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The Merit of the Practical and Abstract within Art Education

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The Merit of the Practical and Abstract within Art Education

An Honors College Thesis

by

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Art Education

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Abstract

Throughout the development of art education within the United States, there has been a constant struggle for the arts to prove itself valuable enough to merit its teaching in public schools. To address this, art educators and political officials alike have made major changes in art education methodology over time. The wide spectrum of changes that art education has undertaken since its inception can essentially be labeled as those that are meant to make art education standards based, and those that are meant to make art education expression oriented. Due to the consistent need for validation demanded by public funding entities, art education has been subjected to an internal “tug-of-war” in which teaching practices of the subject greatly favor one or the other in regard to fulfilling high standards or promoting the expressive power of art as a medium.

In this paper I will discuss the early history of art education within the United States, how the rise of progressive education within the United States affected art education, current trends regarding how art education is taught and valued in the United States, as well as my own investigation into the issue of art education methodology as demonstrated through my visual thesis, Practically Abstract. While at times they may seem contradictory, I argue that both standards based and expression based art education can, and should, coexist due to how the differences among them can contribute to each other to make a more effective educational experience as a whole for students.
Introduction

Throughout the extensive history of public education within the United States, art education has always been a source of debate among educators and government officials alike. The black sheep of the educational field, art education as a whole has been constantly subjected to ridicule and skepticism due to competing opinions regarding its merit. Amongst debates such as how valuable art education is or how much financial support art education should receive, perhaps the most controversial arguments regarding art education are those concerning how it should be taught.

During its inception throughout the 1800s, United States public art education, influenced by the stresses placed upon public schools to generate a workforce of capable students as fast as possible, was molded to be focused on functionality. However, as education in general became more progressive during the 20th century, art education became more expressive and subjective. This transition was not seamless though, and the conflicting ideologies of a practical, functional art education and a subjective, expressive art education caused major disagreement within the United States’ modern educational field. Due to the United States’ current trend of stressing the advancement of standards based learning, students stand to lose the creative thinking and problem solving skills that are innate in subjective art practices. In order to best enrich the learning of students, art education should have both its standard fulfilling and expression based methodologies embraced by teachers due to how their differences allow them to cover each other’s weaknesses for the sake of a more well rounded educational experience.
Early United States Public Art Education

Although art education has been an accepted portion of the United States’ general public school curriculum ever since the 1800s, its inception is much more recent than that of United States public schools themselves. Instead of being embraced along side core classes such as math and science, art education needed to be argued for by influential figures of society before it gained the respect needed to become a universal public school feature.

One such influential figure in favor of art education was Benjamin Franklin. When expanding upon ideas for how schooling should be developed within Pensilvania during the late 1700s, Franklin proposed that art education should be a respected pillar of education alongside more practical practices such as public speaking and writing within his collection of ideas, Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania (Boudreau, 2002). Franklin argued at great length for the merit of a wide variety of practices ranging from those that had use for survival such as agriculture, as well as more function oriented practices including writing.

The aspect of art education that convinced Franklin of its immense importance was that art has the potential of being a very effective manipulator of social status (Boudreau, 2002). Due to his highly respected position within early United States culture, Franklin witnessed a consistent parallel between artistic awareness and the social class of individuals. Enjoyment of the arts, especially the ability to become well versed with artistic ability, was considered to be an immense luxury during the time. Franklin strongly believed that either through the creation of art or through association with powerful figures that consumed the arts, teaching students artistic knowledge could greatly expand the amount of opportunity they have to enrich their lives (Boudreau, 2002).
Franklin’s proposal called for art education to be equal with more traditional practices such as writing. However, it is important to note that despite being in favor of teaching the arts he did not argue for them to be taught for their own sake. These proposals are the beginning of a long lasting trend in United States education which is based upon justifying the teaching of art education because of how it can be used as a tool for other means. Franklin had nothing to say in regard to the expressive and subjective attributes of art and how they in themselves could be valuable for students (Boudreau, 2002). These less immediately functional aspects of art would not be expanded upon in an educational sense until the rise of progressive education.

Despite the immense respect Franklin had among his influential peers within early United States history, his suggestion of embracing art education within schooling was not convincing enough for art education to become a standard feature in public schools. The main reason for the rejection of art education was that even with Franklin’s argument that it could be used to open opportunity for positive social mobility, art education was generally deemed not practical enough to be worth the expenses it would cost to teach it to students. Even when art education did become accepted into public education, it was taught in such a way that focused solely on how art could be applied as a supplement for other educational practices.

A perfect example of how art education was restricted to being a tool for the sake of other forms of activity is one of the first art textbooks utilized by United States public schools, *An Introduction to Linear Drawing* (Francœur & Fowle, 1839). This textbook was originally written by Francœur who lived in France, which taught art education long before the United States did, and was selected to be translated by Fowle for United States schools due to its foundation in mathematics.
The introduction of the book consists of a lengthy argument for the importance of teaching drawing skills to students. This argument is twofold in its reasoning. Firstly, the book explains that many professions besides those of an artistic nature require drawing on a regular basis (Francœur & Fowle, 1839). Professions that are argued within the text to benefit from functional drawing skills the most are those within the field of science as well as those with mechanical and architectural backgrounds. This is a clear attempt to market art education as a sort of means to an end, which is particularly important due to the constant backlash of funding entities in regard to spending resources on art education. Secondly, it is argued within the text that educational outlets that taught art education during the time of the textbook’s publication were failing to produce students with the skills necessary to utilize the linear, practical aspects of art (Francœur & Fowle, 1839). This claim makes it evident that only a particular form of art was prioritized during this time period. Expression focused art practices such as those concerning social change or therapeutic self discovery were completely disregarded in favor of those that could be taught in order to make students more capable of performing jobs.

The textbook is broken up into six lessons which include: Right Lines, Solids/Figure, Circles, Cylinders/Cones, Mouldings, and Orders of Architecture (Francœur & Fowle, 1839). Each of these lessons consist of a multitude of tasks that students must complete as well as sketches providing guidance for what students are meant to learn. Much like a standard modern mathematics textbook, *An Introduction to Linear Drawing* is filled to the brim with mathematical jargon and there is practically no flexibility in instruction. Through the guidance of this text, students were meant to complete concrete goals and become proficient in reproducing the same results when needed without the use of tools for assistance.
The immense emphasis in regard to the idea that mathematics must be a foundation for the practice of drawing is even further enforced by the textbook’s arithmetic and geometry sections that are provided after the six “art” lessons. Completely devoid of the aspects of drawing found prior in the text, this math portion is strictly designed to further students’ understanding of advanced mathematics. While it was a huge accomplishment for those in favor of art education to have it accepted into public schools across the United States, the failure to have it taught for its own sake degraded art to nothing more than a piece of intellectual equipment for the sake of more generally reputable studies. Expressive art, and especially abstract art, were anything but appreciated within early United States education.

Movements in favor of expressive, non-traditional art becoming more appreciated by the public were occurring around the time of art education’s inception within the United States, but they were met with considerable criticism. Der Mönch am Meer, painted by German artist Caspar David Friedrich, acted as one such deeply criticized attempt to portray expressive art in a respectable matter (Meyertholen, 2013). Created in 1810, Der Mönch am Meer is a skyscape painting portraying a gloomy sky over a deep blue ocean which is being viewed by a lone figure.
who is meant to be a monk (Meyertholen, 2013). While the subject matter for this image was not anything out of the ordinary during its time of creation, the reason Friedrich received so much backlash was due to the non-realistic, painterly way he portrayed the scene. In a time period without photography, when painting was respected as a means of documenting people and scenes with realism, the simplification of forms and over dramatization of color within the piece caused it to be rejected by critics who disdained variation from what was expected of prestigious, academy art.

The painting was critiqued by a wide cast of reviewers, who were mostly incredibly negative in regards to Friedrich’s work. However, one critic was surprisingly very pleased with the painting. Heinrich von Kleist, a German novelist and journalist, not only praised the controversial painting, but goes on to further describe how imagery could become even more abstract within his review (Meyertholen, 2013). Where most critics found frustration, Kleist experienced a sort of intellectual freedom while attempting to decode who the distorted figure within the painting was meant to be. Much like the exercises of self exploration that are taught within modern art education classes, Kleist was able to discover an untouched sense of creativity within himself due to viewing Der Mönch am Meer that no traditional painting could ever allow him to. Although the term abstract art was not an agreed upon term by the general public during
the inception time period of *Der Mönch am Meer*, the image acts as a precursor to the breaking of realistic limitations and focus of expression that would not only receive immense recognition within the world of art, but also find its way into United States public education.

**The Rise of Progressive Art Education**

During the 20th century the United States experienced massive cultural changes, most of which were lead by reformation activism devised to challenge traditional norms in favor of benefiting society. Deep rooted problems in United States society that were actively challenged during this time include political corruption, the poor living conditions of people within cities, the dangerous work environments of most factory based employment, as well as many issues regarding social justice.

In regard to United States public education, school curricula adapted to the demand from the general public for more progressivism by adapting lessons to be more open ended and intellectually expansive in nature. This is particularly true with art education, which was able to take advantage of this progressive era within the United States to become more focused on the expressive capabilities of the arts. Beyond the newfound acceptance of non-traditional art within public schools, art education also received massive financial boons due to supplementary support provided by independent school supply houses (Whitford, 1923). With this newfound intellectual freedom and financial backing, art educators were able to expand like never before the realm of possibilities in regard to teaching art to students in United States history.

Throughout the United State’s progressive era during the 20th century, art was consistently used as a form of communication for controversial ideas due to its ability to have widespread appeal and to easily gain the attention of others. While the use of art in this
progressive sense may seem similar to the utilization of art as a tool by early United States art educators, the dramatic difference between these two examples of art usage is that there were no set rules enforced for how art should be made for the progressive artists. Unlike the need for precision and practicality that was a main facet of the art taught in early United States public schools, the focus on self expression and mass communication that was promoted by influential figures during the progressive era opened many opportunities for non-traditional art to flourish. This made it socially acceptable for artists to break away from traditional art practices in favor of more unconventional, unique forms of art. The acceptance of artistic experimentation for the sake of expression was the main cause for the rise of many now famous artists as well as a new genre of art, the abstract.

Abstract art was extremely revolutionary due to its abandonment of traditional norms and expectations. While most traditional art was created for the sake of representing real life forms and scenery, the lack of restrictions found amongst abstract art allowed the genre to become something more significant than itself. In particular, the non-representative depictions utilized in abstract art forced its viewers to experience abnormal forms of visualization (Noë, n.d.). Without representative forms to visually guide the audiences of abstract art, what is being depicted by the artwork is dependent upon the interpretation of those that view it. Abstract artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko took full advantage of this art/viewer interaction with their artwork that is completely devoid of any representative forms (Noë, n.d.). The unconventional methods of depiction used by these abstract artists forced viewers to deeply analyze their artwork rather than focus on what their artwork is depicting, which is significant because it invited people to
develop their own opinions and interpretations in regard to artwork that would otherwise be impossible with the limitations of traditional, representational art.

Another key reason for abstract art’s rise toward social significance is that it resonates well with the passing of time, and how people gradually change their dispositions. Similar to life, art is continuous in that it changes over the course of time (Noë, n.d.). Although the appearance of an artwork may remain unaltered after its creation, it is constantly subjected to change due to how people interpret what is being depicted by the work. As people change and develop over the course of their lives, their life experiences greatly influence how they understand media. Abstract art capitalizes on this ever changing sense of perspective due to how its non-representative methods of depiction make it easy for people to develop new understandings of what the art may represent. A downfall of traditional art that abstract art avoids is that the concrete, realistic depictions of traditional art allow themselves to become outdated with time, or even worse, completely rejected due to social developments. While abstract art and its emphasis on expression would never become a replacement of traditional, realistic art, its development in the United States became a key focal point for dramatic social change.

One major social change that was caused in part, by the rise of abstract art in popular media was the instruction of abstract art in public schools. Alongside traditional art skills, abstract artistic practices began to be taught within United States public schools in hopes that such instruction would allow students to develop better interpretation skills and a greater sense of creativity. A major influential figure who strongly supported the teaching of abstract art within the United States was John Dewey. John Dewey was a United States educational philosopher who was greatly inspired by the abstract expressionists (Buettner, 1975). These abstract
expressionists were revolutionary artists during the mid 20th century including people such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning. Through abstract art Dewey believed that students’ educational experiences could be greatly enriched by the open-ended nature of the artistic genre.

Dewey had many beliefs in regard to the importance of art and how traditional means of art creation and education had heavily restricted the potential for art to develop and maintain an impactful influence on society. Two key arguments of Dewey’s that form the foundation for his beliefs on art are that the finished product of a work of art is not as important as the process needed to create it, and that emotional intensity is vital for artistic creation to be fulfilling for viewers of art (Buettner, 1975). In regard to the first argument, Dewey is essentially claiming that art is an experience, not a means to an end. Rather than just a process for the sake of producing a finished product, artistic creation in its self is an art form.

Similar to how Jackson Pollock’s methods of pseudo-unpredictably applying paint to his large canvases is a major component of what makes his art visually distinct, Dewey believes that how art is made determines its potential to be impactful in regard to its audience (Buettner, 1975). While traditional, representative art is also capable of being expressive, the rules and limitations of the genre cause it to lack the potential to challenge its
viewers to the extent that abstract art can with its unconventional methods of depiction which cause viewers to look for deeper meaning within the artwork. Dewey would argue that the restrictions that force representative artists to work in specific ways take away from their work’s potential to be impactful and emotionally evocative (Buettner, 1975). It is not what is made through art that is ultimately important, but rather the process that was performed to achieve the creation of a finished work of art that is important due to how that process is a key component that defines what that art represents and portrays to others.

When Dewey argues that the emotional intensity of a work of art is vital for it to be fulfilling for its audience, he is essentially claiming that art needs to be capable of evoking feelings and responses from people for it to be effective (Buettner, 1975). Art not only needs to be visually interesting, but it also must be able to make its audience react upon viewing it. Whether those feelings are evoked due to the subject matter of an artwork or the representation of an artist’s beliefs and interests, the ability of artwork to make people respond to it emotionally is directly proportional to its potential significance. Art that fails to move its viewers towards developing emotional responses to what they are witnessing not only fail to leave a lasting impact on those viewers, but also suffer the fate of becoming forgettable when compared to more influential examples of art.

Within his book, *Art As Experience* (1934), Dewey combines his beliefs in regard to the importance of both the artistic process and the emotional potential of art in order to portray how art can be used to support social awareness (Buettner, 1975). Dewey argues that art should be used to express the experiences and circumstances of the places it is made in and the people it is created by. Essentially, art is at its best when it is not only appealing for its audience, but when it
can also convince its audience to interact with it on an intellectual level. Such an idea gained immense popularity among abstract artists throughout 20th century United States, who consistently spread their political and social agenda with publicly accessible artwork. While Dewey believed that all forms of art had the potential to drive positive societal change, abstract art in particular was well suited for this task due to how its generally unorthodox methods of expression made it well suited for directing its viewers to new forms of thought and understanding.

The rise of abstraction and the newfound appreciation for the ability of art to act as a far reaching form of expression during the 20th century forever impacted United States public schools by causing them to become more liberal with their art instruction. While the teaching of technical, representational skills still maintained an important role in art education, the inclusion of expressive, experimental art practices within standard art education curricula provided opportunities for students to further develop their creativity and sense of self. Although art education flourished in the United States due to the melding of these two main forms of art instruction, art education as a whole still lagged behind other educational subjects in terms of perceived general importance. Unable to completely shake off the stigma of being less useful for students than more concrete educational fields such as math and science, art education was generally still deemed to be lesser, as well as less deserving of resources, by educational officials and funding entities. This major issue has persisted till the modern era of United States public school art education, and has caused great divide among art educators in regard to how art should be taught.
Current Art Education Trends in the United States

Today, art education in the United States public school system has been adjusted to become more structured and standard focused than its 20th century counterpart. While both practical and experimental art philosophies have a place in the current visions of art education in the United States, the demand for higher standards forced art educators to discover methods for having art enhance other subjects of education which are considered more practical. Despite gaining more freedom of instruction since the inception of art education in United States public schools, art educators are still required to justify themselves and what they teach by proving how art can serve students in other aspects of education. Controlled by immense pressure, spurred by the threats and demands of government funding entities, art educators have practically lost their ability to teach expressive oriented lessons in favor of lessons with direct links to other academic subjects such as math and science.

The issue of funding has always been a major struggle for art education, especially considering the immense capital investment that is required to have an ample stock of art supplies to meet student demand. However, this issue has only escalated within the modern era and it is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to afford the costs needed to provide acceptable forms of art education for their students. During the 20th century, multiple government programs and independent agencies were established in order to support education as a whole. One of these agencies in particular, that greatly benefited public school art education is the National Art Education Association (NAEA) (Flynn, 2016). The NAEA is an influential, educational society that helped public schools receive the funding necessary to pay for newly trained art educators. With the ordeal of finding well qualified art educators, paying them, and
then also needing to pay for supplies made simpler for public schools with the assistance of the NAEA and other forms of educational funding support, public schools were able to elevate their capacity to teach art education.

While the support given to public schools allowed art education to flourish in the 20th century, art education started declining with the passing of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. This act was a reaction to the fear that United States public school students were generally falling behind those of foreign countries, especially in important subjects such as science and math (Flynn, 2016). The NDEA caused art education to receive less funding in favor of using that capital to further the development of science and math educational programs. With its government funding suddenly siphoned away due to beliefs that the arts could not help advance United States students to the levels of their foreign counterparts, art education programs needed to be cut down across the country in order to readjust to their new, more limited, budgets.

Within the current scene of United States public school education, art education is still struggling from this shift in funding, which has only worsened with time. The demand for higher standards for public school students has intensified greatly, therefore art education has been further financially neglected for the sake of academic subjects that are deemed more practical according to standardized testing. Along with the damage caused by increased standardization for United States public schools, art education also experienced financial losses due to George Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (Ford & McMahon, 2016). The No Child Left Behind Act was meant to inspire public schools across the United States to reach higher educational standards by providing financial incentives for schools that produced the best results. Unfortunately, since the results of the public schools were evaluated through high stakes testing which heavily focused on
mathematics and science, most public schools invested the majority of their access funding to further strengthen their math and science programs in order to compete with other schools. This further drew support away from art education, and the financial neglect made it difficult for art classes to remain a part of public school curricula.

This neglect in art education can be directly linked to the lack of actual art instruction among public schools. While the majority of states within the United States require art education to be taught in elementary schools, higher grade levels have reduced art education to optional, elective classes (Flynn, 2016). Art education may be capable of greatly enriching the lives and intellectual capabilities of students, however, the lack of financial priority compared to other academic areas prevents it from being as effective as it possibly can. This further fuels the general belief of funding entities that art education is less valuable than other educational subjects, and therefore continued financial negligence becomes the norm.

Along with the rise of high standards within United States public school education came multiple programs that sought to direct the changes educational curricula needed to make in order to achieve the United States government’s standardization goals. One such program is STEM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (Froschauer, 2016). This program is meant to act as a guideline for what skills and information should be prioritized for public school students. The four educational subjects that make up STEM all share a common theme of focusing on skills students need to be able to do well on high stakes testing. The functional, practical problem solving skills that are focused on within these educational subjects are highly valued by both government officials and funding entities alike, which lead to immense
support for these educational subjects in regard to having the financial backing needed by educators to effectively teach them.

In an attempt for art education to rise in importance and potentially receive similar support to that of the educational subjects that make up STEM, STEAM was developed as a proposed extended version of the original program by art educators (Froschauer, 2016). As an amendment to STEM, art educators argued that the inclusion of art could allow the creative skills that are developed within art education to be applied by students while they are working with other forms of academic material. Through the application of creative, problem solving skills, art educators believed that art education could greatly enhance student learning potential in regard to the rest of their studies due to how a boost to creativity may allow students to learn and adapt to new information easier. In order to prove this theory, many art educators redeveloped their art education methodologies in order to provide lessons for their students that are closely tied to technology.

One influential example of art educators conforming to the demands of high standardization within United States public schools is the Maker Movement. The Maker Movement is an educational campaign that aims to integrate technology into public art education in order to provide an educational experience for students that directly links the study of art with other academic subjects (Patton & Knochel, 2017). Most lessons inspired by the Maker Movement have a heavy emphasis on student manipulation of materials and the incorporation of mathematics and science. For example, one lesson based on the Maker Movement consists of having students create and decorate small moving robots that they build which are battery powered (Patton & Knochel, 2017). This lesson is significant because it expands upon the artistic
skill of composition by challenging students in regard to how they decorate their robots without hindering the robots’ ability to move freely. While this sort of technology inspired art lesson is effective for introducing students to new knowledge outside of art curricula, it also limits how students can develop expressive capabilities due to an emphasis these lessons have for doing things in particular ways in order to be “correct”.

Students are still encouraged to be expressive through means of personalizing the artwork they create in class, however, abstract, expressive art has seen a major decline in United States public school education during the modern era. Art skills with a technical basis such as those of line work, proportion, and illustration are more often prioritized for teaching within art classes due to their easily proven applications to other educational subjects, which is strikingly similar to how art education was approached within the United States during the 1800s (Francœur & Fowle, 1839). Current trends in public school art education are almost entirely directed by the flow of money art programs receive from government support. Unfortunately, this direction has caused art education to become specialized in the promotion of artistic skills that align with the demands of government standards at the cost of vital, non-function oriented artistic learning.

**Practically Abstract**

*Practically Abstract* is my visual thesis which was produced as a form of investigation in regard to how function, standard based art education and abstract, expression based art education could coexist and benefit from each other within United States public school education. The name *Practically Abstract* is derived from the idea that despite the rejection of abstract art practices in the United States’ high standard focused public school environment, both standard based and expression based arts instruction have tangible, practical benefits for students. This
body of work consists to two main forms of art, realistic, unedited photography and abstract, grayscale charcoal drawings. These pieces were presented in a diptych format in which each photograph was presented alongside an abstract drawing that depicted the same subject matter.

Figure 4. Kahl, N. (2019). *Man Down* (photograph and charcoal drawing)

The photographic aspect of my body of work embodies the traditional, functional arts instruction that was taught during the inception of art education in the United States, which is experiencing a revival within current United States art education. Each photograph was shot in a RAW file format and then printed onto 16x20 luster paper. All of the imagery depicted within these photographs are unaltered subjects that I discovered while searching for visual material. When selecting imagery to use within the visual thesis, I primarily

Figure 5. Kahl, N. (2019). *Man Down* (left image, photograph)
focused on developing a theme of beauty and decay as a means of expressing the dramatic contrast between representational and abstract art.

Along with this focus, I also shot each photograph with the goal of having it appear to my audience that I was documenting an isolated scene of life. Essentially, the way I composed my photographs to portray outlying scenes and objects is meant to symbolize the concrete, representative depictions of structures that were heavily emphasized as being valuable in a practical sense for students to produce in traditional United States art education. With my photographs acting as a traditional, representational foundation, my abstract drawings work off of the them in order to challenge my audience’s sense of perception.

Counter to the photographs, the charcoal drawings that are a part of Practically Abstract are meant to symbolize the abstract, expressive art education methodologies that were prevalent within the United States during the 20th century. Each abstract drawing was created with vine charcoal due to its ease of utility, and were developed upon 16x20 heavy drawing paper. The drawings of my visual thesis all depict the same subject material as their photographic counterparts, however, the implications of non-gradual shading cause the drawings to take on an entirely different identity and tone.
The shading applied to my abstract drawings was created through the process of breaking down forms into smaller, organic shapes based upon the lighting those forms were subjected to during the time of being photographed. Each tone found throughout the drawings represent different light values. This method of shading causes the drawings to appear visually busy, which effectively encourages viewers to repeatedly scan the imagery in order to visualize all of the detail. In order to prevent these drawings from becoming unclear, the scene that is being depicted in each had its forms defined by thick, dark outlines and their coloration was monochromatic. The abstract appearance of these drawings invite the viewer to see beyond what the drawing was depicting. In other words, the lack of realistic depictions among the drawings allowed my audience to feel comfortable with applying and sharing their own understanding and experiences with the artwork.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 7. Kahl, N. (2019). *Passion Petals* (photograph and charcoal on paper)

With the representative photos and the abstract drawings supporting each other, I was able to have my audience repeatedly compare the two art styles and develop an appreciation for the capabilities of both. This was made more effective through the diptych presentation format.
that I used, which made it simple for viewers to examine each piece at the same time. While each photograph and drawing pair I made are technically devised of two separate pieces of art, I situated each pairing within my visual thesis as one unified artwork. This unifying of representative and abstract art is exactly what I believe should occur in United States public school art education as well.

Although the rising requirement of standardization in the United States favors technical art practices, those function oriented skills become far more powerful for students when they are supported by the creativity and outward thinking that is developed through expressive art education. In terms of expressive impact, my visual thesis would have been far less effective if either the representative or abstract imagery were removed, just like how students can achieve a more well rounded and effective educational experience if they are exposed to both the technical and demonstrative aspects of art. The increase in standards has the potential to greatly benefit students by making them more intellectually capable than their predecessors. However, losing the expressive aspects of art education in order to achieve that potential would cause students more harm in terms of missed opportunity than good.

**Conclusion**

Art education has experienced multiple periods of immense change ever since its inception into United States public schools during the 1800s. Starting out as extremely function oriented and relying on its close relation with mathematics to be considered worthy of financial support, art education’s earliest stages were not as focused on the teaching of art as it was instead acting as a support for other educational subjects. This changed, however, with the rise of the progressive era and with it new educational freedoms that allowed art educators to teach students
the expressive aspects of art. The shift towards a more expressive outlook for art education was short lived, due to government interference for the sake of higher standards for United States public school students.

Within the modern era the divide between traditional, function based art education and abstract, expressive based art education has grown dramatically due to how standardization favors the learning of technical skills for students. Despite this, I believe that art educators must not disregard the great progress that was made in favor of expression based art learning during the 20th century in order to appease government funding entities. Instead, I propose that both functional and expressive art skills should be taught in tandem so that students can achieve a more well rounded educational experience that will not only increase their artistic prowess, but also benefit them with their other educational studies.
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