



# TRAUMA INFORMED ART THERAPY

Art Therapy at Be Brave Ranch

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# What is art therapy?



- Art therapy is the marriage of the exploration of the creative process to psychological theory with the purpose of providing a means to generate creative solutions and expressions of internal (frequently unconscious) thoughts, ideas and processes that are causing emotional and psychological difficulties. The artistic energy has the potential to be transformative: fear, pain, lack of confidence and a host of unhealthy coping mechanisms can be painted into the past as a new and beautiful, rich life appears on the page.
- Creative arts therapies can take the form of art, music, dance, drama, poetry, writing, or any other creative endeavor.

# Why ART THERAPY?



- Many psychologists and therapists use art activities as part of their treatment. They may not have the specific knowledge of how different types of art media affect people in particular ways (for example: natural clay can be a deep trigger for individuals who have been sexually abused). The ethical considerations for art therapists differ slightly from other therapists, for example: touch is an inherent part of art making (guiding hands, applying mask materials to face...)
- Art therapists are trained to assist individuals understand the meanings of their own art. “In general, creative arts therapists, expressive therapists, and play therapists do not seek to interpret individuals’ drawings. Movement, poems, or play, but facilitate those individuals’ discovery of personal meaning and understanding of such expression.”

- Malchiodi (2008, pp. 25)

# Art Therapy and Trauma

- Trauma changes brains.
- Specifically the area of the brain known as Broca's area has been shown to be affected by trauma. This part of the brain is responsible for language control, thereby making it difficult for trauma survivors to speak about their experiences.
- Trauma is stored as somatic experiences: sensations and images. Art therapy can mitigate the trauma survivor's need to speak about the trauma- using arts therapies that are also somatically based, can help.

(Malchiodi, 2008. pp. 9-10)



# More on ART THERAPY and Trauma

- “Using creative activities to tell their crisis stories offers them an opportunity to begin to give form to raw experience, gain some sense of cognitive mastery over the crisis, and make important discoveries about possible resolutions.”

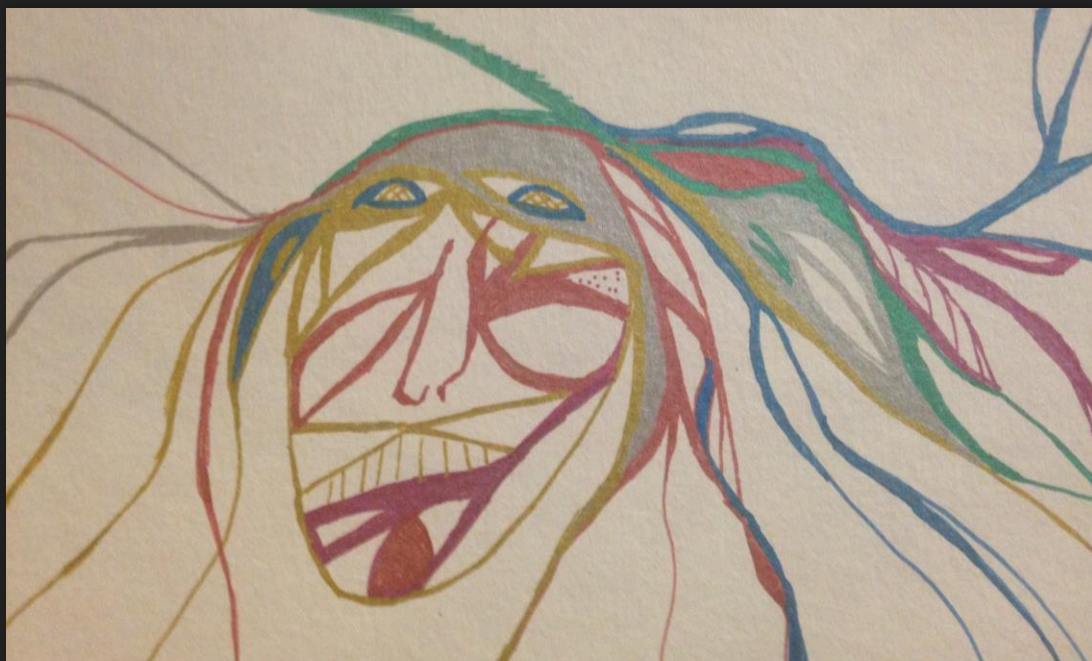
-Lennis G. Echterling

Anne Stewart (2008, pp. 198)





# Raw Experience



# How does art therapy 'work'?



- Art Therapy:
- 1. Uses a “neurosequential approach” via expressive arts therapies to stabilize the body’s responses. 2. Identifies of the body’s reactions to stressful events and memories through trauma-informed evaluation and sensory-based activities using expressive arts. 3. Responds to the body’s reactions to traumatic events through somatic and sensory approaches to self-regulation. 4. Reinforces a sense of safety through reconnection with positive attachment and self-soothing. 5. Builds strengths by using the arts to normalize and enhance resilience. Malchiodi, C. (2014/ 10/ 01). Trauma-Informed Art Therapy (TI-AT) and Trauma-Informed Expressive Arts Therapy. Retrieved on October 1, 2014 from [http://www.cathymalchiodi.com/Trauma Informed Art Therapy.html](http://www.cathymalchiodi.com/Trauma%20Informed%20Art%20Therapy.html). - See more at: <http://www.cathymalchiodi.com/art-therapy-books/trauma-informed-art-therapy/#sthash.t83P0Sb7.dpuf>

# Using Art Therapy at BBR



- A loosely applied tri- phasic model gives us a framework for working with our children:
- Judith Herman is a psychiatrist who has identified three stages of the healing process from trauma. In her book *Trauma and Recovery (1992)*, )Herman identifies this tri- physical model as including:
- Stabilization and Safety- in this stage clients practice self- soothing behaviours and exercises that will support them through the coming stages, and help them stabilize when they become distressed by sensations, flashbacks and intrusive thoughts.
- Working through the trauma- clients are ready and able to tell their trauma narratives. The therapist has helped to install tools necessary for remaining stable during this process of giving voice to deep pain.
- Reconnection- This phase of the healing journey includes orientation towards the future; adjusting to the concept of post- traumatic growth.



# Round 1



- During the first round at BBR, children are exposed to the use of different media: paint, different papers, pastel, pen, etc. The intent in providing an opportunity to explore different ways of working with different materials is to encourage finding alternate ways of doing things. This can open doors, new ways of thinking of familiar objects- a metaphor for trying new ways to resolve our challenges. The art therapy program, also gives children a different way to imagine boundaries, and practice group engagement.
- Initial explorations are about feelings. Colour wheels of emotion, soothing with 'science experiments (colour, shaving cream, pasty concoctions, fingerpaints...), sand and modeling clay are a few sensory modalities that are available. Invitations/ directives may attend to what we have to be thankful for. Spirit Warrior Sticks are generally introduced during this stage of work.

## Art Therapy Feelings Check In

Using the gingerbread shape,  
we use colour to connect  
with the sense of what is  
happening in the moment.



## Warrior Sticks

Many layers of metaphorical healing goes into the creation of our Warrior Spirit Sticks





## Mandalas

Starting with a feelings colour wheel, we move to using those colours to contact and express what is happening in the body.

Author's mandala- exploring feeling with colour



## Puppets and safe place

Puppets of all types- paper, sock... are used to install personal traits and attributes as resources.





## More on Puppets

Like other art forms, puppets can take on many different looks, forms and meanings





## Safe Place

...an essential psychological process within Trauma Treatment



# Rounds 2 & 3



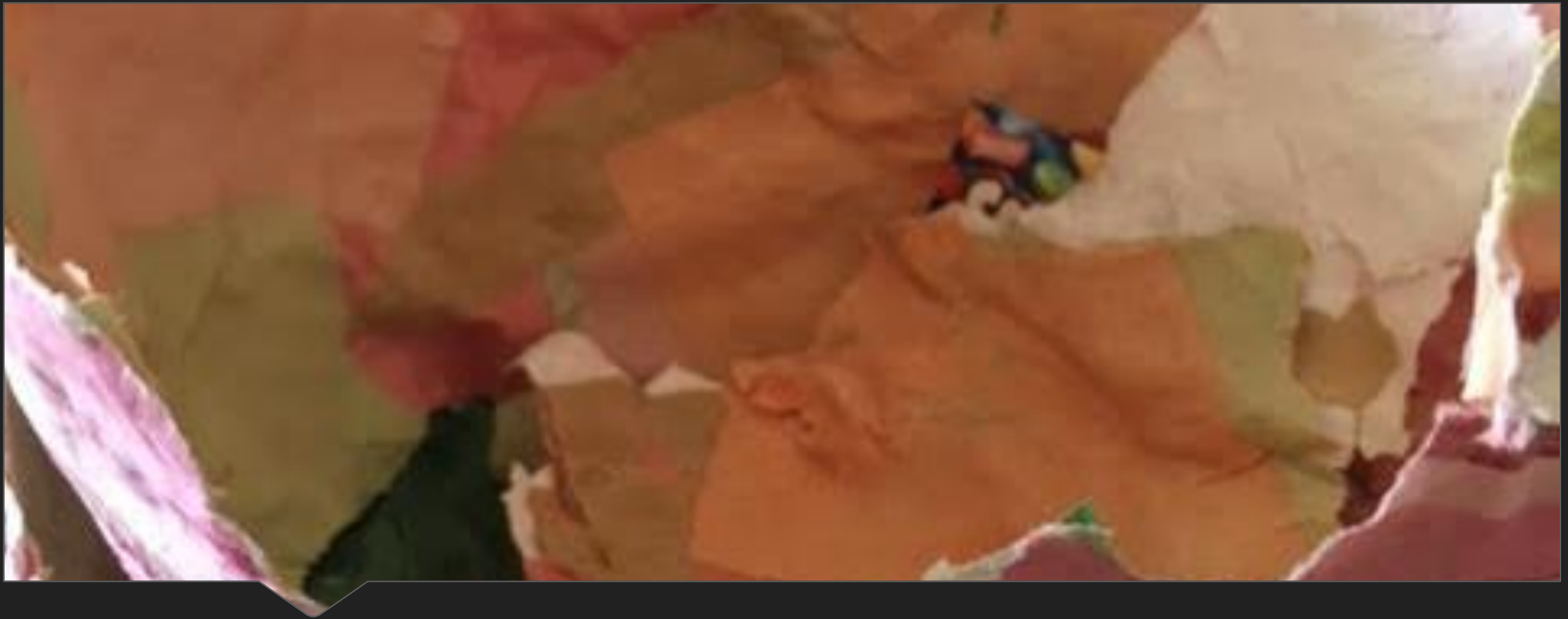
- The intention of the art therapist must be to provide a safe container, time and space to explore the feelings that go with the deeper immersion into trauma healing.
- With older or more adept groups there is an opportunity to use an 'open studio' concept. This allows group members to choose art media and techniques that they gravitate towards. Facilitated by the art therapist, individuals can pursue their unique needs.



# Reclaiming the Self



- Healing Pinatas help to understand that the hurts that have accumulated can be stripped away to the underlying goodness.



...and the sweetness within

Revealing the "inner" parts...





# Exploring Texture



'Cityscape'

...And techniques that enhance  
expression







More texture and layering





## Round 4

During round four, the goal is to provide some closure to the experience of BBR, to ensure that lessons learned have been installed with the greatest permanence possible. Art revolves around what individuals are leaving, and mostly what they can look forward to.



# A New Vision of Mandalas







Mandala Mobiles





Acrylic pour





Questions?



# References



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