CES, featuring the leadership of artist and master teacher Peter London, held its first artists’ workshop on September 27 and 28, 2013. From the first lecture through the closing exercise, the sessions were marked by London’s appreciation of the Earth-life experience—mature understandings reflecting his own artistic journey.

On that Saturday participants began by selecting a single wax crayon from the scattered pile in the center of the table. Even though several were experienced artists, in that moment we were all first-graders again, hesitant to draw our first mark on a page in full view of our peers. Before we drew a line, however, London relieved those fears, as he did throughout the day, by setting new rules. “No judging,” not even of our own work. “No good or bad.” Not even “I like or don’t like.”

In the first activity, in fact, we made no marks at all. Instead we were asked to close our eyes and put one hand on a piece of paper. Then we were asked to attend to our feelings and move our hands on the paper in a way that reflects how we were feeling. Only then were we asked to put a crayon in our hand and continue moving our hand as we were feeling.

The true artist, he conveyed, is seeking the unknown, venturing to express something hitherto hidden. The attempt, when successful, will unveil what no other person could have found, because each life follows a course no other life has taken. “Artists are not illustrators,” he told us, duplicating on canvas what any eye can see. Rather, art is a work of relationship, a human taking the risk of a deeper encounter with another.

London believes, as he writes in the introduction to his popular book, No Second-Hand Art, “Making images is as natural a human endeavor as speaking. The necessity to communicate with the world underlies both, and both are means to touch, explore, and create the world.” By leading the students into touching and exploring activities, his teaching helps restore some of the naïveté that lets children create unselfconsciously. The goal is to explore, first using bodily faculties, and then through images employing the tools of visual art.
We experienced three such adventures, going out into the natural world for an encounter and then trying to convey that event non-verbally, with paint, chalk or another medium. Each time he gave a different orientation, such as “find a tree that attracts you.” After we expressed the experience in an image, we came together and used words to describe the results. Sometimes we shared with one other person, sometimes with the group.

In the closing activity, Peter asked us to write a verbal thank you to accompany our rendering of an experience in nature. Here Cynthia Wolfe of Greensboro shares her picture and poem:

I want to say thank you
For scarlet, fantastic, melting into golden drops,
lines scattering down veins of watery-green-brown,
every single leaf a brand new painting-
I could frame every single one,
I bring them home in piles, and they
lay on my table--
purple, sienna, viridian creations.
Dear Universe Maple Goddess, I want to say thank you!

Allie Scales: I picked a very tiny white and yellow daisy and made a largish hasty daisy collage and I wrote the "poem" circularly around the yellow center.

Dear wee little daisy flower, you stand here for all daisies small and giant, that express for me, distil for me, are, for me, the glory of the herbaceous population, opening symmetrical selves to the sky and the sun, and me, and for that I want to thank you, hugely.
The words Peter London spoke as guidance and feedback were enriched by the 50 years he has invested in teaching art. He is both masterful and unassuming. His life spent studying art and nature, including humans, is now in its fruitful maturity. His openness to us inspired our openness to each other as well as to new artistic exposure.

We ended feeling filled but eager for more, and CES is committed to bringing more such opportunities to our community.

We expect our ties with Peter London and his work to enrich the entire CES community as we go forward.