

*The following article originally appeared in 1993, Volume 10(3), 148–155*

## The Art Therapist as Social Activist: Reflections and Visions

Maxine Borowsky Junge, Janise Finn Alvarez, Anne Kellogg, and  
Christine Volker, Los Angeles, CA

### Introductory Comments by Lynn Kapitan (Editor, 2006-present)

To select a singularly influential article from Cathy Malchiodi's 9-year tenure (1992–2000) as the Editor of *Art Therapy*, I had to re-read the 36 issues she edited. It became clear to me what an important legacy Cathy left from overseeing a period of tremendous growth in art therapy literature across a stunning range of topics. Her unique gift as editor was to encourage dialogue—to inspire thinking and writing about art therapy theory and practice and, in the process, to develop the field's breadth. The Journal from this period provided a lively forum on everything from the art therapist's identity, to art and biology, new practice arenas such as in medicine and education, and advances in technology. It also included 25th-anniversary commentary (1994) on future trends in the field and two seminal issues on research (1998).

In making an editor's pick of only one seminal paper as representative of this period, I considered many worthy contenders, such as Ellen Dissanayake's keynote address "What is Art For?" (1995, 12[1], 17–23), David Henley's unusual research on art therapy with elephants, great apes, and dolphins ("Facilitating Artistic Expression in Captive Mammals: Implications for Art Therapy and Art Empathicism" (1992, 9[4], 178–192), and Barbara Ann Levy's Viewpoint in the same issue called "Psychoaesthetics Dolphin Project" (1992, 9[4], 193–197). Susan Spaniol and Mariagnese Cattaneo's "The Power of Language in the Art Therapeutic Relationship" (1994, 11[4], 266–270) is as valuable and instructive today as it was when it was published in 1994. But ultimately I turned to Maxine Junge and her coauthors' paper "The Art Therapist as Social Activist: Reflections and Visions" (1993, 10[3], 148–155), having read it many times over the years. I require my graduate students to read it whenever they are hungry to apply their art therapy knowledge to the social ills of the world.

I must come clean that my selection reflects my own bias as someone who has worked as an activist-art therapist over the past decade in Latin America and who knows very well the historical period described in this paper. But my decision is more than personal: In the 21st century, the world is becoming smaller and more connected. Art therapists entering the field have "made the conceptual leap" that Junge refers to that will broaden the limits of the field to include communities the world over and all the complexities therein of culturally sensitive and ethical practice. The article is therefore timely and well worthwhile to read

and reflect on; my hope is that it will continue to inspire dialogue on using the power of art therapy where it will do the most good, especially in helping to repair the damaged social fabric in which many people must live.

---

### Abstract

From a systems perspective, the role of the art therapist as social activist at a time of deep and crucial change for our clients, mental health systems, our country, and the world is discussed. Despite the fact that art therapists, through our artists' identities, are natural agents of change, our education and strivings for professional acceptance mediate against our natural proclivities in this direction. Case examples of their experiences as change agents are presented by three art therapists: two write in dialogue about their participatory research project with Central American refugees, and another writes about her work as a trade union activist.

### Maxine Junge: Art Therapists and the Paradoxical Gift of Sight

Art therapists are particularly talented at seeing; it is our stock in trade. As the dictionary states, seeing is "perceiving, coming to know, forming a mental picture of, and understanding the meaning of something."\* Seeing, we come to profoundly understand our clients. Visible in their art expression are the depths of their terrors, the joys of their inner worlds, and their efforts to change these worlds. The art therapist's and the client's engagement with the process of creativity as a method of inquiry and a way of knowing, pictorially reveals and externalizes reservoirs of memory and deeply felt implicit and tacit awarenesses hidden from consciousness.

Art expression takes us to unknown places beneath the silences of words and brings the terrors of the dark into the light where they may be tamed. All human beings are paradoxically both cursed and blessed by the darkness of not seeing. What do we look at when we see? We cannot bear to look upon mountains of corpses, faces from the Holocaust, or images of the evil of African-American slavery and oppression. Such imagery assaults our eyes and

---

**Editor's note:** A different version of this paper was presented at the Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association, San Francisco, California, November 1989.

---

\*Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

threatens to burn them out. By seeing too much we go blind; we close our eyes to defend against our own powerlessness in the face of horror. But by closing our eyes to shut off what is too terrible to know, we may go blind to what is before us.

What do we see when we look? Thirty-five thousand people die of starvation each day; the majority are children. The images of Somalia haunted us and, finally, led to United Nations' and American intervention, but many died and will still die before help arrives. The great plague of AIDS confronts us daily; there are two or three listings each day in the Los Angeles obituaries. Already lost are many of our best and our brightest. The violence of the cities explodes daily, in particular against and within minority groups. Recently, we rejected as President a man who advocated a "kinder, gentler world" and in a condition of astounding denial refused until the end to see beyond his office walls to the desperate realities in which many people live.

What do we see when we look? A decade of denial when we allowed ourselves to be lulled to sleep by a handsome, forgetful Hollywood actor and his successor. We see a country where in most places the sale of fireworks is illegal, but the sale of machine guns is not. In the Los Angeles rebellion or "riot" (as you may choose to call it), we saw the faces of despair and desperate, encroaching poverty and racism. We saw the logics of pain unraveling identity. In the year since that cataclysmic event which altered the consciousness of our nation, not much of a concrete nature has happened to "rebuild L.A." How can we come to know the truth in Krishnamurti's words: "You are the world and the world is on fire"? This image that lies before us is what we must see.

### Artists as Those Who Help People See

We who come to the profession of art therapy embrace the tradition of artists as those who help people see. We resonate with the idea of the artist as outsider, observer, social critic. Imagine the images of Bosch, Goya, Daumier, Ben Shahn, Picasso's "Guernica," Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial in Washington, her civil rights memorial in Montgomery, Alabama with Martin Luther King's words on it, "Until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream," and the AIDS quilt. Let these images glide through your mind and speak their truths to your heart.

As these images move through your mind, you cannot avoid feeling the sweeping power of the arts for change... you *feel*. And it is that word—"feeling"—that is the problem. Feeling requires that we open our eyes to break through our denial. It leads to deep questioning about ourselves and our world, intense discomfort, possibly despair and possibly joy. Feeling lets us know what we try hard not to see: that we do not have control over much. Feeling leads to opening the windows so that the unknown comes in and the winds of change blow through, so that we can see.

### The Role of Imagination

The great painter Goya told us that "the sleep of reason produces monsters." The key to sight and, beyond it,

to change is the power of the imagination. To paraphrase Goya: The sleep of the imagination produces, even in life, death. Imagination is the essence of hope—and of the potentialities of the creative process. However, the word "imagination" does not appear in the indices of many of the books about creativity written in the last 20 years. Additionally, dictionary definitions hold within them the intriguing duality of imagination as creativity and change on the one hand, and, on the other, as something not real, devoid of truth, as in "imaginary." But it is the act of imagination that offers a vision of something different, better, and the resulting hope that can impel us to action. The power of the imagination gave rise to the dream of democracy, in China for example, and the tumbling of the Berlin wall and the national boundaries which have tossed Eastern Europe into so much chaos. These examples prove that change seldom comes when or as we expect it to, nor in a necessarily orderly or predictable fashion. The concept of planned change is, indeed, an oxymoron.

### Psychotherapists, Art Therapists, and Social Change

Psychotherapists, unlike artists, have not tended to be activists, but rather agents of social control. As the mental health system has crumbled around us and our clients in the last 10 years, we must wonder if our twin identities of artist/therapist—the artist awake to change and the therapist holding on to containment—force us into some impossible double bind.

At first therapists saw the individual and his or her intrapsychic problems, but not beyond the boundaries of the person's psychic skin. Most therapists sat in the protected havens of their offices and waited for clients. A powerful conceptual leap occurred when we widened our view of the individual's struggles to also include the family system. However, most therapists have not yet taken to the streets or viewed our territory to include the community, society, and the larger world environment. All too often therapists heal what is already wounded and do not attend to the milieu which wounds and re-wounds again and more deeply.

Suggested by Jung, Rank, and others, people project outwardly the dark sides that cannot be tolerated within. For example, in the 12th and 13th centuries, at a time of denial of the body, leprosariums isolated lepers so that they would not have to be seen, to infect others with the awareness of bodily reality and mortality. At the beginning of the Renaissance, a time of renewed worldly sensuality and the birth of rationality, leprosy died out and the leprosarium buildings became insane asylums. Insanity, thus, became the disavowed projection of the age of science and rationality—insanity which must be locked away from view.

In more recent times psychotherapists have embraced the notion of themselves as scientists, objectivists, rationalists of the psyche. They focused on examination of the individual mind, with social adaptation as a goal—let us not forget the era of lobotomies. The value of conformity to the culture was, and to a large extent still is, the norm within the white male medical hierarchy; the labeling of de-

viance as psychopathology had as its intention the reification of control. If deviance and irrationality are incarcerated, they become invisible, and safety of the status quo can be maintained.

That our ideas are culturally and socially constructed is not news. Even in the short 20 years I have been in the mental health field I can remember when mothers were blamed for all problems in their children, particularly boys. (This mother-blaming era, of course, is not over yet!) Schizophrenia was thought to be caused by families, particularly schizophrenogenic mothers. Autistic children were a result of “ice box” or very distant parents. Father/daughter incest was not all that bad and could even be helpful for a girl. The dominance of women in single-parent black families was destroying black men and children, and a patient who was unable to get to the clinic with her six children because she could not afford the bus fare was considered resistant to change. Although paradigms and pendulums shift, we retain within the new, habits of the old. Thus, many of these ideas remain today in barely disguised forms.

O'Connor, in his article “Therapy for a Dying Planet” (1989), writes of an incident which occurred in Frieda Fromm-Reichmann’s practice before she left Germany to come to the United States:

A young woman with numerous irrational fears came to her for help. During the course of psychoanalysis, the patient gradually overcame her fears, and after three years, the therapy was successfully ended. A few weeks later the young woman, who was Jewish, was picked up by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp. (p. 70)

The message is obvious: In the words of a social psychologist friend, “Are we missing the forest for the clouds?” As art therapists are we too often helping people adjust to a destructive society? Are we ourselves co-opted by the status quo and, understandably, yearning to be inside, adapt, make do, and continue to cope with a fatally injured mental health system?

## Art Therapy Education and Activism

What about the art therapist’s education as education for activism? Does our education help us see?

A part of our history as art therapists that may impede us is that we have been trained as “appreciators” of art, as reflectors, supporters, explorers of the intrapsychic landscape rather than pro-activist, co-creators engaged together with our clients in their struggle, which is ultimately also our own. Typically, we are not trained as advocates or revolutionaries, not as social and cultural analysts or critics, but as those who through the art therapy process help people cope and adapt.

As the director of a masters program, I confess to you my belief that all too often education is not authentically based. The process of professionalization itself initiates the student into the community through a series of formalistic rituals which deaden the senses and overinflate the thinking processes to the exclusion of feeling and imagination. As art therapists, we learn many unforgettable lessons about change.

Unfortunately, when student therapists graduate into the professional world and seek to enter the ranks of employed and respected practitioners, in the words of Pogo, “They see the enemy and the enemy they are us.” Quite naturally, with student loans on our backs, we embrace the status quo, strive to climb the hierarchical ladder, and forget everything we ever knew about the artist’s mission to make waves.

As example, a few years ago our masters program engaged in deep changes in the system which included not only the department, but also the university, the mental health community, and the state. On the face of it, a simple issue of licensing was at the core. We all are aware that there are political and economic tides that arise out of complex struggles and exert enormous pressures on our lives. In addition, themes of the artist, the arts, and therapy as outsiders in the academy and in the mental health professions were apparent along with art therapy emerging as the projected dark side of rational, scientific, behavioral psychology.

In this circumstance, people, particularly students, refused to accept the status quo. They found that the answers were in themselves and empowered them to action. Touching the strength in themselves was education at its best, and in an extraordinary way helped them understand the meaning of empowering their clients as human beings. In our profession we need this kind of systems observation, reflection, and social change, and must undertake this willingly, with our eyes wide open.

I propose that it is time for art therapists to take another conceptual leap—an activist leap. To begin, we must recognize ourselves and those with whom we do therapy as deeply interrelated. Next, we must acknowledge that we and our clients are part of larger systems in which life and work can go on or may end in despair. And we must see that struggle clearly and engage in it strategically and effectively beyond the boundaries of office walls and the psychic limitations of our own consciousness and denial.

## Art Therapists as Activists: Three Stories

Following are the experiences of three art therapist/activists. Christine Volker and Anne Kellogg speak in a dialogue about their participatory research project with Central American refugees. Janise Finn Alvarez was also part of the work. She writes about her participation and work as a trade union activist.

### Christine Volker and Anne Kellogg: A Dialogue

*Christine Volker:*

I come from the tradition of the artist/activist. In art school I found myself drawn to the work of Kathe Kollwitz, the German Expressionist artist. Although Kollwitz’s work was inspired by a great spirit of social activism, I could never make that leap in my own artwork. An axiom of the formalist school of painting prevalent in my art education strictly stated that one did not mix politics with art. As a result, I kept my political activism and my art separate throughout the 1980s.



New political activism eventually led me to Nicaragua in 1986. I celebrated New Year's Eve with the campesinos of the state-run coffee farm cooperative where we had been picking coffee beans high up in the mountains. Later, I drank a toast with Luis, a Commandante of Sandanista troops stationed there to guard us from Contra attack. Our four-mile radius was protected, but nightly I heard the shooting and saw the helicopters flying the wounded to the hospital in nearby Matagalpa. As a result, I returned to the United States a changed person.

In 1987, I enrolled in the art therapy program at Loyola, where I was astonished to meet another social activist, Maxine Junge, who also happened to be the director of the program. In my first semester when I talked about my trip to Nicaragua, a fellow student, Anne Kellogg, stated, "I feel very connected to you." From this connection began our joint clinical research project.

*Anne Kellogg:*

When Chris and I discovered each other, we realized we had both been previously active in social justice work with the Central American community. We decided to integrate our past and our present, developing a project we called "Going Through the Journey with Central American Refugees" which explored the conditions of uprooting, migration, and relocation through family art therapy.

Our project examined the family drawings and dynamics of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees who migrated to the Los Angeles area. Particular attention was paid to the psychological effects of premigration conditions, the migration process, and postmigration relocation in the United States.

*CV:* This work with refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala provided for us an integration of activism, art, and psychology. Our multiple personae have finally become one. This is partly what we hoped to accomplish with our interventions with the refugees: An integration of their past identity in their country of origin with their present reality as they adjusted to a new culture and country—an integration which involved an acceptance of self. For only in realizing our pain, can we heal.

*AK:* In the early '80s I became involved in housing Central American refugees as part of what was called "The Underground Railway." This movement helped to shelter, feed, and find work for Central Americans. As part of a church peace group, I became active in educating my parish about U.S. involvement in Central America and the conditions refugees experience after their arrival in the United States. My parish supports a sanctuary house in Los Angeles called Casa Grande which gives short-term shelter to arriving Central Americans. One million Central American refugees have arrived in the United States in the last 10 years, largely due to increasing violence and oppression in their countries. While many of these people now receive amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act, hundreds of thousands have illegal status and, if returned to their country of origin, could be subject to political reprisal, torture, or death.

*CV:* Our art therapy project was accepted by the committee at Casa Grande. The house is a temporary shelter which provides a safe haven and community for Central American refugees who have arrived in this country in the last one to five months. While staying in the house, refugees may apply for political asylum and search for work and more permanent living conditions.

*AK:* We hoped artwork would provide a safe place for containment of the multiple traumas experienced by these people during their uprooting, migration, and relocation. It was thought that the art process could facilitate grief and mourning, capitalize on family strengths, and begin to integrate past experiences with present reality. Perhaps most importantly the art product could create an historical document to be used as a touchstone marker in the defense of these peoples' human rights.

*CV:* We held two pre-session meetings with the families in the house before obtaining permission to do the therapy. We found our values as "gringo" psychotherapists challenged. We were questioned and rightfully so. "How could drawing pictures possibly help?" they asked. "Didn't we realize that these were painful issues better left alone?"

*AK:* As we attempted to address these questions, we felt an overwhelming respect for these people who had gone through so many traumatic experiences to reach our country. We also knew that our own country was responsible for fueling much of the violence with our military aid to El Salvador. We realized that this project was as much for our own healing as theirs. While it was difficult to establish trust and respect under these circumstances, we received approval to proceed with the group.

*CV:* The multifamily group consisted of 12 people, including two intact families. The others were single members of families who had come to the United States hoping to bring other members of their families later. Since families usually arrived in stages, many felt fragmented and experienced grief for absent members. Following are case examples of representative themes or issues which came up during group therapy.

The Chibarras were a reconstituted family consisting of Father, Esteban, Mother, Ana, two sons, Gustavo, 9 and Rene, 7, and one daughter, Estralita, 3.

Esteban fled to a refugee camp in Honduras when his village in El Salvador was ambushed by government soldiers. The soldiers would often come to the village looking for evidence of guerilla activity. When the soldiers came, the villagers would flee, taking specially prepared boxes of provisions which would sustain them in their hiding places until a scout informed them that the soldiers were gone. On one such occasion the returning villagers were met by a surprise ambush attack. A massacre ensued. Esteban was one of the returning villagers. He escaped the soldiers by diving into a lake and emerging behind a bush with just his nose and eyes above water. He watched while his village was burned and his neighbors slaughtered. He watched while his four children were butchered. He watched while his wife was raped and then shot to death.

After the soldiers left, Esteban ran to the nearest refugee camp.

There he met Ana who had lost her husband in similar circumstances. Together they reconstituted a family, migrated to the United States, and found sanctuary at Casa Grande.

The artwork of this family depicts various intrusive themes—the bombs, soldiers with guns, helicopters flying overhead machine-gunning the people below. One drawing showed four children and a wife sitting at a table eating. The father, Esteban, is standing in the corner of the page. Esteban explained that he had returned to the village from the refugee camp in Honduras to get a table which had been left behind when he fled. Esteban had built this table for his family and retrieving it was important to him; it served as his transitional object. A border was drawn encircling the family, symbolically containing the anxiety stirred by this memory. Esteban said that the border represented a map of Honduras, yet he placed himself outside the family. Esteban's present family with his new wife Ana had only three children, yet here were drawn four children. Could Esteban have unconsciously drawn the family he had lost in the massacre?

In his drawing, Rene, age 7, showed two helicopters. One was black signifying the death helicopter shooting people on the ground below. A person was shown lying on the ground dead. Two donkeys looked on, one with a black death head. Three trees were drawn, all uprooted from the ground. One of the trees, like the person, is lying on its side, perhaps also dead, signifying that the life force itself was also dying. The house was depicted with people standing in the doorway, seen through the walls. The rendered Coca-Cola machine was a visible reminder of American involvement in El Salvador. Rene spoke about his drawing: "Here's the helicopter, here's the dead person, here's a fallen tree."

Rene was asked to draw something about the United States. He drew a helicopter shooting a figure holding a machine gun pointed upward outside Casa Grande in Los Angeles. People were inside the house, sitting at the table and two figures stood at the entrance. The recurring theme of the shooting helicopter was seen in many of the children's drawings and seemed to symbolize the common trauma of war they experienced. The children were also aware of helicopters in the skies over Los Angeles since on many evenings a helicopter could be heard flying over Casa Grande. For Rene the black image of the shooting helicopter represented a threat not only from the past but also in the present. This is an example of the intrusion of thoughts and feelings associated with past traumas which are symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Esteban's and Ana's 3-year-old daughter Estralita used glue, pen, masking tape, and collage as she created what she called "La Bomba." She and the two other young boys in the group were the only ones who mentioned bombs. The adults did not respond to this or talk about it. The children seemed to have more direct access to their memories of the traumas of war. The adults seldom referred directly to the conditions of the war relevant to their uprooting.

A collage by Esteban illustrated the conditions in El Salvador. There were four images: two men riding horses signifying life in the country; a scene of the desert representing the crisis in El Salvador; an old woman and her granddaugh-

ter, symbolizing love and respect for the elderly; and a perspiring boy with a thermometer in his mouth, representing the sick ones and the sickness of the country.

Predominant in the children's drawings were destructive weapons of warfare. The helicopters firing down, the man with the machine gun, and the bomb. These represented intrusion into their present reality of the past traumas of war. The floating houses, which we found in many of the drawings, symbolized the loss of home and country and current rootlessness. Casa Grande is only a temporary shelter. Floating houses without any baseline represented the insecure existence of these refugees in a foreign country.

The floating house, the uprooted tree, and the running man occurred repeatedly in the artwork and seemed to symbolize the trauma of the uprooting, the migration, and the relocation. The multi-family art therapy was brief crisis intervention work and did not allow for addressing the many losses in depth. But the project was a gesture of healing in the context of incomprehensible wounds.

*AK:* During our work at Casa Grande, we came to admire and respect the strength and courage of the men, women, and children we met. Through the art process and product we tried to validate this strength and normalize the natural responses that come from going through such out-of-the-ordinary experiences, to contain the pain in the context of the art.

*CV:* From individual statements presented by the refugees at the final evaluation meeting, the art therapy process helped more than any other kind of therapy that had been done at Casa Grande. Visual imagery allowed for the confrontation of painful past events. The refugees told us that this was not easy for them, but they said it was necessary.

*AK:* The creation of symbols to explore the uprooting, the migration, and the relocation offered the people the opportunity to address their traumas and to integrate them. But monumental wounds continue. People arrive with images of murder, rape, torture, and the loss of loved ones. When they first arrive, they are preoccupied with survival, but as time goes on the images return as nightmares. How can we provide healing in this overwhelming context? We believe the art helps; the people we have worked with say that it does.

### Janise Finn Alvarez:

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to be the translator and the art therapist for the project described by Christine Volker and Anne Kellogg. The experience of working with the refugees was as empowering in its own way and as moving as anything that I have done. These people have courage and have been through things that even speaking of cannot give them their full weight.

I am Central American in heritage—Central American and Irish. My mother comes from Nicaragua, and my father comes from Ireland. There aren't too many Central American art therapists around. And I am bi-lingual—I was born in Los Angeles, but Spanish was my first language. I learned English in school.

Also I feel a kinship to many of the Salvadorans since one of the groups most persecuted there are trade unionists. It's up there with being a Jesuit priest in terms of the mortality rate. As disheartened as I often am by the attitude in the United States toward labor unions, I think most people have been successfully brainwashed by the forces of major business which Ronald Reagan personified and to which George Bush was handmaiden. It is powerful and deeply moving when I think of my trade unionist counterparts in El Salvador who are killed.

When I graduated from a masters program in art therapy, I was thrilled and grateful to have a job, especially the job I wanted working with families in the Hispanic community in East Los Angeles. But I started to get a little uncomfortable about the fact that art therapists and dance therapists were paid less than other M.A.-level therapists. Being an activist is first having pride. When you're a trade unionist, you have pride in your work. You feel you must be taken seriously and be listened to. I had a good sense of what I was and felt my training was good. I also believed that my specialty as an art therapist was very important and that I should actually be paid more than other therapists. But at first I didn't even try to get that across to others.

I mentioned my sense of injustice about the situation to people, and someone suggested that I run for the union negotiating team because we had a contract coming up in the agency. So I did. It was an empowering experience to achieve what I wanted, which was parity. The sense of sitting down across the table from your employer as an equal was also empowering.

Suddenly, I had changed the job. I didn't beg for it; I didn't plead for it. We just sat down and got what we asked for. I thought this was really wonderful: People's lives change this way. I helped myself, but I was also helping others. My dance therapist sisters on the staff were crying they were so excited with our success. They had been beaten down with the idea that we're just lucky to have a job. "Creative arts therapy—what is that? You're so lucky to get what you can get—whatever little crumb...five dollars an hour...ten dollars an hour...hey, you're doing well!"

That experience changed me. I went on and ran for president of the union chapter, and I continued to inform myself about labor history. It certainly dispelled a lot of the myths that I had heard over the years. I became the treasurer of the Local, which is a state-wide Local, representing social service workers throughout the state of California.

I also had a wonderful experience when I attended a women's conference. For one week I was surrounded by other union women from all over the western United States—rural women, urban women, professional, highly degreed women, and also sheet metal workers—all different colors, all different shapes. I'd never seen a less racist situation in my life. And we were all representing workers.

The strike that occurred at my agency was remarkable for me. After we resolved the strike, I went back to work at the clinic, and it was tough. I had to go back and deal with harassment and the things that make people afraid of being in a union. One of the most effective methods that employers have when they wage a campaign against a union organ-

izing drive is to say that it's going to be different—it's going to be nonadversarial. It is adversarial. It's not a question of morality. It's a question of each person looking out for his or her own interests, and if you're not looking out for yours and you're thinking that your boss is doing it for you, you're really in a dangerous, victimized situation. If you're leading your clients to believe that the world is basically okay and it will always take care of you, because you believe that, you're leading them into some dangerous situations.

A strike is, of course, the most adversarial of situations. We went out on strike and stayed out for 12 weeks. Even though the economic issues were settled in a week, management wanted to keep every scab they'd hired. If we had accepted that contract and gone back to work at that time, that would have been selling out so we stayed out for 12 weeks in solidarity. We were able to triumph. I'm very proud of that. It's a special moment in my life, though it was painful being without a paycheck for 12 weeks.

I am an artist and a labor activist, and I think there's a connection. An important social realist art tradition most of us are familiar with is the WPA work that came out in the '30s and how strong that was. It was the artists' responsibility then and now to speak out. As an art therapist/activist, I believe I have a responsibility to take what my clients are telling me and discern what is theirs and what is the chaos and injustice of the world they live in. If I say the responsibility is mainly the client's, then I am doing something that is not unlike what a bad boss does to her or his employee. I am causing the client to be weakened. A therapist may even wrongly think she or he is empowering the client by giving him or her a sense of an unrealistic idea of what the world is—the sense that it's all their doing. It is not. Children in Central America saw bombs dropping. They didn't imagine that. The devastation that occurred in their lives wasn't their choice. It was die or leave—it was that simple. And so they did leave. Now they are in pain, and there's a realistic reason for that. They should be in pain and they should be angry as hell. And we should be angry as hell, too.

I see my roles as an art therapist and activist intertwined. I can't just think of that person in front of me as my client for one hour. I must consider what that person goes home to, what that person's life is about. If I am not doing something to rectify the injustice that's creating the problem in that person, then I'm just hand-holding and frankly I don't want to be a part of it. If you do not act, you become accepting of all that happens to you.

## The Challenge: Toward Community

The art therapist has had a proud tradition as a pioneering individualist. But we believe the time is now to move away from individualism toward community, to break through and look at the world we and our clients live in, and to work to change it. A colleague, a Korean who grew up in this country, went back to Korea recently. The Koreans he met said to him, "Do not come to help us. Come in solidarity. We do not need your help. We need community with you." We must look to each other, to other creative arts therapists, to other people to form a



community—a global community in which human growth is prized. Together we must find the courage to take the actions to ensure this vision.

Joanna Rogers Macy, a peace activist, has written:

When we face the darkness of our time openly and together, we tap deep reserves of strength within us. Many of us fear that confrontation with despair will bring loneliness and isolation. But—on the contrary—in the letting go of old defenses and our denial, truer community is found. In the synergy of sharing comes power. (1983, p. 75)

With our eyes wide open, as art therapists/activists in the human community we must cherish the transcendent dream of a just and creative society and using our imaginative hopes, nurture it into being by our actions. As art therapists we have unique talents to offer in this regard.

In Maya Angelou's words from her inaugural poem (1993) for President Bill Clinton:

History, despite its wrenching pain,  
Cannot be unlived, and if faced  
With courage, need not be lived again...

The horizon leans forward  
Offering you space to place new steps of change.

Here, on the pulse of this fine day  
You may have the courage  
To look up and out...

Finally the challenge:


Lift up your eyes upon  
This day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream...

Lift up your hearts  
Each new hour holds new chances...

## References

- Angelou, M. (January 17, 1993). "Inaugural Poem" printed in *USA TODAY*, 7.
- Macy, J. R. (1983). *Despair and personal power in the nuclear age*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- O'Connor, T. (1989). Therapy for a dying planet. *Family Therapy Networker*, 13(5), 69-72.

**MARYLHURST UNIVERSITY**




- ▲ **Master of Arts in Art Therapy Counseling** approved by The American Art Therapy Association.
- ▲ **Intensive clinical program** where the art in Art Therapy is highly valued.
- ▲ **Post Graduate Certificate in Art Therapy**


E-mail [studentinfo@marylhurst.edu](mailto:studentinfo@marylhurst.edu) or call 800.634.9982 extension 6244 to learn more.

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities accredited  
17600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY (HWY. 43)  
MARYLHURST, OREGON - JUST 10 MINUTES SOUTH OF PORTLAND  
Serving students since 1893. [www.marylhurst.edu](http://www.marylhurst.edu)

**Florida State University**



- **Master of Science in Art Therapy**
  - 2-year, 2-summer program
  - 3 internships at a variety of settings
- Approved by AATA
- Doctorate with an Emphasis in Art Therapy
- LMHC License Eligible



Contact Marcia L. Rosal, PhD, ATR-BC at [mrosal@fsu.edu](mailto:mrosal@fsu.edu) or 850-644-2926, or go to [www.fsu.edu/~are](http://www.fsu.edu/~are) for more information.