

# Joining Heaven and Earth

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Let's talk about **Joining Heaven and Earth.**

Art and its teaching serve many purposes; just now social justice is our prime agenda; visual culture, discipline based arts education are still others. All are worthy and all contribute to social welfare and to the invigoration of the arts and art curricula. But the arts also serve another function for the human condition, the most ancient, universal and the most consequential: I call it Joining Heaven and Earth. Amongst all the other contributions the arts offer the rest of the community, it is this: Joining Heaven and Earth, that presents us with engaging in the most important agenda for this most perilous phase of our species.

Something that really matters in the grand – *and* the close, scheme of things. For if we do not get *this* right, if we do not finally begin to behave in ways that are informed by, and consistent with, the ways of the rest of the universe, then for us, who are on the brink of ruining the whole fabric of human life on this- exquisite- our dear, one and only planet; If we *do not rejoin* our ways with the ways of all the rest of creation, then utilizing the powers of the arts to extend social justice, increase visual literacy, foster self expression, entertain us, decorate us, assuage us, will not matter a jot. Not a jot.

And so, can we talk? Yes? Then turn directly to what Thomas Berry, the recent clarion spokesperson for the fate of the Earth, called “The Great Work”, rejoining what should never have been sundered. Rejoining this infinitesimally small, but oh so very important fragment of the universe- US, with the

rest of our family- the *rest of the universe*. Something, some dreadful thing, which is now not currently the case. And of course, let's examine the case for the arts, specifically the teaching of the arts, to be a unique and powerful instrument for awakening our students, our people to this Great Work.

What business do the arts have in this seemingly overly Romantic exercise? Indeed, what business does art education, required as we are to teach to national standards, beholden to state frameworks, required district priorities, as well as they might be designed, that make no mention of heaven nor earth for that that matter, no less “Joining Heaven and Earth?” And yet...

And yet, if we allow ourselves the pleasure of reminiscing for a moment, did we not decide to teach art and to make art to *do this very crazy thing*? When we were still young and new to our glorious profession, did we dedicate our gifts and hone our talents only to comply with national standards and teach curricula that were designed by others who never met *our* students, visited *our* school, or ever met either *you or me*? Or did we secretly say to ourselves and only to our very best and trusted friends: “I want to change the world! I want to make this a better world.” Did you perhaps put it still in other terms? Something about saving children? Creating community? Bringing beauty into children’s lives? No matter. However you phrased it, didn’t we not also want to Join Heaven and Earth?

If you *were* to take up this grand agenda, you might admittedly find yourself –just now- with few companions in the field of art education, *but you* would find yourself in good company, you will become a member of an ancient, universal confederacy of artists who from Lascaux, to Virgil, Aeschylus to Giotto, Rembrandt, Vermeer, William Blake, Van Gogh, Mondrian, Monet, Cezanne, Brancusi, Rodin, Rothko, Judy Chicago, Maya Angelou, John Lennon, and a million others who thought that lending their gifts and time to this pie in the sky ambition of Joining Heaven and Earth would be a good way to spend a life. But whatever exactly does this lofty and overly ambitious term imply; Joining Heaven and Earth? And, what special contributions have the arts to offer to bring this grand agenda to bear upon *our* particular profession as art teachers?

So, just what might “Heaven” mean? And “Earth”? And to *Join* Heaven and Earth?

For some of us- Heaven –might consist of: a single god in command of everything and everyone, for others Heaven is full of lots of gods each in charge of one thing or another, for others still, no gods at all, but spirits dwelling in all things. For some others, no gods or spirits, just divine Nature as it arises each day. For others it is still more abstract and rarified; Heaven is the heavenly regularities and patterns that make up all the particularities of the world. Western traditions posit that Heaven resides above; African and Australian traditions mostly have Heaven embedded in the earth. Asians have it above, Native Americans everywhere. Whatever Heaven consists of and wherever it is to be found, the concept and pull of Heaven has exerted a tremendous, if not the most important influence on humans in shaping our behaviors, institutions, policies and of course; all our arts and their teaching.

Suppose however, we might think of what Heaven connotes from yet a different point of view. For as long as we continue to consider “Heaven as some place “else” as *somewhere* else, as *Over there, Beyond* here and now, or, as in another *realm or dimension*. In other words, *as long as we continue to divide*

*Heaven from Earth*, how we consign our selves to live *now*, from how we desire to live, *then*; we will always separate our selves from all the rest of creation. And so we will remain broken off from our family of origin, our immense, spectacularly varied, gorgeous, wonder full, astonishing, stupendous, rambunctious, sublime...family. Being so alienated from our family of origin and ultimate destiny, all the rest of creation, we all too often experience a sense of being alone, apart from the great ongoing swarming, and to us, seemingly indifferent universe.

Not good. And, not necessary.

For let us suppose, *that just where we are, here and now*, our little orb, this dear planet, is a chunk; one fantastic chunk, of the rest of the universe, operating within the laws of all the rest of the universe. Every tree, every leaf, pore, twig, bud, every root, every frog tadpole bean pole, stream brook, dew drop, mountain top, blue bird, scarlet tanager, painted bunting, violet wisteria, purple iris, cadmium tulip, buttercup, Andromeda, cosmos, is; what could they be anything else but our *family!* Our relatives.

If we do take the time to merely look just past our very own noses, what will we see of this chunk of the universe, of Great Nature? Of this piece of Heaven? It’s what you and I see every day whenever we merely step outside and bother to take the merest gander all around us;

**A great ecology**, teeming with variety, everything exquisitely made, every single thing necessary, every thing grace full in its particular movements, everything patterned at every layers of its being, all layers exactly fit, every thing subtle in its manufacture, nothing sloppy, nothing incomplete. Everything throbibly robust, every thing complex unto its finest details and order of magnitude, every thing musical in its movements, not a thing shy of its self, not a thing embarrassed by the company it keeps, or its origins, or its capacities. Everything pulsating in harmony with every thing else, no pushing no shoving. When it rains, everything gets wet. When the sun shines, every thing grows. When

the seasons change, every thing changes simultaneously, each in its own way, each at its own pace, each living to the fullest each season, each day, each moment. The night having its beauties, as the Day has its beauties. Nothing ugly, no notion of Ugly, nor beautiful really, because every thing is well made, every thing fits, no left overs, nothing and no one left out. If we look a little while longer, we will see that nature, every portion of it and how every portion is integrated with every other portion; "it is a self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self-fulfilling community" (Berry, p. 162).

Let's call all *this*, Heaven. A community with no end. A vast, domain wherein there is no leader nor followers, an infinite ecology of all beings, much like an improvisational jazz ensemble; each member enriching the other, and together creating unreachable domains and harmonies alone.

Just like our government? Just like Wall Street, just like Maine Street? Just like our health care, welfare system? Just like our school system?

All this vast "bit of the universe/ Heaven, it is not simply right around the corner! It is right here, just step out side; just take one step back into Nature. And let us call the ways of our *singular species*, you and I; Earth; a place where there is all too much shoving and pushing, too many people with too many things and too many people with nothing, too much vulgarity and too little grace.

This then is the Great Work: to observe, to experience, to participate in and thus to come to acquire enduring knowledge about the ways of Great Nature, [our HEAVEN] and to inform the ways of our wayward segment of Nature; you and me. [our EARTH].

*This is Joining Heaven and Earth.* I believe artists and teachers of the arts have much to offer in this Great Work, to try our best to indeed make this a better world. And what a world we have made for ourselves, quite in contrast to the ways of Nature/Heaven.

Let's see what we have managed to concoct for ourselves: A world in which we seem almost incapable of not wounding our selves and each other by our penchants for solving problems through violence, for the allure of short term gains, for the unseemly wealth of the few at the cost of the impoverishment of the many, for being urged to leave no child behind without sufficiently funding even the children we do promote. A world in which we seem to delight in categorizing people and demonizing them for such banal reasons as their skin color, their gender, religious convictions, or political beliefs. A world in which our species is devouring and befouling the very resources of the entire planet so that we might live in relative comfort *now* at the price of our grand children living at all.

No, I am all too well aware that the project of **Joining Heaven and Earth** is a daunting one, given our often fatal shenanigans. And yet *we must press on*. We simply must evolve past our present state of sordid affairs. We must rededicate ourselves to **creating a life right here and now** that conforms ever more closely with what we have imagined it should be like "there and then."

How then might we teachers of the arts lend our talents, knowledge and high office, to address the Great Work?

Let's start with what art is for: Indeed art is for self expression, for decoration, for entertainment, for social justice, for cultural literacy, and this and that, it for *lots of things*; but at its very core and purpose, the most profound mission of the arts are to bring images and stories down to the people of how we *might* live, compared to how we have come to live. Art is the most human of activities that help us savor life as it is, surely, but more importantly still, *the arts provide us with glimpses of how life might be lived*.

Have I just announced a startling point of view about the prime purpose of art? Is this news? If so, what do you think Bach was about? Or Beethoven or Brahms, or Martha Graham, George Balanchine, or

Bellini, Fra Angelico, Homer, Virgil, Mondrian, David Whyte, Mary Oliver, the Kahlilvala, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Robert Pinsky, Wasilly Kandinsky, Igor Stravinsky, Nijinsky.

The necessary counter parts to those artists who have devoted their gifts and talents to providing us with views of how we might live are the artists who have shown us how we have come to live: Breughel, Dickens, Melville, Roth, Larson, Ensor, Beckman, Goya, , Grosz, Warhol, Rauschenberg. And the price we have therefore exacted upon ourselves and the price we will bequeath to our children and their children

But why? Why both sets of artists? One to wake us up to the look the consequences of how we have come to live. The other to show how we might live. How might we live? Compared to how we have *come to live?*

How about a civilization that is characterized by a great ecology, a society teeming with variety, where everything is exquisitely made, every single thing is necessary, every thing grace full in its particular movements, everything patterned at every layers of its being, all layers exactly fit, every thing subtle in its manufacture, nothing sloppy, nothing incomplete. Everything throbibly robust, every thing complex unto its finest details and order of magnitude. Every thing musical in its movements, not a thing shy of its self, not a thing embarrassed by the company it keeps, or its origins, or its capacities. Everything pulsating in harmony with every thing else. No pushing no shoving. Nothing and no one left out. Nothing to kill, nor die for. Self propagating, self-nourishing, self- educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self- fulfilling communities."

*How about living within a society like that?*

We too, might live in harmony with all the rest of creation- Where black and white skins, red and yellow skins, bowing to the right or bowing to the left, fast and slow, old and young, bent and straight, are made room for at the same infinite banquet table. We might live grace fully, not helter-skelter.

We might craft every iota of our life as if our life depended upon it. For it does. And we presently don't. When it is our time to yield our place, we might die easily, lightly, snuggling back down in into the bosom of our mother. Like every thing else in Nature. But not us. We might live robustly, colorfully, each day, each breath, at each meeting of each member of our infinitely large always strange, family.

How about *that!*

The reason why the arts employ principles of harmonies, execute everything they do with diligent craftsmanship, connect this with that grace fully, and always speak in such a way that matters of the heart are fused with matters of the mind, and with matters of spirit is to give the people both by form and content, therefore, *convincingly*, how we might live.

**So, why not make the prime objective of Art, the prime objective of Art Teaching?**

If we were so bold to do so, what might such a school look like? What might we see as we spent a day in such a school? So confined are we by our current schools and the role the arts play there, if we are going to see anything at all, we must first shift the focal point from which we are accustomed to, and be prepared to see differently and thus to see different things. Therefore, let us take a step back and away from what we are presently doing within our profession of Art Education for a moment, and think freely about what the presence and the teaching of the arts might look like within a school in which the entire enterprise; its curriculum, pedagogy, administrative policies, and allocation of resources are conceived of as a *vast experiment towards the Great Work*, towards Joining Heaven and Earth, of exploring the ways that Nature creates a vibrant and robust ecology of all entities, so that our ways may become as vast, viable, robust, and exquisitely made an ecology of all beings.

I take courage in so bold a proposition from many sources, the prime one being Thomas Berry, for he tells us in his book, *The Great Work*;

"We need to reinvent [what it means to be and behave like a human] *because* the issues we are concerned with seem to be beyond the competence of our present cultural traditions, either individually or collectively. What is needed is something beyond existing traditions to bring us back to the most fundamental aspect of the human... The human is at a cultural impasse. In our efforts to reduce the other than human components of the planet to subservience to our Western cultural expression, we have brought the entire set of life-systems of the planet, including the human, to an extremely dangerous situation. Radical new cultural forms are needed. These new cultural forms would place the human within the dynamics of the planet rather than place the planet within the dynamics of the human" (p. 160).

What then might we see as we take our little walk around this "New School?"

Even before we enter the buildings themselves we are greeted by a thoughtfully designed and highly crafted landscape. A broad bricked or field stone path, gently curved to slow the pace, and to herald the specialness of things to come welcomes us. Bordering the path are clumps of native trees selected to provide the particular visual joys of each of the seasons; some apples and pears, a clump of birch, some poplars and sugar maples.

Underneath the large borders where in earliest spring, crocuses and snowdrops sparkled against the receding snows, followed a month later by daffodils, and tulips and hyacinths for the spring, followed by simple to maintain cascade of blooms from roses to phlox, now the dahlias and fall asters dazzle us with their crimson, violet and scarlet blooms.

What immediately strikes our eyes as we approach the buildings, is that everything is so handsomely painted. The entrance brightly and subtly colored to proclaim that this is a place of high adventure, and that everyone is welcome to its community. Other portions of the building are differently colored some to induce quiet reflection, others to invigorate the body, others to support intense conversation. Still others that promote abstract and imaginary flights of fancy. Large scale sculpture are thoughtfully placed here and there to complement the natural sculptural qualities of the landscape. The signage strikes one as being made- and well made at that- by the students themselves. The whole place proclaims that this is a special place, loved and cared for by its members, a place which invites bold imagination and finely crafted things.

A great vase in the entry hall, covered as it is with marvelous hand made tiles of local clays and pigments, segways the great out of doors- in door. It is the project of the first graders to daily create and refresh this grand seasonal reminder of Nature's endless variety of definitions and look of the beautiful. Upper classmen designed and made the vase- it's as tall as a first grader.

The walls, like the walls of the courts, temples and palaces of ancient Egypt and Assyria, the courts and palaces of Rome, Versailles, Moscow, Vienna, Angkor Wat, Oaxaca, Khartoum, are all covered with mosaics of the many tales of Genesis, including the children's own conceptions of how this all began, and how it might be unfolding, and what might be our destinies. These too have been conceived and executed with the fullness of talents and industry of the most dedicated members of the community.

This grand project has taken many years and is in the process of being recreated with each succeeding generation of students and teachers. Of course it takes a lot of research, preliminary and continuing discussions with many people, each contributing different knowledge, perspectives and skills. The completion of each section is always attended by fabulous ceremonies involving dances and music and poetry, fancy dress and fancy foods all created

by the children, their teachers and the parents. You should make it to the next one.

Let's skip back out side for a moment and take a look at the small but lovely pond that they all created- hand dug! And now surrounded by self designed and built benches, picnic tables, the little landscape park interwoven by paths, subtly connecting one area to another. Each brick and tile, flower and shrub has been obviously chosen and placed after much thought, discussion and consensual decision.

A modest raised viewing platform over looks it all, again designed, engineered and built by the entire academic community with of course the enthusiastic expertise and muscle of the parents- and some concerned citizens. The platform has been researched and now designed to symbolize the principle of Endurance, of, unshakable determination, of Heaven over looking the things of the world. The water reminds them all of the Earth, the ephemeral, the evolving, the effervescent. The little islands in the pond are to remember that like these islands, our lives too are moments in time, the brief- but beautiful moments of a life span. Small arched bridges- of course designed and crafted in house, span the islands. It's particularly beautiful to see in the mornings when the children arrive; and in the afternoons when they return home. It's awfully lovely in the fall when crimson and gold leaves dot the pond, and in the winter and in the spring with all the clumps of daffodils- that the kindergartners planted – are in bloom.

The symbolic and actual relationships between water and its many ways, and humans and our many converging ways are the subject of much art and literature of the children. Teachers tell stories of such things to their students. Older students create such stories and read them to the younger students. The youngest students do the very same things amongst one another.

At the far end of the park- that was used only a few years ago as a vast asphalt plane for kids to run around on for fifteen minutes after their fifteen

minute lunch break, is now covered with gently undulating grassy slopes dotted here and there with clumps of shrubs and flowers, some medicinal for the body, some for the spirit, all for the observing eye.

Oh look, at a distance, is a little hut. It's modeled on the idea of a tea pavilion, open on all sides to view North East South and West. It's really not much of a structure at all. Easy to build, easy if you do it *very carefully*, each step fulfilling its own purpose. A canopied platform really to observe how the world is ordering itself, so that the occupants of the pavilion *might so orders their ways*. It's only large enough for about a dozen children and adults to sit comfortable. It's a place that everyone knows is special; a place where only personally made things are shown, spoken of and performed for invited guests. Here children can read to one another their own poems, stories and essay. Where they can perform their own music, on their own crafted instruments, sing and teach their songs, try out their dances, invite a few of their friends for tea! Personally made snacks. Of course the clothing is hand made too.

Vases, baskets, paintings, sculpture, weavings, prints; are all shown, one at a time by the students to their guests, their friends, teachers, parents and concerned citizens. The children speak thoughtfully and carefully; their listeners are likewise thoughtful and attentive. The children therefore become thought full and care full. Qualities uncommon today in both speakers and listeners.

Every one values craftsmanship because *craftsmanship is really only clarity in the service of making and saying meaning full things*. This is the pivotal reason that the values that informs all of the arts informs all of the thinking and activities of all aspects of the school.

Look over there, it's the greenhouse. Poking inside we see a group of children and some adults; they are planting flower and vegetables seeds for next seasons. Another group are gathering seeds from the spent veggies and flowers of the previous season. Still another group are making carefully

drawn images of orchids that will be made into an illustrated book, based on the hand tinted wood block prints and texts they are composing. The limited edition books will be auctioned at the end of the year to supplement the budget so that greenhouses and ponds and bridges and printing presses are no strangers to this school.

Over there, under the geodesic dome they recently completed, is another group of children and adults, they seem to be speaking with a horticulturist from the Brown University about a planting scheme for a new experimental rose garden. The funding for this is underwritten by the county horticultural society.

In the **Imagine/Research/Art, Design and Build** workshop a large multi stationed building where people go to design and build out their projects, there are a number of clusters of people at work. The theme of this year's school-wide theater/performance piece is; "Spring dreams of summer, winter hopes for spring". Some kids seem to be about designing and fabricating the costumes, others the sets, others the lighting, others are composing and practicing the music, others are working on the dance. People from one group are constantly going back and forth to other groups, coordinating invigorating, and negotiating, trying to establish a viable ecology amongst all the many necessary portions.

I think that group over there is working out the storyboards for the video/cinematographic elements of the work.

Here's a wing, that's entitled" "Microscopes and Telescopes and binoculars, Oh Boy!" Nice! Maybe we can get to go inside next time.

Those kids crawling around on the ground with magnifying glasses? They are following a trail of ants from their feeding grounds to their nest, noting the many different tasks they are performing and how they signal to each other where to go and what to bring home for supper. Each one is writing and illustrating their observations.

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Oh that's right, you were looking for the *art room*, right?

Of course the **Imagine/Research/Design and Build** facility could be considered an extension of the art room, but, In this school artistic principles and skills inform everything that everyone is doing all the time. Nothing gets decided upon or designed or fabricated that is not without the eye and values and hand of the artist. And the artist teachers. Aesthetically conceived, designed and crafted things are the only things permitted in *this* school.

Oh! You say, but this is all simply impossible to afford on the budget we get from the state and our impoverished community. Of course with only those sources of funding much – but not all- of this would be difficult to afford! That's why you have a Development Office! Just like those fancy private schools! How do you think they get to do all the fancy stuff that they get to do? They have a Development Office and staff who raise the money, from alumni, from businesses, from philanthropies, from wealthy folks all of whom are also dedicated to the effort of creating a better world, a place where **Heaven joins Earth**.

There is also an office of Collaborative Learning, that develops working relationships with like minded institutions like RISD, and RIC, and PC, and URI and Johnson and Wales, and Brown; so our school is marvelously supplemented with expertise also betting on a future they might create rather than the present they have been forced to inherit. Members of each institution- and the Banks of RI are on the board of overseers.

Our school can be understood to be a colossal experiment, a laboratory investigating both how we have come to live the way we have, and, how we *might come to live* given what we now know about how we used to live, and how it is becoming ever more clear as to how we might possibly live- and that must be ecologically, ever more satisfactorily rejoining our family of origin and destiny.

The children and the teachers come to this school each day not because *they have to*, but because *they are needed*. And they *feel* needed.

That girl is putting on the final coat of paint today on the garden bench she and her friends made in honor of her grandparents who donated the funds for it. She's bringing the paint, so she must go to school today.

That boy is the fellow who is responsible for firing the kilns for the mosaic tile; he can't be late for school today.

Those two are doing the lighting for the play and they have to come early today to set up the lighting board.

Here comes that older kid who is presenting a lesson on butterfly life cycles to the kindergarteners this morning. His mom and dad have been so helpful on helping the research on this and so they are all here for the presentation.

This school is doing real and important work that requires everyone's dedicated efforts, an ecology of all beings. And all beings here know that their individual and collective efforts are absolutely necessary if this Great Work is to have any chance of success.

### **When the children graduate from *this* school:**

They will come to love this world, because they will have had a deep and close, and care full sustained acquaintance with her

They will come to know the many ways of caring for this world, and its many many things

They will have observed and taken to heart that in this world each thing leans and depends of every other thing. Just like Nature. Just like the rest of our little chunk of the universe. And they have learned to behave likewise.

They will, each and every one of them, know how to prepare the ground, plant and tend, harvest and prepare food they eat

They will know how to dine, not merely eat

They will know how to design and make all the *utensils* for planting, harvesting, preparing and serving food, all the bowls, baskets, knives forks, plates and cups

They will know how to create sustainable systems; biological, social, political, intimate, familial They will know how to design, make and use all the furniture they need; chairs and tables and desks They will know how to design and build and care for their shelters

They will know how to fix everything they break They will know how to share everything they have in surfeit, with everyone in need

They will know how and when to be gentle and kind, when to be patient and enduring, flexible in times that require it, unmovable at times that require that

They will know how to treasure what is of value, how to let go of what requires relief

Did I already say that they will come to love their home, and their extensive family and treat this planet as indeed their home and all its entities as family? Perhaps I did.

In *this* school, birthdays, of which there are over 400 in the school year, are most often celebrated; not by going to Chucky Cheese, or the Pizza Hut, or Taco Bell, or Burger Chef or Burger and Fries, birthdays in this school are celebrated by the donation and planting of commemorative trees, and gardens and islands, and fountains, and telescopes and park benches, accompanied by appropriate poetry, music, and children concocted snacks. Actually quite tasty – anyway quite interesting, novel, in any case.

Being charter members of the Junior league of the National Audubon Association, and also that of the national Wildlife Federation and the regional chapter of the Trust for Public Land, all the students, and their families and the teachers become LIFE members of these organizations, receiving their literature and the school a raft of free speakers and free admission to all their lands, and events: for *life*.

At the end of the school year, *this* school publishes an annual report, outlining all the experiments, discoveries, achievements, in a handsome, in house publication that every student and their parent receives, school board members, city councilors, as

do all the alumni and benefactors. Just like every big business, every college, just like every private school. The last pages list all the benefactors and their gifts; as the list of the school's accomplishments increase, so does the list of the benefactors and the largesse of their gifts. In this school, all the teachers, whatever their several and common expertise, are always planning and working together because that's what happens in all the rest of creation; an ecology of all entities. That makes anything and everything viable, sustainable, dynamically evolving. Music, and visual art, and woodworking, poetry, dance, and literature, horticulture and microbiology, astronomy, food services, nutrition, and physics, economics, ceramics; every single one of these working together go into the creation of every movie you see, every opera you attend, *why not every school?* Especially a school whose very business it is to create a new ecology of all beings? A school whose mission it is, is to Join, no, *Rejoin Heaven and Earth?*

Ready now to go back inside our school? What do we see? Well, there is *so much* to see and imagine and discuss, and explore, and create- why don't you take this portion of the trip on your own? Take a few minutes out from reading this essay and step into such a school of your own hopes for a future closer to the way you wish to live, rather than the way you have come to live. Star just one that seems most appealing to you and also easiest to bring about -starting tomorrow. Tomorrow, start.

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But wait; couldn't *any* teacher in any discipline also do this? What special qualities *do* the arts contain that contributes to **Joining Heaven and Earth**? And more precisely, what does a teacher of art have to contribute? Thomas Berry, again tells us; "The natural world demands a response beyond that of rational calculation, beyond philosophical reasoning, beyond scientific insight. The natural world demands a response that rises from the wild unconscious depths of the human soul. A response that artists seek to provide in color and music and movement" (p. 54).

The very bases for creating *any* art form are these: **to discern the patterns and hear the harmonies that coheres every single thing, and place every single element within ecology of all things.** To see the patterns and hear the harmonies that coheres every single thing, and, to place every single element within an ecology of all things. This is the core of every art form. **It's called composition-the very grammar of all the arts.**

**The Great Work of Art; composing the many elements of any art; line, form, shape, hue, tone, texture, interval, pitch, pattern, rhythm, into a grand ecology of all elements, turns out to employ the exact same procedures – using only different elements- as the Great Work, joining (composing) the many human elements of creation within a coherent ecology of all the rest of creation.**

And what are the skills that artists have in particular abundance that enables them to bear witness to the harmonies of Great Nature- and give evidence of them to their colleagues? How about these?

Penetrating curiosity, Devoted seeing, Exquisite workmanship, Integrated themes, Astonishing variations, Passionate forthcoming; Unhurried wonder, Reverent attention, Leaping imagination, Openness to this and to that, Searching after Pattern, Perceiving harmonies subtle and complex, Transparency, Persistence. Devotion to excellence, Awe, Wonder, and given the privilege of witnessing the crushing beauty of Great Nature, a quiet, but absolutely certain, a pervasive sense of Gratitude.

Enduring qualities of *Character*, to join with those of *Enduring Knowledge*.

Do we have any examples of artists and art work whose qualities empower this joinery? **Indeed the evidence is art's history.**

Have you not heard a Bach Cantata? What do you think that was about?

Or Verdi's Requiem? Puccini's Madame Butterfly, Mozart's "Così fan Tutti?" Brahms's Deutche Requiem, or our own John Lennon, Nat King Cole, Marion Anderson, Kiri DeKanawa. Tibetan Mandelas, Navaho sand paintings, Mixtec pottery, Bengali temples and their dancers, Basho's Haiku, Shakespeare' sonnets, Pacsal's pensees, Almadovar's movies, How about the pyramids of Giza, Angkor Wat, Machu Pichu, the Parthenon, Chartres, the Dome of the Rock, Temples of the Sun and of the moon, the stars and the flowers.

In the creation of all these what do you think, in the main, their projects were? What *work were they engaged in?* Some handsome objects to entertain us while we remained attached to how we now live? A good deal of this, of course, but it is simply not credible that these people used up their lives, poured their gifts, honed their talents over the course of their life times merely, to entertain and decorate the lives we have, distract us from our more serious engagements with life, like shopping, holding down a job, paying bills, driving our kids here and there.

Is it not more credible that their project was to see so deeply, so broadly, so finely, so courageously, and to listen so care fully, feel so empathically, move so courageously, say so completely, that the "news" they brought back from their seeing, their expeditions beyond the horizon of where others had gone, their scrupulous craftsmanship, were all unveilings of how *we might live*, rather than acquiesce to how we were given to live and now believe that we are *consigned* to live.

Put in other terms, employing the language of Martin Buber, might we not say that Art filled consciousness engages every thing, every "it" in the world as if it was a "Thou"? And, by the intensity and sincerity of that reaching towards the "other," unveil the Thou that is indeed embedded in every thing; elevating every "it," to "Thou." Thus every day things; a **pear** in the gaze of Cezanne, a **puddle** in the eyes of Monet, a **hand** in the hand of Tintoretto, a **cloud** for Turner, An **urn**

for Shelly, a **bone** celebrated by Georgia O'Keefe become- now for us too, Thou.

The bequest of the arts for those who would attend- seriously to what the artists introduce to their communities, is a world that is more complex, more exquisite, more necessary, more related, more mysterious, can I get away with saying, more holy? Than we ever expected.

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To conclude this excursion into the possible, actually towards the absolutely necessary, I return to a view presented at its outset: At heart, originally, and deeply still; you are artists. You desired to employ your gifts and enthusiasms as an artist and as a teacher of art, to make this a better world. Why not bring that same exact ambition more to the center, the explicit center of your professional life? Not incidentally and quite importantly, doing so, will also migrate the same ambition to the center of your personal life.

Be the teacher of what you wish to become. As Maxine Greene famously said, "Make of your classroom the arena of your own becoming, and it will surely follow, that the children will do like wise, for only as *you strive to become* the person you desire to be, so will they. Bring the full array of your talents as artists and the loftiest ambitions of your choice of career as teachers to bear upon this Great Work. Walk along the broad road with such companions as Virgil, Duccio, Whitman, Beethoven, Tolstoy, and Aretha Franklin, Paul Klee, and John Lennon, join Heaven and Earth.

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Well, you may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one, I hope some day you will join us, and the world be.... how about where Heaven and Earth are truly one?

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## Following workshop:

### Implementing the Great Work in your classroom and school

How *does one* begin to address the Great Work of Joining Heaven and Earth? The following might initially seem a weak response to an overly ambitious agenda; but hear me out, please, consider the following;

First; **DESIRE TO**; make joining heaven and earth a prominent agenda in the ways you actually conduct your affairs – at least *some* of your affairs, *some* of your art curricula, *some* of your teaching methods.

DESIRE is quite real and compelling. Desire shapes the inclination of your thinking, the myriad choices you make moment to moment, your choice of friends, your topics of conversation, the objectives of your art lessons, the criteria of your evaluations, the tone of your voice in conversation, what you bring to lunch. Desire functions in a similar way as a keel on a boat does; it emphasizes certain efforts in the direction of what is sought, it dampens disturbances towards your goal. So, the first serious work of Joining Heaven and Earth is the awakening of the **desire** to do so.

The absence of desire leads to quite different qualities of life, and art and teaching. If you are disinterested in Joining Heaven and Earth, if you do not think it possible, and pay it no mind; then the project will be proportionately weakened and delayed by the absence of your singular gifts and talents and energies. And you and your students will not experience the exhilaration and the rewards of participating in the wild and maybe impossible but glorious adventure of engaging in this ancient and perennial task.

And, please remember, just desiring something and trying something brings that something closer. And with each try we increase our skills at achieving what we desire. So, want to live in a world here and now that more closely resembles the world that you

desire there and then. Of Course you do! That's why you are here at this convention.

You might for instance; in the **title of your lesson plan**, include some reference to Joining Heaven and Earth.

1. To what family do you feel you really belong?
2. If I had two wishes, this would be the first.
3. Under what conditions do you flourish best?
4. And what is the look of the bloom that you bring to the world?

When you list the **objectives** of the lesson, describe some exact outcome relative to Joining Heaven and Earth. Such objectives may be these: the cultivation of **devoted seeing**, or **“slow-subtle seeing,” exact craftsmanship, Astonishing variations on a given theme.**

In developing the **criteria to evaluate** the degree and kind of success you expect for the project, insure at least one of the criteria reference Joining Heaven and Earth. Perhaps you might raise such questions to the students as these;

1. Where and in what ways did you permit your imagination to LEAP rather than to simply plod along predictable ways?
2. What bravery was required of you in this piece?
3. Did anything unexpected happen to you as a result of working on this piece, and did you allow it to remain, perhaps even take it further?

Making explicit references to Joining heaven and Earth in the title of your Unit Plan, in the objectives of your lesson plan, and your criteria of evaluation, shifts desire and yearning into actual trying.

Embracing the project of Joining Heaven and Earth is as much a matter of **“Tone,”** the quality of your presence in the classroom, as it is of curriculum, lesson plans and grading. Just as I earlier described **Desire and Yearning and Trying** devoted to the cause of Joining Heaven and Earth are at the very

root of the project, it seems to me we can continue along that same path and say that it also is really a matter of how you relate to people; your students, their parents, your colleagues.

If you relate to them reverentially, care fully, devotedly, empathically, you will, *over time*, nurture the reciprocal tendencies for them to address you likewise.

If you treat everyone and everything reverentially, care fully, the brushes, the paints, the clay, the child who comes to class late, the janitor, the smart aleck, the scissors, that someone dropped on the floor. You model in your classroom these same qualities and all the work becomes – in time- reverential, serious, care full, elevated. **Art Full.**

Combining your presence in the classroom with your explicit objectives of joining Heaven and Earth, you inch forward this ancient and necessary theme of becoming ever more human.

- Do the same when you **critique the student work,**
- When you **exhibit** the student work,
- When you have them **write essays,**
- When you **speak to the principal** about your program,
- When you **offer in-service workshops** for your peers,
- When you **speak to your closest friends** and colleagues.
- You- again, know; the same way that you walk into your own studio, address your own brushes and marks.
- In other words, Joining Heaven and Earth is no far fetched ambition at all, and well within even the everyday responsibilities of every teacher.
- The only reason I believe we are **not participating** of the grand community of artists throughout time and place who are also engaged in the fabulous adventure is simply, and tragically this:  
*No one invited us to.*

- Ever have this brought up in your teacher preparation courses? Ever asked about this by your supervisor of student teaching, by your principal, or the parents, or the kids? If you were like me: probably not. If no one speaks about something, and no one invites you to join in something, and no one else is doing it, and no one is rewarded for it, how indeed can anything be done- about “**it?**”
- But now I *have* tended you the invitation. And you have been reminded.