

2025 Teaching Artists Grant - Final Reflection

ARTFARM's Marcella Trowbridge and Mo Andres

Marcella and I met multiple times over the course of the past few months to discuss our process, both in relation to general mentorship and to serve the manifestation of *Practicing for Death*. Each time we met, we made the conscious choice to ground ourselves in breath and slowness while building the work, which itself is the ethos of Practicing for Death. In our first meeting, we articulated the conclusion of what “practicing for death” means to us – to *Live Well Here and Now* – and such a realization manifested as a responsibility we had within each stage of the process.

I was so grateful that Marcella took the space in our process to really try to understand my lived experience in relation to Practicing for Death. I myself have experienced profound loss in my young life, which informed my perspective into our work together. In our creative process, I witnessed the way that Marcella identifies strength in collaborators and encourages those strengths toward serving the artistic work – a skilled curiosity I aspire to bring forward into my own practice as a teaching artist.

The strength found in my lived experience was quite helpful during our visit to Camp Compassion in Kent, Connecticut in the early summer. Marcella and I led a closed workshop for teenage attendees of Camp Compassion, all of whom had experienced the death of a loved one. Having experienced my mom's death in early adolescence, I was able to work with Marcella to bring the artistic offering toward the students, as well as add input from the lived experience perspective. The workshop went quite well. We began physical exercises that involved connection, then group-brainstormed parts of the grieving process that made students feel angry, sad, connected, etc., which resulted in student-led mini-performances. We endeavored to lead with presence and openness, and in bringing that, we were able to land as a group into a shared space of feeling, identifying, articulating and partially healing the complex emotions that come with grief.

As we moved into our process towards the public *Practicing for Death* workshop, I had the opportunity to learn on a practical and logistical level the scheduling and collaboration that is necessary to hold such somatic work for a body of audience participants. While part of the challenge of this work was purely logistical - finding a space, landing on a date, etc. - the challenge of opening + closing our artistic offerings in the container of a specific time-frame was equally present. In our meetings preceding the workshop, Marcella and I had to “plan well enough to throw out the plan.” This involved our testing of artistic+somatic explorations, deciding which of those were most important to the ethos of *Practicing for Death*, and building in enough time in the workshop itself for participants to *digest* the psychosomatic experiences emerging from our offering.

Practicing For Death involved multiple physical explorations and reflections built to touch the emotional body of each participant in the room – including the clay mapping of a “grief body,” guided meditation & reflection, and the physical act of participants slicing through their fear. These exercises were each tested together in Marcella's backyard - as well as others that didn't quite work for either her or myself. My own role in the final workshop became one of quiet, grounded support – as that was what I needed to practice for death, to live well then and there. This workshop ended with participants feeling grounded and reflective in and upon their grief.

As this Teaching Artist's grant timeline comes to a close, Marcella and I both lead with the understanding that our work together is not at all over — as the work of *Practicing for Death, Living Well Now*, only ends at death itself (at least). I end this leg of the process with a more refined understanding of the practical necessities crucial to building somatic, experienced theater work, as well as a confirmation of my strongly held belief in presence and gratitude within the process of creation. I have grown much as a teaching artist (and individual!) over the past few months, and we are both quite grateful to the Teaching Artists Grant for providing the resources towards developing *Practicing for Death*.



Practicing patience, presence, and planning in Marcella's backyard!



