

Invited address at 2023 IASD  
conference, Ashland, Oregon

# Dream Meaning Through Art Making:

The Personal Journey of a Dream Researcher

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# Dreams and Art?

- Have always been separate for me
- Dreams
  - Began as a researcher with my dissertation on lucid dreams in 1978
  - Did research on dreams from a variety of perspectives for next 45 years
  - Eventually dreams became my major self growth tool thus kept a dream journal for 43 years
- Art
  - I was always doing art. So much so that my parents sent me to art classes in grade 3
  - Wanted to go into art but my father insisted I could not make a living at it
  - Still art making has been a major avocation for me my entire life – I'm 77!

Painting always my ground



Painted bedroom wall as a child



Under-graduate  
in New  
Mexico



Graduate  
School in  
Virginia

# But how do dreams and art connect for me?

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- For most of my dream history and my art history they did NOT connect
  - Even when I did dream art I often pasted the dream text on the art
  - They were separate worlds that rarely came together but there were noteworthy exceptions
- 



Dreamt I watched as something was sniffing around some very large eggs in the ground – they were pastel. Then I saw two animals. They were clearly the same species but different sexes. What I assumed was the male was darker in coloring than the female. The male was also quite large relative to the female. They were kind of like a big pig but not that. They had snouts blunted, rounded like pigs, with various colored blotches on each. Pastel blotches on the female and darker pastel ones on the male and on the male were dark colored areas around the blotches. Of particular note was the growths on each – like horns sticking out all over but each horn was blunted, so not long but each was large. The overall appearance then was of lots of stub

- With the introduction of personal computers and my fascination with doing art on my Mac computer I did some collages of dreams I had while pregnant with my two now middle-aged children



Pregnant with my son during first IASD conference 40 years ago

# I continued to do dream art as illustration of important dreams

- ❖ 3 years after a TM colleague died
- ❖ Four dreams about him, one a month for 4 months
- ❖ None before or since
- ❖ Telling me to help in a writing project
- ❖ Contacted a TM friend and he said I could help in editing a special journal issue devoted to my deceased colleagues work
- ❖ my help I was told would be from an outsiders perspective as per the dreams



# Most powerful dream of my life

- Wisconsin in 1985
- Nursing my son
- During time I was working on *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain*
- This art done 16 years after the dream
- Guided and haunted my consciousness ever since



16 Year Dream



# Presentations on art and dreams at IASD began 2015

Gackenbach, J.I. (2022, July) Casual Gamer Dream Incorporation: First Person Observations after Decades of Research. Paper presented at the International Association for the Study of Dreams, Tucson, AZ.

Gackenbach, J.I. (2019, June). Color in Dreams: A Scientific Analysis of the Artists Expression. Paper presented at the International Association for the Study of Dreams, Kerkrade, The Netherlands. Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/jgackenb/color-in-dreams>.

Gackenbach, J.I. (2018, September). *Color in Dreams: A Scientist/Artist Perspective*. Paper presented at psiberdream conference online for the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

Gackenbach, J.I. (2016, September/October). *A Dream and a Painting Marking Raven Woman's Death: Synchronicities and a Jungian Analysis*. Paper presented at psiberdream conference online for the International Association for the Study of Dreams. Retrieved from <http://www.iasdconferences.org/psi2016/schedule/>

Gackenbach, J.I. (2015, September). *Snow BB Dream*. Art work and dream presented at the psiberdream conference online for the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

# Conceptual Framework

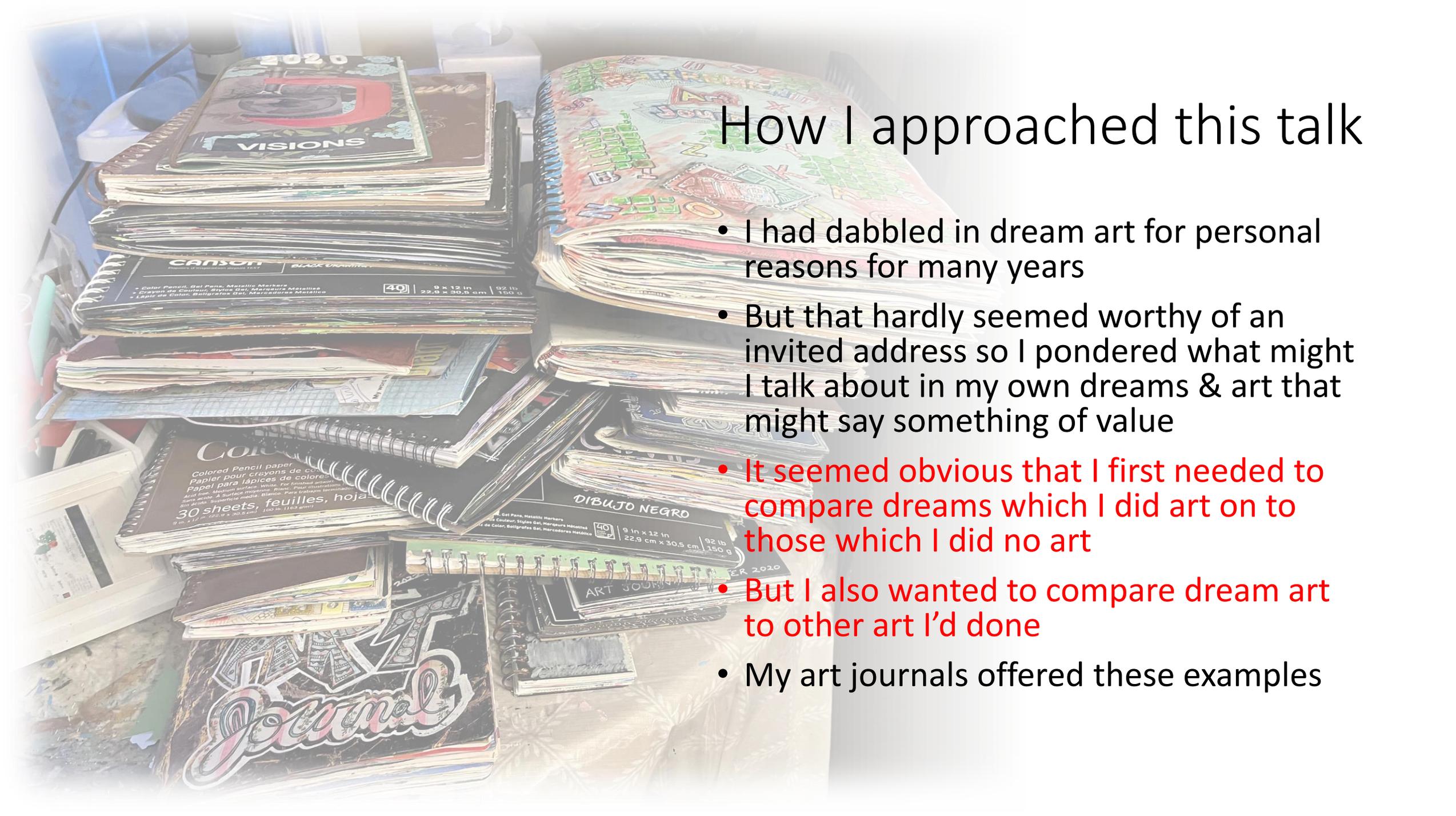
- The idea that art making has emotional healing properties as does dream work is often suggested
- It's the main idea behind
  - Expressive arts
  - Art therapy
- Putting visual art and dreams together offers opportunities to engage in the unconscious material without the verbal skills so often needed in dream work
- Presumably making art of dreams opens a new window to some personal insight

# Conceptual Framework

- Sleep and dreams play a role in memory processes
- Boudrias (2021) argues that the creation of images based on dreams can result in the updating of emotional memory through reconsolidation done in art making
  - She notes, “since images increase both emotional arousal and memory processing, art therapy and dream images can be used to facilitate emotional memory reconsolidation . . . .”
- Furthermore, Mersky & Sievers (2019) hold that dream art can be a transitional object, a concept in psychoanalysis where inner and external are brought together

# How I approached this talk

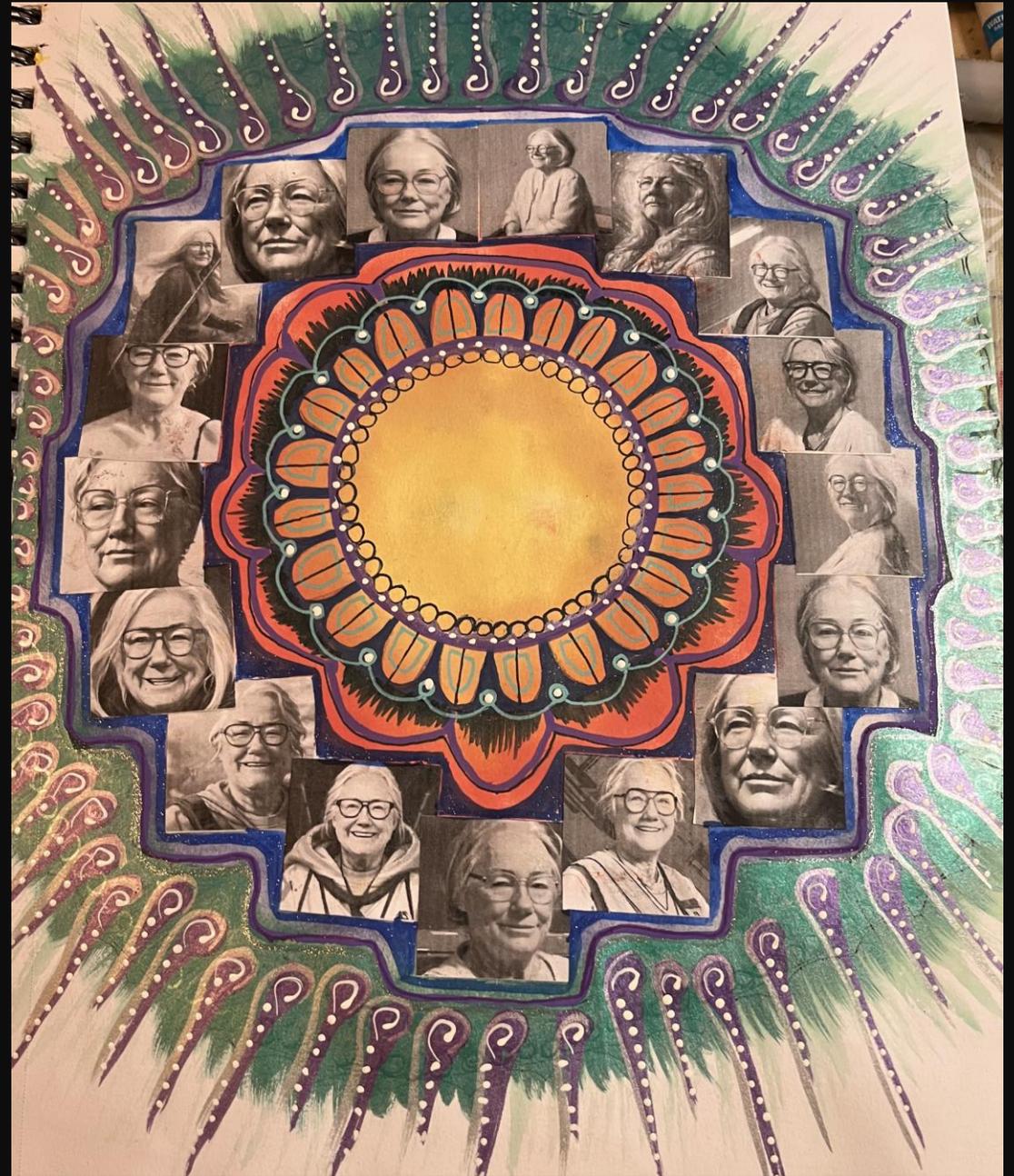
- I had dabbled in dream art for personal reasons for many years
- But that hardly seemed worthy of an invited address so I pondered what might I talk about in my own dreams & art that might say something of value
- It seemed obvious that I first needed to compare dreams which I did art on to those which I did no art
- But I also wanted to compare dream art to other art I'd done
- My art journals offered these examples



# Art Journals

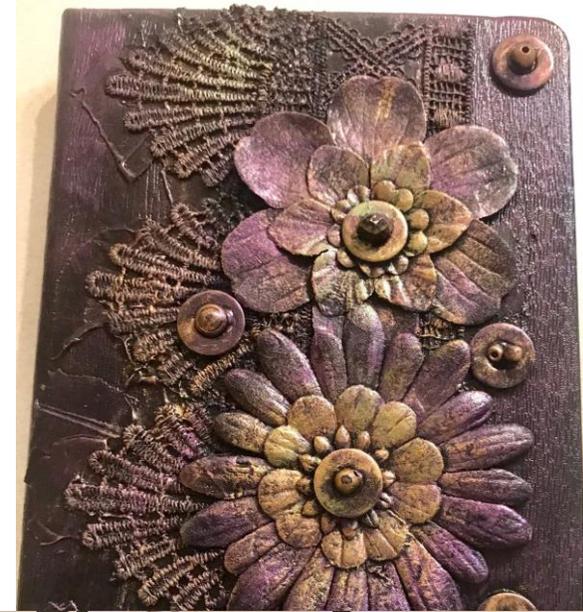
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- Due to the sheer quantity of my art making and dream recall I had to narrow it down by a range of years where I had both dreams and visual art
- I chose two kinds of journals from 2016 to 2022
  - Art Journals: 2041 pages in 39 journals
  - Dream Journals: 1097 dreams in word documents



# non-journal art works done in the 7 years of this analysis

- I typically take photos of my art thus I was able to approximate the number of
  - 273 dimensional (fimo, boxes, book covers, frames, beading, mosaic)
  - 464 Stand alone (paintings, cards, single paper, cardboard)



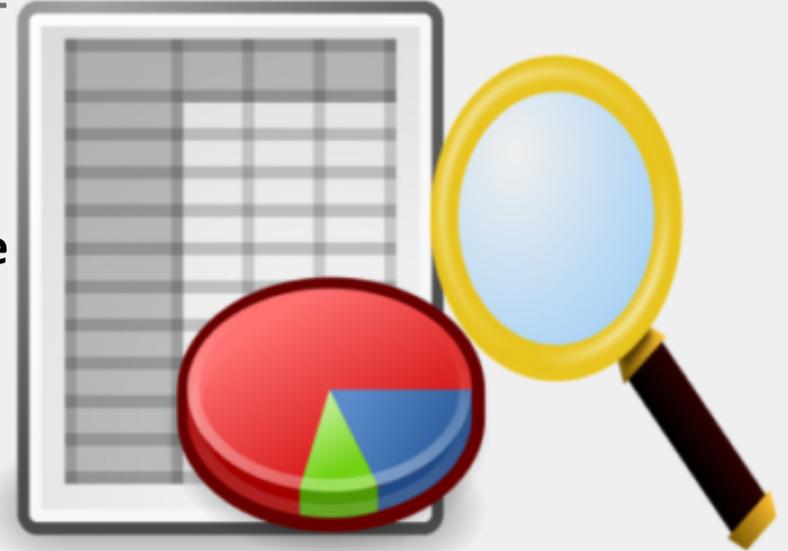
# Analysis outline

Tellingly I had done art to only 32 dreams in those seven years!



Qualitative  
research

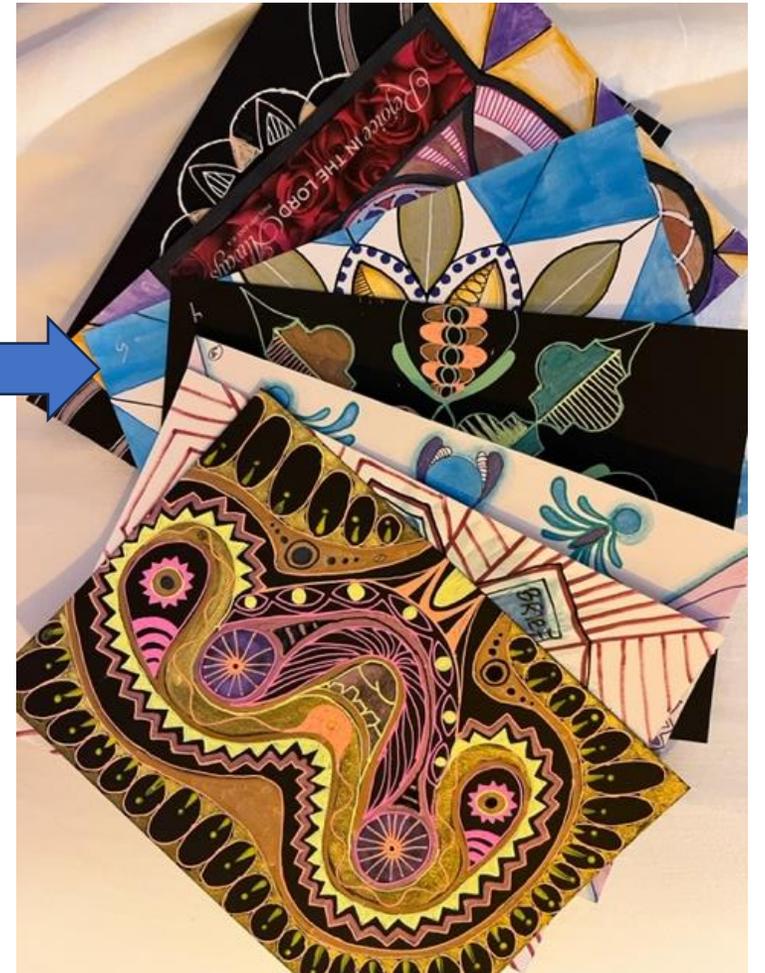
- 7 year sample frame – quantitative analysis
  - Text **VS**
    - Dreams with art done
    - Dreams with no art done
  - Image content
    - Dream art
    - Expressive art
  - Text in images
    - Dream art
    - Expressive art
- 3 year sample frame – qualitative analysis



Quantitative  
research

# The 7 years selected to analyze in dreams and art

- As it turned out there were several major life changes in those 7 years:
  - Retirement from full time work
  - Increase in part time employment
  - My daughter got married
  - My son began living with me full time
  - Estrangement from my daughter
  - Illness of my mother
  - Stroke and subsequent disabilities of my sister
  - COVID years
  - Death of my mother
  - Death of my brother-in-law
- Needless to say this invited talk to look at my art and dreams has been a growth experience in its own right



# Dream comparisons

- Comparison dreams were selected as the next dream after the dream art dream but not on the same night
  - These ranged from the next day to the next week
- Dream samples
  - 4357 words in dreams for which art was done
  - 2996 words in comparison dreams
  - To the extent that word length is an indicate of engagement, but certainly amount of memory, those selected to do art on were longer

First string of images in next set of slides are all from dream art



# Dream comparisons

- Content of dreams was compared using the Linguistic Inventory and Word Count (LIWC-22) system (Boyd, Ashokkumar, Seraj & Pennebaker, 2022)
  - Widely used data analysis system
  - Tabulates frequency of word usage
  - Easy to use system via computers
  - Bulkeley & Graves (2018) used it to examine dream content of nightmares and lucid dreams
  - Zheng & Schweickert (2021) compared its outcomes to the Hall & VandeCastle norms

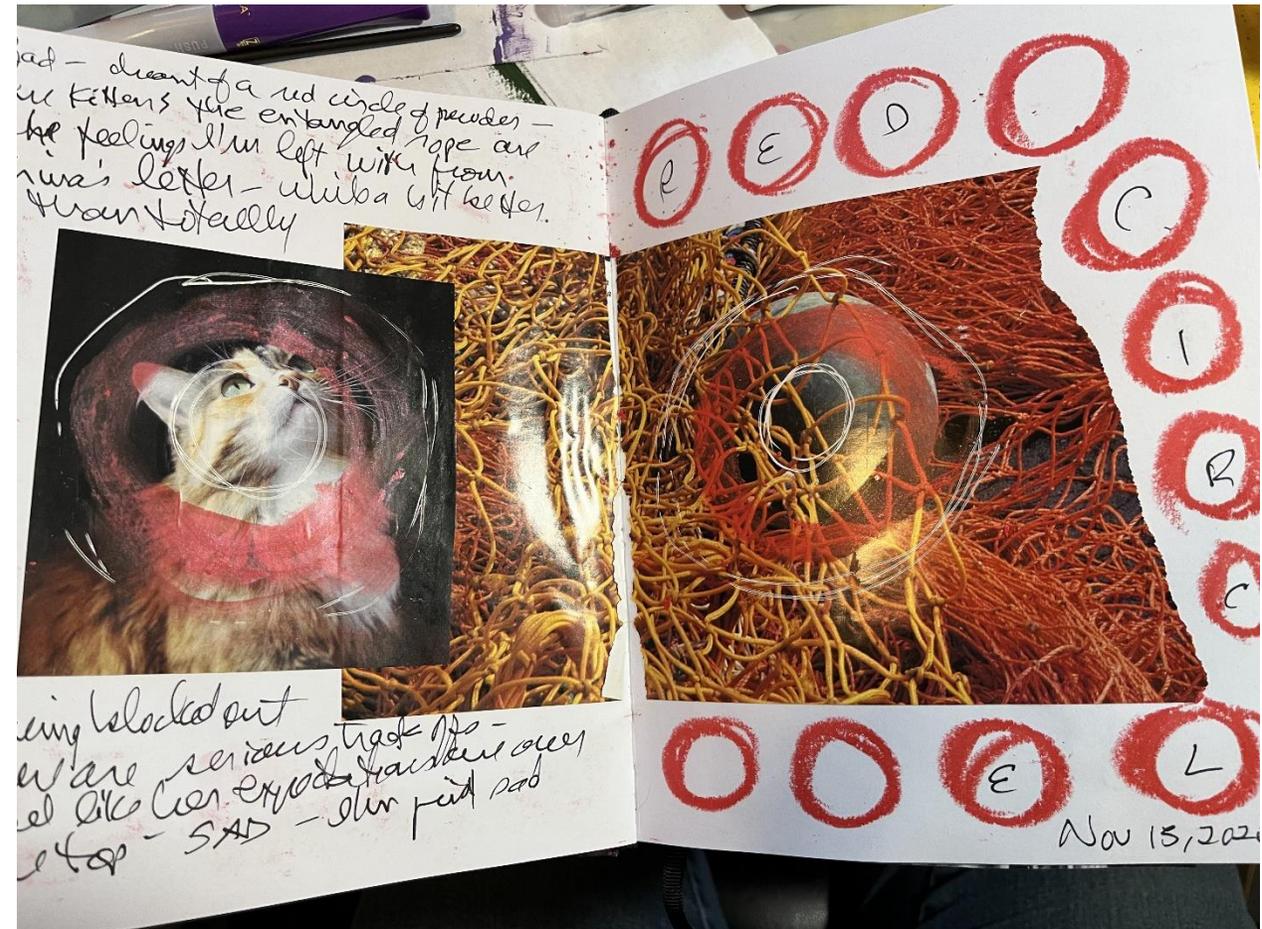


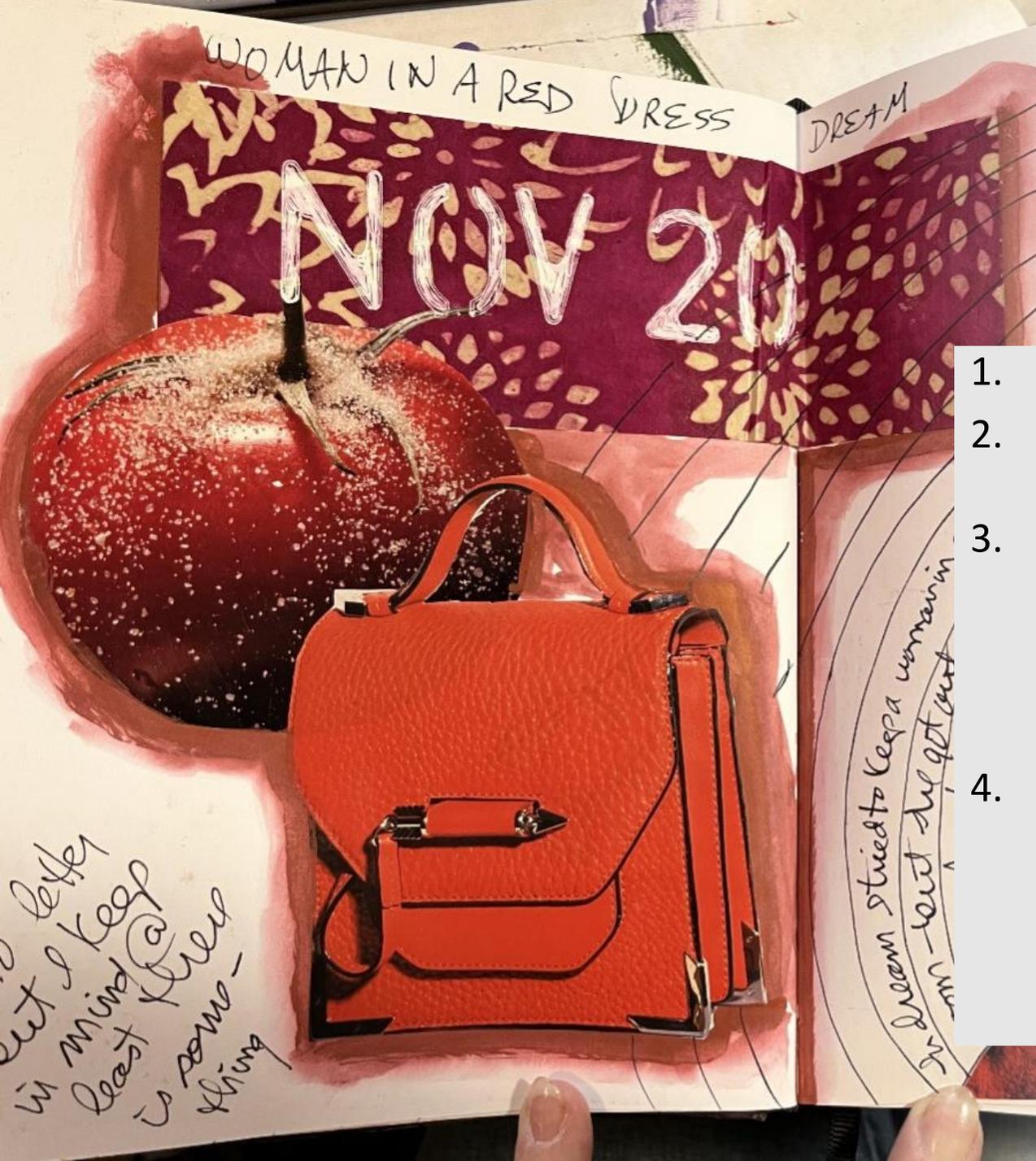
# LIWC-22 findings for percentages

- 44 variables used to compare dreams with art to dreams without art using LIWC based on previous research
- My data adjusted for number of total words in samples by using word percentages as reported by Zheng & Schweickert

## BOTTOM LINE:

1. **Most of my dreams had less than norms, may be due to my dreams in general being rather short which is a function of aging and dream recall – its hard!**
2. Some same as norms: anger, death, sadness, sexual
3. Bottom line NO difference between dreams where art made versus those where it was not made





# LIWC Summary of Art vs NonArt Dreams

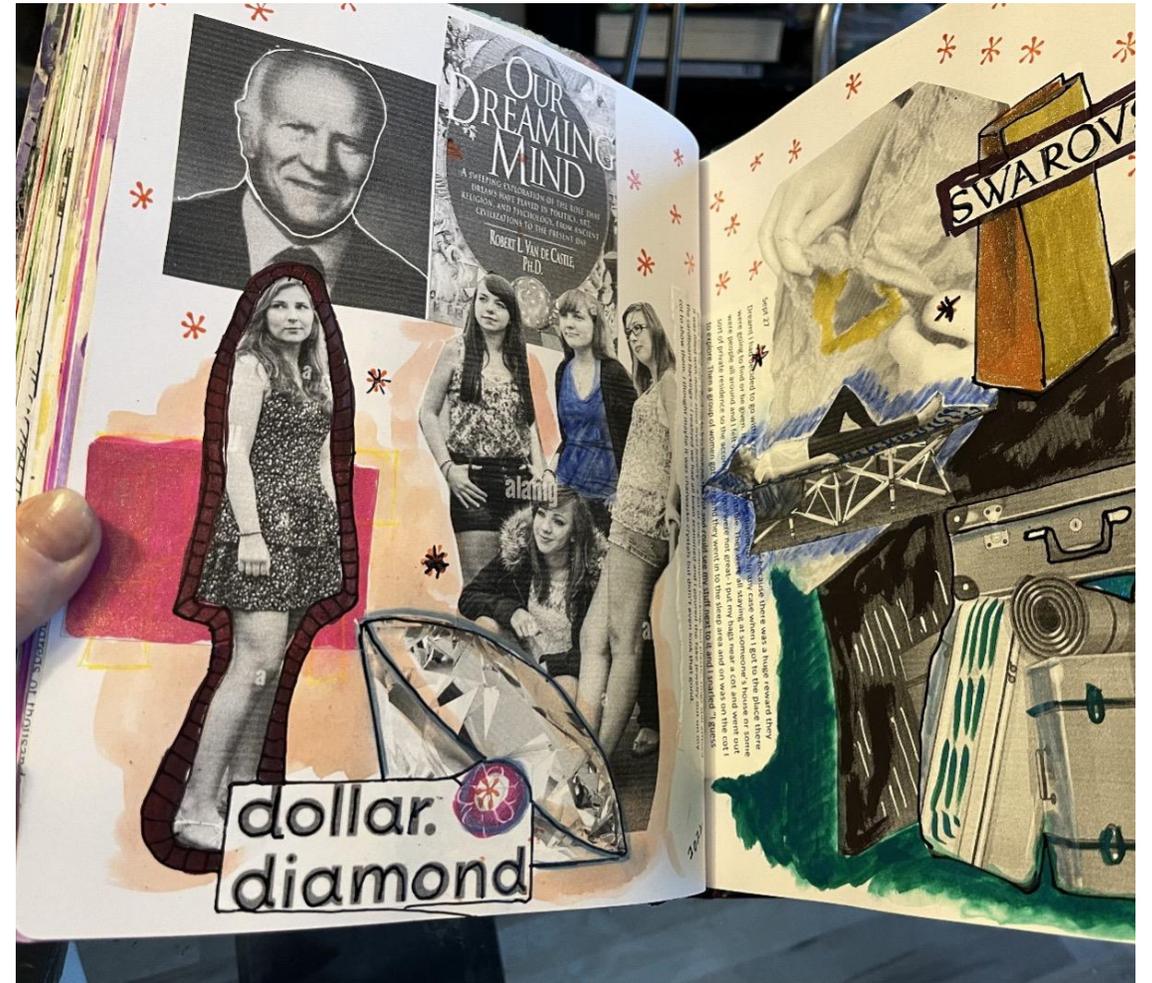
1. More words in dream art
2. Very little content overall in my dreams relative to norms
3. Where **few** differences between my two dream types
  - a. None art dreams richer in content than art dreams (achieve, +emo, social, males, etc)
  - b. Surprising given there are fewer words
4. Why
  - a. Not a function of word count as controlled for when using percentages
  - b. Choice of dreams to do art, picked ones less impactful?

out of my  
in mind  
least I  
to some  
thing

dream tried to keep woman in  
- but she got out

# Choice of dreams to do art, picked ones less impactful?

- While there have been times when doing art on dreams was wonderful, engaging artistically and helpful psychologically
- For the most part when it's been suggested that I do art to a dream, or I'm required to due to workshop or class enrollment, **I'm repelled by the notion**
  - **Despite doing a lot of art and recording a lot of dreams I very seldom do art on dreams**
- Why?
  - On a feeling level it feels like I'm constrained if asked to do dream art while just doing art for its own sake is unlimited, open, relaxing, absorbing, NONTHINKING
  - So it may be a function of the approach to art that I take more than any comment about the value of doing art to dreams
  - **Thus it seemed relevant to look at the art itself**

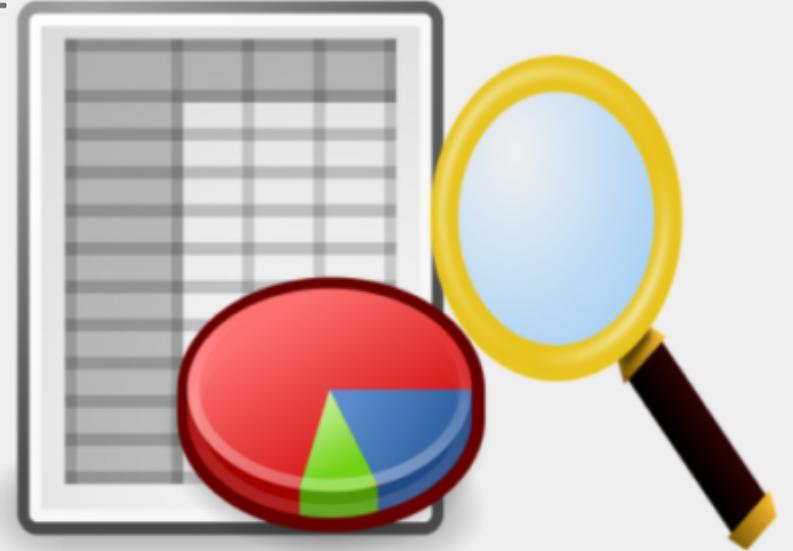


# Analysis outline



Qualitative  
research

- 7 year sample frame – quantitative analysis
  - Text **VS**
    - Dreams with art done
    - Dreams with no art done
  - **Image content**
    - **Dream art**
    - **Expressive art**
  - Text in images
    - Dream art
    - Expressive art
- 3 year sample frame – qualitative analysis



Quantitative  
research

Next series of images  
on slides are  
expressive arts

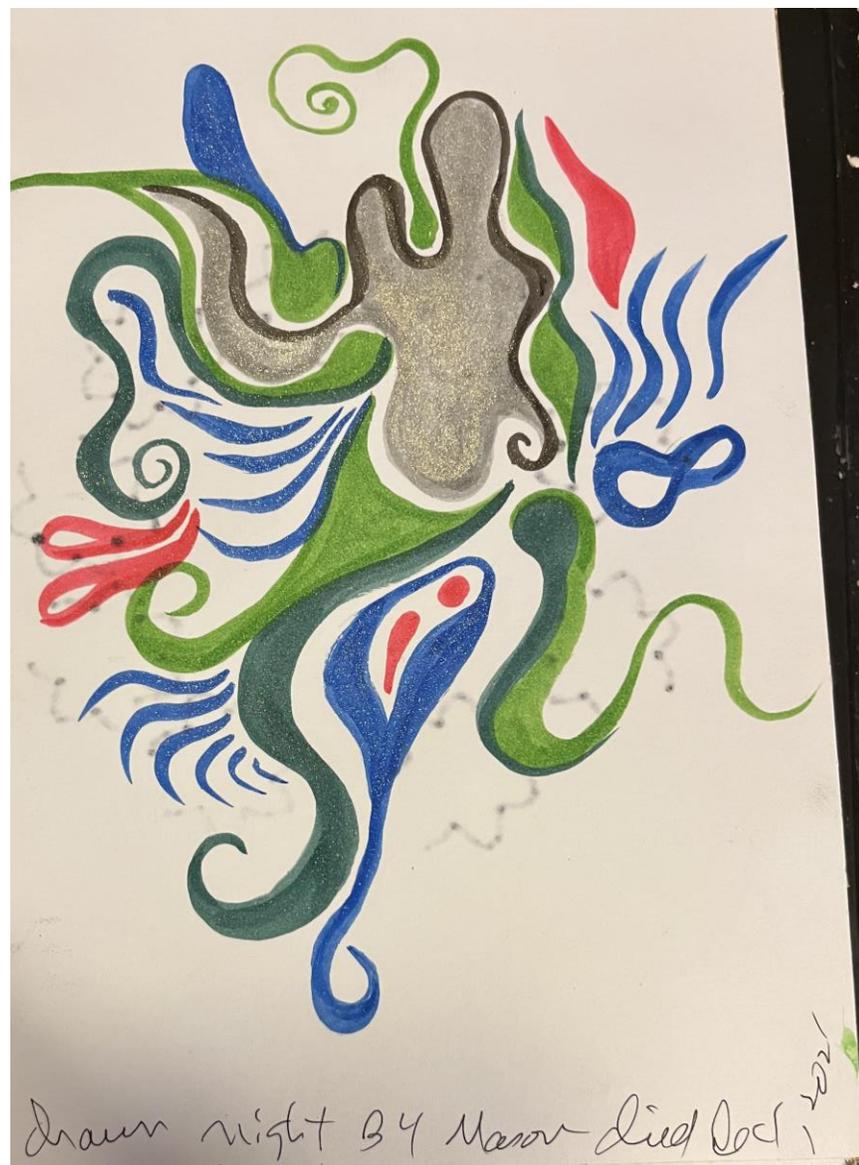
# Compare Dream Art to Expressive Art

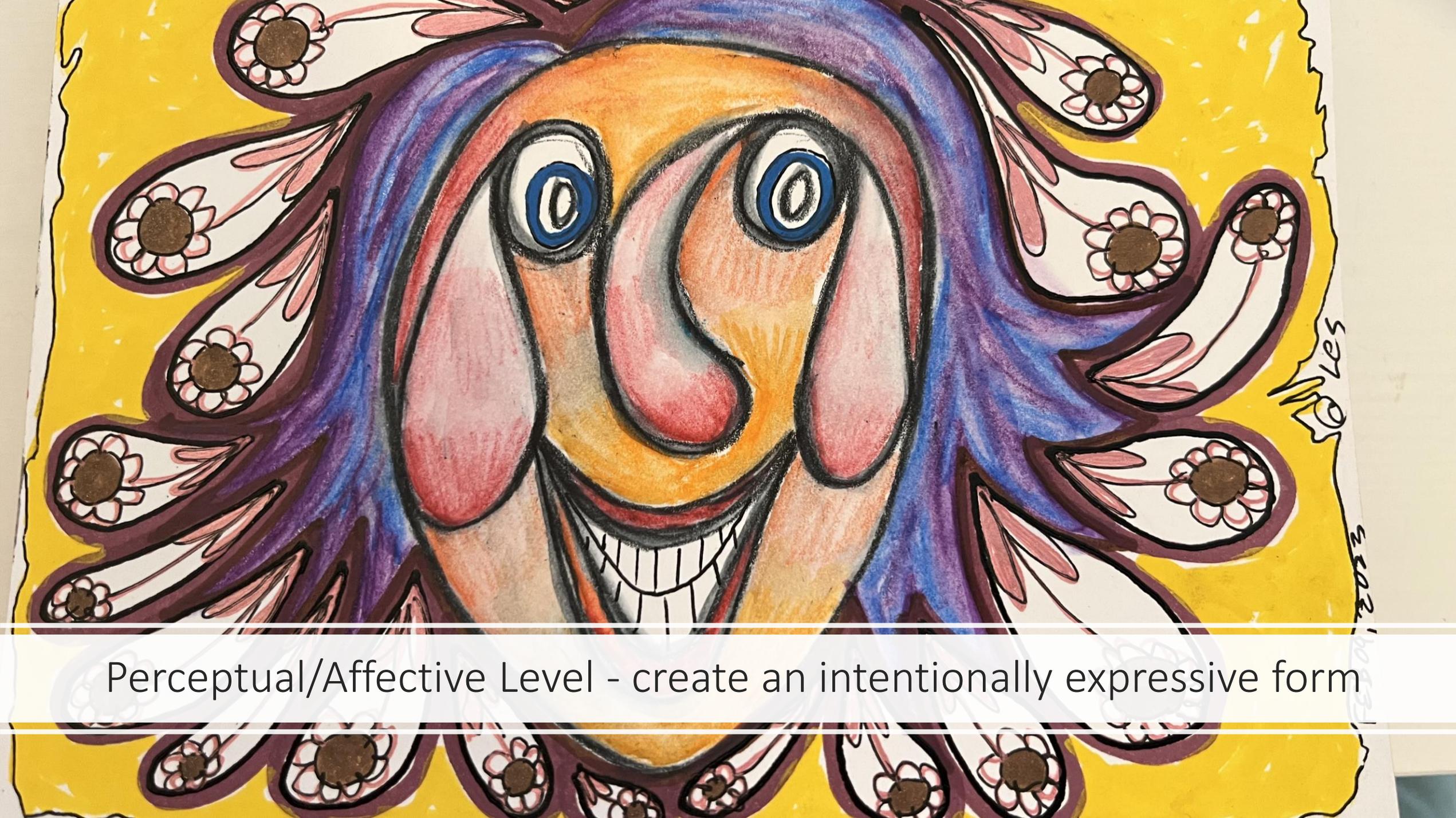
- Expressive Art: emotional expression through art making
- One can argue that all art making, of any form, is expressive
- Developmental model of expressive art through creative functioning by Lusebrink
- Three levels: each of which can culminate in the fourth level
  1. Kinesthetic/Sensory Level – rhythmic, tactile and sensual
  2. Perceptual/Affective Level - create an intentionally expressive form
  3. Cognitive/Symbolic Level – plans the art piece
  4. Creative Level – achieve a sense of joy

# My art making in Lusebrink's model

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- Kinesthetic/Sensory Level – rhythmic, tactile and sensual
- This form is central to my lifelong art making
- The feel of paint on brush flowing onto paper

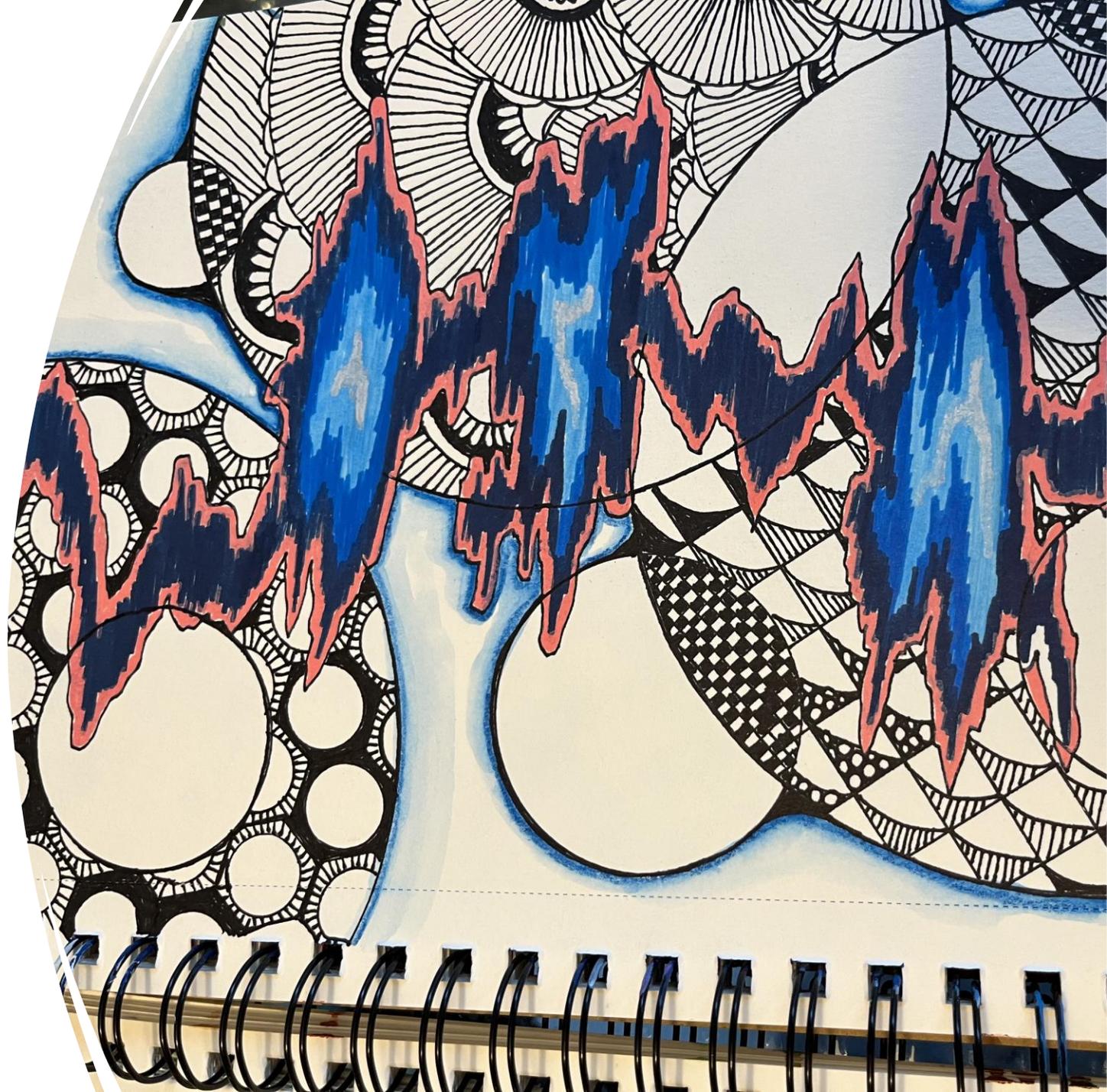


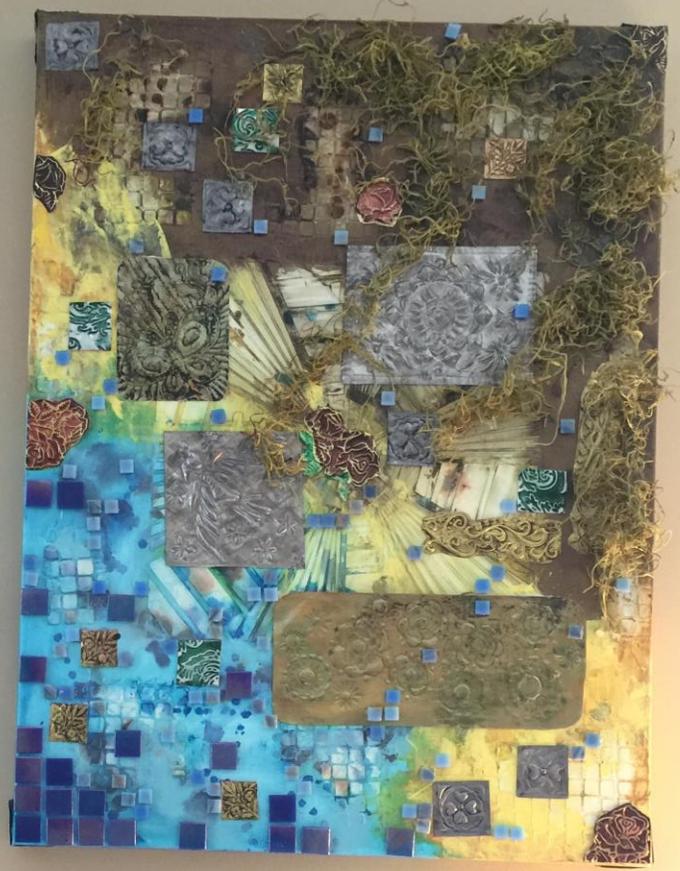


Perceptual/Affective Level - create an intentionally expressive form

Cognitive/Symbolic  
Level – plans the art  
piece

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Creative Level –  
achieve a sense  
of joy



# On Lusebrinks art making model

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Three levels in order of my preference

1. **Kinesthetic/Sensory Level** – rhythmic, tactile and sensual – almost always
2. Perceptual/Affective Level - create an intentionally expressive form - often
3. Cognitive/Symbolic Level – plans the art piece –rarely

Remember any of the three levels can result in

1. Creative Level – achieve a sense of joy
2. I regularly have this experience with art making and when looking back at my art



# Narrowing my samples of art

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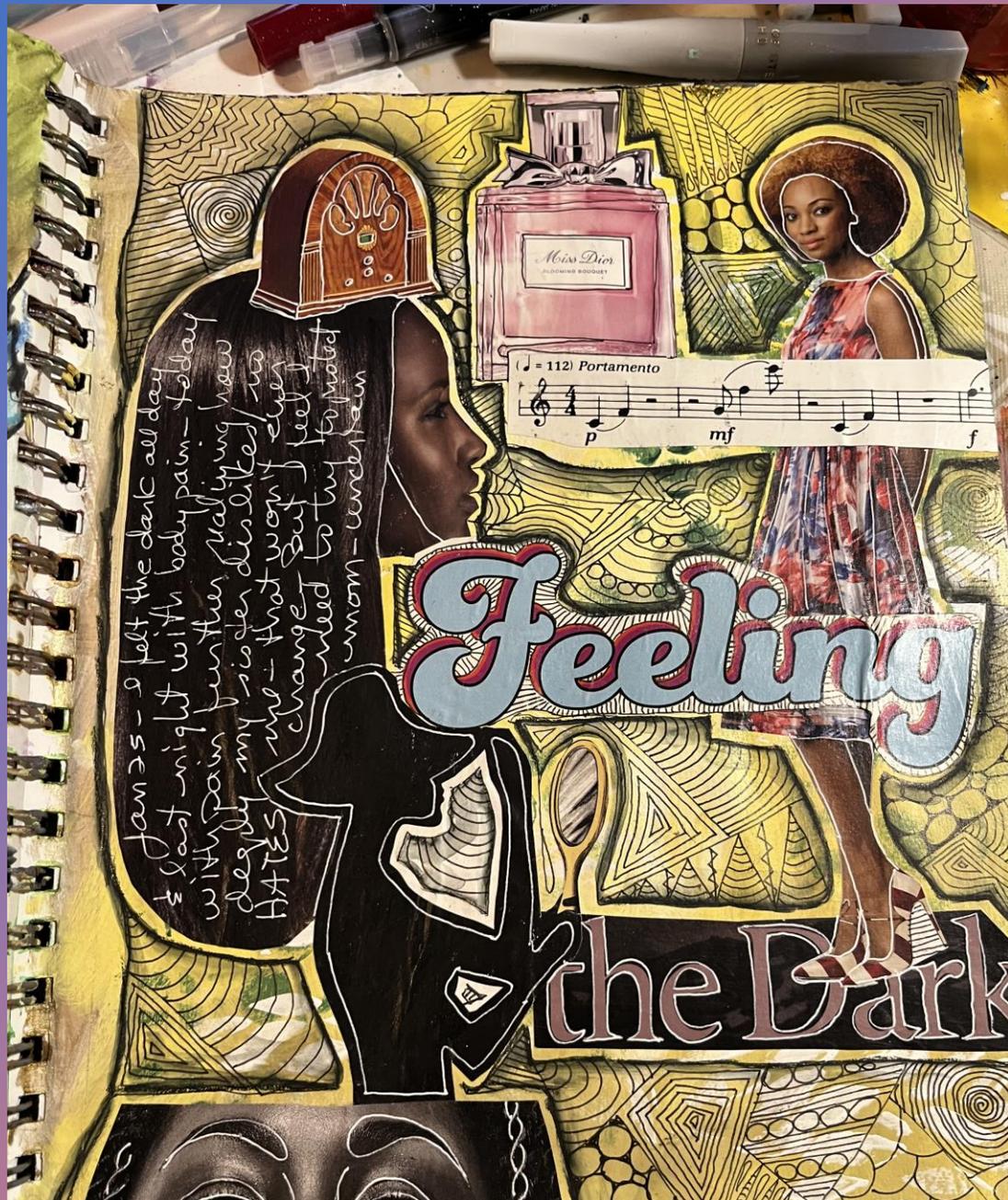
- Dream art was easy to identify as the dream texts matched specific art works but they had to be in the journals in order to more directly compare them to expressive art
- Expressive art was more of a challenge to identify in order to narrow it down
  - I chose images with words on them which was 178
  - I further identified these into categories based on when/how done



# Expressive art categories from 178 images

1 visiting family	19
2 family/other drama	30
3 words on art	28
4 event/holiday	41
5 workshop/class/meeting on expressive art	60

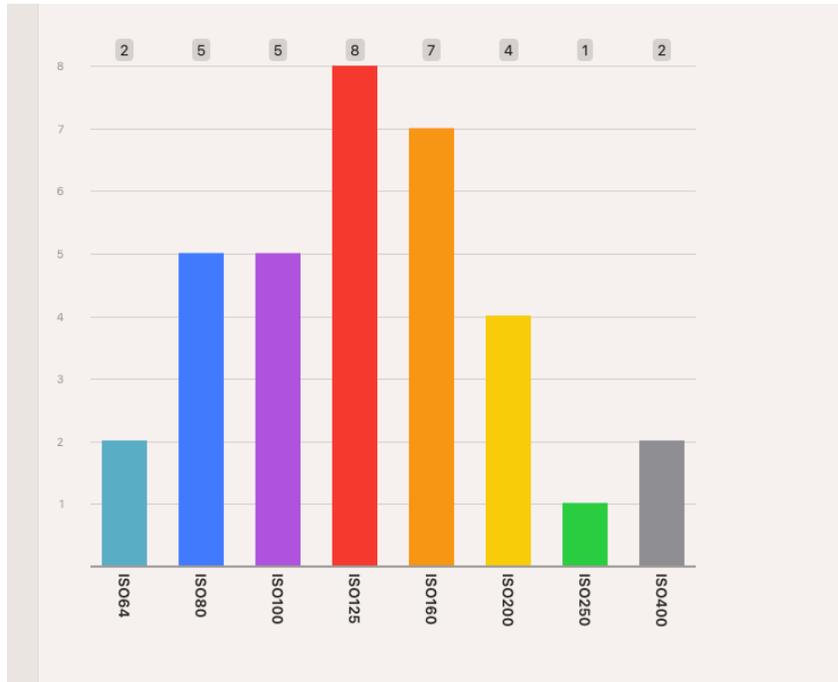
- When you consider the sheer volume of art done by me in those 7 years there really wasn't a lot with words (expressive art) and even fewer art works from dreams
- I had to further break down the expressive art selection to make comparisons more manageable to do
- Thus, I selected expressive art pieces from this sample which occurred in the same year as the dream art – thus one expressive art piece for every dream art piece
- Given the heavy number of expressive art works, my selection criteria was to have as much as possible one example of each category of expressive art to match each dream



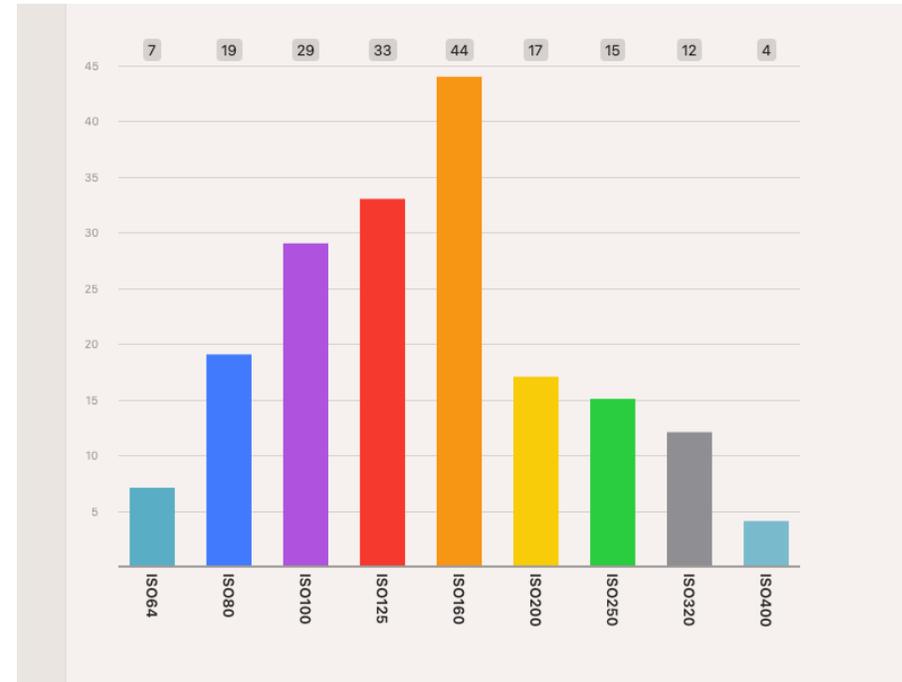
# Comparing expressive art to dream art

- After various eliminations I was left with 32 dream art compared to 32 expressive art pieces done in the same year if for a variety of reasons
- I did several comparisons of these art works
  - Used image analysis software
    - Photostats
    - Google Vision API
  - Created a version of HVDC and used it to judge visual content
  - Used LIWC but this time for text inside the art works

# Photostats comparison



Dream images Color frequencies



Expressive Arts images Color frequencies

# Google Vision API

- derive insights from images and videos with pre-trained software
- I used the sample software and did not program further details as when used commercially (i.e. windmill repairs)
- Output variables: Seems like a great list but various problems when actual output is examined against input of art images

The logo for Google Cloud, featuring the word "Google" in its signature multi-colored font (blue, red, yellow, blue, green, red) followed by the word "Cloud" in a dark grey, sans-serif font.

# Google Vision API: Findings no differences

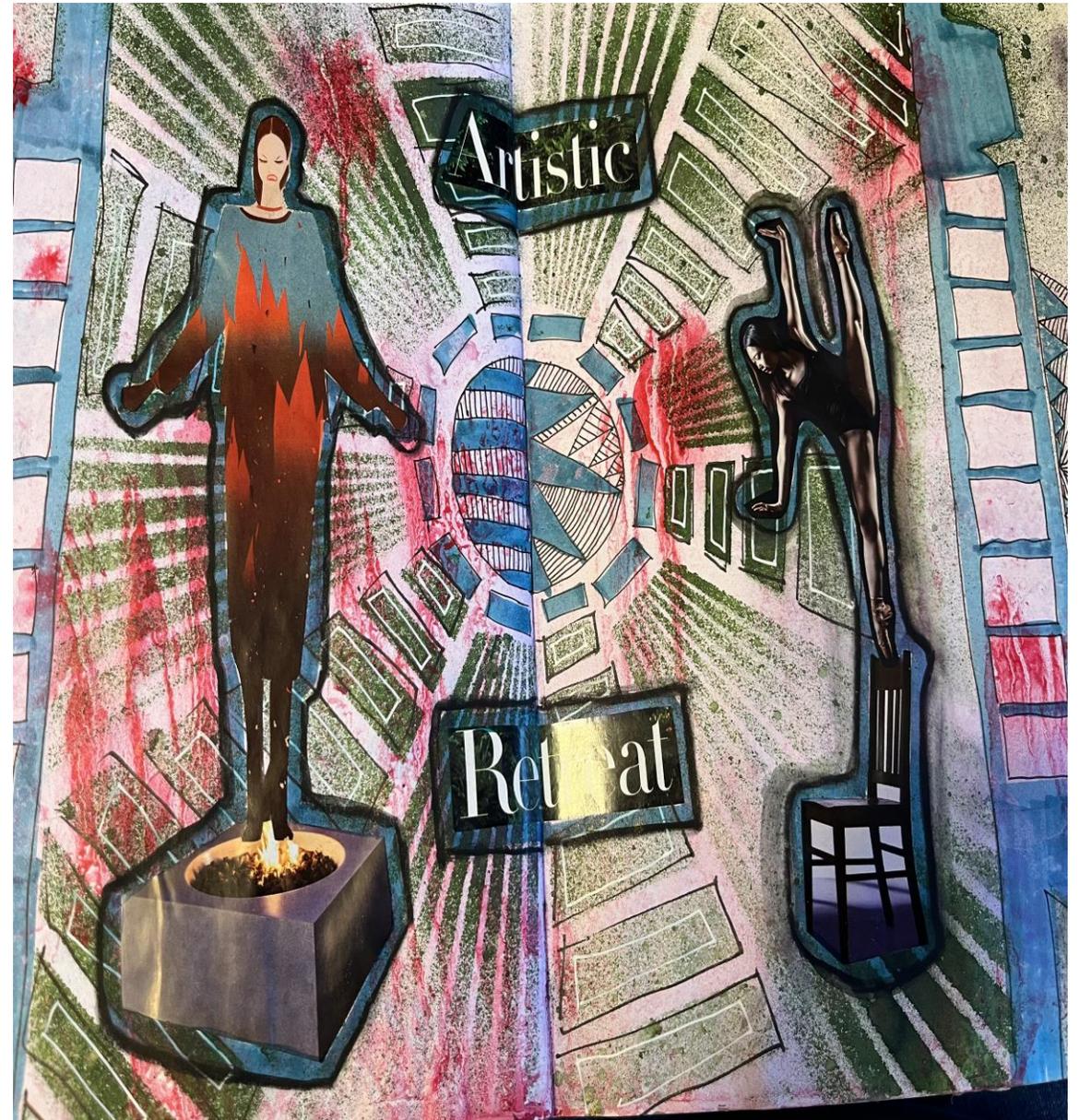
- 32 dream art was compared to 32 expressive art images
- #Objects identified ns
- Label is color ns
- AI recognized Text blocks ns
- AI recognized Faces ns
- # Labels given

**# Labels given: Dream art=689, Expressive art=782**

# Results of coding misc category assessment of art

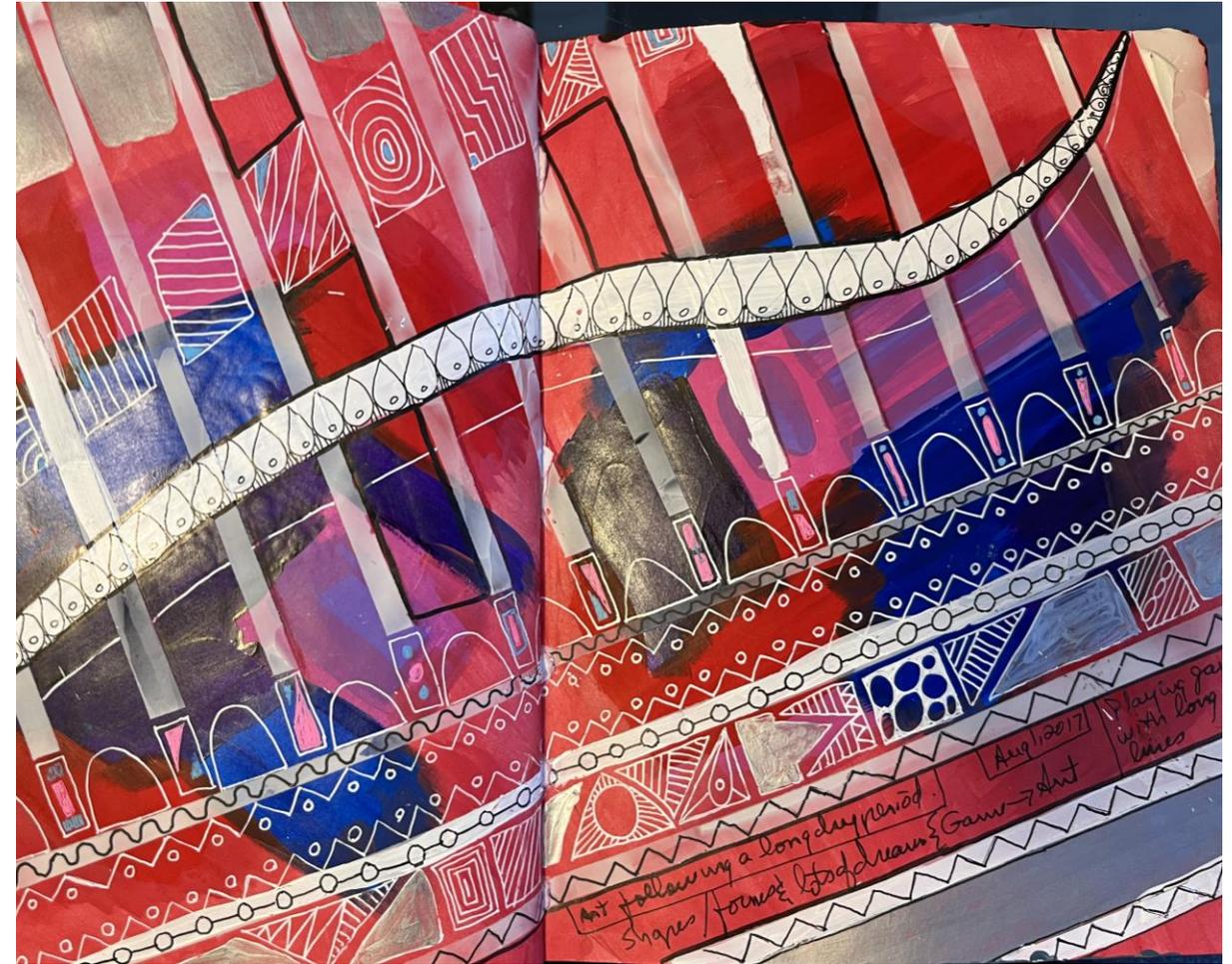
Dream art = expressive art

- Words on page
- Both a combination of Collage and painting
- Created alone
- abstract



# version of HVDC used it to judge visual content

- Items coded as no/uncertain/yes
- I moved back and forth between dream and expressive arts as I coded
- Scales used:
  - Characters
  - Social
  - Activities
  - Success/failure and misfortune/goodfortune
  - Emotions
  - Settings
  - Objects
  - Temporal
- A few significant differences





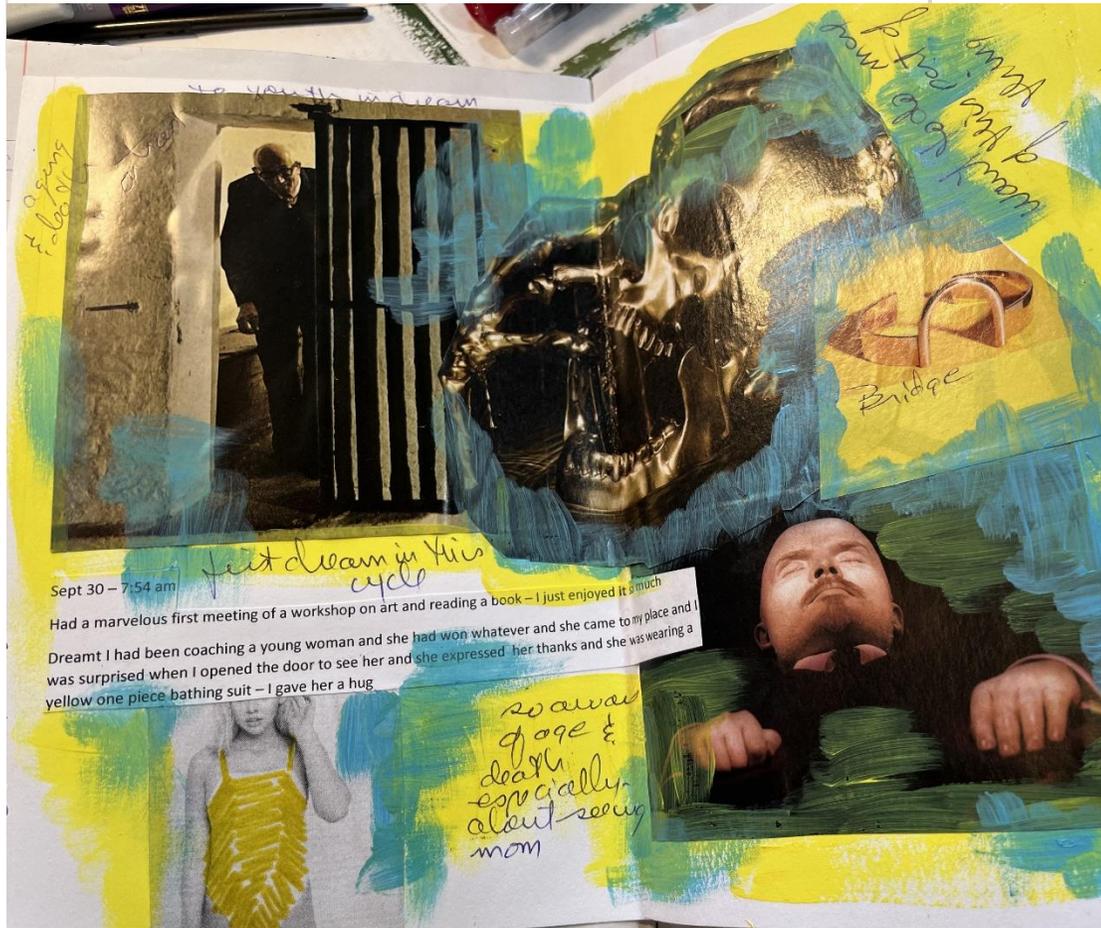
version of HVDC  
notable results

- Animals more in dream art



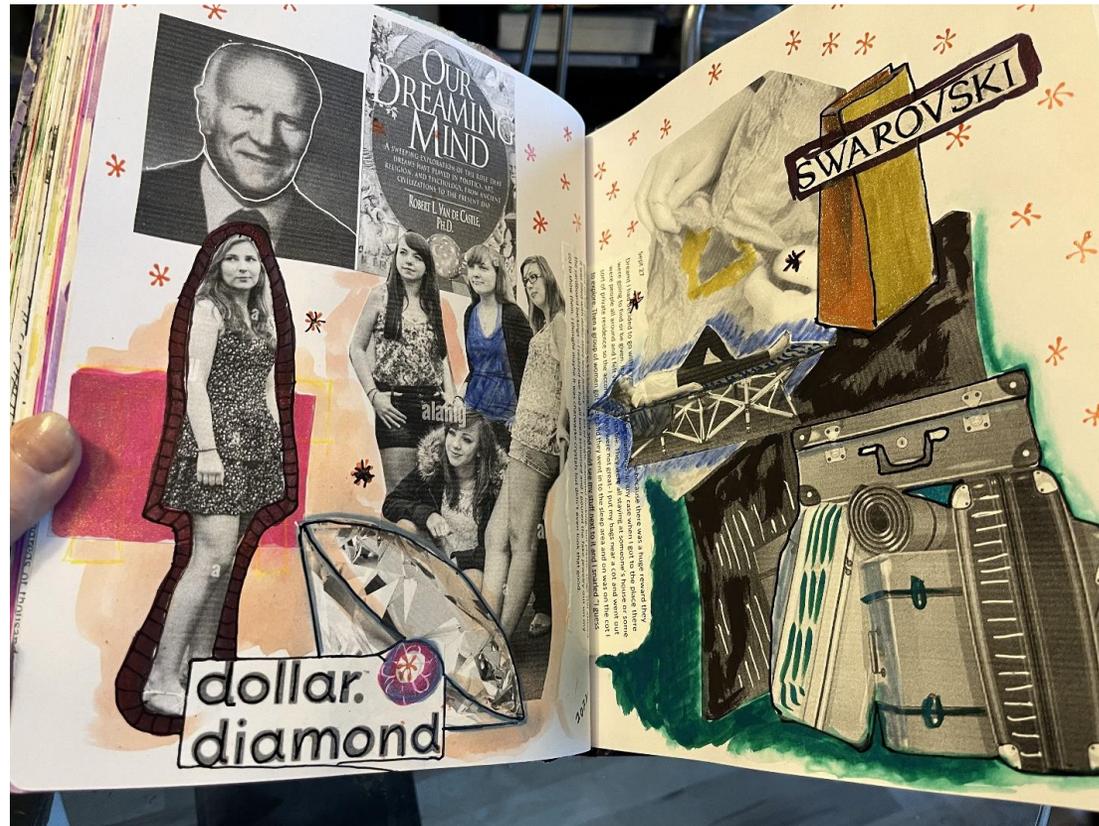
version of HVDC  
notable results

- Body Parts more in dream art



version of HVDC  
notable results

- Travel more in dream art



# Analysis outline



Qualitative  
research

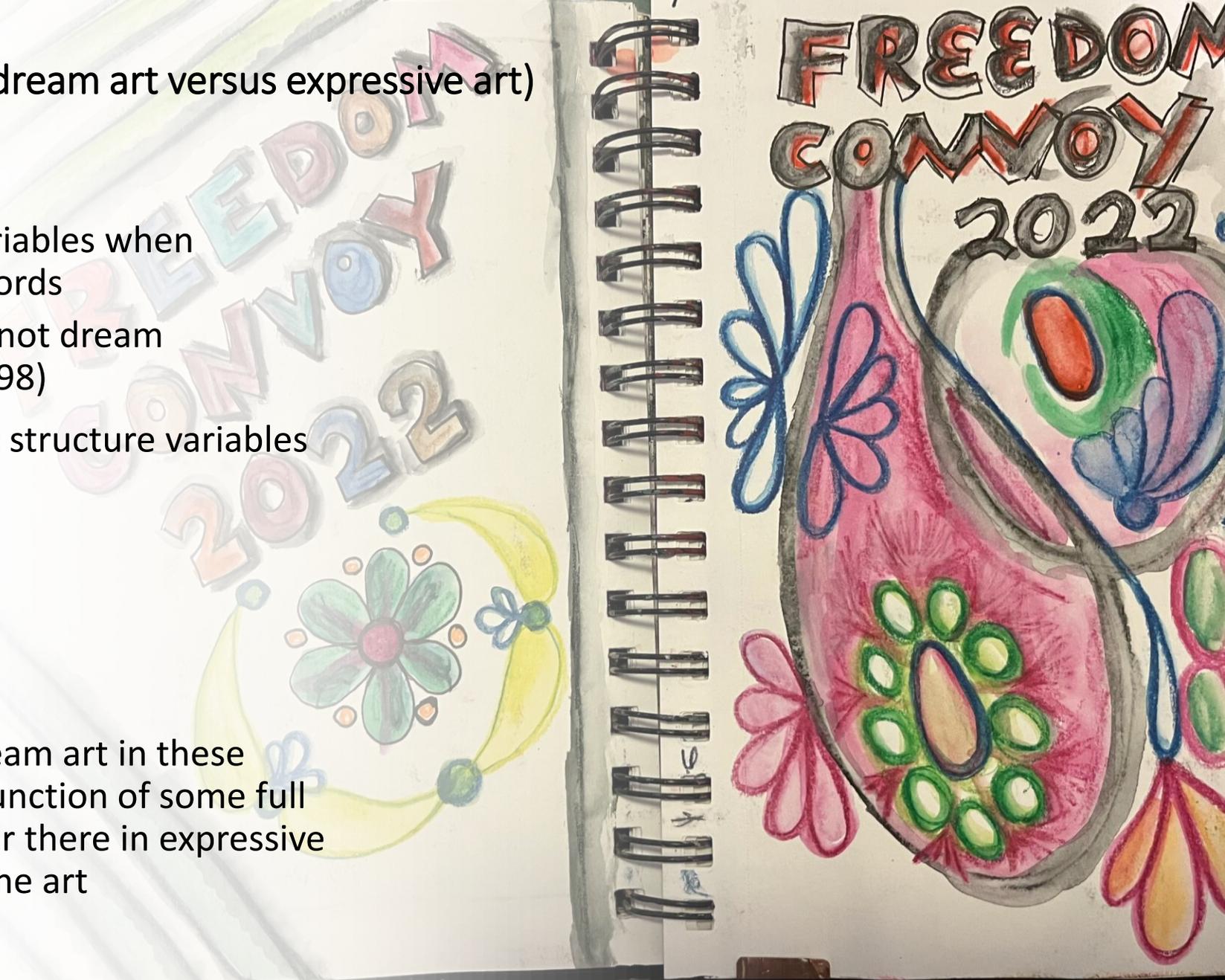
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Quantitative  
research

## LIWC on text inside the art works (dream art versus expressive art)

- No difference across all content variables when converted to percentage of total words
  - Word count (dream art = 637 (not dream transcript); expressive art = 1598)
- Some differences in some linguistic structure variables (dream art > expressive art)
  - Analytic
  - Authentic
  - Dictionary
  - Linguistic
- Thus the minimal superiority of dream art in these linguistic type variables may be a function of some full sentence writing while largely never there in expressive art where the words were part of the art



# What did I discover about my dream art?

- Dream comparisons
  - # words: Dreams with art longer
  - LIWC: Less content than norms
  - LIWC: dreams without art richer in amount of content than dreams with art but most variables showed no difference
- Art Comparisons
  - Photostats: red/orange dominant
  - Google Vision API:
    - Expressive art > dream art
      - Number of labels
    - No difference in rest of content
- Art Comparisons continued
  - Misc categories
    - Dream art = expressive art
  - HVDC coding
    - Most no difference
    - Differences favored dream art (people, animals, body parts, travel)
  - LIWC of text in art
    - More words in expressive art
    - Most categories no difference
    - difference in linguistic variables, more in dream art

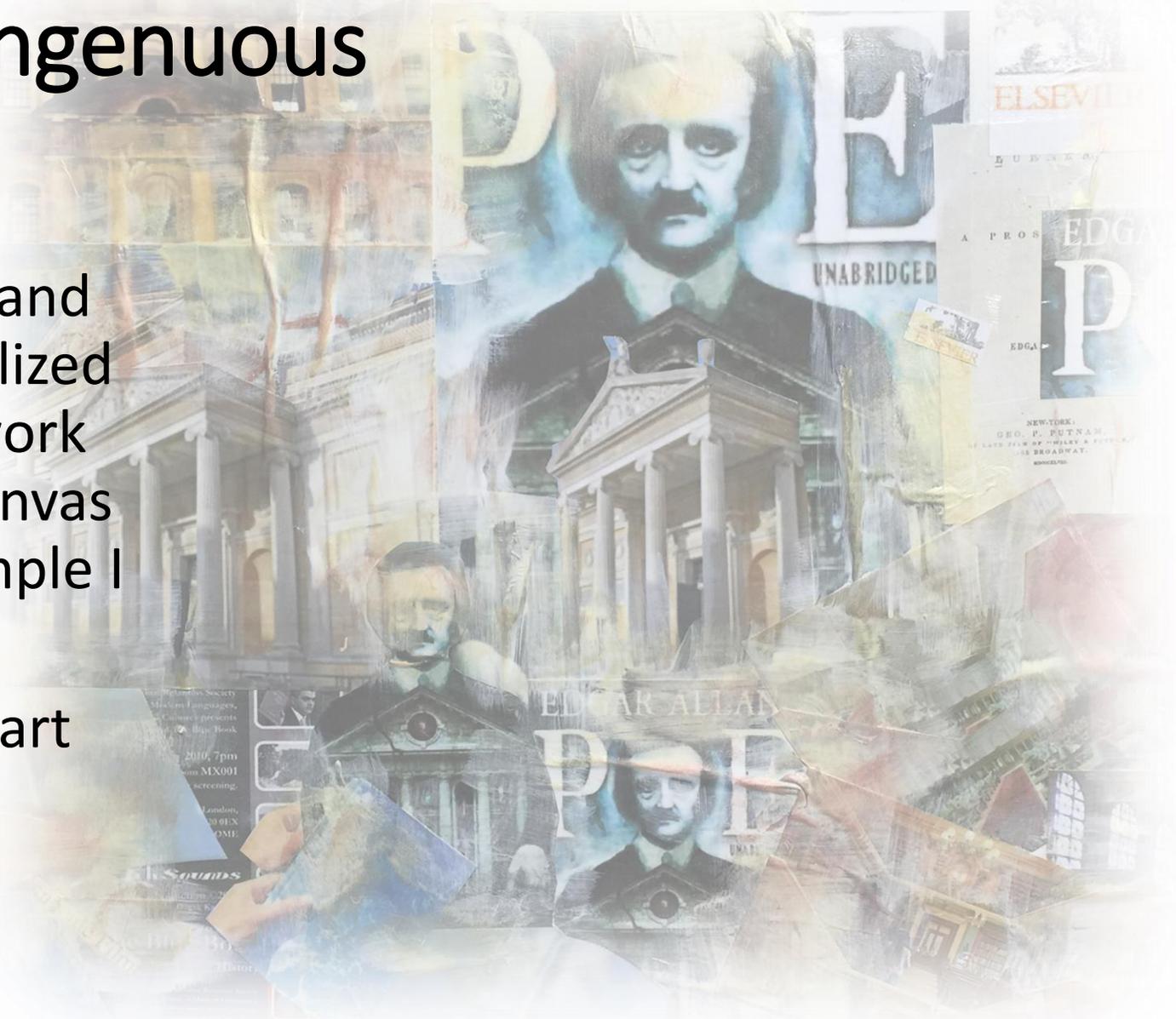
# Making sense of all this data analysis



- For me at least my art is basically the same if it's done about a dream or not
- My dreams illustrated or not are basically the same
- My preference is to do art and dreamwork but not necessarily to combine them

# BUT...that feels disingenuous

- As I was reviewing past presentations to IASD on art and dreams that I had made I realized that my most impactful art work from dreams was done on canvas and thus NOT part of the sample I selected
- So I decided to look at those art works and dreams

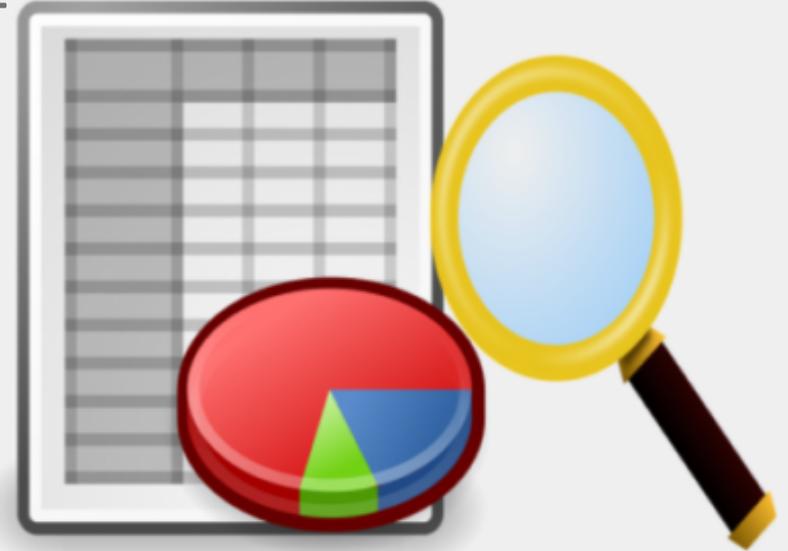


# Analysis outline



Qualitative  
research

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    - Expressive art
- **3 year sample frame – qualitative analysis**



Quantitative  
research

# Previous extensive analysis on one such work

- Gackenbach, J.I. (2016, September/October). *A Dream and a Painting Marking Raven Woman's Death: Synchronicities and a Jungian Analysis*. Paper presented at psiberdream conference online for the International Association for the Study of Dreams.



# Canvas Based Dream Art

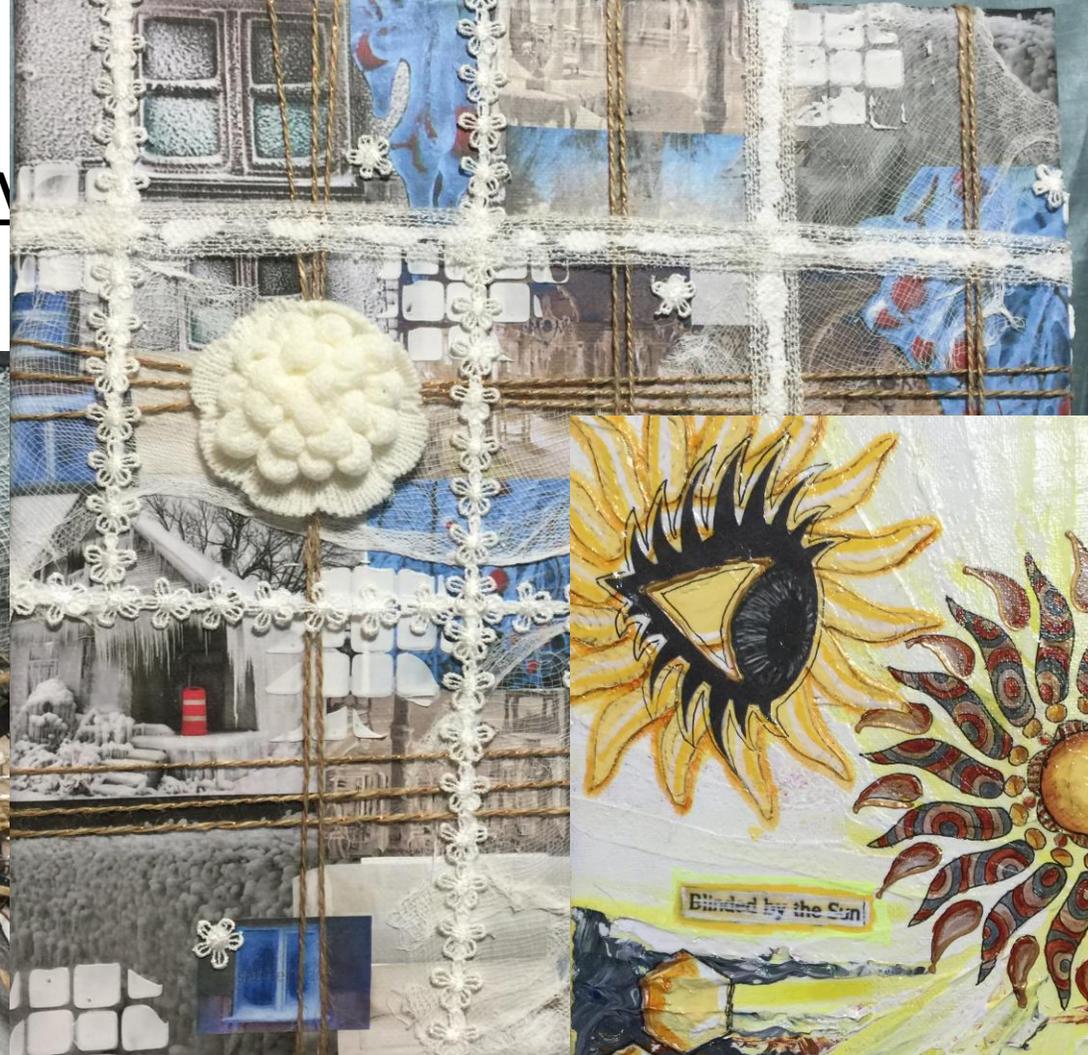
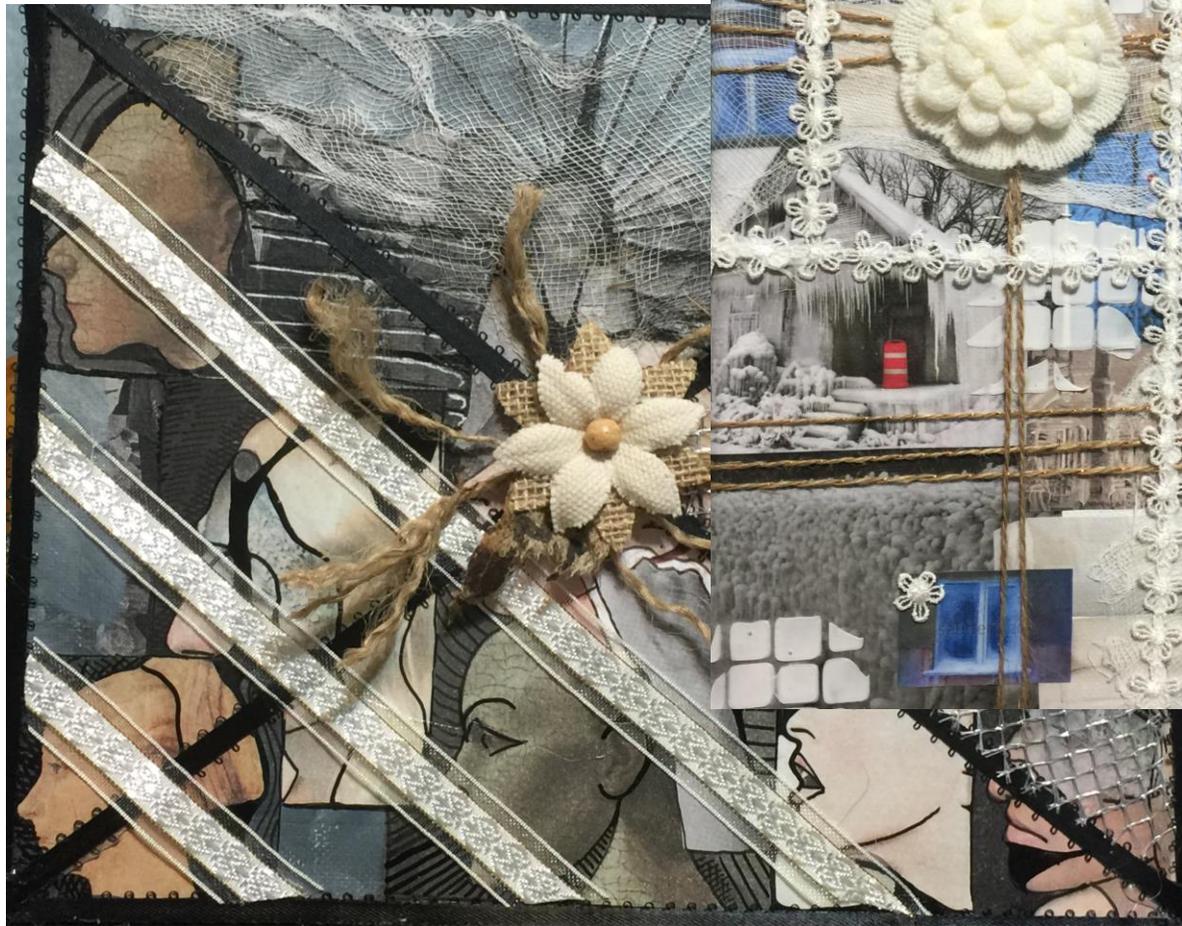
2014	2 dreams
2015	21 dreams with 4038 words
2016	8 dreams with 1580 words

- The scrapbook data was from 2016-2022 so this data is mostly prior to the data just analyzed
- As before I combined these into 31 dreams/images and selected comparison dreams
- That is the next dream recorded after the one painted but NOT from the same night
- I then did most of the same sets of analysis on the canvas dreams as I had done on the scrapbook dream art
- Generally got the same result – basically no difference in the dreams
  - Canvas versus scrapbook dreams versus comparison dreams
- But as I was compiling this new dream art data I was struck that **there were differences**

# Qualitative Differences: Scrapbook Dream Art vs Canvas Dream Art

- The length of the dreams in the year prior to my data collection amazed me
  - 5628 words in canvas dream art
  - 3798 words in scrapbook dream art
- The canvas dream art was sometimes accompanied by extensive art process notes with accompanying pictures
- Follow-up notes from discussions of the dream and art were also more frequent
- It was apparent that unlike the scrapbook dream art these pieces were often gone back to and adjusted
- There was considerable thought and planning that went into them
- They were often shared with family, friends, and therapists for comment and processing
- More indicative of Lusebrinks creative level of expressive art making

# Canvas Dream A



# Dream Art became part of the therapeutic process in working the dream: Examples



- July 30 – 1:44 am
- Dreamt about a devil that was attacking me and mine at my mothers house – it had tried to attack me earlier and I had gotten away – this time as it came in I was more aware of it and I went upstairs and it was dark upstairs but light on the first floor– and it started up the stairs and I knew I had to attack it before it tried to get me – I had to be preemptive – I threw a bowl of soup at its face and it charged up at me and I think Tom was upstairs with me – I grabbed its mouth and held it wide open, way wide, and kept it open it was helpless so long as the person holding him was wearing something from his birthday in December – there was another woman there and we couldn't tell if what she was wearing was from the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> so we were unsure of letting go – then I woke

# Dream Art became part of the therapeutic process in working the dream: Example

- Aug 1 – 4:28 am
- dreamt I was out in the country someplace – farmland and rolling hills – someone called me over and asked me to explain how a tornado works, I thought the question odd as I was hardly a tornado expert but began and explained how the top winds went from right to left while the bottom ones went from left to right (could have been the other way around I don't know but I do recall using direction of left to right and visa versa rather than saying clockwise or counterclockwise). In any case as soon as I was finished someone screamed tornado and we all looked and there was a huge tornado bearing down on us – it was big and close and then it literally filled the sky with black swilling winds and I ran along with those around me but I was also watching me run and watching me see the tornado – it was exhilarating and scary but mostly exhilarating



# Aug 5 session with therapist on nightmare paintings: Notes on session

- I focused on the first nightmare about the devil/demon as it was the scariest
- She pointed out that at various points in the dream I was managing, either with inner figures helping (the woman on the stairs holding him or Tom upstairs in the dark) or
- I was managing on my own – had fought him off earlier, was holding his mouth open

# Aug 5 session with therapist on nightmare paintings: Notes on session

- – the dates of Dec 18 or 19<sup>th</sup> were obviously important and I explained that my wedding anniversary to Tom was on Dec 19<sup>th</sup>.
- then she focused on the Dec 18 or Dec 19 quandary at the end of the nightmare and how I might use active imagination to go to the next step, that is deciding which is the right direction/choice to make –
- **I pointed out that I had done that with the images – and explained how while both images were about the dreams that there were differences including that one had Dec 18 on it and one had Dec 19 on it – we then went through the differences between the two paintings and I pointed out that any differences were entirely unconscious – while I stayed true to the dreams and added various components from them as I went along – it was a hard process to do but I kept coming back and the images deepened and finally I got to a point where I thought “I like them” – it felt complete and finished –**

# Aug 5 session with therapist on nightmare paintings: Notes on session

- as it turned out the bad decision (worst elements of each dream were all on the painting called Dec 18) while all the good decisions/elements were on the one Dec 19<sup>th</sup> – it was weird element after element lined up perfectly that way –
- I'm still amazed at how the process played out and eager to get to another dream to illustrate it – as so much comes out – like last night jumping up out of bed and putting the Mandela stencil on the horse dream image from a dream about my daughter



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