

The Visual Journal as Post-Studio Practice

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we conceptualise a visual journal practice through an arts-based post-intentional phenomenological investigation and advocate for its inclusion across educational contexts. The discussion will focus on how the practice-oriented site of the visual journal, when made mobile and portable, can operate as a surrogate for the traditional visual artist's studio, and therefore, transform the actions of making to ones that are post-studio (Baldessari & Knight, 1992). Within this context, we trouble the conventions of the studio/classroom site through an examination of the visual journal's ability to offer socio-material, educational and integrative connections.

Keywords: Visual journals, post-studio practices, studio, practice, site.

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We are in the Raleigh-Durham airport en route to Seattle for the National Art Education Conference in the Spring of 2011. Sam carries his largest visual journal; it is hardbound, 100 sheets, each 18 x 24 inches in size. After 15 months of use, it has become so thick that Sam can hardly hold it under his arm. He sends the book through the x-ray machine, and on the other side of the body scanning booth, a few TSA security guards pull him aside; Sam wonders if this extra examination will make us miss our flight. To our surprise, the security agents are simply curious about the book and want to talk to Sam about all their family members who are artists and the type of work they make and how that relates to the contents of Sam's book. While Sam gathers his things and ties his shoes, three or four of the TSA screeners gather around his book, thumbing through the pages excitedly. Fellow travelers rubberneck as they walk by, looking over with curiosity. Realising that this kind of thing happens all the time. Sam is in the world with the visual journal as a post-studio practice allowing for the relation through the book to become a phenomenon.



Figure 1: Sam's Head Stuck in Venture Wall

METHODOLOGY

Theorising through the post-intentional phenomena of a post-studio visual journal practice, we ask how this art-based research activity takes shape out in the world? Within this paper, we wrangle with this question by exploring the manifestations that arise through post-intentional phenomenology while thinking through the spaces produced and surrounding post-studio practices, “Post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle 2010a, 2010b, 2014) draws on the post-structural commitment to knowledge being partial and ever-changing. Whereas early phenomenology is interested in the ‘essence’ of phenomena (Husserl, 1900/1970), post-intentional phenomenology is more interested in chasing the lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) phenomena can/might take” (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016, p. 334).

We use post-intentional phenomenology for its philosophical underpinnings that experiment along the margins of qualitative inquiry and allow us to follow the “flows and swells” (Hofsess, 2013) along the boundaries intentionality. Within post-intentional phenomenology, intentionality is not defined as the place to plan or to intend instead, it describes the “interconnectedness” (Vagle, 2018) between all things in undoing the disconnect between body and mind that Descartes brought to Western thought. The philosophical underpinnings here depart from the essencing of earlier phenomenological methodologies as this intentionality is reconceived with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987[1980]) understanding of, “How things connect [through-ness] rather than what they are [of-ness]” (Vagle, 2018, p. 129). The purposes and functions of visual journals are well established, (Grauer, 1984 p.32-34; Sinner, 2011, p.183-195; Lymburner, 2004 p.75-88), we are interested in expanding beyond these conceptions in an attempt at chasing the lines of flight that entangle with a construct of the visual journal as a post-studio practice. When addressing the activities of a post-studio visual journal practice as phenomena to be studied, the authors assert that the activities themselves call into question how they should be studied (Vagle, 2018, p. 17). We postulate that these activities act as a place to theorise around, within, and through. Vagle argues for philosophies/theories/ideas to come into play with one another in describing the methodology of post-intentional phenomenology, “...to see what might come from such playfulness. It is in this playfulness (opposed to a dialogue) where...weeds grow” (Vagle and Hofsess, 2016, p. 335). This playfulness, potentially removed from the confines of a conventional artist’s studio, is the space in which our aims for post-studio visual journal practice unfold. We explore the phenomena that arise within a post-studio visual journal practice based on personal observations, insights through post-reflection, and interviews with other practitioners. Before we begin discussing the relationship amid the artwork and the artist, we want to point towards the happening of the in-between. When Irwin and Springgay (2008, p.xix) define the in-between “where meanings reside in simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time.” We consider our experience of living within the in-between through the visual journal, acting as a place for the complication to manifest. This in-betweenness acting as aesthetically embodied (Grosz 1994; Snowber, 2012) and intersubjective (Chilton, Gerber & Scotti, 2015) arts-based research (Leavy, 2020). lived experience based in knowing from artistic inquiry (Shields & Irwin, 2019) are discussed within the paper that follows to think amongst through the productions of the phenomena.

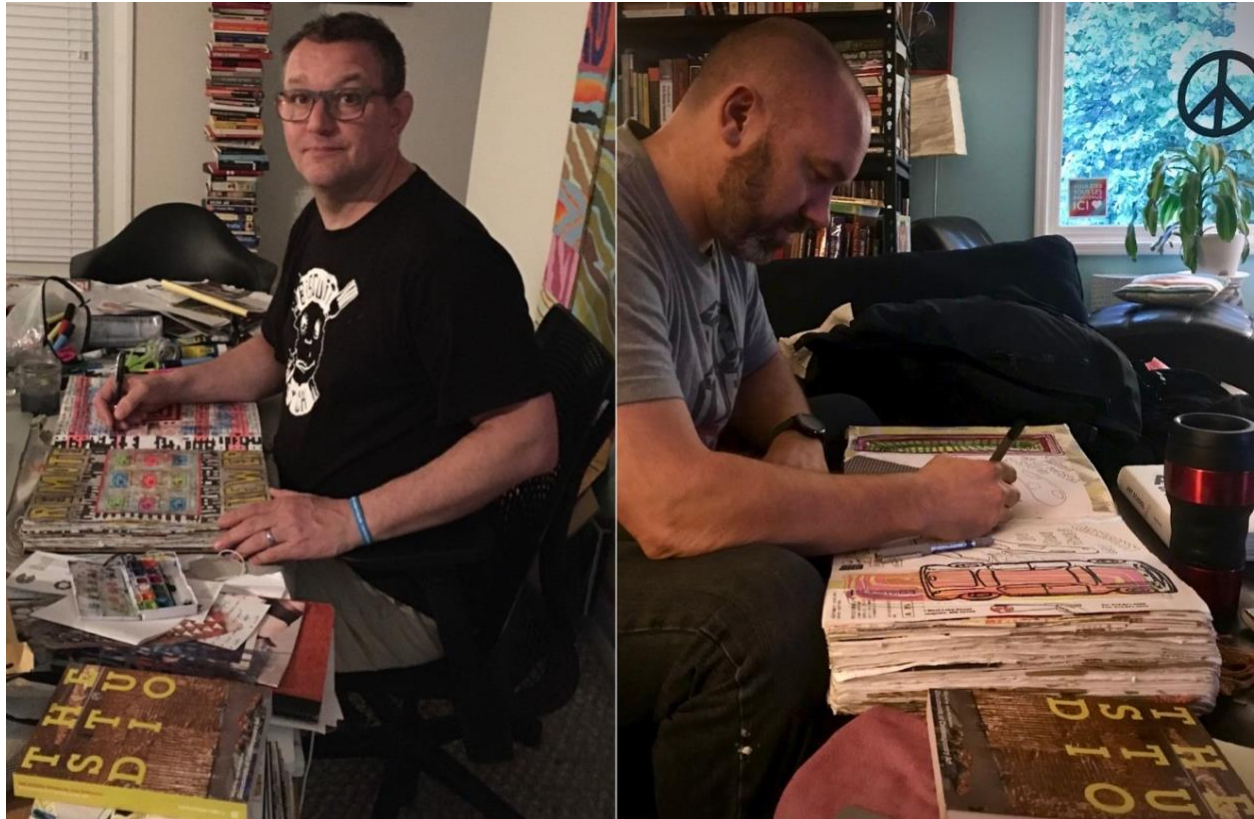


Figure 2: David And Sam Working In Journals Together/Apart

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE ON POST-STUDIO PRACTICE: A FUNCTION OF THE MACHINE

In Daniel Buren's (1979) essay, *The Function of the Studio*, he posits the following, "Analysis of the art system must inevitably be carried on in terms of the studio, as the *unique space* of production and the museum as a *unique space* of exposition. Both must be investigated as customs, ossifying customs of art. What is the function of the studio?"

- (1) It is the place where the work originates
- (2) It is generally a private place, an ivory tower perhaps
- (3) It is a *stationary* place where *portable* objects are produced.[Sic]" (p. 51)

In comparison to this assertion, the visual journal is a space where the work originates, as both portable place and object. A visual journal is a place for the thought that happens within a studio to be continued across all spaces, whether at home, in the classroom, or our studio. We propose that our studio is the visual journal, as it is the space and the object simultaneously.



Figure 3: Unfolding Space

In his discussions of post-studio practice, Robert Smithson (Jones, 1996) invokes Cezanne as an example of an artist who would work and think off-site, especially as he came to understand perspective in painting as described through colour in his studies of Mont Sainte-Victoire (1902–1904). Cezanne painted outside to get the work started and would then resolve their canvases in the studio. He went out into the world to see it, to gaze upon a specific landscape or composition. Likewise, we see the visual journal as the bridge between our post-studio practice to our physical studio and classroom spaces.

In *The Machine In The Studio*, Caroline Jones (1996), discusses the late Robert Smithson's arguments for the post-studio through the lens of his work *Spiral Jetty* as a place. Jones infers that if the studio is where artists say production happens and where they store the materials, then we theorise the visual journal as a studio, a unique place of post-studio production. As Jones pointed out, in Smithson's (1970) *Spiral Jetty*, earth moving machines make the work; those were his tools for production. Smithson's post-studio practice is the trade-off of the tools he employed. He decided to use the tools of industry to create this artwork and to situate it in a space that is not a museum or gallery for people to experience as was the ossifying customs of the tradition. Here Smithson subsumed the studio because the work was done on-site. Correspondingly, the backpacks that we carry our visual journals and materials in act as the storage container, allowing us to work on-site, and therefore function as a machine for our studio.

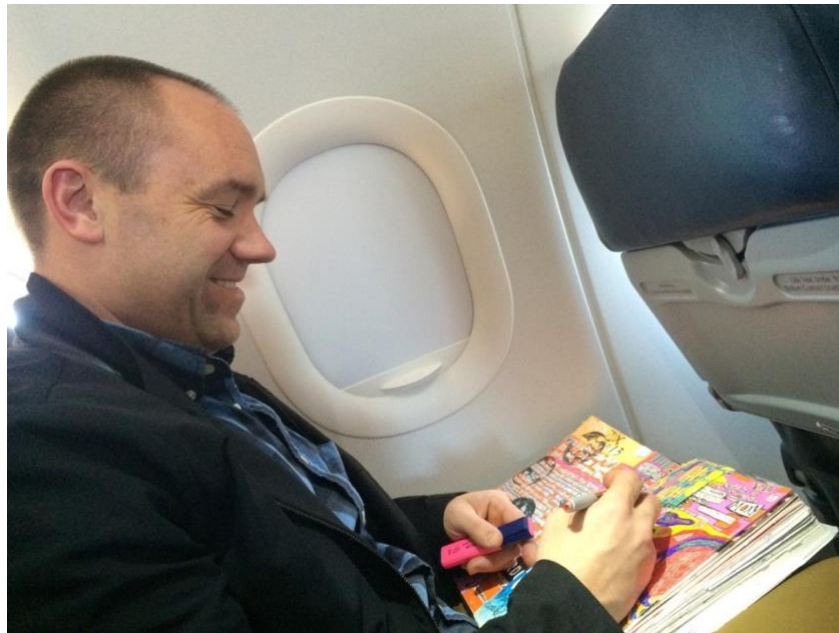


Figure 4: Sam in Airplane

PHYSICAL SITE: SITE-SPECIFIC VS. SITE-RESPONSIVE

The fields of art and arts education have always included planning and integrative forms of visualisation. Besides, the visual journal is understood as an object and space valued for its ability to provide a platform for the synthesis of multi-modal interdisciplinary concepts. In our visual journals, we take ownership of this studio practice. We do not see the visual journal only as an object that moves to completion; it is not another product of the studio or classroom. Instead, the journal becomes an interdisciplinary space to write, philosophise, and make creatively. Drawing, painting, and printmaking lend themselves to visual journals, as do sculpting using pop-ups, windows, or attachments. Likewise, a choreographed dance can be recorded with or within a visual journal, and it can house musical notation or be used to construct instruments. It also acts as a space for character development or can become a theatre. The visual journal is a multimodal, embodied, transdisciplinary

research tool done by and for artists. However, after taking all of this into consideration, what makes the visual journal a post-studio practice? While some have formulated this space to be a desk (Gillick & Long, 2010), we argue that a post-studio site must have mobility and not be rooted in a piece of furniture, as evidenced in Figure 8 as one of the authors is amidst his practice in transit on an aeroplane.

In *Notes Toward a Confidential Art* (1985/2011) Robert Irwin discusses the working categories for public art and theorises around site-specificity, “Here the ‘sculpture’ is conceived of with the site in mind; the site sets the parameters and is, in part, the reason for the sculpture.” The journal is site-specific in its relation to where the work happens, but in relation to the artist, becomes site responsive. In this way, our post-studio visual journal practice is not tied to a specific site; the space in which we work becomes an in-between space that reflects the world we live in through its practice. Through observations of our practices, we have noticed that the visual journal is always with us; therefore, we do not have to wait to be in the studio to be engaged in our work. In this way, the visual journal works in the third space between theory and practice (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) The accessibility that a post-studio practice provides allows the journal to become a consistent accumulation of marks, traces, and threads (Ingold, 2010). As a facsimile, we can take out our glue stick on the spot and attach the ready-made to the page or slide an item into a pocket fabricated inside of the journal to integrate later (see Figure 9). As these works exist in the day-to-day time of the journal’s practice, it becomes a reflection of its landscape and a collector of the remnants of lived experience. “In this way, phenomena do not belong in the intentional consciousness of the experiencer (of-ness), they belong in the intentional relations circulating in the lifeworld of which each experiencer is a part [through-ness]” (Vagle, 2018, pp. 94) . Similarly, the relational process of adding ephemera to the visual journal page transforms the remnant into evidence that marks the moment and speaks to the assemblage of daily existence.

When approaching studio practice with a consideration for only traditional site-specific ideas, artists find themselves limited by having to travel to a specific site to work, or for specific materials. Both of these often-time-consuming necessities can be a burden to engagement for studio activity. Since a visual journal is a mobile medium and can be easily worked on within the traditional studio or outside this space, it can act as a unique site for creative production within this mobility and provide for continuity of the studio process across space and time. This site-responsive capability can break down the artists’ constraints with time and place and offer new realms of possibility for content through context.



Figure 5: Ephemera Pocket

Additionally, our observations have shown us that the freedom to practice within the visual journal over time without chronological preoccupations, fuels the flexibility of this post-studio practice. The visual journal encodes time from the moment the first markings are made until the moment the last page is filled, and the next volume is initiated. Because the artist can return to any moment (page or volume) at any time, adding and recreating, it also subverts linear notions of time. Like the ideas of Arendt (Vasterling, 2013) “The phenomenological perspective of lived experience elucidates the relevance of the distinction between linear and cyclical time. While the repetitious character of cyclical time is experienced as a necessity, the discontinuous linearity of human existence can be experienced as freedom.” The pages within the visual journal become an experience in discontinuous linear time that can return us to the sounds and words of a lecture, event, or quiet moment of somber reflection. It is a document to the whispers of who we are. This practice reflects all who take up the process; as educators, we not only enacted these practices ourselves but demonstrated them for our students’ (Modler, 2020) and hold potential open for the practices of other art educators. Reading a visual journal is transformative; the creation and messages within hold value for not only the creator but also for those who engage with the work.

ARTIST-THEORISTS WE WISH TO THINK WITH AND THE BACKPACK IN POST-STUDIO PRACTICE

The artist who most inspires us is the photographer and visual journalist Dan Eldon. The seventeen visual journals he produced in the 22 years of his life is a plethora of work that is in a compendium edited by his mother, *The Journey is the Destination* (Eldon, 1997). Eldon's visual journal practice was highly influenced by the work of photographer and visual journalist, Peter Beard, who is known for documenting the devastation poachers propagated across Africa (Beard, 1963). The look of Beard's work, and their mutual connection to the African continent, resonates in the pages of Eldon's journals. Both Beard and Eldon held a post-studio practice across their photography and journaling practices. The making of their ready-mades emerged from the context in which they lived. For example, while working for Reuters in Mogadishu, Eldon would take photos on the streets and then develop film in a hotel bathroom by night. Beard had a visual journal practice that lasted longer than Eldon's and often relates to the famous company that he kept. Beard ran with the likes of Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Mick Jagger, Andy Warhol, and was a known collaborator of Francis Bacon. We cannot help but admire the elaborate, well-crafted, and well-built visual journals from the ready-mades that were displayed in the short biopic by Jason Russell discussing Eldon's work (2013) where he says: "Since the beginning of us, we were recording things about ourselves that we wanted to last. Cave paintings turned to alphabets, alphabets to sentences, and soon sentences became memoirs. We started [visual] journaling things about ourselves. Personal history books [that are] written for no one that accidentally reveals something about everyone. "(0:00-0:35) When an artist like Russell speaks of the intimate within Eldon's work, something revealing within the visual journal becomes crucial for others.

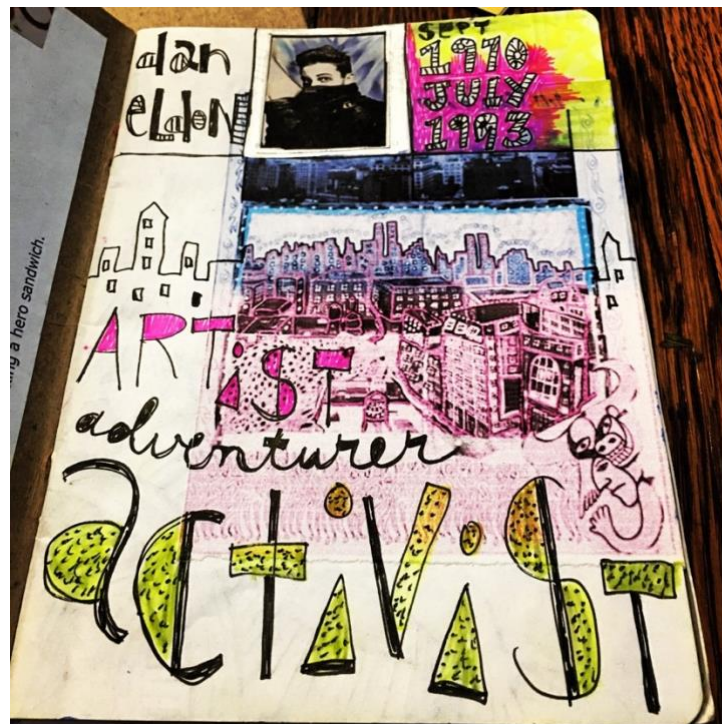


Figure 6: Visual Journal Page - Dan Eldon

Considering Eldon and Beard's work, the visual journal is not dependent on an immobile place for creation. The backpack functions as a mobile space where the tools and journal are stored, as a holding place for our paints, pens, scissors, glue, and mobile phone. Just as the visual journal replaces the studio as the site of production, the backpack is a stand-in for the storage space in this post-studio practice. The backpack is a transgressive cornucopia of supplies we build to allow for what we desire within our studio no matter where we find ourselves. Over the time of its construction and wear, the visual journal's agency reflects our embodiment in action (Grosz, 1994; Snowber, 2012). When not in the studio, we must make choices and set limitations for our work and process. We do not put things on hold because supplies are not available; instead, we learn to 'make do.' In this act, we sometimes make a substitution that can create a problematic manifestation, but because of the visual journal's post-studio nature, we figure out what to do with what is on hand. Working with limitations, such as limited supplies can expand an artist's skills. The post-studio visual journal attests to this because the materials in the backpack are limited.



Figure 7: Backpack as Cornucopia

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EDUCATIONAL AND INTEGRATIVE CONNECTIONS

It is freshman drawing class, and David is at the beginning of his university studies. The professor enters, takes a look around, then turns and leaves the room, and David is perplexed. The professor re-enters and proclaimed that he needed to check the number on the studio to be sure he was in the right place because there was no way there were this many artists. Welcome to art school! As the class progresses, an assignment is introduced, and students are directed to purchase a 11X14 inch sketchbook and produce fifty drawings for review at mid-term. The drawings should document the materials, techniques and subject matter addressed in class during the first half of the semester. Mid-term arrives, and David is in the studio the night before the critique feverishly producing the fifty drawings needed for tomorrow's review. He uses a variety of drawing materials and reflects on the concepts covered in class. Counting the pages until there are fifty drawings exactly, David retires to his residence hall, confident he has accomplished the assigned task. But has he? In hindsight, the author is confident that the goal of the sketchbook assignment was to instill a vigorous work ethic and dynamic artistic behaviours. But has it? Not really. Why did this happen? As a student straight out of high school, it comes as no surprise that David saw the assignment as just another thing he had to do for his teacher, not an activity to encourage the development of daily artistic practice. In its conventional use, because it is a teacher-directed activity, the traditional sketchbook tends to fail in producing the desired outcome. However, the authors argue that where the sketchbook fails, the visual journal succeeds. The approach that we promote is artist directed, develops a place where images and words merge, and personal meaning-making thrives.



Figure 8: Sam's Installation Space at UBC

Often art educators use overly prescribed assignments for work within the sketchbook, and their thinking starts with a preoccupation with standards and outcomes instead of with their student's artistic behaviours. This pedagogical approach honours the product over the process as the means for

summatively assessing the work. They see the work as a means to an end rather than a process to engage. Taking a (TAB) Teaching for Artistic Behaviors (Douglas & Jaquith, 2018)) approach would offer a pedagogy for engaging teaching and learning. A choice-based approach allows for the visual journal to become a component of the student's artistic practice that can be mobile across contexts allowing for multiple formative assessment strategies to be realised through this single tool. Through T.A.B., students are given agency and ownership over their learning and its direction, "...They practice coming up with art problems to solve, asking questions and seeing possibilities in the world around them. Students learn to persevere through difficulties as well as to trust themselves and their judgment while simultaneously becoming self-directed, and organised." (Douglas & Jaquith, 2019) This pedagogy offers another possibility, one which recognises the importance of studio habits (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2015) where the visual journal becomes a tool for the arts education classroom as more than a recipe for a product of the assembly line.



Figure 9: Artists on Green Field

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Through our observations and interviews, we have noticed that artists think through their practices, many keep some form of visual journal, and these documents are often in review while other work progresses. As post-intentional phenomenological researchers, we want to thoroughly consider our assumptions of the visual journal and acknowledge them as well as the productions that arise over time (Vagle, 2018). Many artists consider the journal process as an act of building, allowing the journal to be a form of accumulated action and a record of purposeful interaction with the world. The visual journal is both place and space where artists encourage themselves and each other to experiment with materials, techniques, and ideas. Included within this process of building is a reconstruction, in that the visual journal is susceptible to damage and how its pages may become torn, spilled upon, and bindings broken all these become hallmarks of this practices inherent frailty due to daily use. The mending of the well-travelled page, the repairing of the split binding all become an act of care for this object and part of the multiplicity within this practice. The practices we speak of are not siloed within arts education as many other disciplines make use of visual journals, including engineers, illustrators, musicians, or scientists. Alternatively, the works of the *1000 Journals Project* (Someguy, 2007), *Sketchbook Skool* (Gregory & Koosje, 2017), *tet[R]ad: Draw and Play Here* (Modler & Peck, 2012), or *The Sketchbook Project* (Peterman, 2006) help to build communities of artists through the visual journal.

As art educators, our students are expected to keep a visual journal for each course. All students perform a self-assessment, receive a peer and instructor assessment of the work evidenced. The authors consider the visual journal process an act of building; we view it as very different from writing a book because it is the practice of developing a 'place' not a 'thing.' The building process is also different from the act of reading which tends to be linear. We advocate a non-linear approach that leads to lines of inquiry which "remain dynamic, fluid, and in constant motion" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Within the inquiry for each course, the visual journal is considered the 'notebook', so students use it as a document for all research. The visual journal is also the place where students are encouraged to explore their artmaking and experiment with materials and techniques; use what they are learning in class (and in other classes) to create pages of personal interest. Similar to the findings of pedagogical tools in the photo-story study conducted by Vagle, Clements, and Coffee (2016), the visual journal offers "...glimpses of how the phenomenon is tentatively and momentarily lived, and equally important is that the visual and linguistic access to the phenomenon deepen[s] what might be thinkable and possible to learn about the phenomenon. In other words, the gathering tool was generative." (Vagle, 2018). The visual journal works in a generative mode for the artist, researcher, and teacher in that it encourages and allows the book to take the shape of accumulated action, a record of sincere contact with the world, an inquiry into what one knows, does and makes. The authors always have examples available upon student request, and some specific artists/themes are discussed in the art studio classroom. The visual journal practices we champion is different from those of the conventional sketchbook and is intended to be artist directed. Students are consistently reminded to take the initiative to engage in the space, permit themselves to experiment, take ownership of their studio practice and have fun with it!



Figure 10: Hand at Work

CONCLUSION

In the early stages of this article, the productions often caused us to be entangled in their rhizomatic nature as lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) which tended to evolve in imaginative mutations rather than stick to a known path. As we take our next steps, we plan to investigate the possibilities that swarm around artists and teachers analysing their current studio practices and how a post-studio expansion to their work can open new lines of inquiry. A fully integrated visual journal practice that can be used for interdisciplinary approaches, cross-curricular connections and content integration may be what a post-studio teaching practice can become. As researchers, we experienced the multiplicities enacted within productions as we reviewed our observations, post-reflections, and interviews and began to think with theory. In this context of the visual journal because we carry the backpack, we carry the place where work happens. We determine the location, which is not limited to

a place or space; instead, the studio is centralised by the artist. The visual journal wears our experiments as manifested leftovers, and they become evidence of the productions in-process. The work within the visual journal post-studio practice becomes both conceptual and physical in practice. We are asking for readers to internalise this visual journal post-studio practise as a way to be with the manifesting production of the post-studio visual journal phenomena (Vagle, 2018). The practices of the visual journal produce surprise that keeps the interest inherent in the challenge of its actions and trials from the materials within it. Manifestations such as the post-studio visual journal process, the lived experience provided in the making of the visual journal rather than the object itself.; the employment of the mobility provided through the backpack, accessibility of its site-responsive approach, and alongside well-established techniques within the visual journal are produced from the existing inherent internalising of these manifestations. Engaging in, creating, and keeping a visual journal reflects the world lived through as a phenomenon through its form as a sculpture in process.

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