

# **Dimensions of Practice: The *Skandhas* as a Gestalt-Informed Framework for Holistic Approaches to Post-Secondary Contemporary Arts Education**

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## **Abstract**

This study proposes a holistic view of post-secondary contemporary arts education within a framework that is informed by both Gestalt theory and the Buddhist conception of the skandhas. Such a framework enables one to track a fluctuating series of physical, cognitive, and perceptual conditions by which one might understand the variable nature of human perception and experience. I rely on Mahayana Buddhist traditions that conceive the skandhas as five interdependent states. These states operate without a fixed hierarchical organization and modulate organically in response to evolving circumstances. The categories of the skandhas are defined as form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. These categories are relevant to the multimodal and transdisciplinary aspects of contemporary arts practices in that they bridge aspects of psychology, sensory perception, analytical thought, and materiality.

I transpose the aforementioned understanding to issues specific to contemporary arts education in five “interior” chapters (Chapters 2-6) framed by introductory and summary discussions (Chapters 1 and 7). Chapters 2-6 provisionally identify constituent elements of practice according to an expanded sense of what comprises art, including “studio” arts. My aim with this conceptual transposition of the skandhas to arts-related practice is to convey a decentralized “field”-like orientation to possibilities immanent in contemporary arts education, maximizing diverse potentials of inquiry according to the aims, capacities, and sensibilities of instructors and students alike. This orientation is supported by reference to a diversity of relevant perspectives drawn from within and outside the domains of contemporary arts and educational theory, focusing primarily on elements of contemplative inquiry, philosophy of science, gestalt-related philosophy, and socio-material theory. Vignettes drawn from my teaching experience in contemporary arts and educational philosophy will illustrate the substance and relevance of these perspectives in practice.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Studio Arts Education; Creative Process; Educational Philosophy; Contemplative Inquiry; Gestalt Theory; Non-discriminatory Care Ethics; Transdisciplinary Practice; Skandhas; Sociomateriality; Philosophy of Science; Buddhist Psychology and Practice; Self-organization