

# Healing with Art and Soul



Healing with Art and Soul:  
Engaging One's Self through Art Modalities

Edited by

Kathy Luethje

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Healing with Art and Soul: Engaging One's Self through Art Modalities,  
Edited by Kathy Luethje

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## INTRODUCTION

“We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams,  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
Upon whom the pale moon gleams,  
Yet we are the movers and shakers,  
Of the world forever, it seems.”

—from ‘Ode’ by Arthur William Edgar O’Shaughnessy 1844-1881

An amazing array of brilliantly creative minds blessed my life a few years ago. They all showed up for a conference I helped to organize. It was a nodal event for me. “Gather your people together,” had been a call from a distant dream, and I had been trying to figure out who these people were for years. I had hungered for a mentor, and when we gathered, I found not one, but many. They came to explore the use of expressive arts as healing modalities. Now, many of these artists and more have decided to join me in creating this compendium of essays to preserve in part what happened between us, and to disseminate the insights throughout the world. What we offer to the readers is not a ‘how-to’ book so much as a ‘why-to’ book, why to use art modalities in a healing practice, although there are techniques and methods within these pages. There are also stories and creative products from working with the arts for healing. Some experiences have been life changing for the authors; some have been transformative for the people within their care.

As an expressive arts practitioner, I know that having the tools of rhythm, movement, tone, color, and form to express that for which I have not yet found words, has made life rich and full of meaning. Like many writers within these pages, I believe that I have always been an expressive artist, although for years that fact went unrecognized, especially by me. Perhaps we are all born expressive artists; perhaps that quality is just what makes children so resilient. Unfortunately, unless this inborn use of the imagination and delight in the activity of making beauty is carefully cultivated in children they can soon learn to judge the products of their

expressive process and find them lacking. Somewhere along the process of socialization and education they leave their 'de-Light' behind.

When we reawaken and open ourselves to the return of our Light, we allow ourselves to experience our wholeness, and therefore, our healing. It is good work. All it takes is a willingness, courage, to engage. The hope of this book is to set forth a vision for the reader of how engagement with the expressive arts can be an avenue for healing the body, mind, and soul. While many practitioners of the expressive arts have not entered this field in order to move and shake their communities, that is exactly what is happening all over the globe. It is the desire of these writers that you, the reader, will feel the passion and compassion flowing from these pages, because of our love for the expressive arts. We believe that we have found some new truths, and resurrected some old ones, about how people heal from the woundedness they receive through trauma and their everyday lives.

The arts have infiltrated traditional healing settings, and they continue to expand their influence in non-traditional settings. Those who have come to believe that the arts are healing in and of themselves are now in positions within traditional institutions, offering complementary and alternative healing avenues for people with terminal illnesses and long hospital stays. Arts practices are beginning to be a part of many individual and group therapy sessions. People from all walks of life are beginning to awaken to the use of the arts for their own well-being, some ideas that art therapists and others have known for years.

As a group of authors, we come from many different traditions and we represent a kaleidoscopic viewpoint. When we gathered a few years ago in St. Petersburg, Florida, to support, advocate for, and educate each other, most of us were at the beginning of this shared journey, although some of us had practiced our therapies and healing arts for many years. We have been the people in the trenches, the ones working directly with people who are hurting and in need of healing. Several of the people you will meet within these pages have broken away from their taught traditions and have formed innovative healing practices of their own. Their work becomes a shining example of what happens when imagination and intuition are rendered into form and action.

We consider ourselves to be both healers and artists, in the very broad sense of those terms. One of our healing tools is a compassionate companioning with our participants and clients through their own journeys; that tool is essential. We engage with our clients and students, while asking them to engage with themselves. It is the heart of the healer coming through to touch other hearts. In this way, we are co-creating with

those we help, matching our tools to the other's need, and working collaboratively with them to weave a mending, a new fabric of wholeness.

Our arts take many forms; they are activated through various modalities, and are accessed through any number of the five senses. Most authors write about realizing that a sort of sixth sense, a spiritual sense, is also at play in the use of the arts for healing. When we gathered to explore the co-creation of health, we realized that most of us believe in the co-creation that happens between the therapist and the client, but also the one that happens when unseen forces move to weave the synergy that is full health. The process of coming to wholeness has been called wholistic, but also holistic, or holy, to emphasize this spiritual dimension.

What you will find in these pages is a collection of the individual voices of healing artists, and a little bit about the journey each one of them has undertaken. Most essays here are anecdotal, rather than being reports of scientific studies, but they provide evidence that there is healing power in the use of the art-making process for those in need of it. Each person writing has claimed his or her identity as a healing artist in some form, and all have taken the necessary steps to clarify for themselves what meaning such an identity has for them. Finding themselves as "music-makers" has also necessitated their being "dreamer of dreams" in order that they could break into the traditional healing settings with their work. Much of what has been done in the field to date has been done through faith, through belief in the efficacy of the work.

My own path to becoming a healing artist has included an intentional pursuit of experiences that were consciousness expanding and self-transcendent, such as zazen and hypnosis, since the 1970's. I established my career in the helping professions, hoping to relieve the hurts of the world, if even a little bit, and to help the people whom I counseled or taught to begin to realize their own innate potential. However, it is through the expressive arts process that I found the most permission to be myself and to explore what it means to be me in the most fulfilling ways. The process in the intermodal expressive arts became a way to 'fan into flames the spark' that was within me to improve the spiritual condition of the people around me. I have always wanted to help others shine forth with the light that is within them. Through the use of the arts as healing modalities, I have new tools for helping others to find the unique and beautiful in all of life. In my seminary studies, I became enamored with Process Theology, and I find that the 'process' of intermodal expressive arts resonates with this way of viewing spiritual forces as they interact with creation. There is a continual process of creating anew in life itself,

and through the expressive arts, we find ourselves at the center of the creative moment.

Since it is becoming more and more essential for people to guide the process of their own healing through the maze of medical and non-traditional options, I believe that they would do well to proclaim themselves healing artists, and to begin using their imaginations and any art tools that feel right to them. Essentially, this is in order that they reach the inner parts of themselves, and begin to heal from within, “creatively integrating the inner and outer life to a life more authentically lived,” in the words of Marc Ian Barasch, who believes this to be the path to healing.

“Our bodies bear unimpeachable witness to the movements of our soul,”

They “speak a deeper, more spontaneous truth beyond ego’s control...the body is our very presence in this world, the space only we can occupy, the place where the self’s private story is given breath.” (Barasch, 1993: 317)

In expressive arts, we start with the body, with what is felt inside, and express out through some sort of art form.

Barasch has also given us a definition of the word *healing*. He references Dr. Jacob Zieghelboim, saying that he views “healing as a coming into touch with the real forces of life.” (1993: 318) A working definition from Wikipedia for healing is:

“the process by which cells in the body regenerate and repair to reduce the size of a damaged area... Healing assessed spiritually, emotionally, mentally or otherwise, is a process which involves more than just the action of cells...Nature, or more specifically, the body’s natural healing mechanisms, (*or the body’s inborn ability to heal itself*) is the principle mechanism by which the process occurs.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org.2008>.)

When we attempt to determine a definition for art, we enter another sort of labyrinth. There does not seem to be one all encompassing definition. Process arts are the kind of arts that focus on the art-making process rather than the art product; they may be called expressive. Expressive arts are not always ‘pretty,’ we are told by our author Dr. June Conboy. Perhaps this is the ‘world losers/ world forsakers’ part of the opening poem. My own experience of writing out what I needed to really feel, through poetry, has not been pretty; my poems have met with mixed acclaim. I am thinking about years ago, when one piece I’d written about the smells of being in bed with a person who drank too much had the sensitive private college students where I worked in an uproar that anything like that could be considered poetry. And my recent writing in a workshop by poetry therapist, teacher, and mentor John Fox about the neverland of the body was deemed “hard to listen to” by my peers. Both expressed my momentary reality.

Today, I write about a grandma waiting for the kids that never come. It won't make anybody smile. But it does help me feel better. My truth has been told. The witness, and the only one perhaps, is the piece of paper; but I still feel I have been heard. I write because I don't want these bitter ideas to live inside me. That is the reason many folks do expressive art. Although art is not always beautiful, true art usually expresses our truth.

Qualities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic are called modalities or 'learning or operating styles;' they are the channels through which we express. Various art-making processes employ these in terms of modality to specify which sensory pathway is being used. Expressive arts are usually movement based, since they are e-motion based; they start in the body. Then there is a weaving back and forth through different modalities, which form and inform one another to create new pathways of expression. Dr. Barbara Kazanis, founder of the provost graduate level certificate of training in the Expressive Arts at the University of South Florida, Tampa, says that this is where the aesthetic experience, the learning process, and the healing transformation form a nexus. It is a crucible for healing.

Art may not be easy to define, but there are many things we know art can do for us. Art can:

Record history

*Memorialize a person or event*

### **Celebrate life**

Evoke thoughts or feelings

Reveal a way of life

*Express who we are*

**Uplift and inspire us**

Relax us

Stimulate our imaginations

*Add to our knowledge*

Excavate beliefs

**Stimulate conversations**

*Encourage creativity and more art*

There is probably much more! I have seen the arts do all of these things. That is why I believe they are so valuable to us in our quest for living balanced and vital lives.

“Art is like faith; you either believe or you don’t.”

—Loretta Benedetto Marvel

In an interesting synchronicity, several of our authors in these pages have written about the Wizard of Oz as archetypal, and our culture’s formative healing myth. It is the story of coming to wholeness through an imaginative, creative path and the quest for bringing vitality home again. The body, mind, and spirit are represented in the story as heart, brain, and courage. Mircea Eliade said, “The myths preserve and transmit the paradigms, the exemplary models, for all the responsible activities in which (people) engage.” (1954, p.53) They return us to what it means to be truly human. Oz is myth-making and storytelling at its best.

We hope you will resonate with our stories about healing. Each chapter is a complete entity in itself. You may select where you read. This book is not meant to be read front to back only. It is organized around the primary modalities each author uses, with the first section being mostly essays that provide an overview of the process and the work. In *Engaging Sound*, we learn about the intimate connection between our breath, wind, and our spirit in tone or song. We also are reminded that our bodies are vibrational, just like all substances in the world, and we re-member rhythmic patterns that affect the workings of our brains.

*Engaging Body* reminds us of the feeling, e-motion, and motion connection. We know ourselves to be embodied souls. We see how the body becomes the garment of the soul, and we become more aware of how our bodies express our inner nature. The section on *Image* offers us symbols and their meanings, and reveals a bit about how manipulating them can teach us new things about ourselves. And the chapter on *Word* discusses how images in art make it possible for individuals to find deeper meanings than their words can express. In the section about *Lifelong Learning*, we see how the arts are being used in developmental stages of life to meet people where they are. We also see how the arts can facilitate the healing of specific conditions of dis-ease...

I think you will agree with me that these authors are outstanding in their field. We hope that you will engage with this book, that you will open your mind and heart to the stories, and that you will use the tools provided here. Many of the pieces within these pages have brought me to tears. I know they will move you also. If you want to know more about the authors, there is a biography section in the back of the book. Please visit it.



I don't know if I sound more like a cheerleader, or the preacher I used to be, but I do hope you will 'catch the spirit' within the pages of this book and get involved in this work. The first time I used the expressive arts with a patient in the hospital I was told, "I forgot I had cancer while we painted." Since that moment, I was hooked. She had gone to the place of remembered wellness, a place in her consciousness where she was whole again, and I know that going there, even for a moment, changed her body in subtle ways, and changed her outlook in great ones. For some suffering people, this is enough to move them into a cycle of healing. It does not have guarantees, but what healing system does? It does have hope. That is exactly what I want to offer the people in my care.

In concluding this introduction, I would like to share with the reader an excerpt from a speech given to a group of ministers gathered at Bayfront Medical Center in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 2001, by musician and author Reed Arvin, who has given his permission for its use. He said:

"For me, the use of the arts in healing is not fluff. When the soul spins out of control, the body spins with it; likewise, when the body turns traitor, the soul has a powerful influence on its healing. I believe this influence to be profound, and I say this after having received the most invasive and powerful treatments that technology has to offer. A diagnosis of cancer led to a surgery that removed half my lungs and more. This, combined with chemotherapy, kept me from dying. Traditional medicine did not, however, give me back my life. I had to make a new life, full of unforeseen physical compromises and opportunities. It was a process that taught me the connection between the soul and the body. They are intimately connected, like aquatic life and the ocean it inhabits.

In my journey, I learned that music and meditation can be as powerful as an Ativan. I learned that journaling wasn't simply writing down my thoughts; it was giving God an opportunity to speak into my life. I learned that every day I took care of my soul my body responded, and every day I ignored it my body paid the price. The arts are invaluable here because they bring peace into chaos. They make us happy, and happiness is an energy patients desperately need to heal their bodies. But they do something deeper and more sustaining: they remind us of a life beyond our illness. Given time, they can even teach us to love our battered bodies again. Technological medicine can do none of these things. And each of these impacts our bodies as surely as a scalpel.

It doesn't matter whether your language of the soul is rooted in spiritual mysticism or in the interplay of endorphins and dopamine; both are a kind of magic for those who have eyes to see. The scientist and the pastor can be allies here, as they encourage painters, poets, sculptors, and musicians to bring their healing gifts to the hospital. In so doing, they will be making a powerful statement to patients to look beyond the pill and the

knife to be made whole again. Together, we can usher in a new era of healing. “



I thank Reed for this affirmation of the work of healing through the expressive arts, and I wish you, the reader, Godspeed on your own journey toward healing and toward finding your identity as a healing artist. Many of the essays in this book have touched the deep in me, and confirmed for me, again, that helping souls to find wholeness and peace is my true work here on earth. I hope they will do the same for you.

“Pay attention and your soul will live.”  
—Isaiah 55:63

Note: Please find all references for this introduction in the editor’s essay section called “Of a Different Color...” Each author, as needed, has a ‘works cited’ section following his or her piece. Thank you.

# FOREWORD

JANE GOLDBERG

Imagine a prolonged glimpse into the inner workings and practices of expressive arts professionals from around the world who have dedicated their lives to the service of healing those in pain and transition, and to those seeking greater fulfillment in their lives. This thoughtful publication offers you this rare opportunity.

The genesis of this wide ranging gathering of stories and methods of healing through the arts was the 18th Bi-Annual National Expressive Therapy Association (NETA) Conference in St. Petersburg, Florida in January of 2006. With the untimely death of the president of this association, Steve Ross, the conference coordinator Rev. Kathy Luethje and I took on more responsibility for the success of this conference than we had expected to. We organized groups each day to brainstorm and discuss new directions for the future. We wanted to keep the dream alive of a community of alternative expressive arts innovators. As a keynote speaker for the conference and a member of this association for 22 years, I was privileged to open the conference, to summarize the nature of our profession's innate calling and to help move us forward.

In our profession, we inspire others to open up to their own creativity and to set the stage for new beginnings or endings; to change. We nurture passions and cultivate enthusiasms for visions and dreams through the exuberance of creativity; expressing the light of imagination, and encouraging states of wonder and curiosity that call forth joy, freedom, delight and flow.

Kay Redfield Jamison, author of *An Unquiet Mind and Exuberance, The Passion for Life*, noted, "it is the infectious energies of exuberance that proclaim and disperse much of what is marvelous in life."

Absorption in the creative process *is* what heals us. Jung wrote that, "the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and inasmuch as you attain to numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology."

Rev. Kathy Luethje brightly welcomed all the facilitators and participants with warmth, sincerity and respect. People had come from all over the world to learn and to grow and to play. Presentations were filled with a palpable sense of heart and courage. We were ready to birth new beginnings. We were inspired to share our work. At the completion of the conference, Rev. Kathy invited workshop leaders to participate in a new undertaking, to share their wisdom and methodologies in the form of a book.

Kathy Luethje became the editor of “Healing with Art and Soul: Engaging One's Self through Art Modalities.” Community members offered to share their work, ideas, stories and successes working with patients and clients over the years. Here, they have contributed their knowledge and experience in a text that provides a rich assortment of teaching stories that will help you understand and appreciate the transformational power of the expressive arts in many diverse settings. Each practitioner has been uniquely creative in designing, developing and communicating their own theories and approaches to this important work.

Earlier in their lives, each contributing practitioner had taken a risk and had stepped out to present this material in their respective settings when it wasn't the traditional choice to do so in our society at the time and they found acceptance.

It takes drive and passion to take that risk and to face the challenges inherent in bringing new material into the healthcare community. I wrote my doctoral dissertation in 1984 when the expressive arts therapies were barely recognized and respected as they are now. It was titled: “Diving Deep and Surfacing: A Creative Process Paradigm Form Change”

I proposed that the creative process, the therapeutic process and the recovery process are all parallel to each other. Isomorphic in form, they promote changes of a healing and constructive nature. I reframed the creative process as a framework for psychotherapy and revealed the 5 steps that are necessary for true and deep change. I recognized it as the archetypal pattern of change.

The synthesis of the creative process as a paradigm for change emerged in the metaphorical image of a downward-upward movement pattern entitled: Diving Deep and Surfacing. For psychotherapeutic purposes, it deals with resistance, blockages and fixations. The steps are (1) Diving In (2) Moving

Through The Waters (3) Finding The Treasure (4) Surfacing With The Treasure and (5) Sharing The Treasure. I discovered that the essence of the creative process *is* demonstrated through work and play with the expressive arts therapies

In the Fall of 1986, in light of my research, education and experience, I founded the Expressive Arts Training Institute in Newport Beach, California. We train and certify hundreds of students in our National Certification Programs, and we are delighted to see our graduates working in the world within their chosen professions. This educational/healing approach is now recognized in schools and universities, churches and synagogues, treatment centers, hospitals, individual and group psychotherapy offices, and in the community.

We all owe a great debt to the original pioneers in this Expressive Arts field, people like Shaun McNiff, Paolo Knill, Steve and Ellen Levine, and Natalie Rogers. We also wish to show our appreciation to those pioneers who listened to their own personal call, learned their skills and talents in their own way and have been out there in their own communities for years working successfully.

There are many paths to take in the creative journey to well-ness. There are many kinds of risks taken and rewards received. The number of us who have stepped forward with the vision of the healing power of creativity and the imagination, the dynamics of the creative process and the expressive arts as a catalyst for change, will definitely increase as more and more people come to accept the intrinsic value of creative and artistic approaches to healing mind, body, heart and soul.

*A Course in Miracles* states: "To heal is to make happy." There is no doubt in my mind that the work of the Expressive Arts will serve to make people happy, healthy and holy in ways we have not yet imagined. "Healing with Art and Soul" is filled with tools, techniques and exercises that you can immediately apply in your own work.

This book serves nonprofessionals and professionals alike. Whether you are considering entering the expressive arts field, a student or professional already in the field, a caregiver, an educator, a psychotherapist, an artist, a creative explorer and/or a lover of healing stories, I encourage you to take the time to appreciate the approaches presented in this textbook. They will give you a greater understanding of the human needs for creative self-

expression and personal growth for achieving wholeness, joy and freedom as well as spark the creative process in your own life.

Jane Goldberg, Ph.D., L.M.F.T., R.E.A.T., C.E.T.  
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Director/Founder of The Expressive Arts Training Institute  
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# **I: SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE: PATHOGRAPHY TO CO-CREATION**

# THE ART OF HEALING AND THE SCIENCE OF ART

CAROL SHORE

Why are expressive arts programs being implemented in traditional healthcare settings such as hospitals? The short answer is—the arts work in ways that nothing else does, and they are cost-effective. Based on a model of wellness and human potential, of prevention and intervention, rather than a pathological model of diagnosis and cure, arts in medicine programs are “good medicine without harmful side effects.”

The broader perspective sees the arts in medicine as part of an international movement toward integrative and complementary medicine that recognizes the patient as an essential partner in their medical team. Treating the whole person—body, mind, emotions and spirit—benefits healing, which is not the same as “cure.”

What makes the very nature of art experiences inherently healing? This overview will outline a few basic principles of art as healing. A patient visit will document how the principles work in actual practice; however, names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Finally, an introduction into what I term the “science of art,” will present key scientific discoveries that validate the positive effects of creative processes on the physiology and chemistry of healing, bridging science and art.

Art as healing is not a new idea. Since ancient times, the arts have been used to alleviate human suffering and to restore a sense of harmony, wholeness, or unity. The World Health Organization still defines “disease” in unscientific, almost poetic terms, as “a rupture in life’s harmony”. Cross-culturally, art has a long historical record of supporting life and health; art was a vehicle for experiencing the self as whole: body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Painting, dreams, storytelling, music and dance expressed the needs of individuals, relationships, and the collective life, and gave form to the great quests, initiations, thresholds and transformations of life that transmitted a sense of meaning, purpose or direction.

These phenomena are not rational goals, but ongoing creative life processes. Modern culture, however, has separated the individual from the



creative tools by which he or she confronts the invisible needs, energies, forces and cycles of human life. The current focus in traditional medical institutions toward treating the whole person restores this basic human need for reuniting all aspects of the self for wholeness, haleness, healing. Art in medicine is integral to this revolutionary vision of what it means to heal.

The advent of arts in medicine programs in “temples of science” represents something of a paradigm shift. We live in a culture that overvalues reason, rationality, theoretical proofs and factual analysis over the soft evidence of direct experience, one’s felt-sense of “knowing,” or shifts in conscious awareness that transform or evolve one’s very perception of reality.

A further problem exists in that the paradoxical process is not effectively communicated in words. It is best understood by direct personal experience, and those opportunities for changing personal and collective perceptions take time to develop. The arts uniquely meet a person where they are—from the need for simple diversion at one extreme, to the personal encounter with one’s own living images at the other. In the short run, this diversity raises problems of stereotyping the work—seeing art in medicine as merely “arts and crafts” diversion on the one hand, or “art therapy” (viewed with guarded suspicion) on the other. These perceptions can be changed with experience and education.

## **The Intermodal Expressive Arts Model**

The practice of arts in medicine at a specific hospital will be used as an example for this discussion. The program is based on the model of intermodal expressive arts. The term “intermodal” refers to the enhancing interplay among the arts when they are used interchangeably (Rogers, 1993:4.) Art in medicine works with creative expression in the physical, practical sense of experience, rather than theory. It creates a safe and protected environment where a person can experiment with natural, necessary expression, from which he may discover meaning in life-experiences—even challenging, fearful or life-threatening ones.

The intermodal expressive arts facilitator is not a therapist or an art teacher, but one who models entry into creative process and supports the process for others. This central concept of the creative process will be expanded in the principles that follow. Art is a dependable container that can carry the questions that we do not dare to ask without support. The creative process, not the facilitator, carries questions that are unspoken, or

even beyond words. Realizing this removes the sense of burden for the artist-facilitator attending even the most burdensome images.

Art is inherently therapeutic and empowering: it does not need an intermediary. It is direct personal experience with constructive inner vision, with that which matters and gives life meaning. It gives practice in managing the powerful life energies we maneuver through us by making a container strong enough to bear with the process of change. The most therapeutic and healing effect of self-expression is that it restores this connection with self-trust, perseverance and meaning making. Attending or facilitating the person and the creative process in this way is akin to witnessing or perhaps midwifing “the image that heals,” to use psychoanalyst C. G. Jung’s powerful phrase. The process is inherently therapeutic, but not therapy.

The artist-facilitator sets up experiences for becoming attuned to one’s own internal state and external expression, opening the possibility for the natural gradient toward healing to express itself symbolically. The artist in residence supports the living image that arrives with acceptance, curiosity and interest, modeling attitudes that respect the image, in contrast to cultural attitudes that habitually judge, compare or minimize.

This interaction between artist-facilitator and artist-participant is a rare open-ended exploration. Paolo Knill, expressive arts theorist, points out that unlike diagnostic disciplines, the creative inquiry approaches “limitations, disorders, disturbances or conflict not as things to be identified, labeled, judged or eliminated, but transformed.” In its radical acceptance of what is, the expressive process invites an opening for what wants to come into being as healing potential.

The four key principles fundamental to the work of an Arts in Medicine program are:

1. **There is an artist in each of us.** We are all born with the power to create and transform our experience of life.
2. **You cannot fail.** The creative process is available to all in a safe and protected environment.
3. **Creative expression is about PROCESS rather than PRODUCT.** Engaging the creative process is the object of the work, and not the art product, performance, or outcome. The creative process is ongoing, with no final product.
4. **It is not interpretive:** Openness, freedom and safety are protected in an open studio environment, empowering each person’s discovery of his/her unique potential and his/her own answers. There is no judgment, comparison, or interpretation; you may want to share or not.

The creative process is the active agent in art's restorative power. The creative process is real experience of concrete, sensuous life energies given expressive form (Kazanis, 1998.) Process is an experience of integrity that is initially beyond words, of body-mind systems working together in a state of flow. One is in contact with a different experience of time and being that is in itself restorative, and fosters resilience. In process, there is a sense of timeless being, where time is an eternal now. All tyranny of time evaporates—boredom, hurry, lateness, past and future, do not exist. There is contact with sources of deep relaxation and exhilarating energies that nourish the spirit, refresh hope and foster positive, dynamic relationship with authentic potential.

In process, one reconnects with the power of play, spontaneity and intuition, restoring the courage to feel. Creative play is discipline that is not repressive, but joyous. It has the quality of “effortless effort.” Creative process expresses in images and wholes and is marked by a high tolerance for ambiguity: an attitude capable of embracing chaos and the unknown or feared thing, and letting go of goals to “play” out a paradox, while keeping in mind what is really important (Coulter, 1989.) When nothing makes sense, creating sense from playing with stimulating color or sensuous textures, can for example, express virtual emotion, or get “in touch” with intelligences beyond the rational alone.

Facilitating a person's shift into creative process benefits the mind/body/spirit in measurable ways that research is beginning to identify and validate. A model supporting resilience is an invaluable asset in a medical setting.

The term “creative process” is not synonymous with “creative product” or “art”. The art product is merely a carrier of images into the world. Philosopher M. C. Richards calls art the “excrement of creative process;” that is, art is what is left over after digesting the nourishing life energies bubbling up within. An example of creative process follows.

## **Return from the Void**

The chaplain's request for an arts in medicine visit had asked if we might do meditative movement in the patient's room, a form of gentle movement for healing in the T'ai Chi tradition. Mari was experienced in Yoga and Buddhist meditation, but in the aftermath of intense chemotherapy, she told the Rabbi, “My spirit left me.” The emptiness was physical, like a hole, and she reported losing her ability to focus in meditation, her usual way of centering herself. When I knocked at the door of her room, I was surprised to be greeted by cheeriness quite out of

keeping with the profound experience of loss of spirit. She was thin, almost frail, yet had a need to project this lighthearted voice as she now seemed to will the energy for moving meditation.

Afterward, I suggested painting in a circle, in the tradition of mandala sand paintings by Buddhist monks. She liked the idea. She announced, however, “I’m going to paint outside the circle. I’m painting ‘being outside my body’ and I’m leaving the center blank—the hole where my spirit left me.” She said this now in a voice characteristic of telling a difficult truth that accompanies becoming more present to oneself, more real.

The void-empty center of her painting contrasted the surrounding colors. It was barren, cold, overwhelming. “The circle is too big,” she said, reducing the size of it, when suddenly the brush accidentally slipped, making a crude orange cut into the pristine nothingness. “That’s the hole in my stomach,” she said, giving interpretation to the accidental. But it was clear that with one slip of the brush, her painting was taking her in directions not of her own choosing. For the first time she faltered, unsure how to proceed.

At that very moment, the arts in medicine musician knocked on the door, offering to play the harp for Mari. Sensitive to the process already underway, the musician was reluctant to interrupt, but Mari and I assured her that it was fortuitous timing. Live music might be just the inspiration to carry the moment past the place of not-knowing.

The music unfolded a sense of softness in the room—and in Mari as well—but starkly contrasted the painting’s utterly empty circular center. “It needs some pink clouds,” Mari sensed, and as she became absorbed with making pink to match an inner vision, no self-interpretation was superimposed on the work this time. Something more profound was taking form.

In a short time, she finished. I held the painting up at a distance so she could absorb it as a whole, and the full effect of it struck her for the first time. “It’s the moon!” she exclaimed, “Surrounded by trees, like the moon peeking through the trees in my backyard! I’ve painted my new focus! A way to center myself in nature wherever I am!” The collaboration between moving meditation, live music and living image had supported a breakthrough, past the fearful emptiness of the trauma that is cancer, to the possibility of returning to a sense of self.

Mari’s social worker was outside when I left the room, and as I listened to her concern that Mari always answered “no” when she was asked if there was anything she needed to talk about, I nodded that I understood. I had also run up against Mari’s wall of protection that

initially proclaimed “everything’s fine.” However, when words fail our truth, the arts can create an opening for authentic voice to speak in other ways.

For example, C. G. Jung points out that in a crisis of health, the natural healing function of the imagination spontaneously unfolds an image in support of the body-mind. “The image is healer,” Jung says. I witness this phenomenon again and again, when like Mari’s experience, The-Thing-Most-Feared flips to become the very thing that heals. Or, at the opposite extreme, when the prospects for a positive outcome are exhausted, a person’s creative wrestling with fate will often galvanize a transforming awareness that heals denial and inner conflict with acceptance of a difficult truth, however unwelcome.

Finally, studies show that a traumatic event such as a diagnosis of cancer has the effect of overloading the senses. As a protective measure in crisis, the senses shut down, refusing to take in more stimulation, so that like Mari, one experiences “not being in there;” in essence, being in exile from the sensing body (Meyer, 1997.) The arts “bring us back to our senses,” opening us again to feel, to express, to come alive—embodied and at one again. And research affirms the sooner, the better: unexpressed emotion is held in the body (Pert, 1999,) a stressor that can itself become symptomatic over time.

## Why the Science of Art?

Mari had been open to exploring movement, painting and music as a way out of the void. But in the prevailing mindset of the culture that overvalues the literal, rational, provable, and factual—this risky, messy, unpredictable creative stuff is suspect. Until the rational mind “buys in,” individuals habitually justify creative non-participation by parroting a mindless mantra that goes something like this: “I’m no artist, I’d just ruin it.” “I can’t draw a straight line with a ruler.” “I can’t carry a tune in a bucket.” “I’ve got two left feet.” In this passive model of creativity, the individual has license to abdicate self-creative powers and responsibilities, and to invest them in professionals of all kinds—“artists,” but also doctors, clergy, authorities and celebrities of all stripes. Creative expression involves doing, actively involving oneself in the process of becoming, of healing, of discovery. It feels risky.

In my experience, one way to beat the rational conventional mindset is to join it. I find that if I give a person’s reasoning mind a “good reason” to enjoy themselves in creative play, then they can often give themselves permission to risk opening up to creative possibility, as Mari did. It can

begin by simply asking, “What is your favorite color,” filling a brush with the color and inviting them to add one stroke to a community painting. And then Process often takes them over. Like eating peanuts, it’s hard to have just one.

But more importantly, affirming the “science of art” can cut the cultural tape loop, opening a new conversation with the individual. Science is now discovering the positive effects of creative expression on the physiology and chemistry of healing. For example, a person whose rational attitudes defend against non-rational, non-directive creative experiences will often take down the wall when given a good reason to participate. A facilitator can say, for example, “research shows that creativity creates endorphins, improving mood and creating a sense of well being.”

Given a morsel of scientific benefit, the rational mind easily gives permission for the child within each of us to come out and play. I have even observed this inner struggle acted out as a mind-body split. Just as the person is in the middle of an “I’m no artist” mantra, his hand will simultaneously reach for the brush on the table before him, and begin painting. It is as if the creative child inside, having been given safety and a good reason to assert, “but I want to do it,” will not take “no” for an answer this time.

It is then that the “art of healing” ceases to be the bailiwick of the person’s medical professionals, and becomes their own empowering process. Art that is personal, courageous and empowering restores a person to their internal sources of wisdom and intuition, to the knowing body’s felt-sense of truth, and the living images that bubble up from below, unfolding awareness of unrealized potential.

There is a growing body of evidence in scientific research—the “science of art,” so to speak—that is making it possible for people in a crisis of health to value their curative creative imagination. Science is beginning to unlock the physiology and chemistry underneath art’s ancient roots in healing, making art relevant to ordinary life. Two outstanding examples highlight the growing field of research.

Brain research identifies creative expression as a function of the brain’s right hemisphere. Functioning “in our right mind,” so to speak, is a balancing mindset for the left hemisphere brain functions of reason and logic. It is in right hemisphere functioning that we process the mystery, wonder and awe of life, experience our aliveness. In right-mind process, we are in touch with a timeless, spacious sense of being that researcher Dr. Herbert Benson termed the “Relaxation Response,” an altered state of awareness and physiologic change that can be aptly characterized as