

Introduction to ART THERAPY



Understanding art therapy and how creating art enables you to enhance your well being

This resource has three sections:

- What is Art Therapy?
- What's It All About?
- Discover Yourself

What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy is a unique experience based on using the medium of art as an instrument of change.

Rather than learning conventional techniques and modalities, art therapy approaches the medium in a natural experiential way.

This process automatically creates a safe and non-threatening place thereby allowing you to shift your inner awareness and discover new emotions and presentation of yourself.

When you are doing art, you are in charge. You get to pick the tools, the colors, the concepts.



As an Aside

I say to you, this morning, that if you have never found something so dear and precious to you that you will die for it, then you aren't fit to live.

You may be 38 years old, and one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause.

And you refuse to do it because you are afraid.

You refuse to do it because you want to live longer. You're afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab or shoot or bomb your house.

So you refuse to take a stand.

Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety, but you are just as dead at 38 as you would be at ninety.

And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

You died when you refused to stand up for right.

You died when you refused to stand up for truth.

You died when you refused to stand up for justice.

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

(From the sermon *But, If Not* delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church on November 5, 1967)

You can scribble, draw stick people, draw sunshine and rainbows or rain clouds and storms.

It doesn't matter. No talent required. Through the process of creating, you will discover an age old healing balm that soothes and restores the soul. You will find your own internal voice and learn the way in which you interact with the world around you.

The brain wave testing on artists shows that when they are looking at art or doing art they run beta and delta waves. So an artist naturally accesses the very deep unconscious that is usually only tapped during deep sleep. When you are doing any form of art you experience the consciousness that you reach beyond the frontal cortex, beyond the thinking mind of the cerebral cortex.

Art therapy taps that place where you are awake but you are actually creating change and working with some of the deep recesses within your mind. In other words, the process brings to light conflicts between thoughts and feelings.

To remain healthy we need to resolve the conflicts between our thoughts and feelings. By using imagery instead of words, we are able to access what is going on inside the body and mind.

Split brain psychology teaches us that the left brain is our judgmental side. It analyzes and examines.

This process often creates negative thought patterns which lower the functions of the body and throws them out of equilibrium.

They create frustrating tenseness. As a result, staying stuck in the left brain creates havoc with our immune system because of the emotions such as frustrations, fear, anger, and envy that are instigated.

The negative side of an issue is always easier to recognize than the positive. Sometimes when we stay in our left brain we can alter the essence of an issue.

Negative, painful thoughts and misconstrued perceptions ultimately cause illness, disease and addiction.

Figure 1



Little Buddha

I was inspired by the innocence and trust of youth and their ability to speak the truth. To me, the color blue represents "walking and talking our truth" and green is the color of the heart chakra.

Because the "little Buddha" speaks his truth in faith, the light shines through no matter what the murky waters may bring.

The right brain however deals with images. This in turn, is a means of emotional expression and liberation. Accessing right brain imagery is an internal form of communication.

This is the most direct way to get in touch with painful and harmful emotions and eliminate them before they compromise one's well-being.

By going within and creating art, the right side of the brain can speak through the drawings and illuminate the truth of what is really bothering us.

As we embrace the issue, the discontent begins to erase. The body begins to release and relax. Perceptions begin to change.

Perception is an important part in understanding how we interact with the world.

Albert Ellis, the founder of Rational Emotive Therapy, teaches that perception and thought create one's reality.

You truly are what you think. The key is you have a choice. Any issue can be re-framed. The greatest magic carpet is your imagination.

This concept is the guiding principal behind Cognitive Therapy. When we think something often enough, we begin to believe it's true.

Creating art is a means of watching yourself closely for self-defeating ways you respond to the world around you.

Your artwork will speak to you louder than words.

Pay attention to the colors you use, the shapes, the symbols and you will find a brand new alphabet that brings clarity and understanding to your personal issues and growth.

Figure 2



Just a Rose?

Sometimes a rose is just a rose. Or is it?

Do you see the swarm of butterflies surrounding the flower to help it bloom? And how about the lone figure in the right hand corner?

I wanted to remind myself that we are truly never alone.

What's It All About?

What's it all about anyway? You get up, you go to bed and then you get up and do it all again. Who am I? Why am I here? Does it really matter why? Of course it does.

It matters because we are willful choosers of conscious awareness.

When the remembrance and understanding of that truth dawns, we realize it is not the method or the destination but the experience that truly matters.

We are here as spirit to experience life through the human form. We chose to be here. We chose this experience. Yet we question and search.

Self actualization, it has been said, is a life long process. Does it have to be? How can I know myself? How do I know who I am?

Just remember, you are a willful chooser of conscious awareness. There is no need to question. Just be.

The key is the knowledge that there are no answers. There is only experience. The understanding of this will free you up. The answer to knowing self is to live.

How many people go through the motions of life and don't feel. Numbness has become a way of life for so many. This is such a sad state for humanity. Some may feel it is their only choice.

The earth changes around us are frightening. The threat of terrorism, war, recession, and unemployment surround us on a daily basis. Vicarious stress is a common factor in the human race. One day you feel you have it all and the next day there is a tornado or fire and you lose everything. In truth our only security is our creativity and the ability to live.

So how do I live? How do I feel? How do I know what I am doing is the right path for me? Questions, there are so many questions. The mind is a constant source of chatter.

Again, the truth is not in the answer but in life. The secret is to truly live while you are alive. Each experience brings with it a new lesson. It boils down to choice.



As an Aside

The following passage is often credited to Nelson Mandela as he quoted it at his 1994 Inaugural speech but it was written by Marianne Williamson in her book *A Return to Love*.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously

Give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,

Our presence automatically liberates others.

There are those who go through the motions of life without really living. We call them the living dead.

And then are those who seem to glide through life flowing with the ups and downs, seemingly knowing who they are and what they are about.

We call them willful choosers of conscious awareness. That's what all the talk is about conscious awareness.

Be alive. Be aware. Experience whatever comes your way. Experience the coming and going of all that is. Life will have ups and downs. Ebb and flow is the natural course of the universe. When you are sad, experience that sadness. When you are happy, be joyful. Let go of judgment and fear.

When I was twenty a flat tire would devastate me. How will I pay for this? How will I get to work? What am I going to do?

Now that I am seventy a flat tire is a fact of life. It is just something that happens.

With proper maintenance and care for my vehicle maybe it doesn't happen that often, but sometimes an unseen nail in the road or driveway may find its way into my busy day. No longer a need for panic, I now realize it may be a blessing in disguise.

Maybe the time needed to change the flat tire is protecting me from a worse fate. That's not the important thing though. What is important is to really experience the whole process. And it's a choice.

I can choose to be angry and upset or I can choose to create an adventure.

One time when I lived in Jamaica, two Swiss pharmacists came to visit me. They were lovely young girls who said they were sent by their government to learn about herbs for pharmaceutical purposes.



As an Aside

I love art because I can impress myself.

- Fourth grader

Figure 3



Tribute to the Source

This painting was a part of a collection I did called "My Beloved Mill Creek". The trees are different colors, some have leaves, some don't, but they all stand together saluting the light that frames them so majestically and binds them as one.

They heard I was an American who had studied holistic health and thought I might be of help to them.

I told them about a mother woman I knew who lived in the bush about two or three hours from the village where I lived. I said I would be happy to take them there but didn't have transportation.

The girls informed me not to worry that they had a vehicle.

Happy to oblige, I asked if I could bring my friend Miss Peaches and that we could go the next afternoon. "Not a problem," said the girls, "we'll see you tomorrow".

Now I must tell you Miss Peaches and I are both well endowed. We have big, big bottoms (or at least we did at that time).

What a surprise when the next day the girls showed up on two motorbikes. They instructed Miss Peaches to get on back of one and me on back of the other and off we went.

Well would you believe that about an hour into the journey we had a flat tire!

It was that flat tire that brought new friends into my life, a wonderful experience at the jerk center along the road, a cool drink and the remembrance of gratitude, laughter and fun.

Instead of fear, worry and regret, we all just laughed, enjoyed the respite and accepted the kindness of total strangers.

For mankind, after all, is one.

But don't forget as you travel the road, it is the journey that matters not the destination.



As an Aside

I love people. I love my family, my children.

But, inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where you renew your springs that never dry up.

- Pearl S. Buck

Figure 4



Northern Angel

She's an angel, she's a rainbow and she brings me joy. Or is she my phoenix rising out of the ashes?

And along the way hopefully you'll glean something of value that you can call your own and in so doing realize that you are fine just as you are.

Discover Yourself

It's not what you know. It's what you feel inside that makes the difference.

Can you trust yourself? Trusting yourself isn't always easy.

Sometimes it feels like that anonymous quote "due to recent cutbacks, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off until further notice". But the truth is we do have all the answers within us it is just a matter of knowing how to access them.

I worked with a healer in the Caribbean who taught me about plants. He said to me one day in his musical accent, "Miss Judith, you want to know what dem plants a say? First know your own vibrations. When you a know your own vibrations then you can hear what dem plants a say".

He was so right. And as I learned to listen to my own body I also learned that my body talks to me if I pay attention. Actually it talks to me whether I listen or not, it's just that sometimes I don't pay attention.

But when I do, the rewards are enormous because it's then that I realize that within me lie the answers to any questions I might have.

By listening to my own vibrations I have discovered that, when making a decision, it's prudent to go with the heart.

The heart always seems to be wiser than the mind.

I learned a lot about that concept by doing art, but it's easier to understand when you know how the brain works.

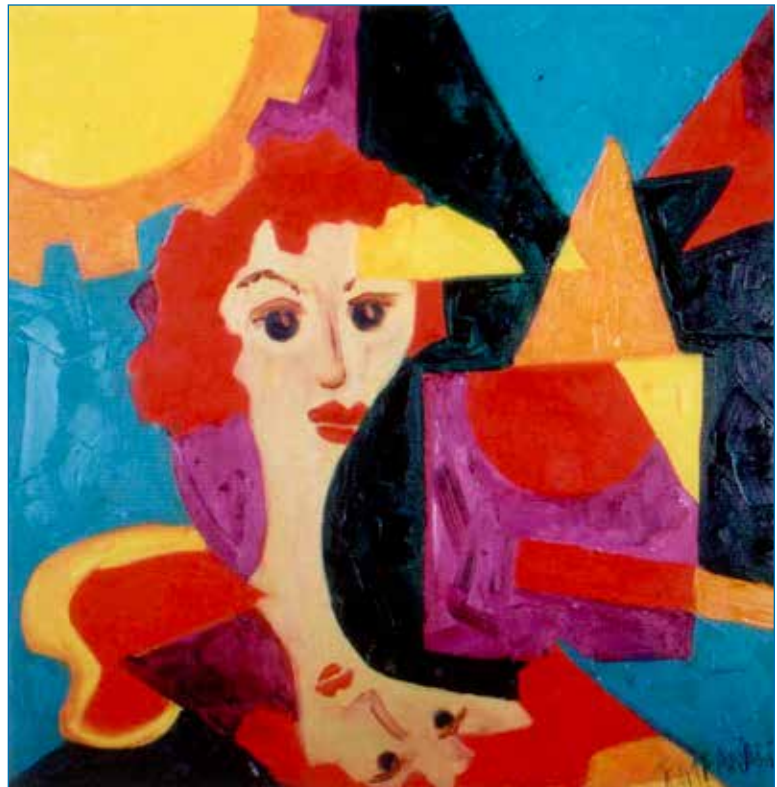


As an Aside

Art is not a handicraft; it is the transmission of feeling the artist has experienced.

- Leo Tolstoy

Figure 5



Pieces of Me

I think it is okay to wear lots of different hats as long as they can integrate and flow in the same direction.

But the truth is that doesn't always happen. Sometimes, it seems like none of the pieces fit together.

Basically, our brain has three levels of consciousness, the brain stem, the limbic system, and the neo-cortex. Each has its own memory system and level of consciousness.

The brain stem is inwardly directed rather than outwardly. It imprints and holds the deepest levels of pain. The limbic system is responsible for feelings and memory, the neo-cortex has two parts.

The left side thinks, plans, schemes and manages our external world. The right side is responsible for feeling and manages our internal world and the quality of things. To become whole we must manage to recruit the fragments of our lives into a complete picture. For that we need both brain hemispheres working in harmony.

When traumatic memories in our brain stem and limbic system are deeply buried, they cause emotional blocks and physical issues. Then the left and right side of the brain can't hear each other.

As a result we lose contact with our feelings and we become driven by these forces without ever knowing it. When that pain gets stuck in the body, a person becomes numb and unable to feel. Going deep into the subconscious is a way of getting the self back, the self that is hidden away from conscious awareness deep in the lower registers of the brain – in other words deep in the heart.

To get something out of life first means to feel the life inside of us.

Joy isn't out there, it's within.

Ask and ye shall receive!

The next time you face a decision place your hand on your heart and ask for the answer.

Feel your own vibrations. Your heart will never lie.

Figure 6



My Beloved Mill Creek

This painting was inspired by the quote "If you're lost and don't know which way to go, stand still – the trees know where you are".

This is a walking path in one of the wild life reserves in Seattle. Nature is such a healing balm no matter where you are.

And, as Ernest Chu says in his book *Soul Currency*, “it’s much better to listen to the heart song than listening to CNN”.

Be still and listen.

The Osho Zen Tarot teaches us that “sometimes deliberate inactivity is all that is necessary in order to aim high above common thought. In that stillness will come the dawning of perception and a movement toward choice and activity”.

Those words are so true, and that’s why it’s important to take time to meditate and listen to your inner voice.

That’s not always as easy as it seems. Listening to your inner voice I mean. There are so many thoughts that run through your mind even when you’re trying to concentrate on just one thing.

The key is learning to focus and honing in on that one thought. That’s what’s meant by inactivity. We are never alone.

In truth we are spiritual beings in human form, and whether or not we choose to be consciously aware is just that – a choice.

It’s all good and well to think about being consciously aware and it’s easy to do when there are no survival issues to be dealt with.

But, when the rent is due and there’s not enough in the checking account to write that check, or when a single mom is feeling overwhelmed with the task of raising her family alone, being consciously aware just doesn’t come into the picture. Stressed out to the max about a life issue seems to take precedence.

However in the midst of the confusion there is always a still small voice at the center of your being.

Call it whatever you will, spirit guide, higher self, guardian angel, but nevertheless the voice is there to guide you.

The truth is problems are not meant to be solved. They come and go in our lives because they are meant to be our teachers. How we face those problems matters, our reactions to them, and the process we go through to work them out.



Challenge!

Here’s a simple little time out exercise:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable space where you won’t be disturbed.
2. Think of the phrase “ah ha”. You know, that “ah ha!” moment when you really get it.
3. While you are thinking of the phrase, stop for a moment after the “ah”.
4. Stay in the space between the “ah” and the “ha”.
5. Remain in the quietude for as long as you can.

Doing this exercise even for one minute will prove to be helpful in learning to hear your still small voice.

Don’t worry. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

And, the more you listen and pay attention, the louder the voice becomes and the easier it is to recognize.

Take some time to journal the answers to the following two questions.

1. Were you able to stay in the space without thoughts intruding?
2. Was it hard to be still?



As an Aside

*Art washes away from the soul
the dust of everyday life.*

- Pablo Picasso

Returning to the center of our being no matter what the issue will always bring a clarity and sense of comfort.

At the time it may seem like nothing more than the calmness in the eye of the storm but that calmness is the beginning to the path with the answers.



As an Aside

*There is no must in art
because art is free.*

- Wassily Kandinsky

Figure 7



Winter Blues

There is something about the beauty of the Northwest that makes me feel proud, tall, and competent.

It's that same feeling I get when I remember that "I am enough just as I am".

That's when I stand more proudly.