

## Visual Communication Design

### Original Research

# Reading Art Therapy Practices as a Media for the Distribution of Mental Wellbeing in Indonesia

Dessy Rachma Waryanti

Program Studi Seni Murni,  
FSRD, ISI Surakarta

**Abstract:** Art practices have become an effective means of facilitating recovery and maintaining individual mental health in an activity called art therapy. Whether carried out according to medical advice in the form of intervention or non-intervention, both types of art therapy delivery practices have produced many positive things. This research article wants to read how art therapy practices and art itself are used in different social and scientific disciplines where the application is carried out according to scientific methods. Happiness, the regulation of human consciousness and control of emotions, can apparently be triggered by artistic activities and is accepted in medical practices. Based on the research method in this article which uses a literature study approach, there are differences from those in America and England. In Indonesia, the practice of art therapy still stands alone and is carried out by medical personnel, psychologists and psychiatrists. This is different from the practices carried out by Adrian Hill, Edward Adamson and Edith Kramer. The three art therapy experts explained that in the practice of art therapy, a medical therapist must be accompanied by an art practitioner or someone who has an art educational background as a counselor. It is important to ensure that the art therapy process is carried out with a deep understanding of creative exploration, aesthetics and local cultural context. The rest of this article also examines that art therapy is also very beneficial for the general public without diagnosed health problems in maintaining their mental health.

Correspondence Author:  
dessyrachma@isi-  
ska.ac.id

**Keywords:** art; art therapy; mental health; art as healing

## INTRODUCTION

Fine art is an element that is not only related to creativity but can also target complex human feelings. One dimension of human complexity that can be approached with art practice is the psychological dimension which includes various aspects such as emotions, thoughts and behavior. The psychological health of a human being must be maintained because it always involves feelings that sustain activities such as sadness, worry, joy, fear and anger. Basically, the essence of art is to provide beauty, activate feelings for anyone who sees and hears (Yusuf, 2018 in Wajahtera, 2022). As expressed by Kris (1952, in Rubin, 2005), the 'miraculous power of the image' has become an ancient root in the discipline of medium art therapy that connects two souls. In the practice of art therapy, art becomes a powerful tool for conveying messages that may be difficult to express in words.

Adrian Hill, a British artist began drawing and painting activities to make himself recover from tuberculosis and after that Margaret Naumburg popularized the term Art Therapy to become an independent scientific field in the United States (Naumburg in Wajahtera, 2022). Until now, the practice



of art therapy has developed and is used not only for people with a diagnosis of certain diseases but also normal people who want to maintain their mental health (Rubin, 2005).

Knowledge about art therapy and its development should be able to provide new horizons on how an artist can be a companion to the development of psychology and mental health. Art therapy practices need to involve art practitioners because an art therapist is recommended to be those who understand art to communicate with therapy clients (Kramer in Wajahtera, 2022). This allows that the practice of art therapy can be run by two people namely a medical therapist and an artist or someone who understands, is trained and experienced with the practice of fine art but has gone through appropriate therapeutic training and qualifications (Moon, 2001).

The development of knowledge and application of art therapy above are things that are realized as mental healing assistance therapy with medical advice and clinical service processions. Adrian Hill, Edith Kramer and Edward Adamson are art therapy practitioners who began to understand where art practice should get a large portion of mental health activities. These conditions include the purpose of exploratory information to emphasize the importance of artistic knowledge and how its practice needs to be carried out with full awareness. This is considering that in Indonesia, the discipline of fine arts is often considered as an aspect of knowledge that is less prioritized in Indonesia. This condition is certainly related to the views of people who tend to place economic values and technical expertise above artistic values and creativity.

Whereas in practice, studies around art therapy trials have been carried out on patients with mental health diagnoses that produce significant impacts such as: coloring therapy is able to raise awareness for participants to change and raise awareness that problems must be solved not repressed (Asnani, 2020). Hertinjung, et al (2020) examined that art therapy restores the health of schizophrenia patients by improving skills by increasing happiness. Meanwhile, Purnomo (2023) found that making photo collage works can evoke memories. Riyanti (2023) helps the elderly overcome anxiety with coloring and drawing art therapy. Hanan (2018) has reduced the level of verbal aggression tendencies for middle age children with group art therapy draw a person test. Finally, Joseph (2018) carried out art therapy to reduce anxiety in women victims of domestic violence in Jakarta by drawing positive experiences and expressing hope.

Furthermore, the accompanying question that arises is how discordant opinions about art still take place in society while in its action with the right science (in this case medical), art has been widely used to help individuals find balance in their lives, both emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Thus, this research will uncover the great potential of fine art as a tool for reflection, growth, and self-recovery and is highly regarded in the medical world. In one scientific window to another, art therapy research has been widely carried out, especially in Indonesia. However, this is not balanced with public awareness in seeing the brilliance of fine art practitioners in creating inspiring works and work methods. This may be influenced by the low attention to arts and culture in the education system as it prioritizes subjects considered to have direct benefits in careers and earnings such as math, science and technology over art. However, we need to accompany the changing perception of people's views on the value of art and creativity to create a more supportive environment for individuals in exploring potential, especially art therapy.

## **METHODS**

This study reads how art activities have become part of the self-development of normal or disabled people and enter the medical realm as interventional assistance. Based on the data above, this research is qualitative with a literature study approach that studies reference books and previous research results (Zed, 2003). This method is carried out to obtain theoretical support for how fine art

accompanies the community to develop itself. So this study will use books, literature, notes and reports related to information related to art therapy and art techniques used, comparing studies on art therapy. The purpose of this study was to see how art activities with a therapeutic approach develop in the wider community. The analysis process is carried out by summarizing and collecting the results of the relationship between art and art therapy practices to assist human self-development.

## RESULTS

### Art, Art and Community Therapy:

#### *Art, Safe Space for Easy Recovery Access*

The general public is a non-art society that does not create works of art with critical awareness but inner awareness. Art produced by ordinary people tends to have a deep and pure meaning according to the experience they have gone through. This is because they are in art, the general public provides a natural awareness without an understanding of rhetoric and philosophy, so that all visual forms that appear have a tendency to be interpreted psychologically. But in *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, MacGregor (1989) there is a history of the interaction of art and psychology over the past 300 years that describes the artist's madness and various attempts to use art as a pathway of mental health treatment (Malchiodi, 2003). The history of art and society in this regard as it relates to psychology is little implied in the debate surrounding external art/brut/art vision/folk art as scholars struggle to place the work of self-taught artists (some of whom are mentally disturbed) within the canon of art history (Borum, 1993/1994; Russell, 2002 in Malchiodi, 2003).

The history of the interaction between art and psychology, as presented by MacGregor (1989), provides deep insight into how artworks reflect individual mental, emotional, and even social processes. By understanding the cultural, social, and psychological context of artwork, art therapists can help individuals and communities to understand and express themselves better. On a societal level, artwork from individuals who may be mentally impaired or have unique life experiences can also open up a dialogue about collective understanding of mental health and the stigma associated with it. This is in line with efforts to understand the character of society through expression in works of art.

Solso (2003) compiled an element of consciousness in humans called AWAREness consisting of:

Attention : the concentration of awareness on internal or external things.

Wakefulness : being alert and not asleep

Architecture : awareness of the physical location of body structures

Recall of knowledge about personal and world information.

Emotive awareness of emotions and feelings

novelty novelty tendency to look for new, creative, and innovative things.

The emergence of consciousness caused by thoughts from oneself.

Human selectivity is constantly choosing some thoughts

The subjectivity of each person's consciousness is unique

Based on what Solso explained above, it brings us to the connection of how the pattern of society naturally creates works of art without special training (in the sense of entering an art academy). Society creates art consciously not to criticize global phenomena, environmental sociology and everyday life

but: 1) reflection of diverse perspectives and interests in society, 2) acceptance of experience, 3) people's awareness of institutions, norms and their environment, 4) reinterpretation of memories and ideologies, 5) expression of complex emotions. Thus, by observing works of art through the lens of the AWAREness model, one can gain insight into how consciousness shapes and is influenced by the production, consumption, and interpretation of culture in a society.



**Figure 1.** Netherne Gallery 1970 (left), art therapy practitioner Edward Adamson at Ashton would, 1990 (center). Netherne Studio, 1965, documentation by John Timlin.

Source: O'Flynn, D. (2011). Art as Healing: Edward Adamson. *Therapy*, 1, 32-36.

One of the events in the history of art therapy with regard to artwork produced from within mental hospitals is a form of liberation of human expression and its artifacts are memories of those who lived life inside mental hospitals (Adamson, 1984 in O'Flynn 2011). This statement then underlies the practice of art therapy which should keep the works of therapy as memorial artifacts that can remind each patient of the memory of the mental hospital where they tried to heal. Adamson (1984 in O'Flynn 2011) adds that non-interventional art therapy works used to assist the healing process, especially for people who are deeply excluded from society can freely express themselves. In a follow-up promise, Adamson, an art therapist who does not want to be called a therapist but rather an artist, reviews the hope that art can be an effort that opens dialogue for those who are considered voiceless (O'Flynn, 2011)

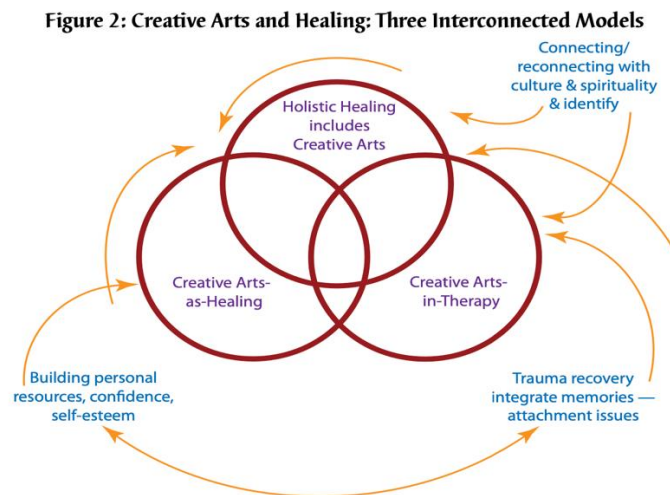
Today's young society has been in the awareness to see mental health as an asset that needs to be treated. On many social media platforms, there have been many discussions, talk shows, podcasts and educational content that are open to talk about mental health literacy in some self-disclosure content or self-declaration content for familiarization of certain material (Rosita, 2021). This condition can certainly increase advocacy for open sharing of experiences. They have realized the importance of managing stress, avoiding burnout and finding ways to care for mental well-being (Zion, 2023). Art therapy is now widely present in the general public without a diagnosis of welfare as a medium to maintain mental health both for mothers in educating early childhood (Vinlandari, 2022), post-Covid-19 students (Christiani, 2021), to art therapy as a stress healing solution (Setiawan, 2020).

Art then became an effective way to promote positive ways of treating mental health (Heenan, 2007). The research explains that art practices can provide cathartic and reflective safe spaces to address mental health in a positive, non-clinical environment. Creative programs with arts core activities can facilitate small-scale but accessible recovery and empowerment. Art can then accommodate non-clinical mental health recovery that can be distributed to the general public but still structured.

Kramer (1986) explains that an Art Therapist is a "third hand" who has artistic competence and imagination, they play a role in providing empathic service to others. Furthermore, he elaborated that an artist can become a therapist because they have an imaginative ability to understand the perspectives and experiences of the general public by reflecting on some things related to themselves. Meanwhile, artists can become formal art therapists by passing clinical therapist qualification tests to tailor therapeutic approaches to client needs and interests for a more structured healing process.

### Art as a Healing Media for Society without a Mental Health Diagnosis

Archibald (2010) in his research explains that art therapy for people without a diagnosis of mental health disorders can promote holistic healing by sewing the broken connection between the inner (physical, mental and emotional) and outer aspects of self (family, community and environment). Thus, when holistic awareness is spread in society through the mediation of art and other creative activities, it will give rise to sustainable cultural change. The information can also lead us to the positive assumption that when humans have a holistic connection between themselves and their environment, the impact will be very positive for the sustainability of a more humane world.



**Figure 2.** The Model of the Interconnectedness of Art and Healing Creativity.

Source: Archibald, L., & Dewar, J. (2010). Creative arts, culture, and healing: Building an evidence base. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 8(3), 1-25

Art therapy opens the door to a deeper understanding of how individuals interact with the world around them, including relationships with nature and society. A good distribution of mental well-being will certainly provide a view of the future where people in large numbers can create an environment that leads to a mentally healthy society that is able to contribute to social and economic sustainability by balancing personal and collective interests.

This holistic humanistic practice is not only about sitting and doing art creation activities. Loannides (2016) conducted research that museums have become spaces that can be considered as therapeutic environments because in them there are interactions involving gallery spaces, artworks, gallery staff, artists and art materials and by involving art therapists, visitors can be encouraged to explore their position in life. This information then underlines that Art is a scientific discipline whose complexity can bring self-development by accompanying mental health to understand self and environment.

## Involvement of Artists in Art Therapy Practice in Indonesia

Currently, the practice of art therapy in Indonesia is still in clinical practice organized by mental hospital staff, researchers with psychology backgrounds and nurses for the purpose of healing patients with diagnosed mental disorders. Herboxing (2020) conducts art therapy practices to increase the happiness of schizophrenia patients at RSJ and this activity has benefited patients in the form of entertainment, fun and good memories and equipped them with useful skills to do outside the hospital. Furthermore, Purnomo (2023) conducted research on the practice of art therapy using mixed media collage techniques, this activity led him to the conclusion that photo collage can evoke patients' memories of past memories only from photo findings. Art therapy has also been used to treat the verbal aggression behavior of mid-age children by means of draw a person test (Hanan, 2018). Art activities as simple as coloring and drawing are also widely used for art therapy practice, one of the benefits of which is to reduce anxiety levels in the elderly (Riyanti, 2023), final year students (Afidayani, 2023), young women with anxiety (Krisnanda, 2020), to elderly prisoners (Herawati, 2023).

Journals about art therapy are found in many psychological and medical journals. This seems to ask again where the role of artists in the overall practice reported in these research journals. If practices involving art disciplines no longer include artists in practice, they may tend to be in practical activities. This can be responded to critically considering how art disciplines that are quite influential and often used for medical activities tend to remain a pure art practice. This then has the effect of alienation due to the tendency of restricted communication between native practitioners and early learner practitioners.

Most of the pioneers of art therapy were artists. They initiated and developed the practice of art therapy. It was Adrian Hill and Edith Kramer, artists who developed the art therapy talk in discuss-discussion which states that in every art therapy practice, a therapist needs to include artists as counselors to find appropriate and diverse art activities. Based on research journal articles on art therapy in Indonesia, we come to the fact that the growing practice of art therapy does not integrate the role of artists as counselors. This is in contrast to the views suggested by art therapists such as Edith Kramer, Adrian Hill, Georgette Seabrooke Powell and Margaret Namburg. It can be said that the role of artists in the context of art therapy is neglected or not fully utilized so that even though the practice carried out has had a positive impact and benefits, it still does not offer a diversity of activities that do not bring saturation points.

Seriously criticized art therapy is then seen to be present only in formal clinical spaces and is carried out after diagnosis. This then gives the suspicion that art therapy tends to be an activity carried out only for people with a psychiatric diagnosis. In fact, the ease of access in treating mental health through art is contained in the potential of art that supports the growth of consciousness. An artist is able to bring a deep understanding to the potential of art therapy in improving mental health, because the character of art is able to work as a vehicle for self-expression and as a way to cope with feelings (Rubin, 2005). Viktor Lowenfield (1947, in Rubin 2005) adds that art therapy can be implemented in educational methods in line with Edith Kramer's perception that art contributes to psychological integration because of the synthesis involved in the creative process itself. Rubin (2005) then closes the conclusion of art for all with the conclusion of the observation that when a human being moves with the emphatic foundation of art practice can organize chaos through the process of thinking, feeling and perceiving..

## CONCLUSION

Based on the reading of the data, it can be concluded that the suitability of art therapy practices that have been tried to be carried out in Indonesia can achieve maximum and sustainable results through the following points of analysis: (1) Currently, art therapy in Indonesia is still seen as a clinical practice that conducts art intervention activities from the medical realm using art techniques obtained from other theories and not from the advice of artists; (2) Artist involvement as a practitioner who is familiar with creative activities, can provide integration based on strong advocacy between artists and therapists in the practice of art therapy; (3) Collaboration between art counselors and therapists can open up new possibilities for diverse and therapeutic art activities. Art counselors can also provide guidance, support and training to art therapists for knowledge of art practices that allow for the patient's recovery; (4) Sustainability strategies in increasing the effectiveness of mental healing can be done with a holistic therapeutic approach. Through mentoring artists, the diversity of art interventions can make individuals accustomed to being creatively open to addressing mental and emotional health issues by using the medium of art as a tool for healing and transforming diverse individuals; (5) Art therapy for people without a diagnosis of mental health disorders can have positive impacts such as: (a) Increased emotional well-being from self-expression; (b) Improvement of non-verbal communication skills; (c) Reduction of stress and anxiety in the management of emotions.

Based on the literacy studies that have been compiled, we can see that experts in medical science and psychology have agreed that art is a creative medium that can help healing both with clinical intervention methods and non-clinical intervention. Art activities can improve motor skills, increase individual happiness and awaken emotional memory. Not only that, the art environment can also support mental health because it provides a platform for self-expression, reflection, and deep self-understanding. When a person interacts with a work of art, either as an observer or even as its maker, they engage in a process of exploration of emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences.

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