

Trust the Process



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I can remember wanting to write books from a very young age. Every day I would create these ideas; most of my creativity would come from thoughts that would wander into my mind. I tried many techniques to get these seemingly random ideas onto the page. I had my mom write it down or I would use voice to text on the computer. Then, I learned how to write with a pencil, and quite quickly, so that I could get my stream of consciousness onto the page. I found that this technique appeared to be more effective.

Although my love for writing persisted, I found that this wandering method translated to making art as well. Even to this day when I have art block, I simply have to sit and clear all the thoughts from my head and new ideas immediately spring to life. This secret method of mine came into play when my class first got our journals in fifth grade. Free-write time was positively my favorite part of the morning. I could write pages of an idea, my day, my thoughts on the stars, or a boy I liked. I was so proud of my writing that I would often volunteer to read mine in front of the whole class.

When I left K-8 school for high school, I lost touch with this automatic writing process I had grown fond of. What still continued was my hunger to match my artistic skill to the ideas in my head. That became pressure that I put on myself to perform or live up to expectations in my own mind. As I grow older more expectation is put on my art, by both internal and external pressures. When the ideas in my mind become blurred and I strive to have a style and aesthetic, or to make money off of my art, then art block kicks in. Anything that takes my attention off of the flow and zone that art usually brings. Anxiety starts to grow and the expectations I place on myself turn my art into something else. In the midst of this, I discovered that there was a whole art movement called Surrealism and that the Surrealist artists had various ways of letting go of that controlling mind! Normally, when I want control over my own artistic process I lean into digital

art and design. I have a hard time tapping into what method worked for me, and struggled with only focusing on that aspect. I forget to let my mind wander to come up with new ideas. I find myself wanting to return to automatic writing to find my way again. Automatic writing and Surrealism are heavily connected. Automatism is at the heart of the Surrealism movement. The Tate defined automatism as “creating art without conscious thought, accessing material from the unconscious mind as part of the creative process” (1). Surrealists took that idea of automatism to create without aesthetics or expectations so that the artist can truly have freedom of thought. Surrealist artists used many different techniques such as collage, frottage, grattage, and automatic writing where the writer allows themselves to let their mind wander, write the first thing that comes to mind, and unlock their unconscious thoughts.

The Surrealist manifesto goes more in-depth with this concept by saying “among all many misfortunes to which we are heir, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought. It is up to us not to misuse it.” (Andre Breton (1972) pg. 4) This plays into my tendency to overthink most of my life, including my art. For this final project, I was thinking about it so much that I couldn’t begin. What would it be about? Does the research paper really have to be eight pages? I was so stuck; I couldn’t even start the creation process. I just wanted to stab a canvas and call it done. That’s when it hit me. What if automatism is the part of art I’ve been missing? Why do I need to overthink my art? I came to the conclusion that I simply would not. I would approach my final art project like a Surrealist artist. I would simply give my mind the freedom to wander in order to access the unconscious and get out of my own way.

Although the surrealist artist occupied the 20s and 30s, another important leader named Julia Cameron, in 1992, brought the idea of automatic writing, which she calls “Morning Pages” into artists’ lives with her book *The Artist’s Way*.

Essentially, “Morning Pages” are the practice of writing three full pages first thing in the morning of whatever pops into one’s head. Cameron states, “You write in the morning because that’s when the veil of the ego is said to be the thinnest. It’s almost as if your ego needs extra time to wake up and start with all of its demands for the day. Take advantage of this” (3). She recommends that you not type on the computer, but instead write your thoughts out by hand so as to slow down to let the ideas flow properly.

“One of the biggest shifts for me came with how I approached time. I no longer viewed it as just quantity and looked at it from a quality viewpoint. Each one of the things that I do helps me in some way to better use my time. They make my mind clearer, sharper, and more ‘quiet’. This allows me to focus better and ultimately be more productive.” Interestingly, she speaks about the benefits of morning pages and hints at some of the same concepts the surrealist artist had been exploring at the time.

I went through a similar realization when I switched from writing my ideas on computers to using pencil and paper. In the morning pages method, Cameron sounds like she’s really taking advantage of the idea of Automatism. I imagine that “Morning Pages” would be a great resource to help me start my day without overthinking. I want my paintings to be my own morning pages, my visual language. I also want to add aspects of morning pages by adding either poetry or snippets of my own feelings in writing on the canvas itself. I might actually write morning pages first thing in the morning and then incorporate that writing into my painting later in the day, or I may decide to write on the back of my canvases all my thoughts about the piece after it has been painted. The whole point is that I don’t want my paintings to be cohesive or aesthetic so that I can let go of those expectations I’ve put on myself. Because of this, I’m waiting to see what I can do with the idea of automatic writing. Maybe I’ll take the idea of morning pages and decide that the morning

is the best time for me to create my paintings and let the ideas just flow without judgment or the influence of ego.

Other techniques that I would like to explore from the Surrealist movement include collage, frottage, and grattage. Collage is the act of cutting up images from newspapers, magazines, and other print media to create a piece of artwork. According to the Tate website, “Grattage is a surrealist painting technique that involves laying a canvas prepared with a layer of oil paint over a textured object and then scraping the paint off to create an interesting and unexpected surface.” Similarly, but slightly different, frottage is the “‘automatic’ method of creative production that involves creating a rubbing of a textured surface using a pencil or other drawing material.” I would like to implement these techniques into my daily morning paintings to add that sense of letting go of control and to free my mind from expectations and follow in the footsteps of the surrealists who also used these techniques to clear their minds. I find myself interested and fascinated by what I might create with these techniques.

In total contrast, my original thinking was to research the influence of the experience of the viewer after I made my automatic paintings by using my rational mind to carefully craft an experience for the viewer. In the article, *The influence of the physical context and knowledge of artworks on the aesthetic experience of interactive installations* (2019), Imbir Szubielska stated “The study replicated previous findings that the gallery context enhances the aesthetic experience – both of art appreciation and aesthetic emotions” (1). Because of this very focus in this specific article on aesthetics, I’m not going to focus on those methods. In fact, I’m going to go in the opposite direction and free my mind to the possibilities of how my art can be displayed. That could be hanging from a tree, half-buried in the ground, or attached to a person. I’m going to let it play out as my art journey unfolds. I had planned to use psychological methods to influence the viewers’

perception of the final installation art piece. I thought this would be the most exciting part of writing this research paper because it engages my deep thinking mind in how to problem solve. It felt more solid to me. Interestingly enough, I felt less resistance in talking about this part of the art piece than about automatism. Perhaps that is because taking the approach of automatism means that I, as the artist, need to step out of my comfort zone and let go of control.

In conclusion, using the methods of grattage, frottage, collage, and automatic writing, I am seeking to reopen my mind to the possible results of the wandering mind. I would like to lift the expectations off my shoulders and add yet another tool to my creative tool belt. I also seek to challenge myself in this way, as this is my last project at Oxbow. I felt that there was a lot of pressure because it was the last project of the semester and I decided that automatism is a unique way to go where I've never gone before with my artwork. That is both terrifying and exciting, therefore I simply must do it.

Works Cited

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