

**Geographic Diversity from an Artistic Perspective**  
**Travel journals and reflections. Contributions by students studying for a degree in Fine Arts at the C.E.S. Felipe II in Aranjuez, Complutense University of Madrid**

**María Jesús Abad Tejerina PhD Fine Arts**

*C.E.S. Felipe II de Aranjuez*  
*Universidad Complutense de Madrid*  
[mjabad@cesfelipesecondo.com](mailto:mjabad@cesfelipesecondo.com)

**Abstract**

One of the objectives in higher education in Fine Arts is to provide students with the creative tools they need to organise their creative thoughts, focusing on their personal projects. One of the stimuli is the journey and the observation of landscape and human geographic diversity. We encourage the tradition of keeping travel journals, which serve as a source of inspiration and as a catalyst for the short, medium or long term projects. In this article the observations and conclusions of a group of students from the “Idea, Concept and Process in Artistic Creation” class will be presented. They were asked to do an introspection on the subject. The study group looked at their travel journals to find traces which led to shows or pages which constitute a final play.

**Keywords:** Fine Arts, Artist Trip Journals, Geographical Diversity, Higher Education.

**Fine Art Studies**

The primary objective of a Fine Arts degree is to prepare future specialists in visual imagery. Contrary to popular belief the goal is not to create artists. This is a misconception about this degree, however we make the assumption that when students enrol in this major course they are already artists and they simply need to develop the tools so that they can carry out their work. Those students who enrol thinking they are artists but discover otherwise during their studies will obtain the necessary preparation for a professional career, access to research or a social position such as a specialist in image arts.

The course “Idea, Concept and Process in Artistic Creation”

This course was chosen because:

1. It is a second cycle course (4<sup>th</sup> year of the degree) when the student has already chosen a specialty. The options for specialties are: Painting, Sculpture, Design, Engraving and Image Arts.
2. Information was available.
3. Students were accessibility.

This is an annual course in which has 15-20 students enrolled. It is worth 24 credits, meets bi-weekly and it is divided into three different foci:

1. Syntactic focus: to do exercises directly related to the subject such as photography, video, design, computer graphics and mixed systems.
2. Semantic focus: students are taught how to generate and plan ideas, which deal with theoretical products related to today’s culture.
3. Pragmatic focus: will encompass the basic nucleus of theoretical knowledge that the students can use to shape their professional futures.

This course gives equal attention to practical and theoretical applications. It's important to note the difference between the theoretical and the practical components of the course.

## **Taxonomy of Images<sup>1</sup>**

In order to organise the visual discourse in the work and theoretical areas we chose subjects that we thought were the most simple and practical so that students can experience and get to know everything that has been done throughout the history of images independent of the symbolism that they might have. This taxonomy that we published in 2006 serves as a reference to put into perspective the subject that we're covering:

- 1<sup>st</sup>. Body: human and animal
- 2<sup>nd</sup>. Landscape: natural and architectonic
- 3<sup>rd</sup>. Still life and vestments
- 4<sup>th</sup>. Machines and man-made devices
- 5<sup>th</sup>. Abstract ideas: geometry and physical relationships
- 6<sup>th</sup>. Graphs: signs and letters

We can note that natural and architectonic landscape has been placed second, immediately after the human and animal body, the great fortitude of occidental art. Landscape constitutes a reference in traditional art as well as in today's art panorama.

## **Natural Landscape, Architectonic Landscape**

We consider any portion of the earth observed from an artistic perspective to be "landscape" as it is related to the idea of art: painting, drawing, and engravings... Until recently photography was not included in the afore-mentioned techniques but with theoretical contributions<sup>2</sup> and its incorporation as a rightful member in today's art world we can include it in the curriculum with no fear of raising any controversy.

Landscape is a constant in occidental as well as in oriental art. It represents our identity, our diversity, the memory of the place to which we belong or the reminder of what we saw. We often see "Lost paradise" or metaphorically the emotional situation of human beings represented, whether it be directly or unconsciously. Classic art used it for decorative purposes and the Renaissance converted it into the main focus<sup>3</sup> where it was used as the backdrop for other subjects, and those backdrops, which were usually invented, were a way of "adorning" and "giving a certain feeling" to the painting.

Landscape did not attain its independence as a genre until the XVIII century when El Canaletto and Guardi paved the way for landscape artists. It acquired the metaphorical dimension of representing human emotional states in the baroque era, especially with Turner and years later with Impressionism. Visual representation received a dramatic contribution with the arrival of photography- painters were no longer necessary to accurately depict a scene and act as the collective memory- painting was forced to occupy another role. It had to do a 360° turn and represent the emotion of contemplation and it did this by using feeling and experience, what is known as "open-air painting" whose main nucleus is made up of French lead by Renoir, Manet, Monet.

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<sup>1</sup> En: ABAD TEJERINA, M.J. Y MORENO SAÉZ, M.C., (2006) *Cultura Icónica desde la Perspectiva Occidental (Iconic culture from the Occidental Perspective)*l.. en *Annali dell'Università di Ferrara*. ISBN: 978 88 6087 065 8. Casa Editrice Le Lettere

<sup>2</sup> Jhon Berger, Susan Sontag, Joan Fontcuberta among other theoreticians.

<sup>3</sup> For example Piero Della Francesca

With the picture revolution afoot a new independence and liberty are born to make landscape more than just a simple representation of reality but rather all the creativity that the artist can transmit to the observer. The architectural representation is linked to that of the landscape. Everything that happens on the ground on which we walk is represented in paintings, everything natural-mountains, trees, rivers, oceans...-or everything that is built, destroyed by man or nature-buildings, bridges, ruins. Architectural representation can be viewed as a sub-genre within landscape. Currently, together with traditional representations, other discourses have been organised of which we'd like to highlight one of the strongest of our era: the little personal stories. In addition it's worth noting the feminine look or the inclusion of weather in artistic language especially when photography is used as the means of portrayal.

Other noteworthy topics are those linked to the identity of a place (Photographs by Martin Parr: Parking Places in different countries), social critiques (Norfolk: cities after war and ruins as a metaphor), structures of power (Jaquelin Hassik: tables of power). There are many artists who speak about the world, society, about their own little stories and use the natural or architectural landscape as a genre to illustrate their visions.

The artistic thought that underlies the contemplation of architecture is more complex than one would be lead to believe. For an artist, architecture is something that cannot be completely explained, it is always seen from a certain point of view: from the inside or from the outside and always just a part, never in its totality. The architecture that we see is just "the tip of the iceberg" and that's why architectural representation always presents an enigma to be solved, thus its intrigue and its complexity.

## **Diversity as a Stimulus for Creation**

The clash with other realities, that is to say, the experience of diversity often caused by a break with daily routines related to "the journey" moves the artist's mind to observe scenes with a heightened curiosity. Artists absorb anything that is new and question things they know which equates to a strong stimulus for creativity. When subjected to this deluge of ideas and knowing that every thought could be the beginning of a great idea for a work of art as well as knowing that one's memory can be stimulated through different means –words, smells and, especially in artists, visual images. Students capture everything they want to remember in their journals which in effect become their memory. When you stop seeing what is familiar to you and you question it, you don't only appreciate and analyse everything that is new but that analysis leads you to see ordinary things with new eyes.

## **The Artist's Journal**

There is a tradition among artists of keeping a travel journal. Painters, draughtsmen/women, photographers... whoever expresses themselves through images and knows how to create them uses this effective tool to remember what they felt when they confronted another reality: Diversity.

There are different ways to capture what one wants to remember, as different as the artists themselves but the recording in the journal has been a constant throughout time. Artists have

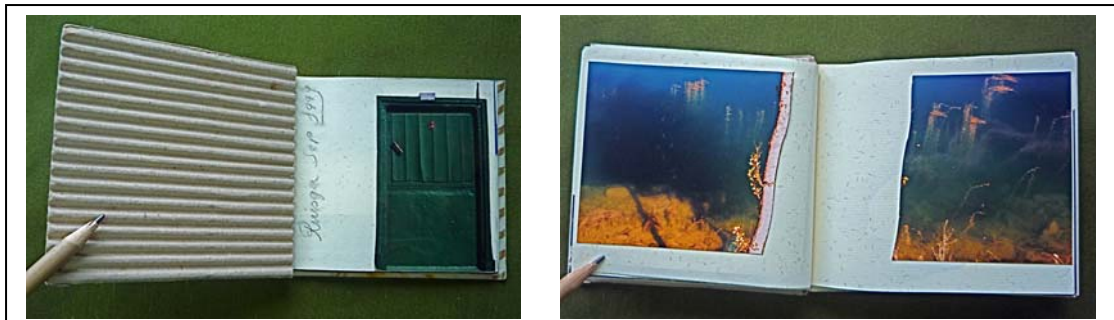


Figure 1: Four images of “Travel journal to Ruesga” Palencia, Spain, 1998  
The journal as an artistic object in and of itself:

always and will always carried journals to record what they are doing, what is going to happen or to note down the ideas they come up in different situations. This constitutes the basic material for creation. The artist’s journal is a versatile “object”, as versatile as art itself.

We can find journals containing a variety of techniques with a strong verb-icon relationship and others which of a more purist style where the artist only draws with a quill pen. It’s common to see them use a combination of techniques: drawings, text, photographs, things found and stuck inside, doodles, notes, clippings... They can be a living maze full of meaning. Before photography was democratized, journals were made of drawings and paintings, generally watercolour because of its easy-to-transport nature, however today journals are usually made up of photographs.

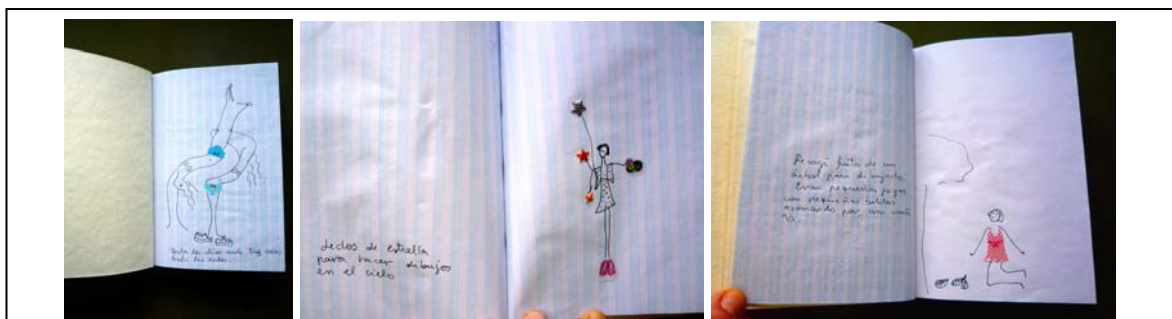


Figure 2: Salt and sea journal. Murcia, Spain, 2008  
The “food for thought” journal or development of ideas:

Mar’s journal: ...

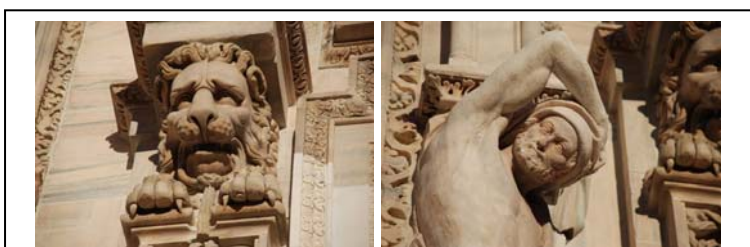


Figure 4: Italian journal. Mar García Clemente

I look like a mess, I forgot that I was in the fashion capital and that everywhere appearances are expected to meet a standard, even to get into paradise. I was left standing at the gates of heaven, I wonder if this is the entrance to paradise? It was

definitely not Saint Peter who chose who got in and who didn’t, or maybe it was, but he was

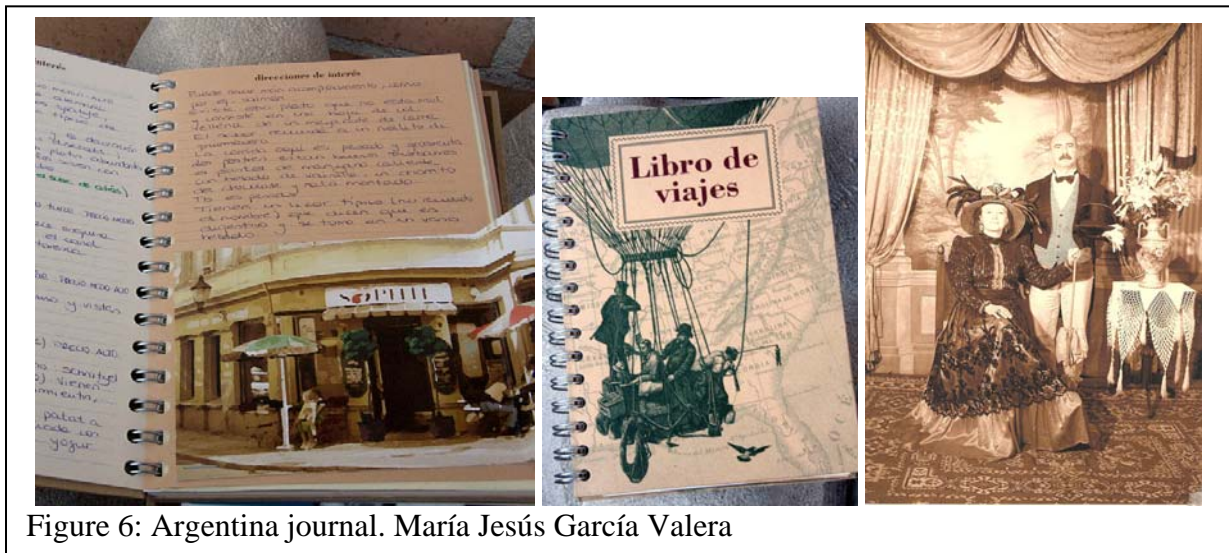
in disguise. Some day I'll know for sure when I see this great structure again, the Dome of Milan.

Pablo's journal



A 5-day trip to Berlin made the forged foundations tremble for 25 years, three of them with specific artist training to understand the art. There's no doubt that when we leave our little "nest" everything is new: language, culture, customs,... and in this it is implicit that the kind of art that was made, in this case German, was different. During my stay there everything seemed strange to me, from the modes of transportation to the traffic lights, the philosophy on life is totally opposite to what I live day to day in Madrid. The respect for public things, education, the cultural level,... I definitely noted it as a possible place of residence and training in the future.

María Jesús' journal:



...it happened in the San Telmo neighbourhood in Buenos Aires among the tenement houses filled with shops selling the most diverse things like puppets, crystal jewellery, siphoning containers, cameras older than my grandfather, hats, leather goods, cheap silver jewellery and a lot of etceteras. I discovered a small photography studio full of old suits used by chance clients. It was very exciting to see those old style scenes, the sun hats, the dresses, the parasols and the large variety of props like a trip to the past, that exciting moment got lodged in my memory. Sometimes the most insignificant things turn into stimuli and ideas, which later we can recreate on canvas or paper, in videos or in any one of numerous forms of artistic expression because art and life melt together in an instant.

Lucía Hervas Journal:

*“When someone is planning a trip they are actually doing nothing more than taking a break from his or her reality, a small tangent that starts with going to another place, another state, and which ends with a return, usually much too soon. During a trip everything changes to a different category, places, customs, speech and even living habits; and during this hiatus*

*one's eyes become keener, one's ears become sharper, one's tact becomes more sensitive. This doesn't have so much to do with the change of location and scenery but more to do with an internal transformation. One can go on a trip without even leaving one's room and this is similar to what happens during the creative process. When we exercise our imaginations it is as if we entered into a hypersensitive state in which everything ordinary becomes extraordinary, and extraordinary things are embraced and personalised. When one travels, whether literally or figuratively, the surroundings are converted in a living stimulus, the landscapes speak to us and as we watch them messages, which are normally hidden under the veil of routine, suddenly make themselves evident”.*

## **Conclusions**

Artists receive an important stimulus when observing diversity and this stimulus affects the creative process in the short, medium and long term.

Artistic works are enriched in terms of ideas, concepts and processes after an artist has made a trip and subjected has scrutinised his/her understanding of the world and these experiences have been fully absorbed into his/her spirit. The travel journal is a very valuable asset for artists as well as for the study of art and its creator. For an artist, this journal becomes the catalyst to help him/her remember and recreate and the object as well becomes a work of art in itself. And for the researcher a door is opened, leading him/her to precise conclusions about the origin and development of some works of art.

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