

**Natasha Reid**

Doctoral Candidate and Instructor  
Department of Art Education  
Concordia University  
[natashasreid@yahoo.ca](mailto:natashasreid@yahoo.ca)

**Abstract:** This paper explores the processes involved in and the revelations that surfaced during an arts-based reflective examination of my beliefs and practices as an art museum educator and researcher. The process began with an imagined narrative in which I envisioned my future museum education office. This visualization was then translated into an art installation. The materials used in the artwork are analysed here for their potential contribution to my evolving museum education philosophy. The discussion is grounded in arts-based research practices and examines the potential value in utilizing such practices in museum educator training and development amidst the currently expanding role of the museum educator in the museum institution and in society.

**Key Words:** Museum education, arts-based research, reflective practices, installation, narrative inquiry, audience, comfort, play, constructivism, emplacement.

## **Creatures of Comfort: Installation as Reflective Practice**

### **Introduction**

Museums<sup>1</sup> are institutions that mingle the theoretical with the sensorial—the conceptual with the material. The body is compelled to interact with artworks. We move around works, we scan and examine with our eyes and imagine (or in some cases actually experience) their tastes, textures, smells and sounds. In other words, we are confronted with the materiality of the art objects in the museum. Olga Hubbard (2007) asserts that “unlike the contents of written texts, artworks present themselves as physical (or virtual) entities that exist in the same space as we do” (p. 47). She refers to a sense of immediacy in viewing artworks, where there exists “a physical, sensorial, and often emotional engagement that precedes the conceptual” (p. 47).

As a museum educator and doctoral student researching the contemporary reality of museum educators, I believe it is essential for me to continuously reflect upon my beliefs and practices relating to museum education. Because of the incredibly tactile and sensorial aspect of museum education, gathering and examining meaningful materials as a starting-point for developing a museum education philosophy would appear to be a potentially appropriate and enlightening process. In order to experiment with the potential value inherent in such a process, I decided to examine my beliefs and practices relating to museum education through gathering material objects that I feel are imbued with meaning. I chose to examine the objects that I imagine I would include in my future museum education office and to explore why I

chose these objects. I began with creating a reflection, using imaginative narrative inquiry, in which I visualized the office I would have in the future and the objects inside. The following is the text that resulted:

I walk into my office in the morning with a cup of green tea, freshly prepared in the staff kitchen. The bright colours of my office communicate with my commonly vibrant attire. The tranquil scent of the lavender oil that I diffuse each day in the space still lingers from the day before. I light a few candles to provide a soft glow. The computer is lightly humming. As I wake it from its sleep with a gingerly stroke, I select my favourite playlist. One-by-one, Nouvelle Vague, Feist, Yann Tiersen, Cocorosie and Air take their turns filling up the room with soft ambient sounds. I peruse my in-box for any interesting or urgent additions. The unsightly pile of art education and museum-related articles glare at me. I think about filing them, but then reassure myself that this seeming disorganization is actually the best way that I work—a method to my madness. I glance at my bookshelf that is filled with references to my past studies—art history and art education books, and my master’s thesis. Prints of my mother’s paintings and images of my partner, parents, brother and cat surround me. A few children’s toys are interspersed throughout the room, taking on lives of their own. I place myself in my ergonomic turquoise-blue chair. I get myself comfortable. I inhale through my nose, expanding each of the spaces between my ribs. I exhale through my mouth, letting the space decrease as much as possible. I repeat this a few times, smile and start my day as a museum educator. (Fictional Personal Reflection, November 2008)

### **The Installation**

This fictional narrative links to and sheds light on my beliefs and practices related to museum education. In order to further develop and concretize the links, I developed a visual representation of this narrative, embarking on a journey through arts-based research. Graeme Sullivan (2006) asserts that arts-based research is “used by those seeking to broaden forms of inquiry that can take advantage of the way the arts offer unique insights into the human knowing and understanding” (p. 23). He maintains that this type of research values the “multiplicity of ways of encountering and representing experience, and the use of forms of expression that can effectively communicate these phenomena” (p. 24, 25). My arts-based research questions became: how can I artistically represent an examination of a narrative inquiry into my beliefs, interests and practices associated with museum education?; And, what insights will the material manifestation of the narrative inquiry reveal? I needed to gather the objects cited in my imagined reflection—to feel them, to study them and to present them to an audience. I began to collect objects that could represent the artefacts referred to in the narrative. Each found object was imbued with a slew of meanings, memories and emotions.

This was a site-specific work, placed just outside of the Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA) Gallery<sup>2</sup> at Concordia University, where I recently held a contract internship. My role as the educational assistant intern at the FOFA Gallery was to research the educational practices of similar sized galleries, to develop an educational policy, to establish relationships between the gallery and a variety of audiences and to develop and implement educational programming.

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008, I set up my materials in a corner in front of the FOFA Gallery. I decided to house the objects in a structure that would represent my imagined museum office. In order to refer to the transient nature of my temporary, contractual museum education positions, I chose to use a tent. The tent became a symbol of the ephemeral characteristic of my contract positions, along with the feeling of emplacement attached to having each position, no matter how fleeting this feeling may be. I began sewing ribbons—a common accessory that I wear—to the outside of the tent.



Figure 1. Natasha Reid, *Creatures of Comfort*, 2008 (IKEA tent, ribbons, teas, hot water canister, tea cups, candles, diffuser, lavender oil, paper documents, posters, photographs, post-it notes, pens, highlighters, CD Player, CDs, finger puppets), 120cm x 120 cm x 95 cm. **Except where otherwise noted, photos are by the author.**

Ribbons were also sewn into the ceiling of the tent in order to hang images of my family members and prints of my mother's paintings. As I crawled into the space, the hanging images would shift with the air currents produced by my body's movements, providing a playful and interactive effect.

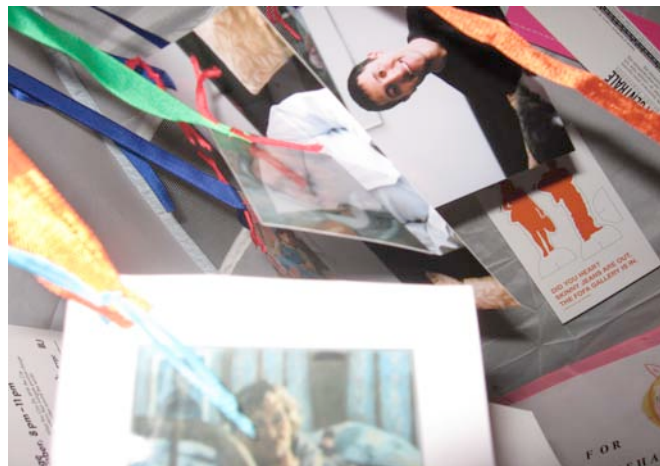


Figure 2. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail).

References to the galleries and museums where I have worked and conducted research were strewn throughout—piled on the floor and attached to the walls. The most prominent reference was to the FOFA Gallery, with the intention of alerting audiences to the site specificity of the work. My museum education-based Master’s thesis along with the related field notes and key literature were placed on the ground of the tent.

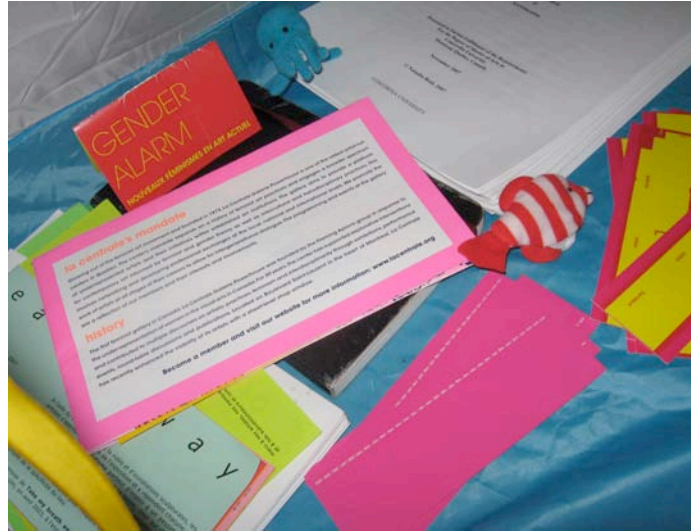


Figure 3. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail).

Teas, candles and lavender oil were included in the space, providing a comforting and tranquil atmosphere.



Figure 4. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail).

Photocopied versions of the spines of books that I consider to be important to my museum education research and practice were hung on the walls of the space.



Figure 5. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail)

A portable CD player and two CDs containing my favourite music were available for listening.

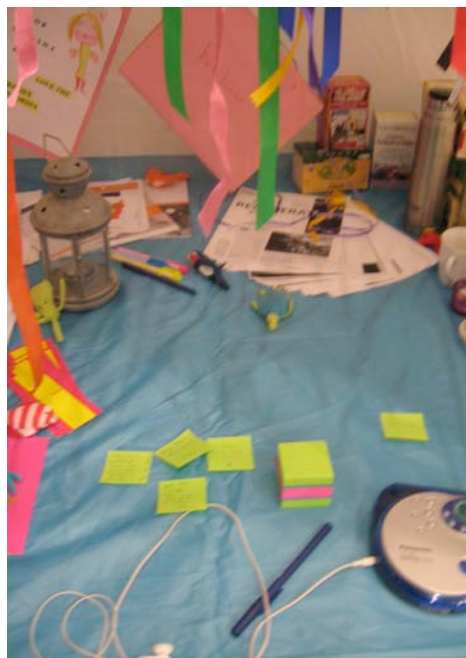


Figure 6. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail)

I attached an artist's statement to the wall adjacent to the work in order to provide the audience with the context surrounding the installation and a glimpse into what the work means to me. Small post-it notes and pens were provided in order for visitors to communicate with me and to contribute to the installation.



Figure 7. *Creatures of Comfort*.

After adding the final touches to the installation, I realized how much this material version of my reflection presented the aesthetic and sensorial experience I had when developing my narrative, capturing my feelings and imaginings at the same time. It became clear that this tactile version of my written reflection was more engaging, sensorial, emotional and physical than my written reflection—it spoke to me and for me in a way that the written word could not. Both the written work and the visual work told stories. These stories supported each other, deepening each other’s meaning—the textual strengthening the material and the material strengthening the textual. The creation and experiencing of art is intimately connected to narrative. That is, artists and audiences view stories, imbue stories and reconstruct stories when interacting with an artwork. Thus, there is a strong link between narrative inquiry and art, and between art and narrative inquiry. Graeme Sullivan (2006) eloquently elucidates this in stating, “while the mode of communication is language-based, the means of representation invoke many artistic forms that are used to capture, reflect and inquire into the multiple textural realities being explored” (p. 23). The artistic representation of my narrative supported and expanded my story, enabling me to research the connections between the objects and my beliefs and practices associated with museum education. Thus, the artistic process and product became material forms of research into my beliefs and practices relating to museum education.

## **Comfort**

The tent structure is the most prominent feature of my imagined museum education office installation. Tents are temporary protective structures that can be constructed and dismantled rapidly in order to be reconstructed in new settings in the future. Each trip offers new stories that are infused into the fabrics, layering themselves into each new situation. This is the reality of my experience as a contract museum educator—I move from one gallery or museum to the next, bringing my knowledge and experiences in my ‘backpack’ and setting up my temporary office to provide me with a comfortable home base.

It quickly became evident that this attempt to create comfort was the primary feature in my artwork. This led me to title the work *Creatures of Comfort*. All of the artefacts that I placed in my transportable tent are objects that I find comfort in being around. This is not surprising to me, as my vision for museum education revolves around comfort. That is, my primary aim as a museum educator and museum education researcher is to discover and implement methods to enable diverse audiences to experience emotional comfort in museum settings, where they feel at ease in embarking on a learning journey. This is not to say that I am opposed to promoting pedagogical discomfort. Rather, I encourage the challenge that learners are faced with in situations causing dissonance, where they attempt to remedy the discomfort in order to reach a level of consonance—which results in learning. What I do believe is that individuals have a greater potential for learning when they are emotionally at ease in a learning situation—where they feel connected with their environment, the educator, their fellow learners and the information. As Falk and Dierking (2000) put it, “humans are highly motivated to learn when they are in supporting environments...when they are freed from anxiety, fear and other negative mental states” (p. 32). *Creatures of Comfort* connects to three ways I have attempted to achieve this in my past research and practice: through drawing upon education-related memories, through emphasizing the value of play and through encouraging emplacement by establishing connections to what I consider to be home.

## **Memories**

*Creatures of Comfort* incorporates a number of important education-related memories—from my early childhood through to some very recent experiences. Photographs of my mother’s artworks dangle from the roof of the tent. These paintings and drawings were fundamental components of my becoming an artist and art educator. My studio practice developed at an early age through mirroring my mother, who was a professional artist at the time. We painted, drew, sculpted, created storybooks and visited museums and galleries. I am comforted by my recollection of these experiences—the warm room where we would create, the smell of the paints as we dabbed water into them, the pencil shavings, the grit of the thick paper and the possibilities associated with colour mixing. These moments have become primary sources of motivation in my teaching, creation and research practices.

The inclusion of books and articles related to art education were chosen with care. Each manuscript included in *Creatures of Comfort* contains aspects of my teaching philosophy and research interests, including: collaboration, inclusive practices in the museum, partnerships, embodiment in art education, active learning, community outreach measures, and theoretical work on early childhood art education. These ideas are floating in my mind, hovering in anticipation for me to call upon them when required. I am comforted in knowing that these scholars are in a sense standing beside me, lending me their knowledge and experiences. These documents provide me with a sense of security, as I know that I can draw upon their knowledge in new learning experiences. Included in these papers are my master’s thesis and my notes and documents that were developed and collected during my terms as the educational assistant at the FOFA Gallery, research intern at the Canadian Centre for Architecture,<sup>3</sup> and educator at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse<sup>4</sup>. These manuscripts represent invaluable educational experiences. When I view these documents I am filled with memories of steep learning curves, the development of relationships, and the continuous maturation of

my teaching philosophies and practices. I am comforted in having these documentations of my past academic and professional successes. They remind me that I am proud of my accomplishments, which reassures me of my value as a museum educator and researcher—the knowledge, qualifications, experiences and qualities that makes me an effective and progressive practitioner.

This is further emphasized by the site chosen for the installation—which was in a corner across a large window from the entrance to the gallery where I was most recently employed. During the installation process, fond memories of my summer internship at this gallery surfaced. To add to this, the employees of the gallery conversed with me throughout the set-up, recalling experiences and catching up. At one point an employee asked me to have a cup of tea with her. Over this warm drink, we partook in a tranquil moment together, reminiscing about shared memories from the summer. Thus, the site was an essential component of the artwork, as it was filled with comforting memories and past relationships that are intrinsic to my identity as a museum educator.

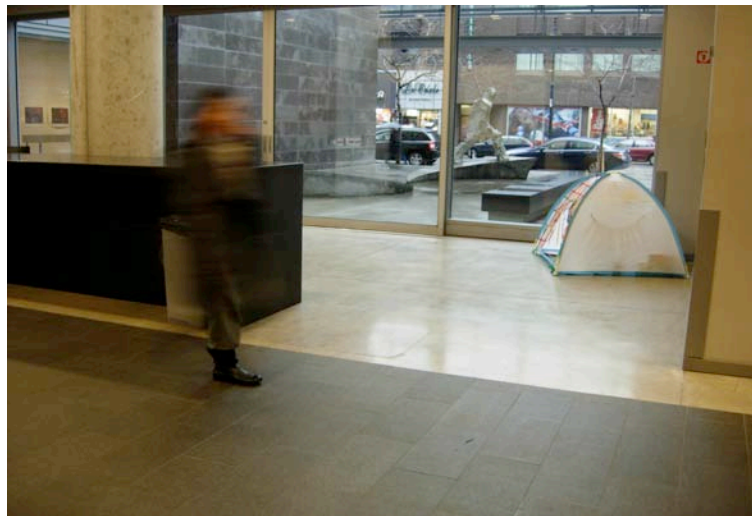


Figure 8. *Creatures of Comfort*. Photo by Kathleen Vaughan.

Incorporating these objects and this space in my imaginary museum education office was a way for me to recall educational memories that are essential to my beliefs and practices as a museum educator. This use of objects and spaces that reveal past memories of education-related experiences and acquired knowledge can be viewed as a metaphor for constructivist educational theory—a powerful force in my teaching philosophy. Hein (1998) elucidates that constructivist learning involves the active participation of the learner and an acknowledgement that conclusions reached by the learner are validated “within the constructed reality of the learner” (p. 34). In this approach, the learner’s memories of past experiences are essential to the learning effort. The memories that surface in a learning experience appear for a reason—they are important to the learner. Acknowledging the value of these memories is vital to making the learner feel comfortable to embark on an educational journey. In 2005 I conducted a study at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) that examined the comfort levels of visitors in guided tours. During this research, it became very apparent to me that the CCA’s tour guides increased the potential for visitors to have comfortable museum experiences when they emphasized the importance of visitors’ past

memories and experiences. That is, through connecting the tour information to visitors' pasts, visitors had a higher probability of experiencing comfort. In a similar way, I incorporated the above-mentioned objects and environment in order to feel connected in this imaginary office and thus to feel comfortable.

## **Play**

I have always viewed museum environments as holding the potential to become learning playgrounds for a wide variety of publics. I view educational play as an opportunity to learn through interacting with people and captivating material in amusing, relational and comfortable ways. Such play relates to enjoyment, engagement and vibrancy. By incorporating these elements of play in experiences, the museum can work towards diminishing the traditional view of museums being sanctuaries hosting valuable objects to be viewed by a scholarly elite—a necessary change for these public institutions.

Everyone relates to or can recall relating to play. For children, certain forms of play can offer an opportunity to learn in comfortable, active and curious ways. Bain and Newton (2003) assert that “play is an important part of education because it helps youngsters build cognitive skills, manipulative skills and good sportsmanship” (p. 33). It is my belief that play also offers many benefits for adults in educational interactions. It is my contention that museums should engage children and adults in curious play in order to offer amusing opportunities for learning that encourage the development of critical thinking skills, hands-on interactions and social learning. Iacovoni (2005) views play as being an active and comfortable conduit for learning in new ways. He refers to play as possessing qualities of freedom, which I believe is inextricably linked to comfort. He states:

The passion for playing, therefore, is a result of its ability to be a free and knowing diversion from the beaten path, a moment of re-creation of parallel universes in which we are freed of identity, rules of cause and effect, physical and material bonds and the rigidity of the world we live in. (p. 10)

Through diverting from the beaten path in play, our curiosity is ignited and we are compelled to ask questions, which is an essential activity in the process of learning.

The structure of *Creatures of Comfort* recalls a childhood memory of play to which most individuals can relate. The vast majority of adults have fond memories of creating temporary inhabitations as children—the gathering and placing of furniture and blankets, towels, bowls, ribbons, boxes and other objects in interesting configurations. These constructions provide shelter and a place to collect toys, books, food, flashlights and other desirable paraphernalia for an imaginary journey. Throughout my childhood, my brother and I spent many magical days imagining, planning, constructing and interacting with our own built environments—castles, tents, forts, houses and other fantastic shelters. The processes were laden with educational value—creativity, the development of narrative, questioning and collaboration. It was a self-directed, participant-centered, informal and fun learning opportunity—the kind of experiences I attempt to promote in the museum. For children's workshops, I often employ imaginative role playing and the construction of make-believe worlds. I encourage adolescents to engage in experimental play with materials and artworks while focusing on

explorations of identity. During adult events, I invite participants to recall imaginative, joyful and exciting memories, often related to childhood revelry.

Many contemporary artists infuse aspects of play in their work in an effort to communicate with their viewers through amusing and often enlightening ways. Tracy Emin's well-known 1997 work, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, was influential in the development of *Creatures of Comfort*, which similarly employs a tent structure (<http://www.whitecube.com/artists/emin/ix/>). The structure of the work sparks memories of childhood play. However, Emin contrasts childhood amusement, innocence and fantasy with reality, shock, voyeurism, and scandal; comfort with discomfort. She accomplishes this through appliquéing the names of all of the people she has literally slept with to the interior of the tent, solidifying the meaning through a conspicuous title. Emin's work acknowledges comfort and play in overt ways in order to bring her audience into her world.

Another striking example of the use of play in contemporary art is Rita's *Passe-moi un sapin* (Rita, n.d.), which was on display at the 2008 International Garden Festival held at the Jardins de Métis in Gaspésie, Quebec. The three designers that comprise Rita created soft, yet durable evergreen trees that resemble the odour-emitting miniature firs that hang from car mirrors. They developed a plot for visitors to "plant" these trees into pre-cut slots, enabling the imaginary forest to be transplanted on a regular basis by the audience. The interactive installation was enjoyed by all ages, and communicated questions surrounding our appropriation of nature, the use of resources for our benefit and options for renewal. This was all achieved through playful interaction—a serious topic tackled through an engaging, familiar and amusing means.



Figure 9 and 10. Rita, *Passe-moi un sapin*, (2007).  
Photos reproduced with the permission of Rita.

In *Creatures of Comfort* I employ a similar link to playfulness as demonstrated by Rita and Emin in order to develop a sense of familiarity for both the audience, and myself, which is important in establishing comfort for learning. *Creatures of Comfort* is a piece that recalls past fond memories of imagining, actively engaging and physically interacting with warm,

personal and comforting environments. It is this type of interaction that I aim to offer my audiences as a museum educator.

## Home

*Creatures of Comfort* contains numerous references to my conception of feeling emplaced. For me, experiencing a sense of emplacement is more than being in a location. Feeling emplaced is being part of a relationship with people, memories, cultures objects, concepts and spaces. Gradle (2007) maintains that “place is a part of the relational nature of people and culture” (p. 393). To feel emplaced is to feel connected, and feeling connected most often requires a sufficient level of comfort. I cannot imagine a space where I would feel more emplaced, more comfortable, than in my own home. *Creatures of Comfort* appropriates a number of objects, smells and sounds from my home—the lavender scent that I diffuse each evening, the ambient sounds from my Ipod, the tea I ritually consume, images of my partner and our family pet, and references to the colourful nature of our apartment, captured by the ribbons. My imagined office space attempts to mimic the comforts and security of my home environment. For many, a large portion of the day is spent in the office. It would be absolutely logical for individuals to attempt to fill these spaces with comforts from the home. It is natural for me to make a particular effort to call upon the comfort and security of my home at a time when I do not have a museum office to call my own. These notions recall Do Hu Suh’s work *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home* where he recreated his Seoul home in fabric, and set it up in other cities he lived in (<http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=266&artindex=70>). Suh brought his home into new living spaces. For Suh, home is something that can be repeated in new situations—which we naturally attempt to do. Suh states: “In my mind I think this notion of home is something that you can infinitely repeat” (PBS, 2003, para. 9).

The cultivation of sentiments of emplacement and home through comfort is of great importance in my research, which has focused on developing relationships between communities of new visitors—people who have little if any experience in museum settings—and museums. For new visitors, it is extremely important to develop connections and relationships, since museums contain a stigma that can be intimidating to uninitiated publics. The community groups that I have worked with are often comprised of individuals already dealing with feelings of displacement—recent immigrants, children living below the poverty line and teenagers transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Reid, 2008). It is with particular sensitivity that I attempt to find ways to enable these populations to feel emplaced in new environments. The implementation of pre-visits is one strategy I employ in an effort to promote feelings of emplacement within these groups. During pre-visits, I spend time with the participants at their home institutions. Through these off-site visits, I have a chance to better understand the group’s culture and home-environment, enabling me the opportunity to acknowledge these during educational programming at the host museum. It is my belief that through promoting a sense of emplacement, the museum can offer diverse publics an opportunity to freely explore, to question, to interact, and, most importantly, to express themselves.

## Audience Engagement

The development, creation and analysis of *Creatures of Comfort* has been an internal self-reflective process. However, this exploration also offered an opportunity to externally communicate with an audience through presenting my narrative in material form to publics accessing the hallway in front of the FOFA Gallery—primarily members of the university and arts communities.

Eisner (1997) asserts that many scholars are looking to alternative forms of data representation as they attempt to “perform the magical feat of transforming the contents of [their] consciousness into a public form that others can understand” (p. 209). He maintains that many scholars are increasingly becoming aware of the need to utilize alternative forms of representation in order to comply with newer, more holistic and less restrictive conceptions of knowledge. My intention in displaying my narrative in a public venue was to reach out to and communicate with others. I aimed to have participants experience aspects of my comfort-based museum education philosophy through evoking memories, stimulating play and sparking sentiments of emplacement. Through this alternative form of representation of research, this installation offered a number of entry points for engaging with my philosophy. The work incorporated: physical engagement as visitors entered and used their bodies in the space; visual stimulation; tactile interactions with the materials; auditory experiences via the CD player; olfactory engagement through the scent of lavender that was diffused in the space; and linguistic interaction through the text panel that outlined the essential aspects of the work. Through these multiple arts-based entry-points, I was attempting to find a way to maximize the potential for my ideas to communicate with publics in comprehensible and meaningful ways.

While constructing the installation, a large number of individuals, including the FOFA Gallery workers, inquisitively questioned me as to what I was doing. I was clearly calling attention to myself and my cause during this activity. Art has this ability to engage people—to evoke questions and critical thinking patterns. If I had left a written version of my reflection lying in front of the FOFA Gallery, rather than the materials-based artistic rendition, few people would notice it and probably not a single individual would take the time to read it. Eisner (1995) states that “artistically crafted works of art often make aspects of the world vivid” (p. 2). He proceeds to assert that artistically crafted works “have the capacity to awaken us from our stock responses” (p. 2).

I was very interested in the responses that individuals would have during their encounters with the work. In order to further the possibility for communication between myself and the participants while I was away from the installation, I offered a means for the participants to contribute to the work through including empty post-it notes and writing utensils in my imaginary office-space. When taking down the work twenty-four hours after it had been installed, I found a number of notes that had been left by participants. The notes contained: references to the lavender scent, thoughts on the aesthetic quality of the space, comments on the interesting solutions I had for representing aspects of my vision and desires to have a similar office space. Through reviewing these notes, I was able to glimpse into the experiences of some of the participants—their opinions regarding the work’s aesthetic qualities, their observations, and the meanings they drew from the piece. The public reception responded to my second research question within the context of audience engagement—what

insights will the material manifestation of my inquiry reveal? The written and verbal responses of participants demonstrated that the material work was thought-provoking, evoked feelings of comfort and effectively represented an office space.

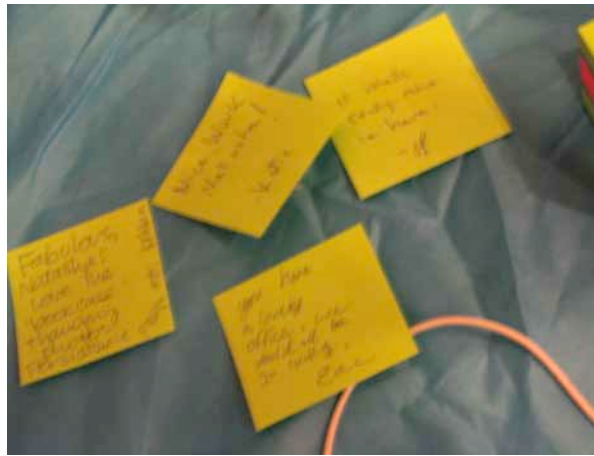


Figure 11. *Creatures of Comfort* (detail).

My public was important in the conception, construction and analysis of *Creatures of Comfort*. In keeping an audience in mind, I continuously returned to the potential for communication in the work—the communication of my philosophy to my audience and my audience’s communication of their interpretations of, thoughts on and experiences with the work. Eisner (1995) refers to the ability of artistically crafted research to evoke empathy—“the capacity to put us in the shoes of those we do not know” (p. 2). In the creation of this artistic research I attempted to put myself in the position of my audience and was offered the chance to hear and read the words of participants in order to deepen this empathic relationship. Likewise, the audience members put themselves in my world as they engaged with the artwork. Through this artistic research, relationships were developed via empathic understanding.

## Conclusion

The roles of the museum educator are rapidly expanding as museums go through dramatic institutional changes. Museums are being called upon to reach out to broad audiences, to abolish their traditional historical hierarchy and to communicate with publics in active, engaging and meaningful ways. That is, as stated earlier, museums are changing from repositories of valuable objects for a scholarly and wealthy elite, to active learning centres for diverse audiences. Museum education aims to effectively engage audiences in learning experiences, making this field well-positioned to take a prominent role in this new function for the museum in contemporary society. Williamson (2007) notes that this has “led to a rise in the status and responsibility of the art museum educator” (p. 89). At this time of change, it is essential for museum educators to reflect on their philosophies in order to develop strong, coherent voices through which they can fulfill their emerging leadership roles within the institution and society. A museum’s material artistic objects are its foundation—its reason for existing. Due to this fact, it seems highly appropriate for museum educators to examine their teaching philosophies through material practices.

The conceptual development, creation and analysis of *Creatures of Comfort* proved to be a highly beneficial material and textual examination of my own beliefs and practices associated with museum education. This artistic-based process offered an opportunity to explore in a fluid, visual, material and endlessly relational way. It is my assertion that this process offered me a deeper, richer and more personal examination of my beliefs and practices than if I were to have relied solely on traditional text-based reflective practices. My first research question asked “how can I artistically represent a narrative investigation into my identity as a museum educator and researcher?” At the end of this research, my response to this question is, I began with a narrative-based text, which then manifested into a material form, and ended with a theoretical, text-based reflection on these processes, resulting in this paper. Thus, the material artwork became the centre of this research process, sandwiched by two text-based explorations, where each unit was integral participant in the investigation. It is my belief that through artistically representing research, through using art as a form of research, and through textually analyzing artistic research one can travel deeper into the connection between the personal and the public. As Bresler (2006) notes, qualitative written research and artistic representation are both steeped in this connection. Therefore, by working with traditional qualitative research, including personal reflection, gathering of theoretical information, raw data collection/analysis and artistic creation, one can maximize the opportunities for connecting the personal with the public and the public with the personal.

Interestingly, the development of *Creatures of Comfort* has shown that my primary aim as a museum educator is to create situations that enable visitors to feel comfortable enough in museum environments that they feel compelled to layer their personal narratives into the public narratives told by museums. My analysis of *Creatures of Comfort* has shed light on three ways that I attempt to achieve this, responding to my second research question in a personal context: through valuing personal memories, offering an opportunity to learn through play and encouraging situations where feelings of emplacement can evolve. In this atmosphere of comfort, visitors and museum educators have a chance to embark on a collective journey in an environment where active learning occurs and where the private and the public have a chance to meet.

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## End-Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In this text, the term *museum* refers to art museums, art galleries, and/or artist-run centers.

<sup>2</sup> The Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA) Gallery at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada is a university gallery. The FOFA Gallery exhibits work from current and past students, faculty and staff from Concordia University. Occasionally, the gallery will showcase artists outside of the Concordia community when it “enhances, amplifies or informs the pedagogic goals of the faculty” (FOFA Gallery, n.d., para. 1).

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal, Canada is an “international research centre and museum founded on the conviction that architecture is a public concern” (CCA, n.d., para. 2).

<sup>4</sup> La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse (La Centrale) in Montreal, Canada is an artist-run center that grew out of the feminist art movement. “The center’s mandate expands on a history of feminist art practices and engages a broader spectrum of underrepresented artists and their initiatives within established art institutions” (La Centrale, n.d., para. 1).