

The Open Studio Process

The Open Studio Process (OSP) includes “Open Studio” and “Process.” The community-based *Open Studio Project* was started in Chicago in 1995 by art therapists Pat Allen, Dayna Block, and Deborah Gadiel. They wanted to make art together and to be of service (Allen, 2016).

What came to be called the Open Studio Process was initiated by Allen in 1991 and developed through continuous reflection and refinement since, in her own art making, with her colleagues at the first Open Studio Project, and through facilitator training that is offered at the Open Studio Project in Evanston (Allen, 2016).

The Open Studio *Process* refers to a structure that includes setting an intention, creating art, witness writing with the art, and reading the writing aloud while others listen. The facilitator participates fully while attending to the space, supplies and time.

A key feature of the Open Studio Process is that there is no comment or discussion about participants’ art or their witnessing, by either the artists themselves or by those witnessing the art or reading. Refraining from making comments supports participants to listen with empathy and to tolerate and own their own emotions and reactions (Allen, 2016).

The Open Studio Process also includes a “fifth element” in which there is opportunity for participants to engage in discussion about the Open Studio Process and their experiences of engaging in it.

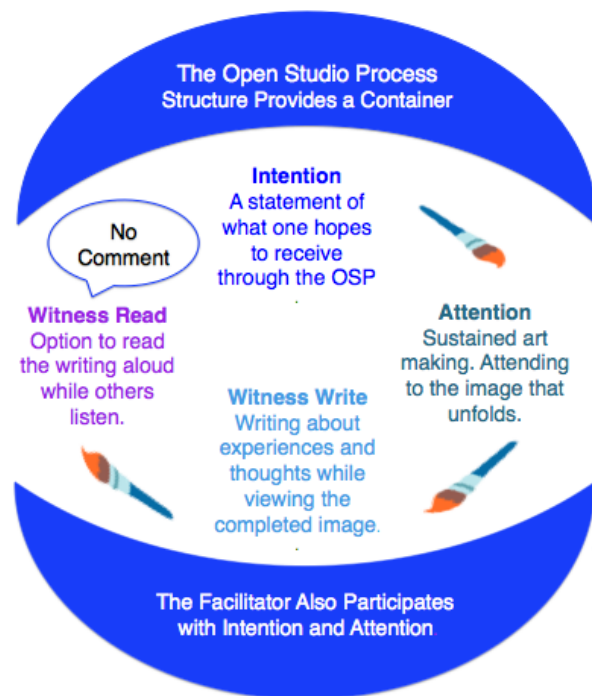
Principles and Practices

We are all creative. All experiences and skills with art making are welcome.

The “no comment” rule. This means we do not comment on our own or others’ work (e.g., quality of the work or interpretation). Knowing that there will be no comments can be very freeing for the art maker. “No comment” may take some practice!

Referencing. The Open Studio Process encourages “referencing.” If we are drawn to something in another person’s art making, we might be inspired to try it (e.g., colour, line).

We all have resources to look after ourselves. Sometimes when we are making art, unexpected



sensations or emotions may well up. When this happens, pause if you need to, sit with what comes up, be curious, and write.

The Open Studio Process includes

Intention. What do you intend for yourself for the session? Write in the present, active voice (I explore... I let go of... I gain insight about... I have fun...). Writing an intention helps us to settle and be present; we then set it aside and move to making art.

Attention (to making art). Use any media that draws you. Focus on the process of engaging with the media and creating. Work on one piece. If you feel stuck, pause. Look at what others are doing. Write about the piece. Ask it “what do you need?”

Witness write. When art making comes to a completion, sit with your work. Spend some time looking, noticing. Write what comes to mind. If you’re stuck, keep writing (the same sentence, phrase) until the writing flows again. You might write about: your process, what you see, what you notice as you look and write (feelings, sensations), reflections, insights, wonderings...

Witness read. After writing, we witness each other’s art and writing. Each of us takes a turn. You may choose to read all, some, or none of your writing. If you chose not to read, we will witness your art. When you read, please read without additional comment. Participants listen silently.

Fifth Element. This is a time to share experiences or ask questions about the Open Studio Process.

References

Allen, P. B. (1995). *Art as a way of knowing. A guide to self-knowledge and spiritual fulfillment through creativity.* Boston: Shambala

Allen, P. B. (2005). *Art is a spiritual path. Engaging the sacred through the practice of art and writing.* Boston: Shambala.