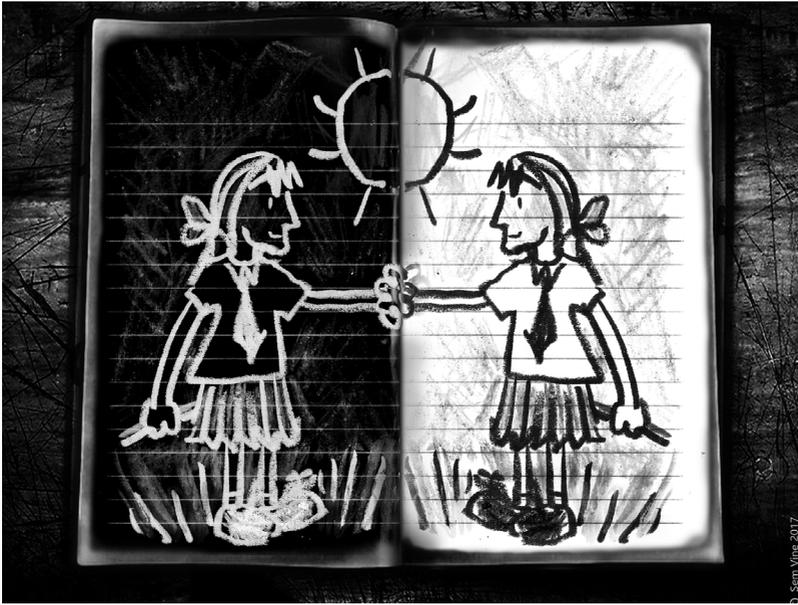


Being and Learning SEM VINE

Some time after a microcosmic Big Bang, much less than a tut on the lips of the universe, I can recall a sense of beginning. The state of things then, as my present Being reflects on that somewhat murky awareness, amounts to one of the inseparability of Being and Learning. Each was each-Other, neither claiming independence, neither naming themselves, but moving together as 'I am'. Time mattered less than matter, and space meant room to explore. Freed by innate content and adaptability, the callings of mind and body, intuition and curiosity, ventured somewhat erratically together, experimenting with error and success. Fingers were burned by forbidden hot things and plants squeezed their stinging fluids into them; dark mud oozed through them, moulding its shape into creatures and marking all that was clean.

As Time secretly counted these halcyon days of temperate adventure, Time announced its significance, and began to matter. The day came for delivery into the spacious halls of instruction, where the blood of generations was centrifuged and separated by measure and, in those days, even by sex. Here, time was to order, to stream the stream of consciousness, to fulfil quantitative requirements, to be qualified and distributed, to be set on a designated course. Here, learning became publicly owned and was named the law of nature. It was lifted out of Being as principle and purpose, confined to matter, to specified time and place, to ink and books, remembering and repetition. We marched an arm's length apart, sat in regimental formations, and were taught by the venerable Sirs that everything within these walls was the inarguable truth. Being moved in its shadow, quarantined beyond by its incongruous haphazardness. It was play, pastimes and parties, friends and fun, laughing, crying and love, all the encounters of disordered spirits, of sensual embodiment, of wildernesses.

In my Now, after more than three years' of a liberal arts study that is underpinned by the exploration of what it is to be human, I view this particular history, this fabricated duality both singular



and collective, through that frame. For many of my peers such regimental rigidity, compared with the fun and freedoms of the world outside, cultured a distaste for school. It blurred the fragile distinction between the disciplined institutional structure of formal education and what Learning is itself. The fortunate child finds, if unknowingly, a way to overcome, to reconnect Being and Learning, a portal through which to love both, so that structured Learning makes new sense of the Sensible, to learn while being, and so that Being is allowed to continue to be curious, to Be while learning. This is the raising one's eyes above the parapet to view a more complete, if complex, landscape of Being. For myself, I realise that which lifted me high, bridging the space between, was drawing, but it might equally have been studying the bones of dinosaurs, the dynamism of machines, flora, or the planets and stars. Unlike writing and apart from the schematic diagrams elaborating science, drawing was largely free of responsibility, of measurement and mark. It brought subjectivity to sense, connect and imagine. It resurrected histories as I drew longboats with Vikings in wool and furs, or steam trains with Victorians in their crinolines and moleskin. Drawing illuminated past, present and future, breathing life, my life, into an impersonal curriculum, infiltrating the borders of Learning's official domain with the vibrancy of Being, becoming the secret teacher, the solitary thinker within its walls.

Through it, Learning's formal world intimated an emotive pulse. Drawing broke an ordered page with colour and brought moments of light-humoured affinity, if brief as a smile, between student and teacher. Being's vital and imaginative inquiry revealed an unreality of ritual observance, proving it brittle and glassy.

Modern Liberal Arts has expanded on the traditional inclusion of art as that of an orderly musical mathematics. Its holistic programme, reborn through the throes of twentieth century revolutions, realises that the arts, which Plato condemned as deceptive 'natural magic' are a natural magic condemned at a loss. The child that I was was oblivious to the potent potentiality that drawing introduced to the structured tasks she was given. She was unaware that its native activity was a soul-forming matter which promised to continue into her adult professional life. At 54 I have drawn in many mediums for many people, from museums to musicians, and of course, for myself, but it has been, it is more than a life of simple illustration. Art is a way to understand and be mystified, to observe and explore, to empathise, to find oneself both at home and at odds, to connect with the world's vitality, to feel a bond within it and communicate, to work with the awareness of a vital freedom to inquire and a discipline, if ultimately transiently, to resolve. And this is similarly where liberal arts seats its beating heart as a finder and opener of doorways, as a doorway itself through the asking of humanity's boldest questions. Through undertaking its study, my personal practice, my person, has become aware, informed, has come to know itself, a Self and its Why better, peppered with regret it had not been sooner. Here, for this contribution, the opportunity to reflect on the young stranger I was is to find a past Self-not-yet-departed, for that Self and its experiences still shape me, a being who continues to Be while Learning, and to Learn while Being.

Sem Vine considers art and creativity as a valuable force which permeates every facet of human life. Working for many years as a professional artist in various media for museums to musicians as well as for her own research has enabled her to explore a plethora of subject matter from spirituality to space. As part of the journey integral to her personal and professional work, she graduated from the University of Winchester with a First Class Honours degree in Modern Liberal Arts in 2016, where she was also awarded the MLA Prize 2016 for her dissertation, Art, Alchemy, and Education.