Janet Fine

Arts & crafts was always my favorite part of school and camp. Art was woven into my daily life: drawing while waiting for food at a restaurant, coloring or sharing my chalkboard with my cousin, making homemade cards for everybody for any occasion, and more. I painted t-shirts for gifts, did tie-dye and leather work at family camp, created bean and grain mosaics, and made a felt-on-burlap mural depicting Icarus flying too close to the sun… In the same closet lived all kinds of creative toys, from early Legos and Lincoln Logs, to tile mosaic, Spirograph, Lite Brite, and stencils, to wood-burning and whittling kits.

The creating with “anything I can get my hands on” started early and never stopped.

I also had an early desire to photograph. I remember the delight of capturing snippets of my world with my little 110 camera, and the anticipation of receiving those grainy images with the rounded corners. I loved to see the world interpreted through the lens of a camera. Through the images I could discover details, relive the moment, and save it for another day. My father had an old 35mm rangefinder camera and I remember wanting to document family vacations and events with him, but always getting shy when it came to photographing people other than our immediate family.

Other art memories that stand out are:

• A favorite gift: A huge set of Marvy markers, all lined up in a continuum of color loveliness… for my bat mitzvah (forget about pens, candle-holders, and checks)

• A cause of inner conflict: In a painting class outside of school, I had been working on a large tiger head with a lime green background and the teacher came over to help. She did some brushwork on the roaring open mouth that transformed it. She made the mouth look real. That tiger hung in our living room and every time it was complimented I felt shame and guilt.

• An outstanding primary school activity: Mrs. Dorn would play pieces from classical music—Grand Canyon Suite, Peer Gynt Suite, and the Nutcracker—and we would draw as we listened to the music. When we finished each suite the drawings would be compiled in a book with a cardboard cover that we would cover with starched-down tissue paper. Just remembering the joy in getting captivated by the music while drawing and painting makes me want to revisit that exercise now.

In my more contemporary creative explorations I have sometimes turned to media of my childhood; particularly Shrinky-Dinks and rice, bean, grain, mosaics. In working on art for this exhibit I let myself truly embrace those materials and more, exploring all the different crafts that rose to the surface of my mind. As I kid, I seemed to be fascinated with things that could harm a person—black widows, rattlesnakes, tidal waves—the vulnerability of childhood. Inspired by that and the Safety Book… I played.

I was nurtured, supported, and praised, but the desire to create definitely came from within. I feel lucky I had the room for it to flourish. I do wonder how much my aesthetic was shaped by olive green shag carpet, a pink stovetop, a bit of hoarding, folk music, lots of humor, and love.