

“Art therapy was my lifeline, my reason for survival. I needed to create, to show the deepest aspects of myself and share that with others.”

– Art Therapy Participant

About Us

We are the Canadian voice of art therapy. We bring together art therapists to raise standards and advance art therapy practices.

Health Benefits of Art Therapy

Art therapy engages all the senses to relax the nervous system. Art making causes a shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic nervous system, which results in improved self-regulation, anxiety reduction, feeling more in control¹, improved executive functioning², and acceptance and integration within the whole self^{3,4}.

¹Hass-Cohen, N. & Carr, R. (Eds.). (2008). *Art therapy and clinical neuroscience*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

²Del Giocco, M. (2000). *Art therapy: A missing link in cognitive rehabilitation for the neurologically impaired*. Del Giocco Art Therapy Institute.

³Collie, K & Kante, A. (2011). Art groups for marginalized women with breast cancer. *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(5), 652-661.

⁴Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.) (2012). *Art therapy and health care*. Gilford Press.

Contact Us

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Annual Conference:
canadianarttherapy.org/upcoming-conference/

Find us on:



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Cover artwork: *Only Time* by Irit Epstein

CANADIAN ART THERAPY ASSOCIATION

The Voice of Art Therapy

Art Therapy for Trauma Recovery



Artwork: Highway 69 Revisited by Claudia Mandler McKnight

Trauma

- Involves a single or series of unexpected and frightening events that are beyond the person's control and completely overwhelm the person's ability to cope and integrate the experience
- Creates a profound impact on a person's identity, mind, body and spirit
- Affects people of all ages, races, cultures and walks of life
- Psychological trauma can result from: combat/war or other kinds of violence; physical, sexual or emotional abuse; accidents, crimes or disaster; deeply humiliating or disappointing circumstances; discovery of serious illness

What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, colour and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings can be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate.⁵

Through the use of art-making, discussion and reflections on the artwork, and relationship building, art therapists support individuals in problem-solving, developing self-awareness, strengthening self-esteem, managing stress, and engaging in positive social interactions.⁶

⁵ Canadian Art Therapy Association. (2017). *What is art therapy*. <http://www.canadianarttherapy.org/what-is-art-therapy/>

⁶ American Art Therapy Association. (2017). *What is art therapy*. <https://arttherapy.org/aata-about-us/>

Professional Standards for Art Therapists

Art therapists are trained professionals with unique therapeutic skills and expertise in counseling psychology and fine arts. In Canada and the United States, art therapists must have at minimum a master's degree or a master's level diploma in art therapy before identifying themselves within the profession. This graduate level education includes supervised clinical practicum hours (700 hours for Canadian art therapists), thus ensuring the safety of the client as well as professional liability for agencies and employers offering this form of therapy.

If you are interested in education in art therapy, or looking for an art therapist in your area, please visit the CATA website at canadianarttherapy.org.

Why Art Therapy in Trauma Recovery?

- Research shows that trauma is stored in the brain as a sensory experience, with fragments of images and sensations, rather than a cognitive, coherent narrative⁷
- A sensory experience such as art therapy can thus provide a vehicle for externalizing traumatic experiences and releasing tension⁸
- The kinesthetic experience of art-making may also serve to enhance a relaxation response and help increase the ability to tolerate stressors⁹
- The manipulation of art material and guidance of the art therapist help to modulate emotions, thus strengthening the person's sense of control¹⁰
- The resulting artwork can serve as a symbolic representation and container of the effects of trauma, thus aiding the person in integrating the experience and feelings into one's life narrative¹¹
- Art therapy encourages creativity, and supports the individual to connect with inner strengths and develop alternative responses to stressors and problems¹²
- Art-making can be a pleasurable experience that supports individuals in addressing emotional numbing as a result of trauma, and reconnecting with positive emotions¹³

⁷ Gerteisen, J. (2008). Monsters, monkeys, & mandalas: Art therapy with children experiencing the effects of trauma and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 25(2), p. 90-93.

^{8,9,11,12,13} Tripp, T. (2007). A short term therapy approach to processing trauma: Art therapy and bilateral stimulation. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 24(4), p. 176-183.

¹⁰ Sarid, O. & Huss, E. (2010). Trauma and acute stress disorder: A comparison between cognitive behavioral intervention and art therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 37(1), 8-12.