

Student Reflections



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*Cover Art: Coucal and dancing frog at Chingara waterfall,
Coorg by Srivi Kalyan*

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Designed by Srivi Kalyan

The politics of creative justice: Conversations on creative processes

Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram

Abstract

This exposition explores the question of creative justice in creative processes and pedagogy. Through an evolving conversation on a chat app, a mentor shares her creative process of a painting that she is emerging with her students at the Masters level. And interwoven through these, they evolve a pedagogy of artistic research, decolonization, reflective inquiry into self, aesthetic encounters with their own cultures, Indian aesthetics and philosophies, meandering and pondering together. The exposition is constructed in four parts.

Part 1: Utopia and the politics of creative justice.

Part 2: The Conversations through chats.

Part 3 - Student responses and reflections.

Part 4: Teaching as philosophy of a way of being.

The mentor journeys through over twenty five years of her practice, inviting her students to participate, question, reflect and ponder with her, offering a creative pedagogy for artistic research that is also bound in the politics of creative justice.

Many thanks to my students - Ashwin Suresh, Hia Banerjee, Kaushik Kannan, Monica M Chandak, Mridul Verma, Nupur Agrawal, Pranav Sharma, Samridhi Pandey, Sonal Choudhury, Surabhi Singhai, for this participatory conversation and the contributions of their reflections in part 3.

Thanks to Ramnath Chandrashekar and Sreelekha Sureshkumar for being there, their reflections and for reminiscing with me.

Part 3

Student
responses
& reflections

Introduction

I invited students to participate with me through chat or share in their reflections by email. Some thoughts, we also discussed over our one-on-one meetings in MS teams or over phone calls. Some others would happen on individual chat boxes as we considered this conversation in relation to their own projects, creative work, evolution of skill, or building new practice. Others choose to remain silent sharing a recognition and acceptance taking their own time to find words and thoughts. Diverse formats, voices of reflection have evolved here, aided by the possibilities of technology and the way time and space works in a chat app. We have each messaged and written when our hearts are full, thoughts are bubbling, others are silent. We have spoken in our own time and spaces, allowing time to embrace and weave in and out of our conversations creating new meanings and relationships.

I shared the exposition as it was evolving with all my students and invited them to work with me in a mindful manner understanding the underlying thoughts and my own pedagogical work with them. I decided to approach this process as a metacognitive conversation, where each of us would be able to bring our perceptiveness, our approaches to the whole

process, our emotions and thoughts and allow for a transparent and reflective engagement learning from each other. This I felt would also keep an active and participatory conversation alive in order to find our individual as well as our group languages.

As a time right after the final submission of my doctoral thesis, as I wait for the final defense to be set up, I am in an in-between space that is overwhelming. The journeys of the last six years have come to fruition, and yet I am mentally and emotionally exhausted by my work for the thesis and my work at the college and all the other personal struggles in between. However, my students embrace my struggles, coming along on this slow gentle walk of a painting with me, allowing me to calm down, gather myself and find new beginnings. I am deeply grateful for this time that we have shared together and the welcoming space and the kind of culture we created together. These reflections are strangely promises we have made to each other and ourselves. In reading these, the idealistic dreams that we set for ourselves does not seem far-flung or impossible. It seems natural and right in our grasp.

Ramrath
Chandrashekar

Ramnath, a student from eight years ago, when we first met is a conservation educator, photographer and filmmaker changing lives in so many wonderful ways. It has been a special few weeks as we catch up between our busy schedules after a couple of years. There is so much to reminisce and cherish, for in mentoring him, we chose informal education. We travelled across South India, we did workshops for children, met principals and educators, met other conservationists, travelled sometimes with his girlfriend, now his wife, grew gardens, painted, wrote in natural landscapes, did birding together, and he came to my college to teach my students photography. We designed for his programs and each of these actions were engaged processes of mentoring and learning, as we got into critical dialogues and conversations on what the essence of education, aesthetics, environmental education were even as we despaired together at the critical loss of the environment. Our classroom was the great outdoors. There is warmth in our memories of each other and hope for the future.

Reflections

"I stopped by at a roadside three days ago. It was to see a school of white cattle egrets in a farmland. The fields filled with water after generous rains; the evening light shining on the egrets; clouds in the background; tender paddy saplings (naathu) ready to be planted with hope; a lone tree on the farm land – growing smartly at a tiny real estate at the intersection of three bunds.

I felt a sense of calmness deep within me as I watched them gently. Suddenly, the egrets, all of them, took a short flight when a farmer moved, and they came back again in a few seconds, settled in the farmland. As their wings flapped during take off and landing, I felt liberated.

If I had observed the same scene in 2012, my words would be, "Cattle egrets on a farm land."



Photo Credits: Ramnath Chandrashekar

I would have felt calm and liberated, which I am very sure of – with equal surety of not realizing the feelings. It was at such a time of hidden thoughts, lack of vocabulary, subtle self, and fear of being judged for expression, I was blessed with Srivi's mentoring. Though my sensibilities were shaped far away from mass education, with my creative intuition, alive, I was at the same time going through devastating loss of voice, self and words.

The culture of the classroom that Srivi created shaped my purpose and redefined my identify for myself – so much so, when I watched a Hawaiian Monk seal glance at a group of people and arch back to rest within seconds, I realized the importance of self-care. When I listened to a tailorbird in my backyard chirp vibrantly, my day became lively and vibrant.

The journey of reflective and meditative understanding allowed me to live creatively during moments of everyday madness and cherish the wonder of natural and cultural world that is around us, and in us."

<https://www.ramnathshekar.com/>

Sreelakha
Sureshkumar

Sreelekha, was a 18 year old art student, when I first taught her illustration techniques at Stella Maris College, Chennai, my alma mater. Extremely talented in graphic arts and illustration, as well as a deep thinker with a quiet humorous way about her, she came to work with me in the company I founded after she graduated from her program. We have spent hours designing and exploring together, meeting clients, working with young children, documenting my work as well as our respective portfolios and the portfolio of the company. She has been with me while I shifted my office building, packing, unpacking, sorting, reflecting, pondering and sometimes even quietly yelling at me when I am preposterous. Wise and gentle, she would cradle my fears and join in my wonderment at life and beauty, sorrow and grief.

She pushed me to precision and perfection in my work, by refusing to budge until her own high expectations were met. She designed Fooniferse.com with me, as we pondered about space and meaning in an online interface.

She engaged deeply with my quest as I began to explore and expand my work in environment and conservation. She documented and worked with me on creating a film of my environmental creative writing program at a school in Chennai. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk9XlbKBea>

She moved on to do her masters after about two years of working with me and I moved on to teach at Srishti Institute in Bengaluru. She collaborated with me on another book design project in 2016.

I have fond memories of my work with her. We have discussed and debated and pondered about every little aspect of design. We have gone to client meetings together and had hilarious moments discussing the most impossible of them. We have redefined each other's understanding of design with affectionate criticism. Much like my work with Ramnath, my pedagogical work with Sreelekha too was in informal spaces.



*Illustration credits: Sreelekha Sureshkumar,
Quirky illustrations for the Fooniferse website.*

I call Sreelekha, my student from about twelve years ago, when we first met, to wish her for her marriage. She is an hour away from when the first of the rituals will begin, and yet, she ponders with me and shares her own experiences of porosity and mysticism with the natural world and life around her. I laugh at her as I ask her to get ready for her wedding and she smiles back in her gentle way and tells me to complete the conversation that she is enjoying. While her words are not here, her musings and joy have been delightful to gather in my heart.

She tells me of her own porous experiences with nature and a frame of being where there are many mystical encounters, a certain aliveness to the present. She tells me how much she resonates with my doctoral work and how meaningful she finds this time in her life. She is still the quiet, contemplative and wise young woman I first met in 2009. Her eyes light up as she speaks even as her body is relaxed and in quiet resonance with everything around her.

<https://www.behance.net/sreelekhasureshkumar>

Surabhi Singhvi

Surabhi is inquiring into our fragmented attention and its challenges in a technological world.

[26/02, 6:56 pm]: I always wondered if I could sit beside you during your process of making art, while quietly observing you, getting to know your philosophies and conversations with your self. I am glad you shared your creative process which paved way to this possibility. It was a comforting experience to witness how endearingly you hold each character and element you draw, giving each stroke a place where it should beautifully belong in your canvas. I truly love the child in you, curious and excited to explore the world through embodied experiences, material explorations, artistic curiosities, music and poetry. I always felt that my younger self was braver to try different things fearlessly and with time I have been marred by 'what ifs', distractions and overthinking of how people interpret me.

But you gave me the hope that one's best memories can be re-lived and experiences can come alive through art. Also, one cannot and never should stop learning.

‘Trust art that has been gifted to you and that you have chosen. You don’t have to trust yourself,’ these words of yours stayed with me, making me wonder what was stopping me to embrace art that wanted to stay with me since childhood. I sometimes loved it but other times I’d let it wander due to my other engagements or procrastination. When you started the painting, the vivid memories you shared gripped me to the story and I was curious to know what unfolds next. The coucal, the waterfall, the frog along with their magnificence, playfulness, forms and their personified conversations made me engross into the narrative of their making. It is amazing to see your music, gliding smoothly into your process, lending the much needed calm required to relive those memories.

You told me yesterday, ‘Convert a statement you are not quite sure of into a question or an inquiry and start seeking answers to it’ and you showed it so well in your creative process. Your geometric doodles of class 8th or 9th consciously or subconsciously helped you in finding how geometric forms can be expanded to depict fluid, organic nature in art . This shows how an artistic inquiry stays with you for years.

During the design sprint workshop, I was surprised to observe how music embraced, dissolved and included me in the process of making, creating a harmony of space and strokes, details and sometimes sheer simplicity conveying my message.

That activity stayed with me and music became my closer companion, sometimes taking me back to my brief training of classical music in my childhood and how I enjoyed it then. You have the perfect playlist as well as understanding of the music guiding you to the inner solace and joy, which those memories want to reiterate. The inner dialogue in my head while doing any art felt close to yours and the best part is the humorous quality of those conversations. It was hilarious to see these characters' interest in coming to life and how they lure you into making them at any point of the day or night.



Illustration Credits: Surabhi Singhai, Scuba diving

I have been 'deep reading' your process and wanted it to stay with me. I started with documenting your works and process. But this time, I also wanted to take a plunge into it by participating as well. I took the opportunity of working along with following your thoughts. I am elated that my phone screen and chats used my 'attention' meaningfully (otherwise mostly distracting me) in the form of your reflective process and we used this opportunity to share our thoughts, feelings and journey through these screens despite staying far.

Here is my attempt of learning through your journey. This is from my memories of scuba diving I did some years back. I recollected the marine life I witnessed.

It was relieving to see how you too have this hidden fear of how an art will finally look; will it be different than expected and what if some characters or elements overpower others. The unison of memories, music, friends cheering us up and trust in art, makes this a truly rewarding journey. Thank you for inspiring us, trusting and loving us enough to share this valuable process of yours. I am blessed to be your mentee.

Hia Bangerjee

Hia is inquiring into the nuances of women led craft in their homes in Bengal for her capstone project.

Dear Srivi,

Thank you for sharing your piece of writing. It has brought an avalanche of thoughts and reminiscence to me. Thank you for trusting us so much, and sharing your mind with us.

I am so in agreement with you when you had said that

“Creativity is generative, like the spider who weaves from within herself, the baya weaver who builds his nests, rivers that flow shaping rocky mountains and crafting valleys. Creativity is simple, natural and the very essence of life.”

When we get a group of peers, that one can share, receive, draw inspiration from as well as the liberty to scrutinize, one truly flourishes. I want to be like the baya weaver. Confident and unhindered. I have unfortunately gotten a bit too excited and written something. I am sharing it with you. Thank you again for giving the space to speak unapologetically.

Resonating with you

While reading your piece, so many thoughts have emerged within that resonates amicably along with your writing. Indeed, it has been a struggle to get out of my fears, and make space for my creativity.

As you had said, the institutionalization starts from a very young age.

Colonization of minds, from the way my art teacher had hijacked my mind by injecting within the conventional standards of what art should look like, how lines should flow, how colors should be used next to each other, has definitely impacted on my mind. I was left to think that my art was limited to certain forms. It slowly became under confident. The way a kid is nonchalant, confident about their thoughts to put on a blank sheet of paper, why is it that, by the time we grow up, we find ourselves scared, and extremely self-scrutinized.

Till the end of my four years of bachelors I had not been able to finish one sketchbook. It was always, either the book was too new to taint with my lines, or the thoughts of what is worthy of putting down. The hesitance from my own mind to my hands was so strict, I felt like there have been an army camp of soldiers, rejecting any kind of percolation that didn't seem to be fit. Any thought that might have been given the permission to pass through to see the day light, used to become a priced possession. Much like a parent who have been trying to conceive for a long time. The insecurities become evident in the lines, always a fear that it is going to below par. Keeping each step with utter consciousness. It used to be exhausting, tedious.

Until one day, I decided to throw myself into the pool of anxiety. I decided to put myself through the pain every day. Sit and go through the exhaustion. Making anything and everything. My mind constantly telling me, it's worth nothing. Still I take another sheet of paper, and make again. Again, and again.



Illustration Credits: Hia Banerjee, Three generations in the simple act of combing and plaiting each other's hair.

Whom do I tell this? Is this something to be told! I have chosen to be in the field of visual art, and here I am after completing my bachelors, struggling with pencil and paper. If people hear this story, what would they perceive of me ? It is my profession, yet I was unable to call myself an 'artist'. I felt I am not there yet.

I had shown some of these works to my friend. I wanted him to scan these, and make virtual copies of them. He returned all, except two. He had told me, he liked them too much, and he wants to keep it. It was so bizarre to me. How can these drawing be worth anything to someone, that they would like to own a piece of my work? On my birthday he gifted me those two artworks. He had framed them, like the ones that I used to see in galleries. It was one of my most overwhelming moments.

Owning that framed piece of my own work make me feel like an artist for the first time. They were probably more than any trophy that I could have won in any of the art competitions. Though there were no audiences, but I had become something in my own eyes for the first time. And that feeling is priceless.

Nybur
Igrawal

Nupur is inquiring into how critical thinking can be fostered in teens and young adults through literary epics.

[9:41 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: I relate to this entire thread. When I came to Srishti, I had it in mind we would have these basic art and design workshops and we would be taught techniques. And I was so lost Srivi...I used to see the work of others and feel like I just was so far behind. And then I did two or three group projects and probably felt more intimidated... but then for Aparna's class I did the Gond art illustration project, a fairly simple project but everything I did from scratch and didn't care much about the output.. I just did it for fun and Let myself flow...this really helped me gain some confidence and I slowly started working and finding things that inspired me...and I started creating. And then in the lockdown with no such peer competition I just started sketching and became a bit more confident of my work...



Illustration Credits: Nupur Agrawal, Not Ready to Let Go of You

and I sketched like you asked us to
Srivi...I sketched everyday two three
pages...and I realised what you meant by
you couldn't really teach us...it was all
practice.

[9:43 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: And even though I have a long way to go...lots of practice to do. Somewhere I can finally understand what you had been trying to tell us in the first semester.

[9:44 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: And I feel grateful that even though I did realise it pretty late, someone did atleast tell me and I can follow it now.

Pranav
Sharma

Pranav is inquiring into how new aesthetes can be emerged for traditional Hindustani music using visual arts, animation and other new media.

“Looking at the Coucal and the waterfall painting. As an aesthete, ready to lure myself into this canvas,

I feel the flow of the painting as it takes form. The connection between the Coucal and the waterfall as it might have been in the moment when it was witnessed re-lives again through me. Even though only slightest, as it was midnight and I was immersed in my work too much, I remember thinking about the frog while listening to the harp by Andy Rigby. The way music hinged me to the visuals of this painting...an inspiration in my darkest of hours. Like a spell of charm lighting up the dim lit lamps of self-doubt.

And it's not only about the act of painting I feel inspired towards, it's the way of life. We see many things, watch few and feel fewer. Probably I am still there under the dews of Chingara. Being transported to a place by a piece of work! By the process of it...might I, too be able to reproduce such experience through art, only if I wasn't in an unknown hurry.

As I look at the abstract geometrical expression from her 11th grade writings, not always so it happens that the others or we ourselves can reason out our art objects. Quoting Srivi's words from one of our conversation, "Intuition needs space to exist in the physical space, or else it will make you go mad".

Looking at the different artworks and the way they have been emoted, I don't see a particular style, no boundaries, no bounding framework. What I see is an ocean of experiences, of feelings, of thoughts... sometimes taking form of a playfully dangerous tide if under the full moon or sitting quiet listening to the surface ripples.

Being her mentee and looking at these artworks I believe painting is not tiring, it's something that makes you want to get tired in. A million ways to express, none to be gauged in the scale of awesomeness, if in true expression! Meeting of folk and naturalistic style



Illustration Credits: Pranav Sharma, A Kathakali artiste applying makeup before a performance. From a book on Theatricality.

would be my personal favorite, no doubts there. Not sure, but I remember the ladyfinger stamp prints on one of the kingfisher paintings. “Continuous inquiries in how to blend the naturalistic, abstract, symbolic and my inquiries into the porous self. All of these are inquiries into form and style”, to be able to articulate like this along with sharing the supporting work is pure awesomeness, yes.

To be able to witness the processes of works done over such a long and intense journey is a joy ride one wants to take on and on. It takes great courage and selflessness to be able to share such personal things in so much detail.

Songal
Choudhury

Sonal is inquiring into how young children can be encouraged to process loss and death through art and design.

Dear Srivi,

Good morning... Thank you for sharing that beautiful waterfall emerging one stroke at a time... In my moments of pause and wonder I read what you have written all over again and find meaning and unbound joy in it... Thank you for being so hearty in your giving...

...

Thank you for sharing snippets of your life Srivi... Thank you so much for sharing these images and also your beautiful paintings... for your process... and your friendship... and for your heart...

...

When I have looked into a painting for a long time be it Van Gogh's sunflowers or Monet's water lilies, I have wondered what they must be thinking. I have wondered if each stroke was planned or were there a few misses... I have wondered if the Colors spilled and smudged in some places or each stroke achieved the impossible quest for perfection... And now I wonder that if art is about imitating life, then isn't it foolish to expect it to be perfect?

A lot of my questions got answered when my mentor began to share the process of her painting with me... Her process was lyrical, rhythmic and so sensory, that at times I felt as if I was a part of the landscape... I felt the ripples in the water, the gurgling sound, and the play of light and shadow on the water... I was further drawn into the scape as Srivi narrated stories and drew me further into the moment...



Illustration Credits: Sonal Choudhury, Making Friends.

When an artist is painting, the mind is constantly in a dialogue with the inner self... this dialogue is usually unheard and unspoken of... by sharing the process through days together, Srivi made me realise that these thoughts can be articulated and also be shared for others to acknowledge the struggles and conversations of an artist with themselves...

I have been deeply grateful and overwhelmed to be part of this sharing... It has inspired me to not curb my desire to express about what I create... Thank you Srivi for being the waterfall of wisdom and learning in my life... I wish to remain perched at its fringes just like the coucal all my life...

Kaushik
Kannan

Kaushik is inquiring into how storytelling and native and tribal relationships with the natural world can inspire stronger bonds with nature in urban contexts.

[7:55 pm, 25/02/2021] Kaushik: Every painting and artistic piece of work that you have shared made me feel inspired to create more pieces of my own. But the fact that there is so much philosophy that drives it made me realize how constricted my flow of work is.

I do struggle with letting go, which is why I need to have a vision of what I want to create. In the process of breaking this, I often feel like a stranded person lost on a lonely island. I constantly find myself dismissing the need to question the philosophical aspect behind 'creating' because the answer seems too far-fetched in my head. But when you shared your reflective process behind the paintings it made complete sense despite my apprehension about using heavy metaphors and words to describe visual pieces of work.



Illustration Credits: Kaushik Kannan, At Chilika lake

Coming to the paintings I often find myself comparing the quality of your work to mine (because they revolve around the natural world) even though there is no need to do so. Although, this did reaffirm my thoughts on how free the 'form' in your paintings look compared to mine. I believe this free flowing aspect gives the surreal feeling to your paintings that I struggle to achieve. Being so articulate about your own work and being so mindful of what you are feeling when you create also goes a long way in achieving this, I am sure. I sometimes, find myself feeling reflective when I make illustrations but the mindfulness aspect is very inconsistent. I know I have a lot to learn along these lines. But reading all your messages and even writing this small note confirmed one thought for certain. I love creating art! :)

[7:56 pm, 25/02/2021] Kaushik Iaidp Mdes: And I know all of us have said this enough but thank you for teaching and being there for us when we feel lost. :)

Mridul
Verma

Mridul is inquiring into shared economy and building a platform to bring communities together to build sustainable societies.

[1:17 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: In relevance to this painting and your memory, what do you mean by 'visions deepen, yet simplify' and 'become layered yet focused?'

"Srivi Kalyan: @ Mridul - As I begin to paint, in this particular section of the waterfall, I suddenly realise that the waterfall is not a still moment, a photographic moment, that it is layered with many moments of my perception and interaction with the waterfall. As I paint, my memories begin to unfold slowly and I realise the depth of my porosity, my experience, as sometimes an intuition strikes me, or a feeling floods through me. At the same time, as I paint, I now just have to focus on my lines, the image right before this text, I am just painting water sliding over the rock. Now I know, that I need to capture each little path of water in different parts of the waterfall. I have arrived at a process and a method. Now I can paint with clear focus. I decide to work with patterns, dots, short lines and flowing lines to capture the different moods, moments and experiences of water I encountered. That's what I mean by simply yet focused. Since my waterfall is not one moment but many moments of a long period of time, it is layered with light, feeling, mood, emotion, opening of my senses, silences, exhilaration, discovery, wonder... and that's how it comes alive for me through lines."

“Srivi Kalyan: This sound, is the sound of water I want reflected in my painting. I will listen...”

[1:18 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: After the writing sprint you conducted in mid-December, I realised how my subconscious influences my work. And how vital it is for me to get in the correct mindset/stance/setting.

External motivations in the form of peers and music helped me push myself. Most of it is subconscious, I believe, and the atmosphere greatly helps in reaching that revered mindset while approaching a task.

But also often I find myself exhausting over fixing the atmosphere, cleaning my room, my workstation, waiting for the motivation, mood etc. If not anything else, I realise I excuse myself from action citing these reasons.

“Srivi Kalyan: And that’s how an internal conversation begins to happen in the painting between the beings that inhabit it”

[1:19 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I pick up the phrase “gentle and quiet” from here. I relate it with the times when I get immersed in my work. When I get disconnected with the physical world, my surroundings, the time by the clock, often even my own body, and am purely focused on the task itself. I recall the times when I used to spend hours and hours working with metal or wood in my mechanical engineering labs. Even after forgetting about food, I still used to find energy in myself to continue working for hours.

[1:19 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Even my addiction to substances of abuse couldn’t command/distract my attention when I would work immersively.

“Srivi Kalyan: Water cascades step by step light-footed like a pixie...”

[1:20 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Naganandini, my pod manager for the 1 week we attended the college this month, shared a small book on metaphors. Until I read that book, I was always apprehensive of using metaphors and stories while communicating, partly because of my ineptness and partly because I felt that metaphors are unnecessary. But since that reading, I'm coming to realise that most of our communications are full of them. For example, the sentence we often speak, "I am out of motivation" is also metaphorical :P

Nevertheless, here how you use metaphors to describe the flow of water helps me imagine and create my own vision of the water. Although you've just used words, I could imagine a lot of visuals and experience it in my own head. Now I wonder, is it always true that 'a picture is worth a thousand words', or if words are used smartly, could it also be otherwise? :P

[1:20 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I'm awed when you and also Sonal for that matter, bring out appropriate metaphors and make the communication more meaningful instantly :)

"Chill kar"
Relax/ be cool

"Kya scene?"
~ What's up?



"Ek number"
~ best / number
one quality

"Thanks yaar"
~ Thanks
buddy

Illustration/ Typography Credits: Mridul Verma

I wanted to create Whatsapp stickers for the multilingual-2-word-phrases which I commonly used while texting.

Inquiries into how typography can address linguistic plurality

“ Srivi Kalyan: I will use this essay ‘Why not be different?’...”

[1:21 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: It was a pleasure to read this Srivi. Deference in abundance for you, knowing that your 17 year old self could pose such philosophical questions which I haven't been able to ask myself or the others around me yet.

Definitely Krishnamurthy came to my mind as I read though your essay, one of his book itself is titled “Freedom from the known”

Also, I don't know why but after reading your essay I feel compelled to tell about the two bedside books I'm reading currently.

The first one is “The story of my experiments with truth”, Gandhiji's autobiography. His straightforward language is very appealing. He does not mince words and keeps his narrative very honest and pure. I feel he also, thought subtly, poses very similar questions to what you've asked on 5th page....

“Srivi Kalyan: Painted in 2013 as a gesture of thanks to... My work underwent a tremendous shift, I began a strong inclination towards...”

[1:22 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Haha, this is what I think is what we all yearn for, discovering our calling, a style, a passion.

“ Srivi Kalyan: I am also able to pause and reflect and work more quietly...”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: And then like for you, I hope we also get to sort out our pieces of the puzzles :P

“Srivi Kalyan: Trust in yourself and your work”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: !!

“Srivi Kalyan: And move forward”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: !!

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I think we should pin these two messages on the top. Your littlest push helps us go a long way Srivi.

“Srivi Kalyan: In most Asian traditions, you find this concept that all things have sentience...”



[1:24 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Along with animating paintings and sculptures, I also feel that having a respect for the materials, tools and skills goes a long way in building consciousness and technical skills. It gives us a moment to be mindful of what we have. It's value, it's properties. The Hindu mythology of god Vishwakarma captures this.

"Srivi Kalyan: These moments between us where I try to entice him (Calotes Versicolor) with my quietness and gentleness, and he assesses my presence according to his own criteria are a precious time of sorts. Our hearts are beating a bit too wildly, just in case we cannot trust each and must flee at the slightest external noise... but this time in Auroville at the Sharanga guest house, we managed to get to friendly banter and acknowledgement of each other. There is a twinkle in our eyes, and we carry our secret meeting with a bit of a thrill and part ways."

[1:24 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Reading though your conversations with nature and other beings invigorate my belief in the power of intuition. I'm slowly forming a belief that we all beings are bound by consciousness.

"Srivi Kalyan: And even the loudness of our minds and interior voices are enough to make them scurry away."

- And this message further strengthens my belief in tacit communication, intuition.



[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: **It is just a matter of bringing purity and clarity in our minds, and once we start clearing out the unnecessary conditioning, we begin to harness the potential of intuition. It is like a muscle, needs to be exercised, but as we gain proficiency, reading animals, people and situations alike, become an interesting game.**

[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: A paragraph from another book I was reading, Intuition on Demand by Lisa K.

[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: It is not just about this selfish motive to get the best out for yourself, but I feel,

it is one power which we all have and can use for a greater good. Be it understanding the predicament of another being or communicating efficiently, listening to our own bodies etc.

“Srivi Kalyan: And this kind of craziness and fun of making is what I want for all of you to enjoy and take pleasure in for your own projects. This is independent of assessment, reviews, audiences, design methods etc. It is simply you having fun with your project!”

[1:26 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Moral of the story, keep doing whatever you want to do and don't worry about grades!:P

“ Jeong Kwan quote: “You must not be your own obstacle. You must not be owned by the environment you are in. You must own the environment, the phenomenal world around you. You must be able to move freely in and out of your mind. This is being free. There is no way you can't open up your creativity. There is no ego to speak of. That is my belief”

[1:26 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Haha although spoken so easily, this is one huge challenge I believe. Not giving into distractions. I remember, you also once said, “chop off the head of the distraction whenever it comes up,” again, so easy and true, but when it comes to putting it in practice, I often find myself weak.

“Srivi Kalyan: I don’t have techniques to teach, learning from me is to learn the philosophy of my work and art, the philosophy of a way of life. Yes I teach techniques and tools along the way, but what I hope you can take away with you is the philosophy and then go on to craft your own ways of being and philosophies.”



[1:28 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Thank you Srivi for these messages. We take huge pride in being your mentees.

“Sonal: Thank you for taking the time to write and share all of this Srivi... Thank you for showing us the bigger picture always :)

[1:28 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: *

“Hia: I feel you expressed what goes on in my mind. But I cannot articulate it.”

[1:30 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: *

[1:32 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I do have my thoughts for the messages you shared a few hours ago, but I'll put them up in the morning! :)

[1:34 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: In a first, I hope we could also be of some help to you! :P



Monica M
Chandak

Monica is inquiring into trauma in early childhood education and working with caregivers on listening to children.

[4:27 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: It has been quite a journey seeing your process. I have been figuring stuff out for myself. And painting comes as a part of healing and expressing. I remember as a child drawing mountains and apples and how much I enjoyed doing. I don't practice it anymore.. but i am trying different methods of expressing. One such tool that I recently learnt about is role play and writing.

[4:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Did anything of the process I shared support or give you new directions for writing/ roleplay?

[4:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: can you unpack 'quite a journey' a little more descriptively?

[10:38 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: So, Srivi I have always looked at you as an ideal person. Someone I want to be for my children in the future, to give them direction, the way you show light to us/me in my dark time (when I feel under-confident, since PGDP mentorship).

When you shared your journey with us in the group it was soo raw, it felt as though we were a part of something real. It was quite different from my imagination of you.

Like you were an idol that I worshiped who knew it all. Coming from that space when you shared your process it was natural, intuitive, and most of all reflective. You are still that someone I want to be, but more you. And I know you keep pushing us to do things, but this time you were doing things with us. It kind of motivated me to think deeper, look deeper within and around myself.



Art credits: Monica M. Chandak

[10:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: About how it helped me in my writing and role-play is, I am not a writer, we have established that. **But, watching your art grow and expand in free flow without judgment and the pressure of being judged has shown me that I am just being too harsh on myself and my process of writing.**

[10:43 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: I have been meaning to tell you that your work is so dear to you and I know it was not the best when you really started off your journey, it has reached this level with practice. I intend to do the same. Now, more than ever, I have started writing small stuff here and there talking about feelings or just anything in any form from poems to short stories (not intending to share it, not just yet), trying to build more faith and less judgment from my end for my own art.

[10:50 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: Role-play is healing, I just did one small session with Sahil and the effect of it brought in so much clarity in terms of my internal self and my project. I have been projecting my feeling of a structured environment and unstructured play. I feel drawn to homeschooling and have developed a certain amount of dislike for a structured/institutional

environment. I didn't realise this, but I did leave myself the hints about these feelings here and there. connecting the method of healing to your art, I know you have shared the tiring experience of work that you have been feeling lately and you still won't stop motivating or pushing us to do what we like, take time for your students and be with them when they need you. The care you have shown by sharing your process ...

[10:52 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: I am NOT praising you to get on your good side, these are my unfiltered feelings about you and can't thank you enough for sharing your experience with you. Please understand the emotion and not the language. I am sorry if I have offended you in any way or form.

[10:53 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Not at all. It is heartfelt, honest and beautiful as you always are.

[10:54 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Thanks so much for writing all this out. I am glad I asked you. I am also honest when I say I am revived and healed when each of you respond. I need this as much as the many things I may share and give of my time to all of you. So you must value your words very highly because they mean so much to me.

[10:56 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: It feels like I want to virtually hug you. You have been such a GOOOOOOOOOD mentor to me; I have grown so much much under your wing.

[10:56 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: honestly my trip to Srishti land has been a success because of you.

Samridhi
Pandey

Samridhi is inquiring into the challenges women face in careers in technology and the need to revisit how we think STEM education for girls in India.

Your sharing of playing stories, characters and experiments was simply precious to me. It roused me from periods of deepening anxiety and crisis of faith. It made me want to run away and play with these characters. It brought joy and nostalgia of childhood imagination, enough to make me doodle with a smile. Having you narrate your experiencing the developing forms in your painting, was like having you paint next to me. And it gave me an opportunity to sit and ponder mindlessly next to you creating.. a soothing feeling that amidst all the chaos, one can and should nurture one's creativity. It was fascinating to read about you articulating each detail of your vision (that sometimes overwhelmed me)... Descriptions of emerging lines of waterfall, relationship between coucal and ridges. I was faintly able to grasp the deep conversation a creator needs to have with form.

The back and forth, the negotiation between inspiration, vision, one's abilities and shortcomings. Sometimes this conversation felt too personal for me too read(opposite to your intention of sharing I believe). But that I think is the essence of an inner artistic dialog.

The feelings that expectations of a vision or visual evoke need to be broken down into words and translated into questions, however vulnerable it may make one seem. I noticed myself noticing sections of your developing work... Some fluid lines meeting each other and going their own way, the changing white space, blues and reds. These gave rise to moments of contemplation of form, line and feeling behind it. These spontaneous moments of organic discovery were a contrast to my striving need to unravel the chaos of complex themes & questions while trying to obsessively categorise everything.

After reflecting on expressive exercises and open discussions of form workshop, time felt more elastic to me. spurts of imagery I see in my mind at some point in time, comeback rearranged, upside down, more nuanced and concrete. And this waiting space needs to be filled with a relaxing energy of creating and pondering.

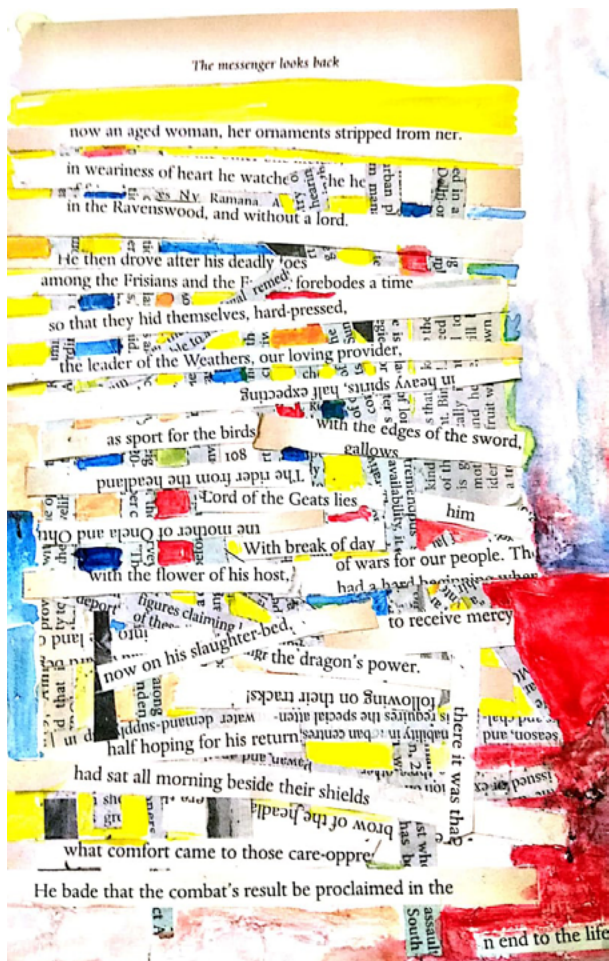


Illustration credits: Samridhi Pandey

Ps: I found some previous artworks that I could connect to the last few lines. These artworks happened more effortlessly, without any objective in mind. Last two are from my asemic writing class.

I realised the difference in my own process of creating either by forcing habits of practice or pure inspiration. The forced practice discourages me pretty soon when faced obstacles of creative blocks, criticism, etc. While creation during moments of pure inspiration happens without me being conscious about it. I can't trace the thread of motivation for these creations that make me pick up a pen or brush...To recreate or reimagine the objects of curiosity and bursts of thoughts and feelings. A balanced creative process that combines these two is going to my new goal. By trying to consistently find these inspired moments, being curious and asking questions through form, without waiting.

Note: These words don't feel enough to express what I have experienced and how much I appreciate you and your sharing your thoughts and process with us. I hope some of this is usable/helpful to you.

Ashwin
Suresh

Ashwin is inquiring into designing an online -offline education model for middle and high school children with a focus on sustainability and engineering.

Inspiration comes from little things, a scene from a movie, a sight that catches your attention, a piece of art, a picture, a word, a story, a piece of music. For me, creating starts from inspiration, either internal or external. Translating those ideas into a process and making a tangible product at the end is something that I have always enjoyed doing. This was a very linear process for me till a point, usually starting with developing an idea and slowly progressing towards the desired output. I have always felt that it lacked depth, though I enjoyed the process the output didn't seem to convey what I had originally intended. This is a practice that I have developed after joining Srishti, to understand myself as an art practitioner, question my thoughts and look back at my past experiences while also enjoying the process of doing it.

Your words have always inspired me Srivi, your ability to articulate thoughts is a gift that I admire.

The sudden transition from a technical field to art field was difficult for me in the beginning but with your tips in mind I was able to kind of merge both my fields of interest to create something stronger that suited me. This has been a major learning outcome for me, to connect dots, it is sort of like a tool that I can use whenever I get stuck at a point.

From your first class on mind-maps to nature walk to helping us through our capstone, I learned a lot as a artist-designer. To observe, find, understand, think, develop, your sessions changed my worldview as a designer. Now I'm in my constant quest for finding errors/gaps, questioning my own thoughts, pushing myself to make connections and articulate my thoughts.

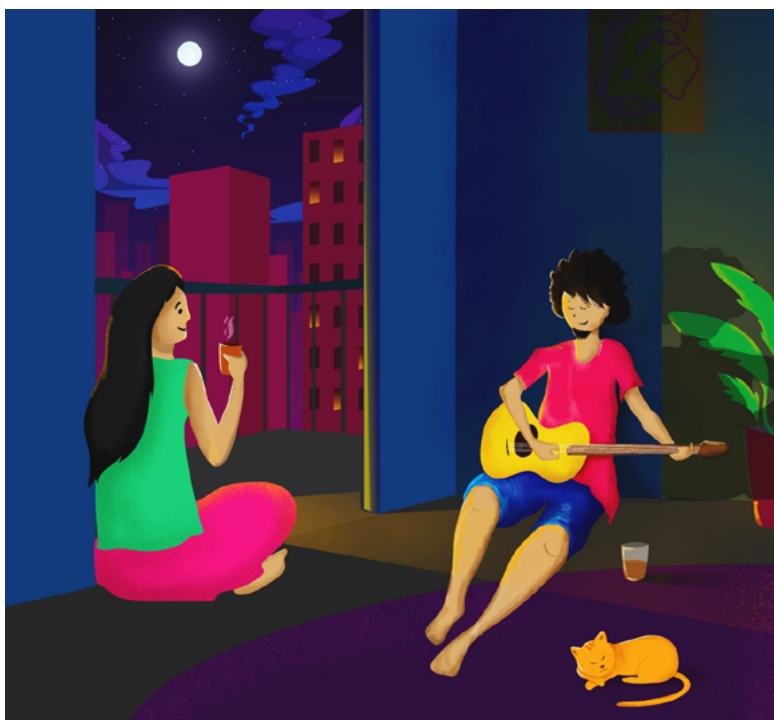


Illustration Credits: Ashwin Suresh

This is a painting i made, inspired from one of my favourite memories. I love how a piece of art can create such strong feelings of emotions within me, though it was created by me. The silence of the city, the sound of the guitar, a hot cup of chai and endless conversations. Everytime I take a look at this, i actually feel myself being inside the painting.

Sharing your process was very helpful for me, it allowed me to understand to a certain extent, why you did what you did. As you said, creativity is natural and intuitive, but we have to make the space for it to happen, this was something I was having trouble dealing with before. Waiting for the right moment to get inspired and then being very conscious about the output did not help in improving my skills as an artist, rather just go with the flow, trust my skills and make more, and slowly I will get there.

Asking questions on form, understanding aesthetics, learning about our own cultural art forms are some of the practices that I've developed after having conversations with you. These practices have the capacity to inform me and mould me to be a better artist. This is a constant learning-unlearning process, asking the right questions and pondering for the answers lets us move ahead, learn more.

Finding all answers might be impossible but I'm happy that I've started my quest, and I think the journey is more important than the destination. Thank you for all the support Srivi.

Thank you

[1:39 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And I have to say that this process of sharing with you, starting sometime in November perhaps, while going through a hugely difficult process of work and thesis writing and then the time of breakdowns after that, I have felt much cherished and comfortable in sharing with all of you.

[1:39 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And I would say that all of you have been there for me, in one of the most difficult times of my life and helped me cross a bridge, that would have otherwise crashed and burned without the support.

[1:41 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And for the first time, having shared the painting process, I have articulated my pedagogy as well.

[1:44 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: So thanks immensely to all of you for making this participatory.

Each time one of you articulates, I become a little more confident and sure of what I am doing also. I also get lost, confused and frustrated and emotional, both with my creative work and my teaching.

And it is always humbling when I work with each of you, even as I sometimes feel like tearing my hair - I enjoy the wandering that we do, but I worry what it may mean for the immediate needs.

[1:48 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And then someone from an older cohort comes and tells me they are doing well, they have good jobs, they are earning well, and they are passionate about their work, about social issues, they share their stories and I feel a sigh of relief. It is scary sometimes, this sense of responsibility and lonely, if students don't lend their voices. So you have definitely been of immense help to me by putting your thoughts into words.

[1:54 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Thank you



**Be still my heart. These
great trees are prayers.**

Rabindranath Tagore