



Eliza Gales Interviews: An Interview
With Art Therapist Jamie Rogers

~ February 27, 2014 ~

What follows is the content of a blog posting by Eliza Gales that no longer exists and has been reformatted here...

#1 What made you interested in art therapy?

I wish I had a simple answer to this question. And yet, I personally enjoy that the answer is not so simple because it comes from an intertwining of situations and learnings within my life that have spanned the last decade and have brought a greater richness to what I am offering as an art therapist. So, I will offer some of the highlights that led me in the direction of art therapy.

To begin with, I had hit a point in my life where I recognized that I didn't have any passion for the work that I was doing as a systems analyst. At the same time, I had become interested in tile mosaics and was thinking about becoming an artist. But, my future plans were delayed as I began having neurological difficulties that would set the stage for a whole new set of experiences during the next few years.

Dealing with neurological dysfunction was challenging and yet it was here that I chose to work with alternative care practitioners. These practitioners did not specifically include a mental health therapist, but they all really held a healing space for me and actually took the time to listen to what I was going through while also offering advice and direction. Within this, I found the qualities of holding space and listening to be equally healing as the specific healing modalities being offered by each of the practitioners I encountered.

During this healing period, I also pursued my desires to become an artist by taking classes in drawing, sculpture, and ceramics. In doing so, I became especially interested in what would happen when I worked without any particular intention on the final product. This was an experience that I had previously described as something coming through me, rather than of me, giving me the sense that some kind of spiritual connection was guiding me to the existence of something deeper within myself. Then, in looking back on the finished product, I was able to discover and acknowledge something that was in fact occurring within my life.

Thus, my experiences with art during my own healing process created my initial interest in art therapy. But, actually making the decision to become an art therapist took more healing and deeper investigation on my part. A turning point came, however, after engaging in a consistent meditation practice and deciding to attend a "Life Vows" meditation retreat, where I found my life vows to include:

- Creating art with the intention of making people feel their heart
- Helping people to create value in their life
- Listening to the spiritual stories of others with compassion and respect
- Encouraging others to grow in their own way
- Holding a calm and positive space for others
- Speaking and writing from the heart
- Being respectful of the earth and the resources it offers

After discovering these vows, I felt that I wanted to do energy work and became interested in a form called bioenergetics. But, I found that the training for this type of work required a masters degree in mental health and thus my attention was redirected to art therapy.

Today I feel that art therapy is in fact energy work, but I also currently see myself incorporating other energetic modalities in the future that are likely to include bioenergetics, reiki, and medical intuition.

#2 You have a Masters of Art Therapy Counseling from Southwestern College of Santa Fe, New Mexico and a Bachelors of Science in Computer and Information Science from the University of Oregon. How do you use your computer science degree in your work?

Both areas of study have their own complexities to them and require a particular kind of analytical thinking. That is, when a problem arises, you need to look beyond the symptom being displayed at the surface. Because, just addressing the surface symptom may not in fact "fix" the undesired effect. Instead, this might also cause additional issues to arise, in people as well as computer systems. Thus, looking further inside the computer program or at the underlying cause of a behavior is more pertinent to finding a desired resolution. Within my work as an art therapist, I address looking underneath a behavior by defaulting to a person's body, heart, and spirit and encouraging the development of their own personal guidance system for healing.

#3 You are currently not registered with the ATCB, is there a reason you have chosen not to register yourself?

The Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) has a number of requirements for registration. For the designation of "Registered Art Therapist" (ATR), these requirements include graduation from an approved masters art therapy program and 1000 hours of supervised, post-graduation, direct client work. After these requirements are met, a "Registered Art Therapist" may take an exam to become a "Board Certified Art Therapist" (ATR-BC). Since only a couple of states license art therapists, Oregon not being one of them, these are generally the only available credentials beyond a master's degree for art therapists. Many art therapy programs however, Southwestern College included, offer a dual degree of art therapy and counseling, allowing for further credentialing and job opportunities as licensed counselors, which generally have yet another set of requirements.

Thus, since I just graduated in October of 2013, I am not eligible for registration with the ATCB. I am, however, listed with the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) as a new professional. But, as to obtaining further credentials from the ATCB, I have not made plans to take this further step, since I am uncertain of the value in doing so with

regard to the services that I am providing and the associated costs. If I were to proceed more in the direction of counseling and mental health diagnoses and treatment, then this might make more sense. But, my current focus has more to do with holistic health improvement that includes: developing connections to the body, heart, and spirit, clearing energy blockages, working with chronic physical conditions, discovering life purpose and passions, and moving through the stages of life. Within this realm, I see myself as more of a healing guide who utilizes processes that are largely based on extrapolations from my own life and educational experiences.

#4 What is the difference between drawing a picture for therapeutic reasons at home and doing it in a therapist's office?

You can certainly gain therapeutic value while engaging in artistic creation at home and I highly encourage all of us to do so, because I believe that it is vital to our well-being as it introduces a metaphorical language that can be interpreted by the body for healing. But, our culture has greatly devalued the artistic process and has elevated it to a level that can only be achieved by the finest of artists which are designated as an elite group. Because of this, many people say they are not artists and cannot draw anything, but in fact almost everyone can make marks on paper or otherwise engage and experiment with art materials.

So, to begin with, the therapist's office provides a space that gives permission to engage in the artistic process. But, to even do this, means that the space needs to be cultivated to provide safety, confidentiality, and support. And, for me, it also means inviting in spiritual guides that will support me, the space, and all who seek help within it. Beyond this, creating art in a therapeutic setting will allow greater insights to be gained as the therapist bares witness, invites reflection, and offers additional perspectives into a client's art-making process and resulting artwork.

Therapeutic insights can be offered in different ways, however, depending on a therapist's philosophy or purpose. Some therapists do interpret client art and, in fact, specific art directives do exist in the art therapy field that are used for diagnostic assessment of a client's state of mind. But, this is not the direction of my practice, although I do keep these ideas in mind to alert me of potential issues that may need to be addressed. My therapeutic style is to allow the client to interpret their art, to question their process, to question what they see and feel, and to give additional insights, which may or may not be valid through the client's eyes.

#5 What are some of the methods you use in your work?

The methods used during a session depend largely on the level or depth that a client is prepared for. At the very top or surface level, a client may just need to express and talk about their emotions. So, asking them to draw their anger, fear, or frustration might be the most therapeutic action to take, because it can provide some relief to their current situation.

At a deeper level, I am most often trying to help a client see something just below the surface of their consciousness. To do this, I first ask them to energetically hold whatever they have come into my office to work with, which I call an intention. Then, to ground them and to deepen their intention, I lead them through a short guided meditation. And Finally, I ask them to come out of the meditation as they are ready, to continue holding the energy of their intention within their body, and to draw or make marks on the paper by drawing from their body. This last piece, "drawing from the body", is really important because I want them to get out of their mind, out of thinking about an art product, and out of thinking about a solution to their problem. Instead, I want them to be in their body, because I believe it holds some important information that is currently unavailable to their conscious mind.

At a similar but more extended level, I use a body map, which would be more applicable to chronic conditions or deeper traumas. Within this method, I will place a body outline before the client and guide them to hold their intention. As they hold their intention, I will ask them to scan their body for sensations. Once a sensation is identified, I will ask them to choose a representative color, to draw what it feels like on the corresponding area of the body map, and to label that sensation. This process will continue until all sensations around the intention have been identified. I call this resulting map a "treatment plan" and I will then start to work with the least threatening sensations on this map as I form appropriate art directives for the client.

Within any of these levels I am also likely to encourage journaling or dialoging. Journaling encourages reflection and helps to capture the information from the experience and to bring out further information that the experience has invoked. Dialoging, on the other hand, is a technique that is used primarily for attempting to access information from the right side of the brain, which is more sensory in nature. With this technique questions can be asked of the image using the dominant hand and responded to by using the non-dominant hand. Both practices bring a greater depth of understanding about the information that is being brought through an individual's image about a specific life situation.

Of further significance to note here is the manner in which these methods are applied. Although, all methods will include an initial conversation about a client's current situation, the resolution or opening of a pathway is found through the art and the

discussion, journalling, and dialoging that follow the art creation. Thus, my role in applying these methods is simply to help with the client's own discovery process.

#6 What is the difference between individual art therapy and group art therapy?

The main difference between individual and group art therapy is the comfort level for the client or clients. That is, some topics are not comfortable for an individual to share within a group and likewise some topics would be more traumatizing than helpful to other group members. Beyond this, individual art therapy is generally for deeper, more personal work, while group art therapy or classes are restricted to more general topics that are common to all members of the group.

#7 What can a person get out of art therapy that they could not get out of traditional psychotherapy?

Traditional psychotherapy actually encompasses many types of theories and techniques, but for purposes of simplification I'm going to assume that you are asking about "talk" therapies. With that regard, I believe the greatest strength of art therapy is that it allows for an externalization of unconscious information in a metaphorical format. On the one hand, this means that unknown information can be extracted from within, given a tangible existence, and then discussed and reflected upon over time. On the other hand, the information provided is more sensory in nature and provides for a type of language that can be more easily interpreted by the implicit, sensory functions of the right brain. Thus, the mere process of art creation and reflection can cause an alteration to the interpretation of sensory inputs, which are the driving force behind behaviors.

To define this more specifically, here are four levels of potential interaction within the art therapy process and their associated effects:

- Art creation is therapeutic in and of itself, providing relaxation or stimulation based on media selection and usage

- Exploring personal art allows insights to surface that were not previously present, by investigating both the art and the process of creating the art
- Creating personal artwork allows the encapsulation of information about a particular moment within a person's life, making it available for greater examination, reflection, and integration over time
- Working on a sequence of art pieces allows a person to integrate change more completely and at their own pace, as their awareness increases, as their sensory and mental information finds congruent expression, and as their artwork and life experiences come to bare witness to the changes that are occurring

#8 What are some of the problems you have seen art therapy help with?

The problems that art therapy can help with are actually very wide and diverse, from the therapeutic value of play to having an effect on severe mental illness and everything in between. My own area of interest, however, includes working with unresolved trauma that inhibits the experience of joy, clouds the pathways toward a satisfying and fulfilling life, or manifests as an energy blockage or chronic physical condition. Within this, my main goal for resolution is to utilize art therapy to enable reconnection to the body, heart, and spirit, which I believe will allow the client's natural guidance system to bring them back into health and happiness.

Saying all of this, however, means that I am pushing the use of art therapy into new territory. While I'm sure you can find that art therapy is being used for life improvement, you are not likely to find instances of it being used to resolve physical conditions. The term "medical art therapy" is out there, but this generally refers to the palliative care of a patient and relates only to their emotional well-being within their current circumstances. But, I have used the "body map" method discussed above to work with an energy blockage that seemed to be related to an unresolved remnant of PTSD. I have also resolved my own chronic shoulder pain by creating art, dialoging with the art, dialoging with the body, and applying other energetic healing techniques. So, I hope to be able to serve clients in a similar fashion.

#9 What is the most unusual case you have seen in your work?

At this point in time, I don't feel that I have observed a particularly unusual case. And, to speak of a particular case would likely be a breach of confidentiality, so it would not be appropriate to discuss here. However, I have observed different levels of trauma and their associated levels of resiliency. Surprisingly, some people with a great deal of trauma also have a great deal of resiliency. Additionally, I have observed that our current culture brings about a huge amount of trauma within most of us that often gets passed over as being "normal", which is the area that I hope to help address within my therapeutic sessions with clients.

#10 What famous artist do you think needs some professional help?

As stated above, I do not make interpretations of a client's or an artist's work. Their interpretations rule in my book. What I think and feel about another's art work may not have anything to do with what is going on within them, but may in fact have everything to do with what is going on within me. But, as an art therapist, I do endeavor to discern whether the observations I am making are associated with me or with my client. I do this by listening to their story and by questioning whether my insights are pertinent before I offer them to the client.

On the other hand, I will note that all artwork carries the energies and intentions of those who create it. Rather than being concerned with whether an artist needs professional help or not, I would suggest that you be more aware of how these energies and intentions are affecting you when you see it or are around it. Art is very powerful! So, be careful about the artwork you choose to keep within your life, for it can actually affect your own state of being.