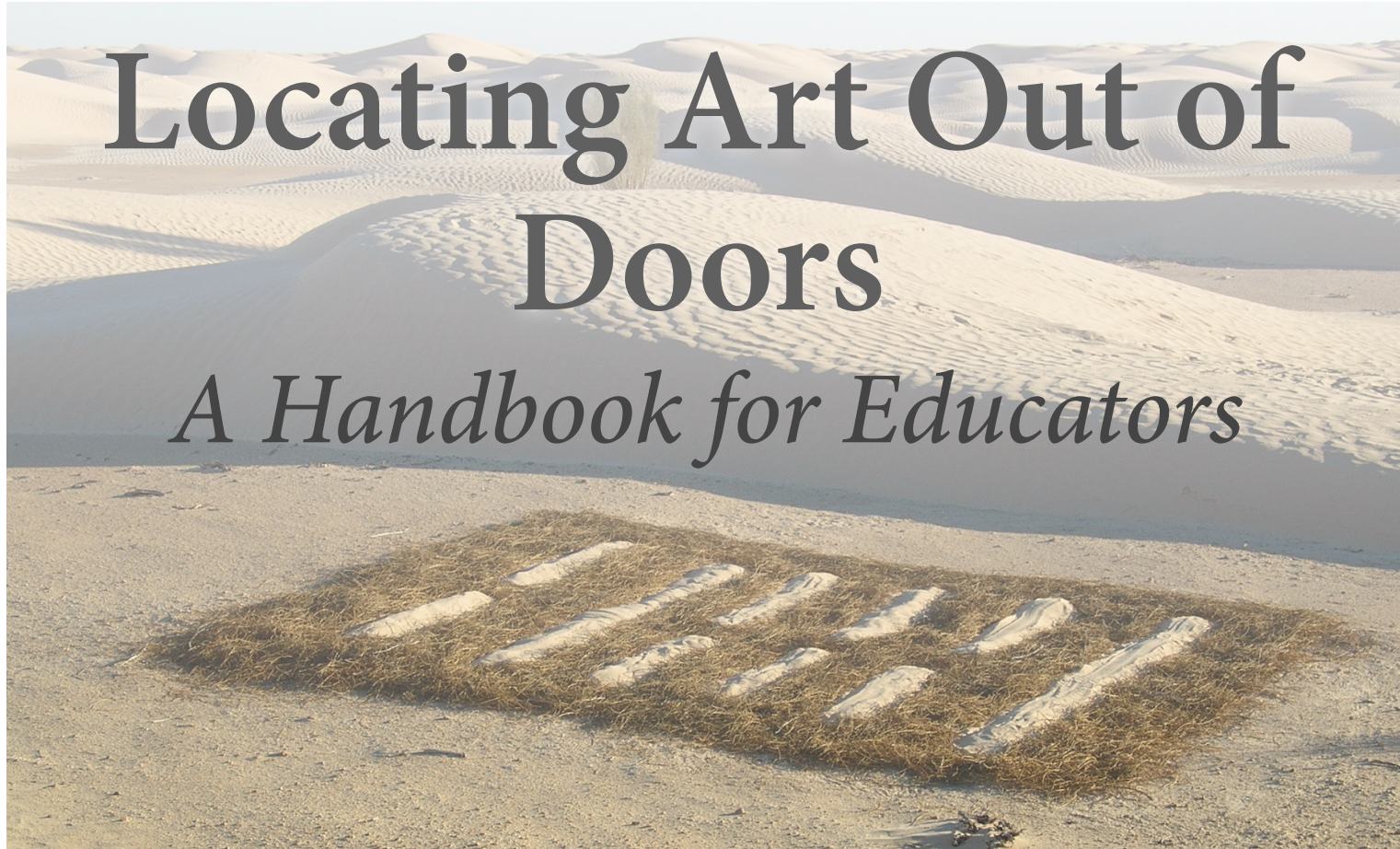


Locating Art Out of Doors

A Handbook for Educators



MARIE GAYATRI

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About the author

Marie Gayatri is an artist and art teacher who specialises in working with the concept of nature and explains her process as follows: “When approaching a new project, I always reflect on the question ‘How do we relate to nature and what does nature mean to us?’ Using thoughts and feelings that have been developed around the topic of nature, I choose a standpoint where nature is valued in a certain way. From that standpoint, I start the practical aesthetical journey to build a project – a piece of art.”

Marie Gayatri lives in Sweden and started to work with both art and art teaching as her major profession around the new millennium. She has realised many art projects around the globe and is involved with several networks focused on art in natural surroundings. To support her role as an arts educator,



Photo: Henriette Ousbäck 2014.

artist Marie Gayatri earned a Master's degree in visual didactics (2010).

This book, her first, is the result of many hours of working over a ten-year period with dedicated people and students in different teaching and learning situations, all with a focus on art and creativity in the outdoors. It is written as a handbook for educators in any subject, who are interested in sustainable learning and educational matters.

Introduction

If you like nature and realise that an outdoor environment provides a range of suitable places for creative teaching, this is the book for you. This is a kind of teaching that can easily be incorporated into your daily pedagogical activities.

The creative process offered in this book presents a pedagogy inspired by Land Art, an approach focused on making art entirely with art in nature. In this special way, it gives people the opportunity to create a dialogue with nature.



To create a dialogue with nature might seem like a simple and obvious matter, within easy reach for anybody. But is it really so simple? In today's society, not only do we have less access to nature, since so many of us live in cities, but we do not go out into nature so much. Moreover, we no longer keep up the social habits of interacting with and doing things in nature. In time, we lose our ability to have an inner dialogue with ourselves during our encounters with nature.

To do something creative in nature is a way to win back part of this familiarity with nature, which is about to be lost. In recapturing this, we practice our ability to entertain timeless questions, as we ponder questions concerning our existence. Nevertheless, this is just as much a matter of dynamic contemporary pedagogy, which is taking a foothold in current approaches to art, as we dare to explore new questions and to consider our sustainable future.

If you want to be inspired by art in nature in your pedagogical work, then this is a handbook for you. I will start immediately and show how a lesson might be practically performed. I then present examples of how the things we do may be combined with subjects that are taught in preschool and school. After this, there will be a section on what you

will need to bring when you go out and useful things to think of before you start. Finally, I will discuss the necessity of having a certain pedagogical outline and I will make some suggestions concerning how to start approaching this matter.

There is a long-term idea behind this e-book. The ambition is that this will become the inspiration for a follow-up publication, which might include in depth theory and thorough practical guidelines for the pedagogical use of creative work in nature. In view of this, the practical and theoretical ideas that are presented here must be regarded as suggested outlines, to be used and evaluated in the future.

If you would like to know more, you can download free supplementary material from www.mariegayatri.se.

Themes

Creative ideas typically arise when different themes are introduced to the group. In this chapter, I suggest suitable themes and offer examples of how participants can interpret a range of concepts.



Themes

In the previous chapter, I discussed the workshop process step by step. Hardly a procedure just to be followed, finding inspiration through art in nature in preschools and schools means that you need to relate your pedagogical content with the current school curriculum. Since this varies between communities, you should investigate how to align your activities with the school curriculum of the community in which you work.

One way to do this is to use themes that connect to a particular subject. By now, you have probably realised that art in nature is not a common kind of art and it is an unusual way to teach. As a result, such activities are not conducted on a regular basis, which makes them seem slightly disconnected and isolated from other educational activities. Consequently, a pedagogical method that associates creating in nature with themes or known situations might offer an appropriate way to establish a meaningful context for outdoor work.

Suggestions for arranging themes

I next offer several tried-and-true workshops, organised thematically. Each workshop's thematic name is presented alongside a picture. In addition to recommending suitable ages and subjects related to each activity, I propose several tips to guide your introduction of the activity to your particular group. Each activity is illustrated by a slide show demonstrating various outcomes.



A. Building playhouses

Theme: Who lives in the forest?

Age group: 5-9 years old

Subjects: Sustainable Development and Arts Education (architecture)

Introduction: Animals common to the area tend to get the imaginations of the youngest going. Perhaps they can make little houses for animals. Older children often want to use the little huts for themselves. You can talk about the significance of shelter, construction and how to make the house more stable. Encourage them to demarcate the huts as their own.



Preschool children constructed huts.

Natural materials

The materials that you will be using can be described either as *natural materials* or *additional materials*. Natural materials are immediately identifiable as those that come from nature without having been refined in any way. What is available for use depends on the time of year and what you find at the place where you decide to work. I next offer suggestions and pictures of natural materials related to the time of year they are most frequently available outdoors. After that, there's a section with examples of additional materials that you may add.



Winter:

Snow and ice, tree trunks, stone walls, wooden fences, etc.



Winter temperatures set the condition for how to work with snow.

Early spring:

Last year's pinecones, branches, bark etc.



Make or find letters with sticks.

Late spring and summer:

Leaves, flowers, grass and brushwood, etc.



Fresh leaves can be laid into a pattern to outline shapes.

Autumn:

Fallen leaves, moss, pinecones, wild fruit and berries, etc.



Autumn leaf rakings may be arranged in different shapes.

Additional materials

Additional materials are those that come from nature, but have been worked and refined in some way. An example might be wood shavings from woodwork lessons or from a carpenter's workshop.

The participants usually appreciate it when you bring additional material – perhaps something with which they are already familiar. Those participants who are not used to working with natural materials might appreciate known alternatives that help them get going with their creative work, enabling them to experiment by mixing and combining.

The downside of using non-natural materials is that they must eventually be removed from the site. Of course, this depends on how carefully the participants plan their projects and how much additional materials they use. By anticipating which materials require removal, they can select materials whose eventual removal won't completely destroy their projects.



Introducing land art

Preparing and inspiring the participants before an art in nature workshop involves, among other things, making them familiar with what the art might look like and why it is made. In general, your preparations may be done in two different ways. If you have a classroom, you can use a projector or the internet to show pictures before you go out into the surroundings to make your creations. An alternative is to show pictures in books. This works best as an indoor activity, since books are heavy to carry and risk spoiling in damp weather, when read outdoors. On the other hand, if your first encounter with the group is out of doors, you can bring visual material to the site of your planned activity. In this case, the best alternative is to print out a number of colour photographs and coat them with plastic (laminated them).



Here are two works of art in nature made by the author (Marie Gayatri). The top one is titled 'Large scaled Shagai' and the bottom one is titled 'Choice No 3'.

They can be as small as a postcard, but the minimum number of suitable examples is five different artworks. If the group is large, you might have to make five copies of each. Hand these out to the group and tell them about the works of art in the pictures. Pay attention to questions and if you can, try to give them some extra background information. After that, it is time to get going. Another idea is to encourage the participants to use the photographs as inspiration for making paraphrases (pages 27). If you have difficulties selecting photographs of art in nature, page 38 lists websites where you can find photographs.

The site

When selecting a place to situate your art, there are several criteria to consider. The main thing is to tell your participants about the location you have chosen for the activity. This location will determine the natural materials they can use. As you will see, the choice of site is significant and contributes in several ways to the outcome.

It's best to start with some questions that you, the instructor, can ask yourself. These questions will help you inform your participants when they are learning creative work in a location/outdoor environment or in nature.

- How do I arouse the participants' interest, so that they have the experience of or a sufficient idea about the use of a place in their visual creative work?
- How do I involve the participants and encourage them to discover the materials available on the site?
- What will happen to our constructions afterwards? How can I explain decay?

Here are some suggestions regarding how to lead your participants to address these questions.

In light of the photographs that you shared before you began, many of the participants will already have some ideas as to how they can use the place. You can choose photographs of works of art that illustrate how a place might be used visually. You can discuss this when you show the photos.

The following photographs show examples where the artists, in my opinion, have really managed to integrate the characteristics of the place into their creative work.



Here the artist Camilla Solberg (Norway) has created a waterfall (of yarn), using the slope to visualise the waterfall, although in a different material than water.



Here, Marie Gayatri has worked with an ancient burial site, where the stones are inscribed with figures. Wooden animals were then constructed, which are also covered with figures. The artist has used the place and its significance to create a different meaning with the aid of new combinations.