

## A REVIEW OF THE THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF MAKING AND APPRECIATING WORKS OF ART

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### Abstract

Artworks which are an important significance in worship are also an integral part of healing in our society. Based on this premise, could the traditional healer who flaunts creative works of art be adjudged to be a therapist rather than a diviner, sorcerer, magician or a wizard?

Could Picasso's (1970) opinion that art is a lie, but it is used in telling the truth, affirm the saying that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder? This paper swings its pendulum on the making, appreciation and use of works of art as therapeutic agents to solving trifling or trivial body stress, anger emotional pressure, worry, self-esteem and many other human conditions.

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**Key Words-** Artworks, Therapeutic, Therapy, Body stress, Emotional pressure.

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### Introduction

Art in all its existing forms speaks to our emotions and memories, and that is why it could be healing as well. Recent studies on the therapeutic effect of art shows that the arts have medicinal qualities that help in reconnecting even the Alzheimer's patient to loved ones as well as their own physical mobility, Reddinger, (2009).

In a recent documentary by Ellena and Huebner (2014) it is proven that, the creative arts bypass the limitations of dementia disorders such as Alzheimer and shows how a patient's still-vibrant imaginations are straightened through therapeutic art. While there is no cure for Alzheimer, it is clear that the arts are vastly improving the lives of the patients, reawakening their inner emotions and giving them a sense of hope and purpose.

Through creating art and reflecting on the products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others, cope with symptoms, stress and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art. Art therapy which is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness and achieve insight to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages- Wikipedia.

Art therapy integrates the field of human development, visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture and other art forms) and the creative process with models of counselling and psychotherapy.

### Objectives

Until now, art was made and preserved for kingship, as it adorns only palaces of traditional rulers and absolute wealthy persons in the society. However, the trend is now trickling down as society is uncovering the immense aesthetical beauty and the therapeutic effects of art to our bodies. Based on this discourse, therefore, the paper shall:

Sensitize the reader on the increase meaningful experience and benefits of appreciating and making art and also evoke on the reader, the knowledge that art provides a safe pace and place for people to explore their creativity in various art media and interest as a soothing balm to most of life's daily challenges.

### Theoretical Background of Therapy

When plastic is molded into the shape of a baby doll we see it both as plastic and a baby doll (whether girl or boy). Although it is only plastic, we respond to it emotionally. Many times, we imagine life into it; it becomes filled with the spirit of a girl or boy child. It attracts us because of its tenderness, although it is not alive, we are made to treat it as though it were human.

Through painting or any creation, an artist gives form to what was his free floating idea. The idea becomes embodied. Quite an innocent object thereafter comes to acquire significance through its creation because of the artist idea which has been attached to it. The creation fulfils a need for the artist in that it brings his idea to limelight. The artwork he has created exteriorizes his idea to the world.

Each time an artist looks at his creation, it permits a release of emotion because of the connection he makes with the idea which prompted him to paint or create the piece, Lubbock (2004) affirms. The aesthetic effect then, in part is due to the fact that the aesthetic both is and is not the object it depicts. Since human society has existed, the arts have helped man to reconcile the eternal conflict between the individual instinctual urges and the demands of society. Thus, all art is therapeutic in the broadest sense of the word. Kramer (1977) holds that,

“the artist who applies modern psychology in the field of art has to adapt his methods to the medium so that the therapeutic value of art is heightened by the introduction of therapeutic thinking, and not destroyed or weakened by the introduction of concepts and methods, that might be incompatible with the inner laws of artistic creation”.

The words of Kramer are strengthened by Naomi's (1980) position that 'at the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source, when you are an artist, you are a healer; a wordless trust of the same mystery in the foundation of your work and its integrity'. Artistic expressions have been known throughout history as a valuable method of communicating emotions that are not easily articulated. Tardieu and Simon (2005)–French psychiatrists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who studied the effect of art on the mentally ill found art therapy to be an effective and operational approach to diagnosing particular illnesses.

### **What Is Art Therapy?**

Various definitions of the term 'ART THERAPY' exist, each reflecting the historical narrative or theoretical underpinnings of its proponents; Edwards (2004) define art therapy as.... a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of communication. Eric (1983) in the American Art Therapy Association Journal defined art therapy as...therapeutic use of art making within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma or challenges in living and by people who seek personal development.

Art therapy began in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, arising independently in English speaking European Countries, though its roots, lie in the use of art in the 'moral treatment' of psychiatric patients in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This treatment Hogan (2001) argues, arose out of utilitarian philosophy and also from a non-conformist religious tradition.

The British artist Hill (1948) coined the term; 'art therapy'. Hill (1948) recovering from tuberculosis in a sanatorium discovered the therapeutic benefits of drawing and painting while convalescing. He wrote that the value of art therapy lay in 'completely engrossing the mind (as well as the fingers)'.

Ellena and Huebner (2014) define art therapy as a form of expressive therapy that uses the creative process of making art to improve a person's physical, mental and emotional well-being. The creative process involved in expressing one's self artistically can help people resolve issues as well as develop and manage their behavior and feeling, reduce stress, and manage self-esteem and awareness. In simple terms art therapy is the use of art and other visual media in the treatment of some minor bodily disorders, which ranges from the child scribbling to express himself, to the mentally handicapped man working with clay to the graphic painting by a woman deeply depressed, though its complex but clearly rewarding.

### **Relationship between Art and Therapy**

The origin of using art in therapy can best be understood when looked at in the context of the arts in general. Art is an indigenous feature of every society and it's ancient as man and has symbolized both personal and cultural aspects of our development.

Art simultaneously reflects and predicts trends within society and has been a forum for personal expression and creative thinking and ideas. The validity of this has long been recognized and indeed encouraged overtime. Nevertheless, when used in a therapeutic setting, art is not recognized in the same way. One possible reason for this is the essential difference between art in the traditional sense and art as its used for therapeutic purposes. While it is

generally believed and understood that most art activity has some therapeutic qualities, what must be made clear is the distinct purpose of art therapy.

The process of art making when entered freely can be relaxing, satisfying, frustrating and even mildly therapeutic. Although this activity is solitary, private and contemplative, its purpose is purely aesthetic as the final product is an end in itself- (exhibited works of art); thus making the therapeutic process rewarding.

In contrast, in a therapy setting, art activity done here is clearly corrective or treatment based and in the presence of a therapist with different purposes and objectives. In therapy, the person and process become more important, as art is used as a means of non-verbal communication. Put elaborately, art activity provides a concrete rather than verbal medium which a person can achieve both consciously and unconsciously, and can also be used as a valuable agent for therapeutic change.

Definition of therapy as that which involves the aim or desire to bring about changes in human disorder makes it clearer. A therapeutic procedure is one designed to assist favorable changes in personality or in living that will outlast the session itself, argues Ulman (1996).

Effective therapeutic procedures are those which result in fundamental and permanent changes and so, as Ulman argues 'therapy is distinguished from activities designed to offer only distraction from inner conflicts; activities whose benefits are therefore at best momentary' Ulman (1996). Art therapy's essence therefore, lies in the therapeutic outcome of the activity of creating something,

Naumburg (1966) a psychoanalytically oriented art therapist and the acknowledged pioneer of art therapy in the USA described art therapy as 'a way of stating mixed, poorly understood feeling in an attempt to bring them into clarity and order. Naumburg, asserted that the process of art therapy is based on the recognition that man's most fundamental thoughts and feelings, derived from the unconscious reach expression in images rather than words. All art activities are naturally and necessarily healing and so what may be considered now is the question; what makes art therapeutic, and how is this achieved?

It is widely accepted that the ability to communicate is an essential human characteristic. Making marks is a form of language that is quite fundamental. When speech is impaired, underdeveloped or for some reason rejected as communicable means, art activity or making can provide a most valuable substitute. It's believed that for people in these circumstances, the discovery of art as a means of communication is extremely therapeutic. 'Even for the most articulate, art can be used as a type of symbolic speech' Ulman, (1975). It is a means of saying something non-verbally through symbols: Images can create clarity in expression, especially with some things that are most difficult to say. Symbolizing feelings and experiences in images can be a more potent means of expression and communication than verbal description, and at the same time, is able to render these feelings and expression less threatening.

Naumburg (1966) believed that, the techniques of art therapy are based on the knowledge that every individual whether trained or untrained in art has a latent capacity to project his inner conflict into visual form. Naumburg further acknowledged that, 'as patients picture such inner experiences, it frequently happens that they become more verbally articulate'. Involving oneself in creative activities daily has a rewarding psychological effect that may manifest overtime, and when it does, it is quite healing to the individual body.

When art is used for communication as a way of expressing personal feeling and thoughts, a person can gain insights both intellectually and emotionally by connecting the meaning of the picture to his or her life situation. By focusing on art making, many aspects of oneself, possibly previously hidden may become clear. Something is learnt through art activity. When analyzed, various stages of art activity can contribute to these therapeutic effects; art being a process in which the person is actively and physically engaged. This activity is spontaneous, self-motivated and also self-sustaining as the person becomes absorbed in what he or she is doing.

Edith Kramer, an art therapist who works extensively with children in the USA described the process involved in art making or activity as having inherent healing properties which explain their usefulness in therapy. She sees art as a means of widening the range of human experience by creating equivalents for such experiences. She opined that 'art is an area wherein experiences can be chosen, varied repeated, resolved and integrated' (Kramer, 1977). It is a

concrete statement that art, as a therapeutic tool is unique to the individual, provides the focus for discussion, analyses and self-evaluation and as it is concrete; acts as a record of this activity, which cannot be denied, erased or forgotten. It also survives in time and so is an index of comparison between past and present.

If art activity is found to be beneficial or therapeutic in this way, why is it not more widely recognized and its use more widespread? Reason suggested may be the common misunderstanding of the way in which art is viewed, perceived, placed, used and its purpose in therapy.

### **How Art Heals**

Art and music can immediately change a person's perception of his or her world. This change affects attitude, emotional state and pain perception. Art creates hope and positivity and help people cope with difficulties as it can transform a person's outlook and way of being in the world. Pratt (2004), defines the arts as a de-stressor and coping mechanism for both physical and emotional pain as it creates a distraction and a form to work out the troubling emotions at the same time, e.g. the ex-voto paintings in a Catholic folk art tradition that, arts are a tradition for divine intervention in personal calamities as well as an inadvertent catalogue of human fortune. According to Meier (2012), the art works covered every aspect of human living and were commissioned as a sign of religious gratitude.

While attached to the popular practice of Catholicism, the ex-voto paintings developed from the votive ritual, which dates back to the ancient pagan belief of Rome, Mesopotamia and Egypt, (Meier, 2012). The ex-voto paintings served as personal petitions to the supernatural. According to Carroll (1944), the practice of installing ex-voto art in Catholic sanctuaries as a sign of healing began in Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter spread across Europe.

Art appreciation and making affects every cell in the body instantly to create a healing physiology that changes the immune system and blood flow to all ages. Studies on therapy have proven that coloring, even as an adult has tremendous benefits. Working through art is a fun way for children to learn self-expression or develop sensory areas in the brain. People who have difficulty openly expressing emotions can express themselves through their art work (Pratt, 2004).

Art making has moved people along their journey of grief, sadness, pain and loss into a more balanced place of healing and hope. In the face of tragedy, the creative process of painting, listening to music, watching a movie can help recalibrate a mourner's life. This position is further affirmed by Puella (2016). According to him, art can be used to 'reduce the transgressional transmission of pain and suffering; and impacting the imagination and creativity of people to transmit love, peace and personal responsibility'.

### **Benefits of Art Therapy**

1. Art therapy can provide a forum to express one's strengths and geniuses.
2. Through the viewing of one's own creative endeavors, the skill of skill-observation can be improved.
3. What ordinarily cannot be said with words- may be explicitly expressed through the art.
4. Metaphors and stories emerge through art- which can provide a voice for materials which may be difficult to express.
5. Art therapy is active and physically oriented, fun and stimulating.
6. Emerging and recurrent symbols expressed in the art can help to make unconscious materials conscious.
7. Art therapy can make the hidden- visible in an external and tangible way.
8. Making art provides an experience which is stress and anxiety reducing, relaxing and able to decrease worry.

### **Conclusion**

It is a known fact by neurophysiologist that art, prayer and healing all come from the same source in the body, as they are all associated with similar brain wave patterns, mind and body changes and they are all deeply connected in feeling and meaning. Art and healing take us into our inner world, the world of imagery and emotion; of vision and feelings.

The journey inward into what used to be called the spirit or soul and is now called the mind is improved as emotions and art are closely connected and making art can aid in uplifting one's mind, the whole brain and can foster integration of emotional, cognitive and sensory processes. Therapy comes to us from within, our own healing resources are freed to allow our immune system to operate optimally and that is always how we are healed. Art therapy can be a mixture of drawing, coloring, painting, sculpting and pretty much more everything else you can think of that is artistic and nourishing to the body. They could be hobbies, plays singing, etc. So why not use these activities to better yourself and show yourself some fun and love.

### Recommendation

'Art is unquestionably one of the purest and highest elements in human happiness as it trains the mind through the eye and the eye through the mind. As the sun colors flowers, so does art colors life' (Lubbock, 2004). Going by these words, therefore, the following are recommendations towards having a pleasant therapeutic affair.

- a. Play with the arts whether in active or passive mood. It will help expand your view of recreation, either by creating, or visiting galleries/museums or watching performances; the benefits are endless.
- b. The arts connect you to the outside world. This helps you appreciate the talents, the form, and the methods of expression as well as the effects of color on mood or emotion. All these are possible through visits to museums, exhibitions as you are opened to collections on art and artefacts ordinarily you are not opportune to see unless you travel out.
- c. Membership to museums, galleries, theatre art groups are a great way to unwind and have information come to you about what is going on in your community.
- d. For children, visiting museums, amusement parks, playgrounds etc. where they can touch, feel, play and do things related to art is very rewarding and will help build their emotion and creative ingenuity as they grow.
- e. The famous British Nurse, Florence Nightingale once remarked 'Variety of form and brilliancy of color in the objects presented to the patients are an actual means of recovery'. This statement is recommending the practice and learning to stay in between colorful environments as colors can have a significant effect on our daily moods. Buy colors for your home and be ready always to learn something new. Practice how to paint even un-professionally with the kids as these exercises are relaxing and soothing to the nerves.

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