

# **ATACO Recognizes Lola Clark Master's Candidate in Art Therapy and Counseling**

*It was an honor for me to interview ATACO's very own Student Liaison; Lola Clark! Lola is a passionate and soulful person and artist. We are sad to let her go from the ATACO board but we are also excited for her and the endeavors she will pursue as well as the wonderful contributions she will make to the field of Art Therapy.*

*– Shauna Perry, ATACO President*

*You are currently in your final year of Naropa's Art Therapy program. Can you tell us more about your Journey to Naropa and what drew you to the field of art therapy?*

Creative expression is a deep part of my identity and it has been key in my own healing process. I can trace my artist identity back to childhood and drawing with my mom. Making art has always been a resource for me; when things were problematic in my life art helped to regulate the emotion I felt. So when things got tough, I would 'art' about it. Not only was it an outlet that gave me some distance from whatever I was dealing with, it also served as an anchor that reminded me of who I am at the core – beneath my circumstances. When I found out about the field of art therapy the idea that I could use art to help facilitate this process in others I was intrigued.

As for my journey to Naropa, I was working for a small healing center in Louisiana and a girl came in looking for a job as a massage therapist. She had just been accepted to Naropa. She brought me the course handbook and I was so captivated by the program and the curriculum that I think I must have read every word in the catalog. That's how Naropa found me. I knew when I saw the course descriptions that I would apply to the art therapy program eventually. I had to get my Bachelor's degree first, and as an undergraduate, I took Michael Franklin's graduate course; *Intro to Art Therapy for non-majors*. During the class there was a moment when I was facing a huge piece of butcher paper on the wall and had an oil stick in each hand and I thought; "Hey, yes, I want to do this". In Michael's class, I realized that as an art therapist, I could support others' self-revelation through art processes and still maintain a practice of my own.

**What do you think is the power of Art therapy?**

I find myself on the “art as therapy” side of the street when it comes to my practice. I think the natural world in which we live is endlessly creative and therefore we, as part of that world, have a generative instinct that longs to be met. Making art is one way we achieve that goal by using materials to bring form to the formless. It’s a way to align ourselves with cosmic forces. That is a powerful act, the act of creation; and it requires the synchronization of body, imagination, and heart to create something that wasn’t there before. No matter where we are on the developmental spectrum, I think it’s probably common to feel a sense of achievement when we produce an artwork, whether it’s a finger painting or our magnum opus. Through art making we learn we can trust ourselves to make choices and work through our mistakes. We see things we didn’t see before. We know ourselves better. Metaphor, materials, and processes all have their role, too. As a witness and guide, the art therapist is able to reflect back to the client a sense of their own uniqueness and worthiness. In my work with traumatized children, I find that many clients lack a sense of their own basic goodness and I try to emphasize that aspect in our work together.

**What or who has been most influential in your path toward an art therapy career?**

My mother was the first person to put art materials in my hand and kindle the creative fire in my heart. I can remember being four or five and sitting at the kitchen table with her doing paint by number watercolors on rainy days. But professionally, the most influential person in my development as an art therapist is my teacher and mentor Michael Franklin. I see him as holding a distinct lineage in our field and his enthusiasm for art therapy and images is contagious. Michael’s teaching style is this unique blend of integrity and contemplative precision. I get the sense that he is always holding the bar a little bit higher than I think I can reach, which inspires me to always do my best work.

**Tell us about your internship experience at Mount Saint Vincent.**

It is one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have ever had. We serve children ages 5 – 12, many who have severe trauma and neglect histories, as well as related mental health issues. So, it’s intense.

Mount Saint Vincent has a trauma informed orientation that is based in Bruce Perry’s Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics. Essentially, trauma and neglect experiences disrupt the sequential organization of the brain. The more developmental injuries a child is exposed to, the greater the disorganization of the brain. This disorganization often manifests in thoughts and behaviors that get diagnosed as PTSD, anxiety, depression, mood disorders, and oppositional disorders. Learning this model has led me to wonder about mental health diagnoses in general, but particularly in adults. Are all mental health issues

trauma based? A majority? As a beginning mental health professional, I think it is important for me to consider this fundamental question: Assuming some mental health diagnoses are trauma related, how do I differentiate between trauma based symptomology and diagnoses that stem from other sources, such as genetic predispositions, so that I am treating what I claim to be treating? My internship has also offered opportunities for further self-discovery; I didn't realize going in to internship that my unresolved issues from childhood would show up and demand attention. It has helped me to understand the importance of supervision and luckily, I have had an excellent art therapy supervisor. I also attend supervision with an interdisciplinary team of expressive therapists. But, being in the treatment setting is difficult at times. There is a certain sense of helplessness I feel sometimes when a kiddo loses funding and leaves treatment abruptly, or just knowing a child is going home to a less than ideal environment. I want to help, and I know I only have one hour with them a week. So self-care, that elusive thing I've heard about throughout my training, becomes more and more necessary.

### **What do you do for self-care?**

Actually, I like to clean. It soothes me to bring order to things. I also do self-care exercises during the day that are more accessible in the moment. For example, when I am commuting to my internship site from Boulder to Denver there is a certain point on the highway as I am getting close to Denver where I begin to 'armor up' and put on my protective gear for the day. I work with internal imagery and imagine this armor and its protective qualities. There is also a place on my drive home where I take it off and let go of the weight of the day. Making art is on this list too, but sometimes it's the first thing to go when I'm under the stress of multiple commitments. During those times, it's harder to maintain my practice. I'm still working on that.

### **What advice do you have for prospective art therapy students?**

Pay attention. Ask questions. As Michael would say, "be a good observer" of yourself, your clients, and the images created. Be confident in yourself and what you've learned. Find where you're contracted and relax. Have your own excellent therapist. Look at as much art as you can in supervision. Make as much art as you can. Take good care of yourself.

### **Who is your favorite artist?**

Contemporary performance artist Marina Abramovich is my favorite artist of all time. I love Klimt's gilded geometric figures and Yayoi Kusama's dot installations. In a cosmic sense: the phenomenal world. I also find the art of

prehistory especially compelling. The kids I work with are pretty amazing, too. Do you have a favorite art piece that you have done? Are you working on anything now that you are really excited about?

I'm working on a process painting right now for my final studio class. My work has generally been either representational or 3D in the past, so this piece is a departure for me. In the last week though, a recurring theme in my work has unintentionally surfaced in the image – the evolution of the absolute into form. I'm pretty obsessed with the mechanics of that, so I really shouldn't be surprised this happened. But I am.

**How important is it to collaborate with your art therapy colleagues as a graduate student? How have your professional collaborations benefited your experience?**

Very. Particularly in regard to supervision. I have found all of my supervisory experiences to be extremely valuable, whether I'm in class, with my supervisor at internship, or the ATACO supervision groups we had recently. Especially as an art therapist in training, hearing multiple perspectives helps me refine my professional identity as I consider feedback and alternative insights about client art work.

I would also recommend becoming a part of ATACO for art therapy students and new professionals. As a board member I have felt a greater connection to the field than I did before. Being involved with ATACO has really provided a scaffolding for me as my identity shifts from student to professional. It's been beneficial and fun to be in contact with practicing art therapists and feel the sense of community that ATACO provides.

**Tell us about your next steps after graduation?**

Well, I'll finish up the school year with my clients at Mount Saint Vincent. At some point, I'll go on meditation retreat. I'm currently looking at jobs and clarifying the type of work I'd like to do. I love working with children and would really like to develop my skills with this population. At the same time, I know I'm just starting out in my career, so I'm also staying open to other possibilities.

Interviewed by Shauna Perry, MA, LPC, ATR, ATACO President

*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).*