

Integrated Counselling and Art Therapy

Working with Identity and Change:

A study of Metamorphosis in nature and art

Author: Amanda Labron Johnson is a qualified counsellor and art therapist working for STARTTS. Amanda trained in the Anthroposophical model of art therapy in the UK and as a counsellor in Australia

Introduction

This is a case study of integrated Counselling and Art Therapy. The client was severely depressed, frequently suicidal and with a 'refugee-like' trauma background.

The client had a passion for poetry, music philosophy and art. He was studying Science at University as an overseas student from Iran and failing his courses as a result of mental health issues linked to trauma. He presented with severe depression, suicidal intent, shame and hopelessness.

Client recited and discussed poetry, he stated "poetry expresses for me the deepest emotions I can never myself express". This provided an opening for art therapy.

Our counselling sessions became interspersed with art therapy. In both therapeutic disciplines our theme was Identity, Change and Self Worth. Our goal was to enhance his sense of self worth through recognising and valuing his love of philosophy and art, poetry and music and building a strong therapeutic relationship of understanding and trust.

Background

- Client was a 27 y.o male from Iran
- Imprisoned and persecuted in Iran for political and religious reasons
- Suffering shame and worthlessness
- Sense of overwhelming guilt for family
- trauma and loss



Fig. 1 Flow form in water tray



Fig. 2 Observation of Tree bark

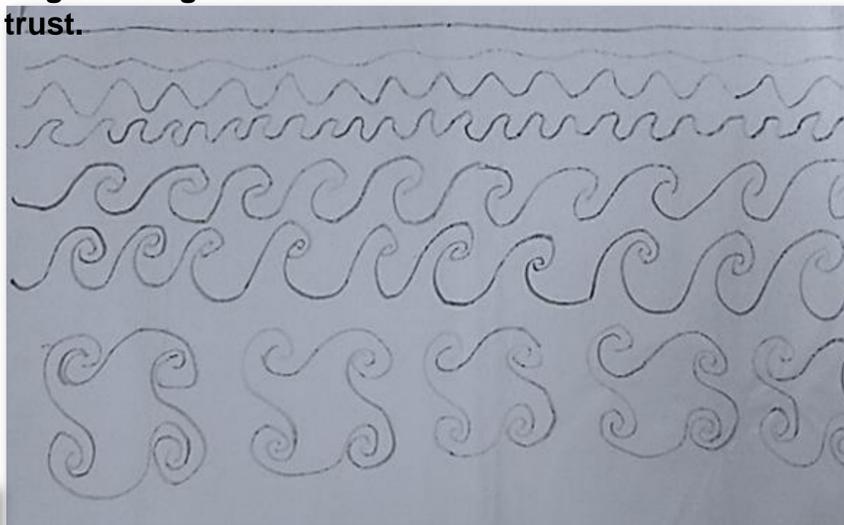


Fig. 3 Client's form drawing on large paper -Metamorphosis of line from straight to wave form. Aim: Whole body experience of movement and change to release feeling 'stuck'. Releasing into free form design with contained shape



Fig. 4 Observation of hidden laws in nature Leaf Metamorphosis (gradual changes in leaf forms ascending a stem). Linking science and art – creating meaning

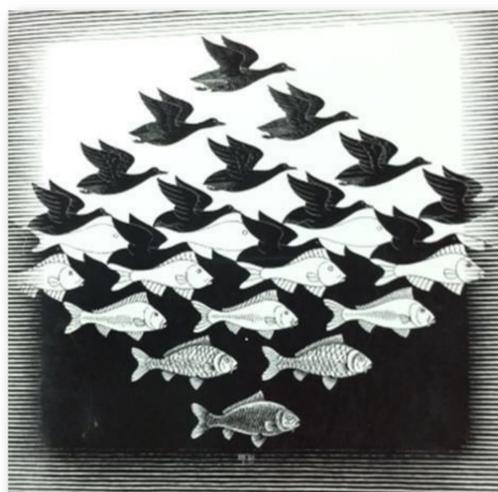


Fig. 5 Metamorphosis of Shape showing Transformation and change in form or identity (example by M.C. Escher)

Methodology

Building Trust and relationship

Self worth and Identity Working with client's deep passion for poetry and philosophy helped create meaning and purpose and positive identity. From conversing this led to working visually with art and observation and drawing of metamorphosis of form. Linking philosophy, art and science

Reframing shame and self blame

Referral to Psychiatry, Mental Health and body therapist

Advocacy creating awareness from University of need for support

Case Conferencing and building an active team of advocacy and support

Portrait therapy Our final session before he travelled home to Iran consisted of a portrait session (identity and "being seen"). (Portrait not shown due to confidentiality)

Results

- Increase in self worth and trust in others as seen in willingness to seek help and broaden supports
- Improvement in passing Uni. exams
- Change from only wearing black clothing to wearing light blue and varying colours of clothing coincided with lift in mood
- Improved sense of hope and reduction in suicidal intent shown through willingness to consider alternative future choices
- Changes in affect (began to smile and laugh)
- Final portrait session concluded with very positive mood in spite of being deported due to visa problems and uncertain future

Conclusion

Working with the meeting of art and science enabled client to value his own strength and talent in this area and unify his polarised interests in art with his science studies. Above all it gave renewed interest and meaningfulness in life in contrast to hopelessness and suicidal intent.

Sessions became a highlight and 'anchor' in his week. Art therapy was interspersed with counselling according to his presentation and when offered it was welcomed as enrichment

Counselling sessions 'held' him in his darker moods and provided opportunity to reframe and find acceptance.

References

Escher, M.C: 2000, Taschen, Köln, Sky and Water 1 (13)

Schwenk, T: 1999, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air (31, 34)