Using the Vocabulary We Know

Too often we think fine writers use a vocabulary much greater than our own. Closer examination, however, will show that they are using words that we do know; we just don’t think to use them when we are writing. Below is a list of creative verbs that I found in Teaching Vocabulary: Fifty Creative Strategies, Grade K-12. A California teacher named Jeffery Williams put together the list. It is a good word bank for you to start with. Think of your discipline, and make a list of verbs that one might use in writing about your art.

Integrate creative verbs into your writing

Utilize the following list as a word bank to raise the level of your writing and forever destroy your overindulgence in dead, overused verbs.

Verbs connected to war
1. sabotage—to do harm to something, to destroy
2. camouflage—to mask, disguise or conceal one’s appearance, feelings, or motives
3. trigger—to activate, set off or initiate (as in an event)
4. ambush—to attack from a concealed position
5. flank or counterattack—to put on each side, or to circle around and attack
6. slaughter or butcher or decimate—to kill large numbers in a cruel fashion
7. dynamite—to detonate, to explode
8. surrender—to give up or concede
9. march or parade—to traverse at an orderly, regulated pace
10. marshal—to enlist, organize or guide
11. torpedo or dive-bomb—to destroy decisively
12. execute—to put to death
13. boomerang—to backfire or result in an adverse effect upon the originator
14. combat or battle or duel—to engage in attack
15. courtmartial—to try by military tribunal
16. bayonet—to prod or stab or kill with a sharp weapon

Verbs connected to nautical terms
17. pilot—to steer or control the course of
18. anchor—providing stability or support
19. navigate—to control the course of, follow a plan
20. tether—to restrict or bind, to secure (also—moor)
21. harbor—to keep, protect, nourish, give shelter to
22. broadside—to attack by surprise, verbally or physically
23. jettison—to abandon or discard things
24. mothball—to dismantle a structure, vehicle or system
25. capsize—to overturn a boat
26. chart (a course)—to make plans
27. pirate—to seize or steal, reproduce or make use of another’s work illicitly
Verbs connected to tools
28. plumb—to examine or study closely, think deeply about
29. hone—to sharpen, give an edge to, narrow one's focus (also—hew)
30. hammer—to deal repeated blows, to work diligently, or to criticize
31. yoke—to harness, fit into labor
32. shovel—to clear, throw or convey
33. wrench—to pull free, to injure
34. drill—to make a hole, to hit, to instruct
35. axe—(hatchet, machete, knife) to remove ruthlessly
36. chisel—to shape, to cheat, to intrude
37. nail—to hit, seize, master, win
38. scissor—to cut or clip

Verbs connected to farming
39. plow or furrow—to proceed laboriously, to form a driving force
40. prune—to remove or cut away to improve growth
41. cultivate—to grow, tend, refine, (also—nurture and foster)
42. glean—to collect or gather
43. harvest—to gather, to reap
44. mow—to cut, destroy or overwhelm
45. rooted—to become firmly established, or to be removed (rooted out)

Verbs connected to fishing
46. angling—to fish for, to attempt to catch, to seek something
47. lure—to entice, bait or attract with a view to catch
48. net—to catch or ensnare
49. bait, cast, hook, reel, land, trawl—process of fishing
50. gut, flay, scale—process of cleaning fish

Verbs connected to religion
51. cloister—to seclude or shut away from society
52. kowtow—to worship or bow down to
53. pontificate—to express one's opinion in a self-righteous, proud manner
54. resurrect—to bring back to life or use or prominence
55. crucify—to unjustly, either verbally or physically, attack someone
56. canonize—to treat as sacred, to glorify, to declare a saint
57. defrock—to remove a minister's credentials due to wrongdoing
58. meditate—to engage in contemplation, to introspect
59. preach—to deliver a sermon on moral instruction
60. blaspheme—to speak against God in an irreverent manner
61. baptize—to initiate, to cleanse
62. herald—to usher in, proclaim or announce

Verbs created from animal characteristics
63. wolf (down)—to eat ravenously, voraciously
64. parrot—to imitate or copy one's actions or words (also—ape and mimic)
65. spider—to invade or infiltrate
66. dovetail—to combine or interlock harmoniously
67. badger—to persistently harass or pester someone
68. buffalo—to intimidate by forceful words or physical presence
69. hound—to pursue closely or watch one's actions persistently (also—dog)
70. hawk—to peddle or attempt to sell
71. fish—to search or hunt for something
72. pigeonhole—to classify, categorize or stereotype by appearance
73. lionize—to treat as a celebrity, king of the jungle
74. cow—to frighten with threats or a show of force
75. ferret (out)—to uncover and bring to light by searching
76. chicken (out)—to act in a cowardly manner, to lose one's nerve
77. snake—to move snake-like, to worm into a conversation, break into a building
78. monkey (around) or horse (around)—to indulge in idle play, goofing off, horseplay
79. dog—worn out by work
80. bulldog or bulldoze—acting stubborn or to bully, act in a cruel manner
81. weasel—to back out of a commitment or agreement in a sneaky or cowardly manner
82. birddog—to follow closely or monitor
83. leapfrog—to advance forward in progress, avoiding a roundabout route
84. flounder—to move clumsily or in confusion

Verbs connected to music, dance and art
85. orchestrate—to arrange or compose music for a performance
86. harmonize—to provide a pleasing combination of sounds to the melody
87. trumpet—to proclaim or praise something with excitement and pride
88. drum—to tap rhythmically, but also to make known, to expel or to devise
89. conduct—to direct the course of, manage or control
90. compose—to create a musical piece, but also to calm oneself or reconcile
91. polish—to make smooth and shiny
92. sculpt—to shape, mold or fashion with artistry and precision
93. embroider or quilt—to add embellishments
94. crescendo—to reach a point of great intensity, force, or volume
95. sashay—to strut or flounce in a showy manner
96. vault—to jump or leap over

Verbs connected to clothing or appearance
97. cotton (to or up)—to become friendly or agreeable
98. tailor—to adapt or alter
99. collar—to seize or detain
100. straitjacket—to constrict
101. fashion or style—to design
102. shroud—to cut off from sight

Verbs connected to computer age
104. network—to develop contacts in order to exchange information, share responsibilities
105. interface—to interact or coordinate smoothly
106. short-circuit—to hamper progress, malfunction
107. download—to transfer data or programs through a computer
108. surf (the net)—to browse or peruse the Internet
109. crash (system)—to lose vital functions of a computer
110. freeze—to lose computer operation through system paralysis
111. boot—to start up a computer

Verbs connected to writing
112. limn—to describe or depict in art—such as painting, sculpture or words
113. parse—to break down into components with an explanation of form, function or syntax
114. journal—to reflect in a stream-of-consciousness form of writing
115. chronicle—to record historical events in prose form
116. pen—to write or author

Verbs connected to functions of the body
117. paralyze—to impair functions, make inoperative
118. hamstring—to cripple or hinder
119. bruise—to hurt or injure
120. lacerate—to mangle, tear, cause emotional pain
121. amputate—to cut away or remove a limb
122. suffocate—to stifle or suppress, to asphyxiate
123. muscle—to use force
124. handcuff—to restrain, immobilize (also—imprison, chain, manacle)

Verbs connected to business and industry
125. calibrate—to make corrections, adjust
126. ignite—to kindle an emotion, a cause or embroil in conflict
127. refine—to make better
128. formulate—to devise or invent
129. negotiate—to sell, to succeed in accomplishing, to manage
130. capsulize—to condense or summarize
131. prefabricate (fabricate as well)—to make up or construct in an unoriginal manner
132. pioneer—to explore unknown territory, or establish a new theory or innovation, trailblaze
133. wrest—to obtain control by force (as in a hostile takeover)
134. augment—to increase or enlarge in size or stature
135. oscillate—to waver back and forth, to vacillate between two choices

Nouns created into verbs
136. feather—to gain wealth, accomplish an achievement, to decorate
137. pillory—to ridicule, lampoon or satirize
138. dwarf—to make small by comparison
139. spruce—to make more attractive with decorations or embellishments
140. jawbone—to persuade or pressure with verbal arguments
141. champion—to support a cause passionately, to advocate for the needs of someone
142. pine—to desire, long for
143. jade—to become insensitive, cynical or skeptical towards the good things in life
144. cloud—to confuse or puzzle
145. milk—to extract or to use for one's own benefit
146. weather—to pass through safely, survive, endure successfully
147. pepper—to pelt or shower with speech or weapons
148. mirror—to faithfully reflect an image or model
149. shadow—to follow after, to trail, generally in secret
150. ground—to supply essential information, instruct in fundamentals (also - school)
151. siphon—to deplete of resources
152. prostitute—to sell oneself for an unworthy purpose

Other creative verbs
153. polarize—to separate, pull apart, sever relations
154. stonewall—to delay or stall the beginning of something
155. pander—to cater to people's baser, physical desires for profit (prostitution, alcohol)
156. propel—to advance forward or upward
157. metamorphose—to transform in appearance, form or character
158. nestle—to settle in comfortably, cocoon in a place
159. evolve—to develop gradually
160. entice—to lure or arouse passions or desires
161. erode—to wear away, slowly crumble and disintegrate
162. relish—to take pleasure in, to fully enjoy
163. regale—to entertain with jokes, stories, music, etc.
164. sponge—to habitually rely on others for money, food or shelter
165. bruit—to spread news of, repeat
166. amplify or magnify or elevate—to make larger or more powerful
167. alienate—to estrange, dissociate or exile
168. abort—to terminate, (also linked...:...miscarry)
169. energize—to activate, invigorate with power
170. masquerade—to wear a disguise, put on a deceptive appearance
171. cascade—to fall
172. treasure, cherish, embrace—to value or appreciate
173. espouse/estrange—to give one's loyalty in a relationship or to alienate a relationship
174. divorce—to separate or disunite

Before
Controversial issues such as abortion or capital punishment tend to pull apart people and groups.

After
Controversial issues such as abortion or capital punishment tend to polarize people and groups.

Before
The tumor grew deeper into the brain, taking away the patient's ability to care for himself.

After
The tumor webbed through his brain, eroding the patient's ability to care for himself.