Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 19(3) pp. 106-114 © AATA, Inc. 2002

Mobilizing Community Strength: New York Art Therapists Respond

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Abstract

After the World Trade Center terrorist attacks on 9/11/01, New York's art therapy community found itself faced with difficult political, professional, and emotional challenges. As volunteerism across this country responded to the need for assistance, many New York art therapists were on the front lines of a wounded and frightened city while attempting to simultaneously cope with the devastation they themselves had survived or witnessed. This article presents the stories of five metropolitan-area art therapists who were actively engaged in relief efforts and who, by joining to write this paper, came together to offer solace and cope as a community.

Introduction

Immediately following the 9/11 attacks on New York City (NYC), people joined together. Traumatized, New Yorkers found solace in the company of others who shared their devastation. One woman passed her 4-year-old daughter to a stranger as she desperately tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge in a suffocating cloud of debris. Acknowledging the dangerous conditions around her, the woman gave her child to a stranger, a man who was able to carry her daughter to safety. This story, like many others, documents how strangers connected in the clouds of destruction.

The narratives shared by the five art therapists in this article reflect various dimensions of community building that happened following the attacks. Art joins the artist with his or her viewers, if even for just a moment, in a collective vision. Essentially, each art product is a community building opportunity. Klingman, Shalev, and Pearlman (2000) describe community art that occurred spontaneously following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin in Israel. They note that by affecting groups of people, traumatic events also serve to create community out of the fellowship of shared experience.

As clinicians, we often work in a telescopic manner with our clients. We constantly examine where they are and work with them to set new destinations in a healthy, defined course. The work is not linear as it requires both parties to adjust their telescopes accordingly. Our destinations in personal growth are continuously being adjusted to meet the changing demands of our situations.

All the contributors to this article were intimately involved in ministering therapy to survivors and witnesses while attempting to simultaneously cope with this terrible tragedy. Because of this, the following stories extend beyond the scholarly nature often expected in professional journal articles. These accounts demonstrate some of the struggles therapists face while attempting to care for the people with whom they work. More important, this article not only describes individual encounters, but also presents the development of a community of therapists (some of whom had not met previously) that came together by sharing stories.

In the wake of tragedy of such magnitude, storytelling can provide necessary psychological distance from trauma. Like artmaking, it uses "metaphor and projection which aid in the expression of conscious and unconscious processes" as well as the "sheltered expression of emotion" (Koepfer, in press, pp. 284-285). As people share and listen to each other's stories, contact is made within our communities and within ourselves. Storytelling allows for adjustment to tragedy and loss. The writing of their stories has helped these five contributors cope with the process of rebuilding their community and their own worldview in post-9/11 NYC.

The World Trade Center Children's Mural Project

Marygrace Berberian, MA, ATR-BC, MSW

I stand in NYC on wounded land, land that has carried many, land that has been traveled by those searching for who they are and where they belong. Two generations ago, my family made this city their home. On 9/11, that home became covered with debris. Debris filled with an almost insurmountable pain that fueled the fear, anger, and sadness we felt as individuals and a community. Artistic expression immediately alleviated the pain of a community struggling to make sense of an illogical sequence of events. I can speak of my own process in facilitating the World Trade Center Children's Mural Project (WTCCMP), a NYC art initiative that began in response to the needs of children and culminated in a montage of 3,100 self-portraits from around the world.

Rebuilding After Destruction

I develop and implement art therapy programs in public schools and community-based organizations throughout NYC. On the morning of 9/11, I was shopping in the World Trade Center (WTC) before work. As I exited the towers, the first plane plunged into the building. Unaware of what was happening, I chose to pick fruit at the green market directly in front of the towers. Hot debris began falling, and the blue sky was littered with slowly descending

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papers. People ran towards me screaming. One woman's head was covered with blood. People screamed that there was a fire in the WTC. Trying to find shelter, I ran into my office on the thirtieth floor of an adjacent building. My head and shopping bags were covered with debris. After the second plane hit, the building rumbled, windows blew out, and all occupants were evacuated. People seemed paralyzed. I boarded one of the last subway trains out of the city. Shortly after that, lower Manhattan lost power and the train stalled in a darkened subway tunnel. People cried, screamed, and began to faint. I responded by offering fruit to those in need. The role of nurturer helped carry me through a horrific experience.

Since schools were closed for part of that week, I returned to work on Friday. I work as the art therapist for a New York University school-based art therapy pilot program in a Hell's Kitchen public school. As I was still traumatized, I spent the day wandering aimlessly through classrooms to assess students in need of intervention. Students wrote letters to police officers and firefighters. Almost every child had spontaneously included a drawing of the Twin Towers in his or her letter. I realized children needed to symbolically rebuild the Twin Towers, to rebuild what was destroyed.

At the end of the school day, I went home exhausted. Friends who were displaced from their homes in Battery Park City, just adjacent to the WTC, were staying in my apartment. I experienced the days immediately following 9/11 as a warp of time and space, a disturbing cycle of mourning, exhaustion, and lapses of consciousness.

The following Saturday, I replayed the previous day's observations. I felt driven to respond, so I decided to rebuild. I imagined providing young people with the prospect of symbolically rebuilding the towers, offering an opportunity to gain mastery amidst feelings of helplessness. Since educators would facilitate the activity, I did not want to elicit the children's vulnerability with professionals who lacked training in how to respond. I decided to focus on children's strengths and conceived of drawing self-portraits. The face is an image all children have mastered, and it authentically represents ethnic attributes. This aspect needed to be emphasized since anti-Arab sentiments were emerging across NYC. I envisioned mounting the faces high on a large mural of a new cityscape for New York.

Facilitator's guidelines were developed for teachers and other professionals to simply and concretely present the project. Information was sent to schools and community organizations. Flyers were posted at groceries, libraries, and laundromats. The response was overwhelming. Educators seemed eager to offer young people an opportunity to process what happened. Many were apprehensive to approach the subject with young people and needed hands-on guidelines to do so.

The WTCCMP was designed so it could be easily facilitated. First, groups of children shared what they knew about 9/11 so adults could dispel any false perceptions they had. Because television footage was being shown repeatedly, some children believed many buildings in NYC were attacked. Second, the activity required the children to name their favorite places in the city so as to create an atmosphere of safety. Children compared hands to examine skin color and shared countries of origin. They actively voted to determine whether or not the group wanted NYC to be a peaceful place. Votes were unanimously positive. Project facilitators emphasized that community peace was not dependent on color or culture. Children also shared ideas about what they could do to help. They were excited to rebuild NYC.

Figure 1
Over 3,100 portraits from 15 states and 22 countries were mounted in the mural.

The capacity to express oneself through line, color, and form is a rebirth process. Art is a recreation of past representations significant to the artist in the moment. Creativity allows for describing, building, and reconfiguring an injured object so mourning can begin. People need to keep alive what is lost and destroyed so they can begin to let it go on their own terms. Hanna Segal, a psychoanalyst, wrote:

> All creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined interval world and self. It is when the world within is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments, and we ourselves in deepest despair, it is then that we must re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life. (1952, pp. 491-492)

Children were re-creating life in their art. The WTCCMP was conducted throughout NYC. Soon, the project received drawings from 14 other states.

The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) supports children's programs in territories exposed to war and terrorism. In a partnership with CCF, the WTCCMP's guidelines were translated into 12 different languages and distributed. Children in 22 countries including Uganda, Kosovo, and Columbia sent portraits and messages of hope. These international faces offered solidarity for world peace (Figure 1). On March 19th, the mural, composed of over 3,100 portraits, was unveiled across from Ground Zero. The mural, a collaboration of hope and strength, still stands across from the pain and devastation that fragmented the NYC community (Figure 2).

Roberts (2000) defines crisis intervention as the alleviation of the impact of a crisis and mobilization of resources for those directly affected. As a victim of 9/11, I have examined the resources that were summoned in my own recovery. My motivation was to become involved and create positive change. After 9/11, people wanted to join with others and somehow be involved in recovery efforts. I knew how to enable children to create art. That is what I chose to do because that is what I could offer. Subsequently, the conceptual framework of the WTCCMP was credited to my knowledge and experience as an art therapist and art educator. However, simply stated, it was a humane response to an inhumane act. As a wounded person, I responded.

In his acclaimed book, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire (1995) writes that every act is "wrapped in thick wrappers [that] have been touched by manifold whys" and that "only some of these are close enough to the event or the creation to be visible as whys" (p. 16). As I began to distance myself from the project, I examined the more complex, unanswered "whys." I looked deep into the folds of the soil that composed the wounded land of NYC. This land had supported me for my lifetime. Now, it embraced all of its wounded dwellers. NYC's soil, rich with nutrients of all that had grown there before, was painfully covered with fragments of life.

I am grateful for the opportunity to write about my experience on the morning of 9/11. My survival, just like blending of soil, was influenced by multiple sources. On that morning, I had heard the internalized voice of my father. My father served as a detective for the Port Authority Police of New York and New Jersey for 27 years. During his career, he was part of the rescue and emergency medical teams for plane crashes. I learned of his heroic efforts only when I was old enough to understand. After he was exposed to horrific carnage and destruction at work, my father would come home and just watch my brother and me sleep. He needed to be reassured that his family and life were intact after being confronted with such great devastation. As I fled the downtown area, I heard my father's advice to "never stand around and watch—just get out." I am grateful for his internalized messages.

I look at the land I stand on today and see the struggles of my grandmother who mobilized her strength as a victim of Armenian genocide. Despite the great violence and violation she experienced, my grandmother summoned energy to flee. She led her family through the mountains to find safety. With the help of my defenses and my grandmother's spirit, I was never fearful in that stalled subway car.

In her work with children in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, Grace Feurverger (2001) posits that the study of human culture is formed from fragments, representations of "loss, pain, fear, and trauma that create the underpinnings of this struggle towards peace" (p. 149). At the time of this writing, the pain is still raw in NYC as we struggle for peace.

Figure 2
Portraits make up the twin towers, 20-feet tall, installed in the Equitable Building across from Ground Zero.

Figure 3
Binoculars were distributed to local school children who visited the mural so that they were able to locate their portraits on a directory.

Countless school children have used the binoculars provided to find their drawings on the 20' x 160' mural (Figure 3). In a recent group discussion, prior to a class visit to the exhibition, one 7-year-old girl said, "I'm very sorry for the people that lost their children and parents. The Mural might help them gather hope. I made a difference."

I knew then that the WTCCMP was a positive response to aid in healing and recovery by re-creating life after destruction. The soil of this city will integrate the painful debris of what has fallen just as I continue to process and respond to my experiences as a member of this community, walking on this wounded—yet richly composed—land.

Art Therapy: From the Artroom to the Board Room

La Shae Brigmon, MA, ATR

The events of 9/11 seemed like a bad dream. They continue to be a hard reality to process. I was on vacation when I first became aware of the attack. Immediately, I returned home and tried to locate my mother. She worked in a building adjacent to the WTC. I couldn't possibly explain the severity of my panic, fear, and the constant throbbing of my head as I tried desperately for hours to locate her. Later that day, I received a phone call; my mother had found refuge at Macy's department store.

Days after the event I contemplated curtailing my vacation and returning to work. I work full-time at a publishing firm as a senior designer. In the evenings I work as an art therapist for Coler/Goldwater Memorial Hospital. I received an urgent e-mail from a colleague, Chriss Berk. Chriss was rallying art therapists to conduct counseling debriefing sessions at various locations. I wasn't sure how effective I would be as a caregiver because I felt wounded. I brought this struggle to my own therapist who listened attentively without giving unsolicited advice or statements of false comfort. I was encouraged to embrace what I was experiencing. Wadeson (1987) states:

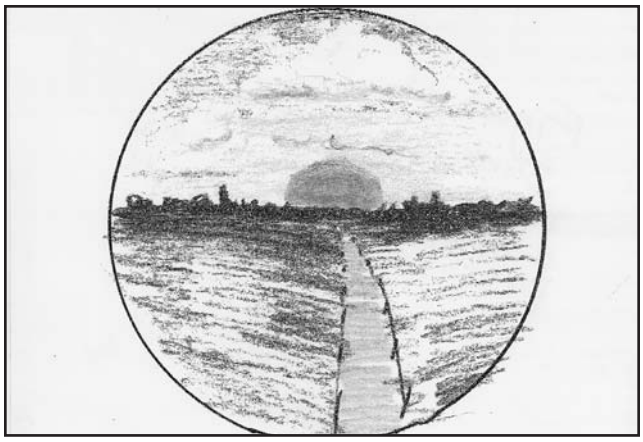

Figure 4
"Destiny's Journey." The path is simple, clear and requires little thought process.

> The concept of "the wounded healer" is related to the foundations of empathy. It is not the unscathed individual who has managed a life relatively free of problems that makes the best healer, but rather one who has faced life's vicissitudes, received its wounds, and survived. She can draw on those life experiences to understand and help her clients and patients face and deal with life. (p. 13)

I assumed I would be conducting art therapy at a hospital, nursing home, school, or other human service organization. Never had I imagined it would be on Madison Avenue. My task was to facilitate several groups and individual art therapy sessions at Louis Vuitton, a very well known fashion corporation. Susan Natacha Gonzalez, my friend and colleague, agreed to be my co-leader. Before meeting the employees, I discussed environmental issues with a human resources representative. The employees needed a space that was safe, positive, offered privacy and comfort, and allowed adequate room to work. We were provided show and conference rooms that had large windows, individual tables, and tremendous space.

Depending upon what the employees needed, Susan and I considered using guided imagery, meditation, relaxation techniques, and patriotic songs. We prepared red, white, and blue ribbons to give out at the end of the session. Another possibility was simply sitting, listening, and allowing the healing process to begin as each employee told his or her story. I had apprehensions as to how receptive the employees would be to creating art. We decided mandalas were appropriate. Never before had a group been in such need of the healing power of the mandala. Our fractured world cried for the cohesive force offered by creating mandalas (Fincher, 1991). The mandala's use as a vehicle for self-awareness and group cohesiveness has been established (Slegelis, 1987).

The groups of 10 to 13 employees of various rank were closed and structured. Sessions lasted 1 1/2 hours. Attendees were asked not to leave the room, interrupt, or speak for someone else. Before each session the Vice President of Human Resources would introduce us. In the middle of a ring of chairs sat markers, crayons, cray-pas, circles to be filled in, and completed samples.

In the first group, many of the employees were overwhelmed with talking about the attack and constant media exposure. Their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language revealed a tremendous amount of anger and tension. A 1993 case series conducted after the first terrorist explosion at the WTC reported that feelings of anger and violation were common (Difede, Apfeldorf, Cloitre, Spielman, & Perry, 1997).

Although everyone was at a different level in the grieving process, common concerns permeated all the sessions: fear, anger, inability to focus, sleep disturbance, lethargy, difficulty concentrating, flashbacks, hopelessness, survivor's guilt, irritability, and crying spells. Symptoms such as these are expected after such an horrific event. In order to begin healing, it was important for the group to validate these feelings and resist suppressing them. The greatest concerns were the possibility of dying and losing a job. School prepared us for many things, but dealing with death and dying was not often discussed. Grieving can be viewed as a weakness in many societies. However, our approach was that there is no wrong or right way to grieve, and no one knows how long the grieving process will take (Markham, 1996).

The sessions were impassioned and mandalas provided great containers for the outpouring of emotion. Images of the plane crashes signified the constant replaying of the event. Red, white, and blue colors of the flag showed patriotism. One mandala had such an impact that it was copied and distributed throughout the corporation (Figure 4). It symbolized hope, inspiration, calmness, peace, and a promise of better days ahead. The artist titled it "Destiny's Journey" because the journey would be just as important as the destination. The journey in the drawing took the viewer away from the city and its turmoil; there was no tension. The artist had anxieties about the possibility of dying and getting laid off from work and created the mandala as a mental vacation. Its circular image represented the sun as it warmed a fetus. The artist's image reminded the group, and later the entire corporation, that while life may be complex, one's own path is simple. Follow the path ahead; no thought process is needed. It seemed clear.

In order to return to some type of normalcy, several coping mechanism were discussed. These included setting goals and focusing on one task at a time, exercising, getting plenty of rest, and maintaining a proper diet. Also explored were previous activities that had helped participants cope with death and grieving. We suggested attendees put off major decisions such as relocating.

As tragic as 9/11 was, it provided unique opportunities for art therapists to expand into different professional areas on many different levels. In my case, I work in corporate America and mental health. I had never thought about combining the two disciplines. This needed further exploration. How receptive would corporate America have been to art therapy if not for the events of 9/11? I contacted the human resources department at my publishing firm to see if art therapists were listed as health care providers. The person assisting me didn't know which category art therapy would be listed under and had no clue what it was. When I finally connected with someone who knew what art therapy was, I was told that although art therapy was a viable option for getting people to open up, art therapists are not considered qualified to make mental health diagnoses. Since 9/11, art therapists have received tremendous exposure. I remain optimistic that as art therapists continue to gain credibility as qualified professionals, art therapy in corporate America will become more commonplace.

A Different View

Susan Natacha Gonzalez, MA, ATR-BC

I was enjoying the tail end of my vacation. Having just returned from Puerto Rico on September 7, I felt rested and

relaxed, with a bronze tan—a kiss from the Caribbean sun. It was such a beautiful day outside, sunny with not a cloud in the sky. As I walked out my door to meet my friend for dim sum I thought, "Wherever the day takes me that's where I'll be. No plans or appointments. My type of day." I even considered trying to convince my friend to change her business meeting and go gallery hopping. Perhaps we'd find a café, and, in true New York fashion, just hang out. As we sat in a large Chinese banquet hall, we were the only non-Chinese. It seemed as if no one spoke English. Amidst giggles, we employed body language to explain to the waitresses what we wanted to eat. "No pork," we said, pressing our noses up and waving our fingers in the air back and forth. We caught up and shared our summer stories.

Suddenly, a grunting waiter caught our attention and pointed to the television in the restaurant. Something on the screen appeared to be the latest Bruce Willis action movie, the Twin Towers on fire. Big deal! We nodded and kept eating. Immediately, the waiter grunted again with urgency. I asked him, "Now? Is this happening now?" He nodded. I looked up at the screen and said to my friend, "I wonder if our fire department is equipped for a fire so high?"

We had yet to find out that there were two planes inside the buildings. I thought, "Oh, it'll be a matter of putting out the fire, some reconstruction. It'll be fine." Then, within half an hour both towers collapsed. I couldn't believe it! I immediately thought, "Call Mom in Michigan. Let her know I am okay." We spoke for a minute. I could not hear her and she could barely make out what I was trying to say. I continued to repeat, "I'm okay! I'm okay!" My cell phone beeped and the signal faded.

I said good-bye to my friend and rushed home. As I opened the door to my building, a woman in a long white cotton dress walked by. Her high heel white sandals, toes, feet and legs were covered in ashes. I looked down Atlantic Avenue and couldn't believe my eyes. An ocean of people walked home from the bridges that connect Brooklyn and Manhattan. I arrived at my loft safe and intact, which stunned me. A sense of guilt came over me. I was home in one piece but, now what? What did all this mean? Who could have done such a thing? I searched for some empathy and understanding for the suicide bombers and tried to come up with a logical explanation. I desperately pondered, "What is the lesson to be learned here?" Nevertheless, the pressing question in my mind was, "How was I to assist others in the face of fear?" I was convinced I would not be of service for some time. My art supplies and my studio kept me grounded. I worked in my studio incessantly for 3 days trying to put the pieces together. I sought supervision and made my way to therapy as soon as possible.

Putting the Pieces Together

Eight months had passed since the collapse of the Twin Towers, and I was constantly reminded of the loss. Bumper stickers, flags, thorough searches when traveling kept the loss alive. New Yorkers had lost their architectural parents. The skyline seemed vulnerable. Would we ever truly understand the impact of 9/11?

I had visited the Whitney Biennial and was once again reminded of 9/11. At the museum, I was stopped at the door and asked to open my purse. A stranger's hand searched it. My purse seemed a metaphor for the lack of privacy Americans have lived with in an effort to maintain a sense of safety. A sense that, to me, seemed illusory.

The curator of the 2002 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Lawrence R. Rinder, began this year's introduction to the exhibit by telling his own story of 9/11. He went on to express that he believed people were at a crossroads in history and that "the wisdom of our response will depend on how well we know ourselves…[that the events of 9/11] have accelerated a process of self-reflection and debate that has been integral to this country since its founding" (2002, para. 2).

Indeed, 9/11 had prompted me to recognize new aspects of my professional and personal identity. As Rinder had stated, my process of self-reflection was accelerated. As a Puerto Rican living in New York since 1994, I often felt an outsider. I recalled how I am now treated as a tourist in Puerto Rico where I was born. Sadly, it took the tragedy of 9/11 for me to realize that I was a New Yorker, that this city was now my home.

Professionally, 9/11 and the diversity of work at the Biennial challenged my approach to artmaking and art therapy. I considered the different elements that could be brought into the therapeutic arena such as media, directives, art technique, and philosophical viewpoints. In my mind it was like a weave. These events had inspired a drive to evolve and keep my work fresh. I also thought about how art has changed throughout history. Subsequently, I discovered the work of Alter-Muri, which suggests:

> Therapists should be aware that every psychological theory and practice is specific to a culture and time in history. According to postmodern thought, therapists must always be aware of the multiple cultures that clients bring to a session. These include family culture, the religious culture, culture of origin, the economic culture, and the culture of the community and society. (1998, p. 245)

The events of 9/11 offered an opportunity to examine my process and motivation as an art therapist. Specifically, how should I address my countertransferences in relation to 9/11? How could my countertransference serve my growth as a therapist? When considering a universally traumatic event such as 9/11, where clients and therapists have been traumatized simultaneously, countertransference must be explored. I needed to assess whether disclosure of my countertransference would benefit my clients.

Disclosing countertransference may provide insight for the client. Dalenberg (2000) suggests:

> In fact I applaud the attempts by other theorists to differentiate the objective from the nonobjective and the neurotic from the healthy within the therapist's reactions. I also agree that the disentanglement of causal threads (who pulled what reaction out of whom) is a worthy endeavor in the therapeutic hour. (p. 10)

When I am asked why I am an art therapist, my initial response is, "To justify the need for art." I work as an independent contractor for several arts organizations. One of them, Marquis Studios, coordinates art residencies in NYC Public Schools. Most of these schools do not have an art program or teacher. I visit at least 15 schools a year for weekly workshops lasting 10 weeks. Four 45-minute classes are visited daily. I am often contracted to work with special education students.

My initial visit is a called a preplanning meeting. I meet the teachers, assess the needs of each classroom, and show them a portfolio composed of goal-oriented treatment plans. Subsequently, the teachers choose, I recommend, or we collaborate on an art project. The challenge in doing this type of work lies in philosophical differences. Contrary to my approach, schools are

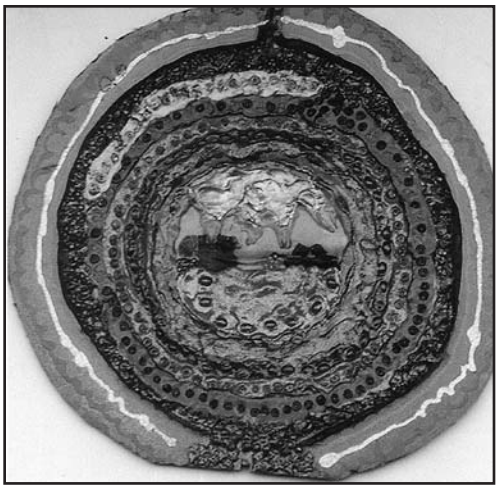

Figure 5 Mandala: "Discovery of America"

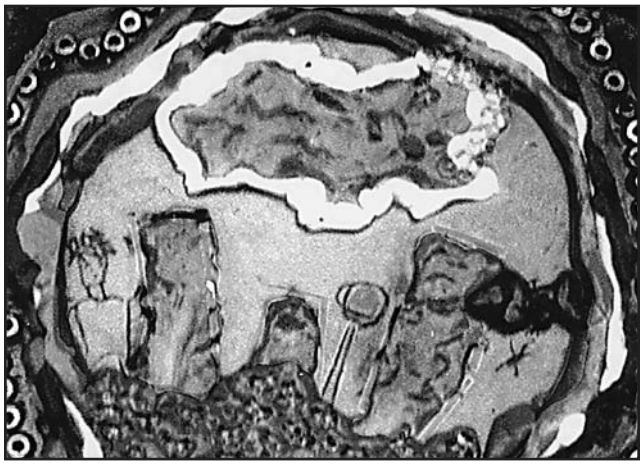

Figure 6
Mandala detail depicting the plane crash and a person falling

generally product-focused. I am a strong believer in the process of creating art. I try to satisfy both needs. Consequently, I spend a lot of time educating others on the importance of art and how it can be used therapeutically.

The Project

I had been seeking to expand my use of media and was grappling with how to handle my 9/11-related countertransferences. In an effort to stay grounded, centered, and organized, I developed the following multimedia project. I wanted to take advantage of the centering effects of the mandala and provide my severely emotionally disturbed students with an opportunity to work with a variety of media.

The teachers expressed an interest in using this project to further expand on the theme established by the Board of Education: "Celebrating America." Therapeutically, I wanted to provide an opportunity for the kids to experience a multi-media task and have them work actively with their hands. The project's goals included opportunities for organization, increased focus, and release of energy. I provided any amount of media they asked for. Supplies were varied so as to offer different levels of controllability. Drawing materials provided a high level of control. Gel acrylic medium presented opportunity for loose fluid activity. I told my students that gel acrylic medium would tie different elements of their work together through its glossy nature. The long-term nature of the project was intended to increase their independence and focus.

The students began by drawing in a mandala that was approximately 6 inches in circumference. They then glued it onto a piece of muslin that was subsequently mounted onto cardboard. I explained that the cardboard was for support, both structurally and metaphorically. As weeks went by, I continued to bring in different media: Crayola's Model Magic clay, beads, colored tapes, origami foil paper, and glue glitter. The results were magnificent (Figures 5 and 6). On the last day, students were asked a series of questions about their artwork. I realized that their work was no longer strictly about 9/11, but about their own identities. Like myself, they were in a state of self-evaluation.

In closing, I am compelled to mention the challenge I have faced while writing this article. It has been invaluable to examine the fluidity and presence, like the transparent and binding nature of gel acrylic medium, of transference and countertransference. I have discovered connections between my simultaneous processes as an artist, art therapist, and a viewer of art. I questioned earlier, "What is the lesson to be learned here?" For me, it has been that establishing a connection with my clients begins with me, my view, a changing view: a different view.

Candles and Flags: Reflections on Cherry Grove

Barbara Ann Levy, MFA, MPS, ATR-BC

On the morning of 9/11, I drove to the college where I taught a drawing class. At 9:00 a.m. I walked into the secretary's office to pick up the roster. As I waited for the list, I listened to her radio. An announcer mentioned something about the Pentagon. The secretary looked at me stunned, having heard more of the broadcast than I, and said, "You're not going home today, Barbara." She told me that a plane had hit one of the World Trade Center towers and that the Holland Tunnel below the Hudson River from lower Manhattan to New Jersey was closed.

At the time, I lived across the Hudson River from the WTC in Jersey City, where rescue workers had set up triage centers for victims. Frightened and dumbstruck, I drove to my summer home in Cherry Grove where I also own an art gallery. Cherry Grove is a predominantly gay and lesbian seaside resort area located on the Fire Island National Seashore, an unspoiled barrier reef in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Long Island. Once settled, I called a friend in Jersey City and asked him to pack my belongings for storage. I then contacted a contractor who winterized my Cherry Grove home. My plan was to stay through the winter. After making arrangements for my safety, I walked to my gallery, sat on a visitor bench, and cried. I let go of my old life in that moment and prepared the gallery for anyone who wanted to do the same.

I established an ad hoc emergency open studio where peers could be assisted with coping through mural-making. Scheduled exhibits were removed from the gallery so mural paper could be hung to encourage self-expression. A variety of materials were placed on a table with an invitation to participate for anyone who wished to express feelings related to 9/11. I was present so that participants could process the incident or their artwork if needed.

The disease model of alcoholism first developed by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (1957) informed the services I offered, as well as my subsequent observations. Also contributing to my outlook are the works of alcoholism theorist E. M. Jellinek (1960) and Arthur Robbins' (1994) object relations art therapy and psychoaesthetics theories.

Unlike Freudian-based models where the therapist must maintain a neutral stance, both the AA member and alcoholism counselor often become mentors who use self-disclosure as a tool for psychological mirroring and modeling. This is thought to help the alcoholic out of the myopic state symptomatic of alcoholism (Kinney, 2000). Similarly, I often shared my feelings with participants in the ad hoc studio. This served to break the isolation created by the trauma and build a bridge to health and wholeness. As an art therapist, I assisted my peers; however, like my peers, I was traumatized and a co-collaborator throughout the construction of the open studio.

Psychic numbing, a symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder, is one of the characteristic symptoms of traumatization (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and, in my opinion, similar to the myopia of alcoholism. Through the manipulation of art materials and symbol-making, repressed and often dissociated feelings related to trauma can be safely expressed. These activities help the artist integrate difficult feeling states.

The following quote was a gift from a friend for the residents of Cherry Grove. The words were spoken by his 5-year-old nephew, recorded by the child's mother, and emailed to me a few days after the WTC bombings: "Let's go to the broken city. Let's help them clear the sod. Let's show the world we'll fill their lungs with the clean fresh breath of God" (M. Ailing, personal communication, September 14, 2001). These words were read in a memorial service held in my gallery. After the reading, I presented some of the many images from the nine murals that were created in the gallery by community members. The following section contains brief descriptions of some of those images.

The Open Studio

It was a warm, gray November day. I harvested snap peas, put them in a clay pot, and went to my gallery to examine murals that became the holding environment for many residents and visitors to Cherry Grove. The murals were spontaneous art productions created by summer weekend residents and Long Islanders. Exhibited in the murals are expressions of shock, disbelief, rage and grief and reactions to the beginning of the new war on America.

The noontime chimes sounded on the gray, warm day, and I heard the pulse of the ocean behind me. It was hard to relive 9/11 through the murals. My heart was heavy and my chest tight as I sought language to describe the sudden disorganization of a community that struggled to make sense of terror through art-making and prayer. The struggle, as seen in the murals, conveyed the healing power of art—its ability to organize chaos and its capacity to provide a safe environment.

I studied the murals' aesthetics to understand the impact of 9/11 on the artists. In Robbins' (1994) theory of psychoaesthetics, it is postulated that art organization reflects the object relations of the client and of the therapeutic relationship on a dual level. The art becomes a container of client and therapist's conscious and unconscious material. The artwork and the relationship then promote integration and health. A therapist can see how a client contacts his or her world through the qualities expressed in the art.

Most Cherry Grove community members are gay or lesbian and live in NYC through the fall and winter. The WTC attack had particular significance for this community as Gay Pride, the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement, was born in lower Manhattan. As I examined the murals, words and images vied for my attention. Each participant found an isolated area on which to work. Few participants interacted. Terror isolated them. Furthermore, contact with each other may have been especially difficult as many gay men and lesbians are "closeted." The real self for many gay people is well hidden under a public false self. This may have compounded their isolation.

There were exceptions to the isolation expressed in the artwork. In a corner of one of the murals an angry person had written, "Fuck religion." Another indignant resident responded with the word "Don't." Many participants drew American flags. I saw a round flag in the shape of a peace symbol, a weeping flag, and an "I Love NY" flag with a black image of the Trade Towers standing in the middle of a heart that seemed to fall away from a field of stripes. The towers in one drawing became gravestones.

A local hotel guest entered the gallery. He told me that he was supposed to be in one of the towers on the 97th floor on 9/11, but had taken the day off. On a 10' x 3.50' panel, stretched out on the floor, he drew his vision of a new WTC that could withstand attack (Figure 7). His artwork was composed of lightly rendered pencil lines that depicted structures based on the triangle. A footbridge attached the towers. The bridge seemed to hold the image to the page. Its horizontal bar acted as a visual magnet for the viewer's eye. The towers did not have a ground line, but the words "stronger than ever" may have been an attempt to stabilize them or to provide the artist with an anchor to reality.

Many visitors to the gallery drew peace symbols. One artist drew a peace symbol that contained the pledge of allegiance surrounded by words from "God Bless America." From another peace symbol a tear fell upon a broken heart. A third seemed to explode from a field of red, white, and blue.

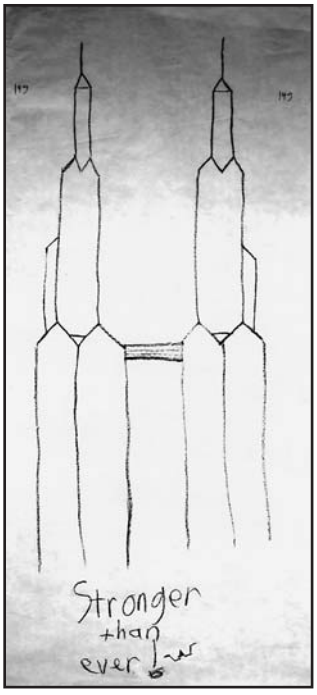

Figure 7 Vision of a new World Trade Center

In another image, the words "and the angels cried" were written in blue pastel arching above a crying angel who rocked a baby in her wing. The image appeared to emerge from charcoal-drawn black smoke. A severed hand carried the torch of Liberty ablaze in pink, orange, and yellow. In comic book sequence, the flames became a dancing devil. A photo of Cherry Grove's pier at sunset was collaged next to it. The juxtaposition seemed to reflect a struggle to integrate the WTC tragedy and the natural beauty of Fire Island.

A graffiti artist, City Queen, signed a panel with her handle and incorporated a drawing of the towers with a halo tied like a bow. Miniature towers with blue wings were drawn in a corner. Another set of towers rested on a rainbow ground. A world was shown with a multicultural theme. People of many colors held hands. All were joined by one hand that rested on a delicate pink cloud.

Months have passed since 9/11. Ground Zero has become a sacred burial ground for the families of those who died, for all New Yorkers, and perhaps all of America. Many bodies will never be recovered and family members may never have closure. The erection of a memorial may help.

The murals have been rolled up and placed in a corner of my gallery to make way for the 2002 summer exhibition season. Many of the artists who will show their work in the gallery had to leave their studios for several weeks or months while lower Manhattan was cordoned off and cleaned up. Most have made art about the tragedy.

Artists have a lot to offer the world in times of war. We are organizers of chaos and can integrate otherwise unintelligible and incompatible realities. Art can successfully contain conflict and help in conflict resolution. All of us in the New York area try to go on with our daily lives with hope for peace.

Conclusion

Stephen R. Koepfer, MA, ATR, FAAIM

I am as native a New Yorker as one can find. My family roots can be traced back to the Dutch settlement New Amsterdam, 1547. In other words, my family has been in New York since before it was New York. Preparing to write this conclusion, I read through Marygrace Berberian's notion of NYC soil as the foundation for all that has been grown here (see Berberian's section of this article). It struck me that I, too, had grown here on the very spot that was destroyed. The WTC lies on the very land that was originally settled by the Dutch, my ancestors.

Like every other New Yorker, I was stunned and frightened that morning as I watched the WTC burn and collapse. At the time, I was sitting with a client whose husband worked in the WTC. We sat all morning in silence, in front of the television, waiting for the phone to ring. Thankfully, he was a survivor. Like every other New Yorker, I had personal connections to the attack. My father, a career NYC fireman, lost four friends that day. And, in spite of these things, like many other New York therapists, I had to work on September 12th.

I work in the pediatric department of Maimonides Medical Center, a major Brooklyn medical center. Like Barbara Levy and other art therapists around the city, I put mural paper on the wall of our waiting room and encouraged families to express themselves. They did—for months to come. The days after the attack were quiet at the medical center as all nonessential procedures and appointments were canceled. Noncritical patients were discharged as it was expected that beds would be needed for incoming wounded; no wounded came. As our patients returned, so did their art, their stories, and the need to address issues I never expected to broach as a therapist.

I began volunteering for various crisis intervention efforts. Through the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency I volunteered, with many other art therapists, to facilitate bereavement groups for the children of firefighters killed on 9/11. We created memory boxes that to this day have continued to evolve into living memorials for those who lost parents. Through the medical center, which offered its services to the local Brooklyn community, I ran several crisis groups for 4th and 5th grade public school classes.

I recall sitting in a classroom with Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Jewish children discussing issues of racism, war, hatred, and fear. It was overwhelming. One boy confessed to beating up Islamic children because his parents said the attack was their fault. Another boy asked, "Is Osama Bin Laden putting kids in our schools to kill us?" Another child, a Mexican immigrant boy who had survived an earthquake several years prior, cried as he had posttraumatic flashbacks and attempted to cope with old and new traumas simultaneously.

Similar to Berberian's experiences, I found that teachers were often afraid to address these issues and, in some cases, were instructed not to by their superiors. I recalled my first art therapy professor's voice. "Trust the process," Estelle would say. Estelle Bellomo, founder and chair of the School of Visual Arts art therapy program, was my mentor and provided my first introduction to art therapy in 1987. Her faith in the ability of one person to provide a supportive container for others was unrelenting and contagious. I took a deep breath and allowed the kids to express their fears safely and without judgment. I honored their humanity. They gave me the gift of their stories. We began to process their fears and, in so doing, my own fears were alleviated.

At work in the medical center, similar issues were arising. Islamic families were taking their children out of school for fear of retribution. One fearful Pakistani family shared their worries about possible hate crimes. Immigrant families were questioning the "safety" that America, their new home, was supposed to provide. Both verbally and artistically children were expressing feelings of fear and confusion. Nevertheless, over time, people began to come to a state of adjustment. A city gripped in fear began to transform into a proud city, a community that came together to overcome tragedy. As Brigmon points out in her account, New York's transformation invited art therapy into realms where it had never before been welcome.

Similarly, in her story, Gonzalez reminds us that tragedy can prompt significant self-reflection on the part of individuals and nations. The events of 9/11 challenged our society to recognize, acknowledge, and validate the importance of the creative process as a means for healing. New York Senator Hillary Clinton (2002), in a recent congressional floor statement, remarked, "Art therapy, the process of using art therapeutically to treat victims of trauma, illness, physical disability, or other personal challenges, has historically been under recognized as a treatment" (p. 1). President George W. Bush "acknowledged in the aftermath of the attack the importance of creativity in American society and [went as far as to] denounce the restrictive social agendas of America's own fundamentalist factions" (Rinder, 2002, para. 3).

Have we recovered? Not yet, but we are on our way. Recovery will take years. Some families are only now able to bring themselves to talk about losses they suffered. America is currently

in the midst of witnessing escalating Israeli-Palestinian warfare in the Middle East and an increasingly unstable nuclear stand-off between Pakistan and India. Like the WTC attack, these too are imprinting children's psyches and being reflected in their art (Figure 8). With such continuing violence on the heels of 9/11, how can we recover? What solace can we art therapists provide?

I recall sitting with the other contributors to this article discussing the importance of getting our stories out to the art therapy community at large. We were all driven to share our experiences. How would we bring our individual stories together in a format that seemed cohesive and scholarly? What could we offer? This article was Barbara Levy's brainchild: Tell the stories of New York art therapists struggling to cope while simultaneously attempting to provide a safe container for their clients.

As we proceeded to write the article, it became evident that documenting our stories was how we were coping, as therapists, survivors, and witnesses. It is our hope that for the reader, the importance of these narratives is self-evident. We did have something to offer: A reminder that art therapists are people first. Oftentimes as citizens of a seemingly violent world and as members of a profession burdened with identity crises, politics, multiple theories, and demands for scholarship, we forget our human foundations. If nothing else, tragedy serves not to demonstrate the lack of humanity in the world, but to challenge us to embrace our humanity more. These narratives remind us that, regardless of what challenge we face as art therapists, compassion, art, and humanity can carry us through. If we lose touch with our human side, I suspect our tenure as therapists will be over. That would be a real tragedy.

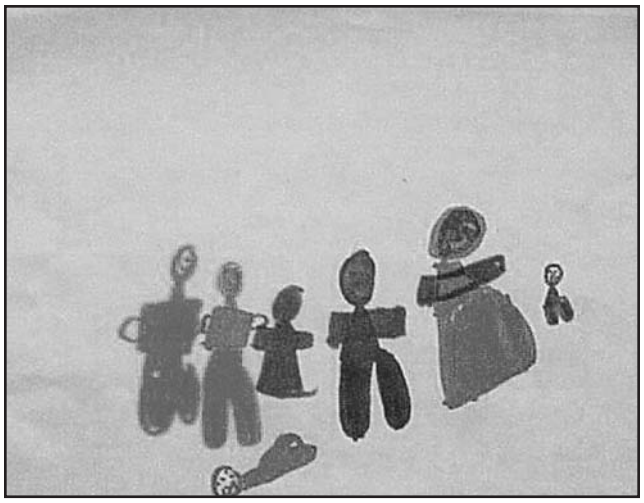

Figure 8
Spontaneous drawing by a 6-year-old Syrian Jewish boy. The image depicts a dead Arab killed by his mother to protect the family's youngest child.

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