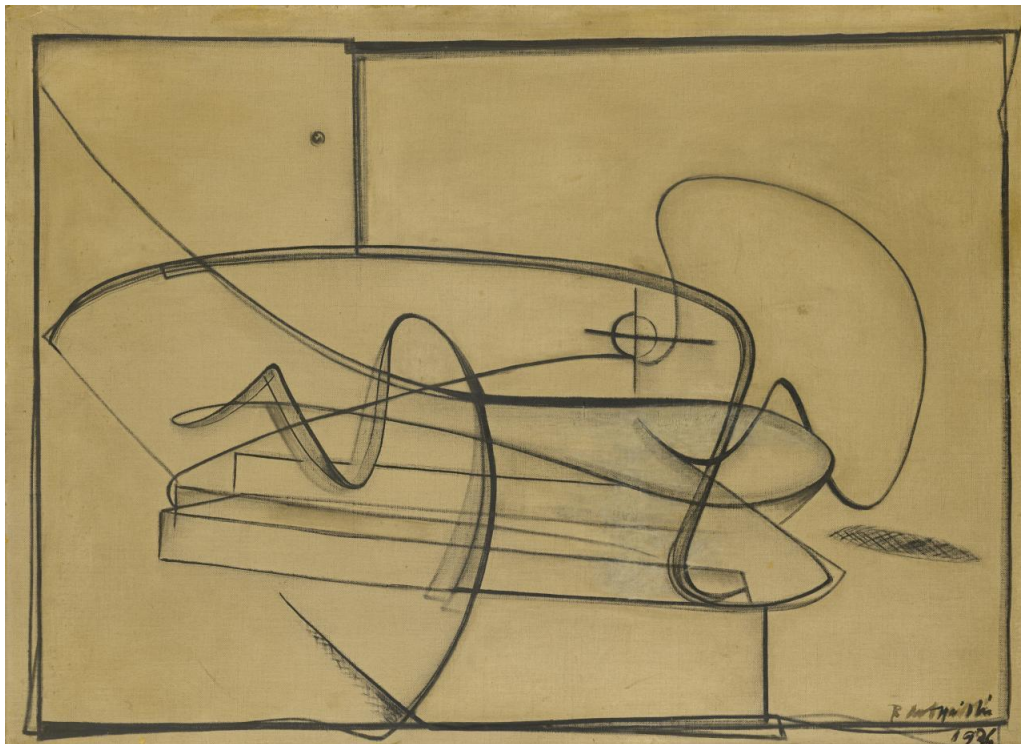


Q: In what way/s can artful, creative and playful experience promote engagement?

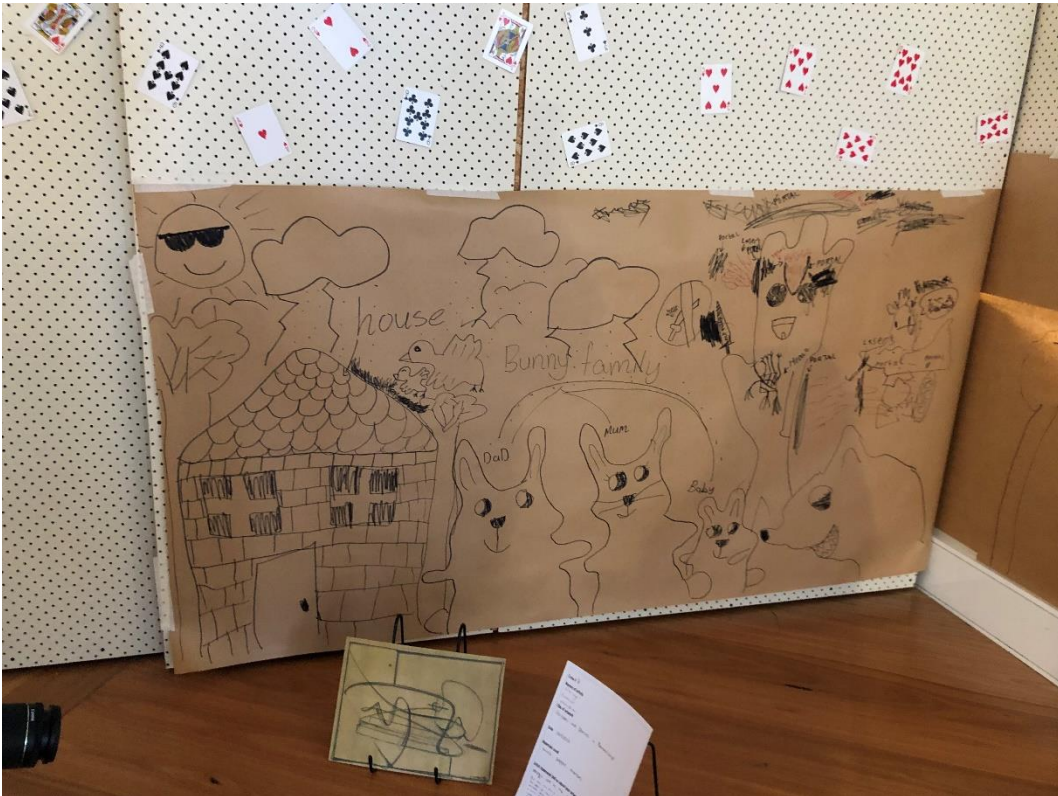
(Word count without question, introductory context template, in-text references and reference list: 2635 words)

INTRODUCTORY CONTEXT TEMPLATE

- Your Crew#: Lucky **Eight**
- Names of Adult Crew Members: Sana, Veronica, Exel
- Number of Children Crew Members: 3; Danny, Francis, Mischa
- Name of NGV Artwork & Artist: Abstract Composition by Roy de Maistre
- Thumbnail of NGV Artwork:



- Materials Used for Children's Day:
 - Wires
 - Colanders/Shadow Tins
 - Brown Papers
 - Playing Cards
 - Lamp light
 - Markers
- Thumbnail of Art Installations:



INTRODUCTION

Upon entering the Humongous Seed Vault, titled the Visual Arts Studio, our team warned the children team (CT) to proceed with caution and slip through a tunnel leading to a magical forest. The magical forest was actually a forest that could grow any creature from their imagination. However, due to a playing-cards barrier impeding the growth, the land became barren. We then requested them to inspect and find the Fragment of Growth (FoG) hidden behind the playing-cards to break the spell. Afterward, we asked them to blossom creatures to once more enliven the forest. Yet, we also provided a set of rules. Firstly, CT would need to “sculpt” their creatures by shaping the wires which were already connected with the shadow tins. Secondly, CT’s shaped-wires would have to be illuminated by lamplight to imprint shadows on the magical forest paper. They could “size” their creatures by uttering the incantation “go small” or “go big” to which, we would adjust the lamplight to. Thirdly, once CT was satisfied with the shape and size of the printed-shadow, they could realise their creatures onto the paper by drawing it using markers.

NARRATIVE

After listening to our premise, Francis and Mischa proceeded with caution, drooping their bodies as they walked and ducked into the tunnel, while Danny tended to walk leisurely through another route into our space before we directed him back on track. The CT then started to find the FoG amongst the playing-cards barrier. They spread and familiarized themselves with the cramped space, as they inspected each back of the cards. During their search, Veronica spelled a hint “It is behind the red ones!” Upon hearing this, the three became very pumped, screaming ‘red’ one after the other as they scanned the reds only, leaving the blacks untouched. Oddly, they already scattered on different sides of the space. Francis on the right near the lamplight, Mischa on the centre corner, while Danny on the left near the tunnel. One minute passed and poof! Mischa found the FoG. We then gathered the CT and briefed them on the magical forest re-growing program. That the magic has been re-released, thus, we can create and grow creatures again, as we explained the rules.

Once they understood them, they divided the space into two almost directly without a word. The boys grouped on the right side of the corner, while Mischa, the sole girl took the other side. Each of them initiated the wire shaping (sculpting) process to create the creatures energetically.

Mischa began by sculpting a human-like bunny. To which we reminded for her to adjust the bunny's size. She enthused "go big!", that point the bunny grew to larger, seeming satisfied, she poured through her drawing on the paper. As soon as she finished, she closed in and drew eyes, nose, and mouth without any command. She seemed so immersed that she trespassed the original creation, creatively embellishing it with sensorial factors to bring it to life. Thus, aligning to our ideas of creating creatures to enliven the forest. Afterward, she began sculpting another 'friend' for her existing bunny. Using the same method, she emerged her bunny friend. Both bunnies' hands connected, I wondered if she was going to make family, to which she responded by sculpting another bunny. Smaller in size, she uttered the magic word for a baby bunny. Ta-dah, a bunny family. "The bunny dad and mom have the baby bunny!" as I pointed on the first bunny then the friend before going to the baby. Having heard my remark, she gave eyelashes to the first bunny. "Ah! so the first one is the mom!" much to her nod. She is unexpectedly aware of the distinction between males and females.

On the other side, the CT boys were creating their respective creatures. Danny, a cat and later, Francis, a vertical-standing fish. Much to our surprise, Danny also embellished the cat after its creation, with Francis following his footsteps. All of a sudden, Danny became more absorbed as he added speech to the cat, opening up conversations with Francis' fish as it unexpectedly established a narrative. However, we know the story wasn't going to be all peace and merry when the creatures had beef escalating right from the start. Danny's cat's speech of being hungry was directly slapped in the face by Francis' fish's desire to eat the cat. There the war of sorceries arc began. Where the strangest, out of nowhere idea of the cat being a magic cat, which could generate explosives (TNT) arose; while the big fish being the antagonist magic fish who failed in sorcery. The war ended with the cat emerging victorious after deflecting the now blown-dead fish' magic of engulfing lava.

Meanwhile, when we took a closer look to Mischa's creatures, to our surprise, she had a big bad wolf grinning, its sharp teeth eyeing on the happy bunny family. It was then that we realized she was entirely into it, that she had correspondingly created a drama where a wolf antagonist character was ready to disturb the family's peace. Which means she was also conscious of the good protagonist and the evil antagonist. I asked Mischa were the bunnies to be eaten by the wolf. She immediately requested the longer wire and sculpted a big solid house to shelter her bunnies in.

On the other hand, Danny and Francis had done it again. Danny sculpted and made a big monster and its smaller minion while Francis unceasingly continued his comments on the story's progression. Both of them then concurred and established a narrative: how the monster woke up from its slumber ready to eat the cat for disturbing its sleep. However, they put their protagonist on a superior position once more, i.e. the one that saved the day by magically putting another TNT into the monster's mouth. The CT boys then began timing out as they start to free-draw the TNT's explosion.

On the contrary, the sole CT girl still seemed absorbed, she kept on inventing creatures. Clouds were her next ones. Yet, when she finished, we were astonished. It may seem normal, but it was extraordinary, as she had constructed a dramatic scene. The clouds were actually rainy thunder clouds. At this point, we were wondering if she was aware of the atmosphere of the drama she had created. Moreover, it was dumbfounding to find her bunny family completely secured in her drawing of a safety bubble-like umbrella, with no raindrops or thunders breaking through. This made us wonder if she held fast onto a certain belief in reality.

"I am done!" Danny shouted, diverting my mind from Mischa's work. He then started chatting with Francis. Not long after, there he went again, "I want to make some more!" re-discovering his engagement. He dove straight towards the paper for another free-drawing, but we halted him, asking him to recall the rules of the imaginative dimension he was in, thus, requiring him to follow the steps. He paused, scanning through the space, before moving closer to Mischa's paper, seeking for a longer wire. As he got it, he sculpted the fictional character Groot and imprinted it onto Mischa's paper. I was asking what Groot was doing there. However, it almost seemed like Danny realized the tension the wolf had against the bunnies, thus, wanting to intervene as an initiation to engage his story with Mischa's. Our belief was spot on as Danny drew a sword on Groot's hand, proclaiming its desire to fend off the evil wolf. Francis, seemingly drawn by the drama started drawing portals to indicate where Groot is coming from. Picking on this, Danny made another portal to connect Mischa's narrative to his and Francis' 'War' where the portal hanged just above the defeated fish and big monster. Yet, the FoG still laid on the floor. When we inquired what would the seed do, Danny picked it and pressed it onto Groot's chest, as he drew veins spreading out of it, "It is The Heart of Groot".

ANALYSIS

Young children are oftentimes seen to be having poor concentration. As they constantly get fascinated over one thing and another, leaving the activity they are doing behind. Even so, it may not be taken at face value, since children most of the times have their own *whatsits* which pique and engage their interest. An artful, creative and playful experience (CPA-E) is one of those. This essay will argue that CPA-E actually promotes engagement through a multilayered way of; entrancing concept and materials, freedom of creative art-making, also its connection with reality; in reference to the narrative account.

First of all, CPA-E can evoke an engagement through its novel and entrancing concept. To begin with, our CPA-E space's concept as a 'magical forest' drew them into borderline of magic, the point where reality's rules cease to function. This, coupled with its use of a tunnel to enter in, had inevitably position CT into conforming with our made-up world. Hence, CT was forced to put their creative imagination into play. This marked the initial bridging of CT's engagement which branched to two. Firstly, as CT was already aware of using their imagination to an extent as well as the concept 'forest', the immersive experience was no longer new, and would only awaken their previously-experienced knowledge to enter the imaginative dimension. Hence, our practice would only "activate prior knowledge", accomplishing Jablon's and Wilkinson's (2006, p. 3) engaging experience's characteristic which explained CT's immediate grasp of the premise. Secondly, as everyone eventually listened and followed the premise's direction, our CPA-E also fulfilled Jeanneret's and Brown's (2013, p. 32) engagement checklist of 'Taking In' where they attentively accept our premise and acted accordingly. Furthermore, not only that CT was willing to participate into finding the FoG, but they were also reactive to Veronica's hint by ignoring the blacks, ticking another check from Jeanneret's and Brown's list 'Putting In'. Nevertheless, the concept that followed was the pivotal factor to keep them focused, i.e. **the unconventional creation concept**. CT who could usually free-draw to create were then restricted into having to shape their creature through the materials (wires), prior to drawing. That disruption may actually pique their interest due to the concept's novelty as well as sharpen their creative imagination. As Jablon's and Wilkinson's (2006, p. 1)'s stated, "children begin life eager to explore the world around them", hence, it should be safe to assume that CT was as curious to try creating through such a brand-new fashion with unusual materials; not to mention that they were already '*in the zone*' of the imaginative dimension, making it even more enticing. Moreover, since the

prohibition of free-drawing required them different mechanics in creating, it could actually require a more concentrated imagination. As CT would have to physically invest themselves and materialise their imagination onto the wires before drawing their creatures. Therefore, this gave a broader opportunity for experimentations with the fluid materials.

Nonetheless, **freedom of experimentations and choices** was not limited to materials and “sculpting” stage only, as it kept expanding over to other subsequent art stages; maintaining, even empowering the engagement in its reference to **the creation concept**. Initially, **freedom** was only perceptible in the “sculpting” stage, as it can be seen from how CT freely crafted different creatures with each of its chosen attributes (i.e. Danny: magic cat, Francis: vertical-standing fish, Mischa: human-like bunny), disregarding the conventional animals. Yet, it was revealed that the art stage of “sizing” was potentially as experimental. It was apparent from Mischa’s utilisation of the magic word. She clearly manipulated and chose the size of her bunnies at will to fit her imaginations, both the first and the baby to grow big and small respectively. Even if the “drawing” stage may seem limited for having to follow the shadow’s lines, it may not be the case. Since, due to CT’s engagement with **the creation concept** and “drawing” being potentially expandable, new stages which contained an even larger room for **freedom** could actually emerge. The new stages were CT’s actions on expanding “drawing” by “embellishing” and ultimately adding “drama/story-telling”. From the narrative account, it was clear that we never ordered them to embellish the creatures nor that we demanded a story. Yet, taking an example: Francis got absorbed into his creature that he started ‘Taking On’ his own fish by free-drawing its eyes and other complementary attributes. In addition, each of them also had their own made-up narratives for their creatures, taking an instance: Mischa’s bunny family was about to be eaten by an evil wolf. As mentioned, these engagements could actually be fueled by **the creation concept** and **freedom** gearing together simultaneously to engage CT. Firstly, since in the concept, creatures were brought to life and always have a purpose; having blank shapes without sensorial factors were not proper living creatures. Moreover, since the creatures’ purpose would usually align to the creator’s (human) nature, i.e. to interact with one another; hence, may be their reason for embellishing and creating story/drama. Secondly, as Dissanyanke (1990, as cited in Brown 2015) stated that being able to experiment and choose what children wanted would

encourage their engagement; such multi-art stages with its each respective freedom to experiment and explore should be the major reason for engaging CT.

Our CPA-E's endless potential for choices and varying creatures and stories (i.e. which displayed Jablon's and Wilkinson's (2006, p. 3) engaging experience's characteristics of "allow for choice" and "nurture independent thinking", as CT could not only experiment in every stage but also decide individually to create their own creatures and narratives.) may had engaged CT 'On Task'. Nevertheless, our CPA-E was not perfect that it could slip through CT getting bored and free-drawing as an escapade to reality. Even so, I **argued** that CT was engaged through the space's overlapping-friction between the imaginative dimension and reality. Since, at that time, only the boys were free-drawing while Mischa kept 'On Task' without break. She instead, submerged deeply, creating rainy thunderclouds to capture the atmosphere of the ongoing drama. The raindrops and thunders, however, did not touch the bunny family, as they were safeguarded by Mischa's protective-bubble. Heinemann (2013, p. 150) stated that the space-used was transfigured through theatrical intervention which sensitized and implemented the participants' daily-lives' features in variation. From these accounts, we could see that Mischa may be sensitized to her reality concept of 'family', associating it with safety protection from a difficult situation, which explained her bunnies' security. In addition, the **argument** was also supported by Danny's subsequent 'Time Out'. During the 'Time Out', Danny was seen "scanning through the space" after we told him to "recall the rules of the imaginative dimension he was in". It could be that Danny was out to reality in that process; recognizing how cramped the space was (the space engaging him) and possibly absorbing essences of "collaboration" and "group work", were then his **freedom of choice** drive when he re-engageddo the dimension, experiment and made Groot i.e. to combine Mischa's with his and Francis' narrative arc through Francis' help of making the portals. As this resonated to Jablon's and Wilkinson's (2006, p. 3) engaging experience's characteristics of "promoting group interaction" and "encouraging collaboration". This was also supported by Brown's (2015, p. 10) account that children's engagement would wane without challenge. Hence, Danny must have found another challenge: in working collaboratively. It eventually revolved to the FoG that they had found; finding nowhere to piece it, Danny took the lead and "pressed it onto Groot's chest, as he drew veins spreading

out of it, “It is The Heart of Groot””. Therefore, their joint artwork may return to the root concept of creation and growth, signifying their engagement.

In conclusion, this essay has argued that CPA-E promotes engagement through a multilayered way of; **the unconventional creation concept** and unusual materials, **freedom of choice** in creative art-making within every art stage, also the **argument** of overlapping-friction between the imaginative dimension and reality; in reference to CT’s experience with our CPA-E.

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