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Inhabiting/Living Practice: An emergent collaborative arts-based exhibition

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Abstract:

This article presents a collaborative exhibition at the 2019 World Congress of the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. *Inhabiting/Living Practice* presented the arts-based research of 18 doctoral students from around the world. We came together in the Hatch Gallery throughout the InSEA congress to collaborate, discuss and make together. We shared our arts-based educational research through this emergent process while allowing it to evolve in relation to our ongoing dialogues, artistic interventions, and provocations. We imagined the gallery as a living body: an emerging embodied space that we inhabited for the week with material, affect and relationality. In this chapter, through photograph documentation and examination of our experiences, we present the unfolding of this emergent exhibition. Through follow-up reflections, participants discuss how the exhibition allowed for a re-viewing of their doctoral research, a re-imagining of the possibilities of arts-based educational research and the ways connections developed through making together over the course of the week. Through this work, we propose that more time spent making together is needed within the context of academic art education conferences.

Keywords

Arts-based educational research; doctoral research; exhibition; collaboration; emergence

Inhabiting/Living Practice: An emergent collaborative arts-based exhibition

The development of an emergent arts-Based Exhibition

This article presents a collaborative exhibition at the 2019 World Congress of the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. *Inhabiting/Living Practice* presented the arts-based research of 18 doctoral students from around the world at The Hatch Gallery. As the facilitators (Shields and Cloutier), we sought to disrupt our accustomed conference experience in which research is presented as complete and separate from other participants and bring ‘making’ into the core of our conference experience. The exhibition was developed on the following premise: Bringing people together within a space to make art together prompts dialogue and emergent learning. We put out an open call to art education doctoral students who engage with arts-based educational research and received submissions from artists worldwide. Eighteen artists were invited to participate in the project with works ranging from painting, drawing, sculpture, performance, textiles, photography, mixed media, and social practice. Participants were asked to consider how they might bring their ongoing arts-based educational research into the space while being open to how it may change and develop through collaboration with others.

In this chapter, we discuss how this exhibition unfolded through exploring the work created, collaborations that emerged and new understandings that developed. The article is written through the lens of the facilitators (Shields and Cloutier). The participating artists and (at the time) doctoral students included: Joanna Fursman, Rocío Lara-Osuna, Jessica Castillo Inostroza, Alicia Arias-Camisón, Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen, Pavla Gajdošíková, Yoriko Gillard,

Kira Hegeman, Samira Jamouchi, Monica Klungland, Tiina Kukkonen, Nicole Lee, Sam Peck, Francisco Schwember, Kate Thomas, Jennifer Wicks, Ellen Wright, Kate Wurtzel. The following participants offered insights toward this article through answering questions related to their arts-based research and experiences throughout the exhibition: Joanna, Jessica, Nicole, Monica, Samira, Jennifer and Kate Wurtzel. Photo collages were created by Rocio, Jessica, Joanna, Alicia and Genevieve.

The exhibition was developed around the concept of emergence. As the facilitators of this project, we sought to create conditions for relationships to emerge between artists, artworks and conference attendees. I was inspired for this exhibition by my own experience as a doctoral student working on a multi-year collaborative project, ‘The pedagogical turn to art as research: A comparative international study of art education’ led by Art Educator Anita Sinner (Sinner, Irwin & Jokela (2018). Through this research, Sinner, Irwin and Adams (2019) aimed to “open a *conversazione*” (p. 3) with and about doctoral research in art education situating this research within the complexities and tensions of creative research within academia. As the facilitators (Shields and Cloutier), we brought that experience to the project as we drew from our respective areas of research to develop our concept of emergence. I, Alison Shields, conceptualize emergence within this project through the lens of my research about artists’ studios. I view art studios as spaces that are active, in-process and where the materiality of the space, objects, images, ideas and materials creatively interact (Shields, 2018a, Shields, 2018b). Lisa Wainwright (2010), professor at the Art Institute of Chicago celebrates the importance of the studio for the creative process: “The studio is a space and a condition wherein creative play and progressive thinking yield propositions for reflecting on who we are – individually and collectively – and where we might go next” (p. ix). This principle was brought into the Hatch exhibition, as I

simultaneously imagined the gallery as studio and exhibition and strove to foster this condition for creative play, material exploration and reflective action. Through embracing a studio-like quality within the exhibition, the intention was to capture the in-process quality of arts-based research.

Through this lens, I view artmaking as a performative process (Bolt, 2004; 2007) in its capacity to provoke or generate experiences rather than merely represent them. Through this lens, artistic and arts-based research is embodied, affective, experiential and emergent (Barrett, 2013). Barad (2007) challenges representationalist views of the world and instead focuses on “practices, doings and actions” (p. 28). Through this performative lens, she proposes that entities are in a constant state of becoming in relation to encounters with other entities in a process she refers to as intra-action. Barad challenges us to consider how individuals exist because of intra-actions with others, through the “materialization of relationships” (Kleinman, 2012). Thus, we view the emergence within this exhibition as a materialization of relationships between art, between participants and between arts-based educational research.

Co-facilitator Genevieve Cloutier draws from her/their extensive knowledge and experience with facilitation and ethical artistic research practices. She/they employs social practices to trouble authorship through relational and emergent practices that blur the boundaries of researcher/participant, curator/artist, facilitator/learner. The relational ethics of entanglement offer new understandings of working *with* others via intra-actions (Barad, 2007) that are always unfolding. Here, uncertain pathways, encounters and outcomes are enveloped with a need to be accountable to the shared art space. For this reason, many questions arose as we developed the exhibition: How will art change in response to the intra-actions and the entanglements within a given space? How will initial proposals shift, change, emerge? How will the collaborative artistic

and facilitation process create conditions for art that which was unthought of before? Ethical facilitation practices often require us to reside in the tensions of accountability. In this way, Cloutier investigates how the exhibition “is one that entangles in relations of debt in ways for which we can never fully account, despite always being willing to be (emergently) accountable” (Loveless, 2019, p. 71). Ethical and accountable facilitation practices in art spaces require an embrace of tensions, difficult conversations and a willingness to let go of initial expectations.

We came together in the Hatch Gallery throughout the InSEA congress to collaborate, discuss and make together. We imagined the gallery as a living body: an emerging embodied space that we inhabited for the week with material, affect and relationality. We propose that inquiry occurs with and through ongoing encounters, and we invited visitors and congress attendees to participate and collaborate in this emergent exhibition. The theme of the conference was ‘Making.’ Thus, we sought to bring ‘making’ to the core of the conference experience. Throughout the week we asked: What connections might emerge between arts-based educational researchers through making together? Rather than view the conference as a space to present about ‘making’ or discuss ‘making,’ we wanted to ‘make’ together and see what would emerge.

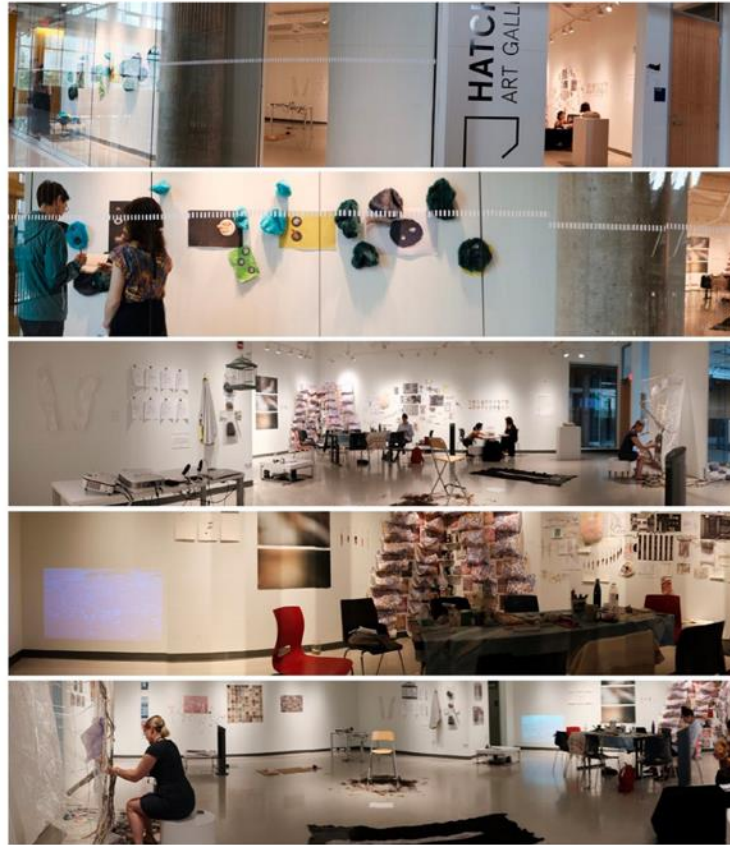


Figure 1. Gallery view of the exhibition. Photographs by Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen

Encountering multiple perspectives within arts-based research

As the facilitators, we came together based on our own experiences with Artistic and Arts-based research (Shields, 2018a, 2019), however, each person brought their own reference points and experiences with artistic research, arts-based research (ABR), and arts-based educational research (ABER). Whereas some doctoral students approached ABR from a position more rooted in research-creation (Manning, 2016; Loveless, 2019), others understood Arts-based Educational research through the lens of their work in A/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin, 2013), and/or a more general understanding of arts-based research in education as presented by Cahmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008). Monica Klungland references Haseman

(2006), *A Manifesto for Performative Research*, as she explains that her practice-led research constructs “experiential starting points from which practice follows” (p. 100). Joanna Fursman references research on practice-based research through Macloed and Holdridge (2006) and the work of Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) as she examines the performativity of practice-based research. Jennifer Wicks draws from Barone and Eisner (2012) and Siegesmund and Cahmann-Taylor (2008) to examine how ABR and ABER create spaces that bring value and importance to reasoning and interpretation through multiple modalities and visual language. She also draws from Marín Viadel (2005) to explore how arts-based educational researchers address educational issues from an artistic perspective, and how artistic research may disrupt the contexts of a given situation. Several participants situate their arts-based research within new materialist theories that draw from Barad’s (2007) theories of intra-action as they embrace the emergence of working with materials, space and artists within the gallery.

While bringing our varied understandings of artistic research, ABR and ABER to the gallery might appear at first to be problematic, in practice it invoked deep conversations around approaches to knowledge production, the role of making, and the thinking-doing involved in research. This diversity in our collective understanding of what ABER might or could be, allowed us to navigate the emergent nature of the experience with fluidity and openness to what continued to present itself. Further, through this work, we drew connections between our varied understandings and applications of arts-based research, artistic research and arts-based educational research as well as how they inform each other.

Through the multiple lenses and approaches to ABER, tensions emerged, specifically in relation to how we inhabited space, opened up space between our works and shared that space with others. Making space for others means entering a space of uncertainty and openness. This

openness required that participants allowed conversations to emerge between artworks and participants that made us re-view our own work through a new perspective. These tensions led to emergent questions related to power relationships between participants, how collaboration may re-produce particular relationships and how to allow for a social practice that is inclusive and open. These emergent tensions were significant to this experience as it provoked us to consider our arts-based educational research in relation to others.

Participant Tiina Kukkonen described the importance of the emergent tensions:

This experience shifted my understanding of collaboration within arts-based research and the outcomes of those collaborations. Prior to the exhibition, I understood that artist-researchers either collect data from study participants and then use the arts/artistic processes to make sense of and disseminate the data; or they co-create artworks alongside study participants to explore/answer a set of pre-established research questions. In the case of this exhibition, we were all artist-researchers from around the world coming into the space with different questions we hoped to answer through diverse artistic/research methods. Hence, there was a lot of confusion and unease on the first day as we all struggled to see how our various practices and ideas could merge into one show. As with any art-making endeavor, the process of collaboration was just as, if not more, valuable than any pre-conceived outcomes or products.

Unfolding Exhibition

In the months leading up to the exhibition, we met online to discuss the project. It was decided that rather than bring a complete, finished work, collaborators were invited to bring an object, an artistic work or a relic from their doctoral arts-based research. Amongst the objects,

materials and artworks that were brought were: wool, clay, rubbings, textiles, tiles, photographs, drawings, oracle cards, prints, etc. We spent our first day together sharing the work, finding connections and allowing new creations to emerge. We gathered in a circle and artworks were laid out on the floor. Each participant shared their arts-based research and the artistic materials they had brought. We responded to each other's objects/images and found connections between works (Figure 2).

Pavla Gajdošíková described her experience working with the group for those 2 days:

For the first two days, we imagined each other's work, then discussed, and then our artifacts connected. It was not easy, many different cultures and identities met here. We found different topics and thanks to that we defined one on which we would finally agree and on which the form of the exhibition could derive. After this two-day process, these sub-themes finally crystallized, from which the real installation of artifacts could unfold: place, identity, experiment, creation, originality.

Regarding the process of working together Kate Wurtzel said:

After a while, and a few hiccups, the installation of our collaborative work started to flow. We found our rhythm, getting to know one another through our conversations, our words, our hands, and our energies. We sat-with, worked-with, experienced-with each other's materials, our photos, fibers, markers, paper, etc. There was a simultaneous letting go and expansion of self through intra-actions that were not only verbal, between human to human, or even through our body movement like when we danced on the raw wool, but with the sharing, the shaping, and the co-joining of materials. The 'stuff' of our lives became shared space for co-creation.



Figure 2. First encounters. Left: Kate Wurtzel, *Blurring Boundaries*. Top right: Jessica Castilla; Bottom right: Francisco Schwember, Tiina Kukkonen and Kate Wurtzel. Photographs by Genevieve Cloutier

Following our second day of working together and installing the exhibition, we invited congress attendees to an opening reception that involved several performances and provided time for attendees to interact with artworks within the space (figure 3). Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen from Vietnam wandered the gallery, her voice repeating “I” as she walked around a collaborative felting. Genevieve put her trust into artist-researcher Yoriko Gillard to cut her hair without any instructions; her strands of hair gradually made a pile in the gallery. For the artist-teacher and researcher Samira Jamouchi, *“the performance was generated by each entity present in the room: all the participants’ bodies and actions; the water; the wool fibres; the pine tree soap; the duration; the gestures; the flux of the movements; the space; the voices; the rhythms; and the*

echoes.” This opening performance set a tone for a collaborative and interactive exhibition throughout the week.



Figure 3. Opening performance. Left: Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen, Samira Jamouchi, Yoriko Gillard. Photographs by Alicia Arias-Camisón and Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen

Throughout the week, visitors came to the gallery as the doctoral arts-based researchers further engaged with each other and their work. Traces from the opening performance and from the gallery visitors were seen throughout the gallery as the artistic creations continued to evolve and morph in relation to our ongoing conversations and interactions with art-making.

Pavla Gajdošíková from Czech Republic drew from her doctoral work that examined memory of place (Figure 4). Drawing from an a/r/tography methodology, she asked visitors to draw or reflect on a memory of their home. Throughout the week, this wall unfolded with a collection of drawings, written notes and textiles to reveal a rich story of conference attendees’

visions of home. Next to this work, Sam Peck installed his participatory research about sketchbooks. Nicole Lee brought a set of oracle cards. She asked visitors to reflect on someone special to them as they created an oracle card to add to her collection. These works invited the participating artists and gallery visitors to share their personal experiences as they contributed to the unfolding exhibition.

In another area of the gallery, visitors were invited to move stickers, allowing a single image to open outward throughout the gallery wall, a map of visitor interactions with space (Figure 5). The 'Valdeloviewfinder' (viewfinder), created by Rocío Lara-Osuna, from Spain, played an active role in the interactive process. This tool was designed to observe the world through a crystal ball and created a unique lens through which to view the exhibition (Figure 6). And in another area, visitors were provided with two microscopic digital cameras also created by Rocío and were invited to see different textures projected over sculptural paper surfaces (figure 7, left). And visitors were invited to listen to electroacoustic compositions in an unfired ceramic piece by Jennifer Wicks (figure 7, right).

Joanna Fursman brought a selection of soft props and materials. While she was in the gallery window space, a visitor to the UBC thrift store was intrigued and came by the gallery. They posed with the props and this key moment determined how she would work in the gallery, producing over 30 portrait images with visitors (Figure 7). *“The exhibition meant I had an opportunity to develop a new approach to making work with other people and was titled Looking for a New School Portrait. These images produced new directions for me to critically explore in my thesis and concerned the relations produced between people when making collaborative work.”*

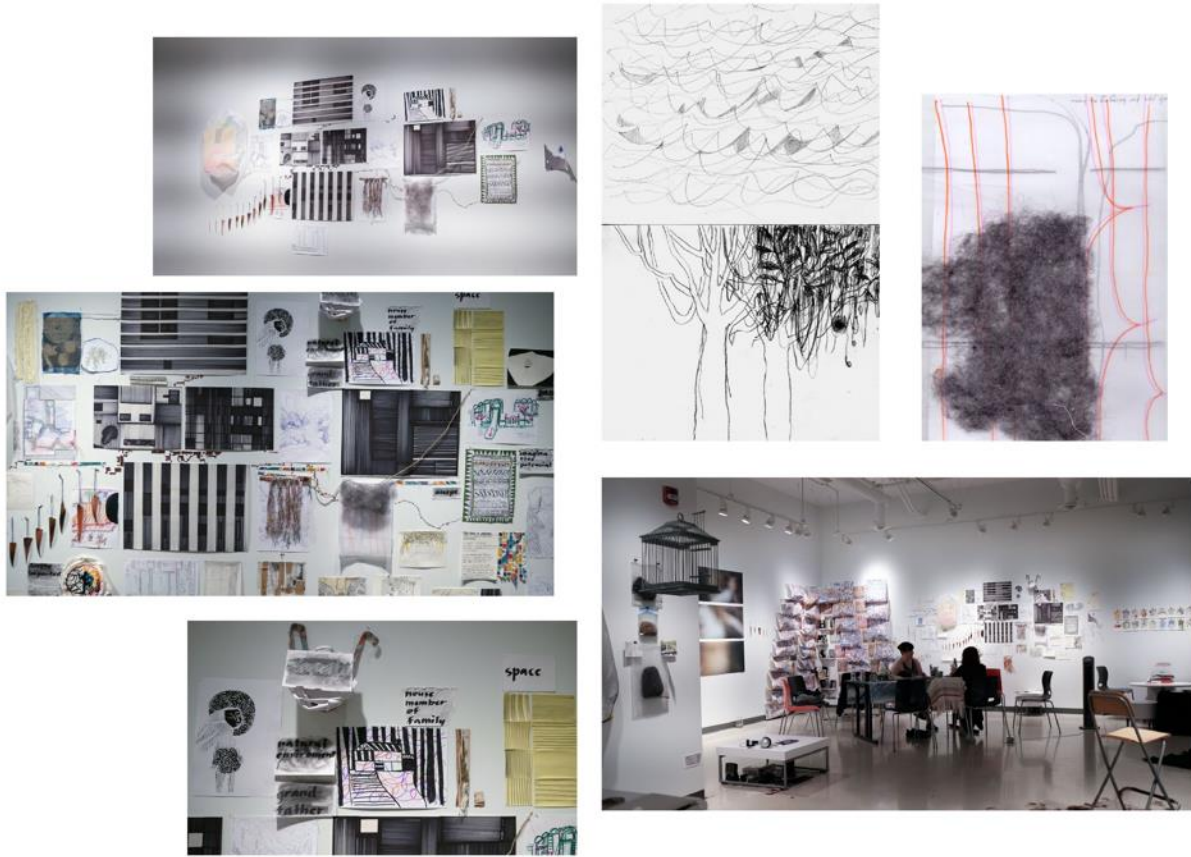


Figure 4. Sam Peck, *Draw & Play Here*; Pavla Gajdošíková, *The Place of Memory*, installation, mixed media, 2019. Photographs by Pavla Gajdošíková and Alicia Arias-Camisón and Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen



Figure 5. Alicia Arias-Camisón's work was continuously recreated by visitors on the gallery walls. Photographs Alicia Arias-Camisón.



Figure 6. Rocío Lara-Osuna. *Sandra observes the pieces through 'Valdeloviewfinder'*.
Photographs by Rocío Lara-Osuna (bottom) and Sandra Filipelli (top).



Figure 7. Microscopic view over Rubbing arms by Rocío Lara-Osuna, Alicia Arias-Camisón Coello and Ellen Wright (left). In this piece, visitors were provided with two microscopic digital cameras and were able to see different surfaces projected over onion skin paper arms. *Hear Me*. Jennifer Wicks (right). Photographs by (Left) Rocío Lara-Osuna & (right) Alicia Arias-Camisón.



Figure 7. *Looking for a new school portrait*. Photographs by Joanna Fursman.

Emergent connections

This exhibition prompted us to consider how we foster active, material conversations between arts-based, artistic and arts-based educational researchers. Through this work, we continually ask: What happens when we discuss arts-based research as we engage in the making process together? Drawing from Barad (2007) we see arts-based educational research as changing, responsive and in need of constant interruptions and provocations to move it forward. We believe these generative interactions and provocative disruptions are particularly important

within the context of a conference where arts researchers from diverse backgrounds are brought together. This exhibition provided the time and space we so craved within this context of an academic Art Education conference. We believe these types of experiences may push back against an outcome driven academia and instead foster complicated conversations and the messiness of art-making and learning.

Monica Klungland explains that within her art and teaching practice there is pleasure in the emergence that occurs through the chaos with the loom. *“I experienced myself during this exhibition and how it felt to go into an unknown situation, encounter the indefinable and unforeseen and feel the tangled connection to other participants.”* This week set in a motion a process of ongoing interruption and provocation as materials encountered materials. Drawing from her desire to challenge an individualistic education policy, Monica asks the following question through the work that emerged and followed the exhibition experience: *“What can happen if attention is shifted away from the acquisition of skills and production of objects, and onto the event itself and students' encounters with each other and with materials and surroundings?”*

Several participating doctoral students considered similar questions through this process. Jessica Castillo Inostroza similarly stated:

This experience has shown me that the collaboration between various artists and the dialogue that emerges from each proposal enhances and improves individual and collective artistic practices. In general, we artists think that when we create, we conceive a single, closed, immovable idea, unwilling to make concessions, and in the gallery this belief was shattered. In the show, the focus changed from the individual to the collective and that enriched not only the artistic products, but also the reflections around them.

Arts-based research does not prescribe a single way of researching, and in that sense, the open process carried out fits, because in an intuitive and instinctive way it was shaping a result based on collaboration, learning and sharing that lasted beyond the exhibition time. This can be perfectly extrapolated to the learning process within a classroom or with social collectives, for example, as an excellent creative exercise of self-knowledge and knowledge of others.

These connections were generative for Nicole Lee as she explained:

Though I have had wonderful experiences in my home institution, this experience revealed how the field of ABER can be an alienating and marginalizing space for individuals who may not fit a particular positive, performance-based, and production-based model of being and doing. It invites explorations on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of what is of value in the field. This experience summons work on the ethics of relationality and the holding of space for difference; difficult knowledges; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and critical theory, and this seems to be of particular importance in collaborative practices. Relationships take time to build and more time is needed for our human complexity to be acknowledged and witnessed in the process of making and becoming.

And Kate Wurtzel learned to be more vulnerable through this project as she said:

I was headed in the general direction of arts-based research and more rhizomatic ways of knowing, but I did not realize how the degree of letting go of control and opening up of the self to collaboration would really guide the pivots made in my own research. Being part of this collaborative experience was the start of me opening up to spaces of

vulnerability and uncertainty, which ultimately became the central focus of my current work. This experience expanded my sense of self and provided the confidence to keep pushing on questions related to how we produce knowledge and understanding. Before this experience I questioned how to engage in post-qualitative work, and what it really meant to identify as an artist-researcher-educator, but my involvement in this experience truly served as a jumping off point for me. It demonstrated how doing this kind of work in a very embodied, real-time, way is possible.

In my artistic and educational experience, I have often witnessed dichotomies formed between individual art making and collaborative art practices. This exhibition brought together arts-based research begun within each individual's own educational context, however allowed it to become collaborative for the week in the gallery. Through this process, doctoral students' arts-based educational research was re-activated within a space of tension, creation and dialogue. This project allowed for a deeper engagement with each other's research through our ongoing negotiations between space, materials and artists. We left the week considering the following questions as we looked back on our experience and looked forward to future collaborations within the context of academic art education conferences: How do we foster a meaningful collaborative environment where each artist and artwork inhabits and shares space through emergence, interruptions and provocations? How can the tensions and liminality between artists and artworks be a source of conversation and connection? While these questions will likely never be fully answered, we draw from each of our experiences to reflect on how we were shaped through this experience. Kate Wurtzel affirms the significance of coming together and being open within arts-based educational research.

I understand arts-based research to be very much an embodied practice that one must travel through in order to understand it, but not necessarily be able to define it. The movements, the intentions, the anxieties, the release, the relief, the muddiness, the confusion, all of it is important to the research process itself. As I witnessed a linen that I began unravelling in Texas take on new forms as clumps of pixelated threads hanging from baskets made from Canadian Birch trees, I realized connections were happening on varying levels of materiality. From fibers and fingerprints to affect and sensations, we were giving it, the research, the lived experience, our all. We committed. We took the leap, and for me that leap was as internal as it was external. I grew tremendously from this experience; it has shaped my view on arts-based research as a form of research that requires a sort of willingness to not knowing, to drawing porous and sometimes flexible boundaries, to being diffractive in your thinking, and to 'feeling' one's research in a very embodied, lived, and material-experienced way.

This experience affirmed our longing for spaces of making, particularly within the context of national and international conferences that bring together diverse voices of Art Educators whose countries and university institutions foster different approaches to arts-based educational research. While I don't know if this exhibition extends our understandings of Arts-based educational research (although each individual's work does this), I believe this exhibition provides an example of the importance of finding ways for sharing ABER that reflects the diverse, in-process and emergent quality of ABER. Further, as was shown through conversation with participants, many (if not most) still struggle to have their arts-based work accepted and understood within a rigid academic structure. Through coming together, doctoral students may

learn from the struggles and successes of their peers working within different contexts, and perhaps return to their own universities with new strength and perspective. Lastly, this exhibition showcases the need for unstructured time within conference settings to allow for these conversations to emerge.

This exhibition affirmed the significance of time spent making with others within arts-based educational research. Within a paradigm of highly scheduled and carefully timed conference schedules we sought to bring time and space for making, talking and reflecting so that authentic connections might emerge. Thus, through this project we call for more time and space to develop connections within ABER through making. Indigenous scholar, Shahjahan (2015) argues for a “reformulating the notion of ‘time’ and temporalities of academic life” (p. 488). Drawing from indigenous ways of learning and knowing, he suggests that we disrupt our notions of time, “in order to reconnect our minds to our bodies and center embodied pedagogy in the classroom” (p. 488). Through this exhibition, we address this necessity as we call for more unstructured time and space within academic conference to dwell within the process of making together. Through these dialogues, we are hopeful that we may strengthen international partnerships and complicate each of our understandings of arts-based educational research. We conclude by returning to Monica Klungland who explained how the yarn that she brought to the space was a metaphor for what might unravel in the gallery that week: *One could say that it starts with balls of yarn. Different kinds of yarn balls inspire me and invite me to do something. Different threads are crossed and bound, making different patterns. Just like in the life itself.*

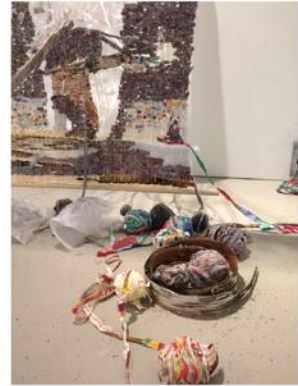


Figure 9. Monica Klungland, *Weaving through open doorways*. Photographs by Monica Klungland, Alicia Arias-Camisón and Lap-Xuan Do-Nguyen

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