

# Art for Life

AUTHORITATIVE  
INSTRUCTION IN ART

Tom Anderson

Melody K. Milbrandt



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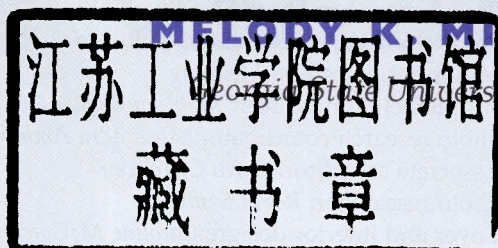
## Authentic Instruction in Art

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**ART FOR LIFE: AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION IN ART**

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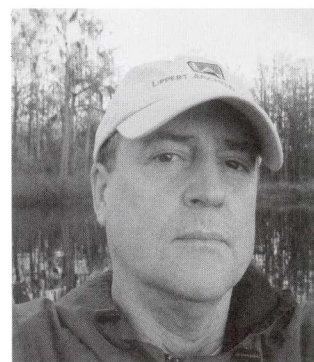
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***To Carrie and Amelia, and for Mary Beth  
To my family, especially Aaron, Mira, Lanny and my  
Kennedy clan***



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**TOM ANDERSON** a native of Montana and longtime resident of Florida, is professor and former chair in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee. He also has worked as a public school art teacher in Oregon and as a commercial artist in Chicago. He has written more than seventy articles, reviews, and book chapters and is the author of one other book, *Real Lives: Art Teachers and the Cultures of School*. He was a cofounder, in 1995, and is still a member of the International Advisory Committee of the Children's Guernica Peace Mural Project, which at this writing is responsible for some seventy murals, exhibits, and accompanying peace workshops around the world. His international teaching and service include stints in Italy, Spain, Kuwait, and Japan; talks to international audiences in Taiwan, Korea, Canada, and Australia; and service in the International Baccalaureate Program in Wales, Italy, Canada, and the United States. He has given more than 100 speeches and workshops in the United States, including Hawaii. At FSU, he has directed twenty-five doctoral dissertations thus far and is proud of his former students' accomplishments in art education and arts administration worldwide. Over the course of his career, Dr. Anderson has been particularly interested in the social foundations of art and education, as well as art criticism and aesthetic inquiry, especially in art for life. He is a frequent community muralist and currently is engaged in digital photography as a means of recording his own life and his place in his local community, as well as in the larger social context. He's married to Mary Beth McBride and has two adult daughters, Carrie and Amelia.



**MELODY K. MILBRANDT** is an associate professor and coordinator of art education at Georgia State University in Atlanta. She taught art in public schools (K-12) for eighteen years before moving to higher education in 1996. Throughout her teaching career she has been active in state and national art education associations, providing approximately fifty workshops and presentations at professional meetings. These presentations have addressed her long-standing interests in creativity, cognitive abilities, and social issues in the art classroom. Her dissertation, *An Authentic Instructional Model for Fifth Grade Art Using Postmodern Content*, was awarded a J. Paul Getty Fellowship in 1995. Since then she has written a number of articles, reviews, and book chapters on a variety of topics related to contemporary issues in art education. Her current teaching and research interests include the role of art criticism and aesthetics in a multicultural setting. Dr. Milbrandt has served on numerous advisory boards for local, state, and national art organizations. She is a past president of the Kansas Art Education Association and was honored as Elementary Art Educator of the Year in both Kansas and Georgia. She is active in the Georgia Art Education Association and received the Southeastern Region Higher Education Award for 2004. She and her husband, Dr. Lanny Milbrandt, have four adult children and five grandchildren. Her studio interest is mixed-media painting.





# PREFACE

*Art for Life* is a textbook designed for elementary and secondary classes in the theory and practice of art education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is based on the idea that art and visual culture engage viewers in communicating, reflecting, and responding to the meaning of their lives. A quest for personal and social meaning is therefore at the center of art for life.

Beginning with the premise that art is aesthetic communication about things that count, art for life is a cognitive approach to art education that stresses the construction and intelligent interpretation of art and other aspects of visual culture in their authentic social contexts.

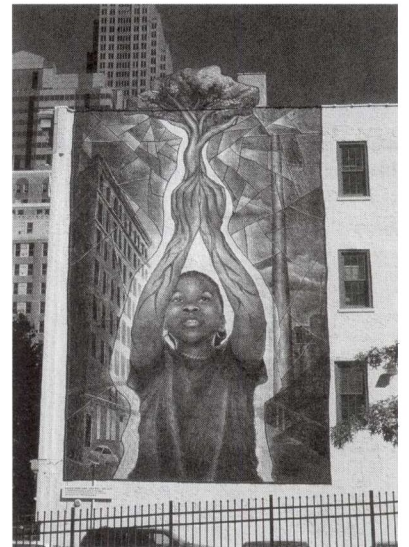
A second premise of art for life is that information resides not only in an artifact or a performance but also in the context of that object or process: the culture and conditions in which it came to be. Art as intelligent communication, then, requires that information be gained not only *from* the work (regarding, for instance, its aesthetic quality and intrinsic nature) but also *about* the work (its functions and place in the world).

A third premise of art for life is that making, interpreting, teaching, and learning about art and visual culture in a meaningful way entails the idea that aesthetic symbolic expression, as cognition, has both affective and intellectual components. Both intellect and emotion are intrinsic to making and “reading” art and visual culture and are equally important in art for life as a reflection of human experience.

The goal is to engage in teaching and learning in art for the sake of life. We address skills, concepts, and ways of approaching art that foster students’ understanding of their own lives and the lives of others. It is art education that, in addition to understanding art for its own sake, seeks to understand it as an expression of emotions, values, mores, and institutions.

The strategies we use in art for life are based on themes (rather than on elements and principles of design, media, or historical periods) and are, as appropriate, interdisciplinary. Guided by the principles of authentic instruction and assessment, we explore the rationales and substance of traditional, modern, and postmodern understandings of culture and art, as well as historical models of art education, extracting whatever is useful for our model of comprehensive art education: art for life. We hold that particular current and historical movements and trends in art education are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as they have been considered in the past; we present them here as mutually supportive toward real-life ends. The disciplinary foci of art for life then are making art, aesthetics and aesthetic inquiry, art criticism and critique, art history and other contextual research, visual culture studies, creative self-expression, and new (electronic) technologies.

*Art for Life* is meant for both preservice and practicing art educators. Its aim is to provide a theoretical base for the study of art, education, and art education as well as to present practical ideas and examples. Part One addresses conceptual foundations, with particular attention to the aims, goals, objectives, and



About the cover: Community mural artist Joshua Sarantitis has been creating public art for more than twelve years and his work can be seen in many major American cities. His approach to making art comes from a tradition of artists who believe the creative process should be shared with the public in locations that are both accessible and socially relevant. He can be reached by email at [murals@earthlink.net](mailto:murals@earthlink.net). This image reflects the philosophy of authentic instruction that centers art for life. As shown here the roots of our discoveries already lie within us. It just remains for all of us to discover ourselves in our own personal and social contexts as the foundation for reaching our full potential.

instructional strategies of art for life in the larger context of authentic instruction and assessment. Authentic instruction is the educational framework of art for life; it involves strategies that foster high-level cognition, deep learning, connections to the world beyond the classroom, and substantial discussion by and support from peers.

Part Two addresses the disciplinary and conceptual foci with particular attention to visual culture, creative self-expression in a social context, aesthetics and aesthetic inquiry, art criticism and critique, art history, making art, and contemporary technologies.

Part Three begins with a description and discussion of thematic instruction, then presents curriculum units for K–12. These units are focused on central tenets of art for life such as personal development in a social context, environmental concerns, and social justice. We present practical lessons and suggested activities as models for learning, *not* as formulas for teachers to replicate. We hope teachers will use this text as a springboard for their own investigation of art for life in their own classrooms.

*Art for Life* is primarily a collaborative effort between two authors but also includes the theoretical contributions and classroom experience of numerous other art educators at all grade levels, including university colleagues. We value their input and hope that this text will stimulate discussion regarding the goals and mission of art education. Toward that end, we invite you to visit the Art for Life website maintained by McGraw-Hill.

Teachers are often asked to envision the outcomes they want students to achieve. Accordingly, we envision the outcome of art for life as students who think critically about art and artifacts in the visual world and feel deeply about the artwork they create and see. We envision students who care for people and the environment in their art classroom and beyond, in the global community; who develop skills for making art and are able to voice their ideas and concerns visibly and audibly. We envision art students who will someday be leaders because they solve problems with empathy and understanding, hold fast to the values of human rights, respect the sanctity of life, and seek peace as a fundamental good. This is our dream, but it is not ours alone. We invite you to join us in constructing a new tomorrow through the comprehensive model of art education that we call art for life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Visit our website to continue your  
education about Art for Life and to engage  
like-minded art educators at all levels.

Tom Anderson also wants to thank my teachers, who guided me in this book by what they taught me. In particular I want to thank Will Clark, who helped me believe I can make art that counts, Vincent Lanier and June King McFee who gave me a broad and deep introduction to art education and whet my appetite for social engagement through art; Edmund Burke Feldman, for knowing and sharing how to write short sentences with big meanings; and Paul Edmondston who believed in me and encouraged me to follow my heart. I also want to acknowledge my colleagues at Florida State University for continuing to provide a rich intellectual tradition within which my own ideas have formed and been refined. Especially, I want to acknowledge my students, in whose caring presence, meanings have been finally tested, refined, and transformed. Finally, I want to thank my colleague and co-author, Melody Milbrandt, for hanging in there for the eight long years this project has been in the making. As she put it, if nothing else, it shows we're optimists!

Finally, more personally, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Mary Beth McBride, who has listened to my ideas, given me wise counsel and centering advice, and sincerely shared my elation and frustration with equal grace. She's my anchor and my compass.

Melody Milbrandt wishes to thank Tom Anderson for his initial invitation to collaborate on this text (he undoubtedly didn't foresee the eight years of effort) along with the art departments of the State University of West Georgia and Georgia State University for their support of her continued research and writing. A special thanks to graduate assistants Mandy Lebowitz and Zenia Zed who, along with numerous other graduate and undergraduate students, contributed and participated in the development and implementation of many of the ideas presented. Thank you also to art teachers and students who provided the wonderful artwork found throughout our book. Thank you to Linda Clay, Kirby Meng, and Elizabeth Willett who took time from their busy schedules to document and share moments of their meaningful classroom practice with us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the membership and leadership of the National Art Education Association for the many professional growth experiences and support provided by this organization. The dedication to research, leadership and professional excellence exhibited in this multi-faceted and diverse organization has been a continual source of inspiration and motivation. I would like to acknowledge and thank Elliott Eisner and June King McFee for their early research and writing that conceptually set me on my educational path, along with my art education professors at Wichita State University and Florida State University. Each person holds a special place in my heart for their valuable insights and contributions to both my individual educational experience and the field of art education.

This is also an appropriate place to acknowledge and thank my art education colleague and husband for almost twenty years, Lanny Milbrandt. His belief in the creative process, the value of work done well, and commitment to the indisputable value of art and art education fund his constant and patient support of all of my professional endeavors. I thank him for sharing a professional, as well as a personal life journey, with me.

Finally, in the positive spirit of *Art for Life*, the authors salute and commend our art teacher colleagues and the work they do for students around the world. As a profession we've come a long way, and we believe the best is yet to be.



# INTRODUCTION

## ART AS THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

This book is based on the idea that teaching and learning in art should be about something that counts in our lives. Human beings are programmed, biologically and psychologically, to seek and make meaning. Art is decorative or beautiful for its own sake; in addition, one of its primary functions in all cultures around the world has been to tell our human stories, to help us know who we are and how and what we believe. This concept assumes that the aesthetic form at the heart of most artworks is used to effect some kind of communication, and that the artist uses his or her skills in composition and technique to create works that extend beyond themselves to tell us something about the human experience.

The purpose of this book, then, goes beyond understanding art for its own sake. It is, rather, to help future art teachers and their students understand something about themselves and others through art and visual artifacts. Our focus is on art and visual culture less for art's sake than for life's sake, on art that counts in the lives of you and your students as personal and social expression. The book is about forms that arise from a need to say something of significance, about art and visual culture that reflect and contribute to the human story. Authentic, content-based art education recognizes works of art as both windows into and mirrors of our lives. It reflects the stories of individual human beings and the groups we live in, told through art and visual culture.

## Art for Life as Social Reconstructionism

Art attains and constructs meanings in the context of its use in particular groups or cultures. People make and receive art because it tells them important things about themselves and others. By extension, art education can and should, at least in part, be a social instrument for improving people's lives. This idea, called social reconstructionism, encourages us to examine competing philosophical systems or narratives, in the conviction that there is no single right way to do things. In this book, we vigorously embrace the notion of cultural and individual plurality in making and receiving meaning through art and visual culture.

To help students view learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but also as practices that provide them with a sense of identity, value, and worth, educators must encourage the use of art in its authentic contexts as a vehicle of change in a world where racism, class oppression, sexism, and nationalism must be continually challenged. Students need to be introduced to content and concepts that address how community life can be structured for equality and justice, and we have addressed these themes throughout the book. Students also need to develop an understanding of the richness and strength in diverse cultural traditions. Through understanding differences, they will be better prepared to change prevailing relations of power.

Moreover, we believe teachers need to implement programs that allow discourse on morality and social criticism, giving students points of reference for making choices in a world of competing ideologies, claims, and interests. Such programs build moral courage and connect both the teacher and the students to the most pressing contemporary problems and opportunities.

In Part Three, we present examples of artists who advocate social reconstruction, and curriculum units built around those ideas for K–12 instruction. For example, in Chapter 11 Krzysztof Wodiczko focuses our attention on homelessness and military threats, and in Chapter 13 Fred Wilson’s work is used to focus on racism and social inequality. There are also units on developing self-awareness and personal choice through journals (Chapter 10), on environmental consciousness (Chapter 12), on human equality and feminism (Chapter 14), and on developing a “sensitivity of peace” (Chapter 15). The point of these units is to explore and understand strategies that make life better through art.

It is important to acknowledge here that social activism is not a new idea in art education. June King McFee, for example, was an early advocate of connecting art instruction to real life. She wrote that equal rights without economic opportunity and meaningful education could compound social problems. She expressed concern for individuals marginalized by society—a concern many minorities, feminists, and others share today. McFee stressed that it is each citizen’s responsibility to evaluate the quality of his or her aesthetic contribution to society, subject to the public view. She rejected the tradition of socially irresponsible individualism in art, described the interdependence of major social forces, and questioned the values perpetuated by the mass media when those values accentuate cultural and economic differences as appropriate topics for art education. Many other social reconstructionists, including Laura Chapman and more recently Graeme Chalmers, Paul Duncum, Kerry Freedman, and Kristin Congdon, have addressed similar issues. Here, we join them.

## WHO OUR READERS ARE

This book is primarily for future art teachers and for practicing art teachers who want to explore new and long-held ideas about art education. Our purpose is to present a foundation and concepts for art instruction for real-life purposes in and beyond school, as well as to present practical examples and exemplary curricula. We call this approach art for life.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS TEXT

This book has three parts. Part One, consisting of Chapters 1 and 2, presents the structure and theoretical foundations of art for life, placing our approach in the larger context of art education and society. Part Two, consisting of Chapters 3 through 9, focuses on particular concepts and associated teaching and learning strategies, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary, including visual culture, creative personal expression, aesthetics, art criticism, art history, the making of art, and new technologies. Part Three, consisting of Chapters 10 through 16, is a series of curriculum units. These include real-life motivations and content and can be used by current and future art teachers for K–12 instruction. The key throughout is theme-based authentic instruction that starts with art but extends to other disciplines using students’ own drives, interests, and abilities to achieve meaningful, holistic educational experiences centered in art. Visit our website to continue the dialogue about art education for life.



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Visit our website to enter a dialogue about art for life.



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