Re-Envisioning Art Education to Foster Democracy

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Abstract   *The American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey famously said, "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife." This essay builds upon Dewey's assertion by arguing for the crucial role of innovative art pedagogies in general education to foster democracy. As humanity's existence becomes increasingly globalized, democracy's rebirth relies on nurturing well-rounded citizens adept at critical thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, and effective communication—four essential skills that can be cultivated through progressive approaches to art education. In our image-saturated world, functional democracy needs an educated citizenry capable of critically processing visual information. Students who study art practice critical thinking through visual literacy: they become proficient in the elements of visual language, learning to decode information and express themselves effectively in visual communication. Art education, like any education, functions best as a democratizing force when it is accessible, inclusive, and empowering, which requires challenging stereotypes that limit what art should be, how art should be experienced, and who should have access to art. This essay examines the theoretical underpinnings of radical pedagogies that have expanded disciplinary methods to advance art education for societal betterment, highlighting models that offer practical relevancy for strengthening democratic citizenship. A valuable case study is the Bauhaus, which pioneered visual literacy and collaborative problem solving in art education during democracy's rise and fall in Weimar Germany, a politically turbulent period that, like today, produced a proliferation of mass-media imagery. More recent case studies show the democratic benefits of public programs that promote diversity by expanding art education to marginalized communities, including people with vision-related disabilities.*

Keywords   *Democracy; Art Pedagogies; Collaborative Pedagogies; Visual Literacy; Marginalized Communities*

My blind father and I first visited an art museum together in 2013, when we attended a *Mind's Eye* event at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. At the time, this was a relatively new program designed to make art accessible for people with vision-related disabilities. Inspired by our ability to imagine something without optically seeing it, *Mind's Eye* engages blind and low-vision visitors with art through verbal descriptions and tactile experiences, including textured models of paintings and hands-on creative workshops. "We all see, if differently," explained Georgia Krantz, an art educator who helped develop *Mind's Eye* by considering the physiological, cognitive, and experiential ways in which the human brain processes information. Although we know that the arts are an important part of a thriving civilization, art education still struggles to overcome misperceptions of its value to all members of society. Progressive programs like *Mind's Eye* prove visual art can create meaningful experiences for everyone when innovative methods expand art education to foster diversity—a cornerstone of democracy.

Throughout my life, my father has introduced me to other multisensory forms of art and culture, including the theater. However, when I was a child, we did not visit art museums together, which were not as accessible as they are today—not only for people with vision-related and other disabilities, but also for people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have had the means or educational opportunities to experience art in museums. Art history is primarily taught in higher education in the United States, which is where I began my studies. I doubt I would have experienced art in a museum before college were it not for the progressive teachers in my public elementary school, who integrated art into our general education—I was nine years old in the mid-1990s when my third-grade teacher, Ms. Linda Flynn, took my class to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. To this day, I remember how the Met's Ancient Egyptian collection of mummies and artifacts brought our history lesson to life.

We often overlook how powerful art can be because modern society, including its art and educational systems, has tended to condition us to see art as a primarily visual experience of a seemingly functionless aesthetic object. In "Art and Human Nature," contemporary philosopher Noël Carroll posits that, if we can see beyond this parochial view of art and consider that "virtually every known human culture has what we call arts," we might find that art, like language, is rooted in our "cognitive, perceptual, and emotive" faculties to foster the necessary social cohesion for humanity's existence (283). Similar to oral and written language, visual art conveys thought, but we can express ourselves

through art in ways that words alone cannot. Throughout human history, art has served as an important vehicle for ideas. As a result, art is often among the first forms of communication authoritarian governments censor and, likewise, exploit as propaganda. In our image-saturated world today, functional democracy needs an educated citizenry capable of critically processing visual information. Students who study art practice critical thinking through visual literacy: they become proficient in the elements and principles of visual language, learning to decode information and express themselves effectively in visual communication.

This essay advocates for pragmatic and collaborative pedagogies in public education that embrace art as a multisensory form of human communication. Art education, like any education, functions best as a democratizing force when it is accessible, inclusive, and empowering, which requires challenging stereotypes that limit what art should be, how art should be experienced, and who should have access to art. As an educator, I position art as a multidimensional experience that can facilitate understanding by building on interdisciplinary linguistic initiatives that promote literacy, critical thinking, and creative dialogues. As an art historian, I draw from precedents in art and art education that aimed at cultivating democracy amidst political crises catalyzed by mass media. I also discuss my pedagogical efforts to expand art history's traditional methodologies by designing collaborative writing assignments that stimulate respectful discourse as students exchange ideas and perspectives. In our era of digital communication, I believe that encouraging collective problem-solving through forms of creative expression will help counteract prejudices that fuel societal divisions and weaken democracy.

Visual Literacy's Necessity in the Age of Social Media

When people learn that I was raised by a blind father, they are often surprised that I became an art historian—after all, art is usually visual. Yet, as a child I developed a keen visual sense by safely guiding my father through our surroundings with careful observations and accurate descriptions. By considering my dad's perspective, I also became more mindful of my behavior, learning not to leave my toys or other objects lying around that might injure him. Consequently, I became aware of the importance of visual information in communication and how problems often arise from limited perspectives. For example, some misunderstandings occur because my father cannot see facial expres-

sions, gestures, and other forms of body language—significant components of our social interactions to which today's popularity of emojis attests. Those of us with sight tend to take our vision for granted and rarely think about the visual information we use to navigate our daily lives. Assisting my father has broadened my perspective by heightening my visual awareness and empathy for other positionalities, factors which have informed my approach to art education.

As an art educator, one of my main objectives is to strengthen students' communication and critical thinking skills by developing their visual literacy. Although blindness can present extreme challenges, the sighted who lack visual literacy are also at risk in today's digital world, which is ordered by signs, symbols, and other visual information that influence our thoughts and behaviors. For most people, vision is the dominant sense: we absorb up to 90 percent of information visually, making visual literacy vital to daily life (Jensen 55). As children, we learn to recognize visual forms like shapes before we can read and write because alphabetic letters are essentially symbols of shaped lines, which we combine to write words that represent ideas. Even with the advent of written language, art has been a primary form of communication throughout history because most people could not read and write. Since educational systems have placed an emphasis on reading and writing, global literacy has risen to 87% from 12% in 1820 (Buchholz). People who are illiterate can still speak, but they cannot read and write. Similarly, the sighted who lack visual literacy can still see, but they may not fully know how to interpret and convey information visually. With the ubiquity of image-based media today, information scientist Irene Lopatovska advocates for developing visual literacy early in life because, like linguistic literacy, visual literacy requires training "to understand visual elements that make an image (syntax) and represent its meaning (semantics)" (Lopatovska et al. 1198).

Students who study art acquire vital visual literacy skills because they learn the alphabet and grammar of visual language—in other words, art's elements (e.g., line, shape, color, space, texture) and organizing principles (e.g., balance, emphasis, movement, contrast, unity). By making art with various materials and techniques, students become proficient in manipulating visual forms. They also acquire problem-solving skills as they determine how to translate their thoughts and emotions into visual compositions. By understanding how to effectively express themselves through art, students develop an awareness for the many human factors involved in constructing meaning through visual communication. For example, students learn that choosing a different color

might convey a different meaning in a visual composition, much like how a different word could change the meaning of a sentence. By studying art, students become attuned to these subtle nuances, which in turn heightens their visual awareness in everyday life. Literacy specialist Peggy Albers claims, "Through engagement with making, viewing, and talking about art, students become more familiar with, articulate about, and reflective upon their own meanings and the meanings of others" (348). Students also learn how to think critically, not only about their work and art in general, but also about the visual information shaping the meaning of the world around them.

Although art historians do not teach students how to make art, we help students acquire the visual literacy skills and general knowledge needed to critically interpret meaning from visual media. Art history is an interdisciplinary form of human history constructed by analyzing visual objects, written records, and other informational sources. Students of art history learn how to understand art within its historical context by considering cultural and environmental influences (e.g., politics, religion, economics, scientific discoveries, etc.). They also become adept at visual (formal) analysis, a primary disciplinary method for gathering information by examining an artwork's visual forms. Applicable to visual media beyond art, a visual analysis is more than just a description: it encourages students to critically think about the causes and effects of visual compositions. For example, how and why the artist manipulated visual forms to convey meaning to the audience. Through a visual analysis, students of art history even learn how to decipher meaning from prehistoric art—the art created before humans invented writing. Visual communication through art and images transcends language and time barriers. With the internet today, visual information also instantaneously traverses geographic barriers.

Understanding Photography's Artifice through Hands-On Art Education

The rise of disinformation on social media and across the web through doctored and AI-generated photographs, as well as deep-fake videos, make visual literacy just as imperative as reading and writing skills in navigating our world and fostering critical citizenship. In 1928, the artist László Moholy-Nagy prophesized, "The illiterate of the future will not be one who cannot write, but who does not know photography" ("Nicht der Schrift-, sondern der

Photographieunkundige wird, so hat man gesagt, der Analphabet der Zukunft sein" [Moholy-Nagy 5, trans. Samson 127]).

Digital technologies have removed us from the original hands-on processes of making photographs, which first developed as documentation tools in the 1830s. The word photography, derived from Greek, means to write or draw with light (*photos*); yet, unlike drawing, photography appears to be objective. We use cameras instead of our hands to create indexical pictures that seemingly capture truthful reflections our surroundings. Knowledge of photography's origins could help dispel beliefs in its objectivity: some of the earliest photographic pictures were made by manually placing objects on light-sensitive paper that created images from their shadows. Today, these camera-less photographs are known as photograms, a term Moholy-Nagy coined to underscore the photo*gram's* (light-letter) elemental role in photo*graphy* (light-writing). In the haptic process of their creation, photograms directly record light without the camera's illusionistic mediation of one-point perspective, thus exposing photography's artifice.

Since digital communication technologies allow us to easily manipulate and disseminate photos, and artificial intelligence can generate photographic images, the knowledge of photography acquired through progressive art education is crucial to visual literacy. During the century after its invention, photography struggled to be seen as a medium for art largely because the camera distances the human creator by mechanically reproducing images of our reality. However, many artistic and subjective factors go into making and interpreting photographs. Even with straight photography, we choose how to focus and frame the image. Moholy-Nagy helped to advance photography as an artistic medium by leading the New Vision (Neues Sehen) movement while teaching at the Bauhaus, the revolutionary German school of art, design, and architecture.

He pioneered abstract photogram experiments and captured photographs from unusual angles, leveraging the industrial production of compact cameras, which popularized access to photography—similar to smartphones today. Moholy-Nagy also helped develop visual literacy training in the Bauhaus's *Vorkurs* (preliminary course). Students learned critical thinking and problem-solving skills through hands-on exercises in visual perception and material analysis, which also incorporated photograms. By merging art and technology in education, Moholy-Nagy propelled the Bauhaus's industrial shift to produce designs that have indelibly shaped our world, including graphic designs with modern typographies to enhance communication.

Although we have long considered photography a documentary tool, the fact that most federal courtrooms, including the U.S. Supreme Court, prohibit photography but permit sketch artists presents a strong argument for integrating photography and art into public education. Despite the fact that photography is a visual language, humans tend to take photographs at face value without critical analysis, unlike other constructed images, especially handmade sketches. Sketches, unlike photos, demand an interpretive process, which during a legal trial helps to balance the public's right to information with the democratic need for a fair judicial process. In a courtroom, a jury of one's peers determine facts based on evidence, including testimonies—stories that offer different perspectives on the truth. A good lawyer, like a good photographer, knows there are different ways to tell the truth. Courts interpret laws, which like art, change to reflect the socio-political imperatives of their time because laws, like the language from which they are made, are constructed by humans. By upholding the rule of law, courts crucially put the principles of democracy into practice. Thus, by integrating pragmatic approaches to art education into general education, schools can better prepare students for democratic citizenship.

Even students of art history are usually tasked with sketching works of art when performing visual analyses to help focus their attention and sharpen their observations. When I assign sketching, I stress to my students that I am not asking them to demonstrate their technical skill or create a masterpiece, but rather to use drawing as a tool in their visual analysis. Studies show that drawing—like the handwriting that evolved from drawing—is better for learning and memory, especially in children (Van der Weel and Van der Meer). As multisensory activities, drawing and handwriting engage multiple interconnected regions of the brain, which are responsible for movement, vision, sensory processing, and memory. However, just as industrialization supplanted handicraft practices over a century ago, advancements in digital communication technologies in recent decades have also diminished handwriting. In 2010, educational officials in the United States removed cursive from the Common Core curriculum. As a result, a generation of Americans are not literate in cursive script, which is problematic for reading historical records, including the original Declaration of Independence and Constitution—our democracy's founding documents.

Art Education and Democracy: Lessons from (Art) History

As I tell my students, one of the great benefits of studying art from the past is that we learn a lot about human history, which can help us navigate our present. The Bauhaus's existence (1919–1933) coincided with democracy's rise and fall in Weimar Germany, a politically turbulent period between two world wars that has some resonance today. Advancements in communication technologies proliferated information to the masses through images, writing, and speech. Photographic developments also sparked interests in optical illusions and visual knowledge, helping to fuel epistemological doubts about truth and facts—comparable to the propagation of contemporary conspiracy theories. Social media memes even recall Berlin Dada's satirical mass-media collages, which artists created from the industrially printed text and photographs in newspapers and magazines. By overturning traditional aesthetics, the international Dada movement advanced new artistic ideas to challenge the societal conventions that engendered WWI—the first mechanized war—and its aftermath. In a similar activist vein, the Bauhaus rejected distinctions between the so-called high and low arts, laying the foundation for design education that merged art, craft, and technology to build a new society with a more meaningful existence.

Bauhaus pedagogy and its descendants offer valuable ideas in applying art education for societal betterment. The school fostered a progressive learning-by-doing environment that foregrounded craft practices in art instruction. Instead of copying old-master artworks, Bauhaus students acquired useful experiences by collaborating on problem-solving exercises in investigative hands-on workshops with unconventional methods and materials. This transformative model of education replaced the academic onus of making art with a playful freedom that stimulated independent thinking and inventive courage, resulting in the Bauhaus's prodigious legacy. The Bauhaus had far-reaching impacts partly because its instructors, including Moholy-Nagy and his colleague Josef Albers, immigrated to the United States and disseminated Bauhaus pedagogy, helping to advance art education in America. Specifically, Albers—who won the College Art Association's first Distinguished Teaching of Art Award (1973)—adapted *Vorkurs* pedagogy to Black Mountain College's general education curriculum, demonstrating that art can develop skills for all areas of life.

Throughout history, enemies of democracy have condemned progressive education and censored art because an individual mind liberated by creativity and critical thought does not easily succumb to the mass demaguery of au-

thoritarian dictators. As the Nazis forced the closure of the Bauhaus in 1933, John Andrew Rice founded Black Mountain in North Carolina, inviting Albers and his wife Anni, a Bauhaus-trained weaver, to establish the art department. Concerned by fascism's rise, Rice drew inspiration from the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, whose treatise, *Democracy and Education* (1916), helped shape the American public education system. Seeking to prepare students for active democratic citizenship, Black Mountain dismantled traditional academic hierarchies between disciplines as well as those between teachers and students to foster a community-driven environment with practical learning for life outside of the classroom. The college's interdisciplinary curriculum uniquely foregrounded artmaking based on the conviction that people who make art become more thoughtful and creative individuals with a balance of "intellectual and emotional" intelligence for the good of humanity (Rice qtd. in Adamic 518).

At Black Mountain, Albers modified the Bauhaus's progressive *Vorkurs* pedagogy to create multisensory collaborative exercises that developed students' "visual empathy," a term he used to describe the sensitive "ability to read the meaning of form and order" (Albers, *Search Versus Re-Search* 10). He encouraged students to work with objects from their environment (e.g., leaves, rocks, bark), preferring that they used their hands instead of tools to attain a "finger-tip feeling" for material (Albers, "Concerning Art Instruction" 5). "Finger-tip feeling" is also a German idiom (*Fingerspitzengefühl*) that describes the sensitivity for handling delicate social situations, a method which aligned with Black Mountain's greater objective to teach students how to navigate feelings and emotions. Apparently, Albers never used the word "art" in his classes (Dearstyne 92); instead, he maintained that his primary teaching objective was "to open eyes" (Albers qtd. in Holloway 459). Among Albers's most successful exercises for enhancing visual literacy were *matière* studies in compositional relationships that obscured distinct material properties through optical illusions (e.g., crumpling paper to mimic weathered wood). Albers stressed formal relativity to help students distinguish between "factual facts"—what physically exists—versus "actual facts"—how our minds perceive it. Recognizing that a person's world view (Weltanschauung) is connected to their visual sight (Schauen), Albers taught students how to work together by seeing things from multiple perspectives—critical skills for a functional democracy (Albers, *Search Versus Re-Search* 17).

Dewey famously said, "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife" (Dewey, "Industrial Democracy" 139). I would further argue that democracy's rebirth relies on nurturing well-rounded citi-

zens through innovative approaches to art education that foster creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication—four essential skills that the U.S. National Education Association deems necessary for success in our increasingly complex and global environments. Over the last century, Dewey's advocacy for pragmatic education to support an "industrial democracy" has been taken to an extreme by STEM initiatives that sideline the humanities, especially the arts. However, it is worth remembering that Dewey later counterbalanced his earlier work with *Art as Experience* (1934), a treatise that provides a necessary perspective on art education for democracy today. Dewey argued that art is not just an object, but the experience people have when engaging with art, which is to say when people think about art, make it, and share these experiences with others. Scholars note that Dewey's shift parallels contemporary initiatives to broaden STEM education to STEAM by aligning the arts with science, technology, engineering, and math (Granger 1). Albers's adaptation of the Bauhaus's *Vorkurs* pedagogy provides an interdisciplinary model of art education for forging creative individuals primed in visual literacy and empathy, who can collectively drive societal progress.

Fostering Democracy through Pragmatic and Collaborative Pedagogies in Art and Writing

Through my teaching and research of art history, I have come to realize how progressive Ms. Flynn's approach was to integrating art and craft activities into our third-grade curriculum, including our science lessons. For example, when we learned about the Amazon rainforest, we made a rainforest in our classroom with crayons, markers, and colored papers. My classmates and I worked together to create the trees and animals, and in doing so, we learned about the ecology of the rain forest. In addition to museum visits, we ventured outside of the classroom on fieldtrips that enhanced our learning through art in more tangible ways. For instance, in our studies about marine life, we went to the beach and collected sand and seashells that we used to create ocean dioramas. As research into brain-based learning has shown, such interactive pedagogies can leave greater impressions on students' minds than simply telling them what information to memorize (Caine and Caine). When I look back on my education, the memory of Ms. Flynn's Ancient Egyptian class at the art museum stands in stark contrast to the textbook-based history lessons I had in the early 2000s at my STEM high school. While I did not know then that I would

become an art historian, I knew that I wanted a more well-rounded education, which motivated me to attend a liberal arts college.

Like many of my students at the City University of New York (CUNY), I stumbled upon art history as an elective course while fulfilling my college's general education requirements. CUNY offers a liberal arts curriculum in which all undergraduates study a variety of disciplines irrespective of their major to cultivate a broad range of knowledge and skills necessary for any career. Founded on the principle that all students deserve a first-rate education regardless of their socioeconomic background, CUNY is one of America's most diverse and affordable universities. Also, since CUNY is the country's largest urban public university, many students are commuters who juggle family and work priorities while trying to further their education and careers. A core-curriculum requirement is Creative Expression that students fulfill with courses in such subjects as art, music, and theater. By studying one of these art forms, students develop a better understanding for how meaning and information are created and communicated. Hence, at CUNY, I teach art history to students with different specializations, including business, science, and technology. I do not expect my students to become artists or art historians. Rather, like Albers at Black Mountain, I approach art education with the hope of fostering a learning experience that will broaden students' perspectives and furnish them with practical skills for life in a globalized world.

To help make the introduction to art history survey course more pragmatic and engaging for students, I have built upon disciplinary methods by creating collaborative writing projects. Collaborative writing is the process by which a group of people produce a jointly written text, which is common in STEM disciplines with multi-author publications, but art history tends to traditionally champion the work of the solo-creator—in terms of both art and writing about art. I initially taught the introductory survey the way I learned it with discipline-specific training through textbook-based lectures emphasizing the traditional Western, predominantly white-male canon of artists. Akin to "story time," survey teachers project colorful images of art on a screen in a darkened lecture hall, where students passively gather to absorb information. Assignments are individual and, apart from exams, completed outside of class. Realizing that reproducing this paradigm lacked practical relevancy to my CUNY students, I began incorporating in-class collaborative writing activities to cultivate valuable community ties in addition to critical thinking and multiliteracy skills. Specifically, each class begins with students working in teams to write a single comparative analysis essay. By comparing artworks, students draw on

visual and contextual evidence to discuss changes in art and reasons for these changes.

Since I had never previously experienced groupwork in an art history lecture, I could not envision creating collaborative projects in an auditorium full of students until I attended Larry Michaelsen's 2014 Team-Based Learning workshop at CUNY's Brooklyn College. Initially, sacrificing any time for classroom activities seemed impossible in a one-semester course that surveys the entire discipline from cave paintings to contemporary art. However, Michaelsen's Team-Based Learning workshop showed me that enriching the quality of the educational experience through collaborative activities enhanced student knowledge more effectively than presenting them with a larger quantity of information—an outcome that scientific studies have proven (Swanson et al.). I assign the first few reviews individually to assess each student's performance and provide personally guided feedback. The individual reviews also acquaint me with students, allowing me to decipher which students will work well together. By the fourth review, I assign students to work in teams of five, distributing high-achieving students with those needing help. As my instructor role has expanded from dispensing information to designing problem-solving situations, the students have become active participants, who engage in meaningful peer dialogues centered on artistic expression. Most students seem to enjoy the teamwork, which lifts the pressure from producing individual responses yet still encourages students to prepare for class. While some students occasionally complain of lazy team members, since the groupwork weighs less than individual exams, final course grades still accurately reflect each student's overall effort. By working collaboratively, students exchange viewpoints in a democratic learning experience that generates ideas and a sense of responsibility for their team's success.

In addition to collaborative projects, I dedicate class time to writing instruction, a learner-centered practice inspired by CUNY's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. Like STEAM, WAC stresses writing's importance to learning throughout all educational levels by integrating writing into all disciplines, including STEM fields. The WAC movement emerged partly in response to the 1975 British government report, "Language Across the Curriculum," which called for writing in all classes, not just English classes (Bullock 188–194). Spearheading this research was James Britton, an educator who argued that language is central to learning because through language and other symbolic systems "we organize our representation of the world" (214). CUNY's WAC program draws from John Bean's *Engaging Ideas* (2011) to help faculty de-

sign problem-based and scaffolded writing assignments that promote active student engagement. Although writing is perceived as a skill that students should have acquired during their school years, undergraduates today have varying degrees of writing proficiency. Rather than assume students enter my art history course with capable writing skills, throughout the semester I devote time to writing instruction. For example, when I teach students how to perform a comparative analysis, we engage as a class in a writing activity focused on structuring thesis statements, a transferable skill. A comparative analysis is a primary art historical methodology, but it is often unintuitive for new students. By being transparent about my learning objectives through writing instruction activities and rubrics, I find that students comprehend assignments better and, as a result, produce writing that more closely meets my expectations.

Although writing and art are often considered individualistic practices, I believe that embracing the communicative nature of these language forms can foster collaborative educational approaches that enhance learning and prepare students for democratic citizenship. Universal education efforts and WAC initiatives have driven the expansion of writing centers, which developed in the 1970s to support the increasing non-traditional student population struggling to adapt to college-level writing standards. Writing centers function from peer-learning since students usually prefer help from their peers, who seem less imposing than professors (Bruffee 637). Collaborative writing studies have also found that students produce better texts when writing together in terms of task fulfillment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity (Storch 168). These benefits from collaborative writing challenge the traditional Western prominence of the solitary original author—a notion that the literary theorist Roland Barthes also critiqued in "The Death of the Author", which was published in 1967. He argued, writing is not an isolated endeavor but rather builds on various cultural sources, from which the reader ultimately derives meaning—just like art. Academia, especially art and other humanities disciplines centered on creative expression, reinforce individual prestige by awarding merit based on personal achievements. However, in the real world, where most students will eventually pursue careers, people are expected to work together. Collaborative writing assignments centered on artistic expression encourage students to collectively solve problems by democratically merging their individual perspectives.

In our era of digital information, collaborative approaches to writing about art can remind us of the human component in communication. Having stu-

dents write about art together helps them understand that there is no single definitive perspective or interpretation of either a visual or textual work. Like photography, printed and digital texts often disassociate their creators, especially when the information is presented authoritatively in the third person rather than the first person, as tends to be the traditional form of academic art historical writing. Also, pedagogies, like multiple choice tests, which encourage students to find the "right" answers, usually conceal the constructed nature of written information by focusing students' attention on surface-level content rather than engaging them critically in the text's ideas (Bean 168). I argue, collaborative art and writing pedagogies that emphasize the communication of ideas over the collection of information can help make art more practical and relevant by attuning students to the methods and processes for creating and interpreting meaning in everyday life. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly for democracy, in the process of giving and receiving feedback, students learn to respectfully interact with their peers as they consider perspectives other than their own.

The goal of collaborative art and writing pedagogies is not to diminish the importance of information, but rather to bring a critical humanistic approach to the utilization of information, which democracy urgently needs in our digital world of partisan news rhetoric, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and artificial intelligence. The historian in me believes in learning from the past to avoid repeating it. Hence, I think it is worth considering that WAC historian David R. Russel points to Hitler's propaganda machine as a circumstantial factor in I.A. Richard's development of The Philosophy of Rhetoric, the English educator's 1936 theoretical treatise, which shaped WAC's framework for cross-curricular language instruction (185).

Richards, who was concerned with the power of language to shape thoughts and behaviors, integrated principles of linguistics and psychology to advocate for pragmatic applications of rhetoric that could facilitate communication, understanding, and cooperation. Studying rhetoric—the art of persuasive writing and speech—is much like studying visual art, which reveals how visual communication is constructed. Let us not forget that the democratic election process helped propel Hitler's fascist ascension to power. Although the U.S. Constitution's first amendment protects the "freedom of speech, or of the press," maintaining free expression requires vigilant democratic practices, which collaborative art and writing pedagogies could foster.

Reimagining Art's Story Value

I remind my students that "story" is indispensable to art history, which is a narrative created by scholars who choose how to write about art. As a feminist art historian, I strive to revise and expand this narrative by writing and speaking about women artists. While content is important, so is the language we use to shape the stories we tell, which is why I try to avoid terminology that perpetuates traditional gender biases. For example, my students would often assume that men created cave paintings and other paleolithic art if I used the term "caveman" instead of "cave person," or "paleolithic man" instead of "paleolithic human." Their responses reminded me how easily we become accustomed to visual and linguistic signifiers that reinforce subjugation and oppression, especially if we are unaware of the societal factors in their creation and perception.

"The *limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" ("*Die Grenzen meiner Sprache* bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt"), pronounced Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which he published in 1922, around the same time Bauhaus educators developed New Vision ideas (trans. Ogden; Wittgenstein 5.6). Language—whether it is linguistic or visual—shapes our perception because we interpret meaning from signs based on the knowledge etched into our minds, which has been conditioned by cultural conventions and associations. How we construct stories from words and images significantly shapes our understanding of the world, which is why expanding conceptions, approaches, and access to linguistic and visual languages can help incite the creativity needed to develop more equitable democracies.

In 2024, my father and I met the blind artist Emilie Gossiaux while experiencing her Queens Museum installation, "Other-Worlding", a term she borrowed from feminist scholar Donna Haraway. Gossiaux visually and haptically approaches Haraway's proposition of engaging in imaginative storytelling modes to envision alternative realities that challenge dominant narratives and power structures. Museums do not usually permit visitors to touch the art, but Gossiaux led a special multisensory access tour, explaining, "As a blind person and artist, touch is an incredibly important part of my practice." Her guide dog inspired the exhibit's central work, "White Cane Maypole Dance." Holding leashes with their paws, empowered papier-mâché dogs dance around a giant white cane—the most recognizable if not often stigmatized object associated with vision-related disabilities. Gossiaux has transformed the cane into a symbol of freedom, celebrating the agency and

independence blind and low-vision individuals possess with aids to navigate the world.

Making the language of art accessible through multisensory experiences could foster the empathy democracy needs to mitigate prejudices. "If you hear people describing what empathy is, quite often people either use the metaphor 'to walk a mile in someone's shoes' or 'to see the world through someone else's eyes,'" observed Clare Patey, an artist-curator who, with social philosopher Roman Krznaric, co-founded the Empathy Museum—a cultural institution that invites visitors to literally walk in someone else's shoes while listening to an audio recording of the shoes' owner narrating a story about their life. Like sight and hearing, touch is a primary sense of human perception that precedes and informs language as a communicative modality. "Our hands and bodies learn to 'speak' a certain language of touch, a language shaped by culture and inflected by individuals," asserts sensory historian Constance Classen (13). Linguistic anthropologists Asta Cekaite and Lorenza Mondada have also studied touch through an embodied approach—as opposed to the linguistic turn's mind-body divide—by expanding on phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of *intercorporeality*, which roots perception in bodily social interactions. Cekaite and Mondada argue that touch orients us to normative expectations in socio-material spaces, within which we "enact, reproduce, and transform the interaction order" as we experience the world with others (2). Helen Keller—a blind-deaf individual who notably learned linguistic communication through touch—astutely discerned, "The bulk of the world's knowledge is an imaginary construction" (89). Hence, multisensory interactions with art could enhance all our perspectives and sensitivities, helping us to imagine how a more inclusive democratic society might look and feel.

Assumptions based on stereotypes fuel prejudices, which is why I seek to change perspectives on the value of art education by making this fundamental form of human communication accessible and practical. Some students reluctantly enter my survey course because they think that art is not relevant to their future careers, which is a perspective I understand from my STEM high school experience. To help alleviate their skepticism, I share a quote by Steve Jobs, one of the co-founders of Apple, who described how the college art classes he took in calligraphy—which is Greek for "beautiful writing"—fundamentally shaped Apple's success and, as a result, the way we communicate today. Jobs recalled that his student experience initially seemed useless, "But 10 years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me.

And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography." In addition to today's many computer word processors that contain Bauhaus-inspired fonts, Apple's popular minimalist aesthetic embodies the school's modern spirit of unifying art, craft, and technology to create functionally beautiful designs for everyday living. By seeing art as a multidimensional and multisensory form of communication, we can re-envision collaborative approaches to art education that could help us break stereotypes. The term stereotype—meaning "solid impression" in Greek—originated from printing multiples with a solid plate of type. The computer, like the printing press, has revolutionized the way we share information. Inclusive pedagogies that enhance learning through art education has the potential to not only leave greater and more varied impressions on students' minds, but also endow them with the necessary skills and perspectives to engage productively in diverse communities.

I recently reconnected with Ms. Flynn, and was surprised to learn that, rather than teacher training, she developed her pedagogy by understanding art's real-world applications through her prior work in advertising and museum education. "My background in advertising was a big influence in creating brochures, advertisements, catalogues and any type of printed signs and promotions," she recalled. "It was fun to be creative and somehow I was able to incorporate these creative ideas into 3rd grade level experiences in the arts, and beyond." Before teaching, Flynn helped her husband Tom manage their company, Peach Arts Advertising (est. 1975), where she developed film photographs while collaborating on creative projects. She also led tours at New York's Museum of Natural History, a science-oriented museum with artistically designed dioramas. Flynn described, "I felt that even in science, doing the illustrations—drawing the dinosaurs, drawing pictures—was much more entertaining than just reading it." By incorporating multisensory art and craft activities into our educational experience, Ms. Flynn fostered a collaborative environment that encouraged students to engage with each other and the world.

For the arts to help democracy, we must democratize access to art and innovate pedagogies that integrate art into public education. Societies that support progressive art education invest in the innovation and sustainability of their future, especially when these programs encourage educators to nurture creative dialogues among children. "I had so much fun teaching," Flynn recalled. "But I also had a lot of freedom to go and present something to a principal and say, I have this idea, I want to go with this. It's still going to be the curriculum, but I'm going to do it in a different way." When teachers transform art

into a holistic experience beyond molding art professionals, education shapes humans versed in the art of communal living, who can democratically handle life's challenges with an imaginative lens.

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