



Creative by Nature Art

Doodling

The Joy of Spontaneous Art



LISA LIPSETT

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"We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community. The community itself and each of its members has ultimately a wild component, a creative spontaneity that is its deepest reality, its most profound mystery." - Thomas Berry

One day while I walked home along the back roads of my island home I noticed nature's doodles in the bark of trees, on blades of grass, in the dirt, on leaves. Even the cracks in the paved portion of my route had a doodling quality to them. The sheer number of these creations reminded me of a capacity we share with nature - spontaneous creativity.

This article is a brief celebration of this shared capacity and how utilizing it not only brings joy to our lives but strengthens our relationship to the living earth. Each time we create with no plan, we spark a powerful shift to feeling, intuition and sensation that puts us in intimate relationship with self and Earth. We access our inherent capacity for creativity and connection while we feel more whole as wild aspects of self jump into awareness and onto the page.

Practices that support this shift can be so helpful. To better understand the power of spontaneous drawing and painting, educator and psychoanalyst Marion Milner (1957) chronicled her personal journey to knowing self and the world through spontaneous expressive art, or what she termed free drawing. She titled her book *On Not Being Able to Paint* and used the pen name Joanna Field as hers was a deeply personal journey and ultimately stood in sharp contrast to educational and analytic values at the time. She took it upon herself to make a drawing or painting each time she felt a strong emotion or simply felt the need to create. She aptly described her experience of a shift to a state of more complete awareness, each time she created:

"When painting ... there occurred ... a fusion into a never-before-known wholeness; not only were the object and oneself no longer felt to be separate, but neither were thought and sensation and feeling and action."

She concludes: "So what the artist ... is doing, fundamentally, is not recreating in the sense of making again what has been lost (although he is doing this), but creating what is, because he is creating the power to perceive it. By continually breaking up the established familiar patterns (familiar in his particular culture and time in history) of logical common sense divisions of me-not-me, he really is creating "nature", including human nature."

The more we are able to nurture our own spontaneity, the more sustainable and ecologically sound our thoughts, actions and feelings become. We learn to trust what comes spontaneously as having a kind of natural connected intelligence of its own. Further, by awakening our spon-



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Doodle leaves

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taneous nature we better align with other creatures in the moment and access our capacity to empathize. Empathy, compassion for all life, including ourselves is about feeling another's feelings, seeing through another's eyes, truly experiencing another without fear of losing self.

According to storyteller and ecophilosopher David Abram we are born wired to empathize with the living earth. "We have such potentially grand powers for empathy and communication, since there is something in us of every animal, and something of plants, and of stones and of seas, for we are woven of the same fabric as everything on earth, and our textures and rhythms are those of the planet itself."

Free drawing awakened Marion

Milner's creative nature. By following the core principles of creating spontaneously, it can do the same for you!

Spontaneous means *occurring or caused by natural impulse* (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, 1988). The word spontaneous is synonymous with instinctive, automatic, involuntary, uninhibited, unforced and natural (Rogets College Thesaurus, 1978).

Spontaneous art creation can take many forms including but not limited to sculpture, poetry, drawing, improvisational music, painting, dance, movement, writing, and drama. However, the medium used is secondary to the nature of the process of letting go of the analytical mind and shifting to a place where creative impulses can run free. Most exciting for me has been the discovery that spontaneous painting and drawing can be done anywhere at any time.

The backbone of spontaneous creating involves proceeding with no plan. We let what is meant to happen, take place as it shall. In its purest form this is a challenge because the analytical habit of planning is deeply engrained.

"It is perhaps the most universal problem ... how to replace in us the will to form with the will to accept natural form." Wu Kuang-Ming

This is where closing your eyes, using your non-dominant hand, and using both hands, along with regular practice helps smooth the way to a shift from thinking to feeling, sensing and intuiting. We can also spontaneously create with dreams, body sensations, plants, animals, our sixth sense, texture, sounds, etc. In these instances, I often talk of drawing and painting as a way of tracking an experience but we can also riff with these experiences, like we



Top: Jeans doodle

Above: Phone doodle

are in one big improvisational dance.

In fact, spontaneous drawing looks and feels suspiciously like doodling. Yes doodling, that much maligned free-form drawing expression you might find yourself doing on a restaurant napkin, or in my daughter's case, on the leg of her jeans.

When she was seven, my daughter said she was double minded. She can remember every detail of a story being read to her while she draws, cuts paper or sews. She says it is harder for her to concentrate if her hands are not engaged in something creative.

When I was a child, doodling didn't really get the credit it deserves. "Stop doodling and do your Math", my grade school teacher would cry out. Doodling

was seen as dawdling, meandering without focus or purpose, wasting time, getting nothing done. I still like to doodle. I like to dream on the page, go with no plan, not apply myself and play with line and colour with a sleepy mind, with no particular direction. Somehow, when I doodle while on the phone I become deeply present with the person with whom I am speaking while I also understand more about how I am feeling as I watch an image unfold. I can actually see how the dialogue feels.

There is now research to support the notion that doodling helps to awaken more of our capacity for engagement. Doodling activist Sunni Brown agrees that doodling has had a bad rap. Click below to listen to her Doodlers Unite TED talk where she puts to rest the myth of doodling being a waste of time www.ted.com/talks/sunni_brown.html. In her latest book *The Doodle Revolution*, (2012), she claims to prove that doodling can ignite your whole brain. Psychologist, Jackie Andrade, published an article in the *Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology* (February 2009) entitled: What Does Doodling Do? In it she recounts improved concentration and a 30% improvement in memory retention of participants who doodled while listening to a list of names over the phone versus those who didn't.

In conclusion, simply setting an intention to be spontaneous is a powerful, easily accessible channel for connection that makes us empathic participants in the earth story. If we pay attention to and act on what draws us in, we can spontaneously respond with a creative gesture to what nature presents to us anywhere, in any given moment. Over time, repeatedly creating spontaneously teaches us how to shift into a body-mind state that better aligns us to live in harmony with ourselves and all earth beings. We are able to feel, to perceive, to meld more fully with the world. We activate our full human capacity for connection and participation. We access a fresh way to know self and earth through our creative nature.

I invite you to try it yourself. Grab three pieces of paper and a pen, close your eyes and let your right hand run freely across the page like a wild horse. Then turn over your page, switch hands and let your left hand out to play.



End by drawing with your eyes closed using both hands at the same time. What fun! Follow where your hands lead. Truly savour this time and rest your attention on the sensations associated with the movement of your hands.

Maybe your images will look something like this.

I invite you to follow this up with a nature walk. Where do you see doodles? Where can *you* doodle today? What draws you in? Maybe it's an icy rock, sand, a car window. The possibilities are endless.

Finally here's a link to a video called *Ice Art* I made just after the Ontario ice storm last Christmas. It demonstrates that you can truly be spontaneous anywhere at any time! <http://youtu.be/NvRiaNrI6y8>

Maybe it's time to start your own spontaneous art practice. There are lots of activities to get you started in my book *Beauty Muse: Painting in Communion with Nature* (2009). To learn more, visit: www.LisaLipsett.com

Creative by Nature Art – classes and event information:
www.creativebynature.org
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Top left: Two hand doodle

Middle: Car window doodle

Above: Drawing on icy rock

Top right: Coloured hand print