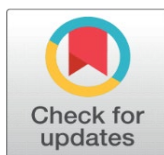
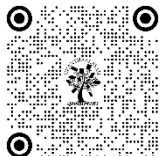


# ART THERAPY: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART THERAPY AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

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## ABSTRACT

Art therapy has been used to aid spiritual healing because it allows people to express and explore their deepest thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Spiritual healing is a holistic approach that includes reestablishing one's sense of connection to something greater than oneself, likely to result in emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. The objective of this study is to investigate the role of art therapy in facilitating spiritual healing in individuals. A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to identify the current state of knowledge on the topic. The review identified studies that explored the effectiveness of various types of art therapy in supporting spiritual healing.

According to the conclusions drawn from the literature review, art therapy can be an effective instrument in aiding spiritual healing through practices like meditation and mindfulness. Art therapy provides a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to explore their spirituality, leading to a sense of connection to something greater than themselves. Further to that, the creative process of art-making can promote emotional release and catharsis, resulting in a sense of inner peace and healing. Overall, the results indicate that art therapy can be an efficient means of helping people heal spiritually. The integration of spiritual practices into the art therapy process can support individuals in their journey towards emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, leading to a greater sense of inner peace and connection to the world around them.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. DEFINITION

According to the British Art Therapy Association, Art therapy is a form of behavioural therapy which primarily uses art to facilitate interaction [Hu et al. \(2021\)](#). Art has been used to heal people for as long as beliefs, values, and practices. This can include themes such as meaning and purpose, connection to a higher power or the universe, and inner wisdom some of them are:

- **Draw a mandala:** The word 'mandala' is a Sanskrit word that translates to 'circle or center'. They are used in a variety of spiritual activities to depict a person's spirituality in its entirety. Mandalas are used in many belief systems, including Hinduism and Buddhism. In Tibet the mandala is known as Khyil-khor, past its Sanskrit meaning, which refers to the core of all formation and the home of a truly self - actualized being [Stiffler \(2021\)](#). For this meditative activity one can use a pattern from the Internet, or make their own circular design made of repeating marks, symbols, and shapes. The completion of this activity will provide the artist with a sense of connectivity with their inner selves.
- **Music:** Given its ability to evoke deep emotions and connect with listeners on a spiritual level, music can be a powerful tool for investigating divine themes [Sharma \(2022\)](#). Music can explore themes such as spiritual connection, inner wisdom, and the search for meaning and purpose.
- **Collage:** Collage is a versatile art form that can be used to explore a variety of spiritual themes. Images of nature, symbols, and text may be used by an artist to create a visual representation of their spiritual journey and connection to the universe.

Additionally, incorporating spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness into the art therapy process can also enhance the therapeutic experience. This can support individuals in their journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, leading to a sense of peace and inner balance [Behan \(2020\)](#).

## 2. ART

Art in itself is the creative expression of one's imagination. It is executed primarily for its artistic beauty, craftsmanship, or the emotional power it may hold. In the context of therapy, we focus on the emotional connotation the artwork holds for the artist. There are various modalities through which art is created and analyzed. Some of them are dance, theatre, doodling, singing, artwork, visual art, sculpture, and writing in the context of therapy [Malchiodi \(2008\)](#). Art is turning out to be the most widely used form of self-expression, as through it an individual can express his emotions and feelings and even communicate with the viewer. Art holds a certain beauty to it as it transcends the language barriers. The artist's or viewer's interpretation of it can be whatever they want it to be.

## 3. ART THERAPY

Art therapy uses methods of art and creativity to treat psychological and mental distress, which helps promote healing. According to [McNiff \(2004\)](#), "when the soul is in need, art presents itself as a resourceful healer," as it transcends barriers like language. Art has been used as a healing modality since the beginning of recorded history. Art therapy is based on the idea of creative expression and the enhancement of healing. To fully comprehend art at all, we should indeed "move from explanation to empathy." We can accomplish this by enabling our images to interact with us rather than with themselves [McNiff \(2004\)](#). To truly comprehend art, we must go beyond merely describing what we see and instead empathise with it. This can help us understand the artist's viewpoint and where he comes from, along with what he wants to convey through his painting or artwork. This can be further explained by taking the example of an all-time famous painting by Vincent Van Gogh, 'The Starry Night'. While some explanations of it may focus on the brush strokes and colour usage, on an emotional level, it completely moves the viewer to empathise with what

Van Gogh must have felt while creating this masterpiece. The emotions felt by the viewer while observing the painting range from being mesmerised by the beauty of it to feeling a sense of turbulence he felt while overcoming his illness [Naifeh & Smith \(2011\)](#).

The following are some of the most common artistic therapeutic methods which promote its effectiveness in spiritual healing:

- 1) Self-expression:** Art therapy provides individuals with a nonverbal means to express their emotions and experiences creatively. Self-expression can help people gain insights into their inner selves while also providing a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. An experiment measured cortisol (the stress hormone; it increases when people are stressed) levels in the saliva of participants before and after a drawing class. Results indicated that in approximately 60% of subjects, cortisol levels decreased by more than 10%, after the class. Therefore, self-expression through drawing is a very effective method of stress relief. It is also easy to incorporate into our daily lives as long as we have a pen and paper [Nakamichi et al. \(2006\)](#).
- 2) Self-awareness:** Carl Jung once stated, "Only when you can look into your own heart will your visions become clear. Who looks out the window dreams, who looks in the mirror awakens". As Jung stated, when an individual starts to understand what lies within him, he gains profound knowledge of himself, and this can lead to increased emotional resilience and spiritual growth. Additionally, by engaging in the creative process of self-awareness, like creating your own safe space, accepting responsibility for one's actions, understanding one's behaviour patterns to adjust so as to promote well-being, etc, individuals develop a deeper sense of self-awareness and a greater understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- 3) Mindfulness:** Art therapy often incorporates mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing, meditation, using art as a medium to express emotions, etc into therapy sessions. These practices can help clients connect with themselves and take control of their emotions and feelings, which can have a positive impact on their spiritual well-being.
- 4) Spiritual connection:** Art therapy can help individuals tap into their spiritual potential and connect with something greater than them. Some activities like creating a spiritual collage, nature-based artwork, a handwritten inspiration board, using color therapy to understand emotions and chakra balancing, etc can help inculcate feelings of peace, serenity, and wholeness, which can have a radical impact on an individual's spiritual well-being.
- 5) Therapeutic relationship:** The therapeutic relationship between the client and the art therapist is an important aspect of art therapy, and it can have a significant impact on the client's spiritual healing. The art therapist provides a safe and supportive environment where clients can freely express themselves and connect with their spiritual selves.
- 6) Expressive art therapy:** This therapy utilizes an array of art forms, including drawing, sketching, installation art, and collage to help individuals express their emotions and explore their inner selves. Expressive art therapy is a vehicle that helps bring out our inoperative creativity. It is a means to access our hidden selves. The art outcome,

whether a self-portrait, a family tree drawing, or whatever it may be, contains parts of the client's self-identity. Through this process, the client's pathology may become more evident [Snyder \(2011\)](#). Further, the root cause of the problem can be decoded and treated accordingly.

- 7) **Sandplay therapy:** This type of therapy uses a sandbox and miniature figures to help individuals explore their inner selves and unconscious thoughts. It also helps individuals express their understanding of the world, themselves, and how they perceive reality. The natural sand and water help the individual make a sand world that is a true visually symbolic statement that touches such emotional depths that are rarely experienced through other art materials [Steinhardt \(2000\)](#).
- 8) **Music therapy:** Music therapy can include playing music, making music, singing, and talking about music, as well as using guided mental imagery with music. Music is also used as a form of meditation to achieve a state of relaxation and inner peace. Certain types of music, such as New Age, classical, and ambient music, have been specifically designed to induce a meditative state and promote feelings of tranquillity and calm [Chanda & Levitin \(2013\)](#). When used in conjunction with mindfulness practices, music can help individuals cultivate a deeper sense of spirituality and connection to the present moment.
- 9) **Dance/movement therapy:** This therapy employs movement and dance to assist individuals in expressing themselves and enhancing their psychological and physiological well-being. "You can change your internal state through external movement", said Miriam Berger (a dance therapist at New York University). Certain neurotransmitters, like endorphins, are released from the brain when an individual moves his body, as in dance or movement therapy. This creates a heightened state of euphoria, pain tolerance, and satisfaction [Svoboda \(2007\)](#).
- 10) **Drama therapy:** This type of therapy uses theatre, role-playing, improvisation, puppetry, and acting out stories to help individuals explore their emotions and experiences, gain self-confidence, and learn new problem-solving skills. Drama therapy can also incorporate symbolic and ritualistic practices to help individuals connect with their spirituality. These practices can include creating altars, performing rituals, or using props to represent spiritual concepts [Emunah \(1994\)](#).

In conclusion, the therapeutic processes of art therapy that underlie spiritual healing are varied and complex, but they are based on the principle that the creative process can be used to promote self-expression, self-awareness, and spiritual growth. By incorporating these therapeutic processes, art therapy can help individuals find meaning, peace, and purpose in their lives and tap into their spiritual potential. [Gall et al. \(2011\)](#)

#### 4. SPIRITUAL HEALING

Spirituality can be considered a dimension in art therapy because it can provide the individual with a deeper level of understanding and connection. Individuals can explore and connect with their own spiritual beliefs, values, and practices by using art as a form of self-expression. This may include exploring themes such as meaning and purpose, connection to a higher power or the universe, and inner wisdom. Additionally, incorporating spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness into the art therapy process can also enhance the therapeutic

experience. Overall, the incorporation of spirituality in art therapy can add a holistic dimension to the healing process, addressing not only the individual's mental and emotional well-being, but also their spiritual well-being. [Malchiodi \(2012\)](#)

Spirituality and religion are related but distinct concepts. Religion typically refers to a specific set of beliefs, practices, and institutions that are associated with a particular faith or belief system. It often includes a belief in a higher power or deity, and may include a set of moral or ethical principles. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a more general term that refers to an individual's personal beliefs and practices related to the meaning and purpose of life, and an individual's link with the world at large and an entity or force that is greater than himself. Spirituality can be expressed through religion, but it can also exist independently of it. Some people may have a strong spiritual practice that is not affiliated with any particular religion. [Stuckey & Nobel \(2010\)](#)

In summary, religion is a set of specific beliefs and practices, often associated with a particular faith, while spirituality is more of a personal, subjective sense of connection to something greater than oneself, which may or may not be associated with a particular religion. [Niemiec et al. \(2020\)](#)

## 5. HEALING

Healing can be considered a by-product of the combination of spirituality and art therapy, as both elements can contribute to a person's general welfare. Spirituality can provide a feeling of belonging, a deep meaning, and a relationship with something greater than themselves, all of which can assist with psychological and emotional healing. Additionally, incorporating spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, or mindfulness into the art therapy process also promotes healing in all dimensions. [Todd Deutsch \(2013\)](#)

Art therapy, on the other hand, allows individuals to explore and express their thoughts and feelings through the creative process. The act of creating art can be therapeutic in itself, as it can provide a non-verbal means of communication and self-expression. The resulting artwork can also serve as a visual representation of an individual's inner world, allowing them to gain insight and understanding into themselves. [Van Lith \(2016\)](#)

The combination of spirituality and art therapy can provide a holistic approach to healing, addressing not only the individual's mental and emotional well-being, but also their spiritual well-being. This holistic approach can also support individuals in their journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, leading to a sense of peace and inner balance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Art therapy has been increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for spiritual healing in the 21st century. As more research is conducted on the effectiveness of art therapy, the field has continued to evolve and expand its understanding of how the creative process can promote spiritual growth and healing. One development in the field is the integration of mindfulness practices into art therapy sessions. Many art therapists now incorporate mindfulness techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga into their sessions to help clients connect with their inner selves and access deeper levels of awareness.

Another trend is the use of digital and technology-based art forms in therapy. For example, some therapists are using virtual reality, augmented reality, and other



digital technologies to create immersive and interactive art experiences that can help clients connect with their spiritual selves. In addition, there is a growing interest in the use of indigenous and multicultural art forms in therapy, which can help clients, connect with their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Overall, the field of art therapy is making significant progress in understanding how the creative process can promote spiritual healing and growth in the 21st century. With the integration of mindfulness practices, technology-based art forms, indigenous and multicultural art forms, art therapy is becoming more and more effective in promoting spiritual well-being. Further research is needed to more fully understand the mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of art therapy in promoting spiritual well-being, but the results of this study provide a strong foundation for future research in this area.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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