Art Making as Spiritual Path: The Open Studio Process as a Way to Practice Art Therapy

The primary contribution of a spiritual approach to art making is the opportunity to experientially dissolve dualism. Spiritual practice is undertaken out of the belief in the existence of a force, power, energy, or reality greater than the individual self, and the related belief that it is possible and desirable to experience our relationship with this reality. This force or energy can be called God, the Universe, Nature, or Creativity, among other names. In the words of William James (1902/1961) in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, there is a “belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (p. 59). Making art can become a means to perform this adjustment, as it creates a path to that unseen force which is easily traveled by way of image making.

The idea of a cosmic unity is found at the heart of all traditions. As Seymour Boorstein (1966) states in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy* “the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest is the experience of oneness with the universe” (1966, p. 5). The practical value of experiencing oneness with the universe is that it leads in a very natural way to compassion for others and the will to do no harm. Typically, laws and rules are relied upon to achieve civilized humane behavior.

All of the world’s wisdom traditions, in addition to providing a creation story and offering some notion of what awaits us after death, also challenge the duality generally experienced in life by holding mystery teachings. The more esoteric aspects of these traditions were not, however, usually available to the general populace. The Kabbalah in Judaism, for example, could traditionally be studied only by married men over the age of 40 who were already deeply learned in the laws, precepts, and observances of the religion. Historically, only a few individuals in any society were involved in such a spiritual quest. The hermits, mystics, and sadhas lived apart from everyday life.

For ordinary people there was religion, a practical, daily, or once-a-week dose of uplifting or moralizing teaching from a professional. The meaning of life was defined by one’s tradition, and important life passages such as births, marriages, and deaths, were served by participating in a community ritual handed down for generations. Just as therapy was originally only available to an educated elite and now occurs in many variations across all social strata, from psychoanalysis to self-revelation on television talk shows, spirituality has also become more egalitarian.

One of the most significant factors in bringing spiritual ideas into mainstream culture has been the arrival of teachers from the East. Over the objections of his monks, Soyen Shaku became the first Zen priest to visit the United States in 1893 to attend the World Parliament of Religions. In the early 1960’s, Japanese teachers began developing Zen centers in the United States, and by the mid-70’s had trained a uniquely American generation of Zen teachers. Tibetan Buddhist Chogyam Trungpa (1934, 1996) came to North America in 1970, and eventually founded the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, which currently houses a Transpersonal Art Therapy training program (Franklin, Falvey-Hansen, Marek, Swan-Foster, & Wallingford, 1999; Franklin, 1999, 2000). Early students of Eastern philosophy were artists, poets, and great thinkers of the era, like Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, Thomas Merton, Arnold Toynbee, and psychoanalysts Erich Fromm and Karen Homey (Tworkov, 1994). Suzuki made Zen teachings widely available through his accessible English writings. The ideas and practices associated with many forms of Eastern thought became common currency, especially on the West coast, and by the mid-70’s psychotherapy was being influenced as well.

Therapists, seekers of another kind, began to see a relationship between spiritual and psychological well-being. A spiritual quest, however, is only truly meaningful within the context of an engaged life. It is necessary to be able to travel back and forth between the poles of existence: activity and rest, individual and universal, personal and communal, a sense of interior self and a feeling of connection to the web of life. As individual therapists became influenced by their own practice of Eastern spiritual paths, their ideas about the goals of treatment or the expanse of human existence changed to include experiences that extend beyond the self, called the *transpersonal* dimension (Walsh & Vaughn, 1996). Aided by thinkers like Ken Wilber (1979), whose work has mapped a unified theory of the evolution of consciousness, therapists began to define *transpersonal psychology*, and its approach to psychotherapy.

The major differences in practice that grow out of the transpersonal approach are described by Walsh and Vaughn (1996) as an *evolution* in psychology. In psychoanalytic models, therapists put aside their own feelings, offering themselves as blank screens for a client’s projections. Humanistic-existential therapists redefine the therapeutic relationship by saying that the therapist ideally opens herself fully to the client’s and her own reactions. “To this human participation, transpersonal orientation adds another perspective: the therapist may serve the client best by viewing the relationship as a karma yoga to foster his own personal growth through consciously serving the client… The therapist’s openness and willingness to view therapy as a process of learning and service can provide useful modeling for the client” (1996, p. 23). Rather than being an expert, the therapist is a fellow traveler, learning from the client as they learn from experiences leading to a greater awareness of the larger movements of consciousness that affect both. The therapist seeks points of connection and works on the issues mirrored to him by the client, aiming to expand his own consciousness and, as a result, be of greater service to the client.

As practitioners continue their own journeys they attempt to integrate their transformative experiences into their work with others. There is a recognition that this approach is not for everyone, that pitfalls, such as ego-inflation, can occur when there is confusion over what is personal and what is transpersonal. Like every aspect of knowledge, spiritual ideas can be used for good but also for harm. Calling something spiritual can
make it seem a noble refuge when it is merely a garden variety avoidance of everyday responsibilities.

The Place of Art

This is why art therapy offers something uniquely valuable for those of us who are concerned with transpersonal or spiritual dimensions. For it gives us a way to bring these dimensions directly into the work we do with others. Rather than focusing primarily on expanding consciousness, like meditation, art making offers a practical path—for the making of images is in itself a practice, a discipline that offers a grounding in everyday reality.

Practice, here defined as mindful engagement in a discipline on a regular basis, is needed in order to learn how to traverse any spiritual path. Art making offers unique possibilities as a method of spiritual practice, because of its ability to travel back and forth between any of the pairs of opposites that comprise our experience of duality in a general sense, while simultaneously allowing personal lessons to emerge for an individual. Guidance about everyday life is as available as cosmic insights about the workings of the universe. The connection between these two can become manifest through making art, allowing what Carl Jung called the "union of opposites" to occur within the individual. Jung, in fact, was one of the first to employ art making in this manner and for this purpose.

Throughout a significant period of his life, Jung engaged in making images and dialoguing with those images. They were created privately as a "self-experiment . . . trying to understand the fantasies and other contents that surfaced from his unconscious and to come to terms with them" (Jaffe, 1979, p. 66). Of enormous significance was an image of an old man called Philemon with whom Jung shared long dialogues. "Psychologically, Philemon represented superior insight . . . To me he was what the Indians call a guru . . . Philemon was a force which was not of myself" (Jaffe, 1979, p. 68). After six years of engaging in the practice of art and writing, Jung transcribed his insights in his Red Notebook, which in fact became the sourcebook for all his subsequent theoretical writings.

This work drew him to studies of Eastern philosophy, to the study and painting of mandalas, and to the suggestion to his patients that they take up painting as part of their analysis. Jung came to understand that "Everything living dreams of individuation, for everything strives towards its own wholeness" (Jaffe, 1979, p. 78). He noticed that the form of the mandala, which became prevalent in his art work, was also found in nature from the most minute scale, as in the formation of crystals, to the unfathomably large image of the sun or moon, or the vibrational image of sound when spoken in such a way as to record a visual image (Jaffe, 1979, pp. 78-79). Jung found, through his personal explorations, that the unfolding of individual psychology is intricately connected with an innate capacity to know the divine. Art and writing constituted his ladder between the individual and the universal, revealing the divine in everyday life.

Florence Cane (1951/1983), author of The Artist in Each of Us, clearly understood that art making can be a spiritual practice. She felt that through creating art the individual progressed naturally in his or her personality integration. Her teaching methods echo many spiritual practices, in her focus on breath, rhythmic movement, and chanting mantric sounds. "It is as if movement, feeling and thought represented three dimensions, and in learning to use all three, the child were permitted to glimpse the fourth dimension, spiritual awakening" (1951/1983, p. 35). Cane was aware that while engaging in a disciplined practice of art making, one's problem areas arose naturally, and that the demands of creating art provided reparative opportunities. Like Jung, she saw the unfolding of the individual into unique wholeness as a natural process that needs support far more than intervention. She found the art studio an ideal home in which this process could unfold. Later, Shaun McNiff (1989) carried forward this trend in his painting studios, and in the inclusion of all of the expressive arts in his work and the training of students.

More recently, Michael Franklin, Director of art therapy training in the program founded by Mimi Farrelly in 1992 at Naropa Institute, helps students integrate personal spiritual practice with their training in clinical and studio art therapy (cf. Franklin, 1999; Franklin, Farrelly-Hansen, Marek, Swan-Foster, & Wallingford, 1999). Embedded in Naropa's tradition of transpersonal psychology, the program maintains the art-based tradition in art therapy that traces its roots to Edith Kramer (1958, 1971). As committed practitioners of diverse spiritual traditions, Franklin and his colleagues are carefully articulating how art therapists on personal spiritual paths can practice art therapy in the world. Students are clinically trained and able to sit for the counselor's licensing exam, and at the same time are required to engage in regular spiritual disciplines that will support and inform their work.

Art Therapy and Spirituality: The Open Studio Approach

I had been deeply inspired by both Jung and Cane in my choice of a career as an art therapist. However, my real-life mentor was Margaret Naumburg, and it was from her that I and many other art therapists took our cue. Naumburg had taken a different path, where the same techniques that her sister Florence Cane had employed toward spiritual awakening, were instead harnessed for psychological insight. Rather than a natural unfolding of the human personality, a dynamic process was imagined, in which the individual struggled against conflicts within the self for mental health. The element of involved art making as practice was lost when, perhaps as a sign of the times, one of the strongest claims made for art in therapy was that it "speeded up" the process of gaining insight. And it was insight, rather than a harmonious alignment of mind, body, and spirit that was considered the therapeutic goal.

Acquiring insight in a speedy manner is not as compatible with making art as it is with making signs and symbols. The premature search for meaning seems to circumvent the creative process, by short-circuiting the energy needed to stay engaged with an image. As in nature, processes of growth and change unfold quite simply on their own timetable and with the right conditions. It is the understanding and providing of the right conditions that makes the art therapist most helpful in work with others.

After many years of clinical work in the mid-70's and 80's, I found that, for me, working psychotherapeutically with others impaired and inhibited my own making and sense of connection to the creative force. It also seemed that, except for a few champions of the soul like Shaun McNiff (1989, 1992), art therapy as a profession had somehow left the bright thread of spirit out of the weave, as it struggled to achieve self-definition as well as recognition and parity with mental health disciplines.

Going back to my own art in search of the answer to my dispirited condition, I tried to systematically strip away whatever seemed superfluous from art therapy as I had learned and practiced it so far. I was trying to locate once again the healing spirit of art. The three key principles that I rediscovered about art as a spiritual practice are:
Intention, Attention, and Witness (Allen, 1995a). It is, however, one thing to develop a personal approach to art making that answers one's own spiritual needs and quite another to determine whether it has relevance to anyone else.

In 1995, after several years of discussion and experimentation with ourselves and others, Dayna Bloch, Deborah Gadiel, and I set out to discover whether it is possible to make one's own art alongside others and be of service at the same time. This intention guided our development of the Open Studio Project, an art studio located in a Chicago storefront, which became a laboratory for these ideas (Allen, 1995b). Over the past eight years we have refined and developed a process that owes a great deal to traditional art therapy but offers a different way to do it. The Open Studio Process is founded on these elements: intention, attention to art making, and witness through writing and reading. This method is available to art therapists as one way of working, but it demands that any facilitator be honestly engaged in the process every time he or she provides it to others.

While transpersonal psychology offers us many useful concepts with which to craft ideas about the larger dimensions of human consciousness, it remains, as all talk therapies do, a largely intellectual enterprise. The Open Studio Process serves the manifestation of spiritual ideas in tangible ways, while at the same time minimizing some of the traps of both transpersonal and art therapy that remain as vestiges of their origins. Where transpersonal psychology adds modeling karma as a new concept to the practice of art therapy, art therapy can, through the Open Studio Process, manifest these ideas in very concrete ways. By engaging in one's own art making alongside another person, the therapist models in actuality what faith in a force larger than oneself looks like—the process of risk and openness to the unseen.

This approach places certain demands on the art therapist and reorders typical priorities. The basic premise is that "Creativity" is another name for the life force energy, and that art making is one means to receive and cultivate this energy. Just as one would hardly seek a Tai Chi instructor who has only watched videos or observed others practice the movements, or who has refused to show by his own example his commitment to the discipline, only an art therapist with a personal understanding of making art can truly work in this way. Living in the moment with fear and wonder is the very essence of creating, and is a necessary condition for this kind of work.

Similarly, concepts such as diagnosis and treatment are given up, as in other humanistic approaches, in favor of the practice of intention and witness. Intention in this model is a statement, composed by each person for him or herself, directed toward the universe, acknowledging what it is that the participant wishes to receive from engaging in the process of art making. The art therapist, too, makes an intention for herself. She might address her role as facilitator, but it must be one of non-interference and doing no harm. In other words, an appropriate intention for an art therapist could be: "I am open to my own learning, and I do no harm to others as I facilitate this experience." It would be incorrect to say "I help others gain insight" or "I facilitate the learning of others." There is a recognition that the primary relationship is between each individual and the creative force, and that those present form a community of service to this force and to each other through their personal honesty in their own process, rather than in covert attempts to "help" one another.

For this reason, no comments about the art or the witness writing are allowed. This is perhaps the greatest difference between traditional art therapy of any orientation and the Open Studio Process. While there may be conversation during art making, the rule against comments about art work is observed. Following the art making time, usually two hours long, each person sits before his or her art and looks at it, noticing body

Then writing begins. Participants are encouraged to write as freely as possible, without regard for grammar, syntax, or sense, adding anything that comes to mind, including judgments or self-observations, without censorship. Beginners are especially encouraged to describe their work in order to really see it. Dialogue with the image is another way to engage deeply. By addressing a question to the image and inviting it to speak, the artist affirms its autonomous existence as the guise of soul, as well as a willingness to engage with its wisdom. This takes five to twenty minutes.

Then, whoever wishes is invited to point out her art work and to read aloud her intention, witness, or any portion of these. The others wait in silence until the next person chooses to read. While there are sometimes sighs, laughter, and even tears, which may be said to constitute commentary, the rule against verbal comments is strictly held and adhered to by all, participants and facilitator alike. Even caretaking behaviors and supportive comments are discouraged during the witness reading. During this time the group members serve as the embodiment of "witness consciousness" (Franklin, 1999), that spacious expanse of no judgments where anything can be held and let go of.

Depending on the facilitator and the nature of the experience, the group may close at that point, or if time remains, a chime is rung and a brief centering meditation or a physical exercise is offered. After formal closure, members sometimes chat socially for a while; and if an individual feels a need for a slower transition to life outside the studio, he or she is invited to help wash brushes or participate in other aspects of cleanup as a grounding experience.

What takes place in this experience? Can it be considered a form of art therapy? Let's consider each element of the process and the theory behind it:

**Intention**

Intention acknowledges that each individual is responsible for deciding what he or she wants to understand, change, or accept about him or herself. There is neither the responsibility nor the right to evaluate or set goals for another person. The setting of an intention may be highly personal and specific one day and more global the next. At any given time in a group, the intentions of participants will span the gamut. Some examples of intentions are:

- I connect to my creativity and allow it to lead me.
- I am open to my learning.
- I understand how to intervene in my family issues without doing harm to myself or others.
- I release my judgments about ________.
- I understand what is behind this feeling of anxiety, depression, helplessness.
- I gain insight into how to facilitate positive change in my life, in my workplace, in my community.

We learn from each other and from simply considering what it really is that we intend toward ourselves, others, and the world. However, we also come to see, as Rabbi David Cooper (1997) points out:

It is important to understand that an intention behind an act does not ensure its results. Intention must be balanced by awareness. The greater the awareness, the greater the probability that something good will come out. The denser the awareness, even though one's intentions may be good, the greater the risk that things will not turn out so well. We could...
do something kind hearted for someone without realizing that this could bring enormous grief into his or her life. (p. 141)

Learning about intention and the discernment required occurs through modeling and sharing among group members. For example, one participant went through a phase where she was setting intentions for her husband and child rather than for herself. Soon, through her own images and witness dialogues, she recognized the futility of this approach, allowing us all to become conscious of how we often seek to change others rather than ourselves.

Art Making

Making art is one of the primary ways to refine one’s awareness. The making of images, as any art therapist knows, often uncovers the hidden complexities of our lives and feelings. The Open Studio Process encourages engagement with simple materials, but in an involved and sustained way. Participants are encouraged to begin spontaneously and then allow the energy of the image to lead. We follow the image by paying close attention to our physical state. A sense of pleasure or flow is a sign that we are serving the image well. Time may fly or seem endless; other concerns may drop away. If there is music playing in the studio we may not hear it, or it may carry us to a deep place. Boredom, physical discomfort, or a feeling of being stuck and not knowing what to do next, signal that we are off track. When we notice these sensations, it is time to ask the image for help and guidance.

Stepping back and addressing the image directly by asking, “What do you want?” can sometimes be enough. Otherwise, a brief interval of witness writing can serve to let us know how or why we are resisting the flow of energy of the creative force through the image and back again to ourselves. Often, we discover fear. We may have created an aesthetically pleasing image, but the image wants more and we resist “messing it up.” Sometimes an image becomes dark, and we fear that something threatening will emerge. We try to stay with the image. If it is too difficult to keep working, we might just sit and look. Writing and dialoguing is an excellent way to move through any impasse.

The experience of pleasure in art making is one of its crucial values. Experiencing genuine pleasure creates a sense of trust. Like having a guide on a mountain climbing or scuba diving adventure, our trust in the image as guide allows us to travel deeper and higher into the complex dimensions of life.

Witness Writing

This is a key component of the Open Studio Process, in which we simply record all that we experience. Often beginning with a description of the piece is helpful, just to train ourselves in the crucial act of paying attention to what is before us. We can describe the image as a way of appreciating it: “You are so bright and full of color.” “I like the way that black line snakes around the top of the page.” We are also free to say what we don’t like and to note ways in which the image is different from what we expected. It is important to examine our judgments as a valuable form of information. If there is something in the image that makes us uncomfortable, it is worth reflecting on. We recognize that the image has a life of its own. Its opinions and wishes may be quite different from ours. Our overriding intention is to serve the image as a manifestation of the creative force.

Therefore, we address the image to learn what it requires. When we ask the image “What do you want?” the answer is usually very clear: “Brighten my background, define my features more clearly, add an owl to the picture.” We may also ask the image what it has to say to us. Direct guidance is almost always forthcoming. It may have to do with the art process or not. The image may tell us to rest, to hold our tongue in a particular situation, to create an image in a particular medium, or to do nothing. The witness writing is a way to practice listening to the inner voice of wisdom, and has proved remarkably useful in illuminating and developing the relationship of the image to the person who made it. In every case, we hear from the image a unique wisdom that enriches not only the writer, but all who are present.

After writing, each person has the opportunity to read their writing aloud. Hearing the words and dialogues is powerful, and often reveals yet another level of meaning or impact, both to the one who reads and those who listen. As we sit and listen to one another, the sounds of struggle, joy, resistance, acceptance, anguish, and humor ring with truth. Because we make no comments, we must each sit with the feelings aroused in us by our own truth and that of others.

This self-restraint is a crucial part of the process and trains us to become mindful of what we say, why we say it, and how little of what we say is either necessary or helpful. We see our judgments of others shift and change, as we hear their images speak. The being with others in this respectful way, owning our own reactions, creates a space for profound empathy among individuals and for the overall human condition. We learn to tolerate strong emotions, rather than to suppress them or act them out through blurted platitudes.

In a sense, the overall process is an action metaphor for the values described by the Dalai Lama: “Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness to self and others” (1999, p. 22). Images, emotions, words, rise and are seen, and fade as the group itself serves as the witness consciousness sought in meditation. The truth that we are unique yet profoundly connected individuals is felt and experienced over and over. A sacred space is created where truth in all its forms is welcome.

While the Open Studio Process can be practiced by individuals alone, the energy of the group has a compelling part to play. As we hear our own thoughts and feelings echoed by others, or at times hear a counterpart to some emotion that balances our own, we are reminded again and again of the depth and variety of the human condition, and feel ourselves an integral part of the human family. At the close of a group, participants often express feeling nourished and deeply satisfied. The hunger for meaning and connection seems indeed to be met by this humble process.

The Story of Janet

Try to imagine that alongside Janet are perhaps half a dozen others deeply engaged on any given day in painting a tiny watercolor with intense concentration, arranging the beaded covering on a sculpture of a female figure, standing and drawing abstract strokes on a huge sheet of Kraft paper taped to the wall, etc. In the background a Celtic harp tape plays, and outside the plate glass window of the storefront studio, commuters walk purposively toward the train, late in hand, occasionally glancing in, and perhaps wondering why grownups are engaged in what appears to be play during business hours.
Janet’s Dog

Janet, an organizational consultant, has a fascinating professional life. As an independent consultant to nonprofits, she helps design and organize large-scale fund-raising events. She is adept at helping organizations see their strengths and capitalize on them to fuel their mission and keep their work going. The nature of her work is feast or famine, periods of huge effort and then down time, big payoffs at the end of a project and lean months in between. Janet has to provide her own structure, and the skill of discernment is crucial to keeping balance in life as well as in her checkbook.

While recovering from bronchitis, Janet formed the intention to nurture herself and to give caring to herself, tapping into and leveraging her own strengths. Her intention read in part:

It means not living for the moment, not buying expensive things, not thinking I’m rich because I get a big contract. It means focus and control. It’s a different lifestyle—not running all over the country to visit friends, but following my dream of buying a house… I need enough nurturing—I need more nurturing—images of nurturing.

The image that came to Janet was a dog. He took shape over a number of months. For Janet, who likes to work fast and get things done, creating a sculpture of the dog was a new experience. If she worked too fast, he wouldn’t be strong enough; he had to be built up of many layers and finally covered with plaster gauze. Then, when he was all built, his ears didn’t look quite right to her and his neck wasn’t strong enough. In her witness writing the dog asked to have these parts fixed. Janet did the extra work and the dog approved (Figure 12.1).

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Janet: How did I do?

Dog: Good. You bit the bullet, ripped me apart, or performed surgery, and put me back together—better, just like the house and mortgage process. Take a look, do something, see results, take the next step, regroup, try again to shape it.

Janet worked on other pieces as well during this time, but the dog presented many challenges, technical as well as personal. He wanted a stand, to look both earthbound and flying, to have both a strong foundation and a launching pad. His heart was a matter of great concern and care. Sometimes his advice was simple, yet profound.

Janet: Dog, anything else?

Dog: Walk the dog.

Janet: What does that mean?

Dog: First literally—all the dogs in your life—walk them whenever you can. Second, get out yourself and get air and exercise. Third, keep practicing!

The dog finally came close to being finished, but continued to advise Janet and remind her of her goals. From her witness writing:

The dog is lusty and smooth—wild circles are under the surface yet can be seen—especially underneath. I like him—he’s solid, substantial, sturdy, yet sleek and shiny. You can see his bumps, bruises and irregularities (like mine), but they are part of the whole. You can see the glitter stripes, but they are like lines of a past life, scars, sentiments of the future. Looks doughy and determined, but strong enough to get where he’s going—running.

Janet: Want to speak?

Dog: You did good. Your dogged determination is paying off. You are walking the dog. But remember, we dogs need walking every day. Once a week doesn’t do it!

Janet: What else?

Dog: Finish me up, glue me down, put a removable bottom on. Wrap up the hearts and dog—the little one—and find a place for me.

The dog, like the tree, is rooted in the earth—in life, in trust… I really did create something here—extremely satisfying. Paint “Walk the Dog” somewhere on it. Make plans to come back.

Reflections

Janet’s dog (see Figure 12.1) was created during weekly groups where five to seven participants gather to engage in the process together. Each person’s work speaks not only to its maker but to the group as well. Many of us resonated with the advice Janet received from her dog. Janet continues to use the Open Studio Process as a means to gain pleasure in using materials, to slow down and figure out what she needs in the moment, as well as to explore issues in her life. She is getting married soon and organized an event about weddings, where she gathered all sorts of images, hung them up in the studio, and invited guests to witness the images.

This sort of deepening of any aspect of life is a natural outgrowth of the process, where eventually life itself becomes an amazing, ongoing work of art that we can continually witness and learn from, delight in, and become curious about. Our particular feelings, like anxiety or anger, become like the colors we paint with, and we can decide to tone
them down, or eliminate them from our palette for awhile, and see how the overall work is shaping up with fresh colors.

The overall outcome of engagement in this process as a spiritual practice is a subtle transformation of personality, as the individual accesses the meaning and purpose of his or her life. Along the way insights are gained, struggles are resolved, and perceptions are sharpened. A larger lens grows through which to view life, putting one's particular faults and failings and those of others into a perspective of lessons to be learned, for the benefit of the world at large as well as for the self.

In the usual practice of therapy the therapist puts her faith in and seeks her guidance from a theoretical point of view. The client puts his faith in the therapist. In the Open Studio Process, it is assumed that there is an intelligence, a force, of which we are a part, that seeks to manifest itself through us; and that if we make the effort, through disciplined practice, to align ourselves with this force, we will be guided to truth and right action. Each of us has something unique to bring to life and to share with each other. "It is in the telling and retelling, as truthfully as we can, and in the genuine witnessing of all the stories of all people that we heal ourselves and the world" (Allen, 1995a, p. 199).

References


COMMENTARY

Bruce Moon

The chapters in this section emerge from the authors' commonly held belief in the inner wisdom and resilience of human beings. Betensky, Rhyne, Garai, Rogers, and Allen offer their own unique visions of art therapy, under the larger umbrella of humanistic approaches. These authors share a deep conviction that individuals long for, and strive to create, meaning in their lives. Despite changes—in health care delivery systems stressing short-term therapy, and in literary forms emphasizing gender-inclusive language—in the time since the first publication of this text, the earlier contributions hold up remarkably well. Perhaps this is a testament to the unchanging core issues of human existence.

The new chapters by Rogers and Allen are significant additions to the humanistic literature of the discipline. Their image of the expressive art therapist as a fellow traveler is clearly in sync with the offerings of the earlier contributors, while being closely aligned with ideas advanced by McNiff (1992, 1998), Moon (1994), and others.

My endeavors (Moon, 1995) as an existentional art therapist have led me into countless encounters with clients' artworks, as well as with my own images. In our common search to understand the meaning of these many artistic works—through mutual self-exploration, self-revelation, and responsive art making—I have witnessed exhilarating breakthroughs by suffering people who were determined to make changes in their lives.

I have come to value artistic processes that support both spontaneous expression and disciplined mastery of materials. I especially admire humanistic methodologies that open channels of self-expression and self-awareness, through artistic activities that enable people to explore their own hopes and visions about how they want to live their lives. Broadly speaking, humanistic methodologies engage art therapists and their clients in tasks that encourage openness, and honor whatever psychic material emerges in the artwork. An art therapist's sensitive alertness to the inner villains and heroes of individual consciousness is greatly enhanced by looking—lovingly—at the image metaphors created by clients.

Betensky, Rhyne, Garai, Rogers, and Allen have all developed humanistic approaches to helping troubled clients looking for safe haven in the supportive milieu of art therapy. As Moustakas (1994) notes, "Again and again I have witnessed the natural tendency of people to share their stories openly and freely when the climate of learning fosters and encourages self-disclosure" (p. 2).

Each of the approaches to art therapy presented in this section emphasizes the importance of "being" in the context of relationships with others, with images, and with the world. Humanistic models embrace the significance of creativity, self-direction, potential, and meaning in all human interactions. These models do not regard human