Editorial

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The pending graduation of the ten pioneering South African art therapists from the Department of Visual Art (DOVA) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is a case for celebration and a long-nurtured dream for many involved in this training. I am not an art therapist and am not familiar enough with the field of practice and literature. I consider myself an artist, art activist, and educator. As the professor in charge of postgraduate studies in our department, as well as a fierce advocate for enhancing arts education for social impact, I found myself holding and facilitating the first visual art therapy training in South Africa, which is also, as I understand, a first for the continent.

Many of our first cohort of registered students have been working with the healing power of the arts for many years. They received their community counselling training at Lefika La Phodiso, the "rock of holding" for the art therapeutic space, founded by my sister, Hayley Berman, almost three decades ago. Some of these mature students have been waiting a long time for this professional qualification to be offered in South Africa. Accompanied by the need for this HPCSA-registered qualification to practice as art psychotherapists, there is an imperative to produce and share ground-breaking South African-centred research. Therefore, with great pride and a good measure of trepidation, I write this editorial introduction for the first *South African Journal of Arts Therapies*.

The art therapy team, comprising lecturers and students at UJ, unanimously and unreservedly supported the establishment of a local journal to be a platform for South African voices in the field. In partnership with SANATA we see this journal as serving all the arts therapies, including drama, dance, movement, music, and art, with rotating guest editors for differently themed issues.

In 2004, 20 years ago, Jordan Potash presented a conference paper in California on 'Rekindling the multicultural history of the American Art Therapy

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Association (AATA) and its need for inclusivity and diversity. Potash (2005, p. 184, 188) stated:

> "As art therapists, we see it as our responsibility to honour each individual story, help integrate it where it is disconnected, and guide our clients to illustrate these narratives in a manner that allows for healing. Personal or communal stories offer a glance into belief structures, values, and lessons […] What we need now is not only a discussion of history and 'facts', but also an examination of how we all fit into this diverse history, how we can preserve it, and how we can use it as a foundation from which to move into the future."

Just as Potash called for inclusivity and diversity in the field two decades ago, we stand on a similar threshold of research and practice. While stories need to be told, we are obliged to tell them through the lens of decoloniality and social justice 30 years after the first democratic elections in South Africa. Approaching a social justice pedagogy in the Global South calls for a much deeper engagement than changing language and recognising inequality and privilege. It is also about offering a new curriculum without the baggage and burden of colonial histories of power and inequality; it offers a responsibility to strengthen a critical consciousness among students. We take on the challenge: How can we make teaching a space for examining a deeper commitment to issues of social justice?

The excellent and relevant scholarship is emerging on intersectionality as a frame to explore identity and difference that moves beyond multiculturalism. According to Savneet Talwar, art therapists should envision identity and difference from an intersectional framework that regards race, class, gender, and sexuality as intersecting principles that shape everyday life (Talwar, 2010). Talwar (2019, p. 3) described herself as leading "a hyphenated life in the United States as an Indian-American Sikh" professor in a predominantly white American University . She insists on the need to understand intersectionality that creates possibilities for exploring the complexities of identity and building alliances for social change. The first step, whether doing research or preparing to be a therapist, requires "deconstructing our own positions of power and privilege [that lie] at the heart of a social model" (Talwar, 2015).

Three months after the introduction of the first Honours in Art Therapy class, South Africa experienced its first lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We pivoted online overnight and did not miss a class. The art

therapy programme is housed and influenced by the social justice mission and active community engagement in the Department of Visual Art. Visual art plays a vital role in challenging and shaping dialogue to imagine possibilities. Artmaking explores the complex intersections of identity formation in social structures of life experience. As Talwar acknowledges, in focusing on the relationships between the personal and political, the private and public, a critical art-based inquiry becomes a meaningful way for art therapists to inquire into the contradictions of lived experience.

An art therapy programme objective is embedding relevant pedagogical strategies that provide opportune moments to find and build autonomous and authentic voices, as well as critique established positions. Some of these values, along with disruptive and innovative opportunities, are reflected by the extraordinary teachers in the programme who are able to manage students experiencing significant anxiety and fear by modelling ways to embrace uncertainty and discomfort. As reflected in this journal, the voices of the first ten students are exemplars of this practice.

These voices provide an important moment for understanding how disruption and uncertainty can be powerful pedagogical tools for social action. In particular, this collection of research, emerging from the pandemic, proposes that art and art therapy can be applied as a vehicle for solidarity and collective action that leads to empowerment and agency in addressing the challenges faced in times of trauma. I am convinced that this new training has added a powerful dimension to social action research through robust community processes that advocate meaningful ways for social change.

What follows are ten contributions to South African art therapy scholarship grounded in lived intersectional encounters that stretched the boundaries of research and practice. These individuals carry a great weight of responsibility as the trailblazers of innovative research and practices that respond to a country in trauma.

Contributors

Leigh-Anne Alexander explores the content of a social dreaming matrix (SDM) and artmaking workshop among art therapy trainees in South Africa. She argues that including SDM and other analytic group-based practices is a worthwhile method of coming to know and actively engaging in the critical

discourse around the lived experiences of students, practitioners, and citizens of South Africa.

Sandra Greeff identifies that art therapy in South Africa has focused on counselling and grief work. She offers a unique art therapy bereavement protocol that could be used as an alternative to traditional grief and bereavement counselling and through the action of clay-work with an extension to paper collage to 'piece together' memories integrating the loss of a loved one into a life without them.

Saxon Kinnear's research provides insight into how training art therapists foster resilience through artmaking which equips them to offer similar opportunities for their clients. In addition, she offers evidence as to *how* and *why* art therapy offers an accessible, efficient, and alternative form of healing for South Africans.

Gugulethu Manana writes about using art therapy to facilitate disclosure among those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in South Africa. The disclosure of CSA is a difficult and complex process, and her article argues that art therapy with cultural sensitivity can be a powerful tool to help CSA survivors find their voice to disclose and initiate the healing process.

Kamal Naran argues that there is value in the false self's protective function as a defence mechanism for the queer population and highlights the importance of making visible the false self through art therapy before exploring the multiple layers of queer identity.

Alisa Ray investigates how inherited perpetrator trauma may result from a family legacy of past familial collaboration with the South African apartheid regime. This historical narrative emerges from a familial relationship with the artist Irmin Henkel, the author's step-grandfather. Henkel was considered the official portrait painter of the 1960s apartheid regime Cabinet. Ray uses a heuristic self-study and arts-based approach to create a five-step protocol that art therapists can use to treat inherited perpetrator trauma. She proposes that making toxic shame conscious and confronting and transforming this trauma can prevent a repeat of past historical transgressions and encourage healthier relationships with self, family, community, and a broader South African society.

Lauren Ross is an educator at St Vincent's School for the Deaf. She explores a visual dialogue between *lived* and *perceived* experiences of deafness. She asks: How does a hearing therapist avoid relying on stereotypes in an overarching

characterisation of the deaf experience to engage in meaningful and useful therapy for this population, which is vulnerable due to hearing loss and the dire socio-economic circumstances in South Africa? Her contribution motivates for the use of art therapy when working with deaf clients. The contribution promotes mentalisation through a dialogical approach to artmaking.

Kara Schoeman innovates a group art therapy intervention model to address mental health stigma among a group of youth in a rural area of South Africa. She offers this as a guide for art therapists who would like to address issues of discrimination and alienation due to this stigma in group therapy.

Kate Shand investigates the contribution of art therapy to literacy in diverse and stressed communities in inner-city Johannesburg. Her programme draws on attachment theories in psychodynamic literature. She presents case vignettes from the Uhambo literacy programme that demonstrate how adaptive art therapy programmes can give children agency to make meaning, increase confidence and pleasure in their artmaking and storytelling, and improve learning outcomes, building resilience and creativity.

Joanne Van Zyl's article is based on a visual auto-ethnographic study of pregnancy loss in a South African context. It explores the creation of a secular, ritualised form of grief work in line with non-linear models of grief that emphasise connecting bonds. Her paper proposes the threading through of these complementary techniques as an effective model of embodied grief work to acknowledge trauma and loss and combat disenfranchised grief.

Conclusion

These emerging art therapists share an understanding of the deep-seated social, economic, and political inequalities in our community and actively profile the power of the arts and social action in delivering mental health services. Art as therapy has been a powerful influence in the NGO movements for decades. The Department of Visual Art at the University of Johannesburg is proud of our role in creating the runway for these outstanding graduates ready to make a powerful difference in our traumatised communities.

We look forward to the next issue that will share some of the insights and scholarship emerging from the University of Johannesburg symposium: **Art Therapy for Social Justice, 13 and 14 July 2023.**

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