

On considering the verbs of art psychotherapy: exploring resistance, tension and ambivalence through process, art making and group reflection

Megan Hatcher & Abigail Robertson

Stretch, tear, mark, stich, stab, pull, push, dab, rub, indent, tie, mould, cast, stroke, smooth, share, show, hold, balance, move, position, observe, envision and decide are amongst the verbs of art psychotherapy. These verbs, taken from Richard Serra's famous 1967 artwork (Verb List), offer ways of connecting to self, our environment, material and process.

As therapists we invite our clients to engage with these actions in art therapy as we come alongside them in search of meaning and understanding in the pursuit of change and recovery. Inspired by Brecht's disruptive epic theatre, which radically challenged audiences to sit with their discomfort, this workshop invites participants to actively consider tension, resistance, ambivalence and passivity through the use of resistive, unconventional materials.

Through artmaking, participants within this workshop will be invited to consider these themes of tension, resistance, ambivalence and passivity within their own professional contexts, responding to create from leather, elastic, resistance bands, clay, foam, eggs, string, tissue, our bodies, plaster.

In working with tension, tightness, tautness, pressure, stretching and straining this workshop invites participants to recognise and reflect on their own feelings around this discomfort. How might we be surprised or inspired through this process? Can the art materials shed new light or bring fresh perspectives?

In recognising surprising parallels between their own seemingly opposing practice as art psychotherapists, Megan and Abigail in turn welcome the breadth of experience and backgrounds within the room. What will take shape? What energy is required to remain hopeful and actively open to change?

Biography

Megan Hatcher comes from a fine art background and has a performance and conceptual art practice. She has experience working across NHS adult and children and young people mental health services. Currently she works as a senior art psychotherapist in forensic adult mental health settings, including medium secure, a community forensic learning disability service and complex frailty and psychiatric rehabilitation. Her research interests include the concept of space and environment as dynamic parts of relationships within longer term forensic inpatient services and the relational contributions of art within them.

Abigail Robertson has a background of teaching in further education. She has experience of working in services supporting adults in recovery from substance use, as well as working with children and families. She currently works as a Senior art therapist supporting families in a Community Perinatal Service in Scotland. She is the lead art therapist for her charity's Art at the Start Project - a parent and infant art therapy group which is part of a wider research project in partnership with Dundee University. Abigail has her own art practice alongside her work as a therapist.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Robertson, A. (September 2019). Presentation: **The art of facing unknown: a recent graduate's reflection on education within the arts therapies.** ECArTE, conference, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

Megan Hatcher, M. (November 2021). Poster presentation: **Exploring the impact of using outdoor ward spaces to facilitate a collaborative art psychotherapy & occupational therapy art group in a medium secure forensic acute assessment ward, in response to covid 19 restrictions on indoor group work.** Forensic Network Research Special Interest Group - annual research conference.

Hatcher, M. (June 2023). Presentation: **What makes forensic inpatient spaces a good place to be - an art psychotherapy-based view of environment.** Forensic Allied Health Professional Conference.

Hatcher, M. (November 2023). Poster presentation: **What makes forensic inpatient spaces a good place to be - an art psychotherapy-based view of environment.** Lothian Health and Care Professions Conference.