks, lines, shapes on the paper without representing any object. Fill the paper as completely as you can. Step back when you are done. Notice your energy as it appears on the page. Is it dense, airy, flowing, nervous, playful? Choose another sheet, either larger or smaller, and with a different medium, do another page of marks. If you began by sitting, stand for your second drawing. How was your energy affected by the changes you made? Do you have a dif-

ferent result standing than sitting? Which feels better to you? Try a very tiny drawing, two inches by two inches. Try a very large drawing. Explore different ways to make marks: exert pressure or lighten up. Smear charcoal with your fingers and rub it in to make a gray ground, then draw on top of the gray field with strong black strokes.

Make as many drawings as you need to find a size and shape of paper and a type of line and pressure that feels pleasurable to you today. There is no right or wrong here, simply the exploration of possibility. Big, loose drawings are not better than small, contained ones. Precise isn't more precious than loopy or meandering.

When you have about ten drawings, whether it takes one hour or several days, spread them out on your display space and notice the different ways your energy manifests. If you are journaling along with your image process, see if words come to describe your drawings. If not, just look and appreciate your work. Notice if you have a physical reaction to any of the drawings. Where does your eye go naturally? Is one set of marks relaxing as your eye follows its pattern? Is another energizing? You are building a vocabulary of marks that can both reflect and create energy states. If you let your first drawing of any session be automatic, just choosing a material and letting your body speak, you can see what kind of energy you have at that moment. By choosing to deliberately make certain kinds of marks, you can change your energy and feeling state.

When I am anxious, I tend to draw circles and fill them in with shades from dark to light; this soothes me. Drawing very large and loose opens me up. Using my whole body, drawing from my feet up through my shoulders and arm and hand, brings energy up and outward, leaving me feeling more alive. I have boxes of old business cards, the backs of which are the perfect size for tiny drawings on days when too much is happening and I feel overwhelmed.

Experiment with different kinds of drawings, with your only goal being to see what feels right to you. Is a tiny sheet of paper cozy or claustrophobic? Is a large sheet overwhelming or exhilarating? Does white space left on the page feel restful or empty?

Notice any thoughts that arise as you draw. You may find you

have rules about drawing embedded within you that you didn't realize. This sort of mark making sometimes evokes old memories of being told not to scribble, that "scribble-scrabble" is for babies, isn't drawing, is a waste of time. This, of course, is not true. If you go to a museum or look in books of art of the old masters, you will see that every drawing, no matter how precisely realistic, is built up of areas of marks—areas of scribble, in fact. Taking away these energetic marks would rob a drawing of its vital force and power.

Was drawing first presented to you as a task of filling in the lines drawn by someone else? When I was in kindergarten, coloring outside the lines was considered a mistake and meant forfeiting the chance to draw. Sometimes having a structure to fill in can be soothing: knowing where the boundaries are is reassuring. If that is your only experience of drawing, however, you learn only to adjust your energy to fit the spaces allotted to you by others, and never find out how to manage and enjoy the natural flow of your own energy in the world. While this intention is not stated out loud, it is conveyed in the task and is taken into consciousness by doing the task.

Once you begin to shift your perception to drawing-as-energy, notice how your concept of "drawing" can expand. The patterns of footprints in the schoolyard snow are a drawing made by exuberant children at recess. Trees draw spidery shadow lines across the sunlit floor. Cracks in the sidewalk sketch a torso. Drawing is energy made visible.

Drawing Objects

Drawing an object is a way to get acquainted with and connected to the energy of that object in a powerful way. I choose to draw objects that I love or ones that have something to teach me. Drawing things is a kind of lovemaking, so the subject should be chosen carefully. I like to draw spiky artichokes and voluptuous, curving peppers. Drawing is a way of knowing the essence of things—"seeing infinitude in the ordinary," a friend of mine says. Working in this way forms a relationship to the energy of the subject. Drawing can be a celebration of the ponderous energy of a granite mountain or the

simple curving line of a tree that puts you back in touch with the miracle of the seasons.

Choose a subject that pleases you. To begin, choose something small enough to handle and be left on your drawing table. Allow it to enter your awareness visually as completely as you can. Travel lovingly over the contours of your subject. Discover your intention in relation to this object. Is it to know about the dark hollow of a cut melon or the gnarled complexity of a tree root? Ask your subject to teach you about itself. As you move your eye along the contours of your subject, move your hand on the paper, recording what you see.

Keep your effort simple, to learn the essential shapes. Draw only as long as you feel connected. If you begin to struggle, stop, let it go. Go back to just looking. As soon as you feel connected once more to the beauty of the object, resume drawing. Or, if this doesn't work, try again later. Drawing is a relationship and can't be forced. The primary obstacle to drawing is losing focus on the subject and shifting consciousness to judging the resulting drawing, which is only a record of the energy between you and your subject. Even a record of a struggle is a useful drawing and affords lots of learning.

If you discover that you really like drawing objects, consider getting a sketchbook and drawing the same object until every page is filled. Choose something simple and let yourself see it as deeply as you can. Drawing in this way is a meditation. It is especially helpful as a balance to drawings focused on your inner process. If you decide on this course of drawing the same object, choose playfully. What do you really want to know more about? Choose things to draw that you want to have in your life. If you wish to be a writer, draw your cup of pens and writing tools. If you wish to be more grounded and steady, draw a mountain; more orderly, the pattern of a brick wall or a well-made fence.

This is neither silliness nor magic but rather a way to state your intention and take action to clarify it. Without action, however small, our intentions cannot manifest but remain wishful thinking. As you draw your chosen object—say, a clock if you have trouble

with time—you are dwelling in that issue. The act of drawing represents a commitment to focus on something. Surprising insights arise as you turn your attention to the object through drawing.

There are whole books written about drawing real things. If this kind of image making has captured you, you may wish to consult several title listed in the "Suggested Reading" section of the bibliography (see Edwards, Franck, and Nicolaides listings). Remember that reading about drawing, however interesting, is never as good as drawing itself.

Drawing in Color

Chalk pastels make an easy transition from charcoal, having a similar consistency. Open your box and let a color choose you. Color is feeling made visible. Begin again by filling a page with marks using just this one color. Besides the kinetic energy of mark making, you now have the emotional energy of color to play with. Using color is another source of deepening our knowledge of self and the world. Choose one or two more pastels to go with your first color and start a new drawing. Let the colors mingle and smear. Use the chalk on its edge and then on its side. Use your fingers to blend the colors into new shades. When you feel you are done, take a new sheet of paper, perhaps larger than before. Choose three more colors, ones that do not seem compatible with one another or ones that you don't particularly like. Notice what it is like to use these colors.

Do at least one drawing using all the colors. Do one more using only the colors you like best. Hang up all your work. Sit and look. Look until your eye decides which drawing you prefer and see if you can say why. Does this piece evoke a particular feeling: tranquillity, anger, sadness, joy? Or an emotional tone: subdued, somber, rollicking, confused? Just sit with your work; these are maps of yourself. If you are journaling, write a stream-of-consciousness response to your colors. Allow whatever comes up to be welcome: memories, dreams, fragments of dialogue or story. To gain what your drawings have to give, you must witness them. Treat them like friends. You wouldn't

run around and ignore a friend who came to visit—you would sit down and pay attention, making the person feel welcome.

Next time, start by using your favorite color or color combination. Make a mark and let it call forth the next mark, inviting the colors to mingle as they choose. You are beginning to develop your own palette, learning which colors nourish you. At the end of a recent workshop, during the sitting-and-looking time, someone noticed that each of us was wearing the colors that showed up in our work. Notice the colors in your surroundings. Do you make a conscious effort to choose the colors you wear or those in your home? Are you living in your preferred palette? Begin to notice colors as you go about your day, in restaurants and doctor's offices, in the homes of friends. Where do you feel most alive, most yourself? What colors are present in those environments?

Oil Pastels

Oil pastels introduce the element of resistance. They require a little more effort than chalks and charcoal. The colors are vivid and the oil binder makes them slippery and greasy rather than dusty like chalks. Start with a smaller piece of paper, 8 by 12 inches or less. See if the same colors speak to you in this medium. Let one color begin the drawing and call forth the next. Layer the colors, letting mark blend into mark. Experiment with smudging the colors and leaving areas of pure color. Try scratching into the surface after you have built up several layers.

You may enjoy using oil pastels in a painterly fashion. Turpenoid can be used to loosen the oil and allow the color to flow more freely. Turpenoid is a synthetic form of turpentine, without the dangerous fumes. It is, however, flammable, and while it is not dangerous to breathe, it is toxic if swallowed and should be used carefully around children and pets, who may mistake it for water. Put a small quantity in a glass jar labeled prominently and clean up carefully when finished. A heavier surface is better if you choose to use Turpenoid with oil pastels. Gesso-coated cardboard or wood scraps or bristol board, a heavier type of drawing paper, all work well. You can dip

the oil pastel into the turpenoid, or you can brush it over the drawing to achieve a wash. If this method appeals to you, you may want to move on to painting, which uses color even more directly. Notice your reaction to this material in its many forms. Some people hate oil pastel and find it smelly, dirty, and imprecise. To others it is sensuous, creamy, and rich. What is important is coming to know what feels good to you.

You have now experimented with several types of drawing materials and surfaces which can be used in endless combinations. A heavy pencil over an oil pastel drawing will etch the surface in an interesting way to add definition. A thin wash of Turpenoid and oil pastel provides a colored ground for a charcoal drawing. When you are working with washes, veils of color leads into painting, which is introduced more fully in the next chapter.

5

Knowing Painting

Painting is allowing feelings to become visible through color, color applied in sensuous strokes, with a brush or even with your fingers. Paint is feeling liquified. Feeling connotes a relaxation of reason, and painting lets us put reason aside momentarily and enter a different realm. While it is possible to paint realistically, that is not our present goal. Our intention is to use paint to explore the realm of feeling and emotion through color. Because paint is a fluid medium, it evokes a particularly sensuous energy.

Tape the corners of a large piece of paper, at least 18 by 24 inches, to your work surface. Choose a large brush, 2 inches wide or so. Have a container of clean water nearby and a sponge or rag to blot excess water from your brush. See which color is asking to be used. Put some of this color on your palette. When using acrylic paints, I use a piece of glass, 12 by 14 inches with a piece of white paper taped to the underside, fastened around each edge with masking tape. The colors stand out against the white surface, and the palette cleans up easily with a straight-edge razor knife. You can also use an old dinner plate, but it is a bit harder to clean. If you decide on tempera paints, an old muffin tin works better than glass, since tempera is more fluid than acrylic paint.

Begin with one color and, while standing, cover your paper with it. This is your ground of feeling. Notice your body as you apply the paint. Where does the movement of painting originate? In your hand, arm, shoulder, torso? Can you feel your legs and feet as you paint? How does it feel to daub color, to make broad sweeping strokes? Make the process of applying color as pleasurable as you can.

Like paint, emotions are the "colors" of experience; without them life is wooden and dull. Emotion is a physical experience. When we are physically unaware, we have limited access to our emotions. Paying attention to how our body feels and adjusting our movements to create the most enjoyable sensation helps to increase our access. We shut off access to our emotions because of experiences of fear in our lives. By gently listening to our bodily cues and responding to them with small adjustments, we create trust in ourselves. While you are painting, if you begin to feel anxious, just stop for a moment and remind yourself that you are safe, that your intention is to explore emotions at the best pace for you. Resolve that you will listen carefully and create a trusting partnership between your self and your emotions.

You have covered your paper in pure color, yet feelings are rarely unadulterated. More often feelings are complex, mixed, muted, even at times kaleidoscopic, changing even as we try to name them. Choose a second color. Experiment with your options, paint over areas, and let the two colors mix and mingle, obliterate one another, and create entirely new colors. Play with the paint on the page. Is one color stronger, more easily overcome? Do the colors blend harmoniously or clash? Notice your response to the colors as they change. Do you miss the simplicity of the pure color, or do you like the swirling mixture? Does the page seem muddy or mysterious, defiled or delightful? When you feel finished, put your painting aside. Rinse your brushes and change your painting water.

For your next piece, begin with a dark color. Create your ground by covering the entire paper. See if you can find a rhythm in putting down the color, slow down your strokes, lighten your touch. Experiment with having the brush so full of paint that it drips. Choose a second color; make it a light one. Be sure to have clean water and a clean brush. What happens when you try to add light to dark? Is the delicate shade swallowed by the dark ground, or do traces remain?

For your next painting, tape a heavy piece of paper to a drawing board. The drawing board can be a piece of masonite, wood, or any other rigid surface that you can pick up and move around. Tape all

the edges firmly with masking tape. The paper will buckle when wet, and the tape will help it to dry more or less flat.

Take your largest brush and paint the surface of your paper with clear water. Using any colors that please you, drop paint onto the wet ground and notice how it behaves. Tilt the board and allow color to run and make shapes. Resist any effort to make the shapes into something recognizable. Simply practice putting reason aside and letting the paint create the painting. Add more water if necessary with a spray bottle or brush. Experiment with more and less watery paint to create darker and lighter veils of color. Play with the possibilities. When you feel finished, put this painting aside, but leave it taped to the board until it dries thoroughly.

Choose three colors that feel compatible to you for the palette of your next piece. Focus on your movement with no other goal in mind than the dance of color and shape on the page. Cover the surface, letting the colors play and blend together. See how many variations result from the interplay of the three colors. See how pleasurable you can make the resulting colors to your eye. Notice once again where in your body you are painting from. What parts of you are involved? Are there any parts that feel absent?

Do at least one more painting, using any of the methods you have tried or a new one that you invent. When you have five or so paintings, gather them together and sit with them and look. What do you see? Where is your eye drawn? Do the paintings seem like images of feelings to you? Reflect on the physical act of painting.- What part of you seemed to be in charge? How is painting different from drawing for you? What did you find most pleasurable in painting?

The pleasure we take in making images is important because pleasure opens us. If you can allow yourself experiences of pleasure in painting, you will become more open to knowing and feeling in a deep way. This is our intention when painting, to experience pleasure and increase knowledge of emotions. It is our emotions that move us to take action. By fully exploring and knowing our emotions, we are more likely to take right action from a clear place.

For your next session of painting, think of an experience in which you felt strong emotion or one where you emotions were unclear. Once you have chosen an experience to paint from, close your eyes and sit with it for a few moments. Ask yourself, what color is the ground of this experience? Take the first answer that comes. Resist second-guessing; so what if you hear pink and it is an experience of anger? If you get no answer, open your eyes and choose a color as quickly as you can without thinking. In either case, trust and begin to paint. Once you have put down the ground, ask what color comes next. If shapes or images emerge, accept them, but don't make a conscious effort to represent ideas about the situation. You already know what your ideas are; now you want additional knowledge that is within you but not so readily available.

It is fine to forget all about what you are trying to learn and just let the painting paint itself. When you come to a stopping point, step back and see if your eye is satisfied. Are you stopping because you are done or because you are reluctant to go on? Look to your body for the answer. Are you feeling relaxed and grounded, or is your breathing shallow and anxious? You are free to stop in any case, of course, but it is good to begin to know why you do certain things and to accept your reasons. If you are stopping because of any fear or reluctance about going on, wash out your brushes and clean up your area a bit before you sit down to look at your work. Cleaning up is an important aspect of image making. It provides a transition from the deep involvement and restores a sense of equilibrium and safety.

When you sit down to contemplate your painting, recall the situation you began with and hold it in mind while you look but without coming to conclusions. What is the painting showing you? What does it mirror back? Have your feelings shifted or become clearer? Take in what your can. Journal your reactions if you wish. Sometimes a painting speaks with undeniable clarity right away; more often, the message gets absorbed slowly over time. Let the painting stay on your wall for a while, and it will yield its wisdom as you can receive it.

Color

Knowing color is a source of deepening our understanding of self and the world. Our individual responses to color are the best place to begin. Reflect on your paintings and see if you can discern for yourself what feelings are evoked by the colors you used. You needn't understand why a color means a certain thing, simply that it does mean that for you right now. Later, if you want, you can investigate the universal meanings of color, which can enrich your appreciation of the interconnectedness of all beings. In general, every color contains a paradox of opposite meanings. Red can connote rage and violence with images of carnage and bloody death but also the pulsing blood of new life and the passion of love. Green is putrid, festering gangrene as well as delicate spring leaves. Fertile earth is black, as are the charred remains of a burnt-out building. Our ethnic and religious background contributes to the emotional meaning of color, as do the places where we have lived, which give us an inborn affinity for certain shapes, colors, and space configurations. The physical and emotional are intertwined deeply within us. We shake with rage and see red, cringe in fear and are yellow with cowardice, are in the pink and dance with joy. Through painting we come to see and appreciate both the uniqueness and the richness of our moving and feeling self.

6

Knowing Sculpture

Sculpture is the process of giving three-dimensional form to our experience. The root of the word *sculpture* means "to carve," and for many people the carved marble statues of classical antiquity or Michelangelo leap to mind as an image. By slightly shifting perception, it is possible to look at ordinary objects, indeed everything around us, as sculpture. Take a moment and scan your immediate environment. Relax and let the familiar labels of the objects surrounding you fall away. Instead of desk, couch, light fixture, stove, or bicycle, see sculptural form, see cylinder, rectangle, sweeping curve, angular box.

Sculpture need not be carved; it can also be assembled by adding together pleasing shapes. It can even be discovered. You have discovered sculpture if you have ever picked up a piece of driftwood or an oddly shaped stone. Something in your inner experience resonated with what you picked up with that particular stone. Perhaps it resembled a human figure, or you saw an animal in a piece of wood. Images that are necessary to us come in all sorts of ways, for the soul never tires of trying to make itself known. Sometimes in the image process we begin with experience and try to express it. Working in assemblage, the art of putting things together to form a new expression, we begin with an object and through our resonance discover our experience and its meaning.

If you have a found-object box in your art space, look through it and choose or be chosen by several objects. Try not to think too hard about your choices. If you don't yet have a collection, take a walk in nature or visit a junkyard or thrift store. Choose objects that delight or intrigue, confuse or repel you. Play with grouping them

in pleasing arrangements. Make a space for your objects, and over the course of the next week, arrange and rearrange them as the spirit moves you. Notice if your assemblage is asking for more color or more shapes. Does it want something vertical? Something round? Try to lose the names of the objects. Look at your arrangement in different lights: in the morning and before you go to bed with the lights low. Look at it from above and crouch down to eye level. Can anything be taken away? Do you like simple, spare assemblage or rich piles of multiple shapes? Are all your objects from nature, or do you mix in manufactured ones as well? Notice what your eye likes. This attention acquaints you with your own sense of beauty, your own aesthetic.

After you have lived with the movable arrangement of objects for a while, decide to commit yourself to an assemblage. Figure out the best way of joining your objects. Should they be bound together with string? Nailed? Glued? Experiment with different adhesives. Wood glue, a yellow, stronger version of white glue, works well for most natural items. Hot glue guns are quick and effective but won't adhere slick surfaces like plastic or metal. Notice carefully the experience of committing to each piece.

Sit with your piece and look at it from all angles. What does it feel like all together? Does it seem finished, does it need a box, a pedestal, a light shining down on it? "Finishing" is a momentary experience, and the chance to change or take apart or add to your piece always remains. An assemblage can be very much like a dream, with fragments of many incongruous items that add up to convey a meaning or a story that can scarcely be put into words.

Following from assemblage is found-object sculpture, where objects are altered more purposefully to create a particular image. I had a piece of tree root in my studio for months that evoked a flying figure to me, but was headless. This stage in the process is like the play of small children, for whom a tiny scrap can be invested with great meaning. Then one day on a walk, I found the head—a small piece of weathered wood that resembled a bird's head to me. I joined the two pieces with plastic wood after whittling off bits of wood to

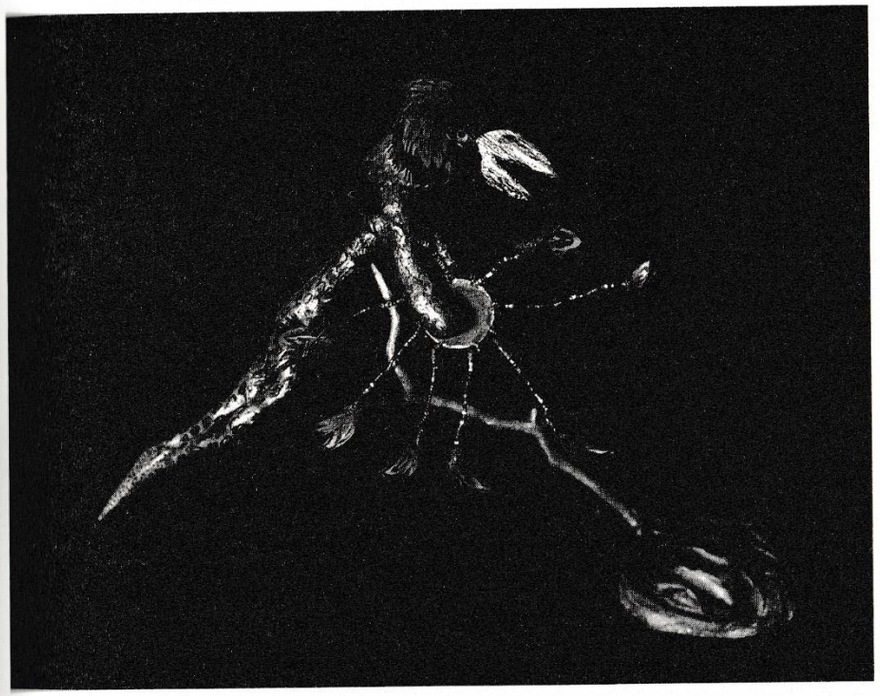

Fig. 1. Shaman's Drum *(painted wood, mixed media).*

clarify the image of the bird-headed figure that I saw in the object. Slowly the figure emerged but then sat for almost a year until I figured out how to make it seem like it was flying. I just looked at it day after day until it became clear that I could drill a hole and insert a stick, anchored in a wad of wood dough, a product available in hardware stores and used for filling in cracks in wooden furniture or trim. Embellished with feathers and a drum made from a film container lid, wire and beads, Shaman's Drum eventually came to be (fig. 1).

This piece, which evolved over several years, was worked on mostly indirectly. Each time, I went as far as the "don't know" place and stopped. Patient waiting is sometimes a big part of image making, just resting in not knowing and trusting that eventually, if I maintain my connection to a piece and don't abandon it, resolution will eventually come.

Direct Clay Sculpture

Clay is a good medium for coming to know visceral experience. Strong, instinctual experiences lend themselves to expression in this simple material, which requires no tools but can be shaped directly with the pressure of your hands. If you wish to contact your gut, clay, which is slippery and dark and evokes dirt or even excrement, provides swift passage.

Throw an old plastic tablecloth or shower curtain or a heavy piece of canvas over your work table, and simply shake it out and roll it up when you finish clay work. There is no need to wash it; just store it for future use. Clay can be obtained from pottery supply outlets, and for your purpose here, the least costly will do very well. Kept it in a tightly sealed plastic bag, clay will remain workable indefinitely. If it gets too stiff, add a wet sponge to the bag, and the clay will reabsorb moisture as needed.

Tear off a good-sized fistful of clay. Sit with it, holding, tearing, kneading it, noticing your response. Do any words leap to mind? Slimy, slippery, dirty, sensuous, pliable, soft, creamy? Pay attention to your breathing and to your gut. What comes up? Let memories, feelings, or thoughts rise and fall in your mind as you handle the clay. Close your eyes. Move your awareness to your hands, then to your shoulders, your lower pelvis. Try touching the clay very lightly, then more strongly. Notice what feels best to you, most effortless. Continue that movement, that form of touch. See how you can adjust your method to find what is best for you. How does it feel to stand and squash the clay with your feet? To squeeze it through your fingers? To roll it out and pound it flat?

Does an image want to be made? If so, follow it, trying to stay focused on your breathing. If the image changes and transforms as you work, let it go and become something else. The changeable nature of clay is a wonderful reflection of mind and the endless coming and going of images. Do any voices pipe up saying "Don't make a mess," "Don't get dirty," "Don't play with mud"? If so, ask, "Why not?" See what sort of answer you get. Is it satisfactory? If it feels right to you, consider adding a small amount of water to your clay and actually making mud. You can do this in an old baking pan or dish pan. What is the experience of mud for you? When you feel finished, let the clay settle in its container. Pour off any clear water, but be sure not to pour clay down any pipes where it can settle and cause a blockage. Journal about this experience if memories or feelings arise.

If in your clay work you do end up with an image that you wish to keep, simply let it dry. Even without kiln firing, clay pieces will last indefinitely. When dry, they can be painted with acrylic paint or coated with a mixture of one part white glue and one part water to provide a protective skin. I have had several unfired clay pieces for over fifteen years with no deterioration. Yet clay is endlessly recyclable. If you wish to reuse it at any point, break up dry clay and soak it in water. Let the water evaporate until the clay is malleable, and use it again.

If you have created an image that expresses a painful or traumatic experience, consider placing the finished piece outside in the elements, where you can watch it return to the earth, taking your pain along with it. Over time, rain and wind will slowly wear away the image until it's gone. Try to have a clear intention to let go of the pain associated with the experience. See if you can imagine it seeping back into the earth to be reabsorbed and released. This meditation is valuable in making the return of all things more understandable.

Reflect on your clay experience. Is clay primarily a kinesthetic experience of touch and movement for you? Did the clay serve to relax you by receiving your excess energy, or did your viscera get stirred up? Does clay loosen old memories, feelings, or dreams? Clay, like all art materials, serves many purposes. As you become acquainted with it, you will discover your most congenial relationship—or maybe that you'd rather not have a relationship at all! Just knowing clay's basic properties helps you to have another option and avenue when certain images arise. I don't use clay very often, but in chapters 12 and 16 I tell of two instances when clay was absolutely necessary and I was glad to have had a bagful stashed away to use.

The final form of sculpture presented here uses simple kitchen materials: masking tape and aluminum foil. I learned this method from my friend, an artist and art therapist, Don Seiden, who has made both small-scale pieces and a life-size sculpture adapting tape and foil. This method is especially effective for creating figures, binding together the elements, which are twisted and shaped out of foil, with the tape. The foil can be the cheapest generic brand, but the tape should be of good quality or else it will not hold together. The figures created are somewhat bendable. Once you have positioned your piece to your liking, use acrylic paint to bring it alive. Fabric and other materials can be used for embellishment, but painting alone can be enough.

Begin with a simple human figure or animal, and allow its personality to evolve as you create. You may want to create an environment or a companion for your creation. These sculptures lend themselves to narratives. See if a story emerges as you mold your figures. We all have a cast of internal characters. Sculpting them is one way to get to know them, to honor them and respect them. Who lives in you whom you might like to know better, to play with or learn from?

It takes a while to make these images. Any process that takes time but doesn't require too much thinking allows you to dwell in the image longer and absorb more of the nuances of meaning. These figures can be totems embodying a quality you want to develop or understand. State your intention to your figure and ask what it needs to help you—maybe an environment, maybe a shrine. Explore the story and myth of your figure—playful-like-a-rabbit, strong-like-a-bull—and let it emerge over time.

In my work, characters that first emerged independently eventually wound up in a scene together, which I call a story box (fig. 2). The dog and devil were each done for different demonstrations, but after a while they asked for a sleeping man and later an angel. After several years, my story box *Night of the Soul* was finished, housed in an old grocery carton, cut and painted. All the figures are of foil and

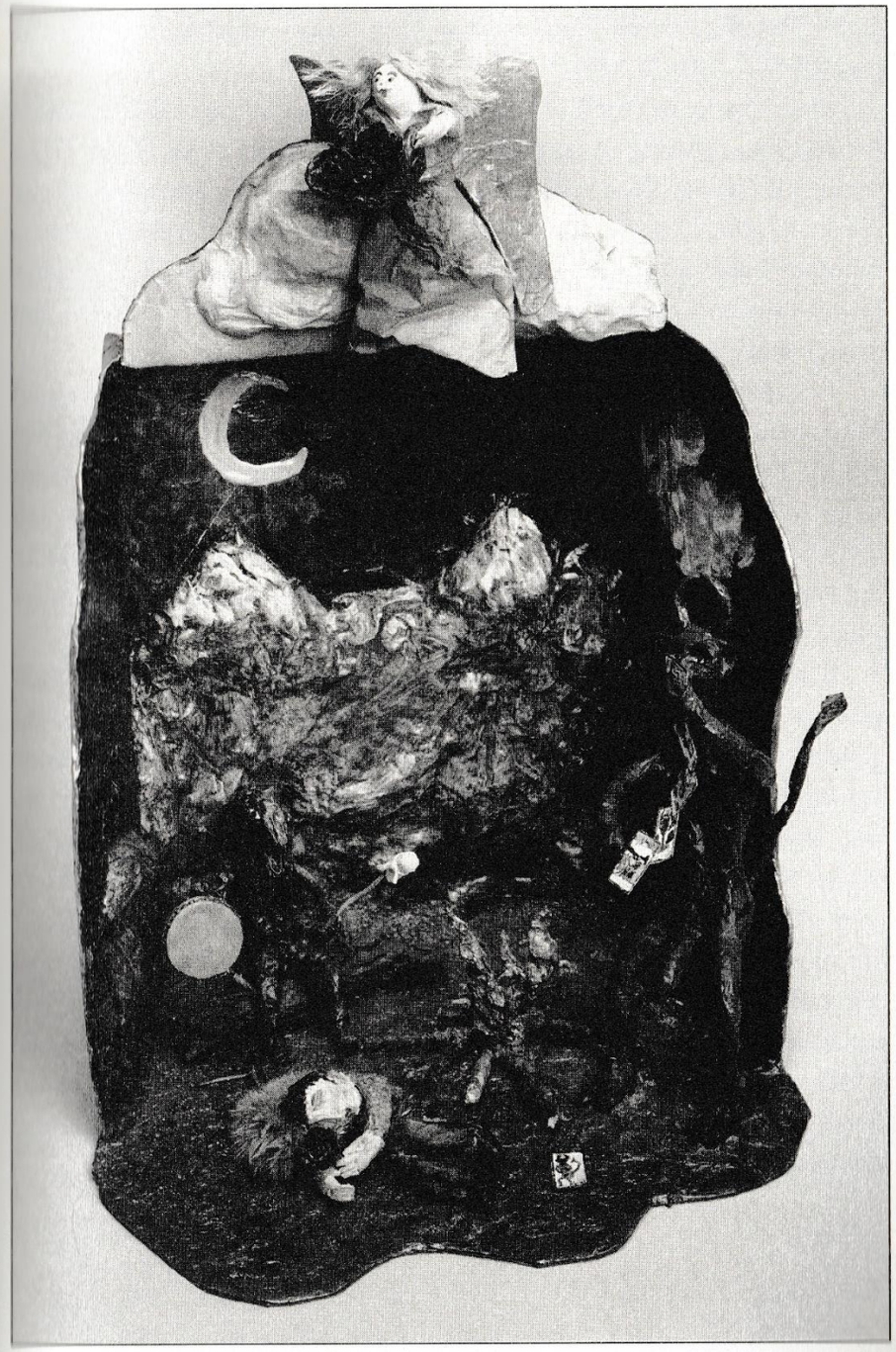

Fig. 2. Story Box: Night of the Soul *(mixed media).*

tape, though embellished with a few found objects. The fire is painted foil with no tape.

Don't be concerned if you tape up a figure rather quickly and it sits and sits, refusing to be painted or to divulge its story. Trust that a process is taking place, even if it isn't conscious. Pay attention to the piece, handle it once in a while, and recall your intention. Notice whether you are avoiding the figure's completion, and let the figure know you welcome it when it is ready to arrive. Write down any stories that develop.

A variation on this method uses plaster gauze to cover the taped foil armature. Plaster gauze is available in rolls from art and school supply stores. Cut the gauze into strips and dip it in water. Then wrap it around your piece, smoothing as you go. The plaster will harden into a very durable sculpture that has a nice surface for painting. Additional features of a figure can be built up using the plaster gauze.

You are now acquainted with a wealth of methods with which you can welcome your images. Some can be used as a warm-up anytime, not only for art making but to get your energy flowing for any type of creative work. The simple, nonobjective painting, drawing, and clay serve as relaxation and centering tools. The found-object assemblage and sculpture provide a starting point for exploration. All of these methods can be the basis for knowing any sort of life experience, emotional or otherwise, that arises. By experimenting and learning what particular materials and tasks are most pleasureable to you, many new options exist for the soul to manifest its wisdom in your life. In subsequent chapters you will learn in greater detail how to go deeper with images and to understand and use the twin concepts of intention and attention.

Part Three Personal Content