

## Clinicians Celebrate the Arts and Community at Mirrors of the Mind

Pamela McCrory, Ph.D. and Terry Marks-Tarlow, Ph.D.

*The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls”*

--Pablo Picasso

What makes the Mirrors of the Mind: The Psychotherapist as Artist gallery events so successful in engaging community? We view art as a universal way to make meaning of our experience, to enlarge our world, to create an opportunity for empathy and to celebrate our shared humanity as well as our diverse perspectives. In its fourth year, the annual gallery exhibitions and accompanying art books explore and celebrate the intersection of psychology, arts and creativity. The growing participation of psychotherapist/artists, the expanding geographical reach of the entries, plus continually swelling attendance at receptions have been gratifying. To us, this confirms the significance of psychotherapist creativity to the practice of psychotherapy and to community at large.

The Mirrors of the Mind concept was born over a cup of coffee between the two of us: A new LACPA President in search of a meaningful community project and the new Chair of Community Outreach Committee in search of a fresh way to engage the public following disappointing turn out for previous LACPA community events. We agreed that community members were not very interested in psycho educational lectures, however useful we might believe they are. We believed that we needed to find a project that excited us and that would inspire others to join the fledgling committee. The integration of two of our passions—psychology and the arts, soon developed into a shared vision and a vital committee—necessary ingredients for successful community outreach.

The first year Mirrors of the Mind was housed in a small, private gallery and theater. Despite the closure of the 405 freeway – “Carmdageddon”, attendance was excellent! Community and LACPA members turned out in impressive numbers for the weekend of theater and the gallery exhibit. By the second year we found Art Share LA, a nonprofit sanctuary of the arts in the arts district as a venue, whose mission is well suited to our broad vision of serving the community. Each exhibition consists of multimedia visual art arts including painting, drawing, photography, textiles, sculpture, ceramics, woodwork and other 3-D pieces created by psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychology professors, and psychology graduate students. Every work of art is accompanied by an artist statement that describes the personal psychological significance and meaning of the art and artistic process. Juried by professionals in both the art and psychotherapy communities, the various works of art reveal how psychotherapists use their creativity to cross-fertilize, heal, protest and renew through self-expression. From the start, we have also included various performing arts, such as poetry and music, and the project has grown to include exhibition books which document each year’s offerings. Each Mirrors of the Mind exhibit has proven to be a rare opportunity to look into the normally veiled, private spaces of the psychotherapist.

Why do creativity and the arts matter to psychotherapists and community members? Artistic production provides a means of communicating shared human experience in everyday life, whether by a child’s drawing or an adult’s journal. Creating meaning is, of itself, a psychologically integrative experience which is central to the capacity for emotional regulation and resilience (Siegel, 1999). Creating art also touches upon the artful dimensions of psychotherapy, especially as expressed through clinical intuition (Marks-Tarlow, 2012; 2014). In this way the processes of

psychotherapy and creativity are parallel experiences, imparting benefit to therapists and clients alike.

Art provides the viewer with a potential therapeutic benefit and can help individuals deal with crises and challenges of life. In addition, helping professionals receive a payoff through creating art. De Botton and Armstrong (2013) propose that viewing art is therapeutic, and that portrayal of what is beautiful and good can perform a “critical function of distilling and concentrating the hope that we need to chart a path through the difficulties of life”( p. 22).

The benefits of creativity don't require engaging in the arts per se. As researchers like Ellen Langer (2005) and Ruth Richards (e.g., Richards, Kinney, Benet & Merzel, 1988) assert, everyday creativity is important broadly for keeping life fresh. We can be creative in how we drive to work, conduct a conversation with a friend, use free time, create a garden and of course, in practicing the art of psychotherapy. By bringing creativity into everyday life, we commit to staying present while remaining attuned to that which is novel and unique about the moment. Richards (2007) describes “being creativity” which facilitates openness, healing and development.

Following the exhibition, a community member told one of us (Pamela McCrory) that when she and her family had attended the exhibit they chatted with a psychologist/artist, whose work had never before been shown publically. They talked together about the meaning of her piece and discovered it tapped into shared meaning of mother daughter relationships through generations. The psychologist/artist then provided them with a “tour” discussing various works of art and their psychological significance. This story exemplifies the organic, connecting power of art and why *Mirrors of the Mind* has taken on such a life of its own in a way that simply isn't possible for didactic presentations.

Art connects individuals with their inner truth, and as Zausner (2003) reminds us “visual art is a mirror of and for the mind” (p. 2). Art connects artists with viewers through the shared experience. But the expansive power of creativity does not stop there, for art also connects people within their own communities. What is more, art transcends the barrier of language to connect people of difference backgrounds and heritages. Art speaks a universal language that heals, reveals, and congeals change. Mirrors of the Mind proved more than just an outreach to psychotherapists to participate in some fun. The exhibition proved more than just a free offering of quality art to the public: It amounted to nothing short of an identity change for participating psychotherapists, reflecting the power of art to expand psychological possibilities and locate untapped resources (Serlin, 2007). Beyond the positive impact on individual participants is promotion of a sense of belonging, of community integration and interaction. As Stuart Brown, play expert, notes “Art is part of a deep, preverbal communication that binds people together. It is literally a communion.” (2009, p. 62). At the local, state, regional and national level, we believe psychology has not yet tapped the power of the arts in its community and educational outreach efforts-- integrating psychology and the arts in the Mirrors of the Mind and other similar community projects (DeAngelis, 2014) , inspires this possibility.

For questions about the project contact Committee Co-Chairs, Terry Marks-Tarlow at [markstarlow@hotmail.com](mailto:markstarlow@hotmail.com) or Pamela McCrory at [mccroryphd@earthlink.net](mailto:mccroryphd@earthlink.net).

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