



Original Article

# The Relationship of Art Therapy to Spirituality

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## Abstract

Art therapy is based on the idea that creative artistic processes facilitate repair and healing and is a form of psychotherapy where image creation and object usage are the primary forms of expression and communication. Although art therapy's emergence as a profession is relatively recent, the roots of using art for healing are as old as the symbolic rituals ancient cultures used in religious ceremonies. Art therapy also spread universally, from mummy's ornaments in Egypt to Tibetan monks' sand mandalas. The ancient intertwined history of the relationship between art and spirituality as well as between spirituality and healing has aroused curiosity about the nature of the relationship between art therapy and spirituality. Based on this curiosity, the article will address within its scope the definition of art therapy and its early roots, followed by discussion on the relationship between art therapy and spirituality with regard to six propositions. By considering the close old friendship art has with therapy and spirituality in the context of art therapy, the study can contribute to the currently relevant literature on both art therapy and spirituality, as well as to the theoretical framework of spiritually oriented practices in art therapy.

## Keywords:

Art therapy • Art • Spirituality • Healing • Therapy

## Sanat Terapisinin Maneviyatla İlişkisi

### Öz

Sanat terapisi, temel felsefesi yaratıcı sanatsal sürecin onarım ve iyileşmeyi kolaylaştırdığı fikrine dayanan; imgeler ve nesnelere yaratmanın birincil ifade ve iletişim biçimi olarak kullanıldığı bir psikoterapi biçimidir. Sanat terapisinin, sanat ve terapi disiplinlerinin birleşmesiyle tanımlanmış bir meslek olarak ortaya çıkışı nispeten yeni olmasına rağmen, iyileşmek için sanatı kullanmanın kökleri kadim kültürlerin dini törenlerde kullandığı sembolik ritüeller kadar eskidir. Ayrıca Mısır'daki mumya süslemelerinden Tibet rahiplerinin kum mandalalarına kadar evrensel bir yayılım gösterir. Bir yanda sanat ve maneviyat, diğer yanda maneviyat ve şifa arasındaki ilişkinin eski ve iç içe geçmiş tarihi, sanat terapisi ile maneviyat arasındaki ilişkinin yapısı ve niteliğine dair merak uyandırmaktadır. Bu meraktan hareketle makale kapsamında sanat terapisinin tanımına, erken dönem köklerine değinilecek ardından altı önerme üzerinden sanat terapisinin maneviyatla ilişkisi tartışılacaktır. Sanatın terapi ve maneviyatla olan eski ve yakın dostluğunu sanat terapisi bağlamında ele alarak, çalışmanın, hem günümüzde oldukça ilgi gören sanat terapisi ve maneviyat literatürlerine hem de sanat terapisinde manevi yönelimli uygulamaların teorik zeminine katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmüştür.

## Anahtar Kelimeler:

Sanat terapi • Sanat • Maneviyat • Şifa • Terapi

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The British Art Therapy Association (BAAT, 2019) defines art therapy as “a form of psychotherapy that uses the creation of images and objects as a primary form of expression and communication.” Unlike most adults, children cannot easily express themselves verbally. Adults, on the other hand, can use words to intellectualize and distract from their emotions. Art therapy enables the client to overcome these cumbersome barriers to self-expression using simple art materials (Canadian Art Therapy Association [CATA], 2019). Edwards (2004, p. 8) also mentioned the limitations of words as follows:

Words are not only the main tools through which we exchange information about the world we live in, but for most people they are the main tools they have for expressing and communicating their experience of that world. However, human experience cannot be completely reduced to words. Expressing what it feels like to love or hate, be traumatized or depressed can involve much more than struggling to find the ‘right’ words. Some experiences and emotional states are beyond words.

Art therapy is based on the idea that the creative artistic process facilitates repair and healing and that thoughts and feelings are a form of nonverbal communication (Malchiodi, 2005). The act of creating allows one to have a say in how they shape and respond to the suffering and hope inside them. By creating art, one participates in self-creation (Moon, 2001, p. 37). The neuroscientist Damasio (2010) views art as a gift of evolutionary selection that helps humans better endure pain. Thus, the mechanisms of action and symbolic functions of the brain that are active during artistic creation, which are complex and have yet to be deciphered, are actively involved in maintaining one’s homeostasis along with many other physiological functions of the brain (as cited in Colette, 2019, p. 6). Visual and symbolic expression gives voice to experience and strengthens individual and social transformation (American Art Therapy Association [AATA], 2019). Like other forms of psychotherapy and counseling, art therapy is used in a wide variety of settings with children, adults, families, and groups to promote personal development (Edwards, 2004; Malchiodi, 2012). Clients who are referred to an art therapist do not need to have previous experience or skill in the arts. The art therapist is not concerned with making an aesthetic or diagnostic evaluation of the client’s images. Practitioners’ overall goal is to enable the client to change and grow on a personal level through the use of art materials in a safe and enabling environment (BAAT, 2019).

Ulman (2001, p. 17), founder of the art therapy newsletter and one of the pioneers of art therapy in America, viewed art therapy as a new field born of art and therapy as its parents. According to her, therapy involves “procedures designed to aid positive changes in personality or life that will outlast the session itself,” with art being “a way of exploring both the self and the world and establishing a relationship between the two.” When combining the individual aims of art and therapy in art therapy, whether art or therapy as the parents will dominate is a matter of debate. For example, theorists such as Adrian Hill and Edith Kramer who think art should be a priority adopted the

art as therapy approach, while theorists such as Margaret Naumberg who think that therapy should be a priority adopted the art psychotherapy approach (Edwards, 2004; Junge & Asawa, 1994; Malchiodi, 2007; Rubin, 2010; Ulman, 2001).

While the expression of art can be used as another form of language in therapy, the act of making art taps into the universal human potential of creativity, a capacity related to health and wellness. Art therapy essentially believes that all individuals have the capacity to express themselves creatively (Malchiodi, 2012; Rubin, 2010). The idea that all individuals have the capacity for creative expression is also a familiar idea from Moreno, the founder of psychodrama group therapy. Moreno felt that individuals are born creative and spontaneous but that this creativity and spontaneity decrease over time through the effect of the cultural conserves<sup>1</sup> one is exposed to while growing up in society and are replaced by anxiety and other pathologies. In connection with this, healing becomes possible when one reconnects with their spontaneity and regains their creativity. Creativity and spontaneity are both a result of recovery and facilitators that provide recovery (Baletner & Blatner, 1988; Moreno, 1987). Therefore, art therapy states the product to be less important than the relevant therapeutic process and brings the therapist's focus to the therapeutic needs of the person for self-expression, not specifically the aesthetic values of making art (Malchiodi, 2012). Malchiodi (2005) summarized the advantages of art therapy as follows:

- 1- It offers a different form of communication; While many therapy approaches rely on words to convey meaning, art therapy offers the client the opportunity to express the inner material it brings to the client through visual images. Making an image, whether drawing, painting or sculpture, is a visual thinking experience and can be an additional source of information for both client and therapist.
- 2- It is experiential and incorporates the body into its work; Whether in the form of a simple charcoal drawing or a more elaborate painting or sculpture, art-making is experiential because it uses the senses of touch, sight and, to some extent, sound and smell. It adds another dimension to verbal therapy as it is a method that includes the body, or it can be used as a stand-alone intervention according to the aims of the treatment.
- 3- Despite the abstract processes of psychotherapy, there is a concrete product; art expression offers therapy a tangible and lasting product. Therefore, the artistic product also functions as a transitional object in that it is a concrete recording of the therapy and a reminder of the client-therapist relationship between sessions. A drawing or picture can be viewed, cited and discussed immediately or in a subsequent session.

<sup>1</sup> Cultural conserve is a term used by J. L. Moreno to express how a creative and spontaneous action freezes in time and loses much of its original significance and vitality and in a sense becomes an idol (Bannister, 2005). Works of art, books, technological inventions, strict moral values, and psychological and physical formulas become idols that communities worship and that take people out of the moment and away from creativity and spontaneity (Altinay, 2009).

4- It functions as a facilitating intermediary between the therapist and the client for clients who have difficulty talking about difficult issues; For some people, looking at a drawing with a therapist may be easier than making eye contact with each other. Talking about an image and its meaning may be easier than talking directly to the therapist about sensitive or complex issues.

5- Catharsis; Art expression helps in releasing emotions.

In addition, Storr supports Malchiodi's emphasis on catharsis with the idea that creativity provides a means to come to terms with or find symbolic solutions to the internal tensions and separations that all people suffer in varying degrees (as cited in Edwards, 2004, p. 4)

So far, the study has addressed the definition and scope of art therapy. The next section will examine the modern and ancient roots of art therapy then discuss the relationship between art therapy and spirituality.

### **The Roots of Art Therapy**

Although the emergence of art therapy as a defined profession is relatively recent, the idea of using art for healing has ancient and universal roots (Malchiodi, 2006). Whether the prehistoric artists who painted animals or carved fertility figures on the walls of caves,<sup>2</sup> Egyptians who painted protective symbols on mummy boxes, Tibetan Buddhists who created sand mandalas, the creators of African ritual masks, the Byzantines who painted sacred icons, or Ethiopian artists who painted healing scrolls, all of them represent the historical precursors of modern art therapy (McNiff, 1992; Rubin, 2010).

The ancient roots of the use of art in healing practices went through many more modern stages before taking its present form. The early philosophical roots of art therapy are based on romanticism, expressionism, and surrealism (Edwards, 2004). These philosophical movements were reflected in artists' works as giving up the representation of the outer world for the mysterious goal of expressing the inner world and setting out to reflect the reality of the soul rather than reproduce the outer reality as had been done before. While these were happening in philosophical thoughts and art movements, the environment had become well-prepared for the discovery of the unconscious in the world of psychology and for the birth of art therapy with the theories of Freud and Jung (Rubin, 2010). This was followed by an interest in patient art. Hans Prinzhorn, who observed the curative effect of art on those made to linger in mental hospitals, which were a kind of prison where mentally ill people were cloistered with the belief at the end of the 19th century being that they were

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2 For example, the Chauvet cave in France and cave paintings from 36,000 years ago, or the Cueva de las Manos cave in Argentina and hand drawings from 13,500 years ago.

untreatable, was important for the history of art therapy in his extensive work where he transformed the art pieces he'd collected from many hospitals into the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (Edwards, 2004). ; Lomas, 2001; Prinzhorn, 1972). People in the turmoil of a psychotic break who are at risk of losing touch with reality often feel compelled to create something as a way of coping with their confusion (Rubin, 2010).

The modern history of art therapy is told through England and America, the two countries where it emerged almost simultaneously (Edwards, 2004; Hogan, 2001; Junge & Asawa, 1994; Wood, 1997). In England, the concept of art therapy was first used in 1942 by artist Adrian Hill (known as the grandfather of art therapy) when he described a new form of distraction therapy. During his treatment for tuberculosis, Hill observed the healing effect of art in its contribution to relieving the patient's morbid introspection (Hill, 1951). The journalist Lucas expressed this as follows:

The disease has served to bring him in touch with a deeper source of inspiration for many that can only be reached through neurosis, and he has entered a period in which he is doing better than ever before." (as cited in Hogan, 2001, p. 133)

Wood (1997) classified this as part of the early developmental period of art therapy spanning from 1930-1959. This was followed by the second phase covering the period of 1960-1979 when the anti-psychiatry movement and humanist approaches had become prominent and the British Art Therapists Association had been founded. In the following third stage from 1980-1999, professional practice became more established in the public sector, and the dominance of psychoanalytic and group systems theory was striking. This was followed by the fourth contemporary stage, which also covers the present. At the same time that the concept of art therapy was first mentioned in England, art therapy emerged in America with Margaret Naumburg, who has been called the grandmother of art therapy. Naumburg was a psychoanalyst who viewed art expression as a way of manifesting unconscious images and as a form of symbolic conversation with the client; she is considered one of the first practitioners to define art therapy as a separate form of psychotherapy (Junge & Asawa, 1994; Malchiodi, 2005).

Through Hill and Naumburg as the pioneers of art therapy in two different geographies, two main directions or parallel lines can be mentioned with regard to art therapy (Waller, 2003): art as therapy and art psychotherapy. Art psychotherapy was represented by Naumburg, who was also the founder of the Walden school, and attaches importance to the verbal analysis of the art product produced in the creation process. With the contribution of her psychoanalyst roots, her art therapy model is based on releasing the subconscious through the spontaneous expression of art, the transference relationship between the client and the therapist, and the interpretation of these two. Naumburg viewed art as a form of symbolic speech emanating from the unconscious like dreams, one that is spontaneously aroused and understood through free association, and always respected the artist's own

interpretations. Thus, art as the so-called royal path to unconscious symbolic contents, requires verbal expression and insight as much as art expression, both as a diagnostic and as a therapeutic tool (Edwards, 2004; Rubin, 2010; Ulman, 2001).

In the art as therapy approach, which was represented by Hill in England and Edith Kramer in America, the interpretation of the product is not essential; the important thing is for the client to experience the artistic creation process because, according to this approach, the real healing process is the client's creation (Hogan, 2001). According to Hill, the curativeness of art therapy lies in "the fact that it engages the mind as well as the fingers and releases the patient's blocked creative energy" (Hill, 1948, p. 101). Meanwhile, Kramer saw art as a way of integrating conflicting emotions and impulses in an aesthetically satisfying way that helps the ego synthesize through the creative process itself (Rubin, 2010).

Historically, art therapy has been used in psychiatric and daycare facilities as part of general services for people with mental illness. However, as healthcare has evolved, art therapy has been used with increasingly diverse patient populations, including those suffering from substance abuse, trauma and loss, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse, eating disorders, behavioral disorders, and most other forms (Malchiodi, 2005). Initially, art therapy had been strongly influenced by psychodynamic thinking. Later on, the Jungian philosophy went through behavioral, cognitive, and humanistic thinking and found ways to adapt each theory with a set of core beliefs about the usefulness of creative expression in relieving pain and promoting health (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; Rubin, 2016).

### **Art, Therapy, and Spirituality**

The relationships between art and spirituality and between spirituality and healing have both long and recent histories. The relationship among art, therapy, and spirituality started in the mid-1980s and strengthened in the 1990s; it has become a focus again both in the helping professions and in the world of visual arts, forcing practitioners to confront knowledge of both Western science and spiritual traditions (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). The idea that a painting or object may have psychological significance to its creator, let alone the aesthetic qualities it may have, is an idea that is taken for granted these days (Edwards, 2004). While Edwards (1989) had mentioned a number of factors that lead one to give meaning to such works and take the healing potential of art seriously, he also mentioned the use of art in religious and spiritual practices. Similarly, artist and art therapist Hill pointed to the spiritual dimension with regard to the regenerative potential of visual arts while giving lectures to the Army Education Corps and underlined that the soldier as well as the artist seek mental shelter and find hope in the creative arts (Hogan, 2001).

In the process of exploring and integrating spiritual dimensions using dreams and artistic imagery, Jung attributed vital importance to spirituality as a precursor to completing healing (Jung, 1961/2021). According to Maslow, spiritual life is an integral feature of human nature and only for self-actualizers; He separated self-actualizers from one another through the experience of transcendence. Those who realize themselves by experiencing transcendence can be distinguished from others in terms of the following characteristics: they have a more holistic view of the world, are more aware of the realm of existence, have a unifying consciousness, have insights that change their view of the world or of themselves, have had peak experiences such as ecstasy, have more respect for peak experiences, have egalitarian attitudes toward people, and are aware of self-identity (i.e., the ego has the ability to go beyond the self; Maslow, 1971/1993, pp. 270–271). Similarly, May (1982) viewed concepts such as meaning, transcendence, and attachment as part of the nature of spirituality, with spirituality allowing individuals to go beyond material experiences and discover meaning in life.

Kelly (1995) defined spirituality as the personal experience of a transcendent connectedness in the universe; according to the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2022), spirituality is an innate disposition unique to all human beings and includes the capacity of a person to be creative, grow, and develop a value system. This spiritual tendency leads the individual toward knowledge, love, understanding, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, well-being, and wholeness. Although spirituality can be experienced and expressed through religion (defined here as an organized system of belief, worship, accumulated traditions, and predetermined rituals), the spiritual issues that arise in counseling may not always be associated with a religious belief system (Burke et al., 2005). Elkins et al. (1988, p. 6) defined spirituality as “a way of being and experiencing that emerges through awareness of a transcendent dimension and is characterized by certain identifiable values regarding self, others, nature, life, and everything that one regards as Ultimate.” Spirituality and religion are not the same thing (Kelly, 1995): The concept of spiritual refers not only to traditionally religious experiences but to all states of awareness and to all human functions and activities that have higher-than-average common denominators (Assagioli, 1989, p. 30). Spirituality is difficult to define due to how it manifests in many different forms around the world (Elkins, 2001); however, the common point in its definitions is that it can be summarized as the longing for a reality beyond the physically limited and the search for deep and permanent meaning in life (ASERVIC, 2022).

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, not only were science and spirituality separated from their partnership, but spirituality and mainstream art was also similarly alienated (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). Before then, art had been an accepted tool for illuminating spiritual truths, whether visions of shamans or the sacred narratives of

great theologically based cultures; the heavens and hells of other worlds had been colored and shaped through art (Lipsey, 1988). In the newly industrialized West, however, realism became the norm, with the technical virtuosity needed to achieve it being highly valued. Many in disenchanting industrial and technological societies are drawn to something greater than themselves; they seem hungry for something both mysterious and understandable, whose value is permanent beyond temporary success or achievement (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). As Rollo May (1961, p. 22) said, "Contemporary human suffers from the degradation and collapse of the central symbols of Western culture."

In a culture that systematically destroys symbols of transcendence, vestigial fragments of ancient mythologies circulate and coexist with the relatively new mythologies of self-awareness and self-actualization. Modern therapists rely on their own mythology (e.g., client-centeredness, intrapsychic models, and developmental theories; Haslam, 1997). The growth of art therapy (McNiff, 1979) emerged in the field of mental health at a time when society had few unifying myths and when the fragmentation of the mind, loss of self-actualization drive, perceptual confusion, and an inability to appreciate the struggle for existence were typical features of emotional disorders, and this growth thus represented a return to the therapeutic (Haslam, 1997).

The rest of this section will discuss the relationship among art, therapy, and spirituality under the following six proposed headings: (i) The use of symbolic expression for healing is rooted in archaic cultures, and this healing process takes place in a spiritual realm. (ii) Art and spirituality reside in the same place in the psyche. (iii) Art therapy offers a unique space for the expression of spirituality. (iv) Art and spirituality have similar functions in the psyche and need each other. (v) Art and spirituality are both important parts of the human experience and healing, and (vi) art and spirituality are transitional phenomena.

### **(i) The Use of Symbolic Expression for Healing Is Rooted in Archaic Cultures, and This Healing Process Takes Place in a Spiritual Realm**

The archaeological record shows that visual images have been used for social, cognitive, and therapeutic purposes (e.g., pain relief, conflict resolution) for so long that their origins are almost indistinguishable from the origins of human consciousness and culture (Haslam, 1997; McNiff, 1979). In most so-called primitive societies, visual arts are prominent in the ritual decoration of the body, costumes, masks, and other accessories; the beautification of sanctuaries; and the creation of a ceremonial setting (McNiff, 1994, 2004). Through art and ritual (e.g., a spiritual phenomenon in nature, a worship-like practice that helps people relate to transcendent realities), the crises of early human groups were identified, shared, and understood. The forms of creative expression (e.g., pictures, dance, sounds, body paints) used in rituals played a



very important role in facilitating the growth and preservation of cognitive systems as well as in facilitating social adaptation (Haslam, 1997). Most healing rituals combine the rhythm of the chant, the beat of the drum, the movement of the dance, and the drama of the story with the power of many visual elements (Rubin, 2010). Countless examples can be found of the use of visual arts in healing rituals throughout time and around the world. Although the beliefs and practices embodied in prehistoric art and in religious and healing rituals can be said to provide the distant cultural basis from which art therapy eventually emerged (McNiff, 1979), radical and important changes have also occurred regarding their nature and functions within these beliefs and practices (Edwards, 2004).

Evidence of the connection between art and spirituality can be found in different cultures around the world throughout the ages. When focusing on the indigenous cultures of the past and present, art is seen to be associated with daily life; one can clearly see how it integrates, from rites of passage to healing ceremonies, utensils, or forms of communication. Beads, feathers, and stone and wooden materials have been used to create symbolic representations equipped with healing and protective powers such as talismans and totems. Some examples that show the mutual relationship between art and spirituality include the everyday objects on which the Bearing Sea Eskimos carved their guardian animals and souls (Ohno, 1985); the Hindu dance Bharata Natyam (Kamuda, 1993), which reminds the audience of the supreme greatness of God; the culture of Native Americans, who saw the arts as inseparable from ritual or religion (Dufrene, 1991) and as one of the explanations of their meaning; the Bushman rock paintings in South Africa (Lewis-Williams, 1983, as cited in Haslam, 1997, p. 7) which is “the belief that visual expression activates the relationship between the healer and the healing power, and that the psychic energy contained in the symbol provides healing through this relationship to the patient;” Egyptian mummies and burial practices; and elegantly crafted places of worship, hymns, and fairy tales (Hogan, 2001, as cited in Feen-Calllgan, 1995, p. 48; Haslam, 1997). This proposition will continue to be discussed in the context of the shaman, a specific figure who identifies the healer-artist-religion trio of primitive societies.

The first manifestation of the concept expressed as therapists are shamans; they are known as medicine men who work with the supernatural, technicians of the sacred, masters of ecstasy, mystics, healers, priests, and artists (McNiff, 1979) and are the ancestors of creative art therapists (McNiff, 1994, 2004). Shamans’ use of spiritual rapture and spiritual discovery as well as creative expression in healing rituals (Haslam, 1997) can be counted among the archaic examples of the inseparable relationship art has with healing and spirituality. While the shaman’s struggle to find meaning and order in the flow of experience is similar to the artistic process, the spiritual importance he attributes to traumatic and tragic conditions supports this exemplary (McNiff, 1979).

In early communities, shamans were the person who helped the group relate to inner experiences and maintained the dialogue. They resemble therapists in this respect, but the process is reversed. Here, the shaman is the main actor who talks to the sick person, detects the imbalance (i.e., the imbalance resulting from “soul loss” where something is taken from the person and missing, or an “alien attack” where something is present that does not belong to the person) that causes sickness by entering a trance, which Eliade emphasized as an intense religious experience rather than a psychopathological state of schizophrenia. The shaman then designs and implements the rituals in which various symbols are used to eliminate this imbalance. Where the shaman plays up conflict and life dramas for the benefit of society, the contemporary psychotherapist has taken the more passive role of reflecting on the client’s behavior. The main player is the client in today’s understanding of therapy; the therapist has the role of listening and encouraging the client to make sense of the symbolic expression they have brought. Clients strengthen themselves through creative expression. Although the process does work in reverse, what is common to both is the transformation of the product that emerges through creative expression in the client (Haslam, 1997; McNiff, 1979). The person’s inner drama depends on the continuities and patterns of the community and through archetypes, which Jung defined as collective primordial images one could call the precipitate of the psychic experiences common in all ages and nations (1976/2016), and the mythological motifs in which archetypes become visible; shamans are in contact with the sacred and use their expressive and associative powers to guide the group (McNiff, 1979). The result is not just emotional purification but a deep insight into the nature of human emotions. Instead of trying to cure outbursts of psychological tension with external calming forces, the artist and shaman go to the heart of the inner storm and express and stage their anger in ways that are valuable to the individual and society (McNiff, 1979, p. 157).

Both the artist and the shaman are practitioners of the sacred. The emergence of art therapy gives one the opportunity to consciously realize and advance these foundations of life (McNiff, 1988, p. 285). According to McNiff (1979), the art therapist is a modern manifestation of the shaman, because the shaman seeks the transcendence of the human soul and responds to the belief systems and values that clarify life by intensifying sensory experience, restoring the balance between the individual and society, and gaining a sense of control over life; put more realistically, shamans have the ability to respond creatively to existential fluctuations and change (McNiff, 1979; 1984). People’s direct connection with their archaic healer roots stems from their reliance on symbols and creative expression as therapists (Haslam, 1997). A shaman’s power source is the unity of mind, body, art, and spirit. The art therapist comes into contact with the continuum of healing at the end of the arts, rituals, and ceremonies, allowing the practice of psychotherapy as well as the direct expression of personal images and sensations. Like shamanism, art therapy occurs when societies become excessively mechanized, disoriented, and detached from their spiritual beginnings; they turn to

unifying art, which offers an alternative to the alienation and imbalance in the aesthetic consciousness in order to heal (McNiff, 1979).

### **(ii) Art and Spirituality Reside in the Same Place in the Psyche**

Spirituality and religion are important themes in art history, themes that artists who'd engaged with deep existential questions addressed. From the perspective of Bell (2011), who defines the artistic experience as an attempt to uncover the archeology of the soul through creative excavation, art opens up a very suitable space to study transcendent non-earthly things and arouse curiosity about what makes life meaningful and purposeful. In the theory of psychosynthesis, Assagioli (1965) assumes a structure of higher consciousness or superconsciousness to exist in all humans. These are the higher intuitions and aspirations of this area of the psyche; in other words, he asserts it to be the source of one's artistic impulses as well as ethical obligations, higher feelings of genius, states of contemplation, enlightenment, and ecstasy (as cited in Horovitz-Derby, 2002, p. 21). Franklin (2001) stated that one gets in touch with one's inner self/spiritual field while making art by actively participating in the creative process. According to him, art takes place on a psychic intermediate/transcendent plane similar to worship. The images and artistic product that emerge in that area contain the messages of inner wisdom and guide the person, serving to align them (Allen, 1995; Franklin, 2001; Jung, 1964/2016).

While creating, the artist takes raw materials and manipulates them in various ways to create new forms. This process is transpersonal because it requires a committed relationship with a source of being beyond the skinned ego. One can say in this context that making art is inherently spiritual and that spirituality is an important component in therapy for the integration of the individual (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). Gutierrez and Santaaria-Osorio (2018) saw art therapy as a path to spiritual transformation; they emphasized that different expressions of art allow one to define the symbolic and universal meaning that can contribute to the comprehensive (i.e., personal and transcendent) transformation of the soul (2018). Therefore, the three materials of art, psychology, and spirituality should be used together to heal the soul (Horovitz-Derby, 2002).

Artist and art therapist Allen (2005) argued that art helps one bring together the ideals and beliefs that guide life. Allen viewed the Divine as the spiritual way in which one can discover the most by participating in the act of creating images. Art is a way that can take one deeply to the place the soul calls home, whether it be a church, synagogue, mosque, dance studio, soup kitchen or a deep forest; art can guide each seeker to their own personal wisdom teachings. For Allen, artistic creation could be a prayer, ritual, or even remembrance of the Divine. The ultimate goal of art as a spiritual practice is to realize the artist archetype in every human being. The artist

archetype activates the ability to see things from an aesthetic perspective, distinguish harmonies and dissonances, and initiate new combinations or interpretations of life. Every artist develops and deepens their relationship with the Creative Source, the inner guide from which inner wisdom comes, and learns to express and share its gifts.

Moon (2001) is one of the art therapists who consider artistic creation as a prayer. For Moon, prayer is an attempt at spiritual connection and can manifest in many forms. In this respect, she considers making art to be an alternative language of prayer. Prayer is the acceptance of something beyond humanity and of what is already happening and is the offering to a supreme power that transcends humanity. Art as prayer involves drawing, painting, or sculpting the everyday, mundane images of life as they present themselves. When the practice comes to an end, one becomes aware of and accepts life as it is and one's capacity to contribute to the disintegration or healing of the self and the world as human beings while talking about the resulting artistic output.

Moon (2001) also raised the question of how traditional elements of a Christian belief system can inform a therapist's practice in a way that affirms the creative process while being responsive to the client's needs without imposing any particular dogma or belief. What the therapist brings to the art therapy session is not religious dogma about the nature of prayer but the religious and spiritual idea to which the idea of making art as a form of prayer touches. As prayer, it enables or strengthens people to change and transform in art; an attempt to make art intentionally but uncontrollably is active quitting.

Julia Cameron stated that everyone is an artist (2012), just as sculptor and artist Joseph Beuys who said that every human being is an artist, based on the fact that people are the creators of their own life journey, which is potentially their best work (as cited in Colette, 2019, p. 5). In Cameron's (Cameron, 2012, pp. 7–21) book titled *The Artist's Way*, she presents an 8-step spiritual roadmap through which one can clear out creative blockages and make the artist within visible, stating, "Just as blood is a part of your physical body and not something you invented, creativity is a reality of your spiritual body and you don't have to invent it." According to Cameron, creativity is an act of belief and art is a spiritual path; people are healed by their lively (healthy) creativity and again reach the transcendent parts of their selves by using their creativity.

### **(iii) Art Therapy Offers a Unique Space for the Expression of Spirituality**

Art is a universal language that cannot be replaced by any oral language humans use (Sutherland, 1995). Every person can discover unique experiences through works of art and search for their meanings and special value. Artwork becomes a symbolic mirror through which one can look, interpret, and possibly transform oneself (Klein et al., 2008). The pain and suffering people inevitably have to endure is made bearable to some extent through symbols and the transcendent meanings they provide (Jung,

1952/2020; May, 1961). At the same time, participation in creation is an act of faithful devotion to an ultimate reality. Just as in making art, whatever term is used to express this ultimate reality, only one's senses are unable to observe and know the object of one's belief. People grasp at God, the Mystery, the Higher Power, and/or the Ultimate Good through their imagination. Anything that cannot be seen, heard, felt, touched, smelled, tasted, or logically understood can still be imagined; thus imagination can be said to be a tool of belief. In art therapy, this belief is embodied in the act of making art, and this art becomes something that can be seen, heard, felt, touched, smelled, and perhaps even tasted (Moon, 2001). The relationship and sense of unity to be established with the symbol that has been externalized and made visible is the channel through which transformative power flows to the client (Haslam, 1997). In this process, the important thing is not the artistic product itself or whether it is beautiful or ugly or right or wrong (Malchiodi, 2003); the important thing is the inner content of the transcendental/spiritual field with which the person connects while creating as well as the inner messages that manifest by taking on artistic images (Franklin, 2001).

Expressing the sacred or transcendent in words is difficult (Moon, 2001). Art provides richness of expression in nonverbal ways (Rubin, 2010; Vick, 2012). When evaluated in this context, art is a spiritual act (Franklin, 2001) and a relational encounter and expression with the shaping of the soul. It has the potential to aesthetically and ethically reveal the objects, events, processes, or encounters that affect the maker and receiver (Ettinger, 2005). As a raptured experience with the soul, whether visual, literary, performative, or musical, one can see and use sensory spiritual qualities in any of the myriad forms of art (Bickel, 2020). Art is a tool that allows one to transcend linear time, move backwards and forwards into personal and transpersonal history, as well as unrealized and possible opportunities (Allen, 2005). The possibilities to be explored in art therapy through the language of the visual arts, their structures, and contexts that are alternative or complementary to words are vast. The nature of creative experience using gestures, colors, shapes, and textures fits universally to all religious and existential beliefs (Wood, 1998). The justifications discussed above suggest that art therapy is well-suited to addressing spirituality in the therapy process.

#### **(iv) Art and Spirituality Have Similar Functions in the Psyche and Need Each Other**

Damasio (2010, as cited in Colette, 2019, p. 6) said that the arts survive thanks to their therapeutic value, which is a compensation against human disasters and suffering. Similarly, many studies are available that suggest spirituality to be associated with positive coping and healthy development (Biancalani et al, 2022; Can & Duran, 2021; Craig et al, 2022; Corrigan et al, 2003; Richardson et al., 2022; Muehlhausen, 2021). In one example where art collaborates with spirituality in healing the human soul, Kearney and Weininger (2012) recommended art therapy as an excellent approach to

bring awareness to the soul in the relationship between fear of death and suffering. Maty (2017) reported that art therapy applied to 14 participants in a spiritual care center had been effective at improving variables such as meaning-making, hope, and well-being and suggested art therapy as a form of spiritual care. Meanwhile, Breitbart et al. (2010) included creativity and art as well as various elements such as nature, humor or memories among the experiential meaning sources that are likely to relieve existential or spiritual suffering in the meaning-centered group psychotherapy they'd developed. In one doctoral dissertation, Bell (2008) used an ethnographic approach to investigate the art therapy he'd conducted with nine patients who were at the end of their life in a palliative care environment. Bell's analyses showed art therapy to reveal meaning and spirituality in people engaged in art therapy at the end of life, stressing the unique place and importance of art therapy for exploring and expressing spirituality. Art therapy offers the opportunity to create meaning and explore spirituality along with other psychic needs (Bell, 2019). Bell supports this view with his experience that, although his patients had come from a wide variety of socioeconomic conditions as well as cultural and religious contexts, the art therapy he'd conducted with patients for 16 years in a local nursing home had described and reflected their spiritual needs and contributed to them gaining a deeper receptivity and spiritual sensitivity (Bell, 2011, 2019). Campbell (1986, as cited in Feen-Calligan, 1995, p. 48) stated that the creative discoveries the artist makes represent universal truths. According to Campbell, the correct artist functions as a real seer and prophet through their inspiration.

Color is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is a piano with many strings, and the artist is the hand that plays the keys to make the human soul vibrate properly (Kandinsky, 1952/2020). Colette (2019, p. 4) explained the contribution of the artistic process to spiritual development and well-being as follows:

During art therapy, clients are the protagonists of their own artistic actions, regardless of their technical skills. They make creative decisions guided by their inner guide telling them to choose a particular shape or color. This is a pursuit of beauty.

According to Kandinsky, beauty is that which arises from the inner psychic need and enriches the soul in an intangible way (Kandinsky, 1952/2020). Every color in a painting is beautiful because it causes a mental vibration, and every vibration enriches the soul. From this point of view, everything that appears ugly on the outside can be considered beautiful inside, both in art and in life. Art-based inquiries explore how individuals and communities construct meaning by representing and reflecting on experiences that challenge previous understandings of the world and one's place in the world. Art-based research is therefore a natural ally of spiritual growth and care (Colette, 2019).

One of Horovitz-Derby's (2002) clients who'd encountered spiritual art therapy when she had been unable to make progress after having been in therapy in other schools for many years mentioned how the psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and eclectic approaches had had no effect on her existential anxieties, emphasizing the shortcomings of two factors. The first factor is that the language of classical psychology remains barren with regard to expressing itself. Her art is something that is only admired in therapy, but what is not on the agenda of therapy is that which has been deeply ignored and excluded. The second factor again involves the language of classical psychology and is the absence of the spiritual aspect that her soul longs for. She talks about the need to not only talk about both subjects on a cognitive level, but to have them resonate with the experience in her soul:

I see painful memories forming in these creations. It's not easy to hold a clay product or look at pictures because they are tangible representations of the issue or parts of it that hurt. Talking about them is an even greater challenge. However, when we talk about these things, I feel my feelings and that inner change begins to happen. (Horovitz-Derby, 2002, p. 13)

### **(v) Art and Spirituality Are Both Important Parts of the Human Experience and Healing**

In the current age, people are like midwives in the collective transformation of consciousness, and art making can be one of the best ways to gain a new understanding in this process (Allen, 2005). Ancient peoples had religions and rituals to deal with mental disorders. In the dilemma one fall into as modern people; one will have to look at these distant healing philosophies that did not have a cartesian revolution, thus did not consider separating mind from body, body from spirit, or separating mind and body from social context (Douglas, 2001). For example, mandalas are found in the art of many religious traditions, where they are used in the service of personal growth and spiritual transformation. Tibetan Buddhism has used mandalas as a meditation aid for thousands of years, and Navajo sand painters use them in healing rituals. Jung saw the mandala as an expression of the self and an archetypal symbol of integrity (Samuels et al., 1986); he believed that creating mandalas helps patients make the subconscious mind conscious with regard to mandalas' use as a therapeutic tool (Edwards, 2004). Jung's emphasis on images and imagination in terms of psychological healing has had a significant impact on the development of art therapy. According to Maclagan, what makes Jung a point of reference for the later development of art therapy was not just his insistence on the primacy of the image and the phantasmagorical thought that is attached to it, nor was it the great importance he attached to archetypal symbolism; it was also the pioneering promotion of making art as an important path to psychological awareness (2001). Jung and his followers have challenged the view that creativity is synonymous with neurosis, thus freeing art from psychoanalysis' reductionist scrutiny (Edwards, 2004). Art serves individuation through symbols, and individuation is a spiritual process governed by the Self (Jung, 1964/2016).

### **(vi) Art and Spirituality Are Transitional Phenomena**

Art is a way of knowing for anyone who wants to connect with emotion, intuition, and inner being, who wants to create a path to the river of spirit that flows under life every day, and who wants to become more alive in the process. Art as a way of knowing is not about the product but the process of creation (Allen, 2005; Malchiodi, 2005). This view is similar to what Winnicott (2007) defined as the transition area and the transition phenomenon. The transitional space between the real and the unreal does not belong to either side. It is the domain of dreams, fantasies, games, rituals, symbols, art, and creativity. Representations of God, spiritual experiences, and religious practices also show themselves in this area (Saur & Saur, 1993).

Art becomes a relational encounter and expression by shaping the soul. It has the potential to “create objects, events, processes or encounters” that aesthetically and ethically affect the maker and receiver (Ettinger, 2005). According to Allen (2005), the first step in making art is playing games. Creation can be simple or complex, alone or in combination; it can involve simple materials or complex multi-step processes. Each person finds their own path to the right artistic experience by following the energy, flow, and pleasure that comes from opening up to the guidance of the Creative Source, and this includes the spiritual experience. This safe space that enables abstract but vital experiences such as creativity and spirituality makes a great contribution to the individual’s adventure of initiation into the outside world.

### **Conclusion**

The article has investigated within its scope the ancient and close relationship among the concepts of art, therapy, and spirituality. This relationship is grouped under six headings: (i) The use of symbolic expression for healing is rooted in archaic cultures, and this healing process takes place in a spiritual realm. (ii) Art and spirituality reside in the same place within the psyche. (iii) Art therapy offers a unique space for the expression of spirituality. (iv) Art and spirituality have similar functions in the psyche and need each other. (v) Art and spirituality are both important parts of the human experience and healing. And (vi) Art and spirituality are transitional phenomena. Although these propositions for explaining the relationship art has with therapy and spirituality have benefited from the use of spirituality in therapy and the theoretical basis of art therapy, the article has aimed not to describe a theoretical structure such as spiritually oriented art therapy but to provide a theoretical review. Issues such as the role of the therapist in spiritually oriented art therapy, therapeutic processes, and techniques can be elaborated upon in a separate study focused on therapy and practice. The examples of the use of art and spirituality in healing with regard to primitive cultures as discussed in this article have been limited to the rituals and practices of different tribes and different geographies that can be considered mostly shamanic; other spiritual traditions and



practices have been omitted from the scope of the discussion. In this context, future research can investigate the relationship between art therapy and spirituality in terms of different spiritual traditions and especially in terms of large institutional religious structures such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

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