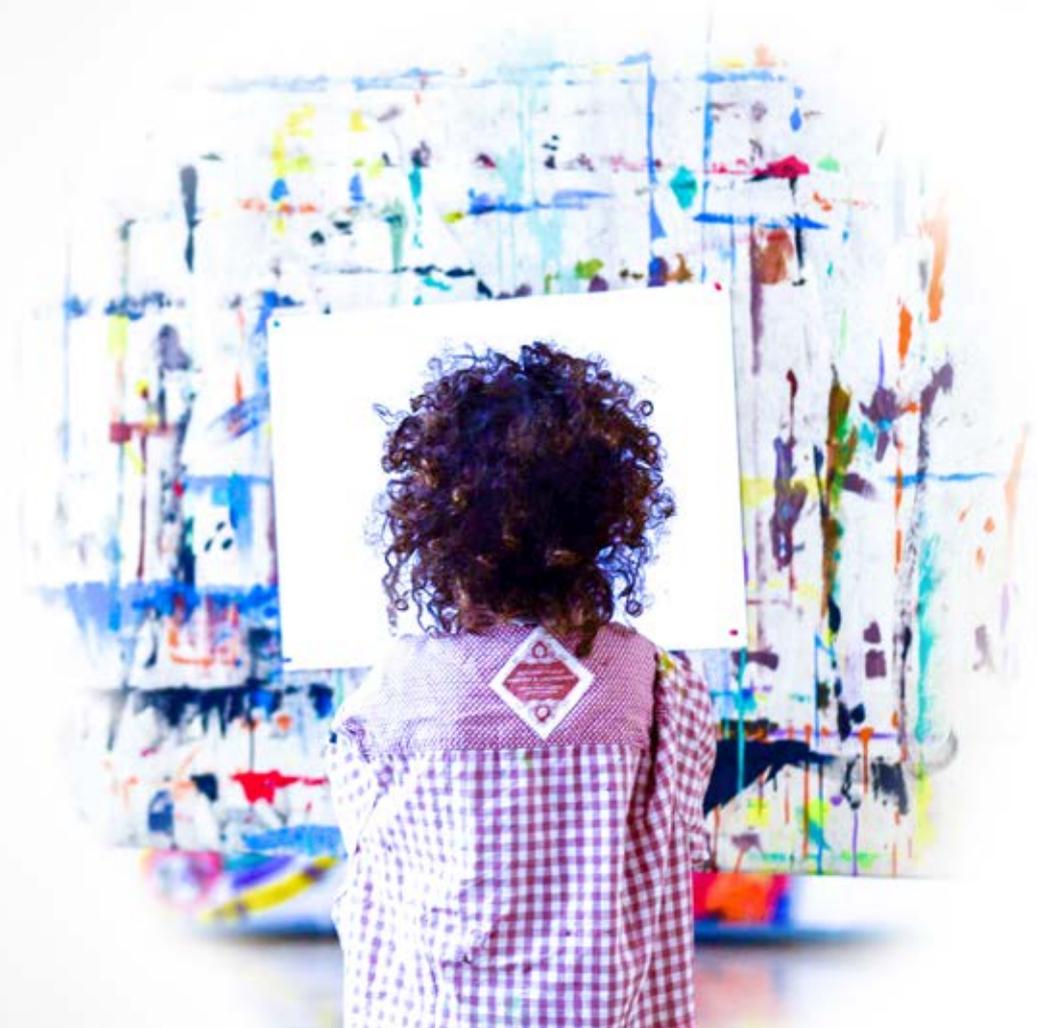


ART
&
PEDAGOGICAL
INPUT

FROM THE

**INTUITIVE
PAINTING
WORKSHOP**

Mikros Dounias
LESVOS, GREECE



Some words on Mikros Dounias

Mikros Dounias is a pedagogical project on the Greek island of Lesbos. On a daily basis since October 2017, local and refugee children of preschool age play, learn and create together in nature. We, the children and adults of Mikros Dounias, jointly shape our life and learning, combining elements of intercultural education, free experiential learning and outdoor pedagogics.

Some words on Mikros Dounias' Intuitive Painting Workshop

In Mikros Dounias, we daily accompany children with diverse cultural backgrounds, who speak many different languages. Many of them are in a particularly difficult, transitional period of their life. Caringly dealing with this requires systematic critical reflection and a continuous quest for pedagogic innovation. In this context, in December 2018, we established the 'Intuitive Painting Workshop'. The workshop is inspired by the important work of Arno Stern and his student Michelle Cassou, which we adapted to the needs of our framework.

The goals of the Workshop

The Intuitive Painting Workshop is a safe space, where children can paint, guided by their intuition – the spontaneous internal voice which, according to Michelle Cassou, works as the catalyst for creativity. Through this method, children are invited to express what is important for them in the very moment; to discover themselves and trust their feelings. They are encouraged to listen to their internal world naturally and to explore the external world without hesitating to take risks. This helps them develop self-awareness, self-esteem, and autonomy. In the frame of the Workshop, we have experienced children who, while painting, focus deeply, forget their surroundings, share, open up, relax, sing and laugh.

The goals of this booklet

Through this booklet, we want to communicate the basic elements of a method that promotes children's creativity, empowers individuals, and prevents the emergence of creative blocks. The pedagogical descriptions are accompanied by artwork, which was created by children of Mikros Dounias during the workshop.

We kindly invite you to explore the method and possibly implement it in your own frameworks of interaction with children – whether educational or familial, formal or non-formal. At the same time, we feel that, in order to support the children's creativity, we need to deal with issues concerning our own creativity. As Pablo Picasso believed, **"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up."** We therefore invite you to also try out the suggestions in this booklet yourself and/or with your adult companions. Let us create spaces, where intuition can flourish!

With warm wishes for creativity, love & empathy!

SOURCES

The main literature behind this booklet is the book "*Kids Play: Igniting Children's Creativity*", by Michelle Cassou.

We recommend that you watch the documentary "Alphabet" by Erwin Wagenhofer, as well as the following YouTube videos:

[Michelle Cassou - The flowering of children's creativity](#) (67 minutes – English)

[Michelle Cassou - Point Zero Insights & Images](#) (7 minutes – English)

[Arno Stern talking about his life and work](#) (6 minutes – French with English subtitles)

[Au Closlieu avec Arno Stern](#) (4 minutes – French)

[Arno Stern, einen kurzen Einblick in seine Arbeit](#) (9 minutes – French with German & Italian subtitles)

[Le Closlieu – legendado](#) (4 minutes – French with Portuguese subtitles)

OUR HEARTFELT THANKS

to the children and families of Mikros Dounias

to Julien Delfosse for bringing to life the idea of the workshop

to Chidanand Hiremath  [chi.cafe](#) for the photos, layout and design of our 2020 calendar

to [Yorgos Nounesis](#) for turning the calendar into a booklet

FIRST PUBLISHED December 2019 **REPUBLICATION** March 2022

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MATERIALS, SETUP & PROCESS

Our workshop consists of the following materials and self-constructed equipment. See photos on the back cover of this booklet.

- Small wooden easels placed in a circle.
 - 12 tempera colors in 500 or 1000ml packages. We place a small quantity of each color in a glass jar with a lid.
 - There are two good-quality, medium and large sized brushes for every color. Note that each brush corresponds to a color, not a child.
 - Old (T-)shirts as painting aprons.
 - Personal folders, where each child's artworks are kept.
 - Large wooden palette placed in the center.
 - Each jar has another glass jar next to it, filled with water.
 - Aquarelle paper in two sizes (A3, A6).
- We make sure that the processes linked to the workshop – its beginning and end for each child - have the form of a ritual.
- The workshop lasts for 1.5 hours. Each child can stay as long as they want and paint as many pieces as they want.



WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE PROCESS, NOT THE OUTCOME

Both daily observation and relevant literature reveal that, in the absence of adult intervention, children paint in order to play and discover and not to accomplish a goal or manufacture a final product. We wish to protect and preserve this spontaneous attitude, and, if possible, follow the children's example.

In the frame of the Intuitive Painting Workshop, creativity is viewed as a process that connects us with the soul. We do not want children to worry about what they are creating or to feel the obligation of painting in the so-called "right" way. We want them to feel free to express in a different language, that of painting, whatever their intuition whispers to them in the very moment.

HOW WE ACCOMPANY THE CREATIVE PROCESS

WE CREATE THE FRAMEWORK

A structured framework, functional and calm, is necessary. We set the rules concerning the use of the space and materials, we clearly explain them to the children, and we ensure compliance in a positive way. At the same time, in ways that are explained throughout this booklet, we establish a safe atmosphere that allows the unimpeded expression of creativity.

WE FACILITATE THE PROCESS

We ensure that children have access to the materials in a setting that is adapted to their size and physical abilities. We are responsible for all practical matters regarding the space, colors, etc.

We support the children in technical matters – e.g. how to hold a brush softly, which mix of color and water works best, etc. The role of the facilitator is to be attentive and available to the children at every moment, without participating in the actual painting process.

However, it is important that we implement the method ourselves, at a separate time.





WE OBSERVE & ACCOMPANY

Our goal is to gently accompany each child on their journey to discover themselves. We want the children to feel loved, appreciated and trusted for what they are, not what they do.

We carefully observe each child's creative progress to see who paints being in sync with their internal world and who is still not able to establish such a connection. We look children into the eyes. We speak softly and only when needed.

WE BELIEVE IN CHILDREN'S INHERENT CREATIVITY

If we want children to discover that what they need in order to be creative comes from within themselves, we need to be absolutely convinced of this ourselves. If we doubt it, even implicitly, this doubt is conveyed to the children.



WE REALIZE OUR INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY

In order to accompany children in the Intuitive Painting Workshop, we need to realize that their creative freedom is greatly affected by adults.

Every adult, consciously or not, has an opinion on what is a beautiful creation and what not. Children, on the other hand, seek validation from adults, who are important and practically necessary to them. They are influenced by adults' opinions, both explicit and implied – let us not forget that children have a great capacity to sense the thoughts and feelings of people they care about.

If our attitude is conscious, we can limit or even eliminate our involvement in the natural development of children's intuition, enabling them to find their own, authentic voice.

DOES PRAISE REALLY HELP?

A usual adult tactic to encourage children that are painting is to offer them words of praise and enthusiasm. We need to keep in mind that a child who draws satisfaction from praise will work hard to earn more plaudits. Spontaneity and connection to intuition give way to an effort to paint “beautifully” or “correctly”. Praise distances children from enjoying the process and orients them to the outcome, increasing their fear towards it.

Then how do we support children’s creativity – especially in the long run?

Throughout the workshop, we show with our attitude that we accept and appreciate the child’s work; that we accept and appreciate the child himself/herself. We draw the child’s attention to the process – again and again.

And how do we react when a child actively asks for our praise him/herself – often repeatedly?

We look into the child’s eyes and tell them the truth: we are here to discover and to play, not to evaluate. We add our comments on the process: “I liked watching you paint so focused”, “I liked that you enjoyed what you were doing”, “I very much enjoyed your excitement when you added the yellow details”. Our experience has shown that, sooner or later, children completely stop asking for confirmation. The process of connection to their intuition has started.

Read more on the topic in Mikros Dounias’ booklet [“Praise vs. Recognition”](#).





WE DO NOT INTERFERE WITH OR JUDGE CHILDREN'S ART-WORK

Our role as facilitators of the workshop is not to "correct" the children or suggest changes to their work, since this can block their joy of discovery. A child that is being evaluated instinctively begins to self-censor, to hesitate, to think before creating. Creativity then becomes an intellectual activity; its source, and therefore its passion, are abandoned.

WE DO NOT PROMOTE COMPETITION

Often, parents and educators foster competition between children without realizing it. In the Intuitive Painting Workshop, we never compare the work of one child to another's.

WE DO NOT ADVISE CHILDREN TO COPY VISUAL TEMPLATES

In the frame of the Workshop, we dare to leave children without templates or references that they can copy. We want children to discover the power of personal expression, to practice relying on themselves and on their own infinite creative potential.

We do not need to worry or intervene, if a child is copying another child's work. He/she is temporarily following along the other child's journey of inspiration and will gradually find his/her own way.



WE AVOID TELLING CHILDREN *WHAT* TO PAINT, EVEN IF THEY ASK US

In the context of the Intuitive Painting Workshop, we do not ask the children to paint specific objects or forms. We know that, if they have specific instructions, they focus on the effort to follow them and distance themselves from their intuition: its needs, proportions, colors, and forms.

WE AVOID TELLING CHILDREN *HOW* TO PAINT, EVEN IF THEY ASK US

"Less technique, more intuition", claims Michelle Cassou, implying that art instruction overwhelms intuition. Based on her many years of experience, she claims that, when the time comes, children discover proportion and perspective on their own. They are capable of spontaneously developing the techniques they use often, which they discover by natural instinct. That is when their works become vibrant and original.

Each child perceives the world in their own unique way; as their body and mind develop, their perception of the world changes. This is clearly reflected in the artworks of every child that paints naturally.

"It took me a lifetime to paint like a child",
said Pablo Picasso.

TWO QUESTIONS THAT WE QUESTION

There are certain questions that adults usually address to children that are painting. They might appear natural at first glance, yet they significantly interfere with the creative process.

“What have you painted?”

In other words: “I cannot recognize what you have tried to paint, your depiction is not realistic.” Most of the times, before we ask this question, the child believes that what they have painted is recognizable. In that sense, our question may disappoint or hurt them. Besides, the artwork may actually depict something abstract. In that case, the question conveys to the child the adult expectation for specific depictions, distancing them from their intuition.

“Tell me something about your painting.”

Often, children paint what they cannot express with words. In order to respond to this request, a child has to violently abandon the world of non-verbal expression and activate a different brain function. Wanting to satisfy the adult who is asking, it is not unlikely that the child might invent an answer that has nothing to do with the actual creative flow, which has been interrupted.



Children open up a lot more when, instead of interfering with their work, we create an atmosphere that inspires safety and understanding. When they want to share something with us, they do – that’s when we experience feelings of real trust and proximity.

ABOUT CREATIVE BLOCKS

"I'm not good at painting" "I'm really bad at art":
The world is full of people with creative blocks, who find it difficult or impossible to express themselves through the language of painting. Children's inherent desire to express themselves creatively may be interrupted by an interaction that was hurtful, confusing, or made them doubt themselves. This can happen at a very young age and affect a person's creative expression throughout their life.

There are indications that can help us to identify creative blocks.

A child might have a hard time exploring, afraid of being "wrong"; they might insist on receiving specific instructions or something to copy; they might treat the process mechanically, as if it was an intellectual exercise. A child might feel or declare that their work is not pretty or realistic enough. Being unable to express themselves spontaneously, they might try to create something that satisfies or impresses adults.

According to both the literature and our observation in Mikros Dounias, one can be re-connected to their creativity through the Intuitive Painting Workshop. The descriptions in this booklet suggest an overall attitude, which can help tired, blocked children return to themselves and to the source of their creativity. We can take more targeted action, if we know or detect the source of the creative block.

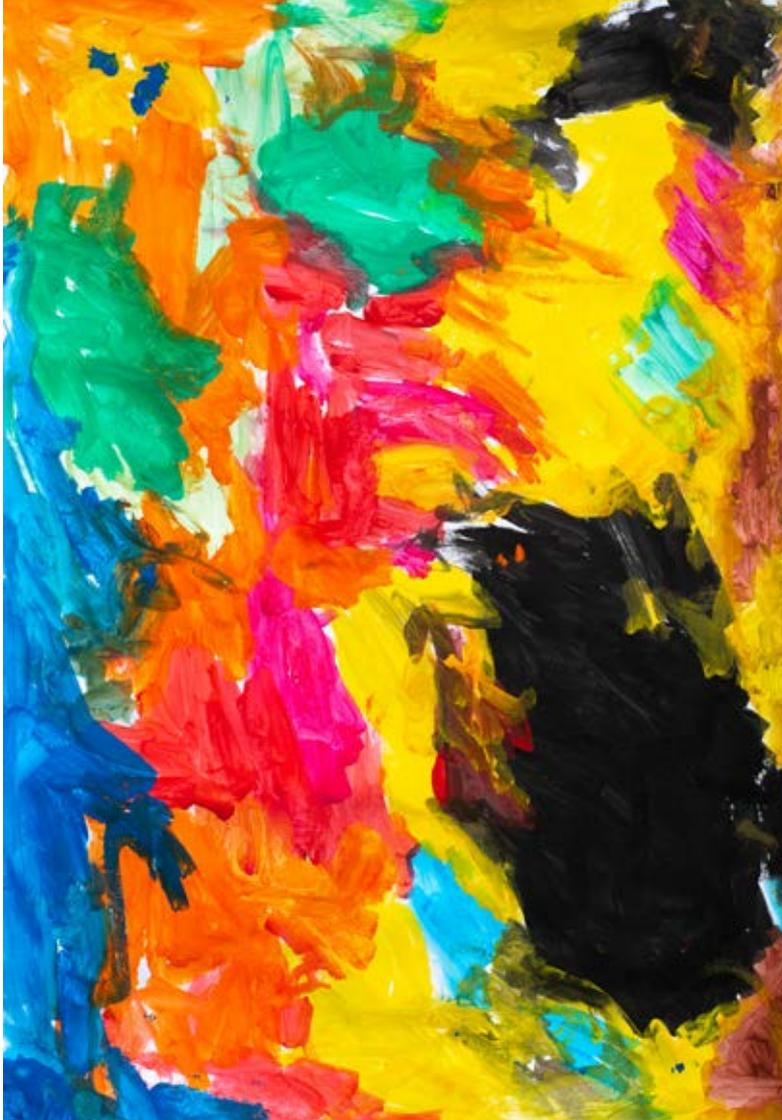


ON THE COMPLETION OF A PAINTING

According to Michelle Cassou, children gain access to real creation when they learn to finish what they have started. The more they work on a painting, the deeper they engage in their expression and the happier they feel.

Completing a painting is a very sensitive moment: excitement and eagerness for the next painting may be reduced, if the previous one remains unfinished.

A properly finished painting leads to feelings of completion and satisfaction, and hence inspiration for the next painting adventure.



There are no guidelines that tell us when a painting is complete – it depends on the child and the moment. We shall awaken our own intuition and carefully observe each child: Did they stop painting because they did everything that they could and wanted to, or because they do not know how to go on?

We can find suitable, playful ways to ask the child if they have used up their potential. This needs to be done with care and sensitivity, in a way that opens up possibilities. Whether something will be added to the painting or not remains the discretion of the child.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ARTWORK PRODUCED?

Arno Stern, the inventor of the method that inspired us to set up the Intuitive Painting Workshop, is very strict on this point. No external observer gains access to paintings created in his workshop. The paintings are not given to their creators; they are kept in personal folders which, upon agreement, can be used for research purposes. This communicates a clear message: the objective is for participants to act and experience, not to produce and demonstrate. We need to safeguard creativity in every possible way.

In Mikros Dounias, we embrace this viewpoint partially. We collect the children's paintings in personal folders and do not organize exhibitions. Yet, we wonder:

Wouldn't it be beneficial for the children to gain access to their early paintings some day? The authenticity of expression that characterizes them now might get lost over time, or as they enter higher educational levels. We think we might want to send the paintings to the children some years after their graduation from Mikros Dounias...

Besides, we took the decision to include twelve anonymous paintings of children in this booklet. Behind it lies our hope to inspire more people into intuitive painting.



Mikros Dounias