



THE ART OF NATURE

NATURAL INSPIRATIONS TO CREATE ART

Tiff Bollhorn

EDUCATION

Before I was asked to write this article, I had never seen myself as 'the artist' whilst creating this art. It seemed more of a co-creation, a conversation, a playful exchange with Nature as pieces unfolded. This art-form involves using a collected palette of natural materials from the environment and using them to make a collaborative art piece.

I first felt the magic of engaging in this type of environmental art when I worked under Sharon Kallis, an environmental artist in Vancouver, Canada. I saw pictures of children making collective art mosaics using natural artefacts of leaves, seeds, flowers, sticks and bark and arranging them in beautiful designs that danced across your eyes. The delight and intrigue was captured in the photographs I viewed. I decided to focus my Masters research on studying the students she worked with in this non-traditional mode of Environmental Education. My research supported what I had seen in the photographs. The students' relationships and knowledge of the natural world around them grew from having these creative hands-on (and hearts-on) experiences. Aesthetic regard and connectedness to the natural world were gained and beautiful reflections were captured from the students. Although many

years back now, I can still recite some of the more memorable comments: 'The roots of nature are branching with love' and 'I learned that when you listen to nature it gives you a nice feeling'.

Since my time in Vancouver, I have had the pleasure to work with students and teachers, luring them into the romance of pattern, shape, and nature's innate beauty co-creating natural art mosaics. First, the participants learn about the patterns observed in Nature: spirals, explosions, branching and fractals, and then get the opportunity to appreciate them through artistic engagement, drawing inspiration from these natural patterns. Mathematical discoveries such as the Golden Ratio and the Fibonacci Series have shown that these patterns have value in their own right but also connect all living things across micro and macro levels. For instance the branching pattern; there are bronchioles in our lungs, veins on a tiny violet leaf, branches of a large Iron Bark, the Nile River System and a flicker of lightning. These all connect when pattern is concerned.

Along with being motivated directly from the natural world myself when creating or facilitating a group in an art piece, one of my biggest inspirations is of course Andy Goldsworthy whose artworks alight Nature's beauty and spirit in wondrous ways. Most of the opportunities I have had to do these natural art mosaics have been independent

invitations. These have included workshops for educators or creating a piece such as the seed mandala for the CERES annual Harvest Festival. Each opportunity is a new creative conversation with a collected palette, resulting in a unique expression in the final piece. I look forward to the next workshop or artwork I am called to do and the natural palette it may accompany (depending on the seasons and request). I also cherish these special occasions of working with educators to help tune them into affective and creative avenues of education in this vast ecological world, as well as enabling others to see the world anew in dynamic colour, shape and pattern.

Participating in art mosaics with collected inspirations from Nature draws you in time and time again. Each time is a new experience and provides the opportunity to be reminded of her deep grace, beauty and potential playfulness ■

Tiff is a mother, educator, and when the opportunity presents, an artist as well! She enjoys learning new ways to deepen her knowledge and practice in the vibrant living world which surrounds us, such as through gardening and creative endeavors. With over a decade of experience in Outreach Environmental Education, Tiff has enjoyed working in redeveloping the children's playspace at CERES and currently enjoys being a school garden educator working with Foodweb Education in a couple of Melbourne schools.