



About Art Student Reading Notes

Not many years after I left the University of Washington School of Art, one of my former students, Carl Chew, became interested in what was then a new technology, CD-ROM (also known as CD/Interactive). Microsoft had added CD-ROM publishing, starting with an encyclopedia, a productivity platform, a music encyclopedia, and children's art.

Carl and I thought, "If they can do that, we should make one for art students." We called it, "Art Student: Everything an art student needs to know." Between us, we thought there were things students needed to know that were not being taught. Or, if they were being taught, there was no encyclopedic collection. Between my professor's experience and his independent, boot-strapping artist's experience, we'd put all that on a CD-ROM.

Secretly, we hoped Microsoft would pick up on it. If they thought little kids would like their art activity CD-ROM and their parents would buy it, why not a disc for adults who go to art school and their artistic kids in college?

We considered the ins and outs of art supplies, techniques, and – most of all, survival after art school. Starting and sustaining an art career after college is not simple, and the professors in art school aren't as well-equipped to teach the realities of making a living outside the teaching profession. I should know!

Few student would get jobs teaching right out of school like me. Most wouldn't even apply for the few positions that opened up. An adjunct gig might turn up occasionally, but there was little chance of it lasting more than a year. Besides, adjunct salaries were notoriously low, and they were not treated well.

Therefore, Carl and I started out. I was in the process of writing a book, "The Art of Selling Art," based on my first few years after I left campus. My writing was based on books about selling everything from real estate to yachts, diamonds and ordinary pots and pans. I went to meetings and joined groups. My art sales increased the more I learned about marketing and selling – good lessons to include in our CD.

When finished and self-published my book, Carl said, “They ought to make this book required reading for incoming freshmen art majors!”

I agreed; but failings I saw in the universities I attended and taught, I believe in higher education, I truly do. I loved my job at the UW, and if it hadn’t been for the politics, I’d have taught 40-years. I couldn’t teach what students needed to know in our field – printmaking. I saw a sea change coming but the harder I tried to expand the curriculum, the more I was shunned.

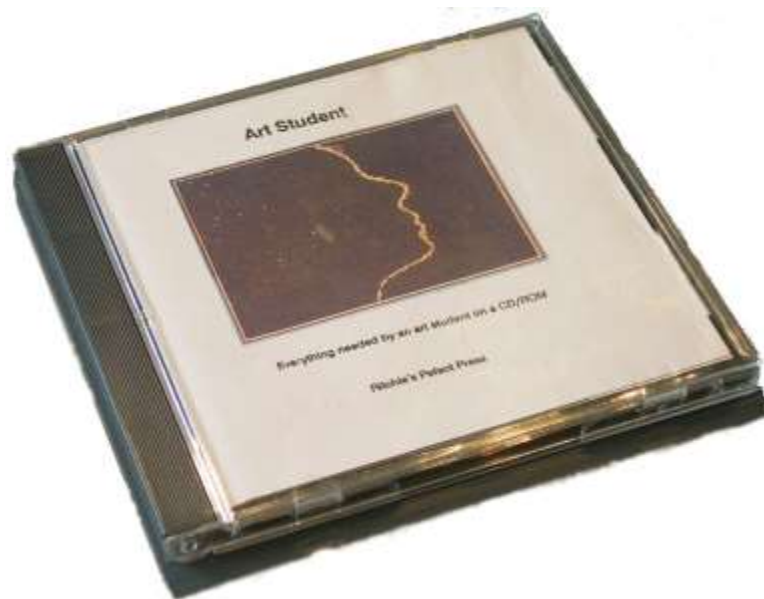
But I have digressed.

The thing about higher education that impressed me as a student and a professor is the intellectual parts. The study of art history, philosophy and even fields like psychology, technology, and engineering. Guided by my intuition, I continued reading and taking notes all through my career and to the present. It was a habit I developed in college and I never stopped. I made my reading notes on 3 X 5 cards. I have two boxes packed full of those reading notes – approximately 1,200 cards.

When I got an Apple computer in 1979, I began copying my handwritten notes on discs and converted them to PCs. Over time, all the notes I digitized were carried forward across different platforms. They’re on the cloud today.

They’re part of the Art Student project Carl and started in 1988. We never got far, even though Carl and I raised a lot of money to buy state-of-the-art computers and finance research. We attended conferences for CD-ROM authoring. We bought software and CD-ROM drives, as they were external devices to plug in. We bought CD-ROMs that came out.

We would need a lot of money and technical help. I attended venture capital meetings, carrying a plastic jewel-box package with a CD-ROM in it and color graphics labels. At these meetings, when we introduced ourselves in 5 seconds or less, I stood and made my pitch waving our CD-ROM package.



No one in the industry knew what I was talking about or thought the subject was worth exploring. Over a period of two years, Carl and I decided that if such a resource were going to be made available to

college art students, we didn't have what it takes. We had the support of our community; people who liked our idea (and our art) bought a fundraising portfolio to help pay for it.

The reading notes are the ones I used to show my students. I thought printmaking students should read and take notes. As while old printmaking traditions may not seem like it, they are the ancestors of all science, technology, and engineering; and mathematics would not exist without printing. I saw a sea change coming because of this ancestry thing, like print is in the DNA of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – what's called STEM now.

Printed pictures help. My reading notes contain essential proof of the concept, and I can call up the exact words on my computer, thanks to having digitized them back when computer became available to me.

Art Student was decades ahead of its time. It came to pass – but not on the CD-ROM. It bypassed that. The cloud and the Internet realized this dream of ours. If I didn't want to go online and try to find, for example, William M. Ivins' exact phrasing for a history fact, I can go instead to my reading notes on my hard drive. I can go to the Web and the cloud.

The personal benefit is great because I can – at 78 – go back and review what I was thinking by what notes I took from Ivins' books and others. It's like having a younger me to consult and I can interpret, weigh, and reconsider what was driving me on the road I traveled.

I'm indebted to many of my former students, like Carl, for giving me a reason to teach and, as they say, push the envelope, think outside the box, and explore new technologies. I'm glad I saved those 3 X 5 cards, although they're not all digitized; but I'm especially glad that I did digitize some of them.

Nellie Sunderland, our second daughter, works for our family to archive and update much of our intellectual property, completing the reading note in April, 2020.

Bill Ritchie, Seattle, May 11, 2020