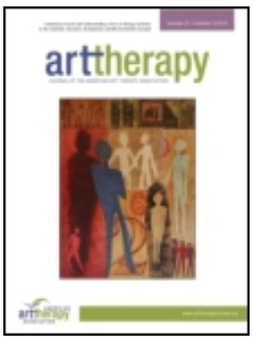

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Inspired by *El Duende*: One-Canvas Process Painting in Art Therapy Supervision

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Abstract

This article describes an art-based approach to supervision that combines clinical insights with archetypal awareness arising from painting on a single canvas throughout the internship semester. Supervision is comprised of three main components: (a) spontaneous painting, (b) complex reflective processing, and (c) aesthetically focused attention to imagery appearing in the painting that parallels the internship experience. Inspired by the artistic struggle of el duende *to bring forth emotional vibrancy, a central aspect of the model is the supervisee's relationship to a single canvas that transforms awareness through sequential layering, that welcomes tension, and that potentially integrates personal and professional identities.*

Introduction

This article describes an art-based approach to supervision that combines clinical insight with archetypal awareness arising from painting on a single canvas throughout the internship semester. The model is inspired by the artistic struggle of *el duende,* which is a Spanish term used in the arts to mean a mysterious power that, like the wind, can assume many forms and can be felt by all but not always seen or explained (García Lorca, 1955/1998). Jungian interpretations of the myths and stories of feminine archetypes (Pinkola Estés, 1992a, 1992b) describe *el duende* manifesting as a creative force. It is an apt metaphor for the complex experience of an art therapy internship. As Woodman (as interviewed in Crumley, 2009) explained, "I'm talking about an energy like a wind that blows through the body, through all the musculature and the nerves of the body. And that sensibility and sensitivity is the reality of the person."

The approach to supervision described in this paper encourages artistic expression that befriends and makes room for the inevitable tensions that result from conflicting thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that students regularly encounter during practicum. Following a progression of conceptual steps that build upon one another, the method is flexible and meant to invite spontaneous reflection by both student and supervisor. Unplanned imagery from the internship experience is layered onto the canvas and integrated from one supervision class to the next. The intimacy that develops between the student and the canvas creates a space to explore the parallel process of the internship on multiple levels. The canvas becomes a metaphoric reflection of the students' evolving selves as they learn to become art therapists.

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Literature Review

Art therapists have been making art in response to the demands of clinical work since the profession's inception, whether for understanding countertransference issues (Fish, 1989; Kielo, 1991; LaMonica & Robbins, 1980; Robbins, 1988), exploring specific questions from their reflection of clinical work (Fish, 2008; Wadeson, 2003), or exploring the darker aspects of what emerges in art therapy (Wadeson, Marano-Geiser, & Ramseyer, 1990). LaMonica and Robbins (1980) suggested that art therapists who turn to their own art as a reflective practice may be engaging in a type of experiential interplay between the art process, the art product, and their own free associations in response to their clients. Bearing in mind that clients are encouraged to make art because it is seen as integral to growth, Kielo (1991) asked, "What then is the potential of image-making by the art therapist as a means of responding to the therapeutic relationship, monitoring countertransference responses, and clarifying conscious and unconscious communications?" (pp. 15–16).

The connection between art making and becoming an art therapist has been broadly discussed among educators. Moon (2000) asserted that the "heart and soul of art therapy and art therapy supervision involves making art and artistic expression" (p. 116). Robbins (1988) recognized that making art in postgraduate training could be used to explore responses to clients. Wadeson (2003) argued for its use in graduate studies, asserting that making images in response to clinical work would help students integrate art making into their professional repertoire. In a formative evaluation of a supervision course, Fish (2008) found general agreement among student participants that art-based supervision was a useful method for containing, exploring, and expressing clinical experiences. If, as Malchiodi and Riley (1996) outlined, the purpose of supervision in art therapy education is to guide the intern in devising successful therapeutic strategies and developing a professional identity, then it would seem necessary to include art making as an essential component. Students who are exposed to a systems approach to supervision (Orr & Gussak, 2005) learn that by attending to their relationship to art they may gain insight into how

relationships—in art, supervision, and treatment—interact and affect one another's responses.

The question of how to create successful therapeutic strategies is heightened for students when they begin their clinical training. Students often are anxious about their limited capacity to work verbally with their clients and help process their experiences in therapy. Wadeson (1987) advised art therapists to focus on emotional responses to art imagery and to experiment while at the same time "refraining from explaining and instead search[ing] for what they find exciting, surprising, puzzling, or intriguing in their own work" (p. 265). The approach described in this article furthers this idea by modeling for students how to access the resonant language of art imagery in their verbal and nonverbal work.

Artistic Approach to Attending

From 30 years of art therapy practice, I have found that cultivating skills of compassion and avoiding being judgmental are essential to the therapeutic relationship. As a graduate art therapy professor, I realized that my students were greatly challenged in their internship experiences by a lack of compassion toward themselves and self-judgment about their skills as beginning clinicians. Art therapy students often seek to gather a "tool box" of planned directives that can be readily called upon to guide clients in their artistic expressions. If students are given too much direction in their training they may orient toward an external locus of control by focusing on relationship objects (e.g., site supervisors, instructors, and clients) they hope to please. If they are not given enough guidance, students feel as though they must "fend for themselves." Wary of revealing their insecurities for fear of appearing incompetent, students also may become closed to exploring culturally unacceptable beliefs in supervision.

Student interns who believe that there always are "right and wrong" choices tend to constrict the flow of the creative process, focused as they are on the purely cognitive construct of doing therapy "the right way." To support students in finding more authentic, intuitive methods for integrating their artistic intelligence with didactic knowledge and techniques, I experimented with non-directive process painting (Cassou & Cubley, 1995; Gold & Oumano, 1998) and found that it facilitated growth in ways that were valuable and different from other supervision formats. In particular, painting on one canvas for an extended period of time teaches students to identify the emergent relationship as an important resource in their work. The practice of artistic attending helps students develop a sense of competence that is internally and relationally based, rather than externally dependent on performance feedback.

The layered artistic expression of the student's authentic voice as it struggles to become visible in art forms is a central focus in this supervision model. The force of artistic struggle (*el duende*) brings forth needed emotional vibrancy. I believe that the development of this voice, both verbally and nonverbally, is an essential part of becoming an art therapist. In contrast to the superficial search for the "right" technique, learning to attend to one's authentic voice in art is a practice that supports complex meaning making. Sullivan (2000) illuminated the engagement that is required:

> The artist is a researcher with his or her whole organism, inquiring, testing with the body as well as the mind, sensing and seeing, responding and retesting—a multitude of functions performed simultaneously registering complexity, then sorting, finding pattern, making meaning. (p. 226)

Therapeutic relationships, of course, are complex. They are "multiple, subtle, and complex, and . . . these very characteristics are part of their potential value" (Sullivan, 2000, p. 220). When engaged in a semester-long relationship with one canvas, students gain direct experience with multifaceted reflective processing and aesthetically focused attention on the relationships that surround them. They discover opportunities to explore several connections simultaneously, including those with clients, peers, and supervisors. They examine multiple layers of response, in relationship to the senses. Students may be asked to name the texture, sound, smell, or temperature of an art image. Multi-sensory learning on the canvas is then extended via active imagination, journaling, sequential photography, and attuned verbal feedback from peers and supervisor. For example, the student who painted *Sun Lady, Moon Goddess* (Figure 1) began abstractly; gradually, new forms emerged that she was then able to name upon greater reflection with her peers.

Moments of tension that parallel the challenges of internship are identified in the painting and photographed from week to week as they play out on the canvas. Thus, students observe how their art itself teaches them to release judgment. Meaning making emerges gradually and spontaneously, with time, patience, and being in the state of "not knowing." As Sullivan (2000) reflected, "For a rather long time I stood there, wondering what I was *supposed* to be seeing. Then I allowed imagination to guide my vision . . . understanding that I could learn about art by giving it focused attention" (p. 223).

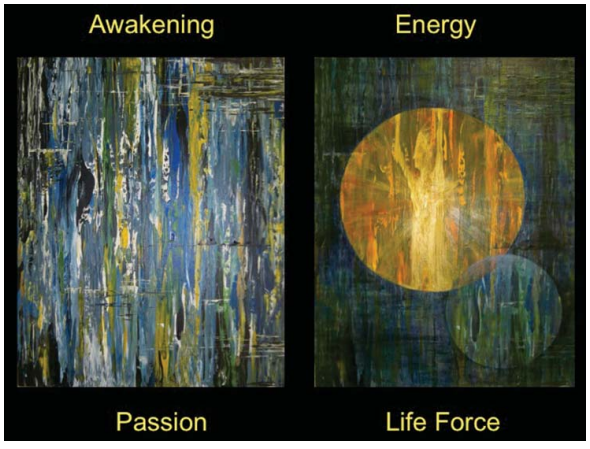

Figure 1 Laura's First (R) and Final (L) Canvases

As they develop the skills of attending artistically to meaning in the here-and-now, students also practice compassionate witnessing and become sensitive to how verbal communications resonate with aesthetic forms. Archetypal imagery often emerges in their paintings, which affords students an opportunity to connect to a deep sense of unity or creative mystery. To introduce an understanding of archetypal imagery, I have my students select an animal medicine card (Sams, Carson, & Werneke, 1999) that becomes a springboard for exploration. As they become familiar with the transpersonal dimension of meaning making, students are able to be more open-minded and curious about these images, which lays a foundation for relating to emergent archetypal forms.

Students need guidance in developing clinical competency as well as a place to emotionally process the challenges they have as interns. In my experience, supervision best serves students when it takes place in a creative space that welcomes the "drama of the light and dark . . . to honor both in their own terms. To bring them together in the mystery of presence" (Harvey, as interviewed in Crumley, 2009). Art-based supervision can invite the mysterious and encourage awareness that is emergent. Being with the unknown is often unsettling. However, as students learn to trust their art making (McNiff, 1998), to connect to archetypal mystery, to welcome moments of stillness, and to witness the breath and depth of meaning made possible through their own creative process (Allen, 1995, 2005), they discover for themselves a new sense of compassionate courage. They begin to learn the complex skill of integrating their personal and professional selves within multiple relationships.

Method

Process-driven art making is a method developed by Cassou and Cubley (1995) that has been introduced to art therapists by Aviva Gold. As described in Gold and Oumano's (1998) text, the artist creates a space for symbolic dialogue by working on one continuous painting and allowing imagery to be painted over in layers, with nothing discarded. All imagery is welcomed and continual attention is paid to the tensions that arise and how they are expressed artistically. An innovative aspect of this method is to photograph the progression of the painting, which captures its evolution in tangible form and often becomes a catalyst for the artist to access deep material of professional and personal identity.

The supervision class under discussion in this paper is comprised of three main components: (a) spontaneous painting (1 to 2 hours), (b) personal and group processing (1 to 2 hours), and (c) attention to concrete details appearing in the painting that evoke supervisory questions (30 minutes to 1 hour), as described below. A brief check-in is always incorporated as well.

Spontaneous Painting

Warm-Up. Creating a tangible connection to archetypal imagery is important to this approach; therefore, students begin by selecting at random an animal totem card (Sams et al., 1999). Commonly explored as archetypal guides, working with animal imagery also exposes students to metaphor and cultural symbolic meaning. From this creative prompt, they paint two small ($3'' \times 3''$) warm-up canvases to express their *personal self* and their *professional self*. The small size of these warm-up canvases helps students begin on a focused scale and glean essential imagery that is pertinent to professional and personal exploration. The visual impact of these two paintings helps guide the students' focused intention throughout the semester. In this first class, students and instructor begin to notice where the tensions are between these two aesthetic voices or aspects of identity.

Single Canvas. Students then select one large canvas (at least $24'' \times 36''$) as a support for painting and assemblage. The only directive is to bring their internship experience into their art making. Students create spontaneously, without a plan. They may paint freely or consciously choose imagery that echoes something from their internship experience. Each week they continue working on the same single canvas. To orient themselves to the compassionate practice of observing without judging, they may ask, "Where is the heart of the painting?" They may alter it, transform it, and/or layer it with assemblage materials or any other self-selected, two- or three-dimensional materials. Students may decide to step back, view the art from a distance, and change the orientation of the canvas—some have even deconstructed it completely. The supervisor is present throughout the spontaneous painting time, observing and offering guidance. Conversations with individual students are within earshot of the rest of the class in order to model the idea that the journey is both singular and universal, personal and professional.

The students continue to work with their canvas even when they feel satisfied or finished; the expectation is that they continue with it for as long as they are in practicum. The point is that clinical training is about growth, and growth is about movement and change. Staying with one canvas brings students face-to-face with different qualities of energy, which may range from passionate energy to inertia, and letting go of what is no longer "alive" or useful (Cassou & Cubley, 1995; Gold & Oumano, 1998). They face attachment and performance issues; they learn to be "in the moment" and to continually come back to center themselves with a "beginner's mind" (Gilligan, 1997).

Personal and Group Processing

Processing the painting experience focuses on moving through three conceptual stages: (a) identifying feelings and beliefs that arise with the spontaneous imagery of the painting, (b) engaging through the creative process, and (c) transforming awareness. As a first step, students reflect personally on their work by engaging in a conversation with their paintings, using Jungian active imagination, which they write out in their journals. Key questions guide engagement and focus. For example, I might ask them, "Where is the 'yes'? Where is the 'no'? And what do they want to say to each other?" The intention is to guide students into listening aesthetically for resonant language that is often more poetically felt than cognitively worded. Material that has emerged in

image form can be more fully illuminated into meaning with active imagination (Chodorow, 1997).

Next, the focus shifts to the group. Each student's painting is given artistic attention while the rest of the students identify their felt sense of compassion for it. During group processing, students share a personal mystery or curiosity about their painting (intra-personal) as well as give and receive feedback with others (inter-personal). Conversations are journal led and shared in the group. Students share what they have written from active imagination in response to the artworks of their peers, posing such questions as "What does it need? Where is the pathway out?" As students consider the reflections of others, they become more attuned to compassionate interaction. They learn how to notice and receive both resonant and dissonant responses. Aesthetic attention is reinforced as students learn that the imagining mind has merit in their supervision.

Attention to Concrete Details of the Internship

In the final segment of the class, attention shifts to the concrete details of the painting that evoke questions arising from the internship. From their explorations of transpersonal meaning via archetypal, metaphoric, and symbolic imagery, students relate their insights to common supervisory issues from the practicum that predictably emerge in the artwork. The many levels of parallel process that occur between client and therapist are discussed from the perspectives of therapist, client, peers, and the painting. To guide this exploration, I have found Gilligan's (1997) suggestion of locating the energies of tenderness, fierceness, and playfulness in the work to be helpful, as well as the text *A Shining Affliction* by Annie Rogers (1996). Rogers depicted the internship experience by artistically exploring how three levels of relationship informed and influenced one another: her parallel journeys as a supervisee, intern psychologist for a young boy, and client in her own personal therapy that was unconsciously affected by the boy's history.

The supervisor's didactic teaching weaves conceptual exploration with emotional experience. Although there is a predictable structure, the content processed during each class is spontaneous. Instruction on clinical progress and process notes is incorporated as well. Concrete matters—such as contracts, internship hours, evaluations, and documentation—are welcomed not only in this focused time of the class but also during both painting and processing. Students bring up concerns about particular case issues and are encouraged to explore these concerns in their process paintings.

Photographing the Transformation

Students photograph the progression of their painting and create a final project shared in the last class that remains faithful to their unique transformational process over the semester. The sequential photographs create another lens for the students to observe the progression of their learning. They step back and focus on the whole or on significant parts of the work. This generates conscious reflective attention that is often guided by intuition or the unconscious mind being expressed in the painting.

Discussion

Evolution through layering is a powerful metaphor and mirror for the internship experience. The process and products of this model can be illustrated with examples of graduate students in different stages of their clinical training who participated in semester-long supervision seminars over the past 4 years. The examples offered here are of students who gave their consent after course completion and agreed to be identified by first name only.

Each week the students studied the sequence of their painting's transformation from the photographs that documented it. They were encouraged to reflect on the past as recorded in their painting and collaborate with the imagery to inspire the future development of the work. For example, Caitlin's painting began with birds and bright color, conveying hope for her new internship after two previous disappointments (see documentation of the entire process at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChKOl3ESQEs). When the placement fell through, energy drained out and she coated her painting in grey. A haunting image then appeared, which she resisted because she felt it was ugly. I encouraged her to stay with the image and develop it further (Figure 2). A transformational moment occurred as a result: the "ugly" old woman now appeared to be holding a heart shape and the archetypal image of the bear from the animal

Figure 2 Caitlin's *Old Woman*

card Caitlin had selected. Caitlin surrendered to *el duende*; an uncomfortable hopelessness ensued as she followed the energies of descent into anger and the unknown. An unwelcomed snake figure was allowed to appear in the painting and then the color blue returned, which soon became the form of the bird, now larger and stronger. The bird image then transformed into an angelic guide. Out of the transformative energy of blackness, the greens of growth appeared and settled into the background color. In her final internship the next semester, Caitlin's painting reveals her arc of growth towards empowerment (see documentation of the entire process at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-CChMLrmjU). Her bird reappeared to guide her toward the archetype of the compassionate warrior, which was symbolic of her growth.

As the paintings progress, students often begin to see how prescient their first two small canvases were. Having just begun her first internship experience, Clare's personal and professional canvases were connected with her hope for growth, depicting a simple pale pink flower for her personal self, and a green leaf on blue background for her professional self. When placed next to her final canvas, a powerful aesthetic integration of "both/and" could be observed. Clare's final artwork, which went through numerous color palates, conveys—through her beginning hues of soft blues and greens highlighted in pink—a presence that is both solid and light.

Joanne's warm-up canvases had a lot going on (Figure 3). Her process painting focused on finding essence in the midst of distraction, which also described her professional and personal challenges during the semester. Joanne's husband was returning from a tour of duty in Iraq and her internship site was at a VA hospital. Her process painting reflected efforts at refinement and simplification, a "getting to the heart of the matter." She was successful in these efforts after responding to guidance about discernment and deciding to enhance only those images that sensually felt true to her while releasing the rest.

Issues with site supervisors often came up in students' artwork. During her first internship, Angie represented her supervisor as a regal figure that was separated from Angie's zebra-self by the presence of a black abyss (Figure 4). In her final painting Angie's zebra-self was enhanced and a connection between the student and supervisor figures is visible. Perhaps symbolizing the growth in their relationship, the two figures share a rich landscape of greens and flowers. Similarly, in her final semester of internship, Emily's imagery progressed from separation to connection (Figure 5). In her case, the group's feedback allowed her to find ways to integrate certain fears after releasing judgments about what the fire image in her artwork might mean.

Students are encouraged to develop a sense of curiosity in relationship to all imagery that appears in their paintings, especially images that are not pleasant or beautiful. During her final internship, Jennifer brought up her concerns about a 10-year-old client whose mother had died during his birth and whose primary therapist was now pregnant. After identifying that the child's rage as a result of abandonment might appear in therapy, I asked Jennifer to explore her own rage in her painting (Figure 6). She became aware of how personally challenging the emotion of rage was to her, and was able to engage with raging energy within the safety of the canvas boundaries.

Deep listening, creative engagement, compassion, and avoiding being judgmental are helpful skills to guide the

Figure 3 Joanne's Professional (L) and Personal (R) Warm-up Canvases

Figure 4 Angie's *Supervisor* and *Self*

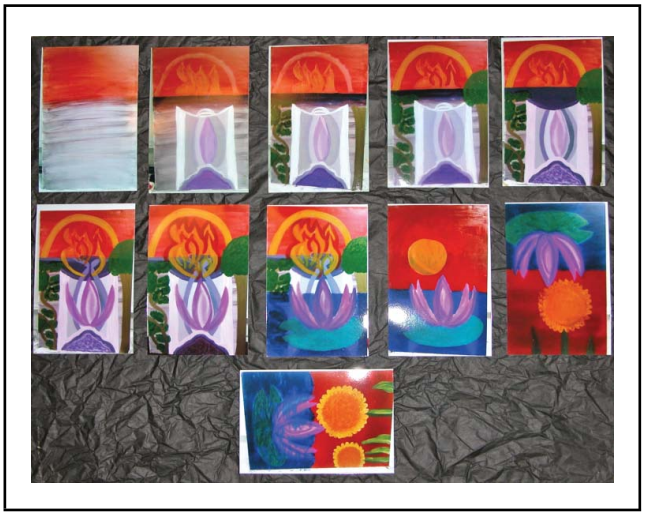

Figure 5 Emily's One-Canvas Evolution: From Separate to Connected

transformation of the paintings and the students' parallel awareness in supervision. Transformation—meaning lasting change—can be subtle and is best observed over time. Students photographed liminal moments during the process, which helped to identify a whole spectrum of transformation—from consciously forced change of imagery ("I chose to change it") to unconscious fluid transformation ("It just happened . . . it felt like that's what it wanted"). One week after Jennifer painted her rage, she reported that she had helped her client express anger in new and appropriate ways and in response Jennifer felt a new level of self-confidence.

The essence of creativity is its capacity to transform both the tangible and intangible truths in each moment (Miller, 2004). Thus the visual progression that each student documented with tangible photographs seemed necessary to include in a final project created at the end of a semester. By reviewing the imagery progression along with their journaling, students focused on consciously integrating some intangible qualities of *el duende,* perhaps made visible through their process painting. Students created music videos, slideshows, power point presentations, sculptures, posters, and books. These became powerful, physical reminders of where the winds of internship led them over the semester. I believe they are a testimony to the potency of art-based supervision. Cara's final project, a sculptural enhancement of an ammunition box (Figure 7), is filled inside and out with art imagery collaged from her sequential photographs. The piece powerfully integrates her work with the veterans and her painting process, as reflected in this excerpt from her writing:

A box is a boundary between inside and out
This one contained ammunition
There are days to paint the explosion . . .
I know the boundaries, the canvas, the box
Their experiences are not my lot,
But I can relate, I try to imagine . . .

The image of the grouse, which came from the animal medicine card she started with, inspired Clare. Throughout the semester, bird imagery kept emerging in her painting, over and over again, despite her conscious efforts to develop other imagery. I see this as *el duende*'s insistence for authenticity leading to Clare's final project of a birdhouse (Figure 8). Embellished with photos of the painting's evolution as well as tactile talismans that connected with both her present and future internship settings, it represented an

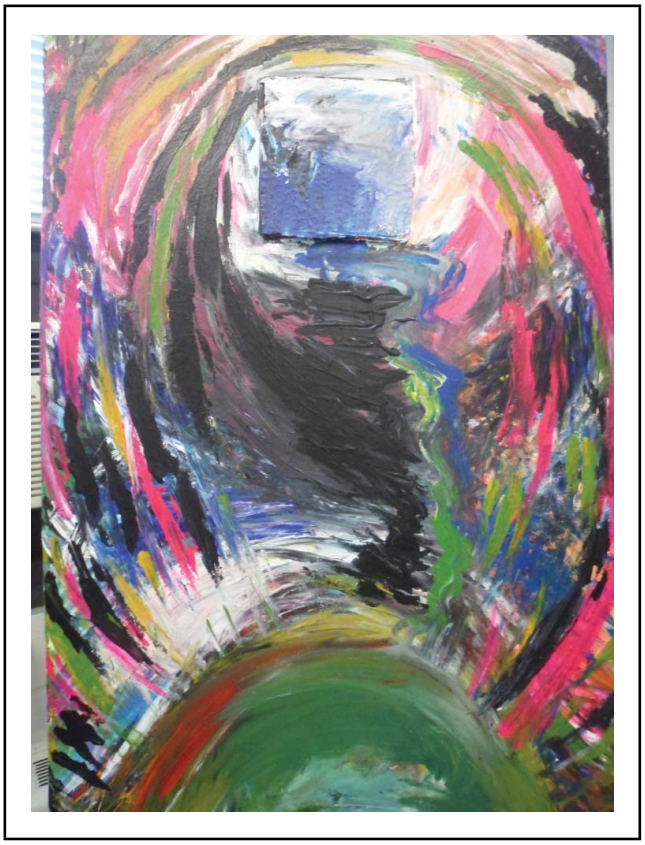

Figure 6 Jennifer's Exploration of Rage

Figure 7 Cara's Ammunition Box (Final Project)

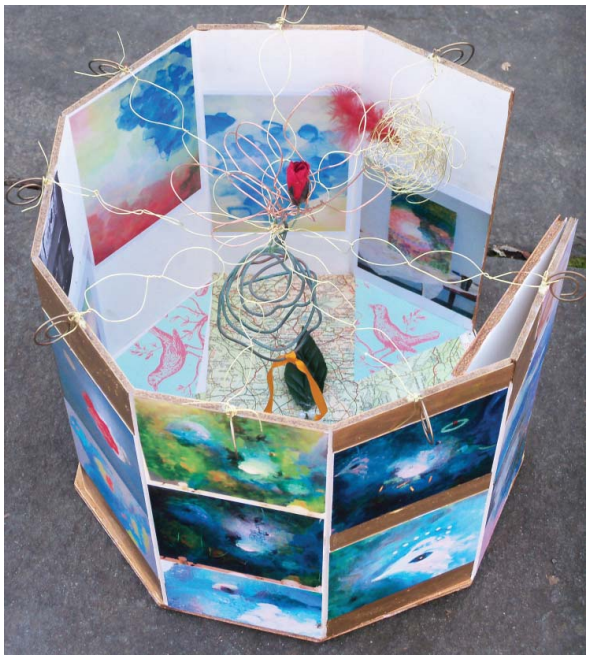

Figure 8 Clare's Birdhouse (Final Project)

integration of her journey. Students often remark that they feel a deeper trust in the healing and revealing powers of the creative process when they review the transformational journeys of their peers. They experience the resource of bringing artistic attention to the therapeutic relationship, which is the heart of art therapy.

Conclusion

Over 60 students in my supervision classes have used this one-canvas painting method inspired by the spirit of *el duende* and developed from my own experiences of process painting (Cassou & Cubley, 1995; Gold & Ouamano, 1998). Confidential course feedback from students has been very positive; they consistently note that art-based supervision reinforced what drew them to the field to begin with: Art is a powerful resource.

Whether the model translates as powerfully and effectively for other supervisors or educators is a matter of significant interest that warrants further study. Supervisors who plan to use the method would need first-hand experience in process painting themselves. This approach should appeal to supervisors who like to dive deep and be spontaneous. They would need to have insight into archetypal imagery and possess the skills required to create open spaces that hold the *el duende*–inspired tensions that will inevitably emerge in process art. In my experience, the model is as effective for beginners as it is for advanced students, and site supervisor evaluations have shown a consistent increase in student confidence during the semester in which the students use the one-canvas method. However, I do believe that it is also important for students to experience a traditional supervision seminar that mentors them in classical skill development as clinicians.

My hope is that this art-based approach to supervision motivates art therapy educators to integrate artistic, emotional, and didactic learning into clinical training. As one of the many benefits of one-canvas reflection and archetypal inspiration, students develop skills that address tangible and intangible supervisory concerns in an innovative way. Their growth as art therapists is made perceptible, observable, and integrative. Art-based supervision develops the passion that drew students to the profession, reinforcing for them the potential and power of art.

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