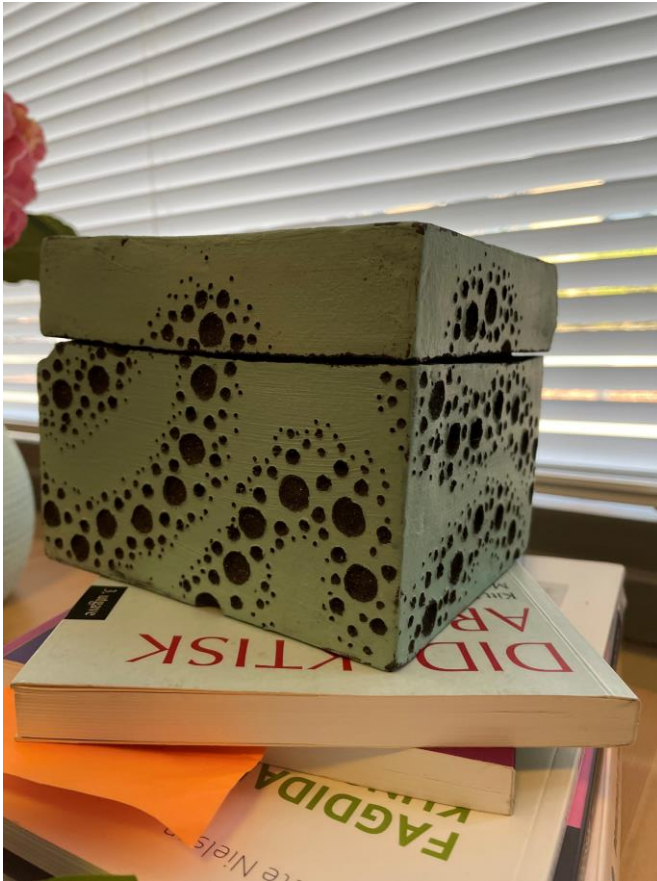




SKILL IN ARTS AND TEACHING

Contextual practice

Professor/Teacher: Julia Lockheart

QUESTION 2

Define skill in the context of your own practice and the work of two Artists/makers/designers from the lecture series.

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This essay will compare the skillsets of a teacher in art, with the skillsets of artists and makers. I will give an explanation as to why it is important to define the skill of teaching in this field as well as the importance of skill when working as an artist. The literature I have chosen to use in this essay is *The Intuitive Practitioner* by Atkinson and Claxton, and *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* by Robert Brownhill. The essay will also contain example pieces from Owen Jones, and Barbara Kreuger. There will be visual examples from the artists mentioned, as well as self-made art relevant to my practice as student teacher.

What is skill? A skill can be regarded as personal traits that tend to stand out more compared to other. It can be called a learnt ability made to do certain tasks or work, which as a result, has the task or work require less time and effort. Skillsets are often different between individuals and develop as we grow older. They allow us to see solutions and patterns easier. How they develop also tend to depend on the individuals themselves. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, people learned with the help of their surrounding environments or elements. Elements such as parents, schools, and society. Skills could therefore be heavily influenced by the culture or society an individual would find themselves in. Other thinkers such as Skinner and Pavlov would note that we learn through a system with rewards that motivate and amplify a person's positive behavior. Piaget's theory surrounding the idea children would develop their skills through what they already were familiar with. This in turn provides the dilemma of how art can be taught and how difficult it can be.

Based on this knowledge, how a teacher learns to develop the necessary skillsets in order to further information to their pupils Atkinson describes six crucial skills needed when teaching. Being able to see patterns such as classroom dynamic or behavior and building up healthy classroom routines. Fluency as Atkinson states. The third skill needed is flexibility. This will prevent the teacher from locking themselves around a strict plan. Making decisions are also important, and better yet, making the right decisions that provides alternatives suited for the pupils. Visualizing and planning the day or week before writing the plans are also beneficial as well as an important skill. The last skill is the teacher's nature when it comes to self-image and self-awareness. Being able to see yourself as a fellow partaker in the classroom, as well as being able to confidently stand in class, providing guidance, is an absolute must.

With this in mind, what can be seen as skill, looking at teaching as a profession? Having patience and the ability to be concise yet understandable as well as being a provider of reassurance are necessary skillsets. The confidence and control needed to lead students in the right direction are crucial. How does one give the answers without taking control, and what problems can arise from this? Art is subjective, and even though students are given a main task, there are no right or wrong ways of going about what they decide to make. If I were to use examples from previous practice, in which I have worked with students the age of thirteen to fifteen, there are numerous ways in which giving an answer can get complicated. Brownhill describes the functions of a teacher in the following way:

One of the most important functions of a teacher is to pass on a certain body of knowledge to his pupils. Yet at the same time it is expected that he will also pass on techniques of reasoning, which can be associated with this knowledge in order that the pupils will develop the ability to make discoveries, come to conclusions, and criticise and estimate the usefulness and rationality of this knowledge themselves.

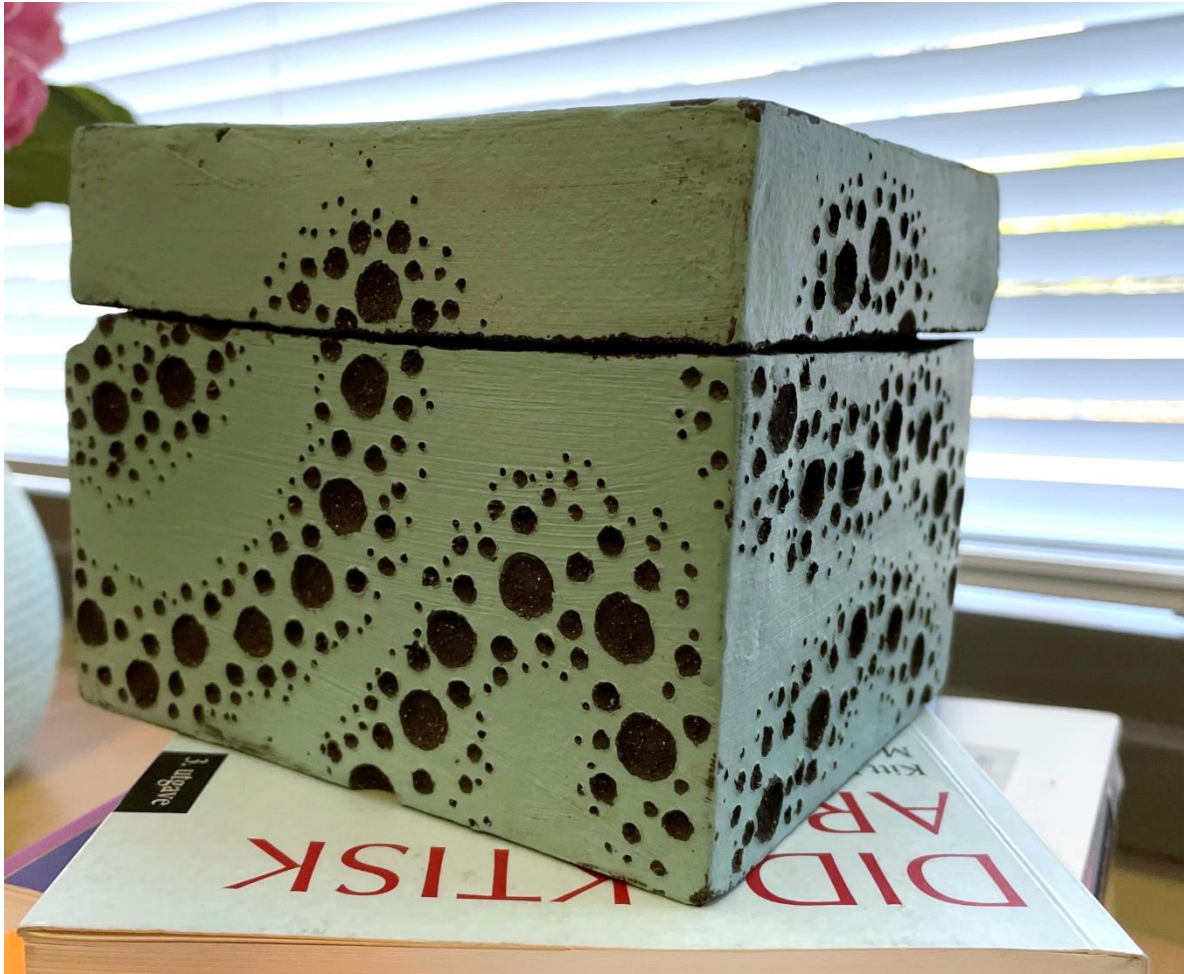
Brownhill, 1983, p. 7

Students often don't want to explore outside their comfort zone or in other cases just hold on to the easy solutions. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers as practitioners to find ways students or younger pupils benefit from. The result can be harmful or damaging to the student or pupil can't benefit from their tutor's guidance.

Looking at artists, makers, or designers. Being able to create something new or exiting that reaches out to the general public is not easy. It requires a lot of dedication, as well as patience. Furthermore, to explore beyond what is normal, and ignore what has already been done by so many others is a difficult task. This task is what gives artists and makers their signature type of work. The confidence and patience, based on this, are comparable to the work of a teacher. James Elkins, an American critic in art, and historian, claims art cannot be taught. That it is too subjective. One of his theories can be called the catalyst theory:

A better name might be the "Catalyst theory" of art instruction, since it is also said that teachers can speed up the natural course of a student's development. The art classroom is a nurturing environment, a place where all kinds of friendships and opportunities exist that might never develop in the outside world. (Elkins. 2001. P. 98)

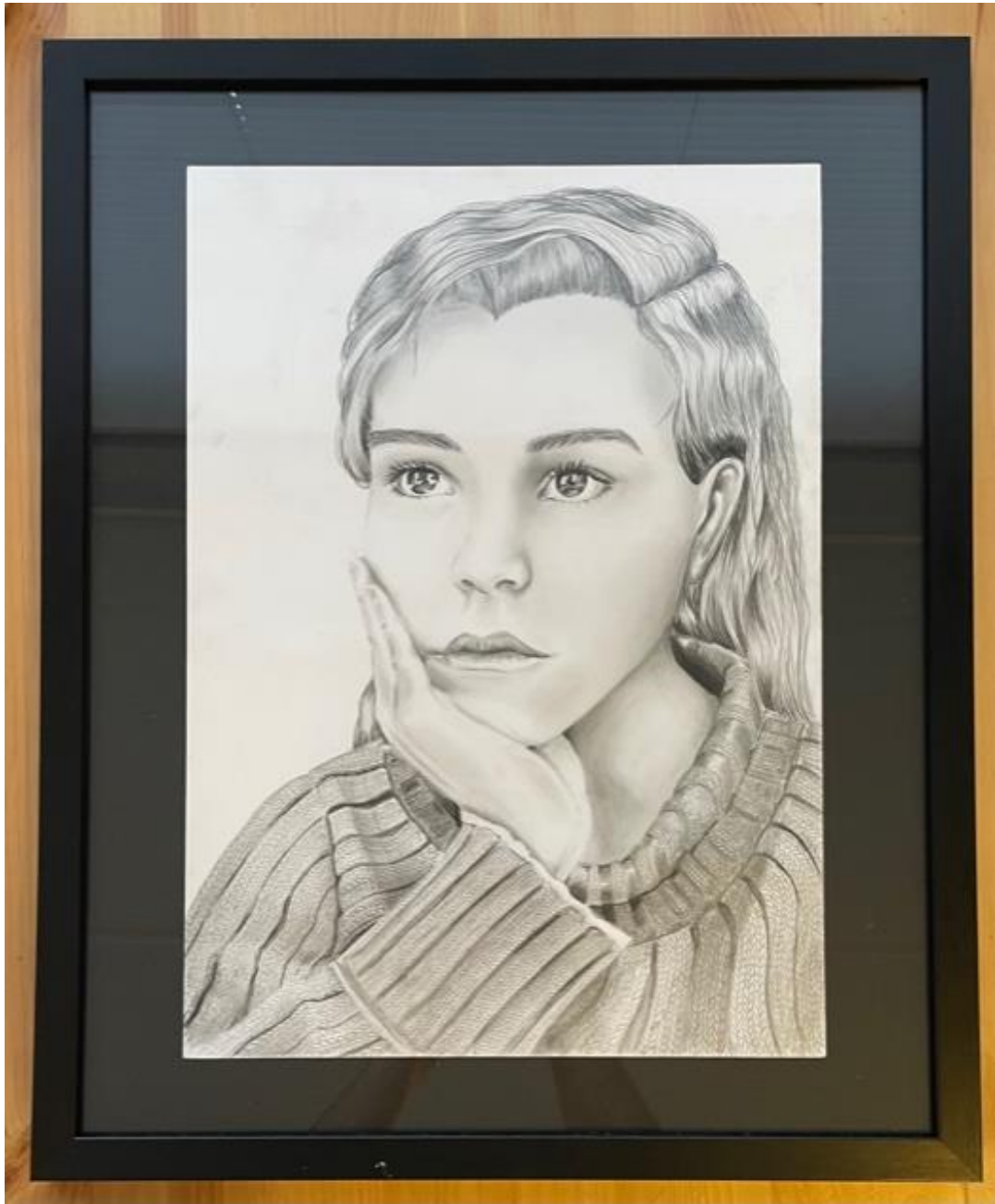
Elkins states, in *why art cannot be taught* (2001), that even though art cannot be taught directly, the inspiration and thought processes can be nurtured by the artistic classroom. That even though art cannot be taught, considering the skills needed are forged from learning basic principles each individual student or pupil take in differently. For the makers and artists able to produce the work they do; a mental and emotional scaffolding must have been made before the initial finished piece was made. This is where the similarities continue to grow between the artist and the teacher. Although it might sound wrong to say art cannot be taught, it is a good reminder that the ability to teach can only go that far. A tutor can provide the student with the necessary tools. It is how they provide these tools, that we determine the how successful the nature of our classes can be. There are needed skills both from the instructor or teacher, as well the pupil. How the pupil decides to learn these skills are highly unpredictable.



Box in Stoneware clay, Ingrid Fernanda Thoresen, 2019

15cm x 10cm x10cm

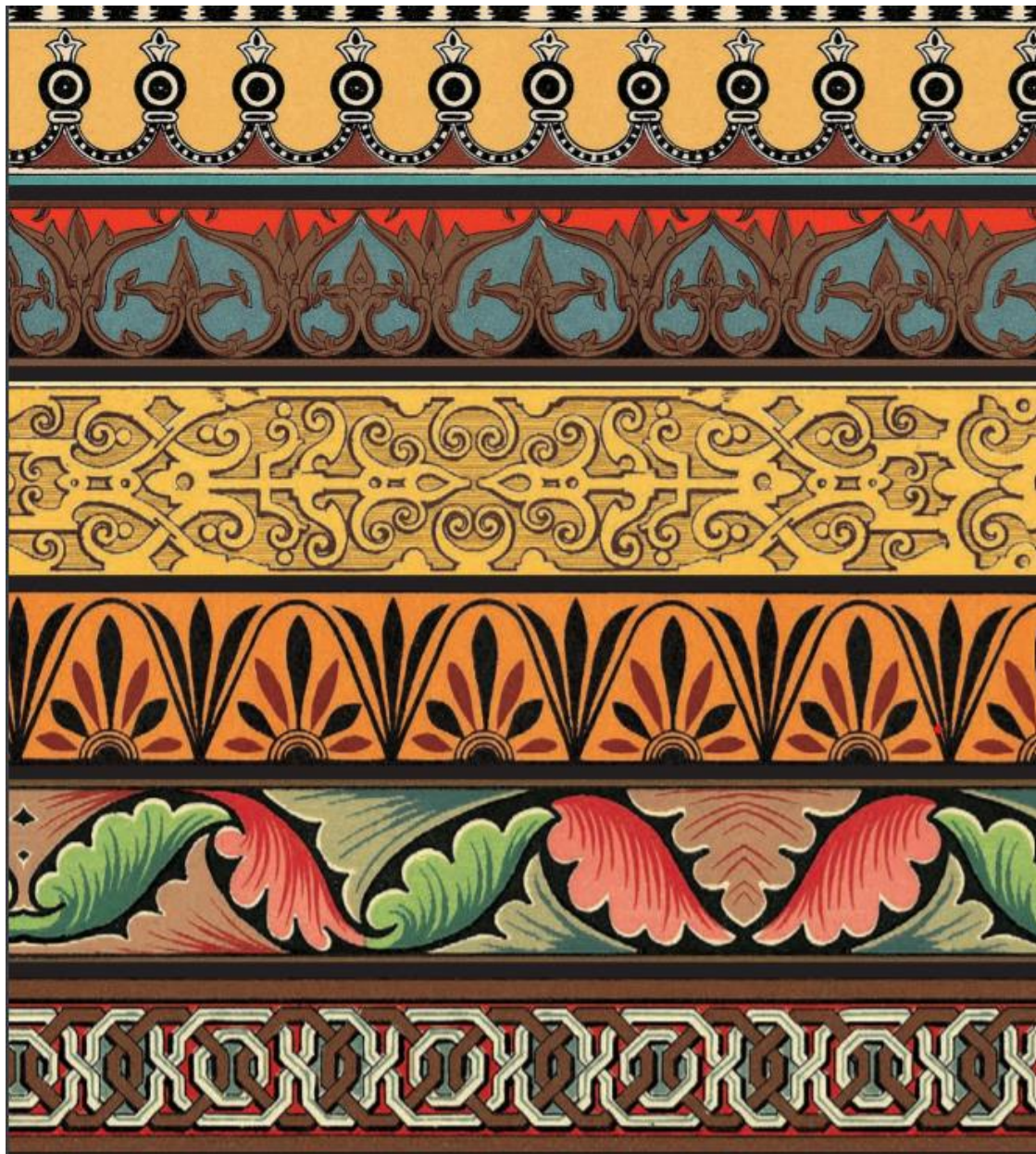
A ceramic box in plate technique inspired Yayoi Kusama made from stoneware clay. The pattern has been made in an indirect system surrounding the box. Having taken inspiration from Kusama, the pattern is bold, and the color is unusual as it doesn't share the "pretty" colors other pieces might possess. Though the pattern and the movement itself looks chaotic, the elements building said pattern are in a strict and well-planned system. This box represents charming imperfections, and a form of naivety and simple thinking. The structure, however, can be seen as flawed due to an irregular coating of underglaze, and the sides being slightly bent or damaged. I used this as an example through my two internship periods. It was not meant to be the example of a perfectly well completed first-time task, but rather a way of showing starting grounds. The idea that nobody starts out as a professional can benefit those who feel unable to perform on a level they regard as good. It leaves their minds with a sense of curiosity that will further their motivation to make attempts.



Indirect portrait, Ingrid Fernanda Thoresen, 2020

Pencil on card, A3 format.

Owen Jones, having had a major effect and having been one of the most important individuals throughout the development of art principles during the 19th century. His theories regarding ornaments and design are still being used to this day. A good example of one of his pieces is from *The grammar of ornament* which became a huge success in the Victorian era. Iain Zaczek, author of the book's introduction states that "In this respect, the book was a great success, and its frequently cited as one of the seminal texts of the Arts and Crafts Movement." (Jones, 2016. P. 12)



Owen Jones. [intro collection0 form The grammar of ornament], 1856

This example of patterns made by Jones is a collection of earlier observations made in different parts of the world. He would travel to countries such as Egypt, Greece, or even some African countries to gather visual information on how to build up patterns. Patterns that would create an aesthetic satisfaction to the onlookers. The tightly knit and detailed elements create a form of calmness, despite on the first glance to be slightly chaotic in the build.

It is this form of build that set the standard for what could be regarded as a guide for design. So even though Jones were more of an artist, his skills became a powerful resource in the field of tutoring art and design principles. There is obvious skill needed in order to collect your values and ideas in a way people can, for the most part, agree on. The patience to analyze intricate patterns and recreate them in a way that appeal to the public are one of the main reason Jones managed to become a successful artist.

A white, grey, and black portrait in pencil on card. The image is in A3 format. It's a mild play with shadows and textures. Its an example of in-depth analysis and long-term work as a result of practice. Having taken years to learn shadowing and anatomy, it is a good example of the importance of practice. Although it is my – a future teacher in art- responsibility to provide a certain level of comfort to the student's self-perception around their practical abilities, it is important to show the reward. In this context, the reward being the result of practice, trial, and error. For students, regardless of age, seeing a development in their own work provides a certain type of reassurance. For the most part, the skill needed in a piece like this is mainly patience, but also the skill of memory. This was a portrait in which I only had used an image of my own eyes, but nothing else. The anatomy, especially the hand I purely done by remembering the natural movement of the human body. The sweater looking rather stiff and unmoving is a result of me not having analyzed fabric the same way as I have human bodies. The skill of picturing a final piece like this is also something comparable to the skill of a teacher. The ability to plan and execute an idea with only limited resources is one of the more common happenings when being a teacher.



Untitled(Your body is a battleground). Barbara Kreuger 1989

Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 285cm x285cm

Barbara Kreuger, a conceptual artist known for her bold collage styled advertisement-like art. Often built up by one or several black and white images with large block text surrounded by a strong color such as red. This would cause the text to pop out from the image and was often pointed directly to the onlooker. Kreuger would put themes of high interest into her images or installations. Political aspects would also be used in her art and would often be featured as visual images. One of the main political values Kreuger had, was feminism and she had an entire piece dedicated to the women's march the 9th of April 1989, though it stands as a reminder of inequality between genders. Untitled (Your body is a battleground) became a symbol of feminism and unfair treatment. It is made with the help of Photographic silkscreen on vinyl. This piece is situated in Los Angeles at The Broad Museum. The installation represents boldness and courage. Thus, a reminder of a necessary skill needed to be heard. Again, Kreuger is an artist representing the ability to provide an entire opinion and mindset through one, what seems to be, quite simple way of doing so. Teaching is the same way only

there are no opinion being forced out. Only advice that can become necessary resources for the pupils learning.

Based on the information gathered, it is easy to see the comparison in the skillsets of a teacher, as well as the skillsets of an artist. The amount of confidence, the long thought processes, and the ability to have clear and concise messages are crucial mental skillsets for both the artist and the art teacher. It is not only the emotional or mental skills that are needed, but also the physical. Being able to show what one is thinking through a product of visuals is the most important skillset. Both for the arts teacher and the artist. Kreuger can be seen as having both the skills as a teacher, with her bold and often political values sewn into her art with the help of powerful words or images. The same can be said for Owen Jones who became one of the most important designers during the 19th century. So important his ideas and concepts of made it into literature that still stands strong in todays values around art and design. Being a general teacher in art, however, can be a lot more complicated as the pupils need the support to find their own inspiration. It is like Elkins tried to explain in his theories about the difficulties of teaching art. Yet how it can benefit the creative seeking mind.

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Image reference list

Barbara Kreuger (1989) *Untitled (your body is a battlefield)* [Photographic silkscreen on vinyl] Barbara kreuger/The broad Museum.

Owen Jones (1856) [collection from the introduction] PDF