



### **ATACO recognizes Shauna Perry, MA, LPC, ATR**

*Shauna has served on the ATACO board in multiple different roles since 2010. She currently serves as the President. Shauna works as an Art therapist at National Jewish Health in the pediatric department. She also offers milieu art therapy to oncology patients at Presbyterian St. Lukes and Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children through the Healing Arts Program.*

#### **How did you come to the field of art therapy?**

I think I sensed at an early age that art making is innate and a visual language. That art is not just an opportunity to be creative, but a process of self-expression. I was exposed to art in my childhood years through my public school education in Buffalo, NY. My elementary school did a fabulous job at integrating arts into the general curriculum. I have fond memories of shadow puppet plays, painting murals, and having 'sing-a-longs' with a folk singer in the school gymnasium. Art was a natural part of my childhood because of my public school education, also my paternal grandfather was an artist and he would sketch with my siblings and I during Sunday dinners. Later in life when I studied art therapy I realized my grandfather was using 'art as therapy' in his own way to cope with the aftermath of his service in World War II. Overall my art making endeavors in childhood were unstructured, rich with spontaneity, imagination, and exploration. Having these experiences has certainly inspired and informed my work as an artist and therapist. Adolescence was a tumultuous time in my life as it is for many, in addition to the painstaking teenage angst, I had a significant loss in my life. I was a quiet and introverted teenager and I discovered that art could be a cathartic release as well as a means to further develop my voice. My high school art teacher; Mrs. Astudillo was a positive and encouraging influence and she introduced me to the concept of visual journaling; very similar to response art. The art room became my refuge and I spent all of my free time there, I took every class that was offered and I even created an opportunity for myself to have an independent study during my senior year. I was interested in

exploring existential issues and I think my art teacher saw that. My relationship to art as a teen became more about self-expression, exploration, and healing. I continued with artistic pursuits into my young adulthood while I studied at Buffalo State college where I was exposed to many different art forms and media. I fell in love with 3 dimensional media at this time, which I had not had much previous exposure to. Hand building in ceramics, figure sculpture, and iron pouring were among my favorite courses. I enjoyed the community element and alchemical process involved in my sculpture classes; we were taught to be involved in every aspect of the process both destructive and creative; breaking down old iron radiators with sledge hammers into quarter size pieces, creating sculptures out of wax, building the wooden structures to create sand molds, preparing the furnace, as well as to participate in every aspect of the iron pour from beginning to end. Having the experience of pouring red hot molten iron into molds along with my fellow art peers is still up there in my book as one of the coolest experiences I have had! I was passionate about art in college yet I oscillated between art and social work as a major. In addition to my studies I worked in childcare centers, recreational programs, and group homes for adults with disabilities. I also had strong interests in politics, my community, and social justice issues. September 11, 2001 occurred on my first day of college and I was the one to inform my entire Humanities 101 class about this tragedy, as I had heard about it on NPR during my drive to campus. Since we were in NY the entire campus was evacuated shortly thereafter. I was a sophomore in college during the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and I became involved in the campus organization 'Student's for Peace'; I participated in several national protests as well as facilitated several discussions and lectures on campus aimed at educating others about the civilian casualties, sanctions, and human rights issues associated with this war. Long story short, what drew me to the field of art therapy is a culmination of all this; my artistic experiences in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. My empathy and compassion for others, as well as the cultural, societal, and world events that framed my paradigm at an impressionable time in my life.

### **What was the next step in your learning process with art therapy?**

After graduating from Buffalo State college, I moved to Denver, Colorado and worked at Laradon, an alternative school setting with dually diagnosed children/ adolescents. I was naturally drawn to using art with the children/ adolescents there, and I saw how art gives individuals purpose and the ability to connect. While working at Laradon I became curious about art therapy and I began to do some research; I took out relevant books and literature at the Denver Public Library. Among the most influential at the time was Pat Allen's; Art as a Way of Knowing. I decided to pursue a degree in art therapy; I was attracted to the experiential learning component and dual counseling degree of the art therapy program at Southwestern College, in Santa Fe, NM. I had visited New Mexico previously during a road trip with friends in college and I had fallen in love with the open space, the skies, and the colors of the landscape! Southwestern College required counseling/ art therapy for graduate students as a part of the curriculum and I am now a huge advocate for this as I am of the belief that a therapist can only take a client as far as they have gone themselves. What also intrigued me about Southwestern was that I had the opportunity to do my internship anywhere as long as I had a supervisor with the appropriate credentials.

### **Who is your favorite Artist?**

I have several favorite artists for different reasons among them are Carl Jung, Frida Kahlo, Oswaldo Guayasamin, Joni Mitchell, and local Denver artist Dylan Scholinski. Carl Jung's Red Book never ceases to

captivate, intrigue, and perplex me. The archetypal imagery, the autobiographical nature of his imagery, the holding and tension of the opposites, is such profound work. Frida Kahlo's use of self as her subject and authentic nature are among the qualities I admire about her art. Oswaldo Guayasamin, because his art is activism and his sculptures and paintings pay homage to human struggle. I was honored to visit his museum in Quito, Ecuador and see his work in person. Joni Mitchell because her art and music transcend time. Dylan Scholinski's paintings are so compelling to me; the use of value, greys, and layers and the narrative quality of the imagery evoke such a powerful and deep sense of emotion. Of course there are so many more artists I value, honor, and respect and many artistic works that I have not yet been acquainted with.

**You talk about the influence of your art teacher. Could you talk more about the importance of mentors?**

Mentors have an important role to both encourage and challenge us. I have been very fortunate to have had mentors throughout my experience in formal education in addition to my soul's path and learning.

I had wonderful mentors during my graduate level internship at Denver Children's Hospital. The entire Ponzio Creative Arts therapy team are all amazing artists, human beings, and therapists! During my time there I had the opportunity to experience group supervision through each of the creative arts therapy modalities; art, music, dance/ movement, and yoga. Tisha Adams was my immediate supervisor and I still benefit from her wisdom and guidance today! Katherine Reed, Tony Edelblute, Michele Turek, Michelle Fury, Erin Anderson were all influential during my early career and I hold each of them in high regard and recognize my experience with the Ponzio Team had huge impact on my development as an art therapist by encouraging and challenging me to further develop my authentic voice, to become independent, and have confidence in myself as an artist and art therapist.

**What role has ATACO had in your development as an art therapist?**

In 2010 I went to my first meeting after graduating from Southwestern College, and thus began my first board member position as secretary. Six years later I am now in a leadership position. Over the past six years ATACO has been a way for me to connect with the larger art therapy community in the state of Colorado. It has allowed further commitment and engagement with my passions. I have been able to develop, expand, and diversify many professional skill sets. I have had the experience and opportunity to present about my work as an art therapist, I have acquired many CEU's, and I had the ability to meet potential supervisors when I was working toward obtaining my LPC and ATR post-graduate hours. I also learned about Heritage Camps through ATACO, specifically HeArt Talks, where I was involved as an art therapist for several years. Being part of ATACO has helped me to form close personal and professional relationships with other art therapists.

**What do you see as the next step for ATACO?**

We are currently taking steps toward a possible state licensure per AATA's recommendation as they are leading a national effort toward the advancement of art therapy as a regulated mental health and human services profession. ATACO has submitted the Sunrise application to the Department of

Regulatory Agencies, if an art therapy license is not obtained the next step will be toward title protection in the state of Colorado.

I am an advocate for title protection, however I am also an advocate for art therapy being recognized as both a mental health and human service profession in the state of Colorado. We are always educating and advocating about how art therapy is a mental health profession and I do believe it should be held with the same esteem and regard as other mental health professions, however art therapists are not solely and only working in the context of psychotherapy and mental health in this state and we should not limit ourselves to this. The integrity of our profession should be valued and recognized in every capacity to which we are serving our community and I would like to see more paid art therapy job opportunities in Colorado, both in human service and mental health settings.

As an organization ATACO has also been focused and committed to developing a greater sense of community among board members and our general membership. We do so by offering open invites to all of our meetings, quarterly educational events, panel discussions, presentations, as well as open studios; where art making and community connection are the central focus.

It would also be wonderful to bridge the gap between new professionals and more seasoned professionals and have more opportunities to learn from each other.

#### **What makes art therapy unique as a profession?**

Art therapists have specialized training in understanding how art is the projection of the internal dialogue. We know about the use of materials, ethics of sharing art, and we respect the image being the third entity in the room. We are skilled at noticing the use of materials and being witness to the narrative quality of the art. I think art therapists are also able to sit with a lot; including conflict, and intense catharsis, which is not always verbal. During my career thus far I have had the opportunity to practice art therapy methods with diverse populations in multiple different settings, I wasn't always hired as an "art therapist" per se, but I have found creative ways to integrate the art process into my work to meet the unique needs of the clients in culturally appropriate contexts.

#### **Anything else you would like to share about art therapy?**

I have so much respect for all those who have practiced, are practicing, and are currently committed to the field of art therapy. I want to thank you all for the invaluable and soulful work you do!

#### **Interviewed by Amy Jones, MA, LPC, Public Relations Chair**

*The ATACO Art Therapist Spotlight aims to recognize the creative and professional work of our ATACO members. If you would like to nominate an art therapist to the Spotlight or highlight your own contributions, please email nominations to email address: [Arttherapycolorado@gmail.com](mailto:Arttherapycolorado@gmail.com).*