

ARTISTIC WAYS OF KNOWING

How to Think Like an Artist

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To Willy, Jennifer, and Natalie—
My family, my love, my inspiration



Constantin Brancusi, *Mlle Pogany*, 1913, bronze with black patina, The Museum of Modern Art, New York City

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We all know how it feels to experience a musical, dance, or theatrical performance or to view a piece of visual artwork. It is a sensation of being drawn in to the performers' or artists' emotional interpretation. That interpretation is the culmination of a gradual artistic process. How do artists create these interpretations? What types of thinking and perceiving are inherent in the artistic process? These are the questions answered in this book.

Artistic Ways of Knowing: How to Think Like an Artist is the first of three books about the concept of Artistic Ways of Knowing—how artists think and perceive—and sets out to explain the cognitive and perceptual functioning inherent in each stage of the artistic process. It provides readers with a thorough understanding of how artists think, as well as how that way of thinking expands in depth and breadth beyond cognitive or academic parameters.

This introductory book is followed by:

- *Artistic Ways of Knowing: A Curriculum for the Artist Within EVERY Student* – This book applies the artistic process to lessons that highlight the different Artistic Ways of Knowing and includes objectives, step-by-step activities, guiding questions, and talent spark indicators. Lessons are within each arts area, as well as interdisciplinary arts/academic areas. The book also contains brainstorming ideas to guide lesson planning for differentiation using the arts.
- *Arts Talent ID: A Framework for the Identification of Talented Students in the Arts* – This book provides a comprehensive process for talent identification within each arts domain. It includes nomination forms, observation rating scales, and performance assessment forms using talent criteria based on Artistic Ways of Knowing as a reference across the arts.



The concept of Artistic Ways of Knowing grew from my quest to understand what I was experiencing when I worked with talented music students in my private studio and in college classes. These students exhibited a palpable energy as they worked on their interpretations of the music, as well as a reflective internal manipulation of expression and creative ideas. I wanted to know more about the cognitive/perceptive process of young talented musicians and how we might be able to identify this “spark” of potential from the start.

I ventured outside my domain of music into doctoral studies in gifted education, which brought the world of academic cognitive examination to the helm. I found myself in the role of “translator,” describing how artists process and create to those entrenched in the clear-cut logical domains of math and science. As I broadened my quest to include all of the arts, I realized that developing a simple, understandable description of how artists think and perceive could serve as a basis for talent identification across the arts, as well

as a framework for curriculum development that embraces the artistic process in arts and academic classrooms.

I am a pragmatist at heart, so I knew that the terminology to describe artistic knowing had to be comfortable and viable for arts educators and those in academic and gifted fields. I remember the “Eureka moment” in the midst of my dissertation development when I ran from my office and into the backyard where my husband was enjoying a cigar on our swing. “I have it: *metaperception!*” The term aptly describes the vital role of the senses that, in essence, lie at the heart of cognition in the arts. Metaperception is the artistic parallel to metacognition. That discovery helped mold the essential core of Artistic Ways of Knowing that is described in this volume.

I invite you to enter the world of the artist through these pages. Savor the wisdom of artists and scholars, enjoy aesthetic experiences that are interspersed throughout the book, and reflect on how you can enjoy your life more qualitatively. I hope that you will be inspired to create as an artist and to realize the significance of communicating through art: *This is uniquely mine.*

—Joanne Haroutounian

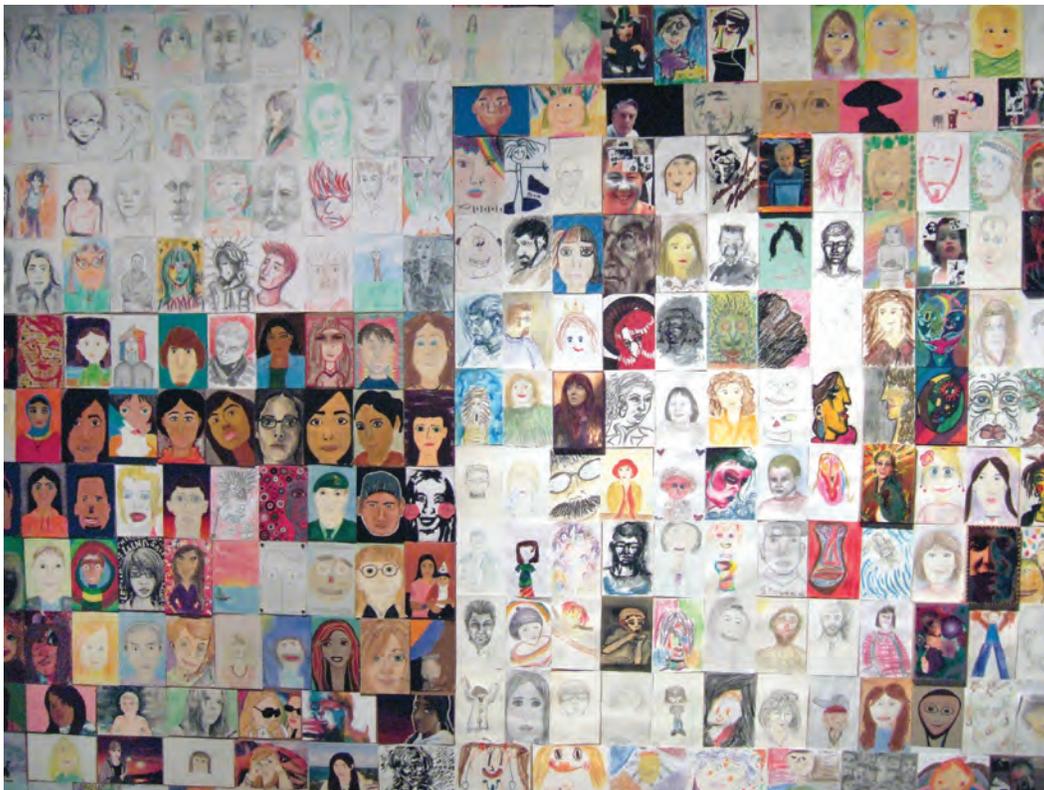


Figure P.1. *In Your Face*. An exhibition of portraits collected from the general public to celebrate the individuality and diversity of Canada at the Art Gallery of Ontario in July 2006. It was part of the Live with Culture program.



Introduction

The young dancer stands alone with arm extended overhead, looking upward at her fingers, gracefully curved. Seated on the floor nearby, her teacher says, “Now let’s search for your favorite star!”

The dancer stretches her arm skyward, aware of the tips of the fingers reaching higher and higher, body balanced to one side to exaggerate the arm movement. Her chin is raised so her eyes can search far above her hand, far above the ceiling, into the imaginary universe of stars.

“Carefully choose the most delicate star—it is yours!” coaxes her teacher.

She moves gracefully on tip-toe, brushing aside stars first with one arm, then the other. She pauses, slowly closing fingers together to capture her “star.” She gently draws it close to her, eyes intently following each movement. She folds her arms inward, cradling her personal star as she sits at rest before her teacher.

“It’s a perfect choice.” Both smile, sharing the moment.¹

This young dancer’s brief experience encapsulates what it means to think and perceive as an artist. She begins with focused awareness of her body and the space within which she is moving. She pays attention to details in this movement, discriminating how to portray the stretched reach and balance as she searches the imaginary sky. She combines this fine-tuned movement with her emotional intent to discover the most delicate star. As she brushes aside stars and brings her own star into her lap, she expressively internalizes what she wants to create in her unique interpretation of this personal quest. The teacher and student share the dynamic of her performance with an intimate smile as a positive, wordless critique.

This girl’s focused awareness of body and space, of internal sensing/feeling, of interpretive decision-making, and of communication through performance mirrors elements of a prima ballerina’s artistic knowing—but with a difference in degree, refinement, and technical fluency. She experiences the perceptual/cognitive process of learning and interpreting in the arts that defines Artistic Ways of Knowing.

*Dance is not about something;
dance is something.
—Joyce Boorman,
pioneer in children’s dance education.²*

The ability to “know” as an artist is not limited to the dance class, art studio, practice room, or stage. Learning to realize the “art” in a dance, a painting, a musical score, or a theatrical production requires the ability to think as an artist. This artistic learning process allows students to add depth to understanding, creativity to interpretive decision-

making, and refinement to abstract reasoning. The ability to understand the world with aesthetic sensitivity is fundamental and should be included in every school's curriculum.

Artistic Ways of Knowing: How to Think Like an Artist examines the perceptual and cognitive processes inherent in working in the arts. An understanding of the artistic process can serve as a starting point to devise curricula that can help *every* student learn to think as an artist.

The book begins with perspectives of artistic and aesthetic knowing from artists and scholars across the fields of education and the arts. We examine the role of arts education and aesthetic education in schools, evaluate research claims of arts education's impact on academic achievement, and compare multiple and artistic intelligences. These viewpoints from scholars and experts expound the importance of artistic thinking as a basic component of education.

The book then devotes a chapter to each element of the artistic process, explaining its specific role as part of the Artistic Ways of Knowing. One cannot truly understand the artistic process without the experience of working through an art form; therefore, readers will have this opportunity through small aesthetic entry experiences (shaded in the text), as well as more expansive Sparkler Experiences that highlight the use of each artistic element in a practical lesson format. Sparkler Experiences include extension possibilities that offer challenge, arts integration hints for use in academic areas, and talent spark descriptions of behaviors that may highlight potential talent in the arts area.

Each chapter closes with a set of ideas to ponder and discuss. These are suitable for coursework or professional development. The book also includes an addendum that lists arts resources that can guide teachers into additional avenues to help every student learn to think as an artist.

The Artistic Ways of Knowing are encapsulated on page xi as a reference as you work through the book. Note the recommendations for how to differentiate each element to provide challenges for students who show strength in those areas of artistic reasoning and interpretation.

Let us now return to our opening vignette, from the teacher's perspective. That smile—that shared dynamic of communication through an artistic interpretation—is at the heart of what is vital to learning through the arts. Perhaps you have experienced such an exchange with a student or have seen it in the face of a child after the simplest performance or the most challenging accomplishment. I cherish those moments and remember them fondly as I seek to unveil artists in every classroom as they experience Artistic Ways of Knowing.

¹ Haroutounian, 1994

² Boorman, in Booth & Hachiya, 2004, p. 85