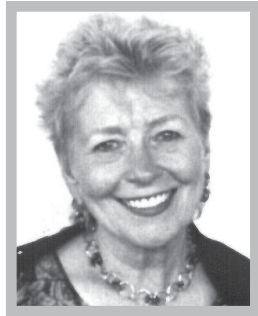


## ARTS ALL AROUND

# A!

by Barbara-lyn Morris



### Creativity: A “Flowering Tornado”

The subject of creative thinking and production has fascinated me for decades. Defining creativity and determining if it can be taught and measured are tasks I have pursued as an educator and artist. I concur with the notion that creativity is, fundamentally, solving problems, not only in the arts but also in the sciences, humanities, and everyday living. I am convinced creativity may be deliberately taught, encouraged, and measured. The work of Ginny Ruffner, an artist, and the late Paul Torrance, a university researcher, underscores these ideas.

Ruffner was born in Atlanta in 1952. Just before turning 40, she was involved in a serious automobile accident in North Carolina. After five weeks in a coma, she opened her eyes and began a long recovery, relearning language and motor skills and rediscovering elements of creativity that most dramatically identified her as a human being and artist. She now lives in Seattle, Washington, and is recognized internationally as a multimedia artist with emphasis on glass.

*Creativity: The Flowering Tornado* is Ruffner's multimedia installation and catalogue exploring the theme of creativity, the essence of life for her. Originated in 2003 at the Montgomery (Ala.) Museum of Fine Arts, the exhibit concluded in 2005 at the Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art in Tacoma, Washington, where I experienced it. While the touring exhibit has concluded, the catalogue – a “pop-up gallery” – is a permanent interpretation of Ruffner's ideas about creativity.

Ruffner explores the stages of creativity in her groundbreaking installation and most unusual catalogue. Her basic premise is that creativity is

problem solving. Each pop-up double page of the catalogue illustrates one of the artist's six rules for enhancing the process for approaching any problem. Rule No. 1: “Don't Get Tied Up in the Small Stuff.” Other rules admonish anyone to avoid self-judgment and “the trap of fear.” She concludes: “A strong will is the most results-producing tool of creativity.” Her strong will led her in turning the “tornado of a disaster” into one that blooms.

Academically, the guru of the notion that creativity may be measured is the late E. Paul Torrance (1915-2003), who was a pioneer in research on the identification and development of creative potential. He established the Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development at the University of Georgia and developed the Torrance Tests of Creativity Thinking (TTCT).

Available to educators and researchers since 1966, TTCT is designed for all educational levels and ages. Widely used in education and business, the instrument includes activities in which a respondent completes figural tasks. One example is drawing a picture from the stimulus of a common shape – such as a circle or parallel lines – and giving it a title. (Drawing skill is not evaluated.)

There is also a verbal form in which respondents express ideas in words. The following is an example of a verbal activity: “Try to think of as many uses as you can for all floppy disks.”

Both verbal and figural exercises are evaluated in the following four key components of creative potential:

- **Fluency**, representing the number of responses produced;
- **Originality**, representing the most unusual responses;
- **Elaboration**, indicating sensitivity to pertinent details beyond the minimum;
- **Abstractness of Titles**, indicating ability to synthesize the story being



“How to Make Your Tendrils Curly” is part of Ginny Ruffner's multimedia installation, *Creativity: The Flowering Tornado*.

illustrated with a verbal element, i.e. unusual and embellished title, that goes beyond the concrete.

Other important variables include the ability to resist quick closure and to practice flexibility. Basically, TTCT quantifies creative potential and confirms the theory that “creative levels can be scaled and then increased through practice,” according to Michael Childs in the public affairs office at the University of Georgia.

The TTCT manual notes that while high creativity scores “increase the likelihood of

creative behavior,” they do not ensure that an individual will behave creatively, just as an high IQ score does not guarantee “intelligent behavior.” What is important, according to Torrance, is to identify and encourage creative potential at all levels.

During the course of his long career, Torrance wrote many books and articles focusing on the identification and encouragement of creativity. In 2001 *Manifesto: A Guide to Develop a Creative Career* was published as a “40-year longitudinal study of creativity – the only one of its kind.” *Manifesto for Children* is a documentary film of Torrance's life and his study of creativity.

The conviction of Torrance and others that creativity may be measured, encouraged, and enhanced is being validated by R. Keith Sawyer, a psychologist at Washington University. He has authored a new work, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (Oxford, 2006). In a recent *TIME* magazine interview, Professor Sawyer attempts to demystify creativity. He concludes, “All the research shows that the creative process is basically the same: generating ideas, evaluating them and executing them, with many creative sparks over time.” He adds, “Sometimes you don't know which sparks are important until later, but the more ideas you have, the better.”

His advice to help anyone wanting to be more creative: “Take risks and expect to make lots of mistakes because creativity is a numbers game.” (*TIME* magazine, January 16, 2006)

As spring approaches, my resolution is to be open to the full potential of new and recycled ideas, so that they, like seeds, may reach their “flowering tornado.”

#### For more information...

- Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development, 323 Alderhold Hall, UGA, Athens, GA 30602-7143, 706-542-5104. [www.coe.uga.edu/torrance](http://www.coe.uga.edu/torrance)
- Ginny Ruffner, [www.ginnyruffner.com](http://www.ginnyruffner.com), email: [ginny@ginnyruffner.com](mailto:ginny@ginnyruffner.com)
- *Creativity: The Flowering Tornado*, 2003 (\$14.95) Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, One Museum Drive, Montgomery, AL 36117, 334-244-5700, [www.mmfa.org](http://www.mmfa.org)

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