

# *A Bestiary in Masks*

## **Creative Practices and Transdisciplinary Approaches to the Production of Knowledge**

**Clarice Zdanski**  
**Franklin University Switzerland**

### **ABSTRACT**

Over the past few decades, arts-based research involving the use of creative practices has come to be accepted among transdisciplinary approaches to the production of knowledge. Exhibitions and symposia are some of the ways in which artists collaborate with scientists and researchers in other disciplines and can effectively be incorporated in the studio art course syllabus. *A Bestiary in Masks* is an example of how this can be done. The project was the culmination of a university travel seminar in which the student participants worked together with a small natural history research museum in Central Italy and a local ceramicist/sculptor to put on an exhibition of glazed terracotta animal masks that they had created during a week's residence in the artist's atelier. The seminar also involved intense work on the use of images and on how animals have been studied in the past and continue to be studied in our own era, thus producing a rich body of material for reflection on our current predicament in the Anthropocene era, and expanding the scope of the seminar through transdisciplinary and transhistorical research to raise social awareness for sustainability issues. As a learning experience, the bestiary project is an example of a model in which the journey (to real places as well as within oneself), hands-on experience (workshops and collaboration with institutions and artists), and consciousness raising enable learners to engage in arts-based research and, by discovering their "artist within", to learn to trust in and exercise their creative powers in producing knowledge.

### **KEY WORDS**

Museum Pedagogy, Creative Practices, Arts-Based Research, Experiential Learning, Artist Within

## INTRODUCTION

Arts-based research involves using creative practices encompassing not only the visual arts, but also poetry, literature, crafts, and the performing arts in transdisciplinary approaches to the production of knowledge. There has been enormous growth and diversification in forms of arts-based research since the 1990s, with the appearance of educational theorist Elliot Eisner's first use of the term and art critic Nicolas Borriaud's work on relational aesthetics promulgating art as a form of living and action in existing reality. The multifaceted field employs the arts in various kinds of projects and applications, ranging from the most obvious in art education, to the more diverse, like exploring issues in health care or the social and behavioral sciences.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I present a studio art project, *A Bestiary in Masks*, an exhibition that was the final product of a ceramics travel seminar I taught in 2015 as part of the Academic Travel program at Franklin University Switzerland, with courses that integrate a period of travel as an experiential learning tool during a semester-long course. The travel destination, the professor's connection with it, and the activities undertaken there enrich the student's understanding of the subject matter of the course. The syllabus for my course, Studies in Ceramics, started on campus with basic hand building techniques, mastery of basic terminology, and preliminary research on the project to be undertaken during the travel period at mid-semester. The group then went to Central Italy, first to see MIC, the international museum of ceramics in Faenza, one of the world's largest, and to do a workshop on maiolica decoration. The high point of the travel part of the course was a week-long residence at La Fratta Art House in Marsciano in the province of Perugia, in the heart of terracotta territory, to produce the works for the final project, an exhibition to be shown at a nearby natural history museum, the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale in Casalina. Trips to nearby towns and monuments were interspersed with the art-making sessions. The trip ended with two nights in Milan for another ceramics workshop on slip glazes and visits to museums and monuments related to our project, most notably the Museum of Natural History, an imposing nineteenth-century building with terracotta decoration in the Neo-Romanesque and Gothic style and the largest collection of full-size dioramas in Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Central Italy was the chosen destination because of its ceramics centers like Faenza in Emilia and Marsciano in Umbria, the canonical monuments of Italian Renaissance art in Umbrian towns like Assisi, Orvieto, Perugia, and Spoleto, and the fact that many late twentieth century artists chose to live and work in that region. This latter aspect – artists traveling to Italy to live and work – ties in with one of the crucial goals of studio art courses, to speak to the “artist within.” Hence, in this Academic Travel course focusing on studio art, the journey is not only to real places to learn more about art, but also within oneself, to discover one's own creative powers. The travel itinerary naturally included visits to the abovementioned art centers, but its central part, an artist-in-residence type of symposium, focused on the participants' experience as artists at work exploring the full range of the creative process, from the original idea for the work to the final exposition. Using a malleable, immediate medium like clay, and choosing this unusual exhibition venue, which contrasted with the “high art” we saw in museums or in city squares, enabled us to explore the history of art from the inside out and enhance each individual's creative experience. Travel was thus the culmination of a process which had already begun on campus before departure. Students were invited to step outside their habitual learning environment, the university art studio or the classroom, and go to well- and lesser-known centers of art and terracotta production not only to deepen their knowledge of new places, art collections and ceramics techniques, but more

---

<sup>1</sup> For a concise survey of the field of arts-based research, see Janinka Greenwood (2019). See also in particular Gary Pearson (2013), Chemi and Du (2017) and Päivi Venäläinen (2012). Borriaud's and Eisner's works have become classics. See Nicolas Borriaud (2002), and Elliot Eisner (1998).

<sup>2</sup> [MIC Faenza](#); [Art-house, agriturismo e ceramica \(corsiceramica.it\)](#); [Informazioni - CAMS - Centro di Ateneo per i Musei Scientifici \(unipg.it\)](#); [Home - Museo di Storia Naturale - Comune di Milano \(museodistorianaturalemilano.it\)](#)

importantly, to learn to use art as a means of investigation and research that values the senses, emotions, and ideas as well as cerebral, verbal, and linear/temporal approaches to acquiring and documenting knowledge.

In the course of this intense making process, a myriad of questions on the spirit of scientific investigation and our human condition were raised, and the choice of the natural history museum as our operations site constantly encouraged reflection on these matters. How can we go about investigating nature in today's digitized world, where studying animals no longer involves killing and embalming living creatures like naturalists did in the nineteenth century? How does being alive in the Anthropocene era and the availability of massive quantities of digitized research change our point of view towards knowledge and our relationship with the animal kingdom? As a group, we also questioned the role of institutions and raised concerns about the place of the artist and the scientist in society. In what ways can institutions involve contemporary artists in increasing the public's use of their collections and resources? Could museum collections be employed in more active ways, for example, through art making so that users might discover their own meaning and find new ways to convey their understanding to others?<sup>3</sup>

As an essential part of the creative process, participants recorded their thoughts as the project unfolded, thus the learning process leading up to the exhibition was artist-centered, where research, autobiographical experience and artistic practice mutually nourished each other. Theory on the subject visualizes the artist-centered process in various ways, for example, as concentric circles with the maker/artist at the innermost one. As the learner moves from personal, implicit knowledge through explicit, overt practices, the gyres widen, moving on to reflection, extracted meta-narrative and, finally, over-arching theory. The artist-centered process is a never-ending cycle, where the individual's personal knowledge base is enriched by acquiring and reframing knowledge, and engaging in the creative application and presentation of this knowledge, which returns to increase the personal knowledge base through an autobiographical process of reflection and documentation of the entire process (Rees 2013, see especially Figures 7.2 and 7.3, 123-24). In the context of Franklin's Academic Travel program, of which my travel seminar on ceramics is a part, acquiring and producing knowledge is truly artist-centered, and comes about not only in the lecture hall, laboratory, or art studio, or through the use of books, electronic resources and other library materials, but above all is lived through art and further enriched and deepened through on-site and hands-on experience.

### **PLACING CONTEMPORARY ART, TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND TRANSHISTORICAL EXHIBITION STRATEGIES AT THE HEART OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

*A Bestiary in Masks* was the core project of a university studio art course in ceramics that involved a period of travel to central Italy to participate in a symposium resulting in the production of artworks to be shown in an exhibition at a local museum. It was conceived of as a collective contemporary art project which involved players on various levels: the students of the seminar, who were at the same time artists and researchers, the teacher, who also acted as artist/researcher/student, the master ceramicist/sculptor Luca Leandri, who had the multifaceted role of technical expert, artistic mentor, and liaison with the local museum where the exhibition was to be held and the staff of researchers and natural historians at the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale who shared their knowledge, facilitated our use of their collections, and made the museum available as an exhibition venue. In planning this exhibition of terracotta objects, the mask as the object to be produced as a three-dimensional version of the medieval bestiary and the natural history museum as the venue came about after careful considerations on opportunities for learning and producing knowledge.

---

<sup>3</sup> On issues involved in art-science collaborations, see Shona K. Paterson et al. (2020).

Why clay and why that particular destination? For making and studying art, Umbria is ideal. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the region is Italy's heart, geographically speaking, and it is also the cradle of the Early Italian Renaissance. But most importantly, it is clay. Over the years I have taken art-related travel seminars there because its wealth of cultural heritage encompasses the importance of the artisan's tradition in its huge ceramics centers like Deruta, or Marsciano, where the visitor is welcomed to the *territorio del laterizio*, or "brick territory." This explains what the *place* has to offer, but clay is also fundamental for the *self-discovery* part of our arts-based research. In almost every travel group, levels of exposure to making art are not homogeneous among enrolled students. In fact, some have never taken art courses before or tried making art, and some may even feel that making art works is beyond their reach since they have no creative talent whatsoever. Clay is an excellent medium because it is very direct, and can cut through many of the barriers beginners face when trying their hands at art for the first time. By contrast, in approaching drawing and painting, skills like perspective, chiaroscuro, and proportions are fundamental for achieving illusions of three-dimensions in the two-dimensional space of the support, but may overwhelm absolute or false beginners. Clay instead is immediately three-dimensional, "responsive to touch and very forgiving."<sup>4</sup> Clay appeals to our basic impulses – think of how children readily reach for clay and take delight in playing with it. The immediacy of clay makes it possible to build simple forms easily. It is malleable, so that when rolled out into a slab, virtually any object can become a mold to press the clay into or drape over. In fact, my past travel seminars' final projects were successful because slabs and molds were used, and that is why this particular hand-building technique was again chosen for the ceramics masks of the bestiary project.

And then, why the natural history museum? For years, I had been attracted by the idea of doing an art exhibition in an unusual setting, someplace which would involve the "displacement of cultural material from one location or context to another" (Potts 2012). Here, I had in mind such diverse works as Francis Alys's *The Nightwatch*, surveillance camera footage of a fox released into a museum or Alberto Garutti's *All'aperto*, an installation in Trivero (BI - Italy), where sculptural benches with seated dogs belonging to resident families are scattered throughout the small Italian town. Since 2010, I have expanded my activity to include sculpture and installations along with painting and the graphic arts. That year I was invited by curator Vittorio Tonon to participate in group shows of contemporary artists set up in the state archive of Novara as installations focusing on the interplay between the context of the archive building type and the theme of time and history. We still work together on multimedia projects. Later, I had a role in an installation/performance of my artist collaborator for the bestiary project, Luca Leandri, with his *Nozze d'arte*, a "marriage" between a patron and his acquired work of art, staged in a remote village church in Montelagello, Umbria.<sup>5</sup> Since then I have continued to work in a broad range of media.

When the opportunity to work together with my students at the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale materialized, I welcomed the opportunity as an experiment incorporating arts-based research in the liberal arts curriculum. By skewing traditional chronological or morphological arrangements, I could get the students to show their works together with the taxidermic specimens of different historical and cultural contexts, and use them to produce new insights and interpretations of the museum objects as well as to show their relation to the narratives specifically created in relation to them. Before the course, my collaborator Leandri and I spent a great deal of time brainstorming until we settled on the medieval bestiary as our genre. As a compendium of the animal world before modern taxonomy, the bestiary's short descriptive texts accompanied by images of real and imaginary animals in a union of "the natural and the scriptural" would allow us to merge artistic, literary and "scientific" genres to play around

---

<sup>4</sup> [More Than Just Clay - The Importance of Clay With Child Development \(lakesidepottery.com\)](http://lakesidepottery.com)

<sup>5</sup> For Alys's work, see [Francis Alys: \(francisalys.com\)](http://francisalys.com); for Garutti's, see [Il cane qui ritratto appartiene a una delle famiglie di Trivero. Quest'opera è dedicata a loro e alle persone che sedendosi qui ne parleranno | Alberto Garutti](#); for Leandri, see [NOZZE D'ARTE, catalogo 2012 by La Fratta art-house - Issuu..](#)

with different disciplines and ultimately reflect on the relations between human and animal life (Mathews 2020, 3). The appeal of the bestiary in the arts has endured through the ages. Modern and contemporary artists and writers have revisited the genre and adapted it to their purposes. Consider Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs for Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles*, Raoul Dufy's woodcut illustrations to Guillaume's Apollinaire's *Le Bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphée*, Graham Sutherlands's portfolio of the same name, or Jorge Luis Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings*. Musical versions abound, from Gabriel Fauré to Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie, and Francis Poulenc.<sup>6</sup> With its characteristic "tension between inventory and imagination" (Nicholson 2020), part manual of classification and part anthology of myths and legends, the bestiary enabled us to exploit that tension by placing artistically constructed, fanciful representations of animals side-by-side with preserved scientific specimens of real animals in a "gallery" of natural history. Thus working with transforming this genre into a sculptural work was ideal for a project in which student/artists at a liberal arts university could do conventional research on animals using library and digital resources, but at the same time have an ample margin of leeway for subjective interpretations and personal narrative.

Collaborating with the University of Perugia's museum researchers and curators was particularly fruitful. Guided by the mission statement of the institution to be a "collection for everybody" and an "archive of biodiversity" (Barili et al. 2010, 23-28), their strong commitment to sustainability and inclusion as well as their enthusiasm about expanding disciplinary borders and hosting our project further stimulated us. Furthermore, opening the museum at its present location was an act of social outreach as it is in a refurbished building complex that formerly served as tobacco warehouses. It thus plays a role in re forging the identity and economy of a territory that was once based on single-crop agriculture while also fostering a sense of the local inhabitants' sense of responsibility for their cultural heritage, for biodiversity, and for the environment.

This characteristic of the museum site also ties in with my choice of Umbria for an Academic Travel course location – the building itself can be savored together with the specimens it houses. Instead of demolishing old structures or eradicating signs of a place's past life, a creative approach of re-use has been adopted to give them another life. What once provided livelihood for a small community plays a new role as guardian of its cultural heritage. The collections are conceived of as a gallery more than a museum, and this is reflected in the its name, *Galleria di storia naturale*. Small and intimate, it encompasses the legacies of different local "collectors" of animal specimens in addition to the main bequest from a nineteenth century Perugian naturalist Orazio Antinori. Visiting these collections is by no means a passive experience, and the element of drama and spectator participation played a part in my enthusiasm about working with the museum for this project. The exhibits begin with a display that, in presenting the animal kingdom in all its variety, is at the same time a plea to protect biodiversity. The building plan has a corridor situated around a central core, and the displays are situated in these two areas according to historiographic criteria. In the corridor, or "outer ring", the animals are not exhibited in glass cases or dioramas, but are in sections organized according to geographical region, with no barrier between them and the viewer (Figure 1). The tour proceeds in a circle, moving around the peripheral corridor first, where the gallery aspect of the displays deliberately recalls another era in the history of science, the Renaissance *Wunderkammer*. The climax of the tour is the second part, when the museum staff open up the inner core of the museum, a dark, refrigerated storage cell where very fragile specimens are kept in cases and drawers. It also houses more "classic" displays of taxidermic specimens in glass-encased cabinets that deliberately recall late nineteenth and early twentieth century natural history museum installations (Figure 2). After entering the dark chamber with only the glassed-in cabinets illuminated, the lights are turned on and visitors are encouraged by the museum staff to open the cabinets and cases to learn more about the specimens they contain.

---

<sup>6</sup> See especially Sarah Kay's concise summary (2020, 36-38). For a more comprehensive treatment of the subject, see McCulloch (1960) and Baxter (1992).

Adding an element of drama to the museum tour heightened students' interest in the collections – something that could only come about through on-site learning.



**Figure 1:** A student/artist poses with his animal mask in the outer corridor of the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG), where specimens are displayed in a “gallery” – free of dioramas and glass cases. Reproduced with kind permission from the gallery.



**Figure 2:** The inner room of the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG). Reproduced with kind permission from the gallery.

The threefold rationale behind this type of display meshed well with the aims of our course: to enable visitors to perceive biodiversity at a glance, to allow users to concentrate on their own knowledge production in an informal way, and finally, to preserve something of the nature of past scholarship. What is more, the gallery not only presents its collections and makes them accessible to everyone, but also presents itself as an object of study in the history of museum studies and a unique type of museum experience. In addition to the permanent collections, temporary exhibitions are also installed in the museum to complement the permanent collections. At the time of our visit, the gallery was hosting a temporary exhibition of contemporary African Tingatinga painting, which added a pleasantly disruptive note to the taxidermic displays by showing the paintings next to the animals they represented. The paintings also provided an additional opportunity for the bestiary project participants to see how a different culture represents animals and to enhance their knowledge of world contemporary art (Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 3:** Considering installation options for a mask inspired by the displays on primates at the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG). The option on the far right best exploits transhistorical display by showing the student/artist's mask next to the taxidermy specimens and a Tingatinga painting. Reproduced with kind permission from the artist and the gallery.



**Figure 4:** Two student/artists posing with their works at the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG). On the left, the artist stands with his mask inspired by Tingatinga painting. Reproduced with kind permission from the artists and the gallery.

**THE SPIRIT OF INVESTIGATION AND THE USE OF INSTITUTIONS:  
LEARNING FROM HISTORICAL ARTWORKS THROUGH THE LENS OF  
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AND VICE-VERSA**

*How do you attract a consumer? And how do you attract a learner? In both cases the answer can be spectacle ... museums should fire our imaginations.* (Asma 2003, 45)

These questions are of particular importance for today's museums and institutions of higher learning, natural history museums in particular, and through this project we became actors in this debate.<sup>7</sup> Nearly thirty years ago, The International Symposium for the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections identified the role of their collections thus: "[They] must serve the broader purpose of encouraging understanding among peoples and of the world around us. Nature conservation is an issue about people – us – as much as it is about other animals and plants" (Griffin 1992). Our collaboration with the University of Perugia's gallery of natural history had these higher aims. *A Bestiary in Masks* was born of the desire to interact with the museum collections by creating tensions on various levels. First of all, the project grappled with the tensions between the real, observed world of science and the (sur)real, imaginary world of the artist by embracing a genre where the natural merges with the scriptural, or better, where the scientist who compiles an inventory of animals is also Adam the first human who gives them names, or Orpheus the poet who charms them with his music (Mathews 2020, 4; Kay 2020, 36-39). Just as the compilers of the colorful bestiaries of the Middle Ages mixed legend with fact, the student/artists who made the animal masks also wrote about their chosen animals.<sup>8</sup> The *Wunderkammer* type of arrangement of the University of Perugia's natural history gallery and the freedom granted to us as user/artists certainly did "fire our imaginations." The nineteenth century collections on display were assembled and studied in a completely different spirit than the medieval bestiary, but the study of natural history in the nineteenth century was nonetheless enveloped in an aura of the exotic. Early taxonomy was driven by fascination with new species and the desire to make them known to the public. The aims of the expeditions of Charles Darwin, his Perugian contemporary Orazio Antinori, and other nineteenth century naturalists share something of their medieval predecessors' sense of wonderment at the marvels of nature.

Secondly, tensions are also caused by the nature of museum collections, art-making, and our sense of time. With their dioramas and posed stuffed animals, traditional museums of natural history might be seen as static rather than dynamic environments. However, museum resources could also become essential elements to artistic inspiration, as they were in our bestiary project where the student/artists were granted unmediated access to an archive of biodiversity. In our case, the curators and researchers that we worked with became active partners in this creative endeavor as we all – student/artists, museum collaborators, the artist mentor, and myself – dealt with fundamental questions that all fields of knowledge grapple with: "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" Science is concerned with observing, investigating and recording the real world; the artist observes, investigates and records in order to go beyond the real world. In the bestiary project, our diverse ways of working merged in a common goal of knowledge production.

Since the 1990s, a considerable body of literature on exhibition strategies and knowledge production in art museums has emerged. In a recent article, Emilie Sitzia uses George Hein's fourfold model of educational theories to explore the kind of knowledge production happening in art museums, outlining four models based on the extent to which they involve knowledge existing outside the learner or the extent to which the learner personally and socially constructs

<sup>7</sup> Besides Asma (2003), see also, from the vast literature on the subject, Chen, Ho and Ho (2006) and Dillenburg (2000).

<sup>8</sup> A link to the small catalog of the masks can be downloaded here: <https://sites.google.com/view/claricezdanski2/home/texts-to-download>.



knowledge.<sup>9</sup> To briefly summarize, in the didactic/expository model, history (of art, of the sciences or otherwise) is a driving discipline, and museums show and tell while visitors watch and learn (cognitive learning); in the stimulus/response model, engagement and creativity is the stimulus, and museums show and prompt visitors to feel, do and learn (interpretation skills and emotional knowledge); in the discovery model, reflection and problems generate knowledge as museums show visitors how to think and learn (critical skills); in the constructivist model, the museum seeks to build knowledge in the visitor, who becomes the major knowledge producer (the self-generative aspect of knowledge production) and the museum staff play an advisory role. Rightly recognizing that no single model can cover the whole range of knowledge production, Sitzia (2016) adds a fifth category, hybrid models.

With respect to *A Bestiary in Masks*, it is interesting to note that the examples of learner engagement offered in Sitzia's article do not take the production of artwork – our major aim – into consideration. The example for the didactic/expository model, the Centre Pompidou's different ways of presenting modern collections (1905-1965) over the years, was concerned with modes of display, while to illustrate the stimulus-response approach, the Art Gallery of Ontario experiment with audio programs designed to stimulate viewers' interpretations of individual paintings was cited. Ways of employing the discovery model included the active, hands-on children's programs developed by science museums. The example cited for the constructivist model, the closest to our partnership with the Galleria di storia naturale, was the "DIY Archive: Make your own exhibition" of the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, The Netherlands). Like our project, visitors were permitted to work in the museum's stockroom/archive area to pick works from the racks, do research on them, and curate a temporary display of their chosen works. Unlike ours, this project did not involve artistic creation or transdisciplinary research. With its transhistorical emphasis and transformative engagement with museum collections (research as a part of the creative process), *A Bestiary in Masks* went a step further, showing that creating artworks can be effective as a manifestation of empirical knowledge and a means of creating meaningful partnerships in art-science collaboration.



**Figure 5:** New identities for the animals on display in the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG). Reproduced with kind permission from the artists and the gallery.

<sup>9</sup> Sitzia (2016) borrows the theoretical framework from Hein (1998, 3).



**Figure 6:** Which is the specimen and which is the mask? Artists' masks installed (or hidden?) among the specimens on display in the Galleria di Storia Naturale, Casalina (PG). Reproduced with kind permission from the artists and the gallery.

By opening its collections to us working artists and art students, the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale brought about a sort of "metamorphosis of the museum"<sup>10</sup> by agreeing to be part of a project concerned with creating living forms through art rather than preserving dead ones (Figures 5 and 6). If in the past museums have seemed boring or out of touch with the general public, perhaps it is because they have been too sectorial, too specialized, too analytical, and too static. *A Bestiary in Masks* was designed to encourage playfulness, discovery, interaction, and creating something new rather than the passive sufferance of well-organized specimens. In a certain sense, it was intended as "edutainment", where education and entertainment find common ground in the territory of the spectacular (Asma 2003, 37, 45). With the rise of virtual reality and the ready availability of most of the world's great collections on our hand-held devices anywhere or on our ultra-wide screens at home, today's museum users may be seeking a more direct kind of gratification (Rourke and Rees 2013, 151-54). The experience of making an art object inspired by a prolonged period of research and exposure to museum collections could provide a level of personal engagement intense enough to "fire our imaginations" and keep our interest burning for a long while (Asma 2003, 45; see also Zdanski 2015). Moreover, institutions could give their users access to systems where they could "assemble their own experiences" or begin to construct a "visual autobiography", so that enriching the user's own experience becomes as much a part of the museum as its collections or its bookstore (Chen 2006, 1; see also Rees 2013). With student/artists involved in the bestiary project, using their acquired skills in working with clay and drawing upon the research carried out with the museum collections as well as their own psyche for inspiration to produce the exhibition, this experience made a deep, lasting mark. Discovering "the artist within" was also inextricably bound up with the realization that artistic production demands exploration of one's inner and outer worlds, and that this soul-searching process is a unique way to acquire and convey knowledge:

The skilled experience that leads to making new things is grounded in self-knowledge: somatic, procedural, intellectual, imaginative, and even revealed...two kinds of empirical knowledge [are] involved in making artifacts: understanding the world we believe to be outside ourselves, and the knowledge we derive of ourselves as a result. (Butters 2014, 61)

Here perhaps it might be best to let two of my former students speak on the enduring benefits of this kind of learning. In a recent email from one of them, who is now going to undertake a Masters in Irish Folklore and Celtic Studies after a few years' break to "find herself", learning through the arts made all the difference in this, her charting out her life path (A. Phillips, personal communication, July 20, 2022):

I remember in your classes, I had the perfect, at least in my mind, ratio of art and anthropology. I actually did a little research, on the side lines, to get the story from each painting, sculpture, or object because it interested me that much. It just made me so happy to learn from you because I found that your classes challenged me in

---

<sup>10</sup> The term "metamorphosis of the museum" came up during Leandri's and my preliminary brainstorming sessions for the bestiary project. Some of the other ideas for this project included "fossils of the future" (art works imagining how future museum-goers might see our present-day civilization) and "Metamorphoses" (inspired by Ovid's great work). With the bestiary, the three-way collaboration between two artists (myself and Leandri), the museum staff and researchers, and the students was very productive and rewarding. Based on that positive experience, another project/exhibition was organized when the course was offered again in the following year, with the zoomorphic vessel as our object of investigation in an exhibit entitled *A Banquet of Metamorphoses*. See also Sitzia (2016, 153-55) on ways that museums might "metamorphose" and on going further with hybrid models and "ignorant museums."

the best way possible ... you helped to inspire me to grow more through learning, listening, and of course, creating art. That, in and of itself, meant so much to me.

Another response is taken from a paper assigned at the end of a summer course on art in the regions around Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland where Franklin University Switzerland is located. It took advantage of the condensed summer course schedule to stay out of the classroom and visit as many places as possible, in favor of site-based, hands-on learning. What this student valued most about the course methodology was the importance of seeing for oneself, forming one's own judgements, and becoming the artist where possible:

...art is not what is seen in frames, power point presentations, and lectures. Art is what is truly experienced by the viewer herself. Without the person to truly experience the work of art, to feel in her soul the meaning of the piece, to give it a unique and valuable expression, art dies. And without art, in truth, the human soul dies, without a means to express the inexpressible. Art is not the enforceable, the mandated, the dictated litany of what "should" be beautiful and great, but rather the personal experience of what it means when art is those characteristics to the human. Art should not be rendered an indigestible meal that is supposedly "good for you" [it is instead] a rare delicacy... To truly keep art alive, the human must go and see the works, finding her own path and becoming partial artist. (in Zdanski 2015, 51)

Again, this is the great advantage of on-site, hands-on learning. In Umbria, we had the opportunity to study "what 'should' be beautiful and great", but our chosen medium as clay and exhibition venue as the natural history museum also let us see this unmandated side of art history.

### **"HIGH" AND "LOW" ART**

Clay has traditionally been at the low end of the hierarchy of the fine arts, a humble material relegated to the ranks of "craft", "applied art", or "minor art" because it is used in the preparatory and project phases of finished works of art sculpture (models and molds for casting in more noble materials like bronze) or because of its primarily functional purpose. The dioramas and taxidermy specimens of the natural history museum, too, might have even occupied a lower place. Yet this is precisely what attracted my Umbrian collaborator and myself to the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale:

The natural history museum is a place where the line between "high" and "low" culture effectively vanishes, where our awe of nature, our taste for the bizarre, and our thirst for knowledge all blend happily together.<sup>11</sup>

Contemporary curatorial practices often promote the erasure of boundaries and encourage exchange and "contamination" between the place of the exhibition, the art exhibited, the artist and the viewer.<sup>12</sup> The bestiary project was set up to enable students/artists to act as contemporary

---

<sup>11</sup> Asma (2003), back cover excerpt from *The Voice Literary Supplement* review. On high vs low art, see Fisher (2005).

<sup>12</sup> The extent to which this philosophy has pervaded the field of curating is clear in the graduate projects from the MA program in Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art in London: <https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/schools/school-of-arts-humanities/cca/cca-exhibitions/>. For exhibits or projects with "contamination" between art and science, see the SciArt Initiative at the link <http://www.sciartinitiative.org/culture-of-contamination.html> or the high-tech Art-Science workshops organized by the Holst Centre and Baltan Laboratories in Eindhoven:

agents not only by creating works of art, but also by organizing an exhibition of them, which is another form of experiential learning. The criteria for the production of these works and the choice of the exhibition venue at this “gallery” of natural history embraced the idea of “contamination”, starting with the choice of the bestiary as the genre to work with, and extending through to our exploration of ceramics, a medium that was once classified as a “minor”, “decorative”, or “applied” art (like manuscript illustration, or in fact taxidermy)<sup>13</sup> in order to make masks (art forms from artisanal or ethnographic tradition), and show them in a science museum. Our undertaking expanded on this dualism in intellectual and artistic genres by questioning and even poking fun at more conventional ideas of the art work. The extreme realism characteristic of scientific taxidermy employed in dioramas or the wax sculpture of wax museums are hardly accepted by the Western European artistic canon as high art. To cite one example, in his volume on painting from the High Renaissance until the end of the sixteenth century (hence one of the high points of the classical tradition), Sydney J. Freedburg discusses a distinct religious architectural complex, the *sacro monte*, or Sacred Mountain, which features life-size colored terracotta sculptures arranged in theatrical painted settings in chapels dedicated to episodes from the life of Christ. For Freedburg, they were “not conceived of as works of art in the developed sixteenth century sense”, but as art whose “sole use was to recreate the utmost that it could of reality...identical in kind to and purpose to what waxworks, or the dioramas of a natural history museum, are today” (1979, 393).

The sacred mountains of Northern Italy might seem a far cry from Central Italy’s ceramics industry or artistic monuments, but I actually got the idea for an academic travel seminar while I was studying the *sacro monte* – to do a course on terracotta sculpture, or the anti-academic, reality-seeking medium par excellence as it has always been considered a baser material than marble or bronze in statuary and used in such situations as the sacred mountains where drama and extreme realism carry the message. The original idea for the course has undergone many transformations, but when I stumbled upon La Fratta Art House while in Umbria for my own enjoyment, I was overjoyed at finding a place where I could give students the opportunity to see the Renaissance in the making by visiting famous monuments firsthand, like Assisi’s basilica of San Francesco, Orvieto’s cathedral or Perugia’s Fontana Maggiore or paintings by Perugino and the young Raphael. I could also try to get them to understand that the Renaissance was more than Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo. It changed our idea of what artists are and how they learn to make art, and forged a tradition in art and the territory that attracted the attention of artists for centuries to come. And this could also be experienced first-hand in places like Città di Castello, where Alberto Burri left his legacy, and Todi, where Beverly Pepper left hers, and Spoleto, “home” to several renowned artists of the late twentieth century like Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, and Sol Lewitt. Finally, they could try it out, in a medium that makes it possible to start immediately and get results, but that teaches respect for the crafting aspect of the arts, since making sculpture in clay requires proceeding with great care and by degrees.

Thus, Freedburg’s distinction between creating “art in the developed sixteenth century sense” and art that recreates the utmost that it can of reality is key to understanding our project. In terms of creative process, the student/artists of the bestiary project worked in a traditional way, using the specimens in the University of Perugia’s natural history “gallery” as if they were plaster casts or live models in an art academy. They went to the museum for inspiration, working in the most academic way possible with preserved animals in order to produce a popular art form – the mask – in an “applied”, “craft” medium, ceramics. Indeed, the line between high and low culture was blurred as the student/artists’ animal masks met criteria to qualify as works of “high art.” In terms of content, they were true to life and aimed for genuine emotional experience. As form, they

---

<http://digicult.it/news/contamination-and-experimentation-an-art-science-workshop-series/>

<sup>13</sup> On these art forms, see “Applied Art” in the Cork Visual Arts *Encyclopedia of Art*, online at [Applied Art: Definition, Meaning \(visual-arts-cork.com\)](#) or for the place of ceramics in the “hierarchy of the arts”, see Gray (2011), Gray (2012), Risatti (2007) and Rowley (1997).

were organic wholes, aesthetically valuable objects of appreciation. Each mask was created by a single artist working under the direction of mentors or collaborators concerned with forwarding skills and knowledge and assisting with the achievement of formal cohesion in the project. Everyone's intention was to engage the intellect, to convey a message of social importance, and to arouse aesthetic appreciation (Fisher 2005, 476-77).

Developments in late twentieth century art and art theory have made it possible to expand our idea of what art is. Stuffed animals have appeared in displaced contexts as early as the late 1950s, with Robert Rauschenberg *Monogram*, one of the first works of art to use taxidermy "with an unprecedented critical awareness designed to destabilize the viewer's anthropocentric standpoint." Curator and author Giovanni Aloï sees the current emergence of taxidermy in contemporary art as a natural continuation of the "ontological derailments" of early twentieth century art movements like cubism, Dadaism, or surrealism, which used gallery space to connect with the outside world in previously unexplored ways. Taxidermy goes beyond artistic trends and theories to embody larger issues ranging from the biopolitical to the posthuman and the anthropogenic, to reach the higher aim of rethinking our current relationship with animals, the environment, biopower, capitalism and perception through art (Aloï 2018, 34). Working in the natural history museum automatically invited us to think about these issues as we of course had in mind the use of embalmed animals in such famous contemporary works as Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and the controversy surrounding it.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *A Bestiary in Masks* demonstrates how institutions of learning may benefit from collaboration with contemporary artists, by creating and participating in cross-disciplinary projects using art practice as a means to acquire and convey knowledge. Indeed, a few years later, I was pleased to see how our exhibition was very much like a later one in 2017 by contemporary Chinese artist Ai Weiwei in the Zoology Room in the Lausanne Museum of Fine Arts, where the artist's works were ingeniously dispersed among the museum objects and installations, or even in some cases camouflaged by them.<sup>15</sup> We actively engaged with the collections at the Galleria di Storia Naturale while inviting viewers and everyone involved in the project to reflect on our current predicament in the Anthropocene Era. As Aloï also points out:

...artistic parameters are also being shifted in the light of the undeniable awareness that contemporary art offers a unique opportunity to unhinge anthropocentric certainties within a productive, experimental, and inclusive space, one that transcends the limitations imposed by disciplinary boundaries. (2018, 29)

## **BROADENING HORIZONS IN LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION THROUGH ARTS-BASED RESEARCH FAVORING ON-SITE, HANDS-ON PRACTICES**

*A Bestiary in Masks* shows how a vital relationship can be instilled between the different agendas or functions of the natural history museum and contemporary artistic practice. As is clear in the intent of the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale to be both a "collection for everybody" and an "archive of biodiversity", the academic work of collecting and analyzing specimens is a function that directly nourishes another museum function, namely, making the public more sensitive to biodiversity and environmental issues. In allowing the student/artists involved in the bestiary project to carry out their work of research and exhibition on the museum premises, they contributed to a new, regenerative role for the institution: producing new life from preserved life; speculating about what the "fossils of the future" might be. Our work there had

<sup>14</sup> See "An Interview with Damien Hirst," <http://www.damienhirst.com/tests/1996/jan--stuart-morgan>.

<sup>15</sup> Ai Weiwei's exhibition in the Zoology Room section was part of a larger exhibit *D'ailleurs d'est toujours les autres* installed in the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne in 2017: <https://www.mcba.ch/expositions/ai-weiwei-dailleurs-cest-toujours-les-autres/>. See also Paterson et al. (2020, 1-4).

given rise to a profound meditation on humankind's place in the world – especially with respect to animals – and how to study nature in today's digitized, Anthropocene Era. The medieval bestiary authors' curiosity about the world was mixed with sense of wonderment, myth and legend before the scientific, cataloguing generation of Buffon came to the fore. The generation of Humboldt, Darwin and Antinori sailed to the ends of the earth to find new species and to gather physical evidence for their theories. What is left for us to do in today's world, where not only can we travel to their places relatively easily, but also even more easily access all their work by simply touching a device held in the palms of our hands? Isn't the fact that Darwin and Antinori went to such great lengths to study nature an acknowledgement of the value of on-site and hands-on experience in learning? Can museums still "fire our imaginations"? Can art and science join forces to encourage a greater sense of sustainability and sensitivity to all living things?

With projects like ours, the answer to these questions is yes. We made a worthy attempt by traveling through historical eras and disciplines that are radically different among themselves to forge a meaningful transdisciplinary partnership and produce a collective contemporary art project in response to a particular place and the knowledge production that happened in that place. On the institutional level, *A Bestiary in Masks* produced fresh insights into the workings of our entrenched historical presumptions, and opened up space to reassess interpretations of individual objects in relation to their contexts and narratives. From the point of view of the artist/students who used the collections, the project gave them the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of natural history and environmental issues, but more importantly, by acting through the arts, self-knowledge and self-discovery were inextricably bound up with it.



**Figure 7:** The last day of the project. *A Bestiary in Masks* was designed to encourage play, discovery and interaction rather than passive suffering of well-organized specimens. Reproduced with kind permission from the artists and the gallery.

One last photograph (Figure 7) shows all of the participants at the end of the project, in a short performance on the museum premises during which the student/artists posed with their masks and animals – artists and their artworks became one.<sup>16</sup> Upon finishing, all of the different actors felt a sense of euphoria at having achieved our goals on various levels: student/artists who may have been discovering creative abilities for the first time or deepening what was already there; the artist/mentor whom I met with for long hours of brainstorming and inspiration and who supervised the technical parts of the project; the museum curators and researchers who embraced the project as coherent with their aims and as having potential to enrich their outreach programs; myself as artist/student/teacher in this transhistorical, transdisciplinary project employing arts-based research and hands-on creative practices enabled by the outer and inner journey as valid means of acquiring and conveying knowledge.

The enjoyment of working together as art forms and practices interconnect with bodies of knowledge across multiple time periods and multiple disciplines is an aim I have strived for over the years in these travel seminars. Travel to Central Italy with its wealth of artistic traditions, forms the ideal backdrop for “edutainment”, where active, arts-based research is the means of opening broader horizons for humanities and liberal arts education. As a learning experience, the bestiary project is an example of a model in which the journey to real places as well as within oneself, hands-on experience through workshops and collaboration with institutions and artists, and consciousness raising enable learners to engage in arts-based research and, by discovering their “artist within”, learn to trust in and exercise their creative powers in producing knowledge. Like the expedition members in René Daumal’s *Mount Analogue*, in today’s world where even the highest peaks of the Himalayas are no longer considered inaccessible, we set out on a two-tiered journey towards a symbolic frontier – the quest for one’s creative self – as we made our way through lands where artists and travelers have meandered for centuries, and by making and studying art in the heart of Italy, we found “a visible door to the invisible” (Daumal 1974, 42).

## REFERENCES

- Aloi, Giovanni. 2018. *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Asma, Stephen. 2003. *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barili, Angelo, Roberta Rossi, Sergio Gentili, and Bruno Romano. 2010. *Lét Marefià: Il luogo dove riposano i sapienti. Sulle orme del naturalista Perugino Orazio Antinori (Perugia 1882- Lét Marefià 1882) alla riscoperta della biodiversità dell’antico regno di Shewa (Etiopia)*. Città di Castello (PG): Alieno Editrice.
- Baxter, Ronald. 1992. *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages*. Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, and London: Courtauld Institute.
- BBC Science. 2010. “Emotional Expressions of an Orangutan.” *The Story of Science*, Episode 6 Preview. Last modified April 22, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGFG1da8qo4>
- Borriaud, Nicolas. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland. Dijon: Les presses du réel.
- Butters, V. 2014. “From Skills to Wisdom: Making, Knowing and the Arts.” In *The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, edited by Pamela Smith, Amy Meyers and Harold Cook. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Chemi, Tatiana, and Xiangyun Du, eds. 2017. *Arts-Based Methods in Education Around the World*.

---

<sup>16</sup> The sense of enjoyment we felt while working together on this project comes through in a short video presentation created by Elisabetta Corrao, owner and director of La Fratta Art House. It is available at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2njBw8NXXfw>



- Gistrup (DK) and Delft (NL): River Publishers. Online at [Arts-Based Methods in Education Around the World \(riverpublishers.com\)](https://www.riverpublishers.com)
- Chen, Hui Chuan, Chuan Kun Ho, and Ming Chyuan Ho. 2006. "A new communication model in the natural history museum," Conference Paper presented at *INTERCOM 2006*, November 2-4, Taipei, Taiwan.  
[https://www.academia.edu/1451800/A\\_New\\_Communication\\_Model\\_in\\_Natural\\_History\\_Museum](https://www.academia.edu/1451800/A_New_Communication_Model_in_Natural_History_Museum)
- Darwin, Charles. 1998. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. London: Harper Collins.
- Daumal, René. 1974. *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing*. Translation and Introduction by Roger Shattuck, with a Postface by Véra Daumal. Harmondsworth, NY: Penguin Books.
- Dillenburg, Eugene. 2000. "The Topical Museum of Natural History: A Walking Paper." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 43, no. 4 (October): 356-65.
- Dye, Lee. 2010. "Did that Dog Just Smile at You?" *ABC News*, May 11, 2010.  
<https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/DyeHard/dog-smile-animals-show-emotions/story?id=10618929>
- Eisner, Elliot. 1998. *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Fisher, Andrew J. 2005. "High Art versus Low Art." In *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes. Second Edition. London: Routledge.
- Freedburg, Sydney J. 1979. *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*. Harmondsworth, NY: Penguin Books.
- Gentili, Sergio, Angelo Barili, Bruno Romano and Marco Cherin. 2014. "Una collezione per tutti! La Galleria di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Perugia." *Museologia scientifica, nuova serie* 8: 23-28.
- Gonsalves, Tina. 2023. "Chameleon Project 2008-2011" for the exhibit *After Darwin: Contemporary Expressions*. Accessed September 18, 2023. <https://www.tinagonsalves.com/responsive-video-work/project-one-mhcbcr>
- Gray, Laura. 2011. "Rethinking the Art-Craft Hierarchy: Assessing Critical Positions in Contemporary Ceramics." *Art History Supplement* 004.
- Gray, Laura. 2012. "On the Transgressive Nature of Ceramics." *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 89.  
[http://www.academia.edu/2761439/ On the Transgressive Nature of Ceramics](http://www.academia.edu/2761439/On_the_Transgressive_Nature_of_Ceramics).
- Greenwood, Janinka. 2019. "Arts-Based Research." Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Available online at [Arts-Based Research | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.29](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.29)
- Griffin, Des. 1992. "Natural History Museums, the Natural Environment and the 21st Century." Paper presented at *The International Symposium on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections, Madrid, Spain, May 9-15, 1992*.  
<http://desgriffin.com/publications-list/environment21/#note%2013>.
- Hein, George E. 1998. *Learning in the Museum*, London: Routledge.
- Hernández-Hernández, Fernando, and Rachel Fendler, eds. 2013. *First Conference on Arts-Based and Artistic Research: Critical reflections on the intersection of art and research*. Barcelona: University of Barcelona - Dipòsit Digital. <http://hdl.handle.net/2445/45264>
- Kay, Sarah. 2020. "The Voice of Light: Nature and Revelation in The Bestiary or the Procession of Orpheus." In *The Modernist Bestiary: Translating Animals and the Arts through Guillaume Apollinaire, Raoul Dufy and Graham Sutherland*, edited by Sarah Kay and Timothy Mathews, 35-57. London: UCL Press.
- Mathews, Timothy. 2020. "Headpiece: Oblique and Prolonged." In *The Modernist Bestiary: Translating Animals and the Arts through Guillaume Apollinaire, Raoul Dufy and Graham Sutherland*, edited by Sarah Kay and Timothy Mathews, 1-6. London: UCL Press.
- McCulloch, Florence. 1960. *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

- Nicholson, Melanie. 2020. "Necessary and Unnecessary Monsters: Jorge Luis Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 43, no. 2 (Winter): 134-51.
- Paterson, Shona K., Martin Le Tissier, Hester Whyte, Lisa B. Robinson, Kristin Thielking, Mrill Ingram, and John McCord. 2020. "Examining the Potential of Art-Science Collaborations in the Anthropocene: A Case Study of Catching a Wave," *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 7. Available online at <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2020.00340/full>
- Pearson, Gary. 2013. "Academia and Art First Research," in *First Conference on Arts-Based and Artistic Research. Critical reflections on the intersection between art and research*, coordinated by Fernando Hernández-Hernández and Rachel Fendler, 35-38. Barcelona: University of Barcelona – Dipòsit Digital. Online at [\(PDF\) Structures and Conventionalized Forms in Research Reports Using 'Visual Arts Based Educational Research' \(VABER\) and 'Artistic Research' \(AR\) in Visual Arts | Ricardo Marin-Viadel and Joaquín Roldán - Academia.edu](#)
- Potts, John. 2012. "The Theme of Displacement in Contemporary Art." *Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone* 9, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.2475>.
- Rees, Vaughan. 2013. "Visual Autobiography: A Methodology for Generating Visual Outcomes from a Student's Lived Experience." In *Building Minds, Forging Bridges. Teaching in a Visually Littered World*, edited by Arianne Rourke and Vaughan Rees, 117-129. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing.
- Risatti, Howard Anthony. 2007. *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Rourke Arianne, and Vaughan Rees. 2013. "Reflecting on Learning from Visuals in a Visually Cluttered World." In *Building Minds, Forging Bridges. Teaching in a Visually Littered World*, edited by Arianne Rourke and Vaughan Rees, 151-54. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing.
- Rowley, Sue. 1997. *Craft and Contemporary Theory*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Sitzia, Emilie. 2016. "The Many Faces of Knowledge Production in Art Museums: An Exploration of Exhibition Strategies." *Muséologies: Les cahiers d'études supérieures* 8, no. 2: 141-157. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050765ar>.
- The Natural History Museum. 2009. *After Darwin: Contemporary Expressions*. Exhibit flyer. London: Natural History Museum.
- University of Glasgow, Special Collections. 2009. "Book of the Month, November 2009: Charles Darwin, The expression of emotions in man and animals London: 1872 Sp Coll Dougan 3." Last modified, November 2009. <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/nov2009.html>
- Venäläinen, Päivi. 2012. "The 5<sup>th</sup> International Intercultural Arts Education Conference: Design Learning. Contemporary art as a learning experience." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 45: 457-65. Online at [\(PDF\) The 5th Intercultural Arts Education Conference: Design Learning Musical experience and sharing musical haptices | Riitta Lahtinen - Academia.edu](#)
- Viola, Bill. 2008. "I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like (1986)." Last modified October 14, 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhv6dDRL-RI>.
- Ward, Carol S. 2019. "Thinking Outside the Lines: Contemporary Art in Historic Settings." *Museum Next*, July 24, 2019. <https://www.museumnext.com/article/thinking-outside-the-lines-contemporary-art-in-historic-settings/>
- Wojtaś, Julia. 2021. "Transhistorical Strategies: Meaning Making and Narrative in Historical House Museums and Site-Specific Art Installations." Masters Thesis, University of Amsterdam. <https://scripties.uba.uva.nl/search?id=c4572515>
- Zdanski, Clarice. 2015. "Finding the Place of Art in Society: The Value of On-Site, Hands-on Experience in Art Education in the Digital Age." *The International Journal of the Arts in Society: Annual Review* 9 (June): 45-53.

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Clarice Zdanski** is an artist, art educator, art historian, writer, and translator. She currently holds the position of Instructor in Art History and Studio Art at Franklin University Switzerland. Her academic degrees include an MA and PhD in the History of Art (University of Chicago), a BFA in Painting and Printmaking (UNC-Greensboro), an Italian university degree in modern languages (IULM-Feltre, Italy), and a Diploma in music (Conservatorio G. Cantelli, Novara, Italy). Her research work in art history, which ranges from the Italian Renaissance to art and travel in late nineteenth century Europe to current practices in art and art education, has always been concerned with how art is studied and its place in society. She is a regular participant in art symposia, most recently the International Symposium of Socially Engaged Art in Finland (ISEAS Finland). She has published in scholarly journals and websites, and her artwork is in private and public collections in Europe and the USA. A multi-faceted artist, she loves to experiment with different media. She is also active as a musician and belongs to various organizations and ensembles in Milan and Europe. Find out more about her work on

<https://sites.google.com/site/claricezdanski/home>; <https://www.facebook.com/clarice.zdanski>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/clarice.zdanski/>.