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**SWART: A Natural Pairing**

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Statement of Purpose:

SWART, the combination of art and social work, is a natural pairing that has informally existed in different contexts in the history of art, but has not, until now, been directly named. Art and social work are both difficult to define: no single statement can encompass all of the rich possibilities. In an attempt to articulate its mission the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) created a Code of Ethics. One of the basic tenets of this code is that social workers must use their skills to challenge social injustice. The use of art toward this same goal, regardless of historic or stylistic allegiance, but framed from the perspective of content and intent, can be understood as SWART. A well know example of this combination can be seen in the mid-twentieth century with the famous American collagist and social worker Romare Bearden. His vibrant and socially conscious artworks, produced off-hours on weekends and evenings, strongly reflected social work ethics. Unlike other artists, such as Pierre Bonnard who in the 1890s left a law practice to be an artist, or Paul Gauguin who in 1885 jettisoned a life in banking for his art, Bearden's career as a social worker was intrinsic to his art and a direct source of inspiration.

Ultimately art and social work share a potential to create change. Beyond direct social commentary, SWART can also accomplish its mission in more subtle and personal ways. The late nineteenth century French Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne believed that "A work of art which did not begin in emotion is not art." A similar statement could be made of social work, a field that one does not enter wisely without a strong emotional commitment. The clinical social worker must attempt to "be where the client is" that is, to give the client support and time to undertake a therapeutic journey based on his or her own needs and understandings, rather than the needs and understandings of the social worker. So also must the artist in the studio give up a degree of control and predetermination to successfully "join" with his or her own creativity.

It is then, perhaps no coincidence that artists and social workers share certain characteristics and sensibilities. In the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a personality questionnaire designed around sixteen Jungian psychological types, the careers of art and social work are mostly paired in the same groupings. In seven of the psychological types social workers and artists appear together sharing common personality traits, such as: helping people achieve their goals; having enthusiasm that motivates others; having a gift for encouraging others to actualize themselves; and being driven by a strong sense of personal values.

My own SWART began with an unwillingness to yield art-making time to my social work studies, thus an inevitable merging of the two has taken place in the studio. For example, laboring to comprehend and memorize the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR) resulted in a number of paintings depicting the supposed multi-axial diagnoses in visual configurations that for me reflect some of the confusion and jumble of current diagnosis. In other paintings the social work code of ethics appears as well, structured within a centralized compound and assaulted on all sides by pressures and ethical dilemmas. In *Poor Voices United* the image of opulent wealth atop Atlantic City's boardwalk is juxtaposed with the poverty and despair below, speaking to a need for social change. Through SWART, which directly addresses the social work of art, I am beginning new understandings of my own art, of the world, and of myself.





Title: Keeping to Code: NASW  
Medium: Acrylic paint, cast plastic forms on wood  
Size: 19"h x 24"w



Title: Poor Voices United

Medium: Acrylic paint, cast plastic forms on homosote board and wood

Size: 31" h x 22" w