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# Art Therapy and Neurodivergence: A Journey in Attunement through the Triadic Relationship

**Huma Durrani & Celine Schweizer**

A parallel may be drawn between Homer's *Odyssey*—an epic filled with adventure, unpredictability, and resilience—and an art therapist's relationship with neurodivergent clients. Homer weaves his journey through words and imagery, while the art therapist journeys alongside the autistic client through the triadic relationship of therapist, client, and artmaking. This relationship is grounded in both explicit and implicit knowledge, is seldom predictable, and requires adaptability and patience. At its core lies the therapist's ability to attune to the client's unique needs, meeting them where they are at and walking beside them to a destination that unfolds through process and creative exploration.

Therapists often grapple with the complex needs of neurodivergent clients. In this workshop, facilitators Huma Durrani and Celine Schweizer, with years of clinical experience and practice-based research behind them, will demonstrate how therapists can address some of the inherent challenges of working with neurodiverse individuals through art-based, relational approaches.

Participants will be guided through hands-on exploration of theoretical and practice-based frameworks, inspired by the likes of Daniël Stern, Marijke Rutten-Saris, and Lisa Hinz. Stern's extensive work on early developmental stages was expanded upon by the late Dr. Marijke Rutten-Saris, who linked his theories to body language, graphic signs, and interaction patterns. The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC; Hinz, 2019) offers a developmental lens through which to understand the expressive language of people on the autism spectrum. Through this experiential process, participants will deepen their understanding of how sensory, relational, and cognitive levels of expression intersect in therapy with neurodivergent clients. The workshop offers both theoretical grounding and embodied practice—inviting therapists to attune, adapt, and co-create meaning through the language of art.



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## Biography

**Huma Durrani**, PhD, is an art psychotherapist, author, and researcher. Formerly based in Singapore and now in Toronto, she runs Coloured Canvas, her private practice. She has taught at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, and the Toronto Art Therapy Institute, and previously served as Vice President of the Art Therapy Association of Singapore. Her approach integrates sensory, relational, and developmental frameworks to address trauma, anxiety, and neurodiversity. Author of *Sensory-Based Relational Art Therapy (S-BRATA)* and the memoir *Wrapped in Blue*, about raising her son with autism, she received the American Art Therapy Association's Best Paper Award (2020).

**Celine Schweizer**, PhD, is an art therapist, lecturer, supervisor and researcher at BA Arts Therapies at NHLStenden University of Applied Sciences, Leeuwarden, Netherlands and MA Arts Therapies at Han University of Applied Sciences, Nijmegen, Netherlands. Her PhD (2020) concerned Images of Self, first evaluation of a treatment program for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Celine is member of the Research Committee of EFAT, EFAT's SIG Art therapy in museums, works at several practice based research projects about art therapy and autism, publishes and gives workshops and lectures around Europe.

## Recent Publications

Durrani, H. (2024). **Parent-Mediated Online Art Therapy with a Mother and her Children with Autism**. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2024.2328954>

Durrani, H. (2023). **Practical Implications of the Sensory-Based Relational Art Therapy Approach (S-BRATA)**. In A. Supritha; K. Vicky (Eds.) *Arts Therapies Research and Practice with Persons on the Autism Spectrum: Colourful Hatchlings* (pp 55-68). New York: Routledge.



Schweizer, C., Spreen, M., Metselaar, J., & Minnaert, A., (2024). **Zelf in beeld.**

**Implementatie van beeldende therapie in primair speciaal onderwijs voor leerlingen met aan autisme gerelateerde problemen. [Images of self. Implementation of art therapy for children with autism related problems, in special education settings]**

Tijdschrift voor vaktherapie 20 (1), 40-48.

Schweizer, C. (*in press*). Studio Connect. **Art therapy in museums for young people with autism: a collaboration between a museum teacher, an art therapist and a special education mentor.** In: *Handbook Art therapy practices*. Routledge