

New Story Group's Arts Pod



Living & Learning the New Story through the Arts:

Insights from recent outdoor field experiences

Mary Coelho, Dave Damm-Luhr, Marion Foster,
Dave Legg and Skip Shiel

27 January 2025

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This evening, five of us who form the Arts Pod are eager to share with you highlights of our four outdoor experiences. Within easy reach of our homes, we selected places that inspire us to express our creativity and connections to the New Story. We see art as a spiritual practice in the context of the living Earth and pulsing universe.

After Cornelia facilitates introductions and meditation, Skip will outline our offering this evening: Living & Learning the New Story through the Arts

in three parts:

1. First, individual artists,
2. Second, all five together,
3. Third, an invitation to everyone to join in with questions, comments and observations.

We'll conclude the evening with a few words from Betty about February's program focused on the Earth Charter.

New Story Meeting: Meditation

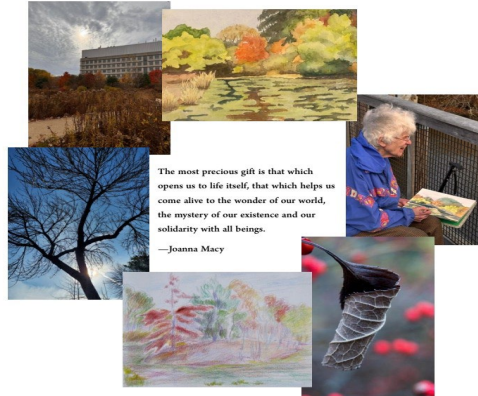


Joanna Macy:

"The most precious gift is that which opens us to life itself, that which helps us come alive to the wonder of our world, the mystery of our existence and our solidarity with all beings."

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New Story Arts Pod: Meditation



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Questions emerging from the New Story Arts pod



- How/when does art touch us spiritually?
- How does our art link with New Story?
- What can emerge from shared experience?
- How connect with rest of New Story Group?

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Sites visited

- Concord: Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
- Cambridge:
 - Mt. Auburn Cemetery - Willow Pond
 - Alewife Brook Reservation
 - Danehy Park

Artists

(Click on name to go directly to the artist/)

- [Dave Legg](#)
- [Marion Foster](#)
- [Skip Schiel](#)
- [Dave Damm-Luhr](#)
- [Mary Coelho](#)

David Legg ([return](#))



Photo 1. Sculpture and Tree with Owl

While concentrating on the composition of tree and sculpture I bent down low to avoid the city scape all around. I love the way the tree, land and sculpture complimented each other. It was weeks later when looking at the photo on my laptop that I saw the large bird in the tree. It reminds me of the New Story making us see with new eyes.

I arrived early and walked to the park before we met up. In my time there the themes that came up the most for me were... Beauty, Gratitude, Community and Connections.



Photo 2. Sit Sculpture

It looked inviting to sit on yet it also looked like made from scrap metal like from the landfill below. Very generous of sculptor to not put his or her name on it and let us sit on it. Most often sculptors ask that we not touch their work.



Photo 3. **Tree bark texture**

Filled with gratitude for trees for photosynthesis, for oxygen, for sequestering carbon, for shade for beauty and for wood that we use to make homes and so many things.



Photo 4. **Wood workers**

These men and the wood of the emerging structure are juxtaposed beyond trees in the foreground. I felt a deep gratitude for and connection to these trees and the workers making a much needed multifamily building at this time when housing is in short supply.



Photo 5. **Worker in a frame**

I took about 20 photos of this man in burst mode trying to a) show the worker inside the window frame and not obstructed and b) trying to show his hands. The emphasis on hands in a portrait was an idea I got from Skip some months before while talking shop at an event at the Agape Community.



Photo 6. **Crows**

I loved this large gathering high in the sunlight in community with nature. I have no idea why a flock of crows is called a murder. I like crows too much to use that term. In the we need new more inclusive language of oneness that comes with the New Story.



Photo 7. Flock of Pigeons

I saw these pigeons before the crows, but they flew away quickly as I approached. Then when I was still and photographing the crows, the pigeons flew back and landed on the ground very close to me. Another gift from being in stillness. It was so great to be so close as to see their fascinating red eyes and their formations.



Photo number 8. New story art pod “flock”

It was such a gift to join this group for the first time at Danehy Park and to come across this wonderful little flock right after the last two flocks. It made me feel at one with life in this awesome park. I was so glad to share in the joy of other artists.

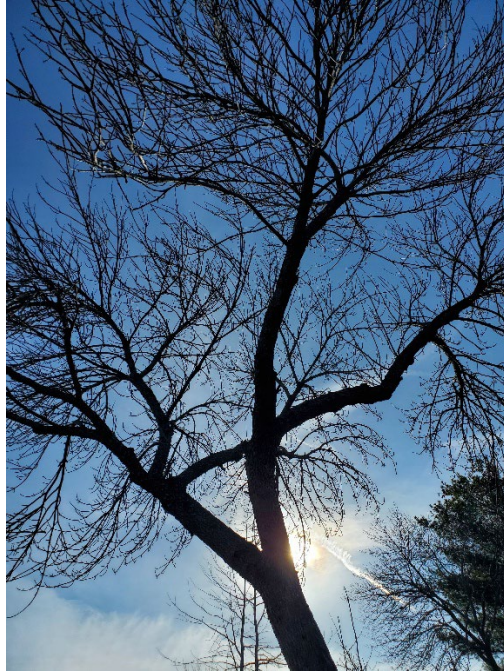


Photo number 9 **Trees and Sun**

Beauty and Light that sustains us all. It reminds me of the Navaho saying " ...beauty is everywhere, beauty is everywhere, beauty is everywhere. I think they mean a beauty of spirit as well as physical nature. Let me close with a quote from Mary Oliver...Under the one Blue Sky that loves us all.

Marion Foster ([return](#))

For me the art-making process reflects the New Story. It begins in a deeply felt response to the beauty of a place or subject. I wait, as I am allured by what has so completely caught my attention. I become still and grounded, aware of my body. I experience a unity, a wholeness. I am profoundly interconnected with my surroundings and with what I am seeing. I am at peace, and joyful.

This experience of wholeness prepares me to enter the process of form-making. If I remain open and receptive I am drawn to make a mark on my paper and so starts a relationship of responsive mark-making in which the painting can tell me what to do. What wants to emerge? I have become a channel, a conduit. The painter, Paul Klee, compares the artist to the trunk of a tree: the artist, as trunk, gathers and passes along what comes from the depths of the earth—from the roots-- and channels this life force to the crown of the tree. The crown, the work of art, is not the artist's; he is a "humble mediator." (Paul Klee, *On Modern Art*.)

Paul Klee has also said, "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible." (*Creative Credo*.) In other words, art reveals, through its language of line, shape, tone, color, texture, what the artist intuits. And the revelation that is the work of art belongs to the whole community of being.

Daniel Schmachtenberger, in his you tube video, "Humanity's Phase Shift," urges us to be

“agents for the whole.” That is what artists of all types are when they are working. May I try to live as an “agent for the whole” in every moment.

I accompany the images of my works with impressions from journaling notes:

Concord great meadows wildlife refuge

August 21, 2024

We are in a great inclusive space: bright sun lights a sea of yellow water lilies spreading thickly across the broad river surface. Billowing clouds move dramatically above, creating continually changing cloud shadows. I am startled and thrilled as a great blue heron flies up from a density of reeds quite close to me. A small muskrat scurries along the water’s edge. I want to express my feeling of being caught up in all of this. After a bit, I take out my colored pencils and paper pad, hoping I can capture the sense of movement I am part of.

Reverberations from Great Meadows stayed with me the following days, leading me to do two oil pastel drawings in my studio.

New Story Arts Pod: Marion Foster: Concord



Mount Auburn Cemetery

September 19, 2024

Sitting quietly at the border of Willow Pond, I am struck by a monumental old willow tree across the water. I notice that Mary has chosen to set up on the other side of the willow. I see that Dave Damm-Luhr is seated, and then reclining, on a stone bench not far away. As I become engrossed in sketching the willow, a stately heron walks slowly into my peripheral vision—and just keeps walking, not in the least bothered by me. A muskrat nibbles at grasses close by my foot. Somewhere nearby Skip is finding photo subjects. I am held in the community of my fellow artists-- and of the heron, the muskrat, and the willow. The water ripples suddenly; my hat brim moves in the light wind.

Before taking leave, I photograph the Great Blue Heron continuing his majestic walk along the far side of the pond. Later, at home, I work on a couple of oil pastels of the heron by his pond.

New Story Arts Pod: Marion Foster: Mt. Auburn



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Alewife Reservation

November 27, 2024

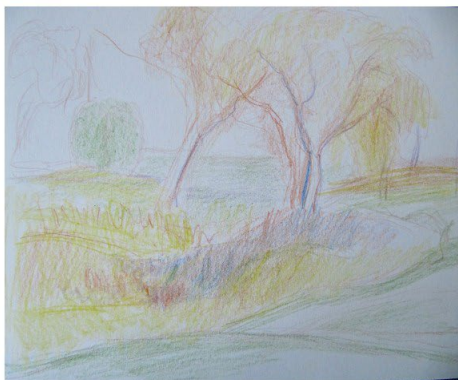
An amazing number of ducks trace lines in the surface of the water. Many of them have come from the direction of a small peninsula, where trees in red leaf invite my eye— especially one maple rooted at the end of the land. I become the red maple. I reach for my red pencils. Mary shares my bench; her gaze crosses mine, as she looks to the right.

Danehy Park

December 18, 2024

We enter the park and walk towards higher ground. We pass the Miyawaki forest, nestled beside the hill. Each of us finds the way to the sixty- foot summit of Danehy Park—and of the City of Cambridge. The undulating, curving path articulates the earthworks beneath, creating a sculptural feeling. At the top I take a seat on a curving stone bench and look east. There, below, at a little distance, are a couple of winter willows and a light earth-toned stretch of pale dried vegetation. The angles or gestures of the trees beckon me.

New Story Arts Pod: Marion Foster: Alewife + Danehy



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Skip Schiel ([return](#))







Dave Damm-Luhr ([return](#))

For me this was a 5-month unfolding of deepening connections with 4 other artists in the New Story Group and with 4 outdoor places pulsing with life. The photographs you'll see I hope suggest how those deepening connections link to the New Story.

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Great Meadows



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In August at Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge I found a quiet place at the edge of the marsh with no humans in my line of sight and no thought of how it needed to be - exploring being in relation to and in solidarity with the life around me, trying not to demand any particular outcome, slowing down, being present and letting go of thoughts about “what’s next?” The yellow palette-like lily and the milkweed bugs drew my attention in seconds.

This was photographing inspired by the vastness below, ahead and above - and associating it all to life’s **radical interdependence of the new story**. Abruptly, my reverie faded with the buzzing of jets in/out of nearby Hanscom Field, reminding me that the “old story” of human domination and control is ever-present.

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Willow Pond



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In September, Mt. Auburn Cemetery's Willow Pond felt familiar from many earlier visits, offering solace & comfort. As I found a seat on a stone bench & noticed - really noticed - where I was, I felt between 2 vast realms: earth & sky. That sense of place led me to see the sky, clouds, trees, and roots with new eyes, with a newfound appreciation of the many different & mysterious forms of vastness in & around us - a core part of the New Story. These 2 photographs capture some of what I sensed.

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Alewife #1



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In November, as we entered the Alewife Brook Reservation, I heard one of us say “we’re going into nature.” Suddenly, a koan appeared in my mind: “Are we humans natural?” This framed my whole experience (and still resonates with me).

Instead of simply clicking the “beautiful” scenes, I felt drawn also to include the human-made - whether signs, buildings, trails, carvings on rocks, trucks, or graffiti - and in some small way felt like I was partially dismantling the human-nature duality at least in my mind. This was poignantly so while photographing the small children on an outing with their teacher.

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Alewife #2



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In December, in Danehy Park, a former landfill, I was struck by the overwhelming sense of human intervention in every aspect of this place. Instead of viewing it as artificial, I found myself drawn to capture its essence through photographs and, in a way, to celebrate the human expression surrounding and beneath us, without evaluating it.

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Danehy Park #1



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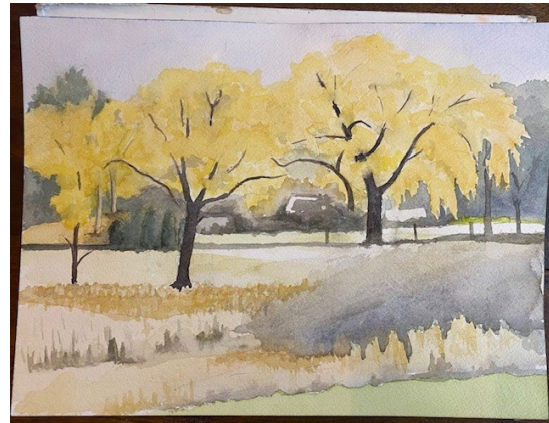
It felt liberating to let go of the need to critique, just being with whatever arose as a participant, being receptive to what the place offered. I aimed for frames with no separation with nature, welcoming the human-made even when we cast long shadows - which here includes most everything!

New Story Arts Pod: Dave Damm-Luhr: Danehy Park #2



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Mary Coelho ([return](#))



Reflections for the New Story Group as an Art Pod Member

I enjoy our ART POD a great deal because of our group and our outings to scenic places in this area that I did not know as I only moved to Boston as an older person. Plein aire painting, that is painting outdoors with watercolor is difficult and it is not done quickly. These two paintings were made from photographs Marion gave me. The willow trees are from Donahue Park and the other painting is from Alewife Reservation. I certainly value our immersion in the natural world. It is difficult to paint quickly outside in watercolor, so I've had little time to reflect on my experience. I have enjoyed painting indoors and outdoors for many years sometimes on trips with groups to many places inside and outside the United States.

So, I thought, with the permission of the group, I would offer some reflections that arise when I am painting indoors when I have more ease and leisure. So, I offer a couple of reflections on understanding myself as a watercolor painter within the new story. Brian Swimme talks about how the new story increases our psychic space. (Hidden Heart, p.29)

1. **One way our psychic space is increased is by the awakening of attention.**

I had not realized that the awakening of attention is a way of being engaged with the earth and its beauty. I thought of it as myself, by myself, paying attention. But attention involves a connection of importance. Sometimes when I am walking in the woods some trees or rocks or moss attract my attention. What I see brings enjoyment. I'm captured. It is a great pleasure when I very unexpectedly see something that captures my attention. My psychic space is enlarged.

I had not realized that until becoming engaged with the New Story that this attention is a form of participation or connection with the trees, moss or lichens. There is a certain excitement or pleasure unexpectedly seeing a scene or an event that sparks my attention. It is clearly not just a rational choice of a subject for a painting. The scene itself attracts attention in some manner. We need to value what has caught our attention. I do not know how this is best understood. The awakening of attention has a depth within the understanding of the new story I was not conscious of for too many years.



This painting of an alcove of a lake in Maine shown on the screen is a place I have found very attractive. The place awakens my attention. It is such that I want to go there again. Beauty attracts. We speak of loving a certain place.

This awakening of attention is different from the quality of my daily life when there is little attention on what surrounds me as I am focused on my current worries, interests, and projects.

2. **Brian Swimme says beauty captures us.**

This is a stronger word than attention. It is exciting to be captured and to pay attention and value that capturing.

I had an experience of being captured that startled me. When I have been working on a painting at home and turn to cooking dinner, I find myself wanting to go again and again to look at the painting. I have been captured to look at it again and again. Why is my attention so drawn to the painting? It does not arise from just thinking that I need to check out some problem with the painting. The desire to look and look is a kind of capturing by the painting. Poets experience this as they search for the right word or phrase. I strangely keep looking and looking. It is an integration or belonging with the part of the earth, now depicted on paper, that has caught my attention. It is a gift.

I have experienced this capturing more by spiritual experience. That is an incredible capture. The capturing by a painting is a mild nonrational experience of a related nature. It is an invitation to full earth belonging as that experience arises both within the earth and our person.



Son of a friend

This capturing reminds me of a story about the ten-year-old son of a friend of my son. The parents had to tell their son he could not practice the piano before 8:00 in the morning. He too often started playing the piano at 6:00 am as he was so deeply captured by playing. This to me is an exciting story, a profound attraction. He is captured.

I think of my husband who played the piano, often just wanted to play. Isn't this an engagement or embrace of enjoying sound and melody and enjoying physical participation to make the sound?

Lines at the opera house to hear certain singers. People get in line hours before the concert. Maybe this has changed with online ticketing.

Great Importance of valuing this capture as understood within the New Story. For example, if more people were captured by the beauty of a forest and understood it in his manner, there might be more resistance to destroying beautiful forests and to losing remarkable creatures.

3. **I had an experience that surprised me when working with a collage** which I've thought about in the context of the New Story.

I was moving pieces of colored paper and designs around on a paper hoping to find an attractive arrangement. After moving the papers around for a while, I suddenly and surprisingly realized – this is it. This is good arrangement. This strong feeling/knowing surprised me. This wasn't a rational decision, but a sudden, fundamental participatory knowing. There was some kind of connection, an attraction that can be valued in an important way within our new story context. There was an inner spontaneity.

Having learned a very reduced form of objectified knowing how do I understand my experience with the collage to be understood? One answer is not to try to explain, just enjoy it. We can't describe it

with our usual objectified understandings. This kind of experienced engagement occurs in many ways, of course as when a composer seeks a sequence of sound that satisfies. While looking in a forest hoping to find something I would like to paint. I'm looking for some kind of engagement.

4. **It is important to own and nurture our gifts/talents as an earth beings** be it as a musician, artist, a writer, healer, or carpenter.

Owning a gift can bring a kind of communion with the earth. It brings a fundamental identity and self-worth as an earth person. It is not an ego project or pride in a talent but an embrace of belonging. We gain a personhood within the new story that is not available if we think we alone are the cause of the connection.

A gift of creativity offers an occasion to embrace personhood and self-worth. I could not own that some of my paintings might be quite good. When someone told me that they really liked a painting, it helped me embrace my identity as a painter. This is part of the process of being a full person. It is an affirmation of not only the painting but also of me. This deep, nonrational (not irrational) appreciation is a gift, a talent given to people in many forms. It is a gift to earth beings.

The new story is revolutionary in encouraging and valuing individual and community creativity. Various forms of creativity are an occasion for community as we are doing in our pod. Sharing experience, encouraging each other, and sharing our excitement and efforts

5. **Conclusions**

As you probably remember, Thomas Berry offers a devastating criticism of our culture that separates us from the earth in countless ways. Thomas Berry writes of the costly, even pathological consequences of this objectification.

I've been thinking about the shoemakers and blacksmiths of the past – their pride and creative engagement with their work and the people who buy the shoes. The shoemaker may now work on the assembly line bringing an alimentation from engagement with the earth in the form leather and colors being a creative earth being.

Our new story group and our Art pod are involved in a worldview change that could not be more important.

The new story teaches us that it is a serious cultural problem if there is no way for an individual or a community to be creative rather than work on an assembly line or be forced to do something about which the person has no attraction or interest. ☒ Note the phrase, no attraction.

As we paint, we are engaging as an earth being in the creativity of the cosmos as it is lived in the human person. Does not our creativity arise from being a form, a being of the creative earth and cosmos? We do not conjure up creativity although the gift of creative talents can be nurtured and strengthened and refined. I've long enjoyed painting but now I enjoy it even more.

6. Comments while showing some teaching paintings

Paintings to express an idea or insight. I am attracted to try to communicate the new story insight.



Tree of Life and a painting with a Celtic Knot.



Tree of Life an image of a communion of subjects



Tiffany Window – church in downtown Boston.

We can dispose ourselves to awaken to beauty to declare itself.

New Story Arts Pod: Step into the Mix!



- **Questions or comments?**
- **Links to Creativity Conversation**
 - How do you express your creativity?
 - What best supports your expression?
 - How might your creativity link to the New Story?
- **Expanding support pods: ideas & energy?**
 - Other arts forms (e.g., music, dance, writing)?
 - Other realms/shared interests