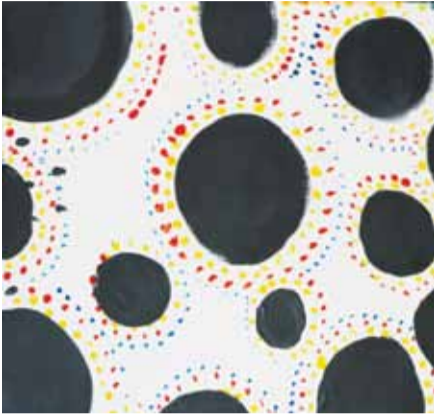


Finding Strength Through Art

By Nithia Devan



What is art therapy? To be honest, before I started researching this article, I knew next to nothing about it. I probably would have said that art therapy involves using paint or other materials or that only those who are artistic can benefit from art therapy or that it is only for children or that art therapy is not “real” therapy. I had a lot to learn.

Sivan Weinstein, a practicing art therapist, said “Art therapy is a well-established branch of psychotherapy that makes use of different forms of art as a mean of therapist-client communication. In art therapy, art compliments verbal communication to provide another layer of exploration and interpretation of the unconscious and by making use of the soothing power of art itself.”

Sivan works with adults and children with a variety of disorders in different settings, such as schools, hospitals and private clinics. Her clients can be anywhere from four years old to

65 and they seek art therapy for a wide range of reasons such as unbalanced relationships, relocation, stress at work, emotional difficulties, depression and more. “It’s essential to first build trust and a relationship with all the clients and to assure them that they are in a safe setting,” says Weinstein. Her clinic is cozy, surrounded by greenery containing a wide range of materials: paints, crayons, clay, games, stamps and more. Sivan calls it a safe place that provides a pleasant atmosphere and encourages self expression. “Part of the process is about allowing my clients to explore various media and materials when they are emotionally ready.”

LASALLE College of the Arts offers an MA in Art Therapy, a two-year, full-time professional training program grounded in psychodynamic psychotherapy theory and principles. The course is taught by accredited and registered art therapists with training from Canada, the US and Singapore. LASALLE is the first and only institution that offers this level of training in Southeast Asia.

Ronald Lay, the program leader says, “This program has been reviewed by the Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association (ANZATA) and has been granted ‘approval’ status. This is significant as it means that our graduates, once they are credentialed through ANZATA, can work as registered art therapists in Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.”

Since first launching in 2006, there have been 101 graduates. In addition to course work, students complete at least two clinical placements and they must acquire a minimum of 814 clinical hours during their training. Lay





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says, “An ideal candidate is someone who has experience working both with the arts and people in need. At a minimum, applicants must have a BA, have social service experience (whether paid or as a volunteer) and have an art portfolio demonstrating proficiency in a range of art media.”

The LASALLE programme is unique in that the students and staff are engaged in several national and international collaborative community projects such as hosting the World Mental Health Day Carnival or presenting a joint exhibition with the Dover Park Hospice. In 2012, LASALLE became the Educational Partner with The Red Pencil, an art therapy humanitarian foundation developed in Singapore by one of the program’s alumni, Laurence Vandendorre.



Vandendorre says, “Art therapy differs from traditional art-making or performance in that the emphasis is on the process of creating and meaning-making, rather than on the end product.” She also dismissed the myth that artistic types are best suited to art therapy. “Art therapy does not rely on artistic knowledge or ability. The therapy works by accessing imagination and creativity, qualities which all human beings possess, in order to generate new models of living and contribute to the development of a more integrated sense of self.”

Rosita Lui, another LASALLE alumni member, is the current President of the Art Therapists’ Association Singapore (ATAS). She is an independent Art Therapist and has piloted and developed the art therapy programs at the Alzheimer’s Disease Association, National



Neuroscience Institute and Alexander Hospital. She works closely with all stages of dementia including patients with early onset. ATAS was set up in 2008 and currently has 43 members. She says there is a misconception that art therapy is without a scientific basis. “Evidence-based and practice-based research is well-established in all the art therapy, including visual art therapy, dance and movement therapy, drama therapy and music therapy.” So, the “art” in art therapy is a loose definition that covers not just visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, for example) but also music and movement. It’s a very wide, if lesser-known, area of therapy, but one that has helped people to resolve conflicts, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and achieve insight. It’s an interesting area that is worth exploring further.



Art Therapists’ Association Singapore (ATAS)
www.atas.org.sg
LASALLE College of the Arts
www.lasalle.edu.sg/programmes/master-of-arts/art-therapy
Red Pencil
www.redpencil.org
Sivan Golan Weinstein
www.art-therapy.sg

Photos Courtesy of The Red Pencil

Nithia Devan is a freelance marketing communications professional, copywriter and editor. She is a keen supporter of the arts in Singapore, especially theater. Her other passions are cookery, cinema, travel, art and crafts. Nithia also writes for City Nomads, a guide to what’s happening in Singapore, www.citynomads.com.

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