



Repetition and return in an Asian Day Centre art therapy programme

Marian Liebmann

This presentation describes an outreach programme in an Asian Day Centre in Bristol, UK. I was working as an art therapist in an inner-city community mental health centre, which served a multicultural population of Asian, African, African-Caribbean, European and UK residents. However, the Asian population was very reluctant to use mental health services, feeling they were stigmatising. The senior Asian community psychiatric nurse suggested taking services to them and asked me to provide weekly art therapy for a time. The programme ran for two years. Most of the participants were people who had come to the UK many years previously for study or work or to join other members of their family.

The presentation will include slides from the work produced. Repetition was manifested in many ways. Members of the group often returned to the same themes, some preferring landscapes, some flowers, some religious themes, some reminiscence memories. Moreover, the pictures themselves contained repetition, as part of the Indian love of pattern. This seemed to provide a feeling of comfort in a country which still seemed strange to them in some ways.

The whole ethos of the Day Centre was designed to provide a sense of their original home to return to, in providing Asian food and celebrating Asian festivals. Care was taken to be inclusive of the different Asian cultures. So, some members of the group also took the opportunity to draw landscapes of places they remembered, and events they took part in.

Many questions arose for me, such as the meaning of therapy in different cultures, and whether my offerings were culturally appropriate. However, the theme of repetition and return immediately resonated with me when I thought of this work.



Biography

Marian Liebmann, PhD, qualified as an art therapist in 1979, and worked in art therapy with offenders, with community groups, and for 19 years in the Inner City Mental Health Team in Bristol, UK, where she developed work on anger, also with asylum seekers and refugees. She has lectured on art therapy at universities in the UK, Ireland, Israel, Eastern Europe and Baltic countries. She has run art, conflict and anger workshops in many countries. She has written/edited 14 books, including *Art Therapy, Race and Culture*. She continues to work with refugees, supervising art therapists and running art therapy workshops.

Recent Publications and Presentations

Liebmann, M. (2024). **What can we do about increasing polarisation?** Workshop at ECArTE 2024, Gent.

Liebmann, M. (2025) **The Barlinnie Special Unit: Art, Punishment & Innovation**. *Book review Insight (BAAT)*. <https://baat.org/publications/insight/spring-2025/the-barlinnie-special-unit-art-punishment-innovation/>

Liebmann, M. (forthcoming) Chapter 15 **Learning about anger and conflict resolution through the arts: Workshop teaching for graduates and practitioners**. In A. Miller, G. Nash and B. Fish, *Response Art: Shaping Practice, Teaching and Research in Art Therapy*. London: Routledge.