

Befriending spiders

Kate Parker

Creative arts therapist statement

I formed this reflection in response to my studies at The MIECAT Institute in Melbourne, Australia. It draws on my experience of my first day on practicum, facilitating group art therapy sessions. I found myself drawn to parallels between my teaching experience and the presence of a spider in my eaves. As I delved deeper into the significance of this connection, I uncovered a wealth of emotional content that mirrored my internal journey.

Utilising practice and procedures learned at The MIECAT Institute, I embarked on a process of self-exploration, translating the recurring sensations I experienced into a visual expression. Through this creative endeavour, I confronted feelings of fear and anxiety that had emerged within me.

As I learnt to engage with these sensations, I embraced them as guides for understanding and growth. By acknowledging their presence, I embarked on a transformative journey towards a deeper understanding of myself and new ways of being.

Befriending spiders

There was a spider nesting in the eaves of my garage. It hung over the driver's side of my car. Its bulbous globular abdomen swelled with pockets of eggs; some already lay scattered amongst threads of web.

It, a mother.

Every day I would limbo the web, careful to avoid its sticky entanglement. Every morning and every afternoon I allowed dissonance to crawl through my stomach and over my spine as I tip-toed under the sticky silver threads, retreating to the safety of my vehicle.

I could have squashed her, moved her aside, contained her somehow; but a part of me felt reverence for what she had built. A nest that harboured her children, caught her food, bonded harmoniously with the ever-changing elements to be forged against them.

Over time, I began to accept her. I named her Synthia, Synthia the spider. I learnt to be-friend her and I spoke to her. I asked her not to bite me or land on me.

She never spoke back.

Instead, she feasted on the snared mosquitoes that had irritated my ankles, and sucked dry the flies that peskily hung around.

Day 1.

As I stepped into my first day companioning, I consulted my body. I felt a crawling, tight sensation in my stomach. It moved erratically. Lived experience told me this bodily inhibitor was nerves. Symptoms of its sting presented as blurred vision, sweating, headaches, vomiting, nausea and in extreme cases, paralysis.

As I stood in front of the group, I briefed my notes. All became a blur. The sweating quickly began, followed by nausea. I took a deep breath and felt into what *I* needed in the moment. An oxygen tonic was required. I began a breathing exercise with the group. I guided them to feel into their arising bodily sensations, bracketing in how the prescription of 'breath' acted as a fast remedy. As we breathed together, I became a witness to what was emerging in the moment. I felt a necessity in bracketing out the intention to be 'perfect' or 'liked' and instead allowed myself to feel into the space, engaging in moment to moment responding, sensing into what was needed.

I offered for each of us to focus on a moment held within the practice. A feeling or emotion that resonated. I lead the way. Sensing into the vibration of my body I began making. I dived into the humming dissonance, clinging to the materials that crawled and stuck, working with the emergent sensations. As the session neared the end, we shared our expressions. I sat mine on the table. I noticed how it moved, eight long hairy tendrils and two shorter, sharper appendages sprouted from a spherical centre; wrapped tightly in a different, stretchy material.

Synthia had somehow found her way into my stomach, feasting on the butterflies that danced there.

"Hello Synthia, what are you doing here?"

I questioned.

She spoke.

"I'm here to keep you safe, protect you."

Synthia didn't speak again.

Arriving home I felt eager to visit Synthia Spider. I wanted to capture her...in a photo. My phone alerted me to 'storage card full' halting my plan, so I spent time looking at her, noticing how she moved, her delicate intricacies.

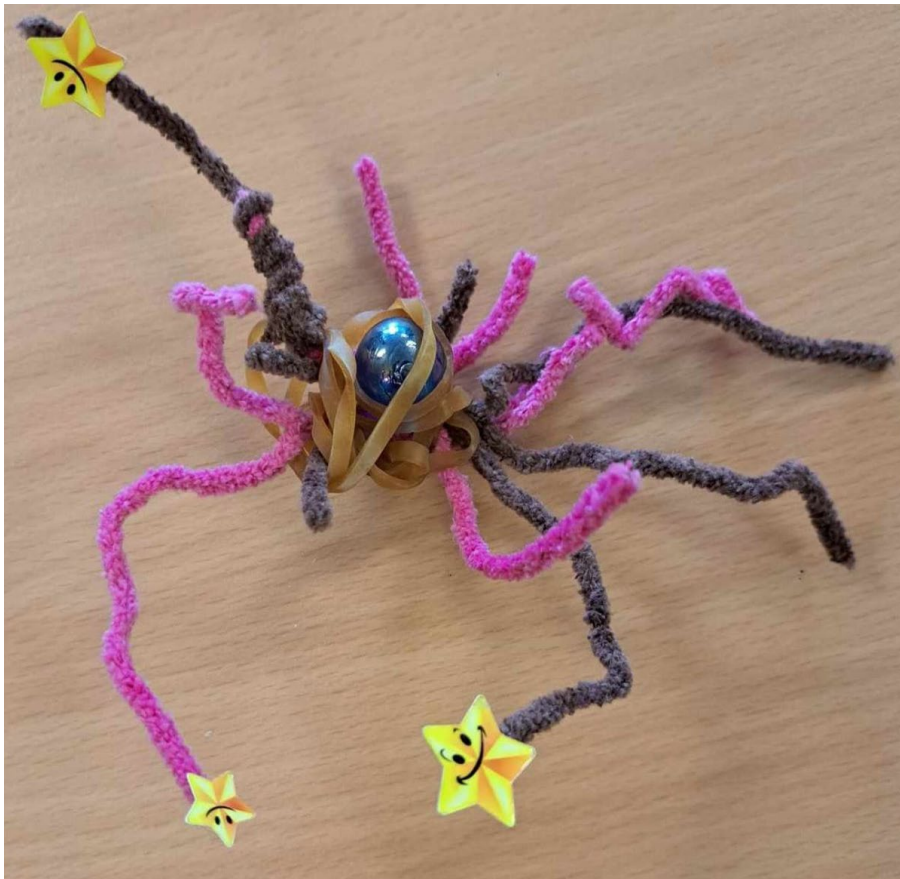
The following morning, I readily approached her eave. Tattered spindles of web spooled, dormant.

A heaviness hung in my stomach.

Synthia
my friend
had gone.

As time passed, I forgot about the emptiness in the eaves. I no longer had to duck and weave, avoiding the sticky. I began to walk freely.

I'm sure other spiders will visit the eaves again; they may wiggle and jiggle and niggle as they feast on butterflies. But as I learn to befriend them, I learn their purpose; not to hurt, keep stuck or trapped, but to protect.



Kate Parker, *Somewhat Synthia*, 2024, mixed media, 170 × 120mm.

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Kate is deeply engaged in the field of disability and therapeutic arts, pursuing her studies in a Masters of Therapeutic Arts at the MIECAT Institute in Melbourne, Australia.

She is a passionate advocate for young people with disabilities and is committed to using creative expression as a facilitator for knowledge, acceptance, and change.

Her academic achievements underscore her dedication to learning, as evidenced by receiving a Sydney University Cadetship, attaining a Master's degree in Special and Inclusive Education.

Beyond the classroom, Kate actively contributes her expertise as a steadily evolving therapeutic arts practitioner. She extends her passion for creative expression into the wider community, providing experiences in wheel throwing and clay through her small business, Nelipot Ceramics.

Through her endeavours, Kate aims to share the transformative potential of therapeutic arts to support the lives of individuals and communities alike.



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