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Do You Think the Painting is Finished? **The Function of Correction/Conversation in Developing Painting Skills on the Example of Outdoor Painting**

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the meaning of correction, i.e. the conversation accompanying the study of outdoor painting. Correction is a tool that can support and motivate to pursue artistic work, and at the same time it can introduce students to the language of visual arts. It is widely used at various levels of arts education. Art adepts in conversation with teachers / experienced artists and other painters gain declarative and procedural knowledge in the field of painting. The article uses materials from observations, conversations and interviews conducted during open-air painting sessions, addressed primarily to amateur artists and people preparing for studies. The article consists of three parts: a theoretical introduction to the subject of outdoor painting and its importance for artistic education, a methodological and empirical section, which discusses the different functions of correction, its types, and the context of the emergence of conversations about artistic progress, including an analysis of the stages of work in the open air context. It concludes with a discussion on creation as an interpersonal and relational process, an important element of which are constructive conversations about art and artistic competences.

Keywords: outdoor painting, correction, conversation, artistic / painting, observation, interviews.

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Article received: 11.10.2022; accepted: 21.01.2023.

Czy twoim zdaniem obraz jest skończony? Funkcja korekty/rozмовy w rozwijaniu zdolności malarskich na przykładzie malowania w plenerze

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie znaczenia korekty, czyli rozmowy towarzyszącej nauce malarstwa plenerowego. Korekta to narzędzie, które ma wspierać i motywować do pracy artystycznej, a jednocześnie wprowadzać w język sztuk wizualnych. Jest powszechnie stosowana na różnych szczeblach edukacji artystycznej. Adepti sztuki w rozmowie z nauczycielami / doświadczonymi twórcami oraz innymi osobami malującymi zdobywają wiedzę deklaratywną i proceduralną w zakresie malowania obrazu. W artykule wykorzystane zostały materiały z obserwacji, rozmów i wywiadów, prowadzonych podczas plenerów malarskich kierowanych, przede wszystkim, do twórców amatorów oraz osób przygotowujących się na uczelnie wyższe. Artykuł składa się z trzech części: wprowadzenia teoretycznego w tematykę malarstwa plenerowego i jego znaczenia dla edukacji artystycznej, części metodologicznej oraz empirycznej, w której przeanalizowano funkcje korekty, jej rodzaje, kontekst pojawienia się rozmów o postępach artystycznych, czyli etapy pracy w plenerze. W podsumowaniu zainicjowana została dyskusja nad tworzeniem jako procesem interpersonalnym i relacyjnym, którego znaczącym elementem są konstruktywne rozmowy o sztuce i kompetencjach artystycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: plener malarski, korekta, rozmowa, kompetencje artystyczne/malarskie, obserwacja, wywiady.

Introduction

Open-air painting sessions offer multifaceted research material on the creative work of people differing in age, painting skills, and their intended goals. The intensity of painting tasks allows the researcher to observe the participants' activities during the outdoor painting session and their results, as well as to initiate conversations about the creative process and the factors either stimulating or obstructing it, while also giving access to the creative results of outdoor painting. Correction, that is, the process of discussing creative progress, is undoubtedly one of the basic didactic tools in visual education which reinvigorates the process of acquiring painting skills. In the context of correction, it is productive to ask questions on how to effectively teach visual language using verbal language, or, in other words, how to introduce people into the world of art through conversation? The following article presents an analysis of the importance of correction/conversation in the dynamics of learning outdoor painting. I will be referring to my own painting experiences, which initiated regular observation, leading to conversations and interviews with participants of open-air painting sessions. This research assumption situates the presented article within the fields of pedagogical research on the environmental conditions of creativity and

the topic of visual education (Szmidt 2013). In the first part of the text, I will discuss the history of outdoor painting and its importance for artistic education, while in the second – empirical – part, I will analyze the types of corrections and factors that invigorate it, also mentioning the functions of correction.

Theoretical introduction. Outdoor painting – development and importance for artistic education

One of the basic problems at the heart of contemporary artistic education is not only the questions of how to define the term “art,” but also how to teach it in practical terms. Outdoor painting had significantly changed the approach to artistic education – since the time impressionists “moved” art from their studios and academy halls into nature, importance began to be attached to the artist’s ability to observe the surrounding reality (Giełdoń-Paszek 2006). I will begin with a series of provocative questions: what is art? what types of action would we call art? and which mechanisms decide whether something is or isn’t art? These questions force us to reflect not only on the terminology, but also on the ways in which we can educate on how to create art. As it can be quickly deduced, it is not possible to offer a straightforward answer to any of these questions. The issue was rather simple until the end of the gothic period, when art was considered a craft, and craft was considered art. However, the issue became much more complicated during the renaissance. It was a consequence of the fact that craft began to be distinguished from art, which led to the constant need to define these concepts anew, in order to adapt them to the creative needs of artists, as well as to the realities of the time and the surroundings. It can be therefore stated with certainty that while each epoch and period in the history of art had brought significant changes in how art was defined and understood, after many centuries of upholding this tradition, the issue is still not resolved. We still do not have a common definition that would reconcile the interests of the artists and the recipients of art, and the debate over what is and what is not art is still ongoing – therefore influencing also the understanding and development of artistic education.

The transformations taking place in the world of art in the 20th century, influenced by the emergence of avant-garde movements, lie at the center of the phenomena that characterize contemporary art: the artist becomes an autonomous creator, beginning with the 1960s artists openly declare a rejection of traditionally understood art, instead emphasizing the creative possibilities of art (Morawski 2007, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2014). Furthermore, in contemporary times, e.g. due to research in the fields of psychology and pedagogy of creativity, the shaping of creative skills is seen as important in the process of visual education, that is – the ability to search for original ideas, make surprising associations, note significant artistic problems while skillfully using artistic tools (Szmidt 2013). The development of these creative skills is enhanced by careful observation of the surrounding social and natural environment – this approach to the competences of a visual art-

ist is developing dynamically at the same time as the tradition of outdoor painting. An artist should be sensitive to what is currently happening among people, what is the current mood of the world, what is being discussed in media, at bus stops. It is because artists not only register how the world around them looks like, but they also comment on it, provoking recipients to change their beliefs, forcing them to reflect. This attitude presupposes the ability to perceive – both topics and phenomena. In other words, we could say that when an artist is living at a time when – contrary to academic art – anything can become the subject of a painting, he or she must be perfectly aware of the exact problem and type of phenomenon they wish to comment on, assess, or challenge. Since the period of impressionism, it is not what is painted, but how it is painted that plays a significant role in art. And thus, the subject is no longer important – it can be something very trivial, like in prehistoric art – but rather how the subject is presented. For this purpose, however, an artist has to have the ability to insightfully observe the world and all of its phenomena. This can be learned from open-air painting – the ability to sense the atmosphere of a place, to build a personal relationship with space (see: Bogusławski, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2022).

Until the beginning of the 19th century, artists searched for inspiration more often in the world of ideas – faith, literature, and history – than in the natural world. The outside world served primarily as a background for the painted themes. This situation – art that is rooted in ideology – generally lasted until the revolution brought on by the works of impressionists. It is important to note, however, that a new perspective on nature in art appeared earlier, in the 18th century, as a result of excursions out of town with a sketchbook, exploring mountains, and Captain Cook's deck painters (Pieńkos 2021; Mączak 1998; Chaunu 1989).

Situating the birth of open-air painting in the second half of the 18th century raises some doubts. Indeed, sources and works of art have a tendency to lie to us, sometimes confusing the tracks of interpreters. Notes about painting in nature, handwritten annotations on drawings such as *d'après nature*, can be understood in different ways and we cannot rule out distortions deliberately committed by the authors themselves. However, during the 18th century there were events happening that led to open-air painting being seen as a powerful cultural current, extremely diversified, with outdoor painting being only one of its elements (Pieńkos 2021: 12).

This was reflected in the visual art of the 19th century and the popularization of outdoor painting thanks to the Barbizonians and Impressionists, as well as American landscape painters from the Hudson River School. An interesting example of art that was rooted in the contemplation of the world, where we can find a strong influence of the aura of the real world on the artist's world, are the paintings from the period of German Romanticism, probably the most outstanding representative of which is Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). However, the first painter who indeed radically transformed his approach to the subject – its defining and treatment in art – and who restored the power flowing from the authenticity of how the world

is experienced and felt, was the British artists William Turner (1775–1851). In his work, he turned to the world – its beauty and fleeting nature. His approach found its realization in the work of artists who came after him. In the beginning, it was continued by a representative of realism, Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), and later by impressionists who would consider their predecessors, Turner and Courbet, as historic mentors.

The idea of painting proposed by Turner and further developed by Courbet strongly influenced not only the impressionists, but also many other generations of painters. Long after impressionism ceased to be the dominating direction in art, Monet (one of the impressionists) still continued to explore the changing world. Inspired by what he observed, the painter registered the changing light shaping the Rouen Cathedral and the nuphars seen in his own estate.¹ Paul Cezanne (1839–1906) would work in a similar way in his later period – another impressionist who repeatedly, in changing weather and chiaroscuro conditions, painted St. Victoria Mountain, which rose above the horizon near his estate.

Open-air painting took its name from the French expression *plein air*, meaning “outdoors,” and refers to the act of painting outside, in nature; the term was used to characterize Claude Monet and the French impressionists (Pieńkos 2011; 2014; Thompson 2006; Kębłowski 1987; Estreicher 1986; Stopczyk 1987). We can also find many painters whose artistic program implied intensive observations of the constantly-changing world among Polish painters from the beginning of the 20th century. We could mention many different names, since the idea unexpectedly flourished in Poland. The best example, demonstrating the great involvement of the eye in birth of a painting, is the work of Jan Cybis (1897–1972) (Bernat 2022).

Observed, heard, experienced. The course of my own research study

In the last 10 years I have been participating in open-air painting sessions organized by my husband – a painter, educator and animator. The program is addressed to both amateur painters and high school students preparing to study in fine arts universities. Additionally, I observed the work of artists during four open-air sessions for professional painters, including one international session. This gave me a chance to conduct observation, to talk and interview them, as well as to try my hand at outdoor painting myself (Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2018b). The research presented in this article represents the theoretical field of symbolic interactionism, which has been discussed at length in Polish literature (see: Hałas 2006; Szczepanik 2015).

Ethnographic fieldwork in the interactionist tradition is focused on the discovery of meanings ascribed to actions by social actors (Angrosino 2010: 30).

¹ Cycles of paintings: *Rouen Cathedral, Symphony in Gray and Rose, Nuphars* (250 paintings).

One of the basic concepts of social interactionism is interaction – “the interaction of individuals with each other;” which can influence them to change their actions and behaviors (Szczepanik 2015: 55). Correction/conversation about the creative process is an example of an interaction between students and those teaching them how to paint, and between the participants of an outdoor painting session. Research studies conducted in the interpretative paradigm are an adequate methodological approach for symbolic interactionism. It requires that the researcher consider the point of view of the people involved in a given action and observe the actions, effects, conditions, places in which they are realized (Konecki 2000; Rubacha 2008; Szczepanik 2015: 45–105). That is why this article is based on empirical material I have collected during week-long sessions in the spring and 10 day-long sessions in the summer, all organized by my husband in the period between 2012 and 2022 (twenty sessions). The research material consists of the following components:

- field notes created regularly during the observation of activities undertaken during the open-air painting sessions;
- interviews and ordinary conversations taking place in the field (the notes were mostly written down after the conversation). The aim of the interviews and conversations was to discover the meanings attached to the process of correction by participants who engaged in painting. I conducted 31 interviews with a list of information I was seeking among female amateur artists aged 28 to 75, living in Lodz (15 women: 9 retired, 6 active professionally), adolescents preparing for higher studies exams (8 people – 6 women, 2 men), students of fine arts universities (5 people – 4 women and 1 man), and graduates of fine art universities (2 women: an illustrator of children’s literature – aged 42, and a graphic designer – aged 30).
- an interview with a list of information I was seeking, with an artist-painter who organized the sessions.²

In order to authenticate the conclusions, in the article I quote the statements of the participants and the people responsible for organizing the painting sessions.

In the text, I also refer to my own experiences with painting. Additionally, my husband’s archive consisted of photographic documentation from the open-air sessions, documents regarding their organization, including: lists of participants, reports written by participants after the session, folders presenting their exhibitions, press materials from local newspapers inviting to take part in the open-air painting sessions. The subject of correction, discussed in this article, is therefore only a small fragment of the observed and recorded topics, events, activities, problems or collected research material. This article is a starting point for my reflection on the field of artistic education in the context of open-air painting sessions, as an example of an environment enabling to develop painting skills and abilities.

² In private life – the husband of the author.

A correction, or a conversation about the creative process – stages and importance in the process of acquiring painting skills

The described open-air painting sessions have a reoccurring structure and rhythm of the day. It has been the same for many years. On the first day, participants go on a long walk with the coordinator, in order to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the place, search for inspiring motifs in nature and architecture (landscape, detail). The rhythm of the day is determined by meals – breakfast and dinner, and between them, the creative work which lasts for several hours. Each day after dinner, a group correction takes place, during which the coordinator discusses all of the works created during the day. It is also a time for conversations, a chance to share one's opinions after an entire day of painting, or to provide others with feedback on their work. The evening is a time of parties, conversations, outdoor walks, individual sessions.

The word "correction" is used to describe a conversation about progress in the artistic work, conducted by the teacher / experienced artist with their student. It is an intrinsic element of visual education both in high school and higher art education. It introduces students into the world of art, helps them to master their painting skills, teaches the sensitive language of art. Constructive criticism is therefore a tool for developing creative and artistic abilities, since it reinvigorates and makes it easier to master a particular domain of visual arts. In the course of the conversation, a student learns how to recognize artistic problems, gains both declarative and procedural knowledge about painting, and develops evaluation skills (evaluating one's own ideas). He or she thus learns how to evaluate their own artistic work, and consequently, is given a chance to value/appreciate their own artistic output (Runco 2003; Szmidt 2013: 176–181). When referring to "constructive criticism," I am thinking about a conversation that is motivating, supportive, while at the same time expressing professional knowledge about certain skills. Many experiments have demonstrated that a negative assessment indeed restrains the creative process on every stage. Although it is different for authentic creative work, as represented by professional artists who regularly participate in art contests, apply for grants or scholarships. In their case, outside evaluation, even if negative, motivates them to pursue new creative challenges (Amabile 1996; Szmidt 2013: 349–355).

Conversation about the creative process is an inherent element of outdoor painting sessions. In the sessions I have been observing for many years, correction is both a group experience and an individual one, it appears at every stage of the creative work, in different forms and serving several important functions in the process of acquiring open-air painting skills. What follows is a description of the meaning of correction in the visual education, presented from the perspectives of an observer/myself, the participants and the coordinator/artist-painter. For instance, in the following fragment the coordinator of the painting session talks about the importance of correction in the process of artistic education:

Correction plays a fundamental role, allowing the student to enter the world of painting, showing a direction. It means that a painting teacher should help to notice those elements which were not taken into consideration during painting, but are crucial for the painting. In my opinion, a conversation about progress should guide the student from a conventional perspective to a more personal, nonconventional. That is why correction at the beginning is like someone guiding your hand, is a type of accompanying, so that the student doesn't have to break open doors, so the learning period can be slightly shortened, to search for one's own path. I don't think it's possible to learn how to paint without correction³.

Below I quote a statement made by one of the female participants (a student of the academy of fine arts) which is characteristic for what participants say about the importance of correction in learning about painting skills:

In conversations with painting and drawing teachers I need information whether the composition is good, it helps to start working, super important are conversations about ways and techniques, of how I can do something, it opens my mind, gives me different ideas, how to play out what is happening on paper, that I don't have to draw everything, I can work with chiaroscuro, draw four lines – and it creates a human figure. Mental comfort is very important, crucial for correction. At first I approached correction very emotionally, I treated it personally, the teacher had to tell me that we're talking about the painting, and not about me... It's important not to be scared, to stick to your own opinion during correction.

I can remember my own attempts at painting and the difficulty in transferring the preliminary sketch onto the canvas, to work out the proportions. Without receiving specific suggestions I wouldn't been able to capture the perspective and the relationships between the various elements of the painting.

The quoted statements turn our attention to the multifaceted nature of correction, which not only refers to the technological and substantive dimensions, but also the relational/psychological. These three dimensions of the conversations become a framework for creative explorations in painting and allow to learn artistic skills. The intensity of the conversations about progress in artistic work is conditioned by several factors, especially: the stages of the painting process, participant's experience in outdoor painting sessions, and the intended goal.

The stages of the painting process and the content of the correction

When observing the course of open-air painting sessions, I distinguished two stages: introductory stage and proper stage, both of which significantly condition the content of conversations about the creative process.

The first stage is the one introducing into open-air painting. In this stage correction mostly has an educating function and it initiates work during the session. It takes on an informative form, which means it relates to expressing basic theoretical

³ All quotes used in the article are taken from an interview with the coordinator of the open-air painting sessions, and from interviews with participants. For the purposes of the research, the statements were anonymized.

and technical information that are supposed to make the open-air creative work easier. During this stage we can observe the following types of activity:

- Conversations initiating outdoor painting work. The coordinator invites everyone to a mini-lecture and discussion, during which he addresses important problems connected with outdoor painting, encouraging participants to:
 - experience/feel the space and calmly observe nature, and later – to select first painting frames / subjects;
 - observe a selected fragment of space during different periods of the day, and especially how light changes throughout the day;
 - ask questions – what do I need, what inspires me, what do I want to address creatively, what do I want to achieve during the open-air sessions?;
 - have conversations with other participants and observe their work (the way the workshop is organized, the selected subjects and ways of realizing them).
- A mini-lecture on how to plan and think about artistic work outdoors. During the lecture the following issues are discussed: selection of the subject (in outdoor painting, it can be anything), the composition of the painting (how elements are arranged), how to construct the painting through the use of contrasts (e.g. color, texture, value, intensity of light, form/shape), the selection of technique – which is not transparent, since ink, pencil, or type of paint will work differently in a painting. The lecture is addressed primarily to people with less experience in outdoor painting.

The proper stage refers to the work of actually painting. In this stage we can talk about a proper correction, directly tied to the creative process:

- Initiating work – selection of the subject (motif, frame, sketch), painting technique, format of canvas. Participants with less experience require more attention, they ask about every element of the painting, discuss their ideas before they begin to work on the painting. They also need assistance in organizing their workshop in outdoor settings (e.g. selection of space, setting up easels, securing paints, brushes). More experienced participants search for ways of expressing themselves on their own. The coordinator of the session also teaches about technologies connected with painting: using various paints (e.g. oil, acrylic), using pastels, ink, or tools (e.g. different types of brushes, spatulas). People with less experience in outdoor painting (participation in two sessions) said that:

In a studio there is no problem, there is still life, and here you have to decide about a motif all on your own. It's my second open-air session, I have no experience, a conversation with the coordinator helps me to make up my mind, it guides me.

I learn how to frame during outdoor sessions. I look and I don't know what to choose from so many motifs around me, you have to choose something, and that's when I need to consult my ideas.

- Composing the target canvas – the correction applies to the arrangement of elements, framing, proportions, perspective. The coordinator not only talks with the

participants, but also helps beginners in arranging the elements on the canvas, in capturing the perspective. In this stage, the correction often takes on the form of “co-painting,” which means that in such situations, the coordinator takes a brush and carefully sketches out a preliminary composition on the canvas, using pastel paint. Below I cite two statements from the participants:

At first I completely didn't know how to make everything smaller, how to transfer it onto the canvas, and the points highlighted by J. [the coordinator of the session] were a suggestion.

After several years of outdoor painting, I can compose a painting almost automatically, it's like driving a car, I don't have to ask, but I like talking about a painting once I have finished it.

- Proper work on a painting – the correction/conversation with the coordinator is about successive stages of painting, it occurs during a moment of impasse, either from the initiative of the participant or the coordinator. This is how an amateur painter who has been painting for many years talks about this stage:

I often get stuck while painting, I get lost in details. During an outdoor session I understand what it means to paint synthetically, that the detail is not always important, I don't have to paint tiny leaves, I can depict them as a smear. I often talked about this during the correction, and after some time I was able to see it in my own work.

- The finishing stage of the work – the correction helps to finish creative work, that is, the author himself decides when to stop painting, or what in the painting needs to be appreciated, refined, improved. The ending conversation about the painting teaches how to evaluate one's own creative work, it takes place during the group correction in the evening. The coordinator asks whether the painting is done, and if it is not, then what the author wants to do with it. Only later does the coordinator ask the group about their own impressions, and shares his ideas on how to improve a painting. According to the coordinator, this stage of the correction is especially important in the process of artistic education. This is particularly true in our times, when finishing a painting is not tantamount to realistically depicting every planned element:

The end of creative work poses a difficulty, not only to unexperienced people. What does it mean to say that a painting is finished? The concept of finished/unfinished refers to adjusting the compositional elements of a painting, and the means of expression. That is precisely why one of the elements of education based on conversation is pointing attention to the problem of how to finish working on a painting. The end of work on a painting is not tantamount to painting every element, as it once was.

This is how a student of a fine arts university, a participant in the outdoor painting session, and an amateur retiree who has been painting for 8 years (participant in 5 sessions) talk about the finishing stage of correction:

For me deciding that a painting is finished is the hardest moment. On the one hand, I can overdo it, spoil it, but on the other, perhaps some small detail would add character to the work, a smear, a stain, a “dot over the I” [student].

When I was only beginning to paint, the start and the end of painting was difficult, I still don't know when to finish a painting, when to say “stop.” And then what? I have to talk it over with J., I ask others what they think about it during our evening correction or when we're painting together [amateur].

An example of a conversation between the coordinator (C) and an experienced female participant (P) of the open-air painting session:

C: How do you feel, did you achieve your goal, did you succeed in painting what you wanted to?

P: I'm not sure.

C: Remind me, what was the initial goal.

P: I wanted to convey the character of the river and the sky in the morning, with the fog raising over the river, so it's melancholic.

C: So, were you able to do it?

P: Well, I don't know, something's not right in the foreground, I think that the stains in the foreground don't match...

C: Why exactly?

P: They attract too much attention, but I don't know what to do with it.

C: But you have an idea?

P: I want to change it somehow.

C: Try to make it less legible, for instance decrease the contrast between the stains.

P: Ooo.. ok.

- The stage of making public the results of outdoor painting during a working exhibition, on the last day of the open-air session. Here the correction can be amount-ed to the reactions of the recipients, their comments, questions, which are also a specific commentary on the presented effects of creative work. The participants have a chance to see how others react to what they had planned out and done, whether their idea is legible, or whether they can find purchasers for their ideas/ paintings. Additionally, the post-session exhibition presents the entire output of open-air sessions (paintings, sketches, drawings). Everyone can view the effects of everyone's work: quantitative (e.g. how many painting per day were made by each person, the size of painted canvas) and qualitative (e.g. realized motifs, thematic cycles, used techniques, tools). Example statements of participants:

That was really something, when I sold my first painting, I thought: wow, cool, my painter's intuition hasn't failed me.

I'm always surprised how many paintings are created during the sessions. I like to see what others had done during the open-air sessions, [...], what they focused on in the outdoor space, what they liked, or found inspiring.

To sum up, it is commonly accepted that easel painting is a domain of art whose ef-fects are created during solitary struggles in painting studios. Indeed, for professional artists, the creative process is an individual matter to a great degree, since they rarely discuss their work as intensely as do people who are still in the process of acquiring

painting skills. Hypothetically speaking, the more a future artist will talk, discuss, and listen to comments about their work, the more effective they will be in their individual work in terms of using these diverse, often critical perspectives to evaluate their work. An open-air painting session undoubtedly becomes a space for listening to different voices, opinions, e.g. selecting a motif together, painting in a group, sharing opinions and impressions, or even corrections on someone else's canvas. Conversations about the paintings happen not only between the coordinator and the participants, but no less intensely among the participants themselves. Oftentimes participants decide to work on the same motif, and spend an entire day painting it, offering advice to each other, commenting and joking around. Open-air painting takes place in a group, therefore becoming an interpersonal and relational process, which means working together through the sharing of ideas, experiences, knowledge. Here is a statement characteristic of how participants reflect on this issue:

Being in a group has its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is the possibility of observing solutions, topics, motifs, talking about how someone painted something. But it's a disadvantage at the same time, since you risk imitating someone else's work.

During the correction I learn what I can do better, differently, what needs more work, and what I can leave for now, or how others view my work. Thanks to this I can sharpen those elements which are most important in my painting, those that are its asset.

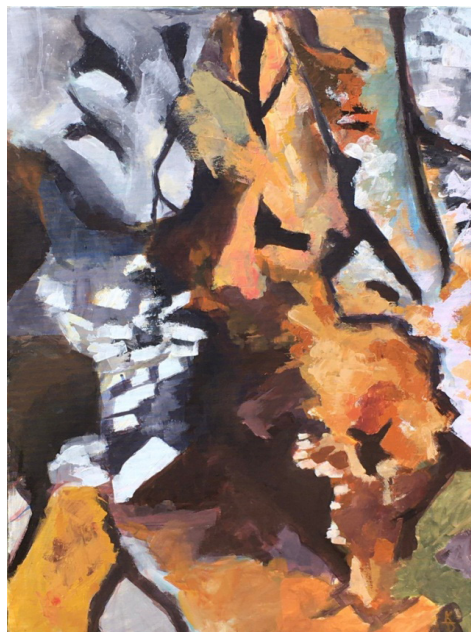
In the psychology of creativity we use the terms "creative synergy" or "group effect" (collective mind) to describe the positive functioning of a team, which is able to generate solutions that are more creative, and make better decisions than even the most creative member would by himself. It is argued (Abra 1994; Paulus, Yang 2000; Góralski 1980; Nęcka 1994) that a properly functioning creative group is able to generate more ideas than all its members put together. I believe we could look at the creative work being done during open-air sessions in a similar way. On the one hand, thanks to various conversations the participants are able to acquire painting skills, learn about the three layers of a painting: technical (during the correction, a participant learns how to paint something, e.g. an apple leaf), formal (how to find a solution, how to arrange the elements), and material, that is, how to express metaphorical content in a clear way (e.g. how to paint an apple leaf in such a way that it expresses nostalgia). On the other hand, working together is probably conducive to the creative use of acquired creative skills, since the people working on their paintings pick up ideas and advice from each other, and then use them to enrich and diversify their own ideas/paintings (Szmidt, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2020). Frequently during an open-air session, when observing groups of painters, one can hear: "what would you do with this," "you should add a complementary color here," "if I were you, I would leave it as it is now," "try using the spatula," "maybe you should paint a fragment of a fence, it would be a cool compositional element."

Literalness and ambiguity – two continuums of correction

Correction is determined by two points – literalness and metaphor; a conversation about paintings stretches from unambiguity to ambiguity and can take on various forms. An unambiguous correction is supposed to help make a painting more detailed. It takes the form of specific remarks and advice given by the coordinator (e.g. “brighten the sky,” “this color is too shiny,” “strengthen the horizon line,” “darken the foreground,” “paint over this fragment”), comparisons with other works created during the session (which, according to interviewees, gives insight into new points of reference, solutions for similar topics), interference in the painting (e.g. correcting the shape by the coordinator, putting a stain, painting over, wiping an element off the canvas).

Photograph 1. Painting by Kamil Danielewicz before the correction (technique – acrylic paints)

Photograph 2. The same painting after a correction suggesting changes in the color range and orientation (after finishing, the author rotated the painting to change the composition)



Source: photograph made during a summer open-air painting session in Mielnik, 2022 (the author of the painting and the photograph – Kamil Danielewicz, photo provided with the author’s consent).

An ambiguous, general correction is a type of inspiration, most often taking on the form of an open message: open questions (e.g. “What does this fragment remind you of?”, “What do you think of when you look at this painting?”, “So... do you feel like

the painting is finished?”, associations and jokes (e.g. “the rock on your painting looks like the number six / a tooth”, “the road looks like a sausage”), comparisons to paintings from the canon which are a point of reference in artistic education (e.g. “your painting reminds me of the work of...”), descriptions of impressions, or longer notes referring to the history of art and the accomplishments of famous painters.

The coordinator looks at the entire painting, while I have a tendency to focus mostly on details, and I don't see the relation between the elements of my painting. We often talked about it, and I was able to see it later.

When it comes to more experienced painters, the conversation about a painting focuses on a general question: is the artist's intention clear and was the intended goal achieved? Here I refer to the dialogue quoted earlier. Beginners, on the other hand, frequently start with painting exercises rather than painting itself. The coordinator helps them with basic issues, such as finding the right subject, using contrast, *chiaroscuro*, perspective.

To sum up, the course of the correction is undoubtedly determined by other important factors, especially the painter's perspective, their sensitivity, abilities, and most importantly, the goal they have in mind when coming to the open-air session – e.g. people who are preparing for an exam focus on the exam portfolio and the practical exam itself. A correction thus serves several important functions in the process of acquiring painting skills (see: Szmidt, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2020):

- educational – related to mastering easel painting in open-air sessions and gaining knowledge on the history of art;
- emotional-motivational – related to upholding the creative process in moments of impasse at various stages of work on the painting, and teaching a more sensitive approach to the world of nature and art;
- creative – related to generating original ideas; I believe that participating in an open-air painting session can encourage a greater ideation among participants. On average, in the course of a 10 day-long session, a single person creates 7–8 paintings of different size as well as numerous sketches, additionally experimenting with the size of canvas, colors, tools, painting techniques, subject of the work (e.g. framing a painting motif, preparing a series of paintings on a given topic).

Final remarks

In conclusion, I wish to draw attention to the issues that seem like possible directions for future research in the field of visual education and the environmental conditions of creativity on the example of open-air painting sessions, but which are also conclusions drawn from my own observations. Undoubtedly art serves an important communicative function, since an artist communicates with a recipient, and establishes contact with another person. It is crucial that the artist imagines the person to whom the message is addressed, since communication always takes place with-

in a community, and the imagined recipient in a way echoes an imagined dialogue about the message communicated in a symbolic way by the artist. It is not often that artists talk about their works directly with their recipients. A correction is one of the first bridges that develops communicative skills with the use of artistic means. Especially group correction, observed during the course of the session, represents the first step on the path to making one's ideas public, sharing the effects of one's artistic work, or simply sharing work with others. The observation of these sessions demonstrates that it is supported by an appropriate emotional atmosphere – mutual sympathy, curiosity, attention to others, ludic mood (see: Chybicka 2004, Szmidt, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2020). Outdoor painting sessions can therefore become a space for studying the environmental conditions impacting the creative process, especially the importance of group context for communicating one's ideas, and the communicative mechanisms conducive (or not) to teaching and learning about art (see: Doyle 2016; Lebuda, Galewska-Kustra, Glăveanu 2016; Pietrzak 2019, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2018a; Sasin, Sass, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2020). Open-air sessions demonstrate that it would be difficult to limit the act of painting solely to psychological factors, since participants work on their paintings in the close presence of others (in pairs, groups of three, small groups, entire groups/group correction). Similarly as it is in the case of professional creative work, artists are active in a network of social interactions, as they engage in conversations with other artists, critics, recipients, and share their artistic visions, and are in turn inspired by the work of others. Nowadays, these networks of cooperation and influence are becoming the focus of particular research interest. We are aware of examples of successful artistic collaborations, even if they are not always emotionally easy for the artists themselves (see: John-Steiner 2000; Sawyer 2007; 2009; 2019; Shenk 2016; Szmidt, Modrzejewska-Świgulska 2020).

Another interesting issue is the interpersonal dimension of the painting process. I wonder to what extent does the act of painting encourage self-discovery, experiencing one's own subjectivity and individuality in the context of a group, and the various effects of creative work being done in the same place at the same time. In other words, how does open-air painting help in opening up and learning about oneself through experiencing the different manifested choices of subject matter, technique, color and expression. I wonder whether open-air painting, which assumes an intensity of interactions between the participants, can be conducive to shaping an attitude of acceptance towards people who perceive reality in different ways (see: Mitchell 2012; Frydryczak 2013).⁴

⁴ I would like to refer here to a very interesting visual education project: The Foundation of the Fort Institute of Photography, *School of Looking*, which inspired my thinking about the importance of correction.

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To cite this article

Modrzejewska-Świgulska M. (2023), Do You Think the Painting is Finished? *The Function of Correction/Conversation in Developing Painting Skills on the Example of Outdoor Painting*, „Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne”, no. 1(16), pp. 144–161, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2450-4491.16.09>.