

# DANCE/DRAW: MOVEMENT MEDICINE AND CREATIVITY

## MOVEMENT MEDICINE PROFESSIONAL TEACHER TRAINING PROJECT

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### Introduction

I am fascinated with where creativity comes from, with my own state of awareness when I am *creating*, with how we inspire and are inspired: how our interconnection with life around us is critical to our creativity, and with how we learn to be more authentically ourselves when we follow our creative sparks.

From an early age I experienced creativity, in the form of drawing and later dance, as a gift from *somewhere else*. I recognise it as a sense of connection to something else/spirit/the divine that happens when I am a witness to creativity coming through me. In this project I call this experience *stepping into the creative field*, and *into creative flow*.

Using the tools of Movement Medicine I have learned to resource and support my own creative process and practice in a more grounded and conscious way. I have been exploring this relationship between Movement Medicine and the creative field in my classes and workshops; exploring the process of bringing creativity into physical manifestation, in movement, drawing and writing.

This project describes my personal experience with this exploration: describing how my practice of Movement Medicine has supported and intertwined with my creative practice, and describes my experiences of inviting the exploration of the creative process explicitly with Movement Medicine classes.

### Creativity

I think of creativity as a kind of magic: it is the act of bringing something *new* into being out of *no-thing* and *no-where*. *The Magician* in the Tarot is shown with a few tools on a table that is only partially visible: much like all of us working with our creative tools (pens, pencils, dancing bodies, voice), within the visible mesa (table) and calling creativity forth from *the invisible*.



### 1. The magician: From the Rider-Waite Tarot deck

#### ‘..but I’m not a creative person’

It is assumed from this statement that there are creative people and there are non-creative people. This seems to be believed by many. I believe that creativity is our birthright: every day we get to choose and create in a thousand ways: from the choice of clothes that we wear to the words that we choose to express with. We do not need to be visual artists, writers or musicians: we all have access to our own creative potential and it is our own nurturing, curiosity, courage, and practice that determine how we access and express it.

*“Let the music and the song of your soul guide your life. Follow the flow from the inside rather than setting up limitations from the outside. Live into your beauty.”*

Tami Lynn Kent <sup>1</sup>

#### The Creative Field

I started using the term *stepping into the Creative Field* in the last few years as I began to get a greater sense of the flow of energy in my body while I dance and draw, and as I witness another’s creativity. Some books that have resonated with what I have been feeling include: Tami Lynn Kent, in her book *Wild Creative*, talks about creativity in terms of tapping into your energetic field, and Gary Zukav in *Heart of the Soul*<sup>2</sup> describes the practice of gaining familiarity with our own emotional awareness in a way that connects with how I see/feel the creative field as both a mesa where we are conscious to our creativity and to the energetic/electromagnetic field of our heart.

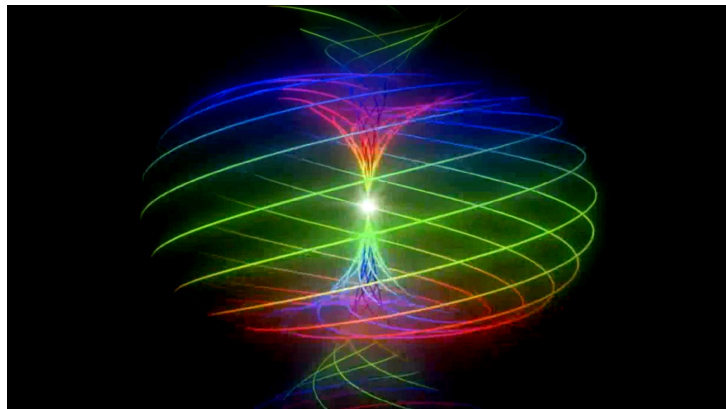
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<sup>1</sup> Source: Kent, T.L. (2014) *Wild Creative* Atria Paperback, New York

<sup>2</sup> Zukav & Francis, Gary & Linda (2002) *The Heart of the Soul: Emotional Awareness*, Free Press

I have felt this flow of energy like the shape of a torus all around my body, and once feeling it expand to fill an entire concert hall (I recommend Nils Frahm..live) with the very distinct feeling of the *offering* of my creativity and the *receiving* of waves of encouraging energy, like breathing; *offering* my gratitude to another's creativity and the *receiving* of waves of gratitude in return; creating a generator of creative flow.

This image of the Torus reminds me of our connection to the earth below and the sky above (*The tree of life*), of standing at the centre of our own circle at our still-point with the possibility to expand our consciousness (the Mesa Practice) and a reminder of our interconnection with all life energy and the fact that life and creativity are forever flowing and changing: never static.



**2. The torus<sup>3</sup>**



**3. The Electromagnetic field of the heart<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [http://www.ivantic.net/Ostale\\_knjiige/torus/](http://www.ivantic.net/Ostale_knjiige/torus/)

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://www.yourhealinginsights.com/insightful-blog/page/5/>

## Creative Flow

Creative flow is a term that was coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi former head of the department of psychology at the university of Chicago. He has spent most of his life exploring creativity and its links with happiness. Many others are currently exploring *creative flow* and the *flow state*: curious about how it comes about and how it might be tapped for greater creativity:

- *“Flow - the mental state of being completely present and fully immersed in a task - is a strong contributor to creativity. When in flow, the creator and the universe become one, outside distractions recede from consciousness and one's mind is fully open and attuned to the act of creating. There is very little self-awareness or critical self-judgment; just intrinsic joy for the task.”* Barry Scott Kaufman<sup>5</sup>
- Jason Silva talks about hacking the *flow state* and describes it as: *“Going into the ‘zone - the place where the ego dissolves. We transcend ourselves in these states of flow.”*<sup>6</sup>
- In California scientists are running a project called the *Flow Genome project* where they are attempting to *crack* the source code of creativity. They describe the flow state in relation to the inner critic: *“Your inner critic gets shuts down in flow. Your inner critic is normally a governor on creativity... When it turns off, creative ideas can spiral and flow.”*<sup>7</sup>
- Everett Bogue suggests nine steps that can bring you into flow<sup>8</sup>
  - 1 Pick an enjoyable, challenging activity.
  - 2 Eliminate distractions.
  - 3 Carry out research and preparation before you engage in the activity you wish to flow in.
  - 4 Isolate yourself. The best way to achieve flow is alone.
  - 5 Let go. Give up any expectations that you have for yourself.
  - 6 Give yourself a time limit.
  - 7 Keep moving. Continuous motion is key to flow.
  - 8 Don't think.
  - 9 Practice.

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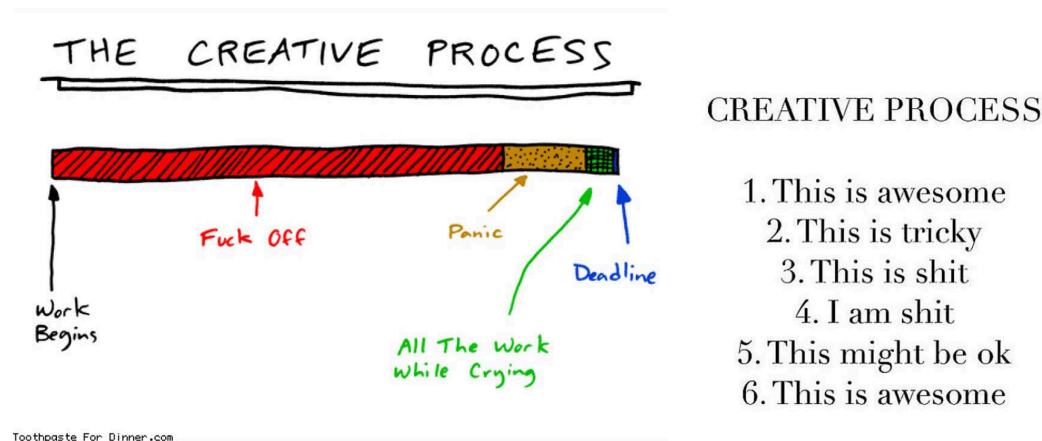
<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-barry-kaufman/consciousness-and-flow\\_b\\_1108113.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-barry-kaufman/consciousness-and-flow_b_1108113.html)

<sup>6</sup>Source: <http://www.diygenius.com/hacking-flow-states/>

<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.flowgenomeproject.co>

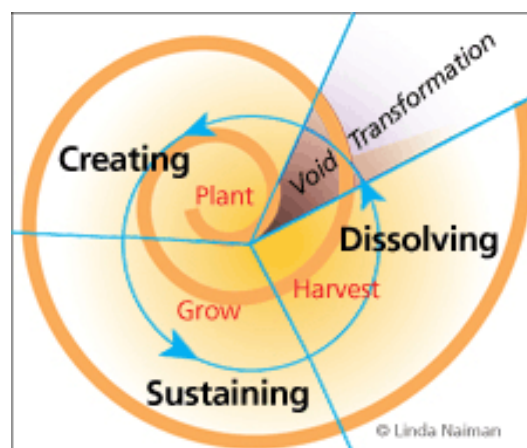
<sup>8</sup> <http://zenhabits.net/creative-flow/>

## Creative Process



### 4. & 5. The creative process<sup>9</sup>

The Creative process is described in varied ways: usually including waves of both ecstasy and torture. It can be described in stages of: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Kaufman)<sup>10</sup> or, creative Invitation, preparation, inspiration, celebration and restoration (Kent<sup>11</sup>). I don't feel that the sequence of the process is imperative; I do feel it is important to understand that creativity is cyclical in nature. I believe that our world is very much in need of an alternative to linear thinking: cyclical or iterative thinking relate to natural systems and their inherent feedback loops: allowing for layers of repetition and learning. Creativity does not happen in a linear fashion: it is a process of birth, growth, maturing, decaying, death and dying, composting and rebirth. It is a constantly moving evolving intelligent process: by trying we learn and by daring we grow.



### 6. The creative process<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Source: [http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/the\\_messy\\_minds\\_of\\_creative\\_people](http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/the_messy_minds_of_creative_people)

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/the\\_messy\\_minds\\_of\\_creative\\_people#sthash.nDXdKWLo.dpuf](http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/the_messy_minds_of_creative_people#sthash.nDXdKWLo.dpuf)

<sup>11</sup>Source: Kent, T.L. (2014) *Wild Creative* Atria Paperback, New York

<sup>12</sup>Source: Linda Naiman <http://www.creativityatwork.com>

## Creative Practice

Each of us probably has our own definition of creativity. It is a very personal thing, and at the same time, something we can all understand: it is basically about bringing something new into manifestation. How we relate to creativity can be very different from person to person and is something that changes over our lifetimes. Creativity is not a static thing it is a practice requiring regular tending and it is this on-going evolving relationship that opens us up to taking steps and leaps into the unknown. The creative practice that I refer to here does not relate specifically to an art practice. We can all benefit from encouraging and developing our uniqueness in our own creative process and without attachment to a final product. I am interested in a practice that allows us to *open up* and become more aware of how we bring something completely new into being.

By tapping into our creativity we tap into a different aspect of our intelligence: our creative intelligence: *“the ability to go beyond the existing to create novel and interesting ideas... To make the most of our creative potential, we need to be able to tolerate the discomfort of an ambiguous situation long enough; so that we produce closest to the best we are capable of.”* Claus Moller<sup>13</sup>

## Exploring my creative process

I am fascinated with where creativity comes from: emerging from nothingness. No matter how much time you spend thinking about something you cannot know when creativity will flow. As a young child I understood creativity it to be something that came through me, but it was not me. I didn't know where it came from I just knew that when it arrived and flowed through me I felt *at home*, happy and connected. My own personal journey with creativity has been an essential part of my own coping strategy in life. Drawing has allowed me to make sense of the world, to explore and interpret in my own language.



7. A three-minute video made in 2014 about my creative process

Link: <http://youtu.be/WxVUgNkbCUw>

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<sup>13</sup> Source: [www.clausmoller.com](http://www.clausmoller.com)

I am an architect by training so drawing has always been an important form of expression for me. Dancing has always been a source of inspiration and freedom. How these two came together wasn't something I had a sense of until I saw an exhibition in the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston in late 2011 called *Dance /Draw*<sup>14</sup>. And most influential for me amongst the artists there was Trisha Brown. (Interestingly that was the week I applied for the AP.)



#### **8. From Dance/Draw, ICA Boston: Choreographer /Artist: Trisha Brown<sup>15</sup>**

Near the beginning of the AP I began to get strong messages as I danced: to *express big!* The messages didn't give in but it took me a few weeks to digest them. So I got large bottles of paint and taped huge sheets of paper to a wall. I started with a charcoal sketch and then dance/painted, with a freedom that I hadn't experienced before: "... I was giving over to a force that wanted to come through me.. I was moving listening looking senses all alive allowing it through me." Below is a series of images from one of my first large-scale dance /paintings. It formed part of an exhibition in Ireland in 2013 called *Create Inspire Transform*.

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<sup>14</sup> Dance/Draw: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-xPTCe8utc>

<sup>15</sup> Source: <http://www.trishabrowncompany.org>





**9. *Ferocious heart* (2012)**



**10. & 11. *Ferocious heart* (2012)**





**12. *Ferocious heart* (2012)**

## **Practices that changed my relationship to my creative process**

These practices include those I completed before discovering Movement Medicine; I realise now the value of them to my evolving relationship with my creative process.

- Mastery of a craft: really delving into learning a skill or craft. For me this was architecture.
- Letting go of the need for creativity to be *pretty*: I cannot stress this one enough. Your drawing or poem may not be published, it might never be praised or even seen but you brought it into the world and this is the part to stay awake to: the moments around the birthing of an idea.
- Being in nature: developing a relationship to the natural world and to the elements.
- Learning to listen to my body: this is an on-going practice of listening to how my body wants to express: drawing at a large scale really helps me with this process.
- Using everything as a place to create from: from sitting in silent meditation or hiking in nature, to cycling through busy city streets or giving it *everything* at a rave; they are all possible moments to be witness to new ideas birthing.
- Being in flow shuts my super ego up! He/she just disappears. It is worth dance/drawing/scribbling/splashing paint around just for a few moments of inner silence.

## Accessing creativity with Movement Medicine

The following are key aspects/tools of Movement Medicine that helped me access creativity. None of these are entirely new but embodying them as opposed to simply *knowing* them made a decided difference to my creative practice:

**Learning to listen and take action (Yin and Yang):** Finding ways and practices that allow me to stop and listen: meditation, dance, being in nature (Yin). Using creativity as a guide. Taking action (Yang) learning when I need to step up and act, for this I use dance, drawing, shouting, screaming into a pillow, anything to bring movement.

**Trust your intuition:** People say this all the time but to trust your intuition you need to listen. We are all so busy that we get caught up in the next thing and the next thing, but while dancing we are *in* the creative field: moving with possibility of being present and attentive to what is, and to what is emergent. So we listen and then we have the chance to hear. We do not however, necessarily hear what we want to hear and that can bring us to our *edge*.

**You create from your edge:** *Birthing the unknowable. Diving into the abyss. Dancing with the great mystery. Taking a leap of faith.* It doesn't really matter what you call it: for anything new to come about we need to go where we have not gone before and before we are ready. Our creativity ignites when we take unprecedented action: doing something we have never done before. This can feel terrifying as we step into the abyss with an open heart and an open mind, doing something new and trusting that inspiration and creativity will flow in like a net to hold us: much like the fool on the tarot. And sometimes creativity doesn't come, and we fall.. then pick ourselves up and start again: its all part of a creative iterative process.

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun" Mary Lou Cook



**13. The fool:** from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck

**Develop a practice:** Creativity requires practice, in my experience daily practice: Take small risks, put simple ideas into action, write, scribble, dance, simply move your ideas, it doesn't matter what they look or sound like as long as you give them some movement; some momentum.

**Trust and enjoy:** Trust your practice and your creativity as a guide. Hours of dancing, wincing, wavering, trying, failing and I have been finding my way and learning that creativity is play and that to create is to remember who you are. You might have no idea what it is that is stirring inside you or what value it may have for the world but it is your birthright to explore it.

**Gratitude:** I thank my pencils, the paper, my room, the light, my feet, the floor beneath me, my cutest and crappiest drawings, my desk, my hands and fingers, the water for my paint, the heater in my studio, my bike and traffic lights as they change colour.. There are days when I curse the lot of them but I find that thanking them gives me greater access to flow states.

**Remember that dancing, creativity...life:** it is all magic and can be fun and easy.

**Begin now:** I cannot write better words than these: *"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."* W.H. Murray <sup>16</sup>

## Bringing creativity into MM classes and workshops

*"Dance connects us – with our bodies, with our souls, with each other, with the space within and around us and with the spirit of life. It gives us breathing space away from the noise of our busyness. In that space we come into deeper alignment with ourselves and our own intuitive knowledge.... Once we enter the flow of our movement we learn to trust the natural creativity of the life force inside us."*  
Susannah and Ya'Acov Darling Khan.

The process and learning involved in exploring the creative process is an on-going one for me. In my classes and workshops I have worked predominantly with movement and drawing. The types of classes I have taught are:

- Weekly classes drop-in where I introduce themes related to encouraging creativity through movement, and with the invitation to draw.

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<sup>16</sup> Sources tell me this quote is attributed to William Hutchinson Murray... did think it was Goethe...

- One-day workshop (*The Magic Circle*) focusing on accessing creative flow and exploring the creative field.
- Workshops exploring *Creative Sustainability* with Masters levels student architects in University College Dublin.
- A workshop exploring *Drawing and Mindfulness* with first year student Engineers in University College Dublin.

And some of the themes I have used in classes include:

- Working with/trusting Body Heart and Mind
- Gratitude for what is
- Exploring sources of inspiration
- Receiving inspiration
- Gratitude and presence
- Leaps of faith
- Circle and centre
- Giving and receiving
- Embracing your wild
- Working with the elements

The Movement Medicine mesa is one big cauldron for creativity and all of it provides guidance for accessing greater creativity. There are however a few key aspects and tools of Movement Medicine that resonate very particularly with the work I have been exploring so far:

- **The Elements:** Working with the elements and connecting them with the seasons, at they relate to the seasons of our creativity and the cyclical nature of the creative process.
- **Yin and Yang:** The more I delve into my understanding and a felt sense of the creative process the more I understand these concepts of Yin and Yang and their balancing roles: I find that it is an unfolding and on-going process of grounding, listening and receiving and then taking action, often unprecedented action.
- **The Mesa Practice:** This is a strong and beautiful tool for exploring the creative practice. I combine it with the *Tree of Life*: connecting to the earth and our roots beneath us, standing in the centre of our circle and the solid core trunk of our body and connecting to the sky and inspiration above us. I use a practice of connecting within the centre of our own circle to our creative energy field where we offer and receive our creativity as a gift. This offering and receiving becomes a generator for creativity: for creative flow.
- **The journey of responsibility:** through working with creativity in classes I have learned what it actually means to uniquely create: feeling in muscles, bones and being a sense of *fulfilment*; to understanding the giving and receiving: the Yin and Yang of *interconnection* and the *realisation* of the unique powers of manifestation inherent in our creative processes.

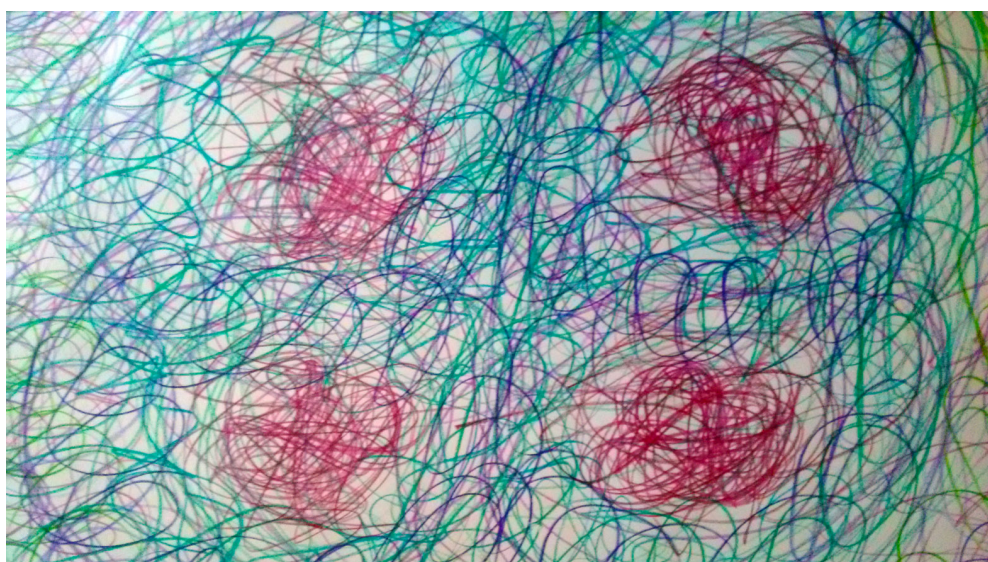
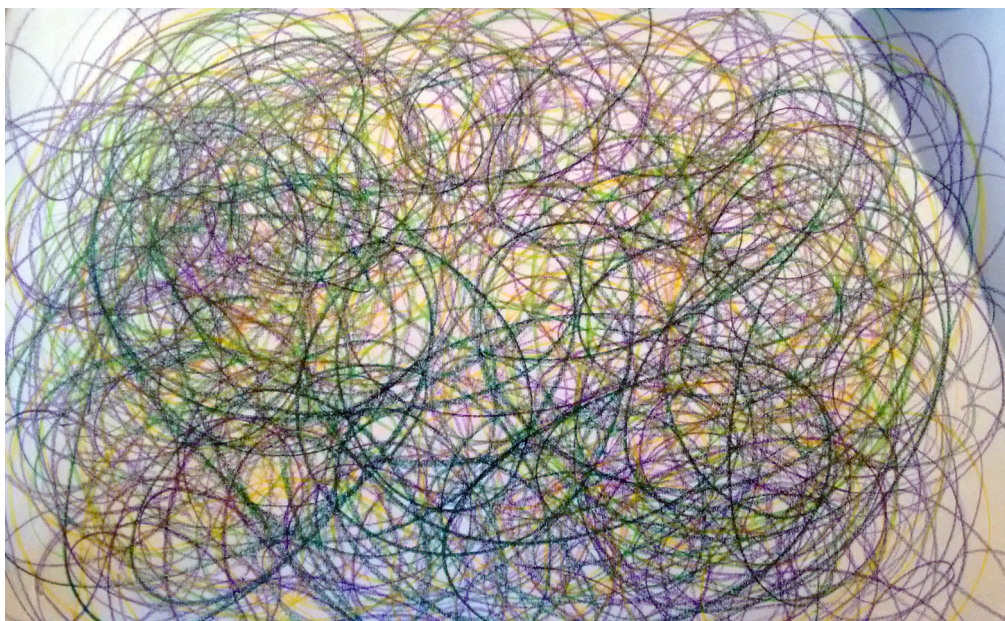
## Exercises used

- **Dance /Draw:** Using movement to sculpt ideas using the body to give these shapes, forms and gestures, colour, opening to symbol, image, pattern; bringing them into a drawn form.
- **Exploring the creative field:** This is an exercise starting with the tree of life the focusing on the spine as the centre for your own creative field, then defining the body and your creative field: the body/spirit interface.
- **Mapping the creative process:** Using sensory awareness, focused energy breathing and visualisation to map the sensations of the body. Bringing awareness to the left and the right side of the body.
- **Working with cycles of creativity:** Creativity is an iterative process that is in a constant state of birth and death, renewal and destruction. This exercise is an invitation to dance with the phases of your creative process allowing the dance to inform your relationship with each stage.
- **The Still point:** Coming back to the still point, at the centre of the Creative Field. This is a visualisation for *Receiving the echo*.

## What worked well?

- Bringing drawing pencils into class: this was a huge leap of faith for my teaching. I had talked about creativity but bringing art materials into the class felt really important and significant. It turned out to be so much fun!!
- Using lots of visualisation, similes in descriptions, inviting sculptural form through movement.
- Inviting participants to dance imaging they are drawing/painting in the space around them, giving colour and form with their bodies to images, ideas and feelings. This becomes the place where dancing and drawing co-exist: and is a bridge to bring images, shapes and patterns into a manifest form on paper.
- I have loved seeing the drawings participants produced in class. Their presence and connection as they draw blows me away each time I am witness to it, and the variety of interpretations, visions and expressions constantly inspire me, give me hope and propel me along this path of enquiry.
- Working with groups in one-day workshops has been more useful in relation to connecting with participants and allowing time for a more in-depth exploration of the creative process.





**14 & 15.** Images from one of *The Magic Circle* workshop participants.

### **Challenges in teaching**

- Trying to get momentum with this subject in a drop in class: I am still challenged to keep the classes simple.
- Finding language to encourage people to draw when they are terrified: I am constantly learning language and exercises to support steps towards expressing creativity.
- I am not a therapist or a creative/expressive art therapist; this has brought about issues with creative art therapists when we have discussed my work. I remain clear that my work is not a form of therapy but a form of exploration that may be therapeutic.

## Some of what I have learned

The following are lessons that I have found valuable for holding space for creative exploration:

- **Sacred practice. Sacred space:** I feel that the creativity is a spiritual practice and as such I consider spaces where I hold classes and workshops as sacred spaces.
- **Safety and trust:** trust between teacher and participants cannot be rushed. It takes the time that it takes. I am learning to find ways to sense where a group is and then work with what is possible from there. I have been witness to the fear and hesitation that people hold around their own creativity but creative flow comes from taking risks, stepping into the places that scare us, and from this unprecedented action something new flows like magic. Both as a teacher and a participant you cannot force it or work it out, you can only *be* with it, witness it, allow it and move with it to let creative flow manifest into form.
- **Seasons:** Creativity cannot be forced. There are times when there is nothing that you need to do and nothing that you can do but rest and allow, and other times ideas are bubbling.
- **Welcome people:** I learned that really welcoming participants, welcoming their dance, their bodies, and their emotional and mental state: their uniqueness is essential in order to work with creativity. From landing into a place of acceptance of the body then you can begin to welcome the uniqueness of creative expression.
- **Acknowledging fear:** Lots of people are terrified of creativity: they may get it wrong; they may not be good enough. As a visual artist I have taken it for granted that putting pencil or paint to paper just is not a big deal, as I don't really care what a drawing looks like. But this is after many many years of practice, trial and error. So it is really important to acknowledge fear.
- **Focus on the process not the end product:** It is how it feels to bring ideas into a visual/physical form that is important, what it looks like is secondary.
- **Give permission to make mistakes:** with creativity mistakes are essential; mistakes are what constantly feeds the iterative process of creativity.
- **Defining your circle:** To work specifically with the creative process it is really important to define your: centre and physical *edge*, your own circle and dance space, the electromagnetic field of the heart and the room you are in.
- **Working with the Edge:** Working with your edge is a key part of being in our creative process. In class it is important to introduce the idea of the edge, embodying it by defining the edge of the physical body, of our energetic field or our ability to stretch and contract.
- **Yin and Yang:** understanding that the process of creativity is a process of giving and receiving: offering your gifts and gracefully accepting that you receive.
- **Gratitude and celebration:** Celebrating after creating is a form of honouring what has come into manifestation.

## Next Steps

My next steps include bringing together my passions for environmental architecture and embodied creativity and design. There is no doubt that our world is in crisis and from my own work as an architect and as a sustainable consultant I have learned that *working out* what is happening in our world is not enough to bring about change. Change comes about through taking unprecedented creative action. It requires using our creative intelligence and trusting in our collective creativity. We cannot imagine the kind of beautiful world that we can create but we can feel it in our hearts and if it is in our hearts then we can bring it into our creative field and into flow and into manifestation. For me by connecting to our creativity we tap into and make possible the changes and the healing that we wish to see in the world.

*"The first step in creating change, then, is to receive a vision that feels true. The second step is to heal the wounds and doubts that that vision illuminates. Without doing that, we will be conflicted, simultaneously enacting both the new story and the old one that accompanies the wounds. The third step is to bow into service to that which wants to be born. This process is not linear. Usually, the vision comes more and more into focus as we heal the doubts that obscure it; that, in turn, allows us to enter more deeply into its service. Deeper service, in turn, brings up new dimensions of the vision along with deeper wounds. The path of service is a path of self-realization."*

Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World our Hearts Know is Possible*

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With gratitude to the seen and the unseen  
The known and unknown  
The courage to step in and the grace to receive  
To all our guides, protectors and inspirers  
To our uniqueness our creativity and our very necessary contributions to the world

I dedicate my creativity to life on earth.

With love  
Sinéad xx

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