



Art Therapist Spotlight Interview: Amy K. Leiter

Amy K. Leiter, LPC, ATR-BC is a practicing art therapist in Colorado. She is a Founding Partner of Violet hive Art Collections, Art Therapist, and Art as Healing Facilitator. Ms. Leiter currently works with women in transition and through that work a lot of spiritual emergencies surface. The work builds around ideas of core values and fulfillment. Through founding Violet Hive Art Collections, Ms. Leiter was able to work with different organizations including schools building connections with the community she sought for. Below is an interview with Ms. Leiter on her personal commitment to art therapy.

Interview

What originally drew you to the field of art therapy?

“I did graphic design for a decade. Through that work, I found something was missing. I originally wanted more connection with people and I hoped that whatever work I was doing would be personally fulfilling and would have an impact on the community.” Ms. Leiter was drawn to the field of art therapy from looking at what was missing from the experience she was moving through in her career. She began to take a look at what her core values were. This practice prompted her to recognize that connecting with people was the first step she was looking for. As she looked at different careers and applied different abilities there was a time she went into therapy. Her therapist at the time asked Amy if she knew about art therapy as it seemed to sync up with her core beliefs. Ms. Leiter discovered “when big levels of healing or growth happen, everything changes.”

Can you talk about the power of art therapy in your life and your work?

“I always knew that art was helpful for me, it’s always been a part of my life even from when I was little. As I discovered art therapy, I realized I was doing a lot of my own growth and healing. The power of art therapy is really surrounding.” Ms. Leiter specified that someone who is trained in art therapy who can guide a person through an art process and be able to reflect back what they are seeing through the narrative of art can be powerful. Within art therapy you have a relationship to help process.

“Through the artwork with a lot of my clients, you can see a tangible result of the growth and the healing process the client is going through.” Ms. Leiter described a bit of her own process working with clients, “I start with using the bridge drawing and the DDS in the first couple session then graduate to creating goals from those art pieces then work towards long-term projects.” With every client she works with she takes the time to go back and review the artwork after approximately six sessions. By doing this “they [clients] are able to tangibly see how their art has changed to show more expression. They are able to see the progress that is happening in relation to how they are feeling.” Ms. Leiter describes art as a physical, tangible way of seeing change. People’s defenses are so different in talk therapy in comparison to art therapy. “There is a level of subconscious coming up to communicate with you in the artwork. When it comes out in the art it is easier to accept and acknowledge.”

Do you see transpersonal elements manifest in your professional work?

Ms. Leiter discussed in the journey to reach the career field of art therapy, Ms. Leiter discovered that spirituality was something she needed for her own healing process. “Generally, talk therapy wasn’t really addressing everything,” she needed spiritual elements to become a part of her own healing. Through her own process of growth, the spiritual realm was an essential component and that really helped her in her own healing work. This inspired her to apply the elements to her professional work.

Ms. Leiter described that transpersonal elements naturally became a part of her client-centered and strengths-based lens. The spiritual inclusion expanded her practice, providing more room to encompass further healing.

Can you tell us about the journey to Naropa?

Multiple scenarios surfaced for Ms. Leiter as she found her way to Naropa University in Boulder, CO. She had her own home and settled herself in Colorado. Ms. Leiter felt it was not the best for her to move out of state to pursue art therapy education when she came across Naropa, the only art therapy school in Colorado. She knew she “was not feeling fulfilled in therapy,” especially just talk therapy. As she found Naropa she noticed more connection with the spiritual realm and was called to the transpersonal component at Naropa. The university incorporated mindfulness and meditation practices that did not fully become a part of Ms. Leiter’s practice until later, “Mindfulness and meditation weren’t much of my own process as it has been post-grad.”

As she walked through her new path, Ms. Leiter shared, “I think a lot of my life, I suppressed my intuition...I was kind of the one who always went against what everyone was doing, unintentionally, but it prepared me to do the work I am now doing.” Ms. Leiter believes that self-judgment is a message from the body or a higher self that says changes need to be made. Through the work, she helps clients work with their intuition and encouraging them to trust themselves through “knowing that you have more of the answers than you think you do.”

From your point of view, what is the most important thing to keep in mind when working as an art therapist?

“When I was at Naropa, one of the things that always stuck to me, being able to sit and hold space as a human being in the room with someone. What separates us from other types of therapists is that we are willing to be creative and flexible.” Ms. Leiter expressed that it does not matter the setting, what matters is “how we present the materials, hold the space, and the rest is kind of trusting the process.” One of the most important pieces to keep in mind could be just small reminders \ of the kind of therapist she strives to be. Ms. Leiter shared, “being able to show up, be creative, and flexible is what holds and creates the space for healing to happen.”

What are some important self-care practices you recommend or practice?

“For me, probably 85% of the artwork, either us as practitioners, interns, or clients...most of the work being done is process art.” In relation to self-care, there is an understanding that a person does not have to stay in a long term process. “Art and mindfulness can work to your advantage. You can show up, have an art experience with minimal elements.” Ms. Leiter provided an example of how a lot of clients can do simple

processes or more complex processes through materials like weaving, embroidery, or watercolor. “The idea that you don’t need a lot to have self-care” because the art can be used simultaneously as a healing and self-care practice.

Are you working on anything now that you’re really excited about?

“Yes, we’re expanding! We’re developing an art as therapy team, so we will be working with artists and therapists.” Through the process Ms. Leiter is working with interns from various universities, working in the community, and with programming at the studio. She is currently in the process of looking for a new studio space for a team of artists and art therapists to come together to provide movement and different modalities.

Ms. Leiter and her business partner are moving into Nurture which is a wellness collective in Fall where fifty (50) different wellness practitioners work in the same space. As part of the new expansion, Ms. Leiter and her business partner are also bringing in interns to start a reduced fee program, “The internship program helps out the community by spreading the message of art therapy to bring the community together, push the message of art for healing.”

How important is it to collaborate with your art therapy colleagues?

For Ms. Leiter’s work and mission statement of building connection she feels it is really important to collaborate with art therapy colleagues. Ms. Leiter believes that collaborations open practitioners up to learning from each other. “I want to always be learning, being open to learning even from my interns. Learning should always be seen as a two way street.” It opens up opportunities for the community to connect in different ways. Ms. Leiter shared that there are times when she will be working a case, trying to figure something out and she will obtain new ideas from watching and collaborating with colleagues who are in their own process of working. Learning and collaborating is a core value Ms. Leiter keeps alive by starting an art as healing team as a way to collaborate with other practitioners.

How have your professional collaborations benefited your career?

“A lot of us have had different life experiences, post grad experiences, and education experiences,” Ms. Leiter responded. “There is an area someone is passionate about and brings it to the clients...which brings in new ideas and creativity to avoid burnout [and] to avoid feeling a lack of fulfillment.” As part of her line of work, she does a lot of team

building groups in activities as she recognizes the importance of connecting with others to build support. Ms. Leiter discussed how therapists in private practice tend to feel isolated. “When you leave your cohort after school, you may be the only art therapist working at a facility or go into private practice” which can stifle connection with other art therapists. “Connecting with the community and other therapists can provide a space of exploration, healing and support to the art therapy community and surrounding areas.” Ms. Leiter makes it a priority in her work to share the importance of connection as well as the awareness of how connection is impacting people.

How would you like to see the field of art therapy evolve in the coming years?

“The biggest thing for me is that there needs to be a push for licensure in every state. The field is changing and sometimes it takes you away from being able to work as a practitioner for art therapy because you are having to serve two different things at once.” Ms. Leiter described how currently art therapists in Denver are becoming more eclectic by adding different aspects to their work and practices as a way to legitimize the work. For example, “connecting to the body is becoming more prevalent.” Ms. Leiter further discussed how art therapists would be able to work with more ease having art therapy licensure. “It can change legislation of how insurance panels work in terms of recognizing art therapy and legitimizing it more.”

Is there anything you would like to see happen to support and expand the Colorado art therapy community?

In the art therapy community, Ms. Leiter would like to see more of a pulling together with the community and being able to meet the community in existing events. Ms. Leiter hopes to have more people understand how accessible art is. “There are so many people in the community who focus on not being good at art when there are so many different ways to look at different crafting and art practices that have been used in the past that can be used for healing.” Ms. Leiter discussed how using sewing, embroidery, water coloring on fabric are some examples to break traditional ideas and standards of who can make art. Ms. Leiter hopes to send that message that “even though it is therapy, you can be having fun and gaining new experiences that maybe, creative wise, have been cut off since middle school.” Ms. Leiter would like to see the art therapy community help change the traditional idea of who can make art especially since it can be beneficial. “There’s a lot of confidence and creativity that is being awakened,” through the art process. “Using the right side of your brain can help [a person] make new decisions

[because] you are open to more things than you thought possible” when you are a part of the art world.

Is there anything additional you would like to share about yourself or your experience as an art therapist?

Ms. Leiter shared that she strongly believes there has not been a time where she has been happier in her work. “Really being able to connect with a classroom,” provides her a daily validation that leaving her old career was worth it. “Even the idea of my adult clients, getting to witness, honor and be part of someone’s story, process and healing. There is nothing else that makes me happier.” Ms. Leiter stated she has been able to learn to trust herself again and take what is coming up for her to use it to guide her life. She enjoys being able to help others do the same, which brings her validation in the journey she is taking and fulfilling joy.

Meet The ATACO Board



Linda Larkin, Jacenta Irlanda, Rachel Duncan, Leanne Stull, and Christina Anderson
(pictured from right to left)

Chelsea Richards and Lara Fairbanks (not pictured).

The Art Therapy Association of Colorado has devoted its time to connect with the community to educate and inform about the wonderful healing world of art therapy. Community helps keep art therapy alive by allowing art therapists to connect together.

So let's meet the team! (In order of picture above)

ATACO's Interim President: Linda Larkin

Linda is an art therapist at the Alumia Institute an adult day center in Englewood. She also has a private practice for adults called Artful Growth LLC. Linda served as Membership Chair, Vice President and President on the Colorado Art Therapy Association as a part of the Board of Directors for the 2013 - 2015 term.

ATACO'S PR-COMMUNITY CHAIR: Jacenta Irlanda

Jacenta currently works with adult on probation at Specialized Offender Services utilizing cognitive behavioral, humanistic, and art therapy. Utilizing superhero

psychology and art therapy has been the focused passion leading to her speaking at conventions and giving talks for podcasts on how to use superheroes and comics in therapeutic practice.

ATACO'S TREASURER: Rachel Duncan

Rachel has a part-time private practice in Denver, runs therapeutic art groups, and consults for non-profits. Her interests include social justice, adults in life transitions, career counseling, caregivers, and mindfulness.

ATACO's AATA Chapter Delegate: Leanne Stull

Leanne believes art has the natural ability to connect us with our inherent wisdom and wholeness. She uses strength-based and person-centered models to support individuals in strengthening identity, managing emotions, and healing from past challenges.

ATACO's Membership Chair: Christine Anderson.

Christine is a strong believer that what makes a good art therapist is also what makes a good mental health practitioner; creativity, clinical skills, and a thirst for knowledge in an ever growing field of mental health.

ATACO's Student Liaison: Lara Fairbanks

Lara hopes to inspire individuals to use the transformative power of art to go on an inward journey to bring forth hidden aspects of themselves.

ATACO's Student Liaison: Chelsea Richards

She has been teaching art in Colorado for the past 5 years and specializes in working with at-risk and underserved demographics, such as jail inmates, seniors, recovering youth, and individuals with disabilities.

See full biographies on the ATACO website.

HeART TALKS



One of the HeART Talks tapestries children are invited to sit around for discussion and sharing.

Heritage Camps for Adoptive Families in Colorado kicked off this summer with the first camp being the African Caribbean Camp June 6-9th and will continue until September 2019. The mission statement on their website reads:

“Since 1992, Heritage Camps for Adoptive Families has been supporting the healthy development of families formed by adoption. We promote the successful transition of adopted children into healthy, confident, well-grounded adults who are proud of themselves, their families, and their heritage. Whether your child was adopted internationally or domestically, HCAF helps adoptive families become part of a larger community “just like themselves,” with shared experiences, challenges, and opportunities.”

Every summer these camps provide a space for adoptive families to come together. Children are able to see other families that look like their own in addition to getting a chance to participate in activities focused on their cultural backgrounds. Parents have

the same opportunity of learning about their child's culture, learn new skills in caring for and teaching their children. In a lot of ways this camp not only celebrates inter-racial families, but provides support for them.

As part of the Heritage Camps, art therapists and art therapy students volunteer their time over the summer to provide an art as therapy group called HeART Talks for grades preschool to fifth grade for each camp. In addition, HeART Talks hold a group for parents as well called Parent Talks and a new group for families. Each group opens a space for participants of the camp to discuss adoption and feelings around adoption. Groups are given the opportunity to process the topic of adoption and emotions through an art as therapy directive. Each directive is tailored to each grade level that the art therapy volunteers help assist with as needed.

This year HeART Talks has a new director Gracie Bueno who graduated from Naropa University in 2017 for Transpersonal Art Therapy. Email Gracie at gracieb.hearttalks@gmail.com if you are interested in volunteering for summer of 2020.



HeART Talks Coping Books set up. Collage, "fluff", colorful paper books, markers, scissors, and glue.

"The Art Therapist's Mirror" June Art Show



Displayed at the Lakewood Public Library Saturday, June 1st- Saturday June 27th

“This exhibit features the work of art therapists and offers a look at how the creative process allows the artist and viewer to ask questions, explore possibilities and create meaning.” -ATACO

At the beginning of June, many art therapists came together to display a wonderful array of artwork that reflects the artistic expression of creative processing through a mirror lens. The artwork is displayed among two walls of the library between organized shelves of books as well as an inviting glass class next to the entryway to welcome visitors into the world of art therapy. The collective gathering of art produced an eclectic vision of artistic styles, mediums, textures, and colors to captivate curiosity in the mirrored process of the art therapist's experience.

After hanging the art a small celebration took place for the opening reception of the art show on June 2nd with art therapists gathering together to honor the display of art on the walls of the Lakewood Library. The importance of having art shows for art therapists is to encourage the need to keep personal creativity alive as a part of self-care practices. To elucidate this point, a few artists were asked to share brief synopsis of the art they chose to exhibit.

The artists spoken word:

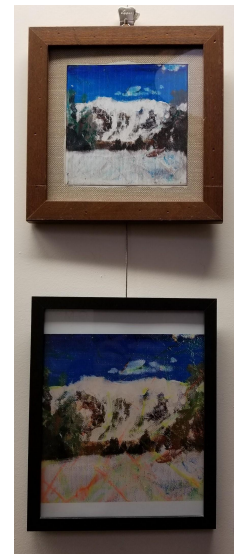


"Nature Shadows 1 & 2" by Rachel Duncan

These paintings are from the past Mother's Day, when my one request was to have a day alone at home to make art. Based on a friend's idea, I sat under the shade of a tree and based the paint markings on the shadows cast by sunlight through the leaves. I stepped into an intuitive, responsive, flow state for hours and I produced many images, these are just two of them. I don't make a lot of art these days since I take care of two young children and my mother. But these shadow paintings remind me how easy it can be to simply make marks and reconnect with my artist self.

"I'm here, in Colorado" by Tricia Zeyher

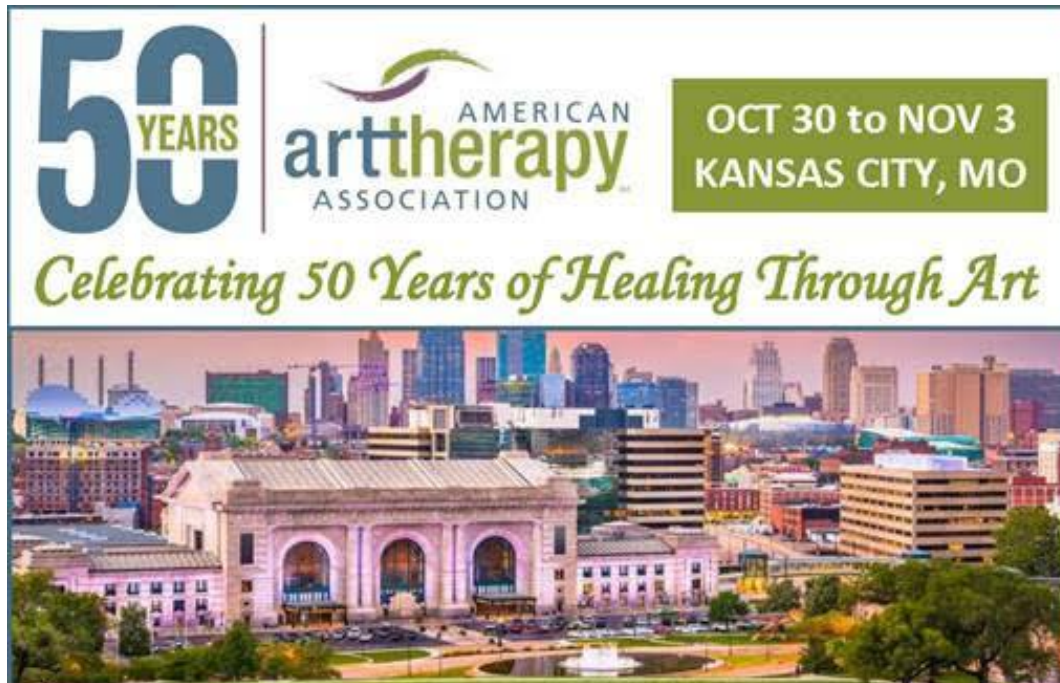
My art piece, "I am here, in Colorado," along with being exhibited in the The Art Therapist's Mirror, was also exhibited at the AATA 48th conference, and has had media added to it since the conference. I added a print layer of black light lines (like ski trails), that were started on another piece. Combining my art through printing against another piece, helps me to connect not only my art collection, but also my connections to different aspects of my life both professionally and personally. This piece may be viewed in sunlight, or under blacklight. There is always more than one perspective to life, so that is also what I try to do for my art, give it multiple ways to be viewed and exhibited.



"Curious Observers" by Leanne Stull



This weaving is inspired by the Colorado landscape, specifically the magic of the Quaking Aspen tree. It grows in previously burned areas and often in poor soil; yet the Aspen's roots are interconnected with the other aspens in the grove, acting as the largest living organism on earth. The Quaking Aspen is a lively tree, earning its name from the pleasant sound of the leaves quaking in the breeze. I find peace in its whisper, warmth in its golden leaves, and joy in its abundance. However, I am most intrigued by the Aspen's "eyes," which seem to hold the wisdom of the sacredness of life. Walking among the Aspens, its eyes are a reminder for me to slow down, be present, and maintain gratitude. The act of weaving this piece allowed for the themes of connection, presence, and gratefulness to transpire.



The Art Therapy Conference

First things first, if you want to attend and have not registered already make sure you register ASAP. Early bird ticket prices ended by 14 June 2019, but you can still attend by registering on the website www.arttherapyconference.com It is a chance to learn from nationally recognized speakers like Dr. Essam Daod and Dr. Angela Roman Clack, have access to education sessions, receive continued education credit, and network with leading art therapists.

Second, if you are planning on attending the AATA 50th Anniversary Conference, ATACO's student Liaisons, Lara Fairbanks and Chelsea Richards have created a conference attendee list on Google Excel for people wanting to connect, carpool, and get information on room share options. Be sure to email Chelsea Richard to get on that list!

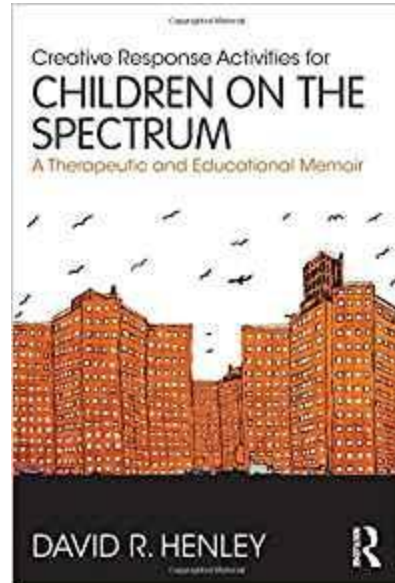
Lastly, book your flight, pick your hotel, block out your work calendar, get some business cards, and check out the preliminary programming on the website. Celebrations here we come!

Highlighted Art Therapy Resources

Two art therapy related resources for anyone who is looking to expand their portfolio of information or are simply interested. These resources provide a new look into the field.



Michael Franklin, Ph.D., ATR-BC
Podcast: *Art As Contemplative Practice*
Episode: Making It with Terry Wollman
Available on Apple Podcasts and Enter
Talk Media



David R. Henley, author, professor, and
child art therapist.
Book: *Creative Response Activities for
Children on the Spectrum*
Available on Amazon

Art Therapy Intervention Mention

Title: Reminder Tokens

Materials: airdry clay, simple clay tools, (optional materials) thread or ribbon, beads, and paint

Objective: Create a token to carry around with you to hold in your hand when you need it.

This art intervention can be used for clients struggling with anxiety or for clients who simply need a small reminder of encouragement/empowerment. Using airdry or bake clay suggest the client create a small token with a symbol on it of his/her/they choice. The symbol can be a strength symbol or one that represents something the client wants to remember such as gentleness, hope, resiliency, etc. The client can also imprint on the stone with 3D objects or fingerprints.

On the back the person may choose to write the word the symbol means. Suggest that this token be something that can fit in a person's pocket.

If clients are apprehensive about making their own symbol or there is not enough time the art therapist may choose to use third hand intervention to create multiple stones with various symbols for clients to choose from. The client can choose to paint, select beads with colors of special meanings (ie pink for hope, red for strength, etc).



Clay Tokens, 2019, Jacenta Irlanda