

anzjat

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Book review

Imagination in action: Secrets for unleashing creative expression

Shaun McNiff

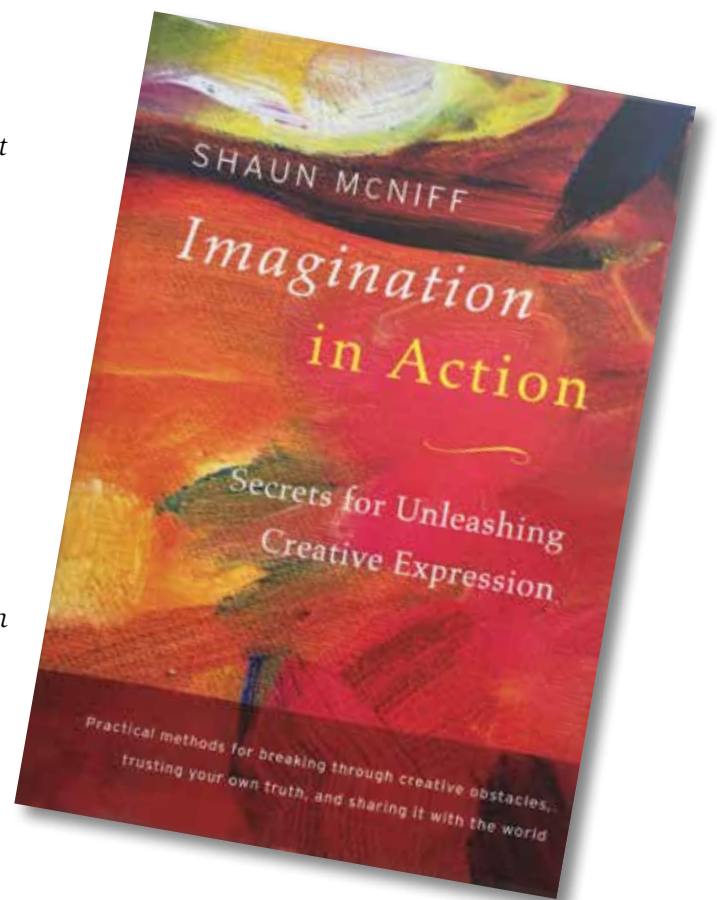
Boston and London: Shambala, 2015 (ISBN 978-1-61180-201-6)

Reviewed by Deborah Green *Whitecliffe College of the Arts and Design*

I've spent the day sliding between deep flow-inducing absorption in the creative process and arriving back with blinking wonder into the vast room full of fellow creatives. I pinch myself to prove I'm awake. I'm here. I'm getting to spend a whole day in a workshop with Shaun McNiff. It is October 2013 and, under smoke-filled skies stained by the devastating forest fires ravaging the Blue Mountains (Sydney, Australia), the ANZATA Conference is hosting McNiff as keynote speaker and masterclass facilitator.

Much of my work with those traumatised by the Christchurch quakes has been grounded in his mindful soul-based approach. Our quake-shaken images created in response to our broken world have become angels guiding us towards acceptance, wound-blessing and aesthetic transformation of our distress.

And now, during his masterclass, I gather with my fellow participants in a silent circle, respecting one of his many iconic 'let's take a pause' moments. He quietly begins to describe the next activity, which we will witness as a demonstration before breaking into pairs to experience it for ourselves. He asks for volunteers and I find my hand in the air, my heart thudding. My partner's large artwork is laid on the ground in the centre of the circle. I stand before this vast image in silence and invite the monkeys jabbering in my mind to also 'take a pause'. I open to and absorb this creation: the off-centre handprint, slashes and swirls of colour, line, shape and textured paint. These evoke deep responses in my being and I begin to move. I embody and dance the



image, my hand straining again and again towards its twin, just beyond reach, printed on the canvas... I ache, closing and opening my body in yearning. Finally, breathing deeply, tears welling, I slow to a stop. I emerge as if from a dark well. I have been inside the artwork of another! I have witnessed with my entire being...

In the light of the rich learnings during this workshop and my warm relationships with his other books and articles, it felt only natural to set McNiff's latest book as the main textbook