

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

**Writing My Experience of the 'Writing Art Therapy' Conference
6th October 2018, Islington, London**

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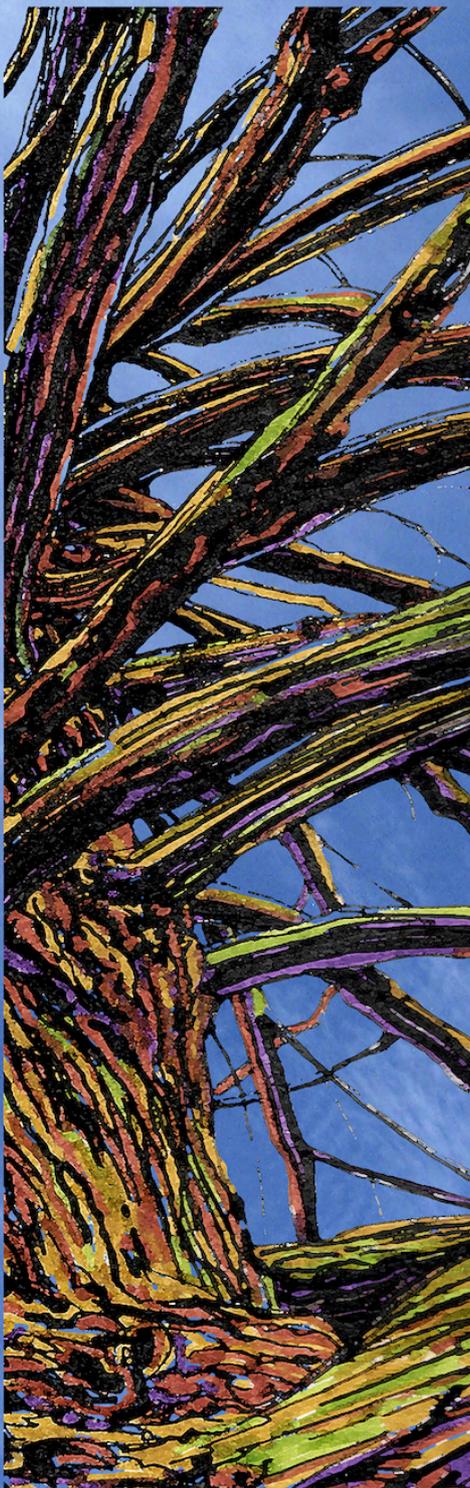
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ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine Writing Art Therapy

9.00 to 5.00

Saturday 6th October 2018

Angel Room

Lift, 45 White Lion Street,

Islington,

London N1 9PW

Programme

9.00 to 9.30 Registration

9.30 to 11.00 Presentation

Chris Brown, Dean Reddick, Sally Skaife and Robin Tipple. The facilitators will lead a discussion about the writing process drawing upon their own experiences.

11.00 to 11.30 Tea/Coffee & Biscuits

11.30 to 1.00 Workshop One

Delegates will make an art response to the discussion along with some writing about the image. Both image and writing will be displayed together and viewed after lunch.

1.00 to 2.00 Sandwich Lunch

2.00 to 3.30 Workshop Two

Viewing of displayed work followed by short discussion. Individual writing on what delegates are interested in writing about art therapy (200 words max) to be displayed and viewed during break.

3.30 to 4.00 Tea/Coffee & Biscuits

4.00 to 5.00 Plenary

Open discussion about anything that has arisen during the day.

It seems appropriate that having been a participant of the conference 'Writing Art Therapy', I should then attempt this contribution, to actually make a piece of writing of my own, about my experience of the day.

During a coffee break someone commented to me that they were sure I had published writing already, even that they had some memory of reading it. I had to disabuse them of this notion, which possibly had arisen due to my having been a tutor on the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths, University of London, with any associative assumptions, not to mention, transferences, at the time of their being a student.

Despite not being a published writer I can be overwhelmed by words, their significance, power and history, perhaps mostly not consciously known to us. Uttering words, what might I be saying? And my sense that the commitment of the written word is only more emphatic, more prescriptive.

As a student, a practitioner and a teacher, I have written, but I have not so far attempted to articulate a contribution to art therapy literature¹. I have often used words in my artworks; these usually have been in English, but also French, Arabic and Hebrew, and in the main composed by others, exemplifying some approbation as well as some distance from myself, except through identification. Using words in a visual piece has evoked a consideration of their 'meaning' and their 'look' and which of these achieves emphasis. My practice is often to utilise the writing of my own hand, doing so with paint. My aim has been that this combination of the personal signification with the 'bedrock' art material will draw attention to the plasticity of the image and counterbalance the connotations of the words for those who recognise its language, and emphasise its mere form for those who do not. The image below shows fragments of my art work from the group exhibition 'some unconscious things' shown at the Freud Museum in 2015, to celebrate the centenary of Freud's paper, 'The Unconscious'.

¹ I have had the good fortune to participate as a member of a group of four undertaking research about an Art Therapy Large Group, which we hope to have published in the near future



The Conference began with presentations from each of the facilitators and these identified personal struggles and approaches with regard to their journeys toward published writing. I liked listening to these accounts; they were generous, open and personal. Instances of 'failure' were described; I only have to hear that word for Dylan's lyric to come to mind:

She knows there's no success like failure

And that failure's no success at all²

I was left wondering how my options and choices had been different to each of theirs.

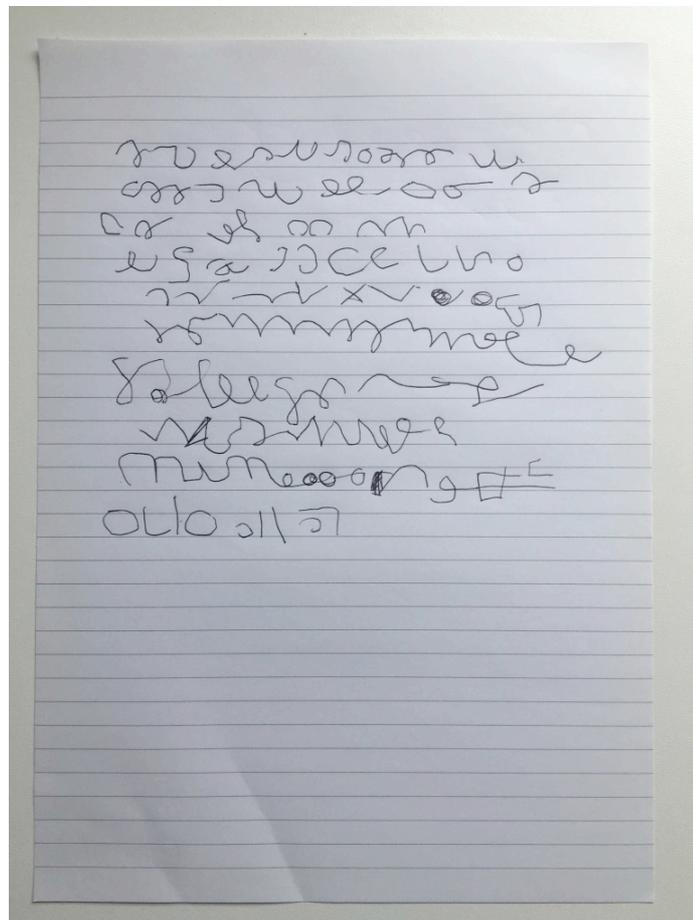
Particular aspects of the presentations resonated with me. Dean Reddick spoke about all kinds of stories and storytellers, including comics and folk-singers and how writing did not need to be an endeavour that is exclusive to certain sets, or constrained in form. I considered whether the words and phrases incorporated into much of my art-making do perhaps suggest stories. Robin Tipple highlighted an analogy between writing and art-making, particularly in terms of structure; how the same processes of adjustment, review and editing are involved via reading and looking. For any of us writing about art psychotherapy, he also emphasised the vitality of making and engaging with material things for our process of becoming and our capacity to be reflective. When Chris Brown contemplated his writing career, he described many facets of his experience working collaboratively and as an editor. However, importantly for me, he was taken back to memories of his childhood, school projects and the significance of a good mark; this reminiscing certainly seems to have influenced my work in the group that day. Sally Skaife, while fully appreciative of reductive gender categorisations, explored the impact of class and culture in a patriarchal society upon the writing of women, and whether writing about art therapy has inevitably reflected patriarchal values. I associated this enquiry with the discourse about the difference between the kind of art that could be made by a woman or a man. As a young art student in the 1960s, the art scene of the period and all of art history seemed to be dominated by men. My first encounters with the work of Artemisia Gentileschi, Gwen John, or Agnes Martin are then fondly recalled,

² Love Minus Zero/No Limit - Bob Dylan, 1965.

demonstrating the importance for most of us to be able to identify with someone, to encourage our permission to engage and to explore our capacities. Sally questioned whether we might aim to comply with the (patriarchal?) zeitgeist for hard-edged research to prove the efficacy of art therapy, or might we consider more carefully what effect this has upon our therapeutic relationships and practice. My feminist hackles were raised in response to these ideas and in the workshops I felt my fear of being female in any misogynist context too, which I sought to describe.

Reflections upon my love and reverence for words, both their appearance and their potential meaning, were evidently and powerfully evoked by the Conference. The impact of the day was due to the inter-relationship of all its components. However, it was my art-making and the subsequent writing about it in the context of the workshops, alongside all the other participants with our unique and shared motivation to develop our relationship with writing, that was supremely vivid.

This is a facsimile of what I made in the Conference art making workshop.



And this is what I wrote about it, in the Conference writing workshop.

I notice that I don't like writing on lined paper
I had many associations to the morning presentation
& thoughts arising.
In the art making I wanted to re-visit an
early memory of proto-writing. Having recently
moved into a new house aged 3/4 yrs, due
to the busyness of the project for my mother,
I had some space - on the landing upstairs,
I was out of her mind I think for a while
& with some paper & pens/pencils
pretended to be writing of something of import
of consequence - I was "at work" &
I could write!! When this inevitably had to
end & normal service resumed I was somewhat
disappointed but it's hard to recall much
about this feeling. Perhaps the realisation that
it was pretend & that I could not yet
write words & sentences was a big part
hate at school - narcissistic wound
recalled arose at my all-girls secondary
I wrote an essay in which I described
realising that I had different personas
in different contexts - I myself felt this
to be quite brilliant but the mark/feedback
I received did not affirm this in any
way. Again disappointed that I in fact is
I seem to feel more scared than ever
about being a woman. In fact it is
a newish feeling in terms of a personal
sense.

I have felt aggrieved & impassioned
to ~~to~~ about the status & treatment of
women - patriarchy
Thinking this morning about the systems
in place around writing, literature,
publishing etc raises the problem of
how to engage & participate.
I want to assert my womanhood ~~as~~ as
it has been lived & have ~~what~~ controversial
thoughts & feelings when some men ~~with~~
want to have that for themselves too!
My art-work tries to ~~see~~ ^{see} the boundaries
& ~~of~~ ^{of} limitations - ~~the~~ ^{Arabic} Arabic writing
came into my proto writing & symbols
of definition. Arabic was the language
my father refused to teach me &
I don't know if this has been helpful
or not ~~whether~~ for me. It is interesting
that I believe he was trying to be protective?
My little piece of writing has an Oedipal
manifestation - still working through ...

My art piece, although made up of proto-writing, was certainly about the form, line and shapes that evolved. I now think that it encapsulates the root of my experience and interest in exploring what is different about painting, say, a flower, and a word.

We all exhibited our images and writing around the room and took a break. When we resumed to look at it, I found that to be too much! There was such a lot to absorb in the time that we had if I was truly to engage with what others had produced. After an initial effort, I realised I was not managing and gave up. Similarly, when we formed into a group circle to discuss our experience I did not have much to say and, with hindsight, perhaps having earlier been so immersed in my own process, I was in a somewhat dreamy state. I recall much of the conversation as about a shared acknowledgement of the fear of writing, of failing and of exposure; also discussion of how this compared with the experience of making and exhibiting art. Much gratitude for the organising and value of the day was expressed.

At the end of this quite exhausting but enriching conference, my interest and perhaps also my responsibility, to at least attempt to 'write art therapy' was more entrenched than it had been. I came away with a sense that I could try to find 'my way' to do it. Also, I suppose I felt the need to accept that I am not so important and my words are not so precious that I cannot give them away!

Biography

Diana Velada has an MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies and is an HCPC registered art psychotherapist. Historically, her practice has been with children and young people living in Residential Care, attending CAMHS and within education settings. She was a tutor on the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010 - 2018. She currently works as a private art therapy practitioner and supervisor, and maintains her art practice.