

BCATA JOURNAL FOR ART TEACHERS
VOLUME 60 NUMBER 1 2018

Reflections and Imaginings 2

BRITISH
COLUMBIA
ART
TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION

BCATA is a PSA of the BC Teachers' Federation





MYSTIC MOUNTAIN, CREATIVE STORM



Bill Zuk is a multimedia artist and Professor Emeritus in art education at the University of Victoria. As a co-producer of the film *Mystic Mountain*, Jay Larson contributed his skills and talents with animation, music and sound.

By Bill Zuk

Introduction

‘MYSTIC MOUNTAIN, CREATIVE Storm’ is based on a series of sketches, photographs and stenciled prints developed into a film exploring the beauty of visual form, the eloquence of poetry and narration, and the harmony of ideas born out of a unified storm of creativity (Leski, 2015). This involved a team of individuals who contributed their expertise as print specialists, language translators, voice producers, animators and sound and music specialists. Their efforts were important in showing how the traditions of print-making could be combined with digital artwork and developed into an art and technology collaboration.

What Makes Mountains Mystical

‘ONCE ASSOCIATED THE WORD ‘mystical’ with a description of Shangri-la, a hidden city on the edge of the Kunlun mountains in China. Shangri-la was described by Hilton (2004) in his novel *Lost Horizon* as an earthly paradise isolated from the outside world. It was the description of mountains lost in the mists of time that captured my imagination. My notion of the word ‘mystical’ evolved as I encountered the artwork of Chinese and Japanese masters (Van Briessen, 1962) who painted mountains swirling in a dreamlike atmosphere of clouds and mist. Surely, I thought, this must be the epitome of what is mystical. Elusive, wistful, dreamlike? That satisfied my curiosity at the time.

However, the drawings and paintings of Lawren Harris (Christiansen, 2000) and (Reid 1985) brought me closer to things I knew and experienced hiking in the Canadian Rockies. Harris’s ideas greatly added to my understanding and appreciation of mystical qualities. He believed that everything was inextricably linked in a cosmic movement of harmony and that mountains were sacred places with a celestial energy, a life force (Zuk in Sinner and Lowther, 2012). When I think of Mt.

Tolmie, an urban neighbourhood mountain where I hike each day, the stories of its origins are filled with tales of upheaval, ice age activity, and Indigenous presence. On one occasion when I experienced the tremors of an earthquake with bedrock shaking under my feet, I knew there were geological explanations for such events but perhaps there are other explanations about energies and forces best left to mystery and the realm of the mystical.

Protect and Conserve

THERE ARE MANY reasons for stirring my passions when it comes to the protection and conservation of special places in the natural environment especially when the balance of ecosystems are at stake. My desire to protect mountain ecosystems began in my artistic practice when the United Nations declared the International Year of Mountains (Zuk, 2003). This declaration emphasized the promotion and conservation of mountains worldwide. I was fortunate in becoming art-in-residence several years later at Numti-jah located on Bow Lake in the Canadian Rockies (Zuk, 2010). Here I was, surrounded by mountains and glaciers whose run-off fed into headwaters supplying precious water to the province of Alberta and the city of Calgary. My appreciation of mountains expanded as I began to understand their importance and relationship to rivers, ranch lands and urban populations.

While I was photographing or sketching mountains, glaciers, and lakes or constructing sculptural tributes, I felt a responsibility to share my thoughts about caring for Nature with hikers, tourists and employees at the park where I was artist-in-residence. This included conversations about key elements of the United Nations Earth Charter which says that we have entered a critical moment in the history of the Earth and that we must join together to declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community, and to future generations when matters of protecting the environment arise. Recent events of climate change indicate a 'shake-up' of earth environments with unprecedented storms, wildfires, and rising temperatures. To

offset some of these events, I believe we need to change the way we conduct our lives and the way we treat Nature. Boyd (2017) discusses the rights of Nature and indicates that the land was here first and should be accorded the same rights as humanity. There are several nations in the world who have recently adopted policies that push Nature to the forefront regarding decisions about sustainable development. Many changes are necessary for the protection of mountain areas and their ecosystems. Their care and protection is vital to our health and the wellbeing of the planet.

THE FILM

IBEGAN ORGANIZING A selection of my poetry, a wistful and dreamlike story about my relationship with mountains. This included sketches, photographs, and digital painting that formed the basis for a film. I also printed images using 23K gold stencil techniques to see how illuminated elements of the screen could be reintroduced into key areas of the prints. These explorations provided a strategy for exhibiting printed images, poetry and film together. The latest explorations of film (Zuk and Larson, 2017) include a comprehensive set of image development strategies: layering and serializing images, dissolving sequences, and animating scenes.

Storyboard

The storyboard is essential to the planning and organization process. It provides a master plan for matching the script with images, creating an orderly sequences for animation, and a blueprint for bringing poetic narrations

and soundtrack together. It also provides a quick review for checking the horizontal format of images, a 16:9 ratio or 1920x1080 format size required for screened purposes. High resolution images are essential for optimal screening.



Prologue

The prologue captures the mystery of mountains, their majesty and ancient past. Using English narration and a subtitled French translation, it invites viewers to gaze, reflect and imagine, and become immersed in the meditative and spiritual role mountains play in our lives.

Mystic Mountain

Mountains, those mystical wonders of the world with ancient stories told in sediment and stone, whose distant past reaches deep into the swirls of mist and time; mountains that connect us with the stars and the far reaches of the universe; holding us spellbound with their majesty and lofty heights; mountains where we can gaze and reflect and imagine, and lose ourselves in reverie. Let every child - let everyone have mountains in their midst.

La Montagne Mystique

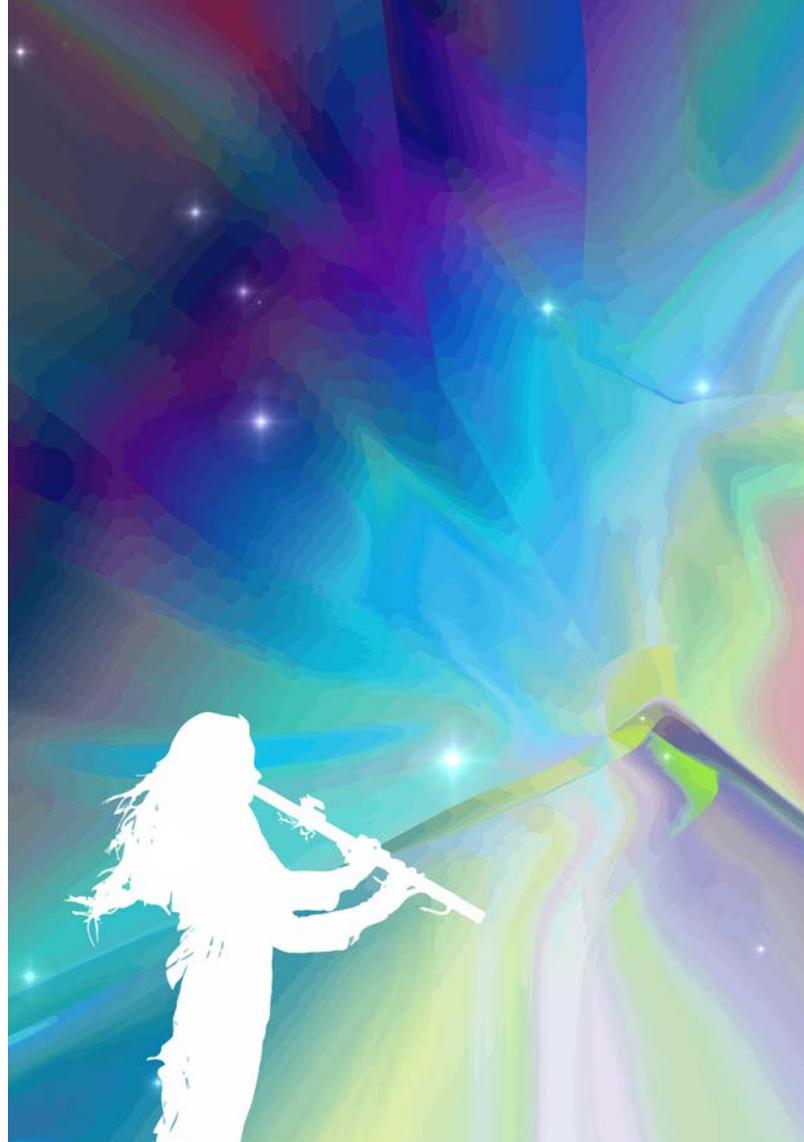
Montagnes, ces merveilles mystiques du monde qui nous offrent leurs histoires anciennes visibles en sédiment et en pierre dont le passé lointain perce profondément le tourbillon de la brume et du temps; montagnes qui nous relient aux étoiles et aux extrémités de l'univers;

Qui nous enchantent de leur majesté et leurs plus hauts sommets; En montagne on peut admirer, réfléchir et exercer son imagination, en plus on peut se perdre en rêverie. Permettez à tout enfant - à tout le monde de profiter des montagnes en leur sein.

SEQUENCE DESCRIPTIONS

The triangle is one of the oldest and most widely used symbols and in the symbolization of mountains, it embodies life and vital power. Appearing in an open space of subtle graduated blues with a bilateral, internal geometric structure of bluish purples, a mountain rises to the stars, an epitome of ascension and ethereal connection.





Silhouetted children in graduated colours turn their heads towards the skies and reach for rays of light in a scene of glowing stars and red-blue triangles (Zuk, 2013, 2014). This dreamlike cosmic setting with a human presence inspires us to think of stars and cosmic events beyond our reach; a passionate narration invites everyone to have mountains in their midst.

I was eager to create a sequence of artistic sensations, elusive dreamlike creations, inspired by stars and comets and midnight skies. Gliding birds that soared effortlessly in the wide open spaces of mountains also became an integral part of my poetry. As these scenes became translated into film, a white silhouetted flute player was added as a metaphor for calling everyone to the mountain. Hair blowing in the wind, the flute player invokes the mountain spirits with a haunting lyrical melody that floats through the air.

'Dream' stanzas were reprinted from *Wild grass mountain: The art of gazing and imagining* (Zuk, 2013).

I dream
Of towering mountains
With peaks
That touch
The sky.

I dream
Of stars and comets
And eagles
Flying high.

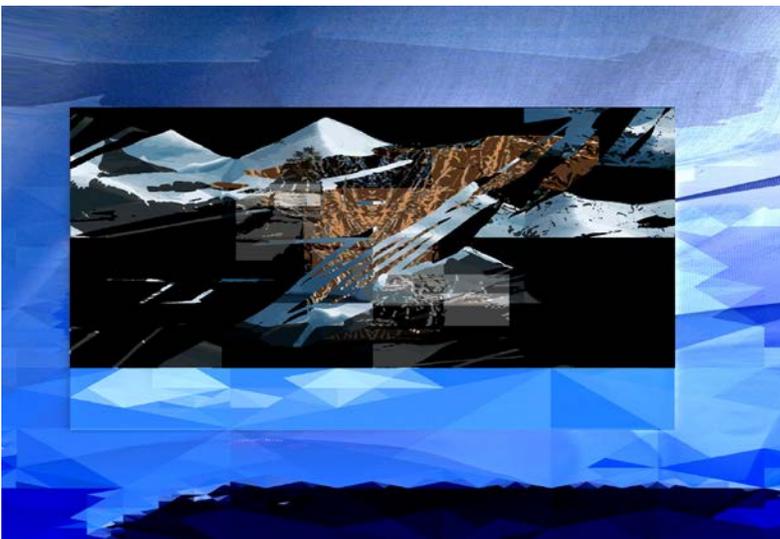
The mountain landscape shifts from vertical to horizontal in an animated scene that corresponds to the phrasing of the narration "stretch out to the sea". The music of the white silhouetted flautist calls to the moon and stars. Male and female narrators take turns in voicing ideas. Snow begins to



fall. Large and small flakes descend; flurries fill the landscape.

I dream
Of snow capped mountains
That stretch
Out to the sea.

I dream
Of all the places
That set my thoughts
Afree.



The voice of the mountain implores us to listen, a narrated whispered voice, hypnotic and endearing. Misty rectangular layers permeate the scene. The ice age, ancient cold and turbulent, dominates the landscape. Snow falls lazily in a blanket of white.

Mosaic images of rock and snow appear in a series of diagonal sloping scenes that correspond to the words of the narration. Slopes transform into an ice filled scene; a red-orange arch with a misty blue mountain is embedded in the snowy landscape. The beauty of the scene slows our thoughts, opens our senses, and sets the stage for becoming 'one with Nature'.

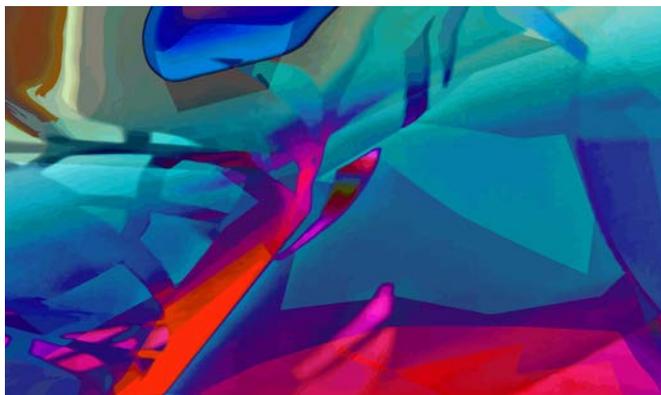


The mountain
Calls
With slopes
Of rock and snow
My mind
Lingers
In its beauty
My thoughts
Begin to slow

Waves of animated lines flow across the landscape, the wind incarnate. This movement is enhanced with the appearance of a red impressionistic tree whose leaves and branches scatter on a background of blues and greens. The scene changes as a backlit tree trunk pushes up into a red-blue landscape. Long, curving branches stretch to the periphery. The scene changes to another backlit scene with a slanted, impressionistic figure in deep red; creamy white flowing canvas textured garments stretch and twist in the wind. The sway of tree boughs is rhythmic and timed to the beat of the heart. Slow paced, relaxed, steady.

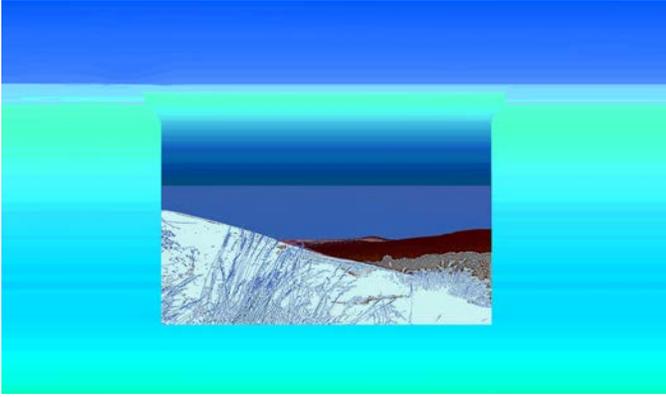
**I listen
To the wind
In trees
Their boughs
Swing to and fro
The rhythms
Of my heartbeat
Grow so ever slow**

A dream-sleep fog scene also slows our thoughts as we reflect on the swirls of mist and rolling fog billowing across the landscape. Barely visible abstract forms fly and scatter in the skies. A distant mountain captures our gaze and invites us to dream while we sleep.

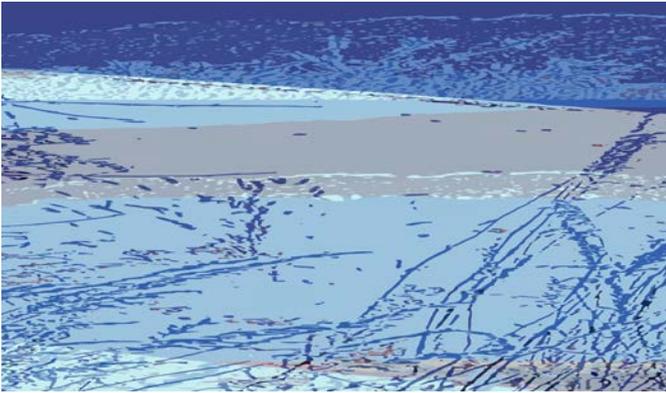


**I see
The streams
Of morning mist
Rising from the deep
I dream
Of billowing
Rolls of fog
Gathering
In my sleep**





The wind is ephemeral, here one moment, gone the next. It moves and shapes the environment; shifts our gaze, and even chills our bones. It bends tall grasses into submissions of humility; breaks seeds from stems, and flings them freely in the air. A window scene with mountain grass invites us to peer at the sky and into the distance. Our attention shifts to another scene of micro chips of rock and earth and bits of grass scattering in the air.



A spider clings to its web, laden with dew. The web strains and stretches with each breath of wind. The earth rattles in a chorus of drum beats rolling and rumbling in a thundering sky. Heavy rains pound the thirsty mountain landscape and droplets run down the screen. As quickly as the rain begins, it comes to a halt. A collage of rainbow shards sprinkle the skies in a welcoming show of brightness.



I hear
The swish
Of swaying grass
Bending with
Such ease
I see
A spider
Spinning threads
Weaving spirals
In the breeze



I hear
The rattle roll
Of thunder
Rumbling
In a cloud
And the patter
Of the raindrops
Growing
Ever loud



The mountain landscape glows in a scene of enchanted warmth and radiance; meadows embrace the lush growth of flowers. Our eyes focus on rich impressionistic colours and deep pollen interiors, accessible to the darting tongues of hummingbirds. The flowers are reminders of Georgia O'Keefe paintings (1977) with their magnified flowers inviting us to feast on the colours of Nature.

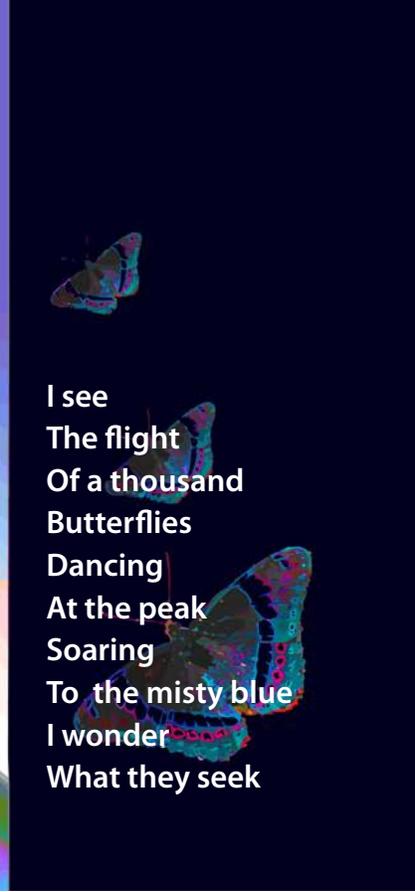
Purple camas flowers sway and flow in a summer breeze waiting for elders to signal the harvest of 'maana'.

Editor's note: The First Nations Lekwungen people have farmed camas tubers on the slopes of Mt. Tolmie for centuries.



I feel
The warming rays
Of sunshine
With flowers
Yellow, blue and red
Strengthening
Fond memories
Flowing
Through my head





I see
 The flight
 Of a thousand
 Butterflies
 Dancing
 At the peak
 Soaring
 To the misty blue
 I wonder
 What they seek

A sharp peaked triangle rises in a sky of graduated colours while a mysterious flute player calls a thousand Admiral butterflies to the 'dance of flight'. Why are they gathering? Where will they go? What will their destiny be? We are left to admire the iridescence of wings and the 'flickering flow of flight' that creates a moment of mountain magic.

Crickets call in the hushed evening; their voices fade as the light dims. Black as the night is bold, a pair of ravens nestle lovingly on a thin branch while nighthawks break the silence with whirring wings and whispered calls. We are invited to 'hear the night' and feel its stillness as daytime comes to a close.

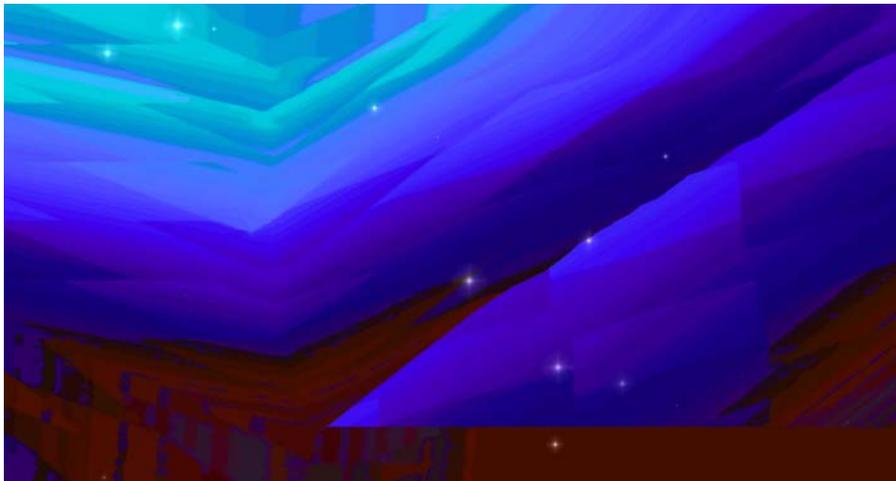
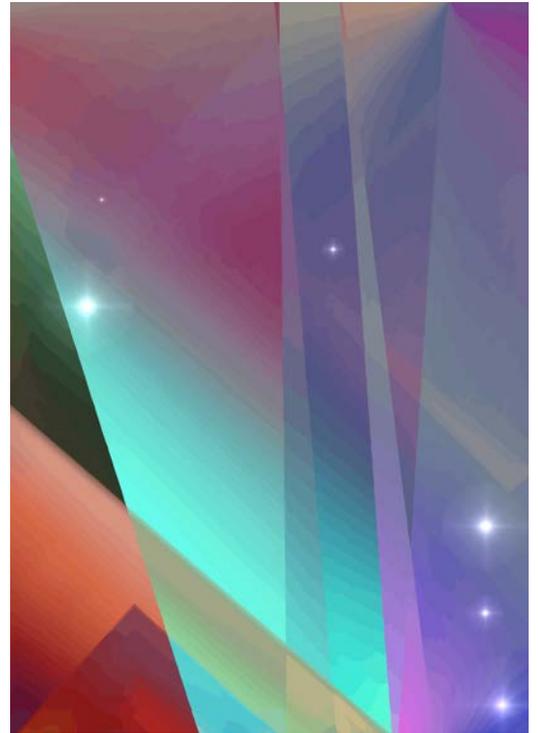


I hear
 The calming call
 Of night birds
 Bringing daytime
 To a close
 The whirring wings
 Of nighthawks
 Their air
 Whispers
 As it flows

Long rays of moonlight filter through the landscape; the mountain is caught in a colourful display of angled lights. A pinpoint glow of distant stars catches our gaze. One star fixes our attention, the keeper of all light.

I gaze
At beams
Of silver moonlight
Shining from afar
And rays
Of glowing starlight
From a very
Distant star

What can be more amazing than the dance of the Aurora Borealis over the mountain? Bathing the slopes with red, anointing the peaks with blues, northern lights fill the sky. And in the richness of angled colours, a collection of constellations twinkle and fade.



I see
The dance
Of the Aurora
And the glow
Of rippled light
And dots of fading
Twinkling
In the silence
Of the night

Stillness, a time to be revered. The sound track goes silent in this scene to emphasize a quiet moment. Feelings of awe flow in the quiet moments; the magnificence of the mountain is strong and majestic. Elusive raven shapes appear in a wash of illusionistic white and cream tones above twin red peaks. This dissolves into a snow sloped peak of creamy white with a giant fissure running from peak to base. Through rumbling upheavals and earthquakes, the mountain remains solid and endearing. The soundtrack continues to be silent in order preserve the still moment.





And in this
 Time of stillness
 My mind
 Is swept away
 To enjoy
 The quiet
 Of the moment
 Let the mountain
 Have her way

Atop the mountain, we sense the roundness of the Earth as it bends to the horizon and stretches to infinity. Human voices reverberate and echo from one soft blend of colours to another. Fluttering peace doves, wings outstretched offer protection. Moire lines running through the entire scene electrify the world with an invisible energy. Where there are doves, there is hope and where there is strong hope and determination, there is a chance for peace to prevail. While this notion is idealistic, I feel it is a pursuit worth cultivating.



May peace
 And calm
 And stillness
 Be found
 In every place
 May it stir
 Our hearts
 With fullness
 And fill
 The world
 With peace and grace

Epilogue

Mountains are one of the greatest spectacles on Earth and their presence deserves celebration. In a series of exhortations, we are urged to celebrate the glory and greatness of mountains. In one scene after another, a variety of bright, cherry topped mountains appear in fancy dessert glasses, reminders of the soda fountain era of yesteryear and vibrant pop culture in the mid twentieth century.



Come
 Come on
 Come on celebrate
 Come on celebrate the mountain
 Come on celebrate all mountains
 Come on celebrate
 Their glory
 And their
 Greatness

Eutierria

THE TERM EUTIERRIA means ‘good earth’ and I subscribe to aspects of this notion because it suggests an interdependence and symbiotic relationship with Nature. I talk about life forces in this article and becoming immersed in Nature. Others talk about the Earth having life or coming alive; a breathing force. How does we become ‘one with Nature?’ It means experiencing the offerings of the outdoors on a regular basis and becoming immersed in the sights, sounds, and aromas (Worthy, 2016, Zuk, 2013). This mingling of sights and sensations creates connection and a feeling of oneness that is uplifting and spiritually desirable.

Summary

WHILE THIS ARTICLE focuses on printmaking, poetry and collaborative film making, it should raise questions about the range and scope of art experiences garnered by students as they complete programs in the lower and higher grades. Will they have a broad range of in depth art experiences by the time they graduate and will there be opportunities for them to work individually and on teams?

The following questions are worthwhile considering as art programs are planned and organized:

- 1 Are there opportunities for students to experience the collective experience of collaboration and the benefit of working on teams?
- 2 How can art programs be structured to include interdisciplinary explorations i.e.: art and literature (poetry), art and music (sound production), art and drama (film narration).
- 3 What opportunities are available to balance art programs with outdoor experiences that include immersive explorations in Nature?
- 4 To what extent will art programs include age old art traditions and newer media explorations including experiences with the digital arts?
- 5 Will opportunities be available for multimedia explorations and in depth experiences that range from drawing, photography and graphic design to sculpture, film and installation?

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Appreciation

Special thanks to Jenn Whiteford Robins for voicing the opening narration, Brita Zuk for her part in voicing the prologue, and to Helen Money for the French translation. To Lance Gilson for his expertise in taking us through voice rehearsals and to Nancy Turner and Paul Marcano for their guidance. Finally, to Jay Larson for creating the animations and music that hold the film together. The input of numerous experts with many minds working together made *Mystic Mountain*, Creative Storm an enjoyable experience. ■