

# Articles

## Aesthetic Empathy in Teaching Art to Children: The Work of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Terezin

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### Abstract

*This article examines the teaching approach of art educator Friedl Dicker-Brandeis as a historical antecedent to the art therapy profession. Dicker-Brandeis's philosophy and her specific methods of teaching art to children in the Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia between 1942 and 1944 are described. The influence of the Bauhaus philosophy and teachers such as Itten, Klee, and Kandinsky can be traced through Dicker-Brandeis's pedagogy, with an aesthetic grounded in empathy. Aesthetic empathy was the doctrine that informed Dicker-Brandeis's art education and later, in the Terezin concentration camp, her art teaching. This legacy is part of the history of art therapy and may contribute to shaping future theory and practice.*

### Introduction

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944) was an art educator who taught art to children in the Terezin concentration camp north of Prague in what was then Czechoslovakia between 1942 and 1944. She attained her art education at the Bauhaus during its foundational years (1919–1923). There she studied under Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer, Vassily Kandinsky, and other European fine artists of the 20th century. Dicker-Brandeis carried on the early Bauhaus philosophy of an aesthetic that was based in empathy (Franciscono, 1971) in her later work with children. Although she was formally an art teacher, her approach resulted in a practice that was similar to art therapy. In 2006, I carried out historical research in Europe on the life and teaching of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. In this paper I argue that her legacy makes a distinct contribution to art therapy of aesthetic empathy as a basis for a post-modern philosophy and practice.

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### The Foundations of an Approach to Teaching Art

In a 1940 letter to a friend Dicker-Brandeis, an Austrian Jew, wrote,

I remember thinking in school how I would grow up and would protect my students from unpleasant impressions, from uncertainty, from scrappy learning. Today only one thing seems important—to rouse the desire towards creative work, to make it a habit, and to teach how to overcome difficulties that are insignificant in comparison with the goal to which you are striving. (Dicker-Brandeis, as cited in Makarova, 2001, p. 151)

Her words point out two facts: that Dicker-Brandeis had imagined herself a teacher while she was herself still a student and that by 1940 her teaching was entirely different from how she had imagined it would be 20 years earlier. By then she had learned that she was unable to protect her students from the distress and uncertainty of their daily lives. Whatever her intentions in her early days of teaching, by 1938, when she was teaching art to Jewish children in Hronov in Eastern Bohemia, Dicker-Brandeis had made it her aim to teach fundamentals from a perspective designed to inspire creative work that would help children overcome their inevitable difficulties. Late in 1942, along with many Jews in Moravia and Bohemia, Dicker-Brandeis and her husband were transported to the Nazi's model concentration camp of Terezin north of Prague. In the camp she continued teaching art with the overarching goal of supporting the children in psychologically surviving the war. Toward this end Dicker-Brandeis used art classes to help them build the courage, truthfulness, and imagination they needed to face their experiences in the camp. By encouraging them to trust their own imagery and to develop their own artistic forms, she helped them build inner resources to honor their own sense of reality, which created a psychological space of empowerment and meaning in the midst of oppression and horror.

Dicker-Brandeis understood that helping children master art fundamentals would contribute to their confidence and make it easier for them to handle the daily dif-



**Figure 1** Friedl Dicker, Portrait study, charcoal on paper, about 1920 (published with permission, courtesy of Sammlung Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien [Collection of the University of Applied Arts Vienna], Austria)

faculties of camp life, which would in turn support them in accessing beauty through the rendering of their personal experiences. Whether or not she intended her art classes to be therapeutic, Dicker-Brandeis used the classes to care for and provide witness to children as they worked to elaborate their own forms of visual expression. In Terezin she assigned the children exercises to help them understand the various parts of a visual art image and to connect with the content of their work. Essentially, she taught children to *see* in the context of forming relationships with the physical world and art materials.

It is evident that Dicker-Brandeis's studies at the Bauhaus enhanced her own ability to see deeply. Her teacher Paul Klee addressed the matter of things and their appearances as well as seeing beyond appearances. In his 1923 essay "The Play of Forces in the Bauhaus" Klee discussed how, in the early development of the Bauhaus, the careful study of the appearances of things had resulted in "excellent pictures of the surface of objects . . . while the art of contemplating and envisaging non-optical impressions and conceptions was neglected" (as cited in Wingler, 1969, p. 73). Emphasizing that artists are more complex than cameras, Klee urged students to "sense the total nature of things [by] entering the conception of the natural object, be this object plant, animal, or human being. . . . The object grows beyond its appearance through our knowledge of its inner nature" (p. 73). By working intuitively, he wrote, "the 'I' is brought into resonance with the object" (p. 73). The early Bauhaus's aesthetic doctrine taught artists that externalizing their inner experiences of things

was integral to rendering the outer physical appearances of such things.

Following Klee's ideas, Dicker-Brandeis introduced portrait study into her art classes, requiring the child artist to closely examine and draw the face of a peer just as Dicker-Brandeis had done in her Bauhaus studies (Figure 1). For plant study she brought blades of tall grasses, a branch, or a bouquet of flowers for the children to observe and then paint. Requiring visual contemplation to capture the essence of a subject, such exercises fostered an intimate relationship between the self and the other, including things of the natural world.

Dicker-Brandeis also taught form, color, texture, and materials. Children learned form by studying ordinary objects such as jars, glasses, and other found items arranged into a still life and rendering them in pencil, watercolor, or collage. Most commonly through watercolor, Dicker-Brandeis introduced color studies both as simple exercises and as full color compositions. Material and texture studies included paper weaving, embroidery on paper, and collages made from a variety of found papers—including Czech military forms. These foundational studies helped children develop their skills while nurturing their abilities to render their subjects intuitively and expressively.

As a Czech citizen in Terezin, Dicker-Brandeis was allowed to receive one package every 3 months. Thus did she prevail upon friends to send her art books and small reproductions of old master works to use in her teaching. She had practiced Old Master Analysis with Johannes Itten at the Bauhaus. Emphasizing the artist's experience as strongly as Klee, Itten (as cited in Wingler, 1969) wrote,

To experience a work of art...means to awaken the essential in it, to bring the living quality, which is inherent in its form to independent life. The work of art is reborn within me.... A living representation is always something experienced, and something experienced is always experienced with life. (p. 49)

In Terezin children used paint, papers, and pencil—whatever was available on a given day—to work separately with each aesthetic component before putting them together into compositions. This approach fostered the children's abilities to produce extraordinarily rich compositions. During free art sessions like the ones she herself had experienced at the Bauhaus, Dicker-Brandeis directed her students to "draw without thinking," meaning to draw without an assignment. Free art sessions offered children time and space to think deeply as they explored personal memories and longings.

Dicker-Brandeis's philosophy can be traced forward to art therapist Edith Kramer, who studied with Dicker-Brandeis as a young art student in both Vienna and Prague between 1931 and 1938 (prior to Dicker-Brandeis's years at Terezin). Kramer described her teacher's approach to teaching different aspects of art making this way:

She would divide up the complexity of a picture into elements—the element of composition, the element of light and dark, the element of texture—and look at each one separately and then put them together...rather than have a

muddle of everything. (personal communication, September, 23, 1999)

Helga Kinsky (nee Pollak), who as a child had studied art with Dicker-Brandeis in Terezin, affirmed that she and her fellow students were encouraged to draw “what we like to do, what we dream about,” going on to say that Dicker-Brandeis “transported us to a different world.... She painted flowers in windows, a view out of a window. She had a totally different approach.... She didn’t make us draw Terezin” (personal communication, February 6, 2006).

## The Terezin Lecture on the Value of Art for Children

In the summer of 1943, after teaching for seven or eight months in the camp, Dicker-Brandeis presented her teaching philosophy in a lecture delivered to other Terezin teachers. The occasion was a clandestine exhibition of children’s art held in the basement of one of the children’s homes. The lecture and the written essay upon which it was based (which miraculously survived the war) were entitled “On Children’s Art.” The lecture was obviously intended to stimulate educators’ thinking by addressing the nature of children’s aesthetics and art experiences and setting forth what could be expected from creative art lessons. Dicker-Brandeis offered guidance for adult interactions with children making art, discussed the role of the teacher in creative art classes, and talked about group work and rhythmic exercises. She illustrated the lecture with children’s works, and although she drew from her education in art and her years of teaching, Dicker-Brandeis focused her remarks on the immediate situation, noting a certain richness despite the lack of materials and tools. She admitted that having so little to work with was regrettable and spoke of how she had adjusted her teaching methods to overcome limitations. Most difficult to overcome, she said, was the children’s lack of means with which to express themselves, which she addressed by teaching them how to see and render with a variety of techniques and materials common to visual art.

Dicker-Brandeis opened the lecture with a discussion of the value of creative art lessons, emphasizing that her own purpose in teaching was not to turn all children into artists but rather to “unlock and preserve for all the creative spirit as a source of energy to stimulate fantasy and imagination and strengthen children’s ability to judge, appreciate, observe, [and] endure” by helping children choose and elaborate their own forms (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 2). She suggested that this was best accomplished by the teacher’s refraining from influencing children with her own taste and artistic leanings, by allowing them freedom of expression, by trusting their creative spirits, and by working with them in groups rather than individually. She wrote, “If we want to do what is best for children, we give them materials and invite them to begin to work” (p. 3). She recommended that technical instruction be offered to students only as they evidence readiness for it and rarely before the age of 10 years.

Dicker-Brandeis explicated the reasons behind her implicit trust of children’s experiences and aesthetic sensi-

bilities. She wrote that a teacher should not direct the child toward particular preferences; a child who is trusting and in need of love will eagerly accept direction from an adult because it will assure a certain success. This would “divert the child from herself and her needs and thus from the expression that mirrors the experience and ultimately from the experience itself” (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 2).

With these words Dicker-Brandeis iterated that making art is a way to claim experience. She knew this from her own art practice. Her words, her teaching, and her artwork all point to faith in image making as a way to access personal courage, truth, imagination, and beauty. She knew that even if the lives of Terezin’s children ended in the gas chamber—perhaps especially if that was their destination and for the majority of them it was—art could strengthen her students through accessing their own images, perceptions, experiences, and intuitions. Indeed, these were some of the only things the Nazis could not take from them. The children learned from Dicker-Brandeis to hold fast to who they knew themselves to be by repeatedly engaging artistically with the realities they had to endure, one way or another. In offering the children opportunities to connect again and again with their experiences of contemplating objects and ideas, I believe Dicker-Brandeis made use of the Bauhaus emphasis on an abiding bond between aesthetics and empathy—a bond that ought to be naturally integral to art therapy thought and practice.

## Aesthetic Empathy in Practice

By 1942, when Dicker-Brandeis was teaching in the camp, empathy had given way to transcendence as the predominant European aesthetic concept. However, she found it necessary in her work with the children to return to the aesthetic philosophy she’d studied almost a quarter of a century earlier. Prizing familiarity and intimacy over transcendence in her painting practice since 1934, she now helped children in Terezin to portray their own direct experiences of a branch, the face of a friend, a wish, or a memory. She taught them that the ordinary—be it an everyday event, a yearning, or a common object—was worth reflecting upon and recording in a drawing, a painting, or a collage.

Dicker-Brandeis’s return to empathy as her preferred aesthetic doctrine did not stop with *Einfühlung*, which means feeling into an object or completed image. It also had much to do with seeing in the way Klee advised: “The object grows beyond its appearance through our knowledge of its inner nature” (as cited in Wingler, 1969, p. 73). Dicker-Brandeis’s approach to teaching held that using art to know a thing first-hand by seeing it before visually recording it was a way to relate closely with both the object and the observing self. In her classes emotional and sensory experiences became the ground of possibility for image making. Although the brutal concentration camp system had no place for aesthetics or empathy, Dicker-Brandeis made a place for both at the art table. She based her teaching methods as well as her own approach to painting in a philosophy that I have come to call aesthetic empathy.<sup>1</sup> Within this philosophy the artwork served as an interme-

diary between the children and their teacher, giving Dicker-Brandeis a way to care for the young artists psychologically and aesthetically. She understood that children's artworks provided "important insights into the child's soul" (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 3).

Believing that group cohesion decreased despair by encouraging group members' hope for the future, Dicker-Brandeis used the group structure of classes promoted throughout Terezin to enhance cooperative and empathetic learning in art for all of the children. She believed that through intensive communal effort the group could achieve the best results. Under these circumstances the children were "inclined to cope with the difficulties of the sparse materials, to get by with little, to help each other, and to fit themselves into the community" (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 7).

Dicker-Brandeis used rhythmic exercises as a pedagogical tool in all of her classes, drawing on the influence of her teachers Franz Cizek and Johannes Itten. She described how the rhythmic exercises, which activated the whole person of the artist, proved convenient for "changing a horde into a working group" ready to dedicate itself to a cause instead of disturbing each other. She observed that these exercises shifted habits of seeing and thinking, "placing the child before a task which he can tackle with joy and fantasy and thereby with the greatest precision" (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 7).

Even when giving instructions she used her voice rhythmically and with shifting intonation, thus encouraging children to relax their bodies and minds as they put charcoal to paper. When Edith Kramer talked to me about this aspect of her art study with Dicker-Brandeis, she closed her eyes and moved her hand in the air as she recalled what it was like:

Oh yes, she did a lot of rhythmic exercises. You had to be very attentive to follow her. They were movement. One, two, three, four, daadadaaadadaa—you had to follow. You had to listen and draw at the same time.... She did some about texture...like how a thing is knitted or crocheted or woven.... I mean the different rhythms that would make for a material that would be this or that or the other and she would make dictations of movement of different kinds of things...like a blade of grass that goes [and she indicated with her hand the graceful arcing of a long blade of grass]... you know it would grow like that and you had to listen very well to do that. (personal communication, March 24, 2005)

Inspiring the hand and the whole person, the exercises engaged the children in listening closely and moving their arms and bodies in time with the rhythm. They required an attention to self, other, and space and evolved naturally into what Dicker-Brandeis subsequently taught as movement studies.

A champion of children's creative spirits, Dicker-Brandeis addressed the role of adult mentors, insisting that they did not need to direct the sparks of children's inspiration. "We must first silence our wishes and demands in regard to form as well as content and we must expectantly accept what they can offer" (Dicker-Brandeis, 2005, p. 10). She noted that the concerns of grown-ups, such as cleanliness, exactness, and the ability to reproduce and illustrate, usually concern other realms and have no place in creative art classes. "When we prescribe the path to children who, incidentally, develop extremely unevenly in their abilities, we at the same time cut children off from their creative potential and prevent ourselves from understanding them" (p. 10). Supporting children's expressions that emerge with no attempt to please the teacher, she continued, "The best allies against...the aesthetic imagination coming out of a mold, against the stagnant world of the adult, are the true artists, and the children themselves, when they are freed from their habits, are the true artists" (p. 4).

In her lecture at Terezin Dicker-Brandeis set forth her convictions about teaching art to children in general as well as specifically within the context of the concentration camp. Her words illuminated a philosophy of aesthetic empathy that provided the scaffolding for her fundamental beliefs about children and art. Caring for children's imaginations, as experienced in contemplating subjects and expressed in individual imagery, was central to her philosophy. She evidenced a fierce faith in her students and their creative spirits, trusting unquestioningly that in working with art materials to give form to personal experience, children would gain courage, speak truth, and unfold their imaginations. Dicker-Brandeis grounded art fundamentals in emotional and sensory experiences and in turn grounded experience in a particular aesthetic. She honored the image and the experience of self and other in art making. She held psychic and physical space for children as they explored themselves, their worlds, and their yearnings through visual art. For her, experiencing was the essence of beauty. These were the hallmarks of Dicker-Brandeis's teaching approach.

<sup>1</sup> I have used the term "aesthetic empathy" to place Dicker-Brandeis's work in a particular philosophical context and to describe her art practices. My thinking grew out of Franciscano's (1971) assertion that the aesthetic doctrine of the early Bauhaus was based in empathy. Since using the term I have discovered that German philosopher Theodor Lipps, in a 1903 essay entitled "Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense-Feelings," developed an idea of "esthetic imitation." Lipps used the example of viewing movement to help the reader understand esthetic imitation. In "voluntary imitation," the viewer sees the movement, knows how the performer felt, and has a mental image of the activity as well as his own movement and experience. In esthetic imitation the viewer's feeling takes the place of a mental image of a movement. Thus in Lipps's esthetic imitation there was no separation between the movement viewed and the viewer's movement or feeling of the movement. The viewer's corresponding activity is stimulated by the activity of the one viewed. He wrote, "This esthetic imitation and this imitation is at the same time esthetic empathy" (p. 379). "Empathy means...feeling something, namely oneself, into the esthetic object" (p. 381). Lipps's thinking about esthetic imitation as esthetic empathy differs significantly from my development of Dicker-Brandeis's art and teaching as a practice of the philosophy of aesthetic empathy.

## Remembering the Teacher

In their mature years the children who survived Terezin remember Dicker-Brandeis in various ways. Helga Kinsky attributed her “love of art and things of beauty” to the art classes, and Marta Frohlich remembered that Dicker-Brandeis “always spoke with me, explaining what was good, what was beautiful” (as cited in Wonschick and Dutlinger, 2001, p. 77). Raja Zadnikova (nee Englanderova) said that “[Mrs. Brandeis] was certain that everybody could draw, and, therefore, her primary goal was to find the means that would bring the children into a state of mind where they would draw” (as cited in Makarova, 2001, p. 237).

In conversations with Elena Makarova (2001) some of Dicker-Brandeis’s older students, in their late teens at the time of their study under her, recalled her personal essence as one of freedom. Eva Beldova commented, “It was not her technique that made the difference; it was the feeling of freedom that she conveyed to the children—her own inner freedom, not the technical skills” (p. 214). Eva Dorian reflected, “I believe that what she wanted from us was not directly linked to drawing, but rather to the expression of different feelings, to the liberation from our fears...these were not normal lessons, but lessons in emancipated meditation” (p. 216). Others remembered the setting for the classes or looking out the window for subjects to draw.

For some, memories are clouded by war trauma and accompanying illnesses. Miriam Jung (nee Mariana Rosenzweig) told me that she remembers nothing of her art classes (personal communication, November 3, 2006). However, because Dicker-Brandeis had children sign their work as a way of maintaining personal identity in a Nazi culture that insisted on identifying its victims by numbers, Miriam knows that she studied art with her. Miriam showed me reproductions of the childhood images she created in Terezin, pointing out the close attention to detail in the collage she made in response to an old master painting.

Talking with me at her home in Vienna in the winter of 2006, Helga Kinsky recalled gathering with other children for the art lessons:

We had only one table. We could not have all worked together. Maybe there were eight in a group.... Sometimes she brought what we should paint: flowers, flowers in a vase, wooden shoes, pictures by famous painters in a book or postcard.... We could choose. (personal communication, February 6, 2006)

Reproductions of paintings that rested between Helga and me during my visit with her seemed to feed Helga’s recollections. Looking at her collage of a horse and plow, she mused that as a child she was not familiar with hills or mountains, having never lived near them, and suggested that the hills in the collage were inspired by the mountains visible from the third-floor windows of the concentration camp house where she lived. “It was important for me to know that [Dicker-Brandeis] existed, that she was alive.... In her presence, everything turned out, almost by itself”

(Kinsky, as cited in Makarova, 2001, p. 214). For Helga Kinsky, Dicker-Brandeis’s teaching offered distraction from her daily reality, connection with the world outside the camp, and relationship with art making and her teacher as “force[s] of freedom” (p. 214).

## Aesthetic Empathy in Her Own Art Practice

Alongside her teaching in Terezin Dicker-Brandeis painted prolifically, creating around 80 paintings in 1943 and the first half of 1944. Her work reflects the scarcity of materials: She used tempera to paint portraits and bouquets of flowers on cardboard and filled both sides of plain drawing paper when working with pastels. She drew the human figure and designed posters for ballets and plays performed in the camp. True to her habit and natural inclination, she rendered her world as seen from the third-story window of House L410, the girls’ building where she had created living quarters for herself and her husband under the stairwell. From here she used watercolors or pastels to depict views of the courtyard through the seasons, painting the trees with their spring or summer foliage, in their fall colors, and with bare branches in winter (Figure 2). With pastels she depicted a view of a window from down the hall, making visible what could be seen just beyond the pane. Then, painting from that window, she looked past the walls and ramparts of the concentration camp to the mountains of central Czechoslovakia and portrayed them in the distance beyond the thick foliage of the trees in the foreground; she rendered them outside of her physical reach but fully accessible to her painter’s hand and eyes. From her perch at the third-story window her views were from above. Sometimes she looked from the inside to paint the immediate surroundings below; at other times she used her brush to span great distances. Always she worked to understand and participate in the world “out there” through her experiences of seeing and painting it.

Dicker-Brandeis painted for the last time in the summer of 1944. Her final work is a watercolor painting showing a child’s eyes, deep blue in a pale face that fades away into the paper-white background. As she had done for over a decade, she painted what she saw in her immediate surroundings—in this instance the eyes of a child—faithfully recording the world around her with a singular expressiveness. Her ability to see deeply is evident in her paintings, and she worked to teach her students to see a thing’s essence along with its actual appearance. Always she kept her eye on the beauty inherent in form and sought to instill hope in her students as they found, saw, and created beauty in response to the world at hand.

While Europe crumbled during the last decade of her life, Dicker-Brandeis painted natural and human domains, as if making snapshots by which to remember a particular flower, place, or face. Her attention to everyday things in her paintings reflected her intimate relationship with them. The resulting paintings illuminate her connection to the physical realm as it sustained her faith in the world’s beauty. Tending to what she perceived as beautiful, she put the



**Figure 2** Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, *View in Terezin (Theresienstadt) with the church*, pastel on paper, 1943-44 (published with permission, courtesy of Simon Wiesenthal Center Library and Archives, Los Angeles, CA)

philosophy of aesthetic empathy into practice in her own work. In her art practice, she maintained relationships with her materials, her subjects, and her completed images. She painted to show her singular experience of seeing from the heart and with the eyes. Then she taught her students to open to their own perceptions in the same way and to use their skills to externalize their deepest knowing.

### Passing on the Work

One of Dicker-Brandeis's Terezin students who survived the war, Ela Weissburger (nee Stein), lives outside of New York, NY. She spoke to me about the link between beauty and hope:

I would say that most of the teachers, not only Friedl, were giving us hope.... That time when you're concentrating on something beautiful, that's how we forgot where we were because we saw everything so beautiful that she was telling us. She would say, "Look at that picture," and she would have a little postcard of an artwork that was done hundreds of years back and she said, "You see it still has the life in it and people [are] adoring it still today." (personal communication, July 24, 2001)

In offering the long-adored pictures from past masters for study and subsequent material analysis by the children, it was as if Dicker-Brandeis planted a seed in the hearts and minds of these children, most whom would not live beyond their 15th birthdays. They could adore, as others had, the beauty of a work made hundreds of years earlier; likewise, perhaps others would later adore the images they were creating each day in their art classes.

Late in September 1944 Dicker-Brandeis's husband, a carpenter and useful to the Nazis, was transported from Terezin to Auschwitz. She did not know where he had gone but, hoping to find him, asked to be taken on the next transport. In preparation, she packed and hid more than 5,000 children's works in two suitcases. Before her October 6, 1944, transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dicker-Brandeis did everything she could to assure that the world would one day see the images the children left behind. All these years later, their creations invite viewers and researchers into empathetic collaboration with the teacher and her students. Just as Dicker-Brandeis empathized with the young makers and their images and taught them to see and empathize with the subjects they painted, citizens of today can extend their empathy through studying the children's works.

Terezin was the context in which Dicker-Brandeis's aesthetic practice grounded in empathy came to fullest flower. She used art teaching to tend children's relationships with themselves, with each other, and with their internal and external worlds. She taught them to participate sympathetically with the world through making images. That Dicker-Brandeis continued both to paint and to offer her art classes for children in the midst of the Nazi's ongoing transports to Auschwitz-Birkenau speaks to her deep faith in the workings of art as a means of human sustenance.

Edith Kramer spoke to me about her teacher's Terezin art teaching and painting, saying,

I think Friedl kind of fulfilled herself in [Terezin]. It was a very fulfilling time.... There was enough trouble there that she didn't have to create [it]. She could be entirely positive and benign and loving and all the other things that were in

her.... You can see from the paintings: her work is excellent, the paintings she did there. (personal communication, March 24, 2005)

Kramer further told Makarova (2001), "All the teaching methods she used came through her art—they were alive. Nobody on earth could have given me what she did—an understanding of a thing's essence and the rejection of lies and artificiality" (p. 20).

## Conclusion

Had Dicker-Brandeis painted and taught only for emotional release, for a sense of control, and as a distraction from the horrors she witnessed, that would have been enough. Her teaching offered these things and more to her students. Art's deep, lasting potency in her own life had given Dicker-Brandeis an understanding that few possess. Thus it was that she did not "push the children into a certain form of expression" (Dicker-Brandeis, 1943, p. 2) but instead invited them to discover their own forms of expression and waited for what would emerge. For some children distraction from the daily traumas of camp life may have been enough; others may have used the art lessons to create beautiful pictures, to remember a past family joy, or to imagine a future reunion with a parent. Although Dicker-Brandeis took charge of scrounging materials, she understood that her students would take just what they needed from each art class. She offered herself, all the materials she could find, and the invitation. Then, providing guidance as she saw fit, she accepted what the children created as valid. In this way she supported their spiritual and artistic strengths and helped them contend with the conditions under which they were living. Providing access to beauty through art classes was her way of helping children to psychologically survive the war and its circumstances.

Close study of her work and her words reveals that the essence of Dicker-Brandeis's art teaching lay in the realm of attachments as it relates to the theory and practice of aesthetic empathy. Teaching as she did—from rhythmic exercises to analysis of old masters to formal studies and free art sessions—she helped children make and maintain attachment to the familiar, to the ordinary things surrounding them and to their own ideas, thoughts, feelings, and friends. The act of turning their paper and paints into images and making parts into wholes gave children a way to stay physically and emotionally in touch with themselves and their realities. Dicker-Brandeis's presence and her passion for seeing and making from the heart engendered in her students a faith in art's humanity. For as long as she lived in Terezin she offered her artistic fervor to the children who attended her art classes, bearing witness to their truths as portrayed in the images they created. In her practice of aesthetic empathy, attention to the process and product of each maker was tantamount. Implicit in this, attention was the act of empathetically holding the space for the emerging artists. In Terezin Dicker-Brandeis's care and attention allowed the children to see themselves reflected both in their images and in the eyes of their

teacher, thus furthering attachment to their worlds and the vital reality of their lived experiences.

Art and empathy working together. Empathy through art. Art making engendering empathy. This was the stuff of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis's approach to teaching art to children during World War II. Over several years of research—tracking Dicker-Brandeis's footsteps from Vienna to Weimar, Berlin, Prague, Hronov, Terezin, and finally to Auschwitz, where she was murdered along with 30 of her students on October 9, 1944, and conducting interviews with surviving students as well as studying documents and works of art—I have come to understand the connective tissue linking her teaching approach with the work of art therapists. Dicker-Brandeis's practice of teaching art in adverse circumstances, replete with its theoretical underpinnings in the early Bauhaus philosophy, was much like art therapy. Research into her art and teaching practices enhances the meaning of an aesthetic past for art therapy.

As the American Art Therapy Association celebrates its 40th anniversary, perhaps the time is ripe to look beyond the organization's history to claim for the profession itself the older, deeper roots of an artistic and aesthetic history that seem necessary to imagining and creating art therapy's future. Attention to the teachings of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, carried forward to contemporary art therapists by Edith Kramer and tracked backward 90 years to the Bauhaus, can contribute to building aesthetic empathy into a postmodern philosophy and practice for art therapy. Turning around to face history and to claim art therapy's long-neglected aesthetic underpinnings may enrich and contribute to shaping the profession's future.

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