A Bibliography of Books, Journals and Articles about art therapy in Museum and Gallery settings

(Not exhaustive! Please email us with new entries you may find and we can add it to the growing list!)


‘The majority of public health programmes are based in schools, places of employment and in community settings. Likewise, nearly all health-care interventions occur in clinics and hospitals. An underdeveloped area for public health-related planning that carries international implications is the cultural heritage sector, and specifically museums and art galleries. This paper presents a rationale for the use of museums and art galleries as sites for public health interventions and health promotion programmes through discussing the social role of these organisations in the health and well-being of the communities they serve. Recent research from several countries is reviewed and integrated into a proposed framework for future collaboration between cultural heritage, health-care and university sectors to further advance research, policy development and evidence-based practice.’


‘Art museums in Canada face the challenge of connecting with their audiences, nurturing creativity and facilitating the collective expression the diverse communities. This paper posts the art therapist as a necessary "stakeholder relations professional" in museums' community outreach. It offers an examination of the current-day use of art therapy in this setting, and describes potential contributions the profession can make based on concepts of acculturation, crisis of relocation, and re-evaluation of the self.
Art therapy can play a crucial role in museum outreach by mediating the complex
dynamics between an institution and its communities, creating transitional
environments, and facilitating and articulating the impact of process-oriented
community artmaking.’


museum as a ‘mind-producing system’ ‘...the museum can be an intimate frame for our lives, what we think of them, and what we want them to become’ ‘...the museum holds things in place for us, so our minds might move toward, surround, look back at, consider and reconsider them. The work of the museum is the revelation of artefacts and texts, but also it is the revelation and embodiment of tacit subtexts and more private, whispered, even unspoken, perhaps unspeakable, meanings or feelings.’ ‘...we encounter objects that engage our attention, demand our reflection, and lead us to interpretations... Our experience change and reconstruct us… museums help to transform us into what we are meant to become’ ‘Museums are… situations where we can select, for ourselves, engaging frames for cognitive acts, from recognition to puzzlement to diving deep. Capturing far more than the total of their visible contents, museums enfold the multiple, infinite, and simultaneous constructions of their users. It is in museums, far better than in other cultural institutions, that people may assume the greatest responsibility for both the process and authorship of the meanings they produce.’


Fears, A. THE MUSEUM AS A HEALING SPACE: Addressing Museum Visitors” Emotional Responses through Viewing and Creating Artwork Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of MA in Art Education, Boston University College of Fine Arts http://hdl.handle.net/2144/2419

‘This study detailed the results of the collaboration between clients at a women”s shelter and the resources of the community museum. Museum visitors were instructed to find an artwork within the museum that was significant to them; for instance, participants were asked to find an artwork that depicted a specific emotion or memory. Williams (2010) included a list of sample questions from his Personal Response tour which were helpful to this study; these questions stress the importance of thinking about personal connections. Following a discussion of the significance of
the artwork, the museum visitors then created their own artwork in response to the
museum experience. The researcher both observed and interacted with the participants
during the tour, while observing during the art making component. The program
concluded with a questionnaire for the participants to complete in order to assess their
emotional responses.’

Gadsby, J. (2011) The Effect of Encouraging Emotional Value in
Museum Experiences Museological Review 15 pp. 1-13 (University of Leicester)

Gray, L. (2012) What have art galleries got to do with our mental health?
http://www.fullcirclearts.co.uk/features/what-have-art-galleries-got-to-do-with-our-mental-
health/ acc 21/02/2013

the therapeutic potential of a heritage-object focused intervention: A qualitative study. Journal
of Health Psychology 2012. DOI:10.1177/1359105311426625

MLA Renaissance East Midlands/Leicestershire County Council (undated) Opening Minds:
Mental health, creativity and the open museum


engage 30: Arts and Healthcare Summer 2012 Published by Engage, London pp.39-47

to practice journal of public mental health vol 9 issue 4 pp. 22-29

‘The research on the health benefits of intensive engagement with creative and
cultural activities through art therapy and workshops led by artists is well recognised
in the literature on cultural impact. In general, this engagement involves small
numbers and, in the current climate, is unlikely to receive sufficient investment to
make a difference at a population level. Less recognised is an emerging field of
epidemiological research on the health impact of ‘general cultural attendance’. This
provides evidence that simply going to a museum, art gallery, film or concert on a
regular basis increases longevity, and that culture is a separate variable. This article
summarises this evidence and looks at the strategic implications for cultural
organisations from the perspective of a practitioner. If cultural attendance can help
address health inequalities, and if the best way to overcome the psychological and
social barriers to cultural attendance is personal contact with a trusted guide, the
article outlines a system where voluntary and statutory organisations can refer people
to cultural organisations who might benefit from them. The former would need to be
able to guarantee a high quality and friendly welcome that recognises the needs of
first-time users from excluded groups. Developed among a network of cultural
organisations with voluntary and public sector partners, such a system could reach
sufficient numbers to have a health impact on a population level.’
Museums are safe spaces for the objects they hold and for the persons that visit them, providing environments that can function in therapeutic ways. Within the wide range of objects, there is enough diversity to help guests discover what similarities they have with others as well as what makes them unique as individuals. Within exhibits, individuals can explore themselves through the reactions they have to particular pieces, through the observation of what holds their attention within the environment, and through the awareness and development of their contemplative mind. Museums can introduce transpersonal information, add information to previous transpersonal experiences, and even promote expanded states of awareness. With direction, guests can use museums to learn about themselves, thus optimizing the therapeutic potentials of these institutions.


Museums, their settings and the objects they care for can be effective allies in art therapy treatment. With the use of two case examples that explore life stages, this article proposes four metaphorical roles that museums can play to facilitate treatment goals. These roles are: museum as co-leader, museum as group, museum as self, and museum as environment.


‘Museums are about prudence, rationality and excess. And yet, as Silverman demonstrates, they are increasingly moving into the arena of risk, loss, emotionality and injustice. Understandably, there is a degree of ambivalence within the profession about this relational turn. To engage in this work, museum workers need a new paradigm away from preservation to transformation.’ But some of this desire for order will have to go if museums want to engage with the raw mess of people’s lives. Museums can foster introspection and communication, but to argue that this “lays the groundwork” for psychotherapy is, for me, a step too far.’


