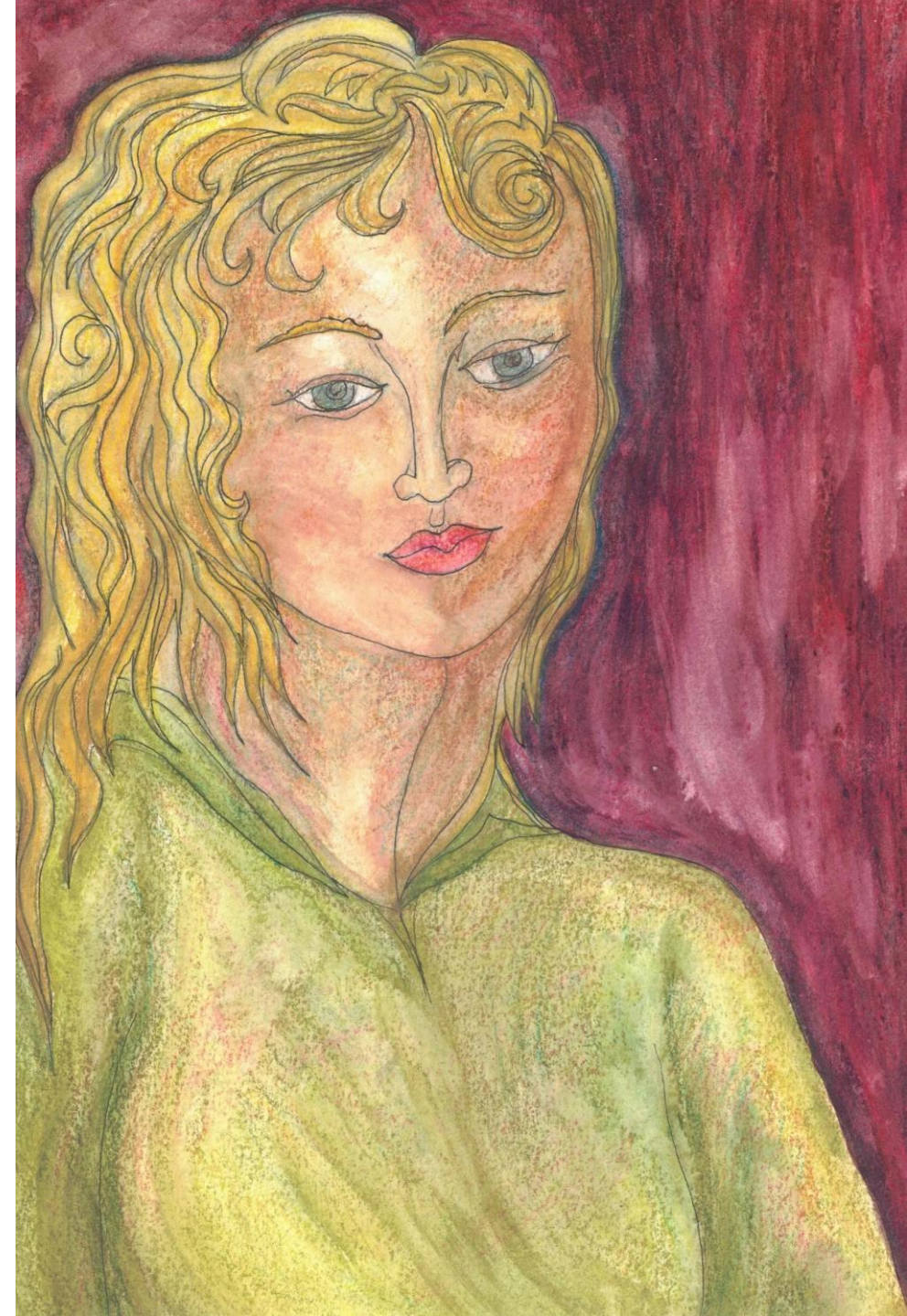


COVID-19 FACES

**A research-creation & art-based case study
on face drawing and painting in the first year
of the pandemic**

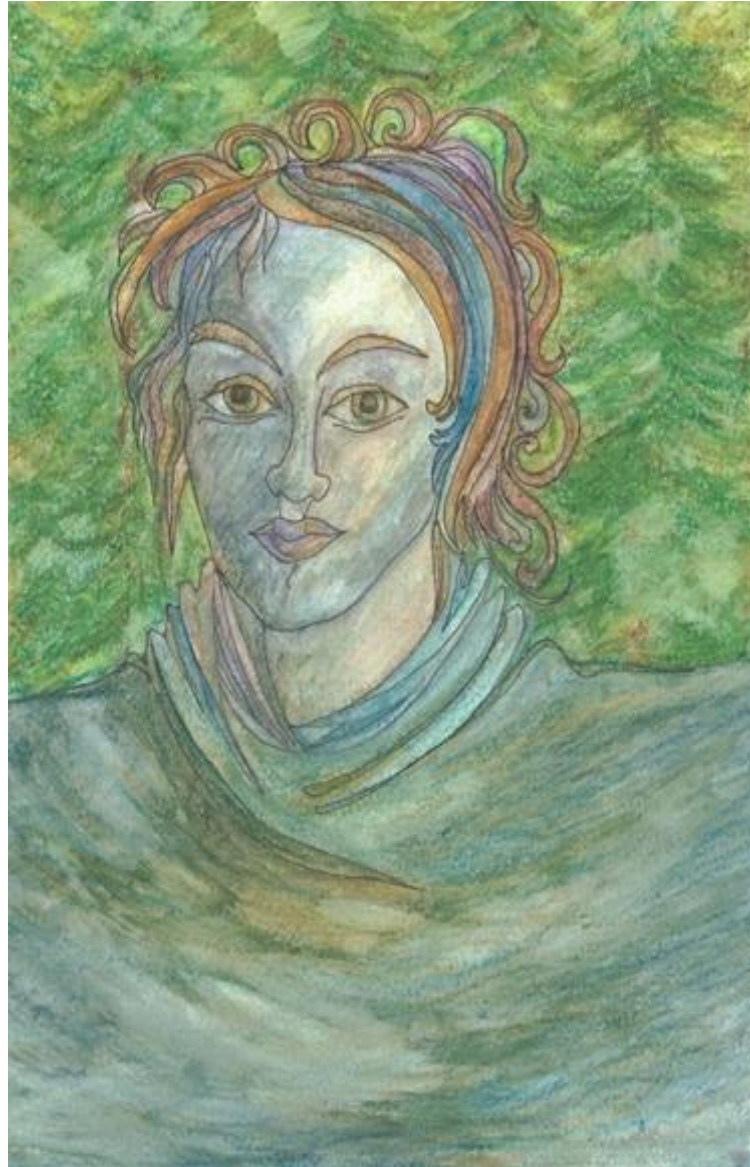
Oonagh Fitzgerald

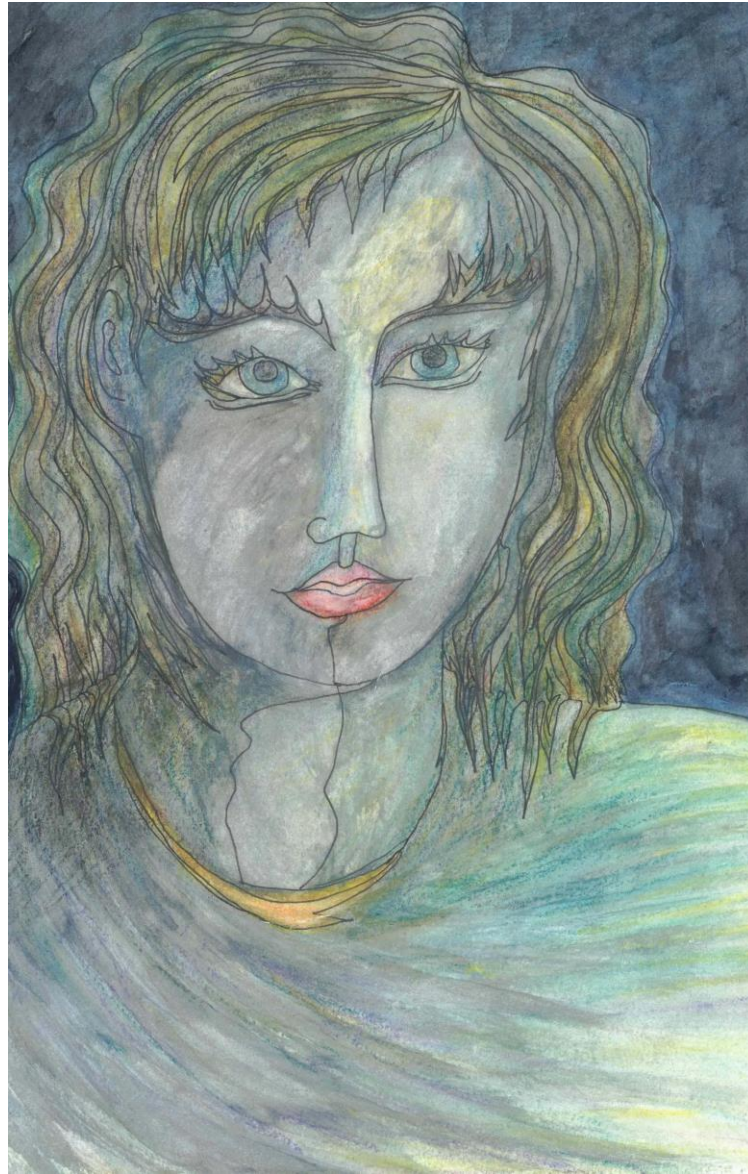
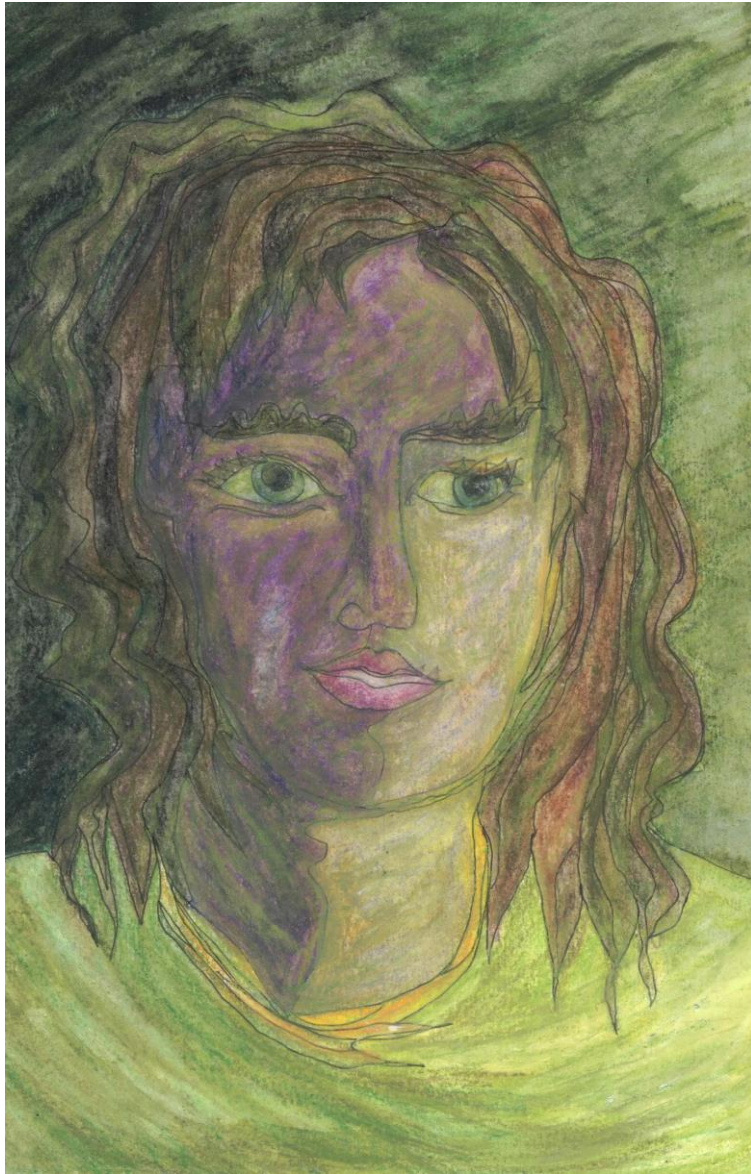
April 14 2021



The question

- What artistic practice did I develop to make art during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- A year later, with the pandemic still lingering, how did others respond to trying the same technique for artmaking?



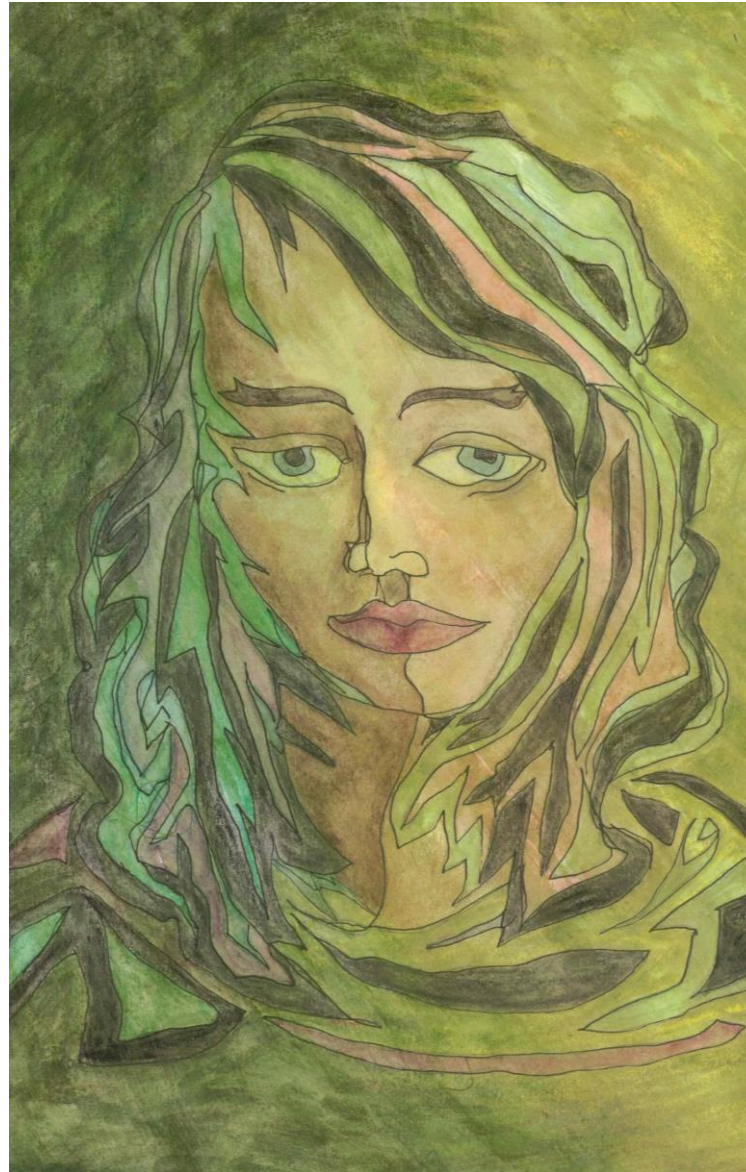


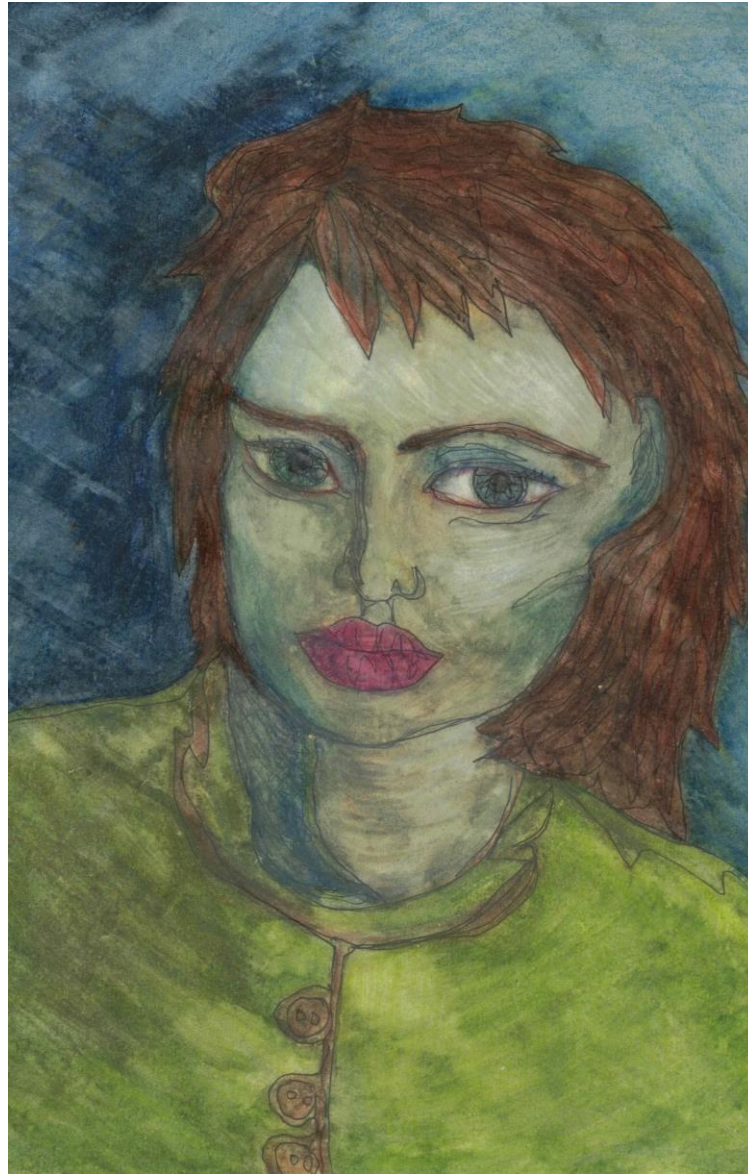
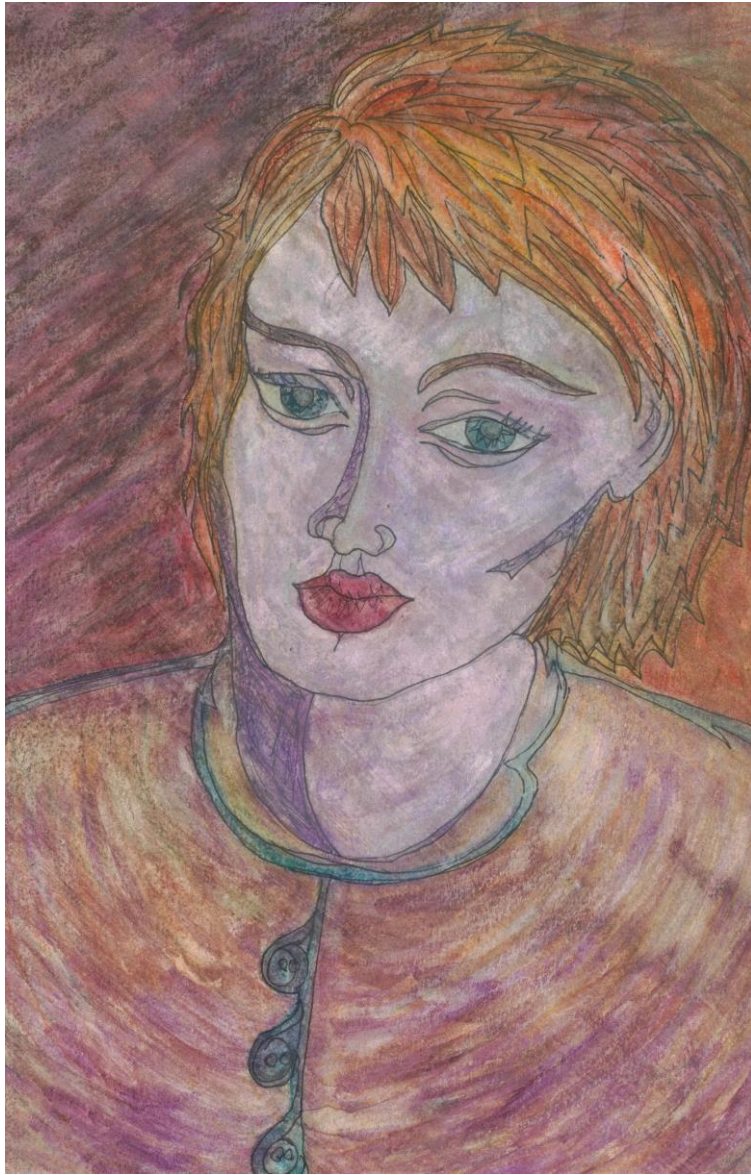
'Family resemblances'

- Playing with the notion of 'family resemblances' (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012), I examine
- My own 'research-creation' project alongside
- A participant 'art-based inquiry'
- 75 individual images: seeing while hearing

Experimenting with research-creation

- Embarking on transversal interdisciplinarity (Manning, 2015)
- Embracing a meditation on face and mask in Western art (Belting 2017)
- Exploring the creative context lying between disciplines of art and law
- Considering the power of face drawing in narrating past, present and future legal orders.



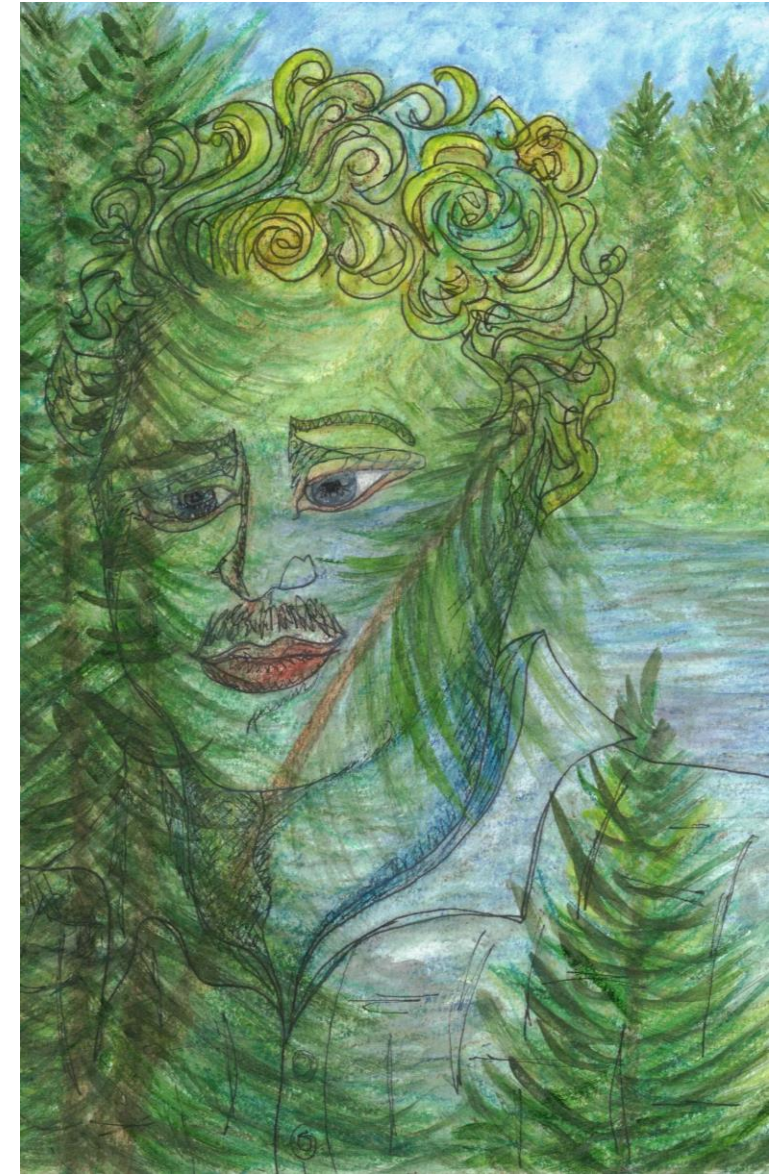
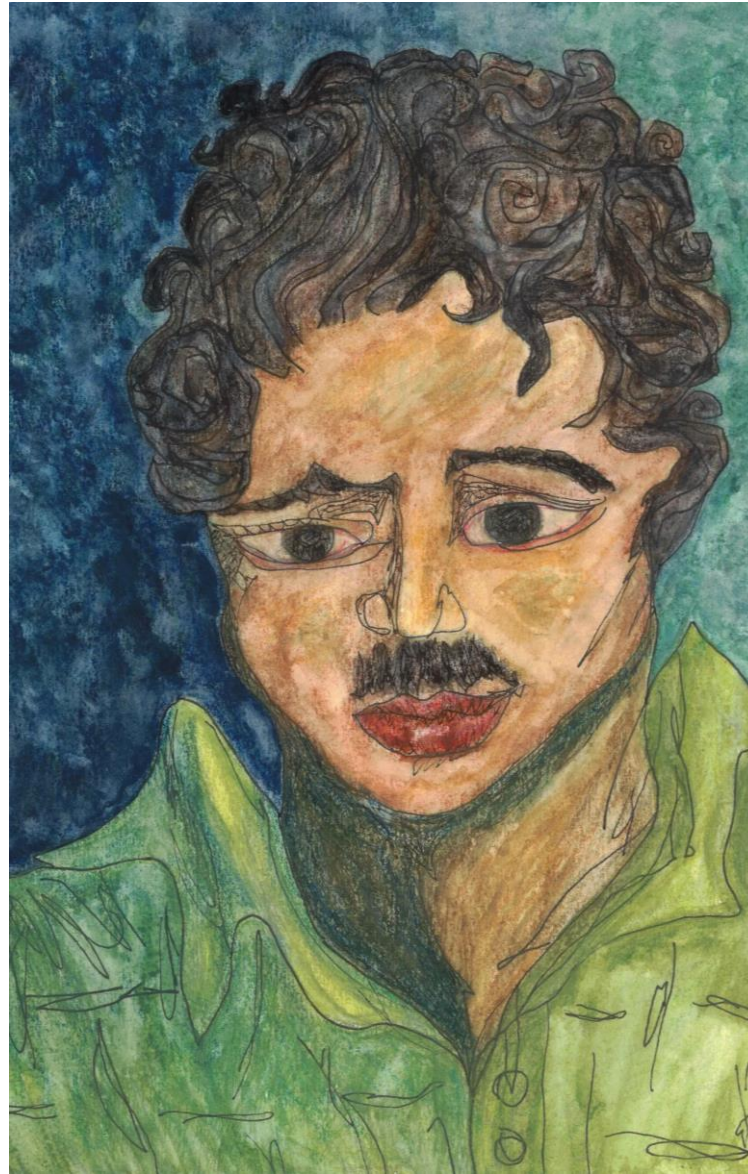


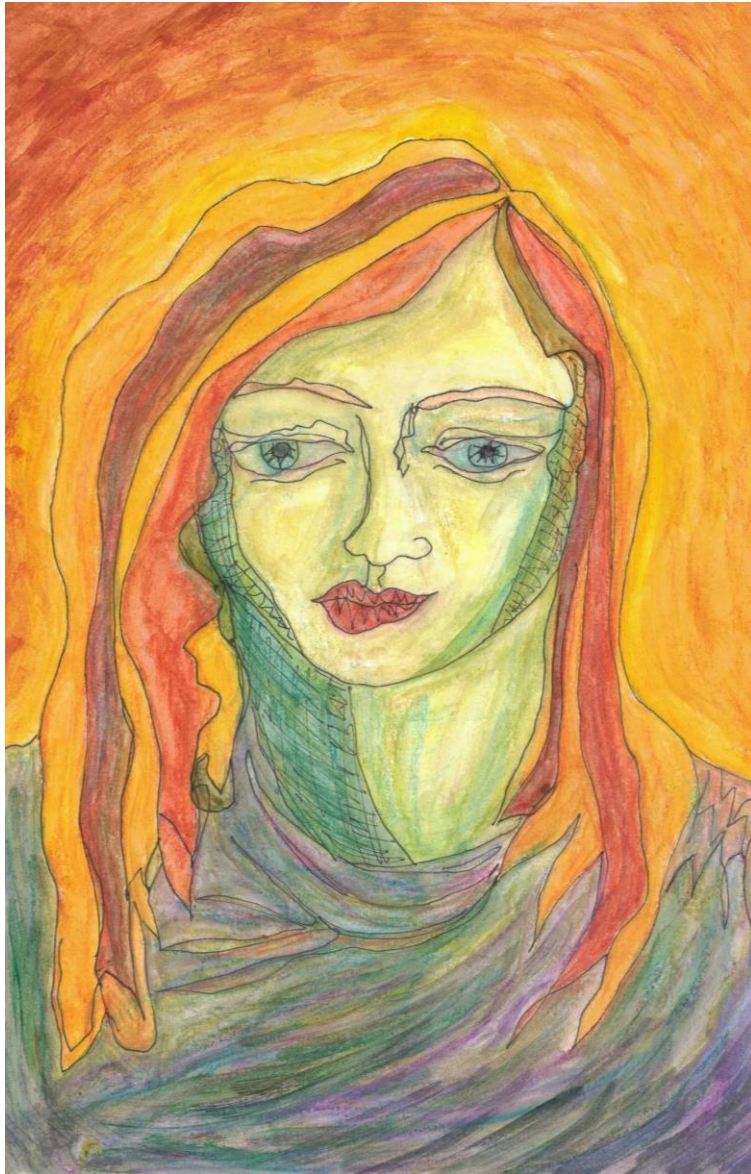
Methodologies

- To frame both a self-reflection and an analysis of a participant study on using a particular artmaking technique in pandemic times, I used:
- Case study method (Yin, 2003, 2004)
- Research-creation methodologies (Noury and Paquin, 2020)
- Compositional visual coding (Rose, 2001).

Research-creation: two-handed technique

- The technique - drawing a face from imagination with the dominant hand, loosely copying with non-dominant hand, roughly colouring both images with non-dominant hand and then finishing the works with the dominant hand
- This propelled me to produce a 33-piece series of paintings over several months in a time of pandemic uncertainty, impotency, and creative drought.



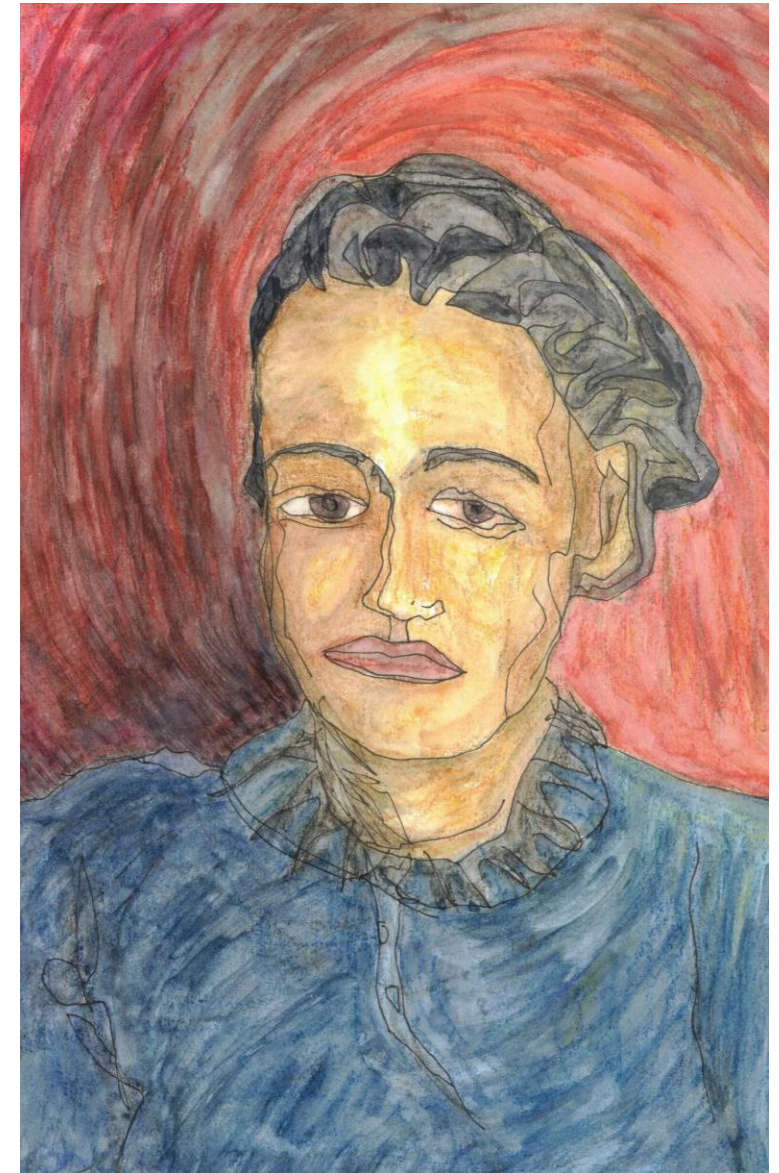
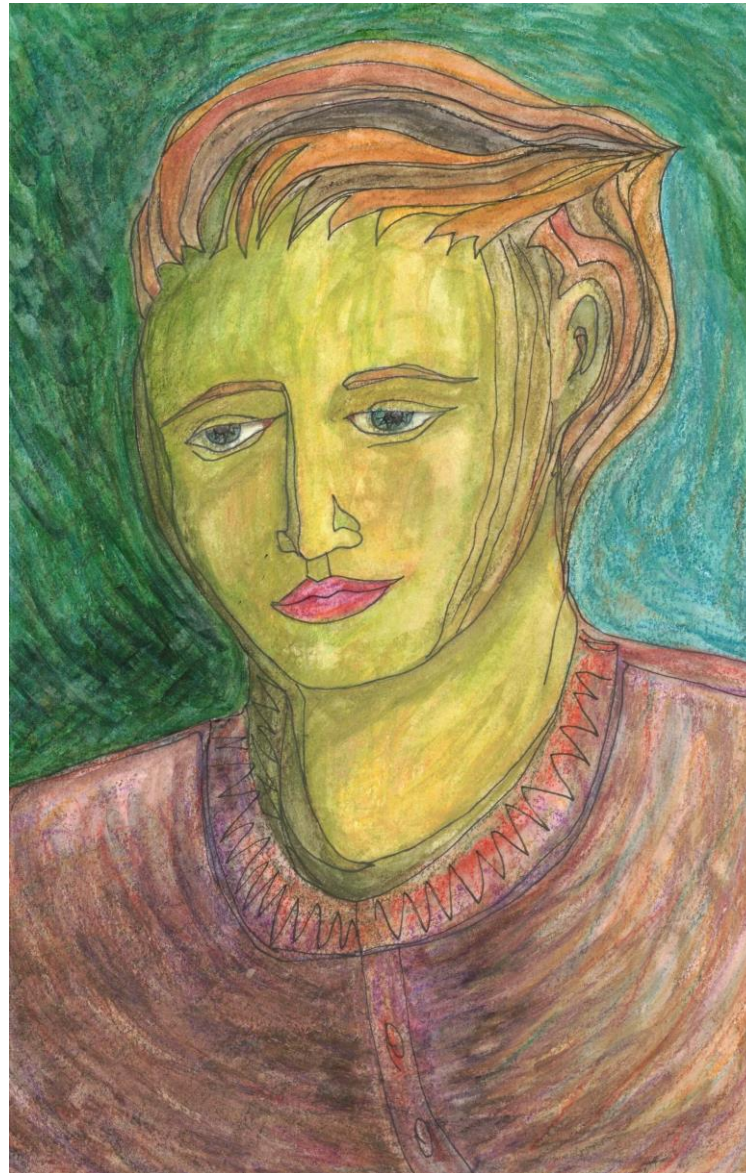


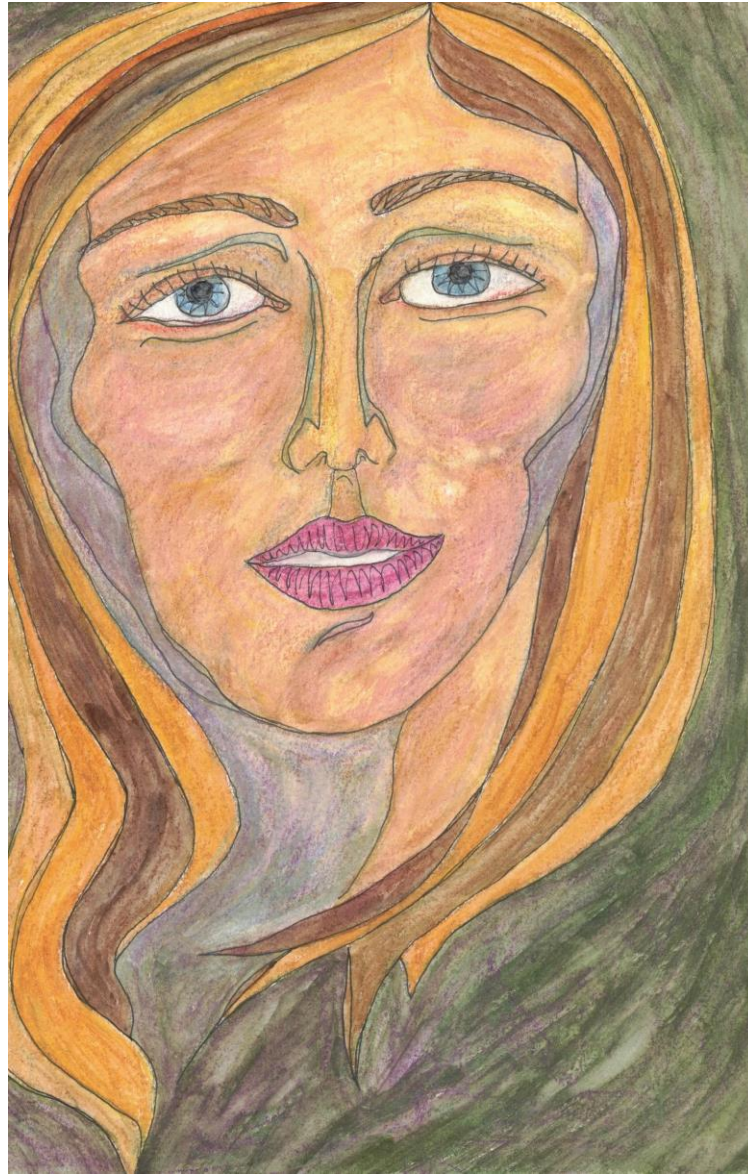
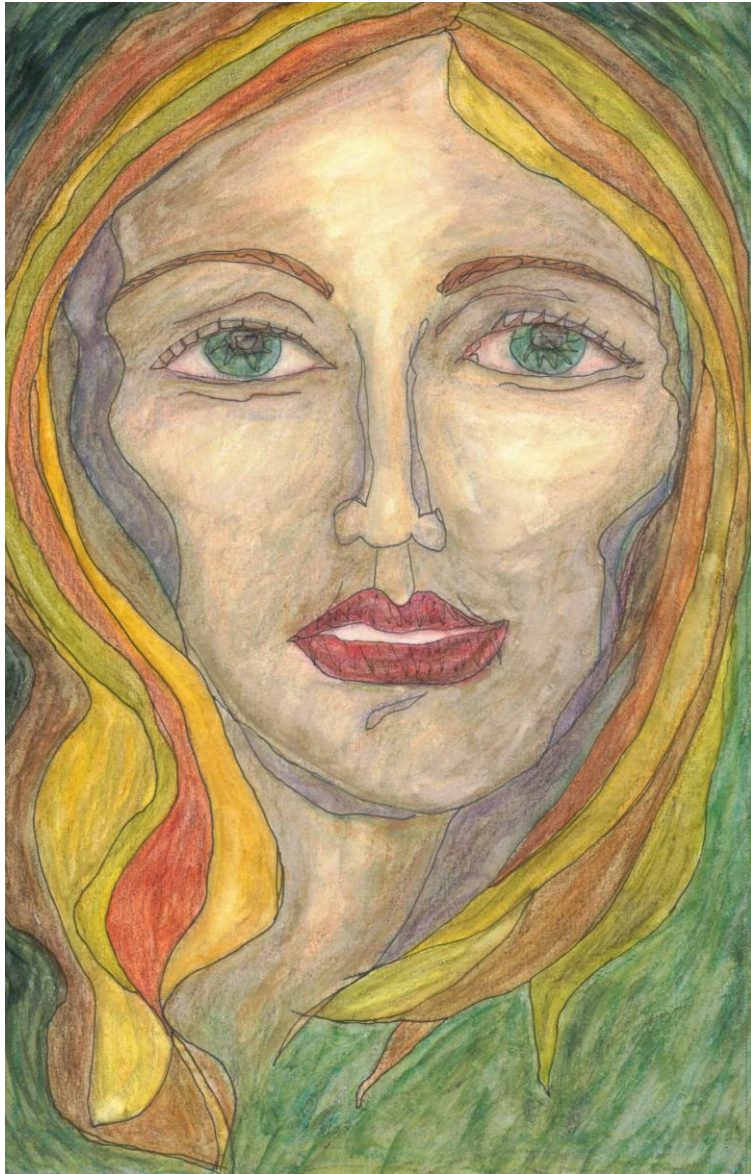
Research-creation

- Manning (2015) invites us to explore through research-creation the transversal spaces, tensions and dynamics between disciplines.
- Her focus is on philosophy. Mine is on exploring international law and governance through art and performance.
- “Research-creation is ... a mode of activity that is at its most interesting when it is constitutive of new processes.”

Research-creation

- Nourry and Paquin (2020) suggest:
- That research creation “comes to life when research is taking place through creation, producing knowledge(s) through that of an original artifact, performance or work, be it material or immaterial”;
- That it “can be activated by a vast array of methods and assemblages specific to each project”;
- And can generate “aesthetic, theoretical, methodological, epistemological or technical” as well as “experiential, tacit, situated, embodied” knowledge.



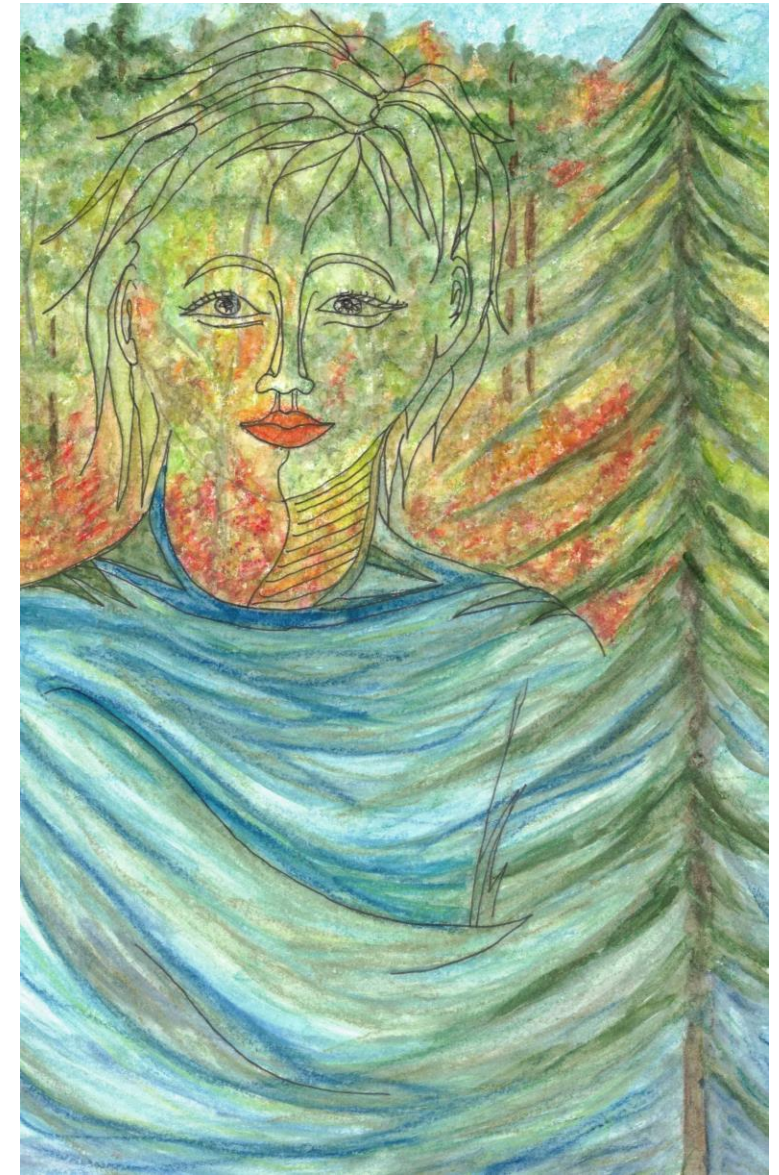
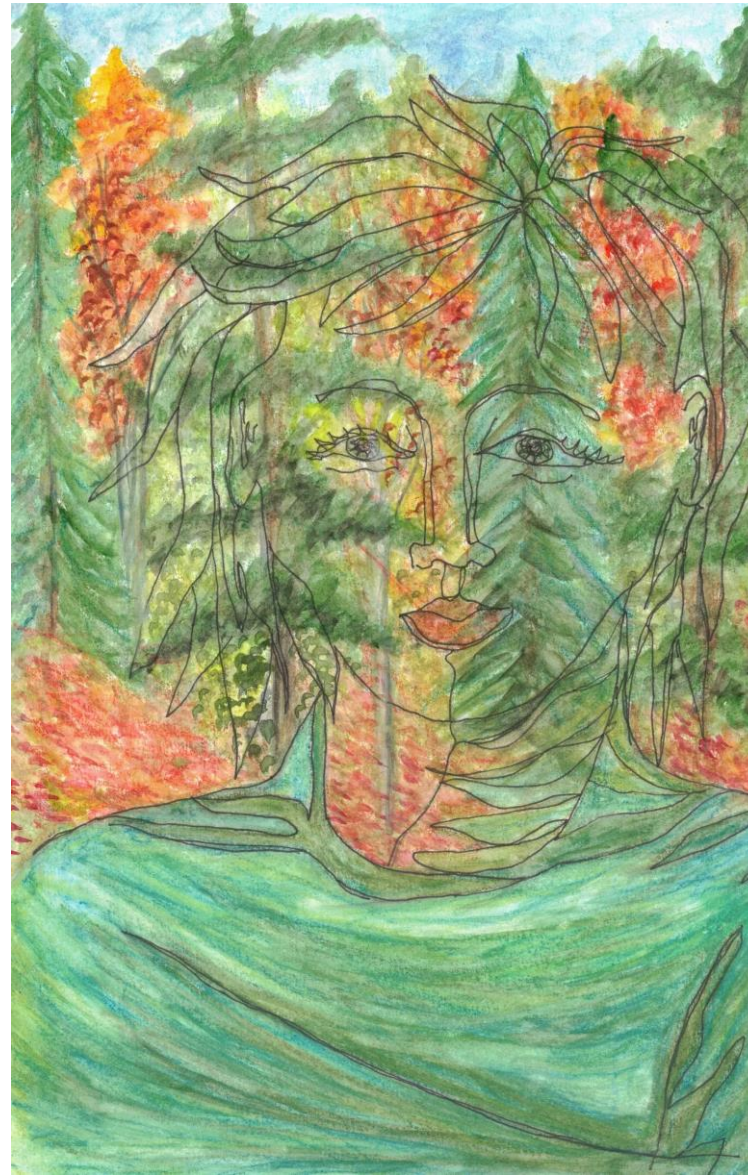


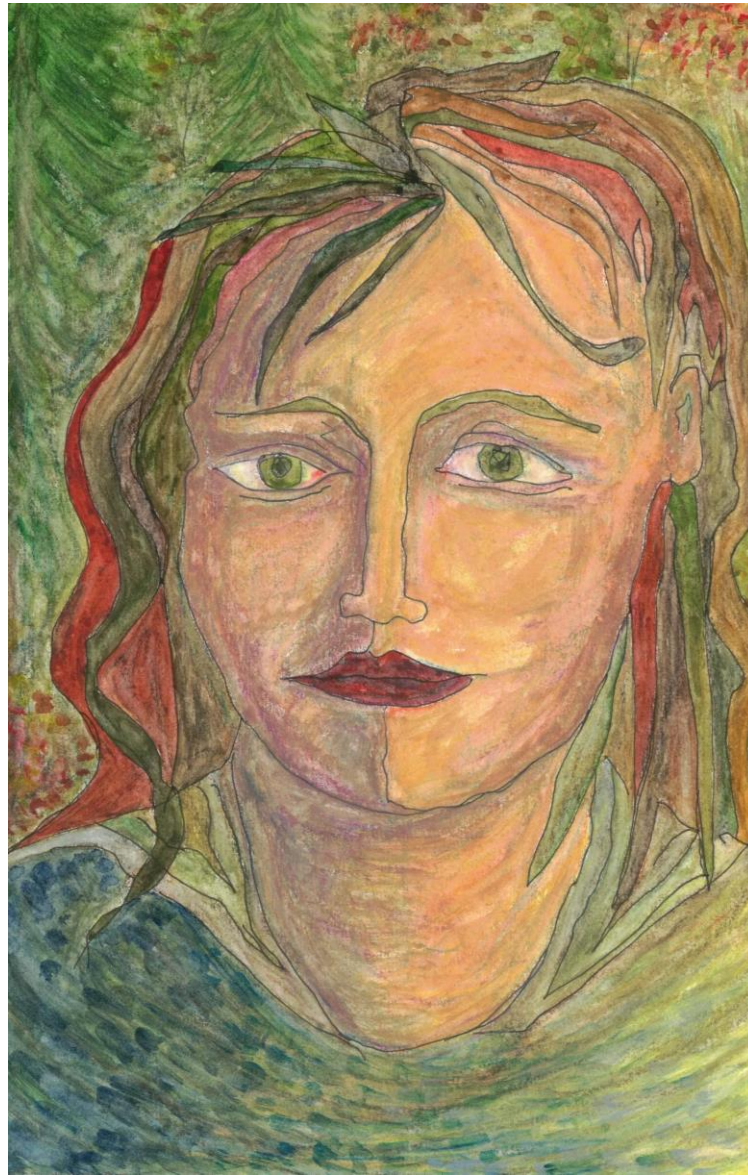
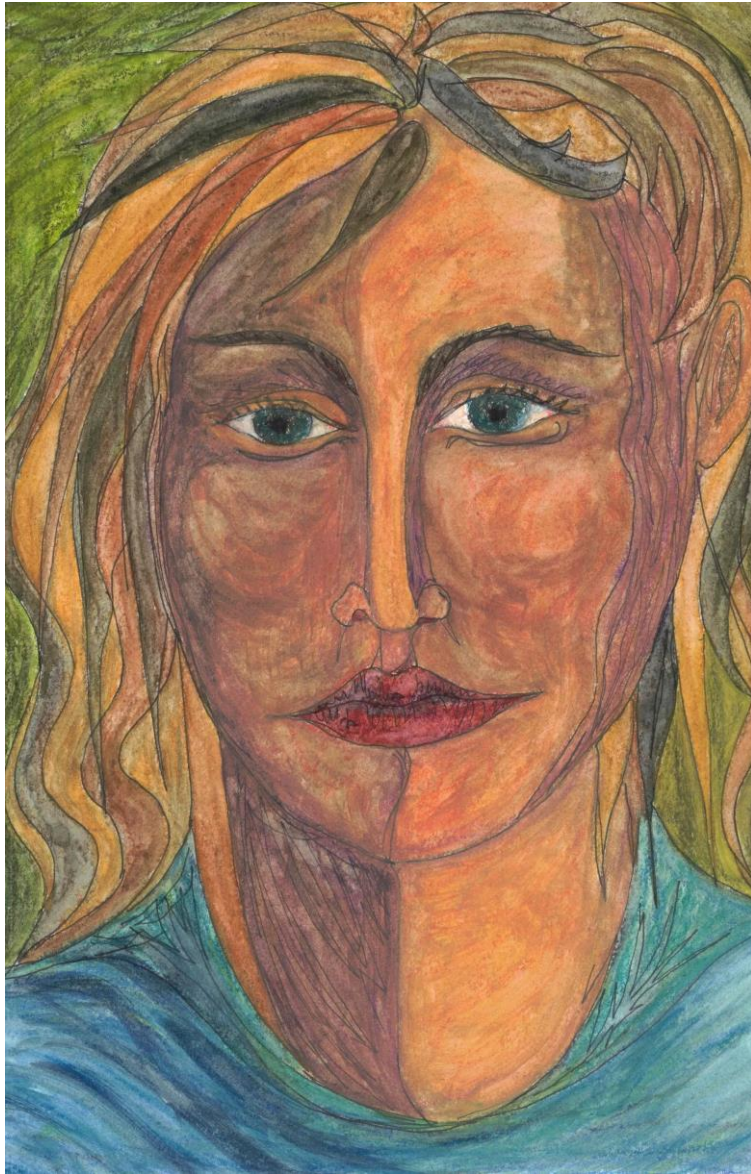
Research-creation

- Is potentially liberating in that:
- It invites exploration of interdisciplinarity in artistic practice, encourages diverse and experimental approaches, and acknowledges the value of situated knowledge;
- Vaughan (2005)'s engagement with research creation theory alongside making of her father's parka (*Unwearables*) provides guidance on how one does this;
- The nod by Sawchuk and Chapman (2012) toward "intuition" and playfulness in the many forms of research-creation lightens the pressure to perform...

Drawing faces

- Drawing faces while listening to live or radio conversations has been a lifelong practice.
- Over the years I came to accept my face drawing as apparently an essential expressive outlet.
- Later I would return to a sketch and elaborate it with colour and ink.
- As I sat listening to COVID-19 news and felt no hint of inspiration I knew that face drawing was going to happen.



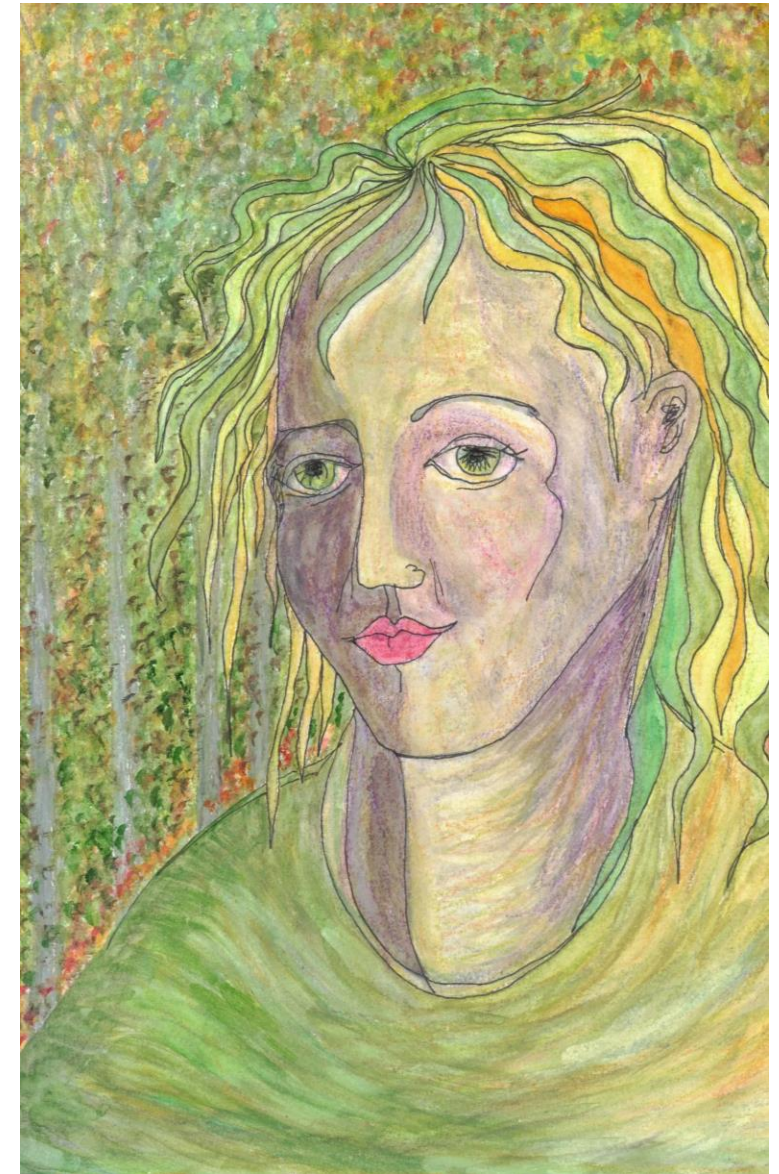


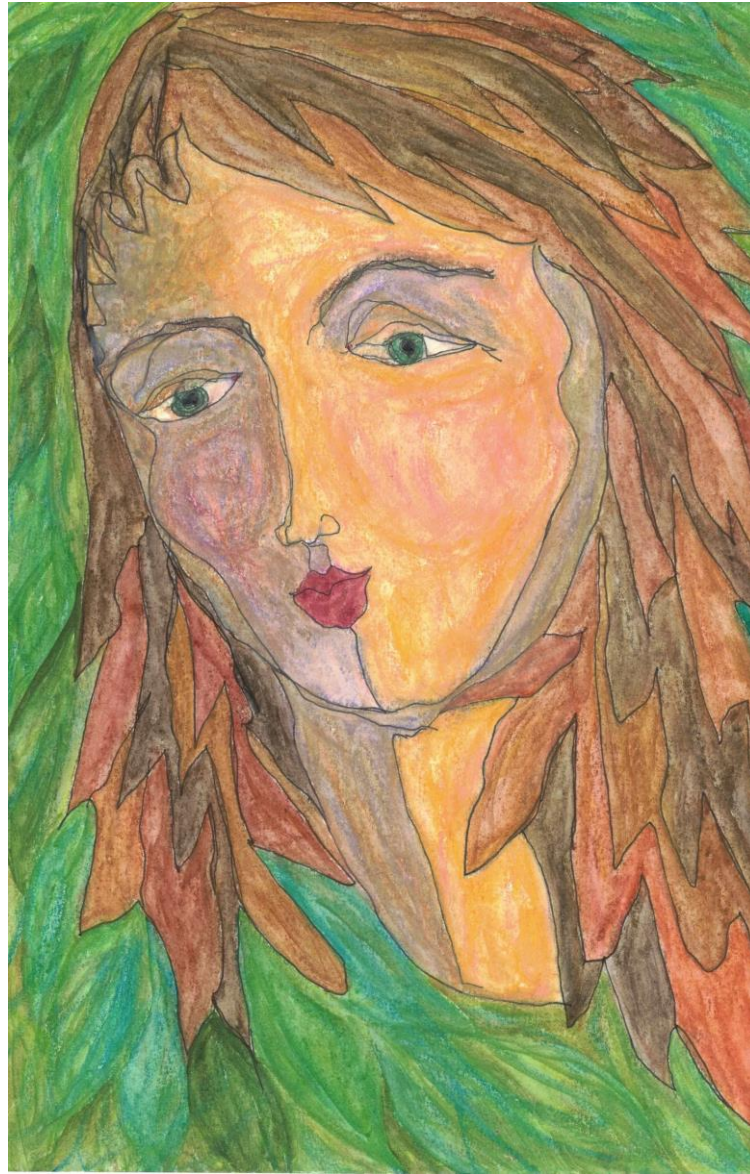
Experimenting

- The desultory dominant-hand pencil drawing of faces thus began.
- Uninspired, I challenged myself to copy the image on the opposing page (back) with my non-dominant hand.
- With my dominant hand I then traced over the lines of each image adjusting slightly as the ink pen flowed.
- As you'll see, the images have family resemblances but are never identical.

Experimenting

- When it came to adding colour my dominant hand gave the task to my non dominant: Do what you can, I am stuck...
- With my non-dominant hand, I boldly picked coloured water pastels and crayons from their boxes and roughly and exuberantly applied them.
- With the creative block thus breached, my dominant hand took up the task of painting and finishing the images.



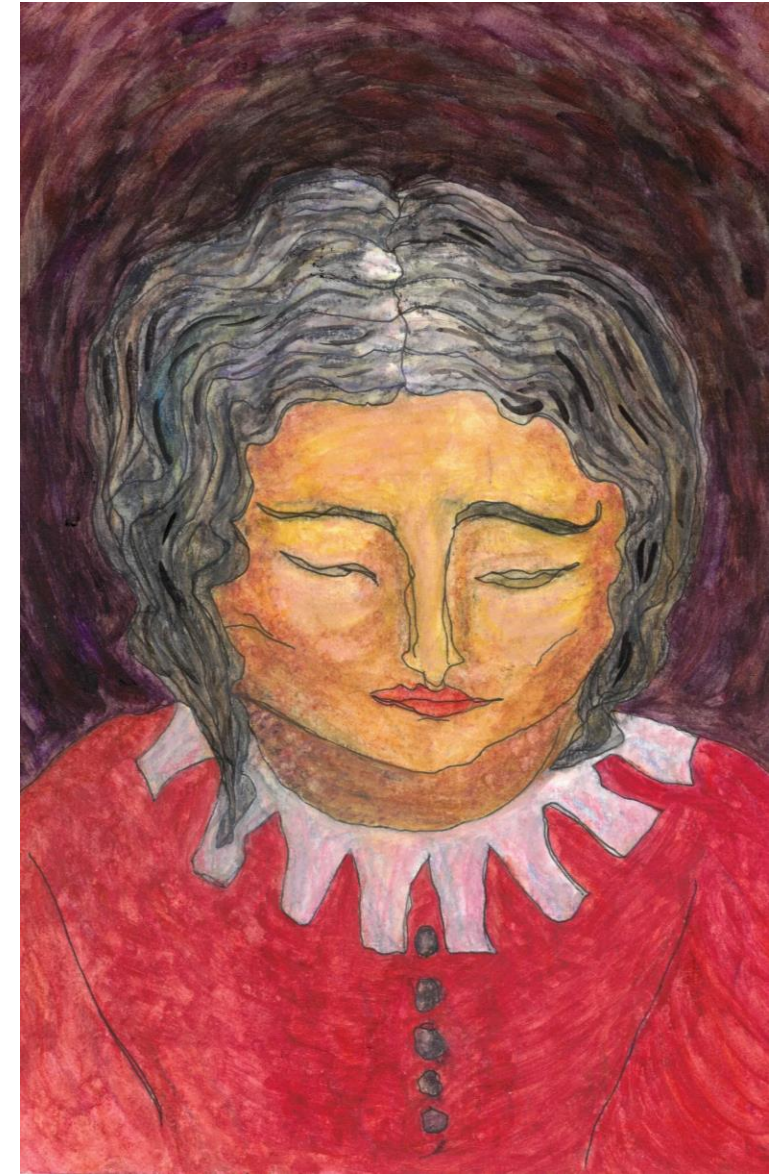


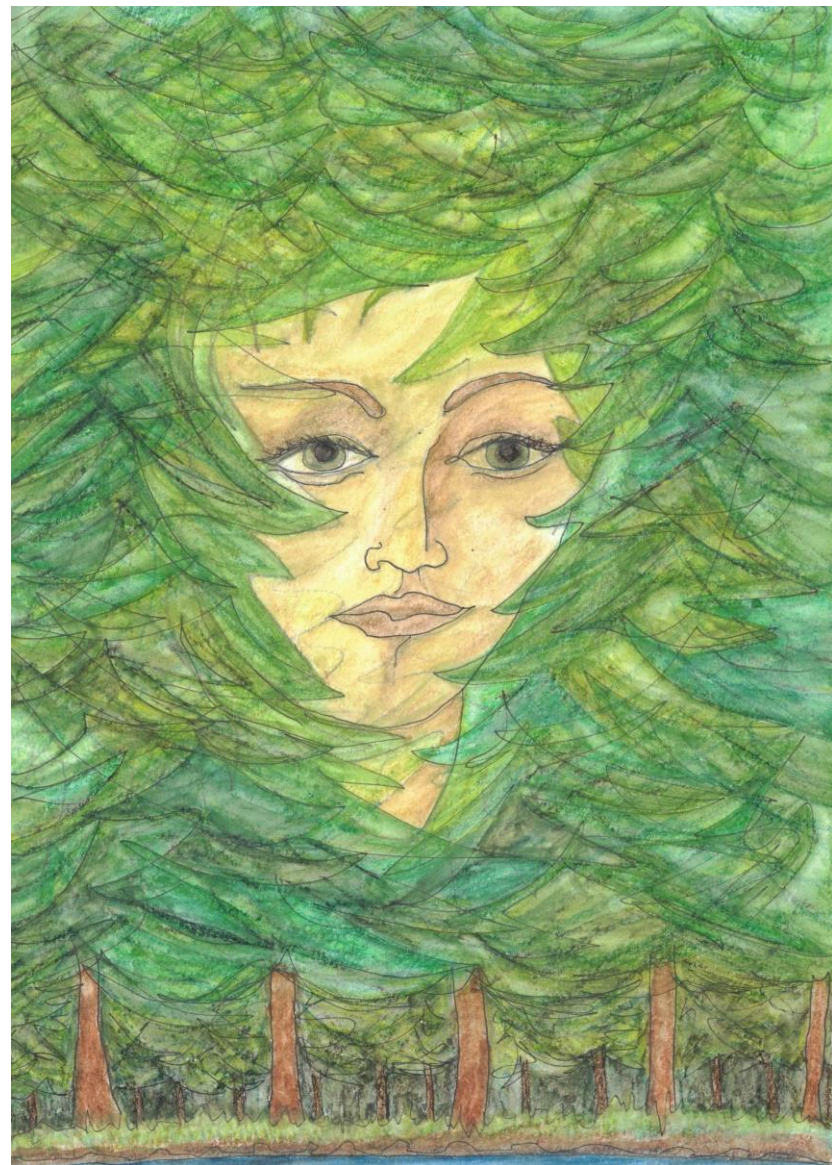
Envisioning harmony

- This series took several months to complete.
- At times tedious and repetitive, I enjoyed the ritual pattern of art production and the collaboration of both hands in finding surprising ways to energize the images.
- The paintings were responses to the waves of change that engulfed humanity in 2020.
- As the series grew, I found myself meditating on racism, despair, isolation, injured nature, healing nature, and human relations with nature.

Envisioning harmony

- The series evolved with deeper colours, nature elements: faces disappearing or drifting in forests and lakes.
- The merging of nature and human faces seemed intuitively soothing and appropriate for this strange time.
- The faces are an interplay of imagination, colour, scenery and surroundings, changing colour with nature's images, reflecting our many skin tones, how we reflect light, how skin tone reflects the environment we find ourselves in at any moment.



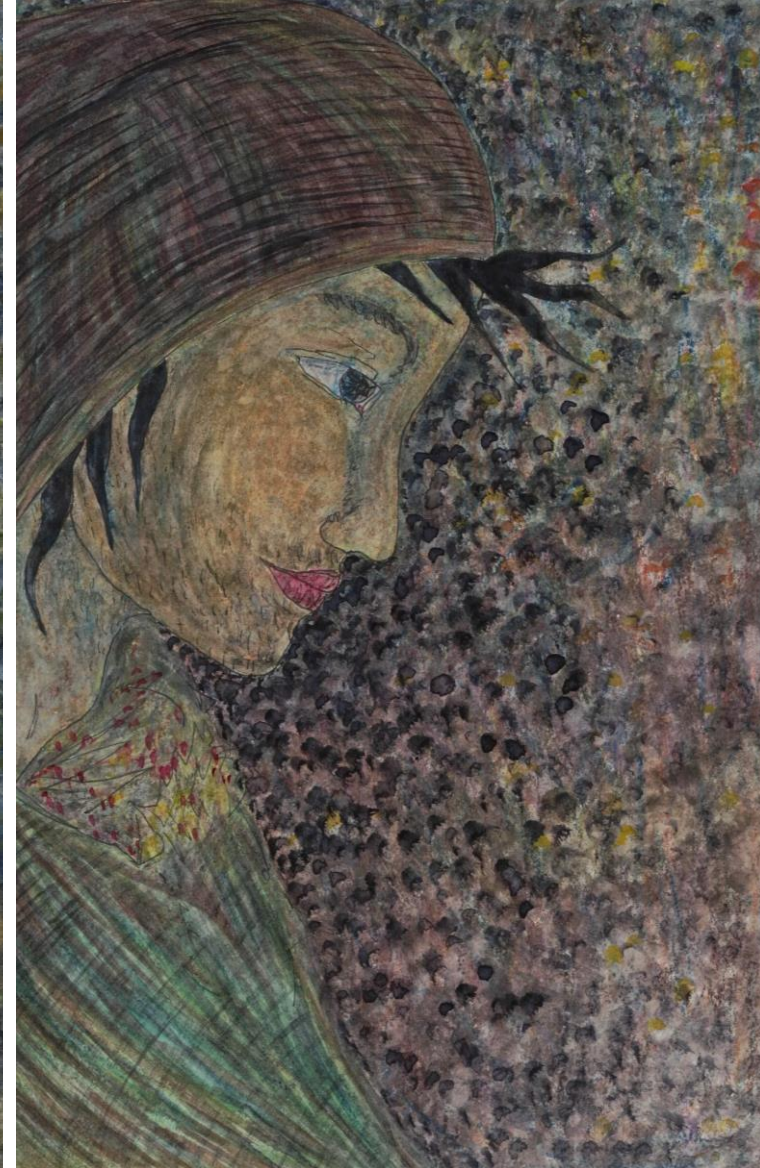
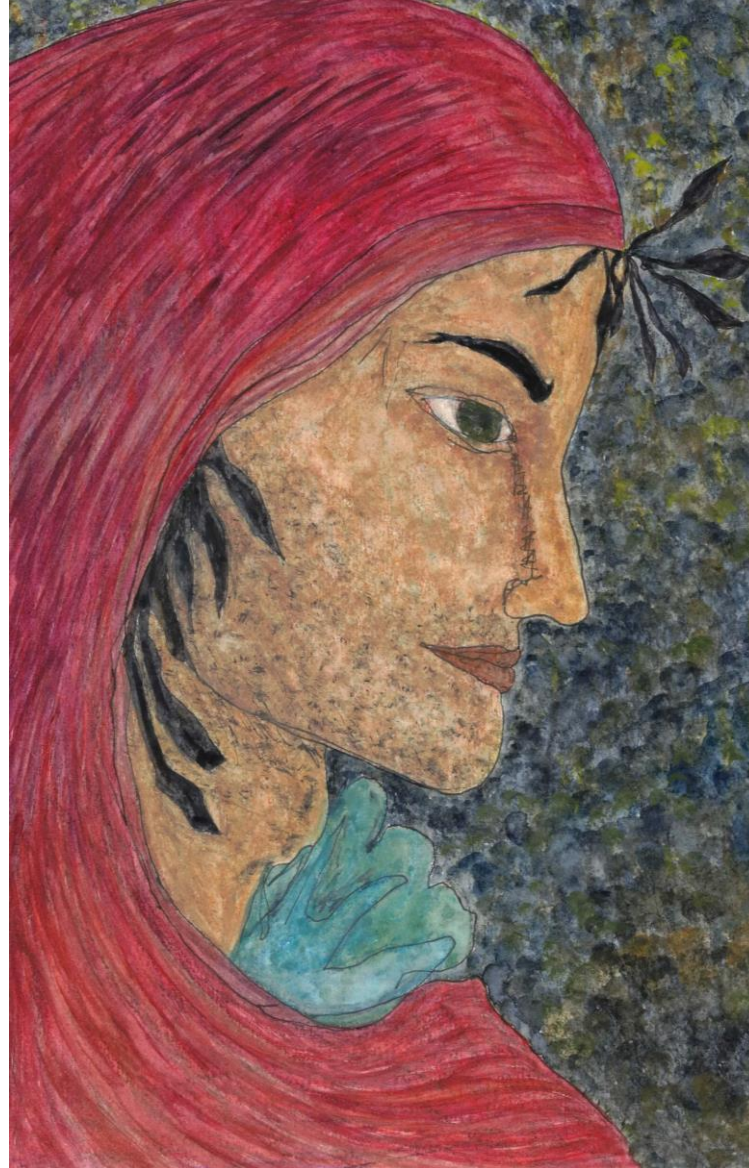


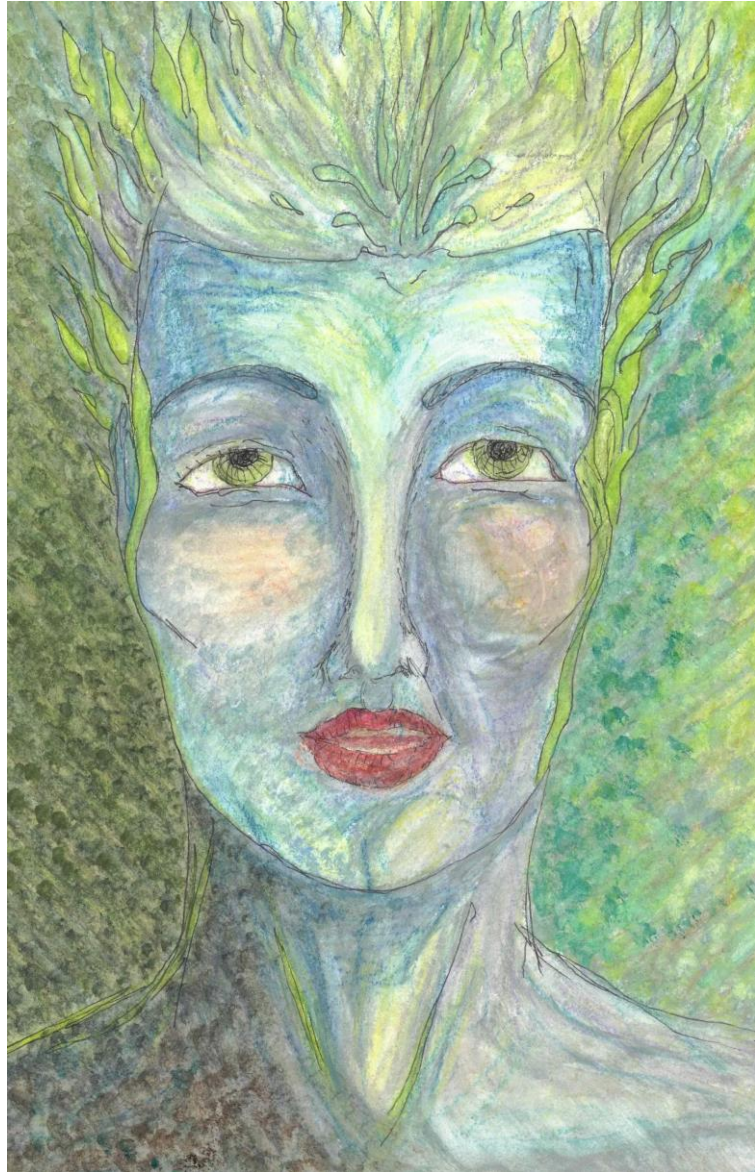
Envisioning harmony

- I was driven by the sense that we are nature, nature absorbs us, and we reflect nature.
- As I worked on the series, I mulled over an idea to apply to do an INDI PhD research creation project at Concordia using art and performance to address failings of international law and governance.
- I proposed to reflect on the 1945 Charter of the United Nations and innovate a new planetary Charter for our times.

Transdisciplinarity

- As I read about research-creation, this deliberate, curious way to engage complex international law and governance issues with artmaking imbued my artistic practice.
- Whether the finished paintings communicate anything about international law and governance is for others to say.
- From my point of view, in each one my hands sought to express and console the tumult of love and pain the world has been experiencing.





Finishing the series

- Towards the end of the series, I dreamt of an image of a person whose head was overflowing with water.
- I found my non-dominant hand was more comfortable drawing that image than my dominant hand, so I reversed my practice and began with the non-dominant hand.
- This suggests the dominant-non-dominant handovers were having an interesting effect on my creativity and expression, opening new ways of artmaking.

Art-based participant study

- One year later, in an art-based pilot study 17 participants used this same technique to produce a total of 34 works (2 lost).
- Visual coding (expressive elements are noted below images) and questionnaire responses (*infra*) provided rich insights on artmaking in pandemic times.



Expression is hidden and ambiguous: determined? overwhelmed? uncertain? tangly pencil crayon colouring of cap; firm, purposeful colouring of red head band

Overview of findings

- The technique drove participants' artmaking forward to completion despite mental and bodily resistance, with some experiencing unfamiliar resources of creativity.
- A year after the pandemic began, participants reacted strongly to questions about whether it affected their artmaking, some rejecting any connection, others expressing ongoing anxiety.



participant noted the dominant hand work was “only slightly better” than the non dominant hand drawing and may have inadvertently sent a double rather than two drawings. alert, closed lips slightly smiling, not unhappy; bright skin tone suggests health; light green eyes: hope; closed, slightly smiling mouth: forbearance

Visual coding

1. Spatial Organization:

- a. % space image uses on the page
- b. Where image is situated on page

2. Colour:

- a. Hue
- b. Saturation
- c. Value

3. Content:

- a. Face Gender Identity
- b. Face Age
- c. Face Racialized Identity
- d. Head Hair
- e. Facial Hair
- f. Props

4. Light: Any noticeable use of light

5. Expressive Content:

- a. Gaze of face
- b. Expression of main figure
- c. Expressive pencil, crayon or brush strokes
- d. Expressive use of colour



the pale blue eyes seem to look inward more than at the viewer; the mouth is firmly closed in one drawing, smiling in the other; fluid, detailed use of pencil markings to indicate wrinkles, stubble, messy hair; pencil grey accented with brown, pale blue and red mercilessly portraying age

Questionnaire Results: Comfort level drawing Dominant hand



Serious; emphatic and stylish pencil crayoning of hair; contrast of blue and orange

	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
QUESTION	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
1. What is your comfort level with drawing in general? (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is I never draw and 10 is I draw frequently)	5.6	5	8.7	9	3.9	5
2. Which of your hands is dominant?	16					
	Right	1				
	Left					

Drawing with dominant hand

	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
QUESTION	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
3. Your response to drawing the face with your dominant hand:	Leave blank					
a) ease in performing the task (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy)	7	8	8.4	8	6.6	7
b) feelings of creativity (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all creative and 10 is very creative)	5.5	6	7.8	8.5	4.6	3
c) any other comment about your thoughts or feelings while drawing in pencil with your dominant hand						



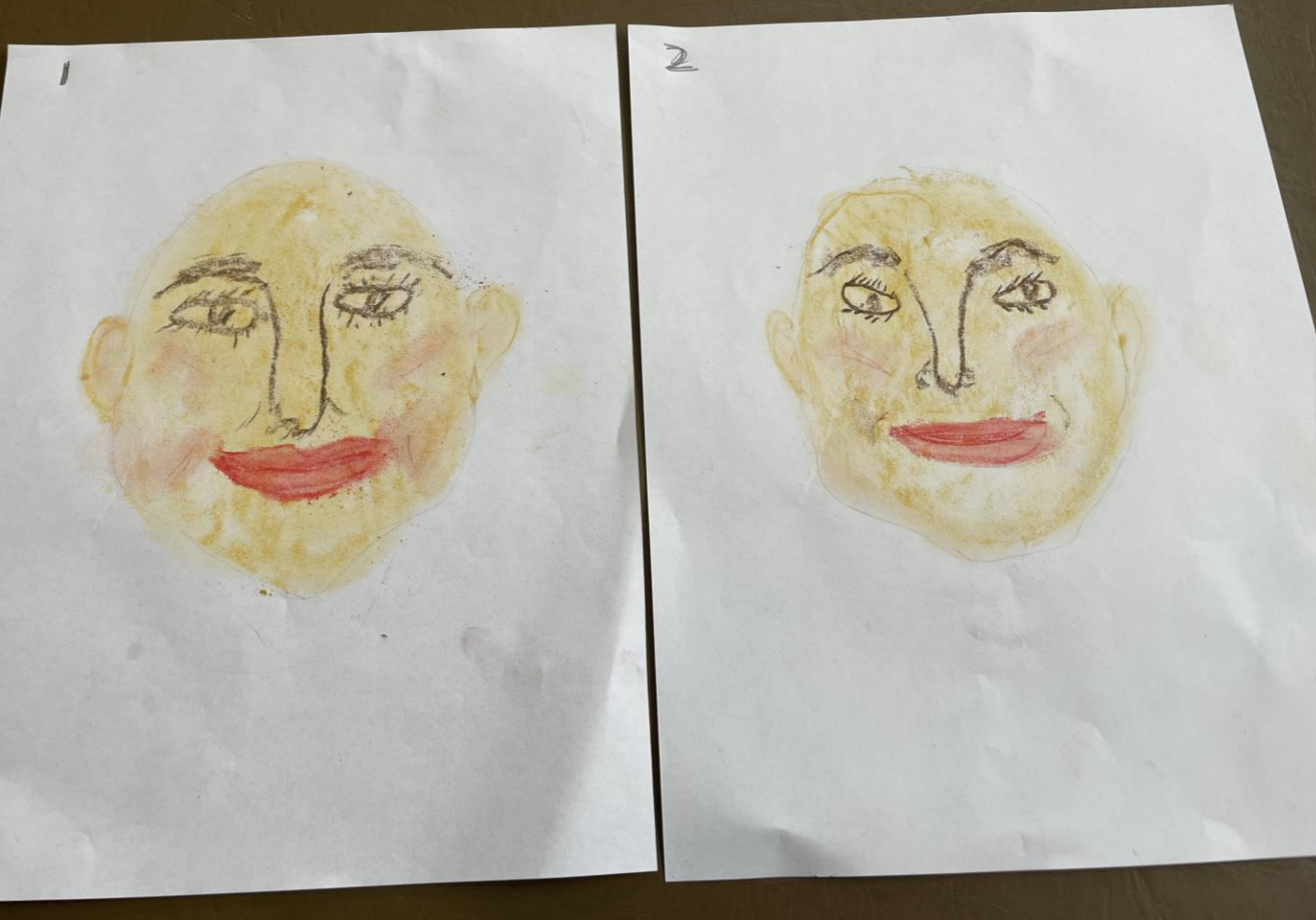
lips parted, white teeth showing, pink rosy cheeks and lips, green heavily lashed eyes, blond hair suggest a somewhat worried iconic female beauty; exuberant colour pencil marking of cheeks, lips, hair; pastel pink, green and yellow colours recall an idealized past

Drawing with dominant hand

- “Putting pencil to paper has always raised feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy.”
- “I haven’t drawn many faces up close, so found this quite challenging, but fun”
- “I enjoyed designing it.”
- “Made me more thoughtful of process”
- “I find it more challenging and possibly more “creative” to draw from life rather than from imagination.”
- “I felt calm and tried to create symmetry in the face structure. The face changed as I was drawing it. I thought it would be a man but it turned into a woman.”
- “Creativity hard to gauge as task was prescribed ‘draw a face’. Some creativity used to determine face portion and view.”
- “My usual thought when drawing is that I wish I could!”
- “I felt comfortable drawing the right image with my right hand.



appears to be an Indigenous person; direct, unsmiling gaze; darker colour pencil markings creating symmetry in structure of face, braiding, headband; contrast of orange and purple in face and eyes



smiling closed full red lips, sparkling black outlined eyes suggest equanimity; careful black brush strokes add facial details to round face; blended golden skin tones create a buddha like round face, smudged red lips emphasize smile

Drawing with nondominant hand

	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
QUESTION	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
4. Your response to loosely copying with your non dominant hand the drawing of face:	Leave blank					
a) ease in performing the task (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy)	4.5	4.5	3.9	5	4.8	4
b) feelings of creativity (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all creative and 10 is very creative)	5.1	4	5.8	6	4.9	4
c) any other comment about your thoughts or feelings while copying in pencil the image of a face with your non dominant hand						

Drawing with non-dominant hand



Left Hand



Right Hand

high eyebrows, wide eyes, could suggest surprise, lightly closed lips suggest calm; light, minimalist sketching and delicate colouring marks hint at facial contours and expression; slightly brighter, more detailed colouring of irises and lips attracts interest

- “Very awkward. Amazingly awkward.”
- “Wanted to reverse the image”
- “I was surprised how difficult this was”
- “Trying to do a very comparable image was much tougher than I thought it would be. Very hard to draw a smooth line, so more challenging for my brain.”
- “Drawing with non-dominant hand feels awkward – I know what I want my hand to do, but the lines come awkwardly. Interesting, my non dominant hand is more balanced.”
- “It felt a little uncomfortable but once I stopped trying too hard to recreate the right image, linework and shapes came naturally.”
- “Felt free to improve right hand image – better centred”
- “In some ways it’s easier because copying. Also, I don’t expect much in terms of fine motor skills”
- “More “at ease”. Lower expectations.”
- “It was a bit more interesting to see how it would end up. I think a big part of creativity is having the unexpected element in the process, so using my left hand accomplished that.”
- “Seemed to go easier!”
- “Much looser, more suggestive rather than specific”
- “This felt freeing and actually came out kind of cool. It feels like a dream version of the dominant hand drawing.”
- “Was pleased with the result”

Colouring with non-dominant hand



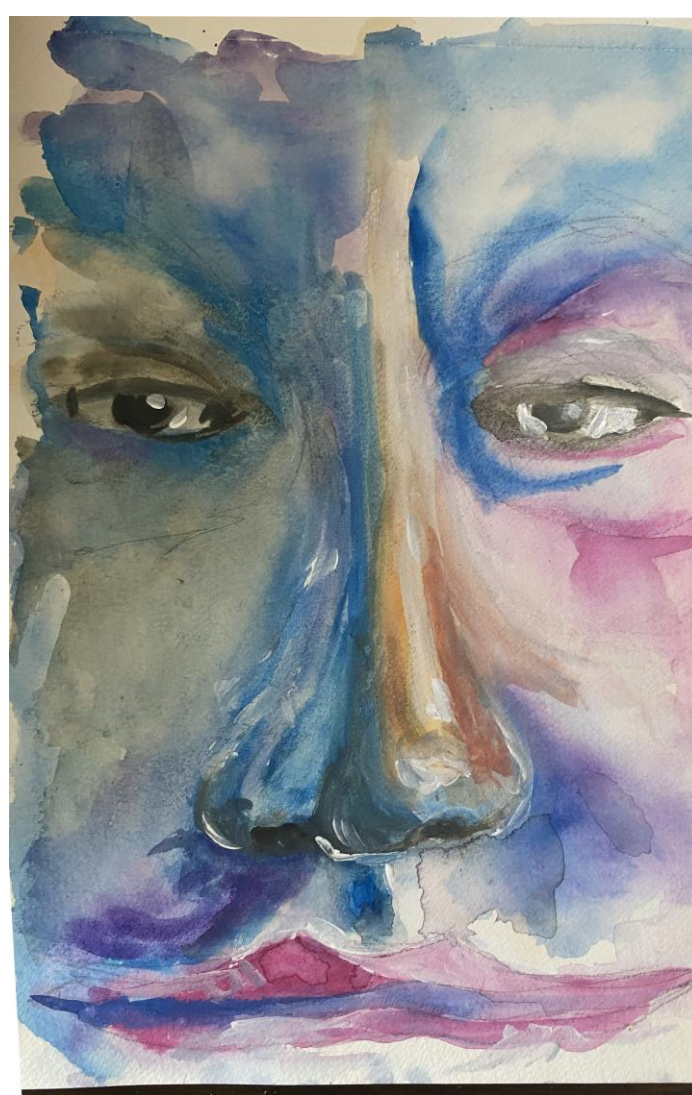
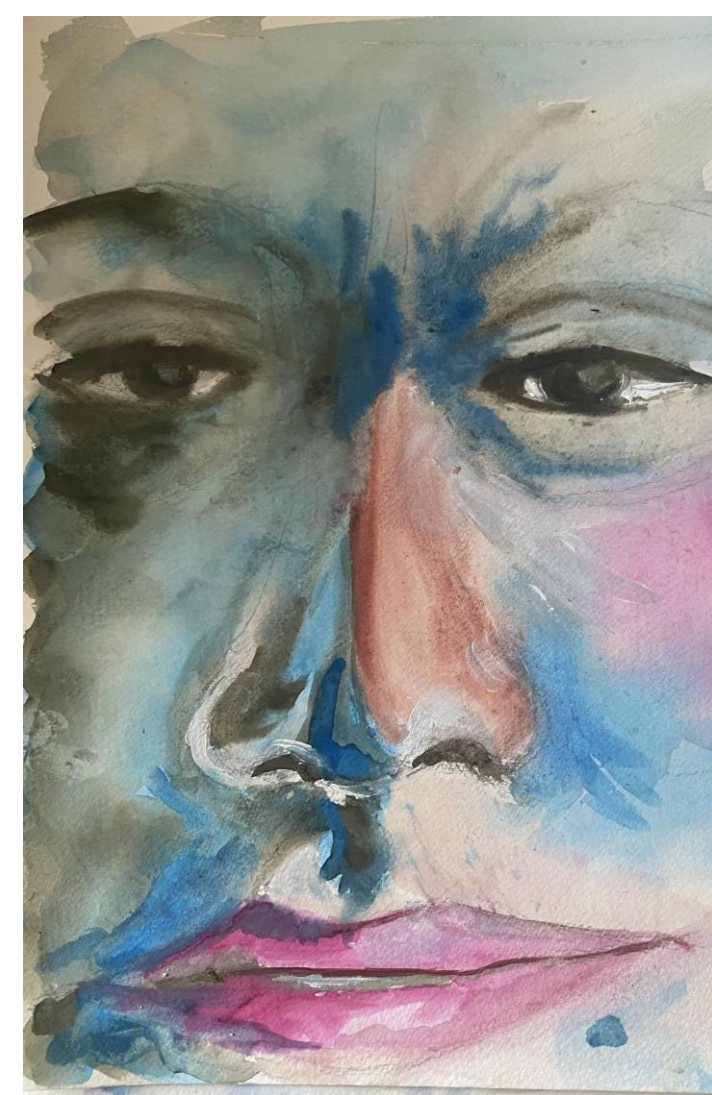
eyes twinkle with radiant colour, mouth quietly smiling; detailed pencil lines and smudging around mouth, nose and eyes suggest contour and smiling eyes of fuschia and turquoise look bloodshot, use of fuschia and pencil markings and smudging convey shade and contour while yellow conveys light

	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
QUESTION	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
5. Your response to roughly colouring the two images with your non dominant hand:	Leave blank					
a) ease in performing the task (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy)	5.3	5	4.4	5	5.7	5
b) feelings of creativity (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all creative and 10 is very creative)	5.9	5	7.3	7	5.5	5
c) any other comment about your thoughts or feelings about the activity and materials used while colouring the two images with your non dominant hand						

Colouring with non-dominant hand

- “Kind of hit or miss, reminds me of “operating” an Oije board”
- “It was kind of fun to color with my left hand.”
- “Drawing and coloring seemed freer”
- “I thought about the colors worn by hospital workers and the skin color of many essential workers”
- “I was happy to hit on the color red for the face shield”
- “I was thinking about how the pink cheeks might have been a bad design choice because it looks like the person has bad makeup on.”
- “I found myself accidentally using my dominant hand at first and I had to stop myself! Instinct took over because I felt invested in the process.”
- “I used watercolours. It was easier to paint than draw with my non dominant hand but awkward to refine details.”
- “This by far felt like the longest process. My hand and back started cramping up at one point. Although the motion and skill required was somewhat low, it used much more mental work than I expected.”
- “Enjoyed it”

furrowed brow, intense eyes, calmly smiling mouth; brush strokes around bridge of nose and brows creating tension; watery blending of colours creating calm



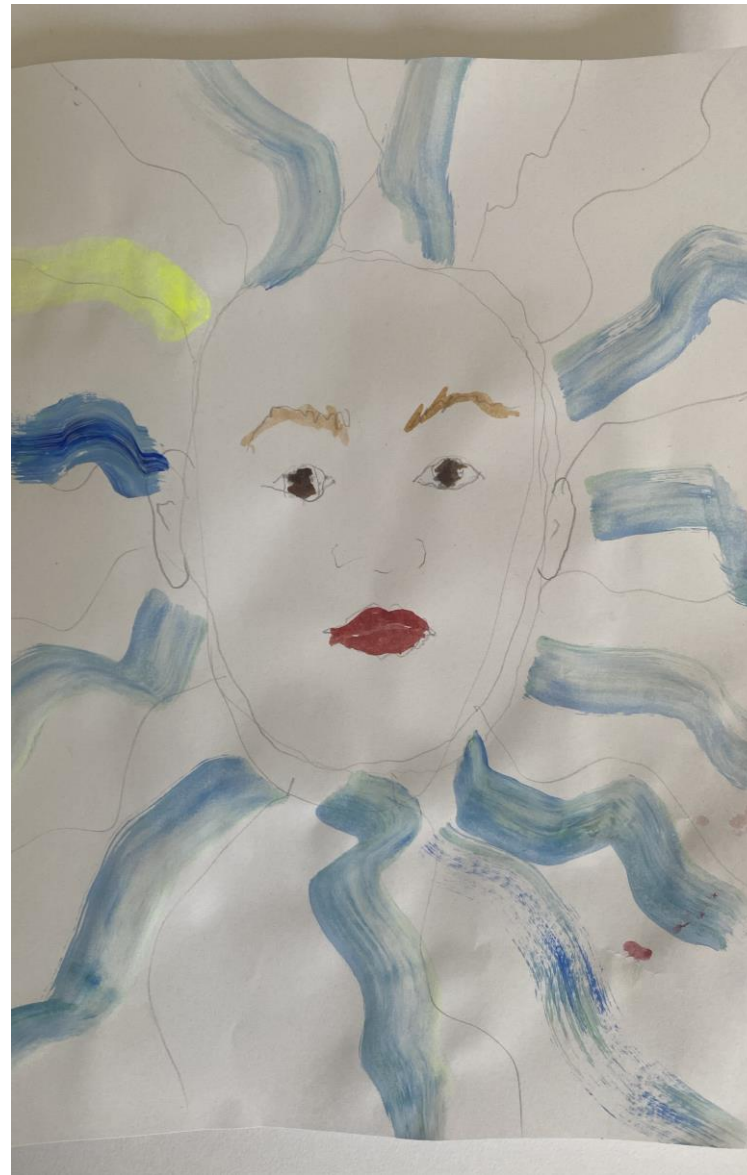
Finishing with dominant hand



closed, full red lips; dark brows; wide open, bright dark eyes staring directly all suggest worry; dark blue green eyes and red lips under tangled dark hair call to the viewer

QUESTION	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
6. Your response to finishing the two images with your dominant hand:						
a) ease in performing the task (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy)	8.2	9	8.8	9	7.9	9
b) feelings of creativity (on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all creative and 10 is very creative)	5.4	4	5	5	5	4
c) any other comment about your thoughts or feelings about the activity and materials used while finishing the works with your dominant hand						

Finishing with dominant hand



penetrating dark eyes, closed full lips, suppressing a thought? rippling colour in broad brush strokes create movement in "hair" swirls; contrasting colours of swirls with still, white centre

- "Some feelings of anxiety as to whether adding a detail was an improvement or a detraction from the original. In the end I preferred the drawing from the non-dominant hand!"
- "Huge relief to have better control. More relaxed while doing it. (whew, almost finished)."
- "I tried to preserve some of the marks made with the non dominant hand. Some I covered up."
- "I didn't really know what else I should color to make it look any better so there wasn't much left after my other coloring."
- "Comparison with non dominant hand interesting"
- "This felt comforting and satisfying to be able to add a few final touches with my dominant hand"
- "Creativity not high as I was just finishing images trying to elevate realism. With dominant hand, I tried to fix details, but frustrating as proportions/coloured areas were off from non-dominant hand's work"
- "I tried to finish the works (copied with non dominant hand) close to the works (drawn with my dominant hand)."
- "It's much easier to control the crayon, but the picture was already pretty set, so not much novel to add."
- "I didn't do much colouring with the dominant hand, just touched up some areas of both drawing. This felt good as I was putting final finishing touches, completing the works."
- "Turned out better than expected"

Influence of thoughts about COVID-19

QUESTION	All Participants		comfortable		not comfortable	
	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
7. How did thoughts about the COVID-19 pandemic influence your performance of this task?	Leave blank					
a) your drawing with the dominant hand? (on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely)	2.5	1	2.8	1	2.4	1
b) your loose copying with your non dominant hand? (on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely)	1.7	1	0.8	1	2	1
c) your colouring of the two works with your non dominant hand? (on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely)	2.4	1	2.7	1	2.5	1
d) your finishing of the two works with your dominant hand? (on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely)	2	1.9	2.3	1	1.8	1
e) do you have any final observations about the materials used and about performing this task during the COVID-19 pandemic?						



Non-dominant



Dominant

eyes stare, mouth is closed and slightly twisted, biting back a thought? strong grey, black marking emphasize line of hair, form of face, eyes; the dark eyes bore into the distance, the small heads seem isolated on the white page

Influence of COVID-19: Yes

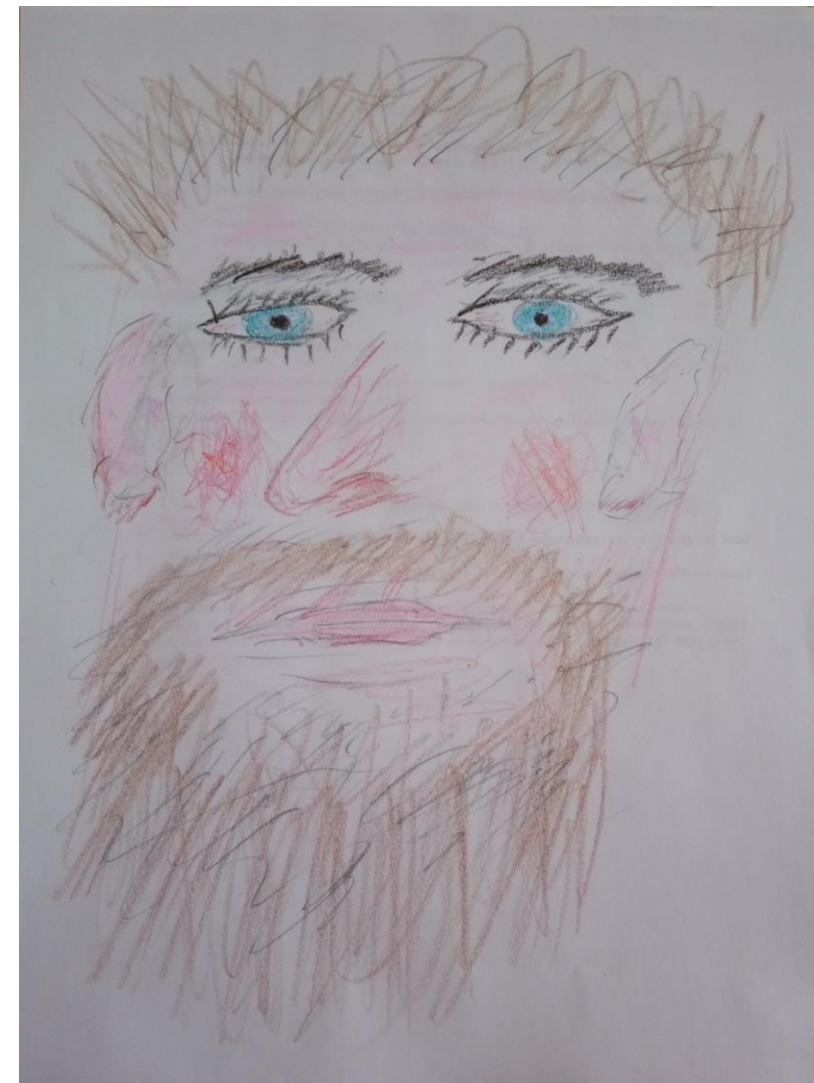
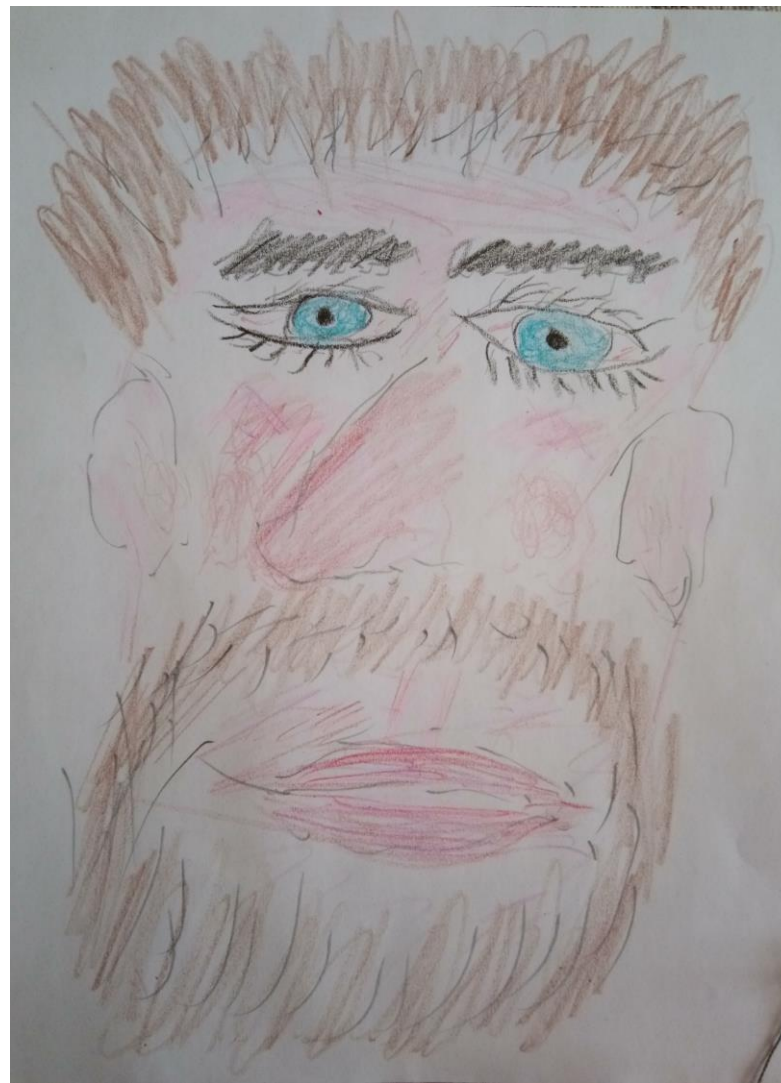
- “I thought about a face that was seen during the pandemic”
- “my mind went to my friend [name deleted for privacy] who has been very sick with Covid long-haul since July”
- “3/13 is the anniversary of the day our lives screeched to a halt, so I’m having some memories of being very freaked out about the new pandemic and trying to figure out how to teach online classes while managing a toddler at the same time”
- “The swirling rays around the face felt like news media and disinformation going into a young woman and poisoning her mind”
- “I tried to portray foggy glasses because of wearing a mask”
- “Would have had more materials but dread shopping with covid”
- “Grateful to have more flex time for interesting projects during COVID pandemic”



face is challenged to see by fog on glasses, challenged to express emotion by mask over half his face; strokes of darker blue in mask convey movement, contouring of cloth; simple, saturated colour blocks provide strong setting to frame the foggy glasses

Influence of COVID-19 - No

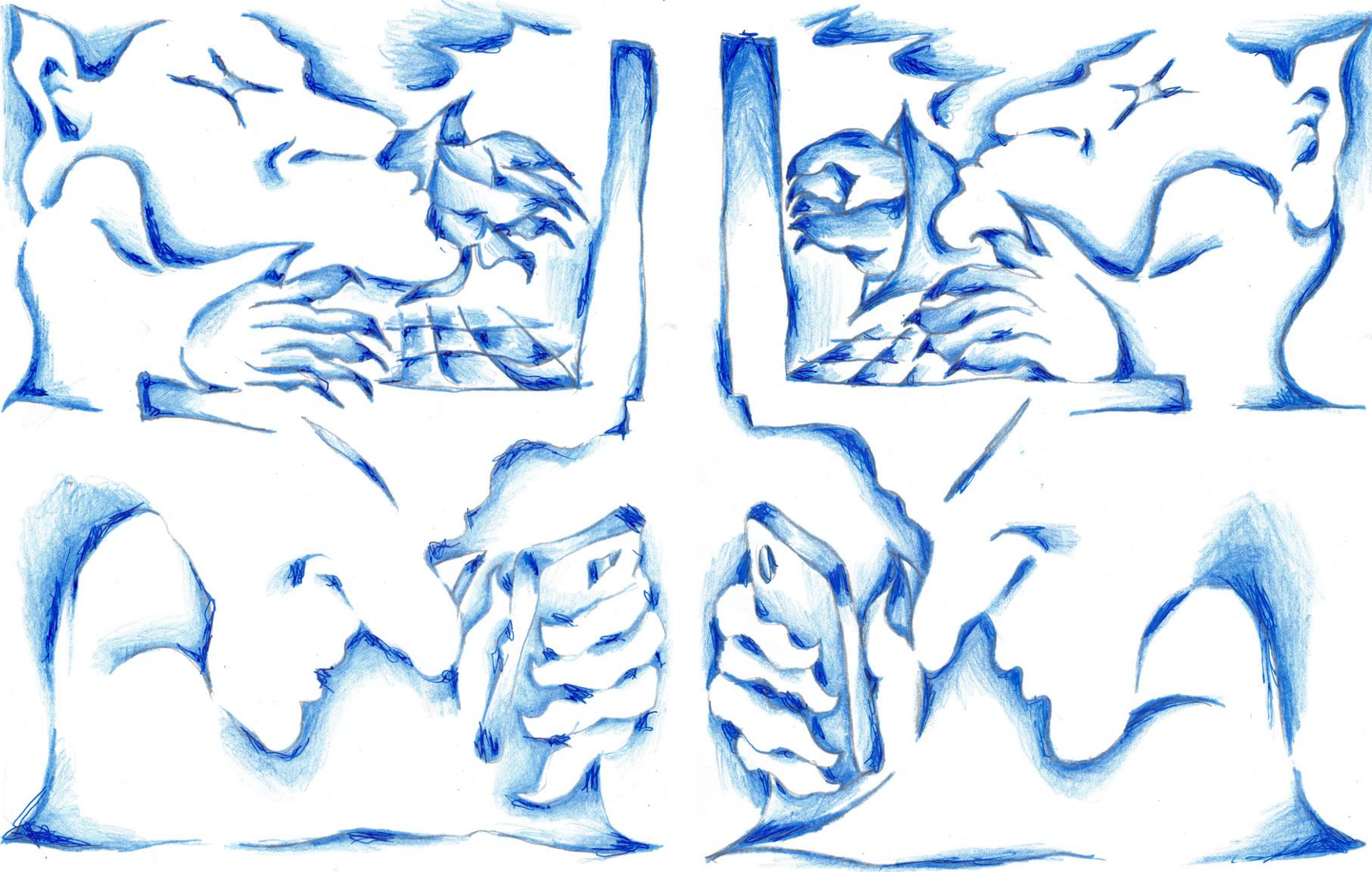
- “During COVID -virus has nothing to do with it for me. No”
- “Pandemic did not affect me at all”
- “I don’t really see the relation.”
- “Aside from the welcome opportunity to take part in something ‘different’, I don’t feel the pandemic had an influence on the performance.”
- “The task felt quite normal to the drawing I would typically do during the time of the pandemic. Therefore I purposely created my composition along that same theme.”
- “COVID didn’t really have any effect. I would have the materials on hand prior to COVID and I completed the work in my apartment during the afternoon while listening to music.”



staring in thought; rapid pencil and colour crayon strokes suggest hair and beard growing with abandon; ruddy cheeks and bright blue eyes, large slightly parted, slightly smiling red lips convey confidence

Conclusion

- Alternating hand technique propels artmaking and unblocks creativity.
- Participant art-based inquiry builds sense of community in pandemic isolation.
- Thank you for your attention.
- Questions and discussion?



“there are 2 characters, one on the phone and one on a computer... I believe their relevance goes with our mandatory network connections ... during a time of pandemic.”

stark blue and white divide up space to create the frenetic images; squinting at their phone, staring frowningly at their laptop the characters look intensely involved and frustrated in working with these communication tools

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