

Inspiring Stories about Art Therapy and the Chance to Share Your Own

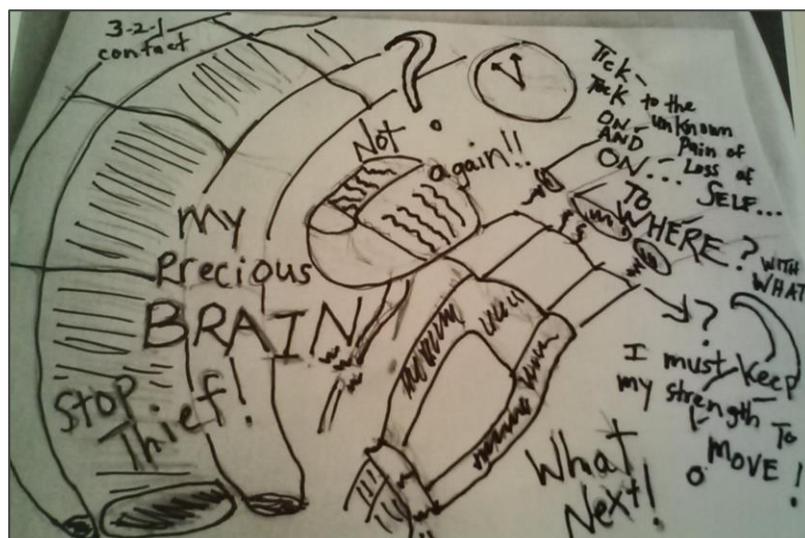
AATA

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In April, the AATA launched *Voices of Art Therapy*, a call for stories by the art therapy community. We have been receiving inspiring stories and companion artwork of memorable moments in art therapists' careers. The stories cover a wide variety of topics including art therapy in the global community, working with specific client groups such as refugees, patients with cancer, clients with Alzheimer's Disease, and trauma survivors, and special moments of clients' empowerment and discovery. We want to share two of them with you, and remind you to [share your own!](#) In the first story, a client with multiple sclerosis realizes the power of art therapy, and in the second, a young girl who has experienced trauma creates a mandala. In both stories, the clients engage in art therapy to battle their anxieties.

“The Power of Art Therapy” by Christina Hom, MA, ATR, CRC, LPCC.

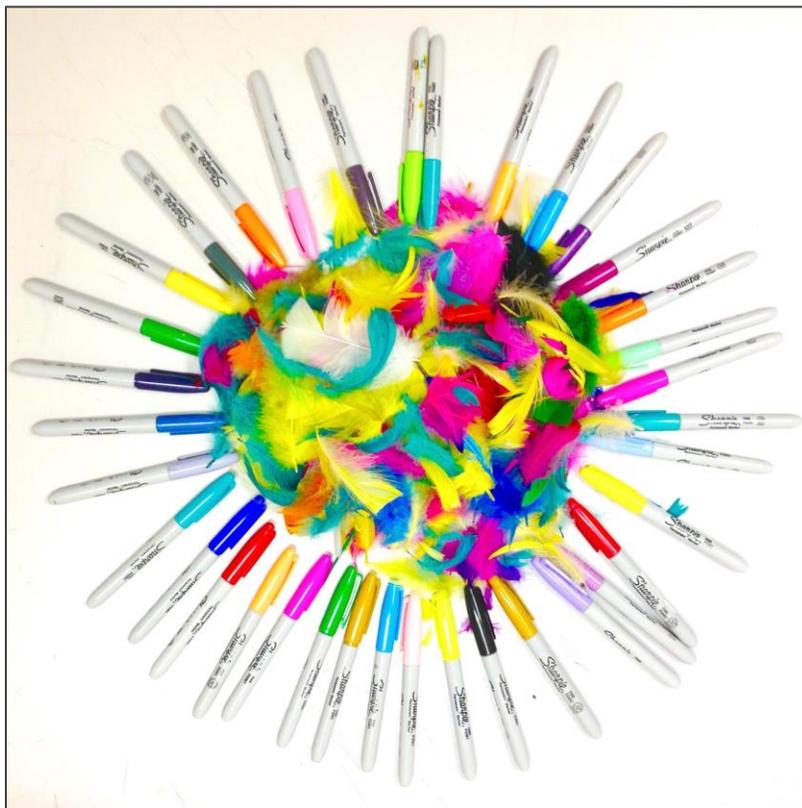
The power of art therapy truly has healing benefits. During my art therapy internship, I worked with Sue, a woman residing at an assisted living community. She lives with anxiety, multiple sclerosis and diabetes. Sue explained to me that her diabetes did not really bother her and that she had learned how to deal with this medical condition. The impact of having multiple sclerosis, however, really did concern her -- especially the progression of the illness. Our art therapy sessions focused on this as well as ways to deal with her anxiety. She created a watercolor mandala and a multiple sclerosis drawing. Art therapy helped Sue improve her quality of life by expressing her feelings, insights, fears and learning ways to cope in her daily life. She was able to find contentment, acceptance, and meaning in her journey of life.



“Inner Circle” by Helen Ellis, MS, ATR-BC, LCAT

A mandala is a circle, a symbol of the universe that is used as an aid to meditation. Some art therapists make mandala-making a primary part of their therapy practice. Although this is not true of me, I see a mandala as a representation of wholeness, and experience has shown me that creating mandalas can be very therapeutic. In spiritual traditions, mandalas may be used for focusing attention and establishing a sacred space. In therapy, creating a safe space is paramount, and focus and self-reflection are ongoing goals. With children who are very disorganized, lack focus, and have difficulty containing themselves, a paper with a pre-drawn circle to work within can be very helpful. It creates a frame, a container, and the circle form surely contributes to a feeling of centeredness. According to Carl Jung, who wrote extensively about mandala symbolism, “The severe pattern imposed by a circular image of this kind compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state—namely, through the construction of a central point to which everything is related.”

An eight year-old girl came to see me for weekly art therapy. She landed in foster care because her father disciplined her and her siblings with regular, severe corporal punishment. She struggled with severe anxiety, among other things, and each week when I greeted her, her brow was furrowed with worry. But she loved making art and found some safety in the sessions. She was easily engaged and lively, and enjoyed the looseness and playfulness of the art process. But experience had taught her to contain herself and to avoid messing up at all costs, so when she did allow herself to loosen up, she could only enjoy it for a little while before the anxiety came flooding back. In a



memorable session, we spent time blowing colored feathers into the air (her idea) with a hair dryer (my idea). After we had spent some time on this playful, silly, fun activity, I became aware that she was becoming anxious. This surfaced in the form of a kind of forced jocularity, a change from fun and silly to nervous, fake, and silly. I knew that giving her a way to contain her anxiety was very important. So we brought things down to earth and made this mandala.

Share Your Story

Now it's your turn to share! How many times have you been asked, "What is art therapy?" There are many ways to describe art therapy and often a story is a powerful way to share our work. We know these amazing stories because we experience them every day and have the honor of witnessing the impact of art therapy in people's lives. Now it's time to share those stories with the world.



Here are some tips for effective storytelling:

- **Provide focus:** Concentrate on one succinct story to allow readers to really connect with the experience.
- **Be visual:** Compelling images draw readers in. Select artwork that sparks emotion and grabs your attention.
- **Use real details:** Quotes, sights, sounds, and events help make your story more tangible and relatable.
- **Get personal:** Focus your attention on the central figure of your story. Tap into human emotion, enabling readers to form a connection with him/her/them.

Please share [this link](#) with your colleagues— all art therapists are encouraged to participate!



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