



Documenting the Moment Using Illustrated Journals as a Teaching Tool in Undergraduate Education



view across the wetland up to aspen
lac du bois rd, km 13-14, may 1, 2005

Even now, this late in the day, a blank sheet of paper holds the greatest excitement there is for me—more promising than a silver cloud, and prettier than a red wagon.”

E.B. White

Lyn Baldwin

Introduction

Illustrated journals ask the author to attend to the moment and describe the world within which they live. Using journals to transcribe the days' events has deep roots in our culture; however, the nature of journals varies tremendously both in content and medium. Reflective journals kept by such authors as Anaïs Nin focus largely on an internal emotional dialogue while informative journals kept by early North American explorers such as David Thompson were typically travelogues, describing the country, natural history and/or people encountered. The mode of transcription may also vary from a strict reliance on text to a series of visual images with little text other than titles and dates. The author and artist, Hannah Hinchman, describes journals that are able to capture both the internal and external landscapes as resonant journals. On both a personal and pedagogical level, I am captivated most by resonant journals especially those that incorporate the verbal and visual.

Pedagogically, I believe one of the greatest strengths of the illustrated journals exercise is the practice we provide for students in making primary observations. Much of our scholarship depends upon our ability to make observations that are undiluted by preconceived notions. Often, however, this is a skill that must be learned. Writing an illustrated journal is also inherently an act of creation and enables students to become the active creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients of

Notes

References

The references listed below are more than mere references. This booklet is meant to provide exercises that could be used with undergraduates students—although they can be readily adapted to students of all sorts. Many of the exercises included in this book have been developed by artists far more skilled than I in journaling and it is important to acknowledge my deep debt to all of these authors.

Goldberg, N. 1986. *Writing down the bones*. Shambala Publications, Inc. Boston, Massachusetts.

Hinchman, H. 1997. *A trail through leaves: the journal as a path to place*. W.W. Norton and Company. New York.

Hinchman, H. 1991. *A life in hand: creating the Illuminated Journal*. Gibbs Smith Publisher. Layton, Utah.

Kant, D. 2003. *Art Escapes*. North Light Books. Cincinnati, Ohio.

Leslie, C.W. 1980. *Nature drawing: a tool for learning*. Prentice Hall Press. New York.

Lincoln, A. 1995. *Abraham Lincoln's introduction to handwriting and calligraphy*. Whiz Bang Graphics. Brookville, Ohio.

information. But why ask our students to both write and draw? The verbal and the visual are different ways of “knowing.” It’s more demanding for my students, but it also accommodates different learning styles. Finally, illustrated journals allow students an opportunity for creativity within the structured confines of a university course.

As a science instructor, I ask my botany students to keep primarily “informative” journals as part of their botany laboratory. The applicability of illustrated journals will depend, of course, upon your specific teaching practice. In light of this, I have included a wide variety of exercises in this booklet. My goal is provide enough detail so that you may adapt any exercise for your students.

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Contour Drawings

Contour drawings are a wonderful way to train your mind to slow down and truly examine an object. I find the complexity of these drawings always intriguing, even though they will not often resemble the object of interest.

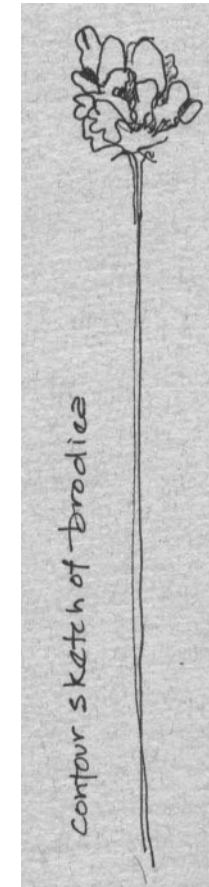
The key to this drawing exercise is to draw without looking at your subject. Position your drawing paper so that you will not be tempted to look at it. Place your pencil at the same point that your eye is looking at on the object's surface. In describing contour drawing Claire Walker Leslie writes, "Imagine your eye is an ant crawling slowly over the whole shape. Either go from right to left or left to right. Using a continuous and careful line, draw the wanderings of the ant over the contours of the object, in and out of each part your eye follows." *Do not lift your pencil from the paper and do not cheat by looking.*

acknowledge the creativity and aesthetic quality of the work that students have turned in over the last two years. To relieve my students' anxiety, I provide the grading rubric (listed below) as part of the introduction to this exercise.

Category	Marks possible
Completeness/Organization	6
All specimens diagrammed and labeled	
Observations "truthful"	
Titles	
Table of Content	
Page Numbers	
Calibration Table	
Level of engagement	3
Independent observations/questions	
Synthesis (compare/contrast specimens)	
Value as reference	
Integration with lecture material	
Use of references other than lab/lecture/textbook	
Aesthetics	1
Is it appealing/interesting/captivating?	

Evaluation of Illustrated Journals

The use of illustrated journals in courses other than visual art courses inevitably begs the question of student evaluation. When I introduced illustrated journals into my botany labs, grades were moments of anxiety for both myself and my students. As a scientist, I did not feel equipped to evaluate the artistic merit of my student's work and my students worried that "art" should not be part of a science course. In order to develop a grading rubric, it was necessary to clearly articulate the goals of this exercise. In my courses, the goal of the illustrated journal is two fold: (1) I want students to practice make primary observations of the natural world and (2) I want students to write a synthetic reference book of the material that they learn in the laboratory of my courses. As a scientist, I can evaluate the quality of the observations my students have made in their journals. Drawings and/or diagrams do not need to be artistic to clearly represent student observations. I can also evaluate the value as a reference that their illustrated journal will provide based on qualities such as organization, completeness, synthetic comparisons, as well the inclusion of material from other sources. While the majority of the grade results from the quality of observations and the reference quality of the journal, I do



Gesture drawings

This is the art of the rough sketch and can vary from 5 seconds to 1 minute. Fast continuous lines are used and gesture drawings are often preliminary drawings for longer works. The point here is to capture the essence of your object quickly. Any object, even stationary objects, has a sense of movement that can be captured. Focus on the posture of an object or if you're drawing a landscape, focus on the lights and darks. Even if you're drawing something close, imagine what could be captured if you were one hundred metres away. What could be captured if you were 30 metres away? It often helps if you hold your pencil/pen loosely and use your entire arm to draw rather than just the muscles in your wrist. When travelling, I like to complete sketches in a contained box and then add color later.

Lettering

Most of us have a foundation hand that is the writing we most often use. Lettering may be as distinctive as individual personalities; however especially pleasing lettering is characterized by a consistent slant and height of the “waist” of each letter. I once spent the odd moments of a stressful period in my life completing the lessons in Abraham Lincoln's Introduction to Handwriting and Calligraphy and found it worthwhile, especially as a soothing exercise in elegance.

Not only can we use blocks of writing to create a visual shape on the page, but we can change the shape of letters to complement or contrast with the subject at hand. The next time you're in a meeting, take notes focusing on the shapes of each letter. First, work to make each letter as round as possible, paying particular attention to the roundness of the letters: a, b, c, d, e, g, q, o, and p. Now stretch all letters, elongating the ascenders and descenders, so that the width between each line of text increases. Note that the impact of lettering will vary with different writing tools, but play with each effect.

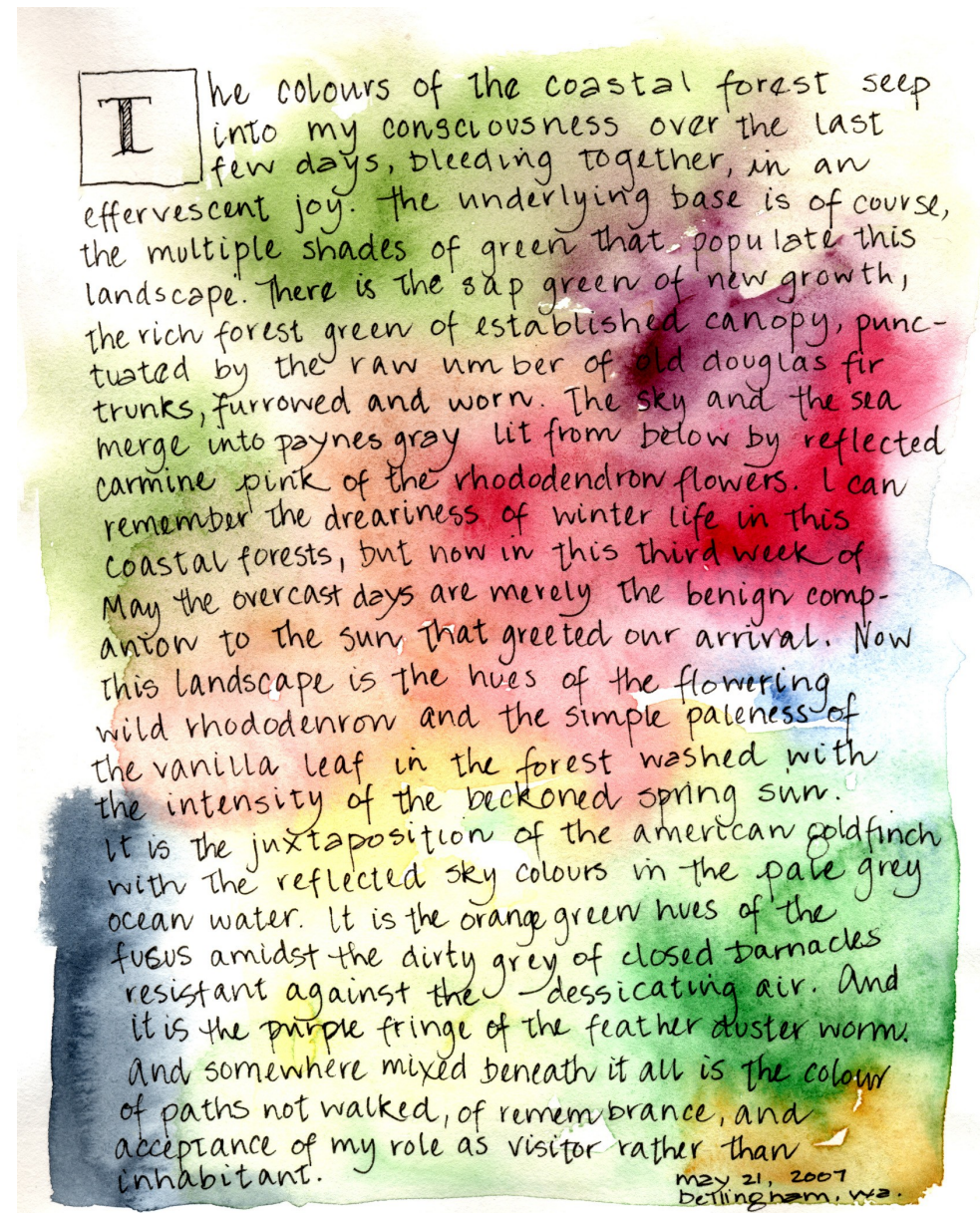
When I have used illustrated journals in my courses, I do not explicitly teach page design; yet inevitably students come to me with questions about design. My interest most often returns to those pages that arose through an organic playfulness arising between the subject, myself and the tools that I am using. However, over the years I have learned to pay attention (or sometimes disregard completely) the following aspects of page design:

1. **Density versus airiness:** Airiness can be conveyed using either lots of white space or very fine tools. In contrast, a dense page can occur when little white space occurs or through the use of heavy pens or dark colours.
2. **Frame versus window:** Borders around pages create discrete frames whereas if images go right off the page, the page acts as a window.
3. **Orientation:** Horizontal and vertical text are conventions, not rules. We can make a choice to organize images and text on a grid, or we can make the text flow organically around the images.
4. **Contrast:** Contrast can occur through the use of either different text sizes and fonts or through juxtaposing the verbal and the visual. Text may surround an image or could be contained within an overall image.



Maps

Maps incorporate a spatial understanding of our world. I find that I spend most of my time operating on a verbal level—telling stories. Drawing maps provides another viewpoint and changes my perspective. We tend to think of maps as encompassing large distances, but I make maps both large and small. A map of my yard drawn from memory highlights what sections I care about and what sections I walk past unseeing most days. Asking students to map the vegetation within a series of gullies almost immediately raises questions about the underlying geology. While mapping, I find it helpful to create detailed insets of particular regions, while other sections are completed only in broad outlines. What does a map of the surface of my desk tell me about how I organize my day? If I imagined myself in the body of my Labrador Retriever, what map would I create for my yard, for Petersen Creek Park?

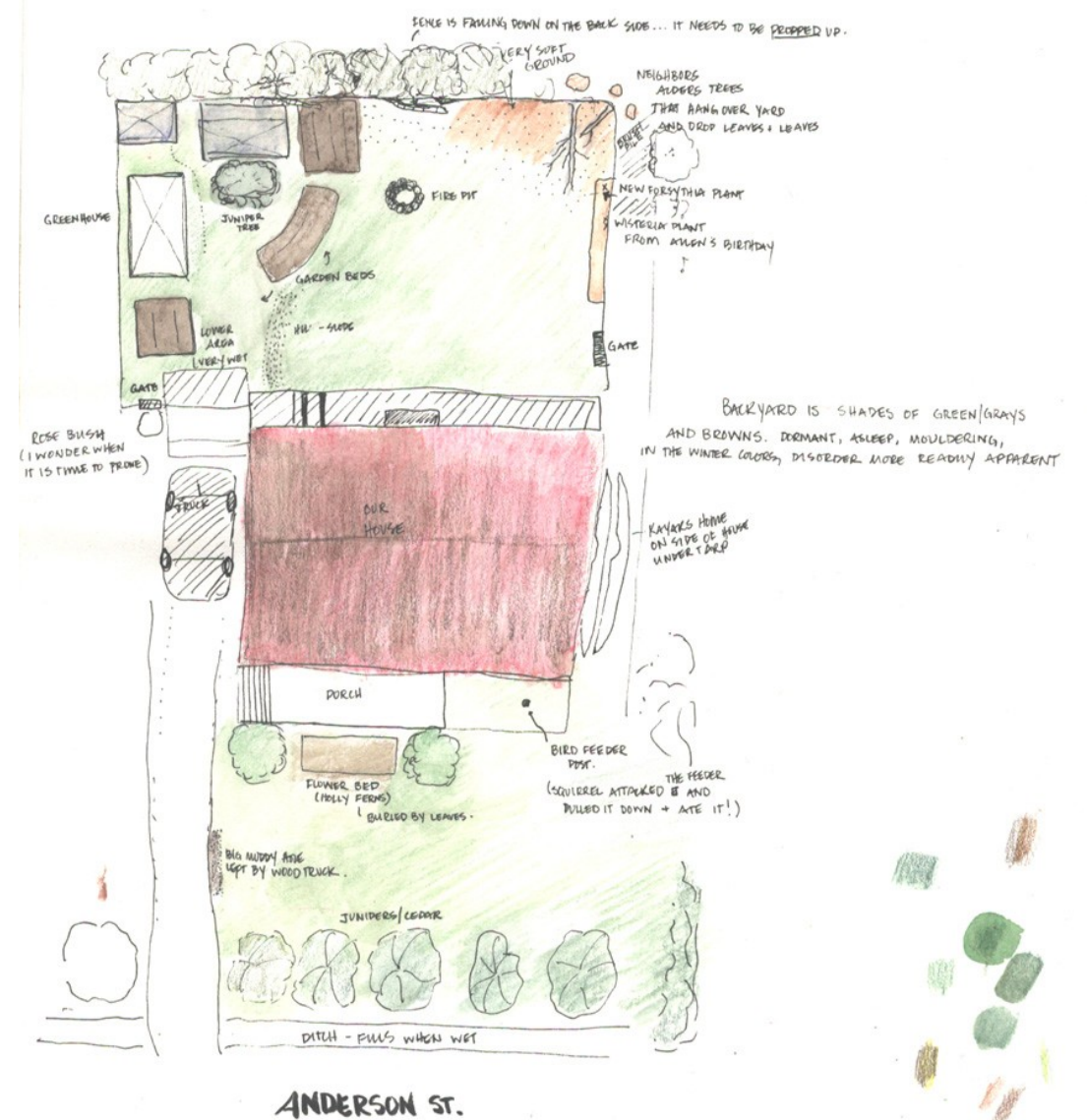


The colours of the coastal forest seep into my consciousness over the last few days, bleeding together, in an effervescent joy. The underlying base is of course, the multiple shades of green that populate this landscape. There is the sap green of new growth, the rich forest green of established canopy, punctuated by the raw umber of old douglas fir trunks, furrowed and worn. The sky and the sea merge into paynes gray lit from below by reflected carmine pink of the rhododendron flowers. I can remember the dreariness of winter life in this coastal forests, but now in this third week of May the overcast days are merely the benign companion to the sun that greeted our arrival. Now this landscape is the hues of the flowering wild rhododendron and the simple paleness of the vanilla leaf in the forest washed with the intensity of the beckoned spring sun. It is the juxtaposition of the american goldfinch with the reflected sky colours in the pale grey ocean water. It is the orange green hues of the fucus amidst the dirty grey of closed barnacles resistant against the dessicating air. And it is the purple fringe of the feather duster worm. And somewhere mixed beneath it all is the colour of paths not walked, of remembrance, and acceptance of my role as visitor rather than inhabitant.

May 21, 2007
Bellingham, WA.

Paint, then Draw or Write

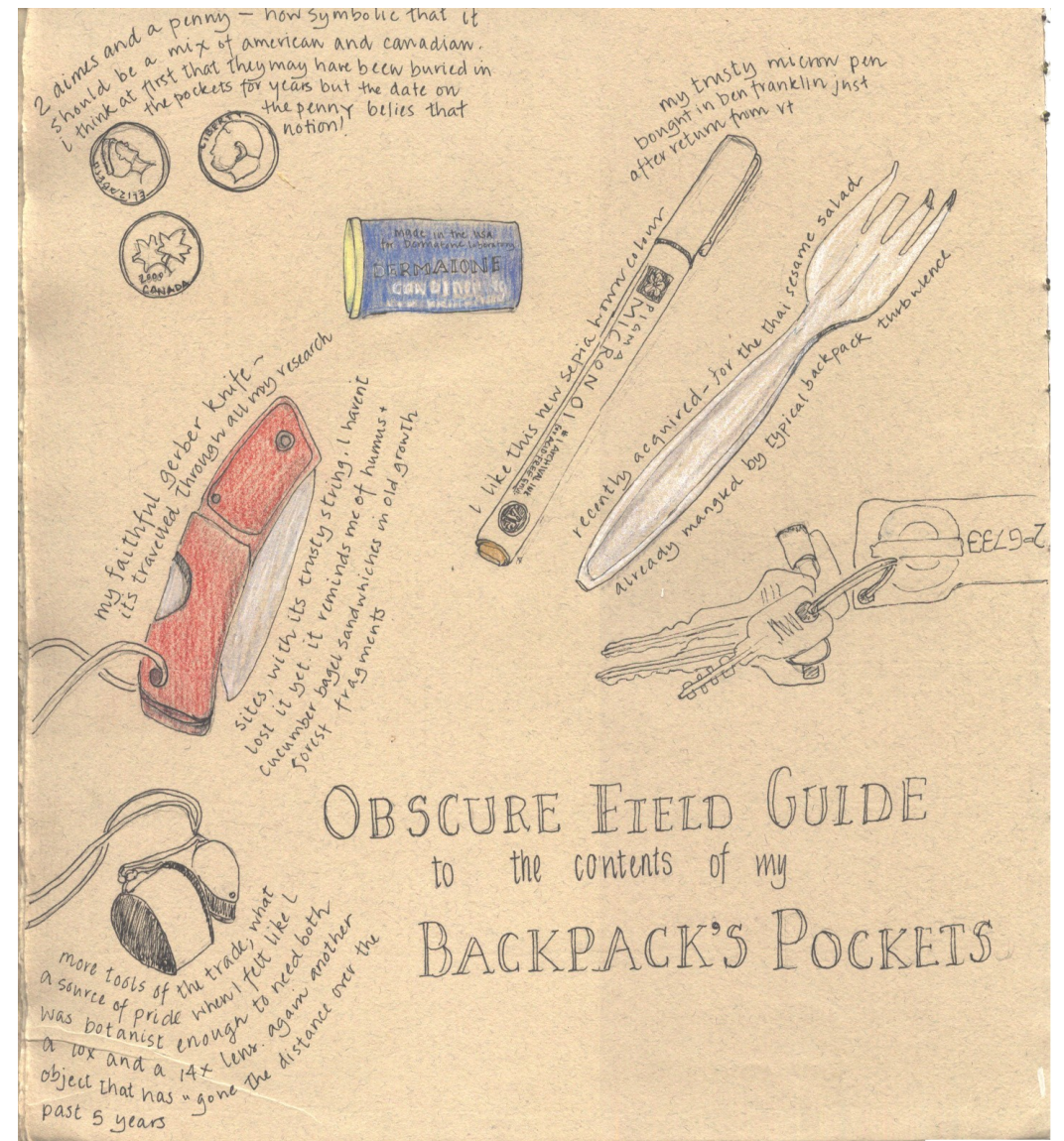
Use the impressions of colour to serve as a background for a longer work—whether it be verbal or visual. I use this when the colors of a room or a landscape affect me emotionally, but I don't have time to sort out why or how. Focusing on the colours first may also allow me a chance to articulate precisely what it is I want to capture. This also allows you to capture the importance of light and colour before the light changes.



Sound Tapestry

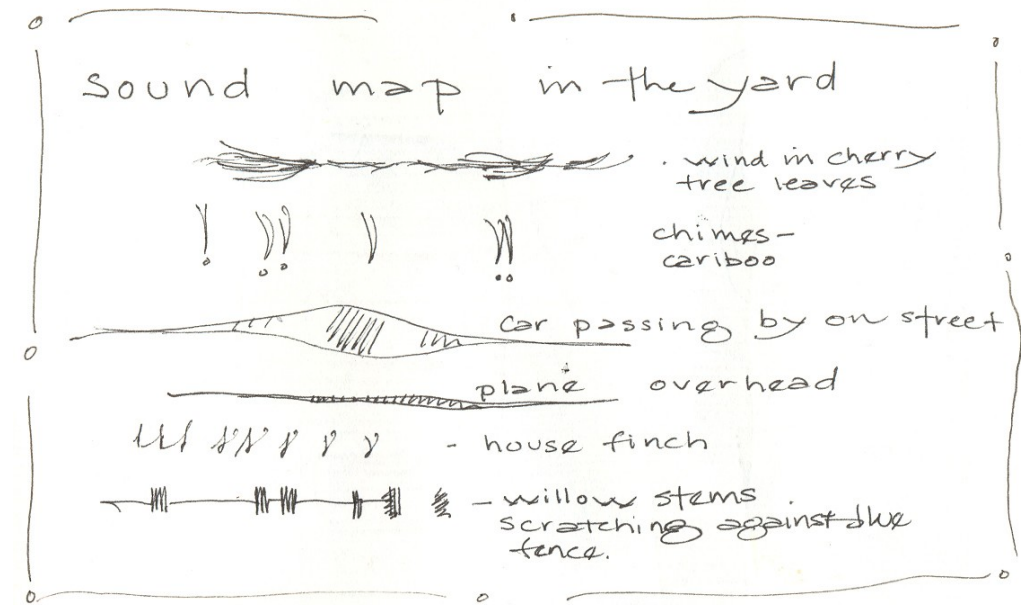
We can also document the moment by mapping senses other than sight. Close your eyes and listen. Rarely are we in a completely silent space. Now focus on one sound and translate that sound into an image.

Draw that sound, listen for a new sound, draw again. I have a difficult time remembering sounds unless I have either a verbal mnemonic or a visual reminder of it. The very act of translating a sound into an image forces me to pay attention and describes a part of my environment that I am more than capable of ignoring.



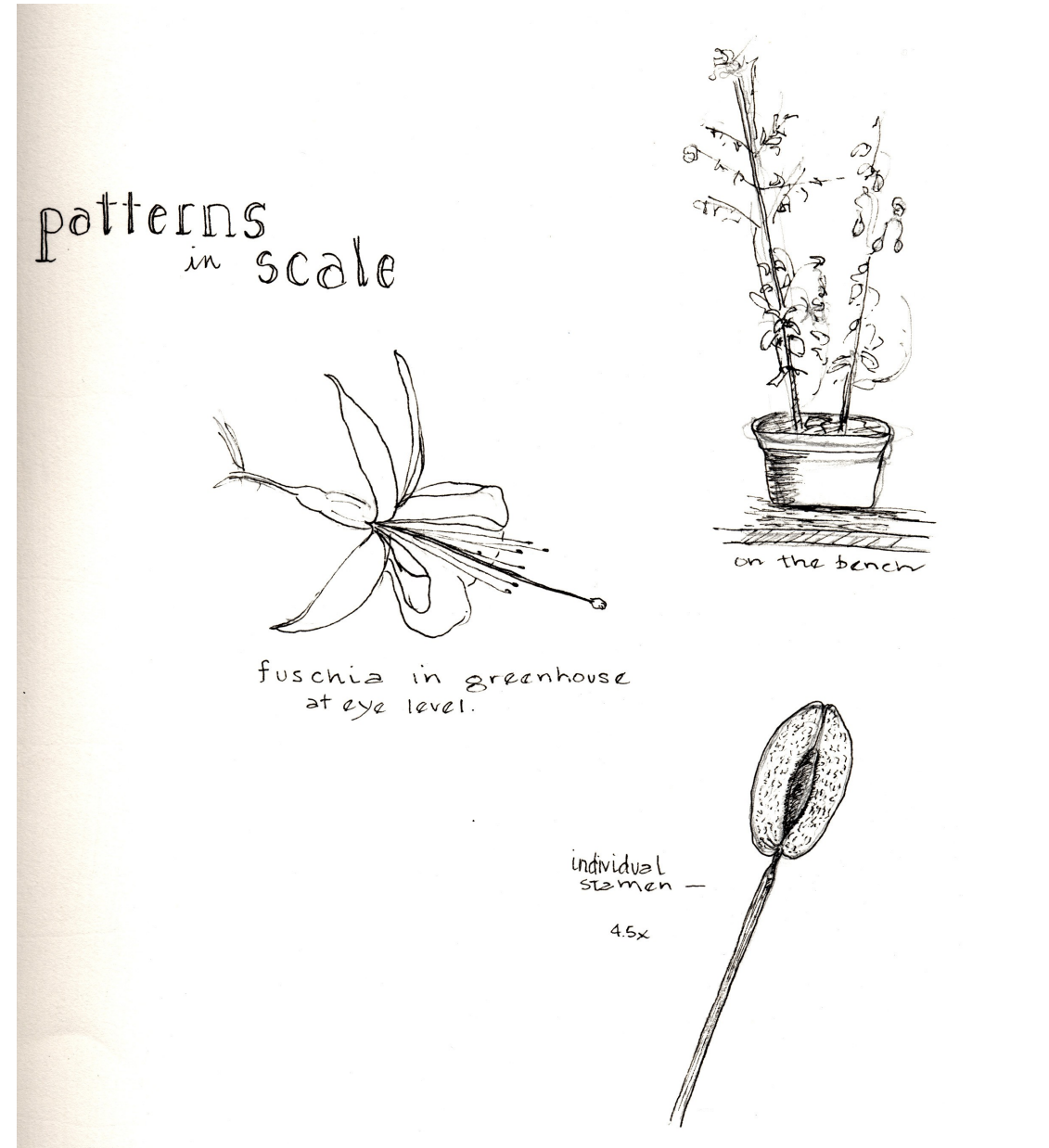
Field Guides

Many of us are familiar with guides to local plants or birds, but there is no rule dictating the subject of field guides. I find it instructive to make field guides to the contents of my pockets or my backpack, to my desktop. An obscure field guide defines what is important by describing what you have dragged along with you as you go throughout your day. What would the contents of a doctor's white coat look like? The pocket of a policewoman's jacket? While I do not believe we are our possessions, they may have much to tell us about the priorities in our own life, if we are willing to listen.



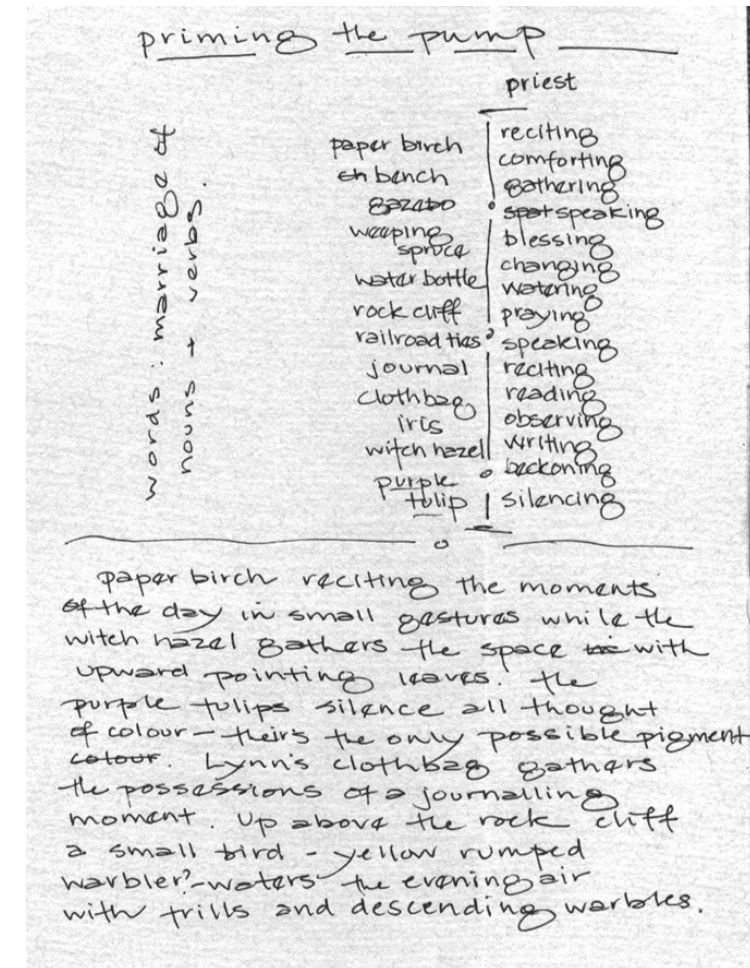
Odd Couples

How to describe the moment in words? Often my writing falls into old habits, using language that is tired and pedestrian, with safe words used and reused. Worse, if I'm not attentive, my journal page may fall victim to a litany of "beautifuls," "terribles," or "interesting." I find that the moment is best described in the specific, the detail. Much of the energy of any sentence is carried in the verb. In her book, Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg provides an exercise to heighten our awareness of verbs and how we use them. Take one page of your journal and fold it towards you. On the side of the fold facing you, write a list of 10 nouns—objects you see around you or that you have been thinking about. Now think of an occupation, a doctor, a lawyer, a priest. Flip the page over and in the space adjoining to your first list, make a list of 10-15 verbs that describe the type of activities that a person in your chosen profession might do in a day. Now open the fold and join any noun with any verb and finish the sentence, adapting the tense if need be. Keep going, describe the place or thing in a paragraph using your two lists as inspiration.



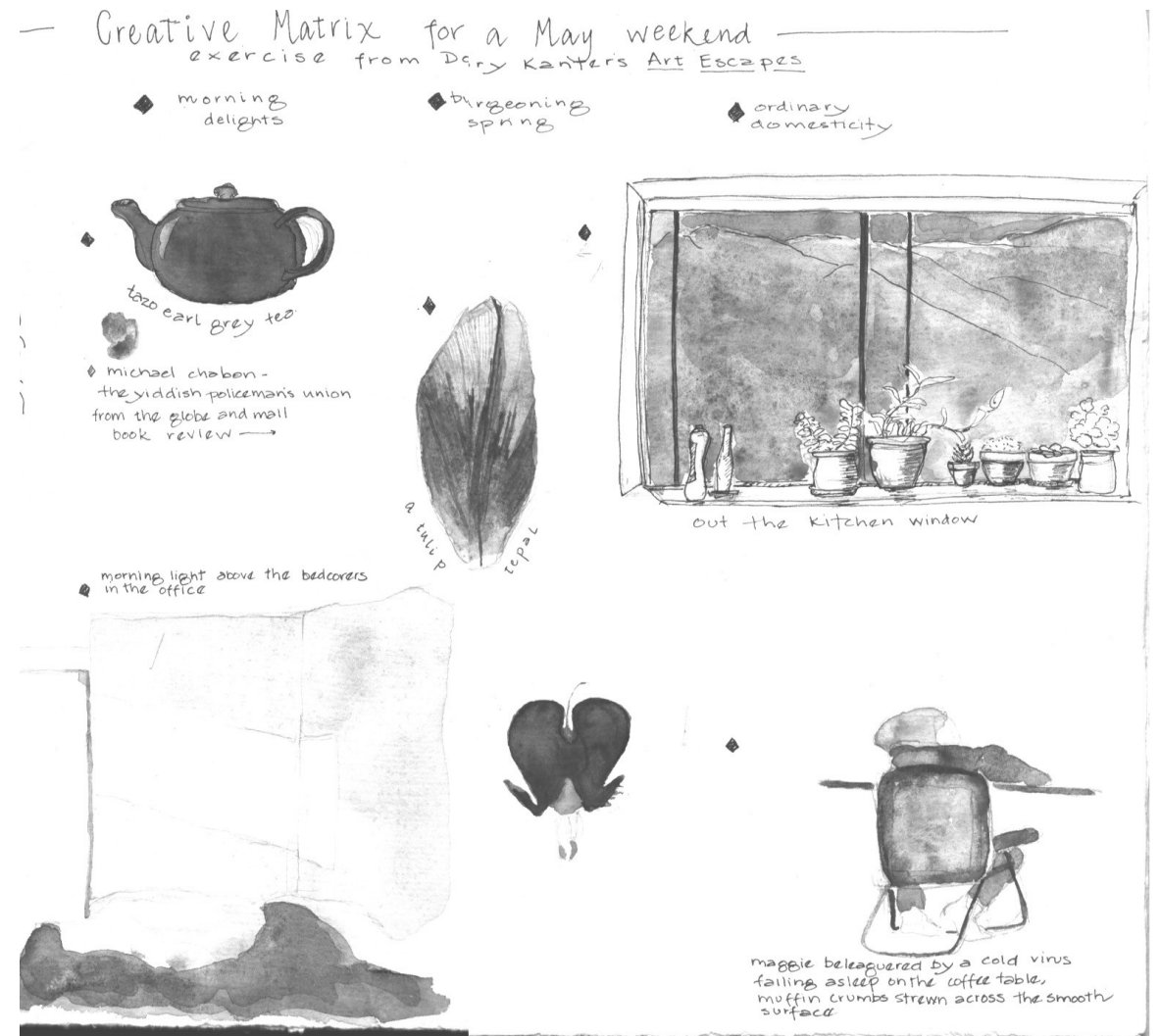
Patterns in Scale

As humans, we exist within a certain scale—most of us are between 1.5 and 2 m tall, and we tend to pay attention to patterns that occur at a similar spatial scale. Switching your perspective to larger or smaller scales can inform our understanding of that object. Map-makers use defined scales—usually a large-scale map depicts a small geographic area in great detail while a small scale map depicts a large geographic area in much less detail. Find one object that interests you. Draw it in the middle of a journal page at the scale that feels the most manageable. Now above and below your first sketch, use a larger scale and a smaller scale to view the same object. How does this affect your perception of the object? Does scale matter?



Lists

Our lives are built from a series of events ranging from mundane to the momentous. While we often have photo albums to document the momentous, the ordinary moments where we take the garbage out back, finish putting the dishes away, or settle into an overheated vehicle before driving home, are quickly lost from our consciousness. Yet attention to the mundane highlights the complexity of our lives and provides an immediacy that is otherwise lacking. Both Hannah Hinchman and Natalie Goldberg advocate the use of lists. The lists we include may vary from today's shopping list to challenges of the upcoming year. Try making a list of the ordinary events encompassed in your commute to school today. Don't focus on place names or directions, focus on the little moments. Capture the elderly neighbour with his worn face pressed into the violet fall of lilac flowers. Itemize the great cafes in your town and describe the most comfortable place to sit (why?) and/or the best pastry in each. Describe the course of your life in 5 different chapter headings. Now expand it to 10 chapter headings.



Creative Mosaic

This exercise, taken from Dory Kant's book, Art Escapes, works best to capture ephemeral fleeting moments and may be completed over a span of time (an afternoon workshop, a weekend, a week vacation). You will create a matrix of items that you are interested in that occur within different time periods. Recently I made a creative matrix over the weekend and my columns were entitled Morning Delights, Burgeoning Spring, and Ordinary Domesticity. Other categories could include Common Dilemmas, Making Connections, Flora and Fauna, Cafes of Note, Crossing Boundaries. This exercise allows you to make a shorthand manuscript of the experience you are wishing to describe

chores for thurs day, august 30

- ✓ photocopy field forms
- ✓ organize field gear
- ✓ take notebook to lee
- ✓ renew library card
- ✓ make food list
- ✓ boots for kim

work through calendar

- ✓ take lists CDs for Wilf

field vests ✓

WILF's book recommendation:
alien invasion
robert derine

chores for friday, aug 31

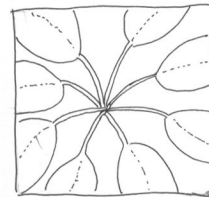
- ✓ buy book at bookstore
- ✓ pick up check at finance

Poem Kernel

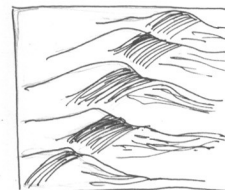
What if I have nothing to write about? What if nothing in the landscape inspires a writing momentum. I have often used the first line of poems as a kernel of inspiration. Take a book of your favourite poetry, open it to a page at random and rewrite its first line. Keep going. Write until you have nothing left to say.



monochrome purple accentuated with black lines
sensuous lines
pattern from wrapping paper

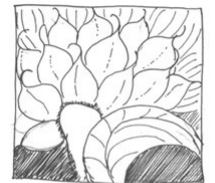


shape defined by negative space.

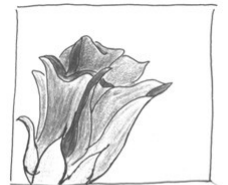


The water on d. J. Annet's new book. more repeated patterns but this time fading into light.

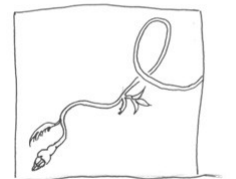
repeated patterns on the underside of the sunflower flower head. also the contrast between the rounded bracts and the pointy extensions.



contrasting shades (lines) of the same colour. after looking at patterns, I am also entranced by the chaotic sense of rhythm.



The actively searching linear line cuts through negative space.



Treasure Hunts

Beauty captivates nearly all of us. We may remark that a flower or a person is beautiful, but rarely articulate exactly what has captured our eye. Make six 2 x 2 in boxes on a journal page and go out seeking beauty. If a flower calls out to you, focus not on the entire flower, but on the aspect of the flower itself that defines its beauty. It may be the overlapping shingles on the underside of the flower head, it may be the creation of the "negative space" defined by the winding stem of a pea vine. Beside each box, articulate the beauty in words.

A
E
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T
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C

treasure
hunt

from the studio
out into the
backyard garden

••• →

"In Greece, a long time ago an old couple opened their door..." - Mary Oliver
Letting in the baking sunshine, letting in the sweet sensory
surprises of the day. A world to turn to, open and unafraid,
never fails to be a gift a delight, a treasure. I opened the door
this morning to vivid scarlet hues leaping up the eastern sky.
Perra and Shasta were aquiver with their eagerness to ~~go~~
smell the tastings left by the deer who come to forage on
the lower flanks of the grass-covered hills. Dried grasses
bristled at my pant legs as I followed the scampering
limbs of my dogs along the trail. Crows lifted up from
the telephone lines, black silhouettes in the crowning sky.
My morning sojourn is not ~~one~~ ^{an} exploration of new terrain,
I have walked this path far too often. It is instead a
wandering among the familiar, a journey made all too bittersweet
by the fading of summer's glory.

Event Maps

It is hard to underestimate the difficulty of making observations that are uncoloured by preconceived ideas or knowledge. One of the best exercises to promote authentic observation was developed by Hannah Hinchman and is described in her book, A Trail Through Leaves:

“...things simply “being themselves” can constitute an event, if we are awake to them. They are among the everyday miracles we have nearly ceased to see. A slight perceptual shift transforms the inert to the animate, invests the simplest situations with drama, or comedy, or a more coherent order...”

An event map is a simple mixing of words, images and symbols on a page, but it achieves things that drawing alone, or writing alone, seem to fall short of. An event map can be more or less complex in its attention to landforms, but usually notes, or represents with illustrations or invented map devices, changes in altitude, terrain underfoot, stream crossings, basic vegetation patterns, and basic geology...An event map won't help you find your way back to a place, because it isn't drawn to scale, and its parts don't have to remain in proportion to each other. If I'm snared in a rich web of events alongside the stream, for example, that section of the map enlarges itself and becomes denser.

An Event Map takes shape around a wandering line that mirrors your path, whether purposeful or erratic. Along it will appear symbols that mark the approximate site of an event, with at least a few words indicating what has happened or is happening. As maps go, it's more like the fifteenth-century mappa mundi, produced in the early stages of world exploration, heavily illustrated with detailed insets of particular regions. Its purpose is to create a trail of encounters as you, the explorer, move through a particular place, at a particular moment, asking “What's going on here?”

