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## Spirit Boats: An Eco-Art Therapy Journey of Return

### Ellen Speert MEd, ATR, REAT

Has the state of the world left you and your clients feeling isolated and adrift? In this workshop, we explore the boat as a symbol of the metaphoric therapeutic journey of return. A boat frequently evokes a passage, transporting us over the watery depths, with the potential to lead us toward a desired destination. In our contemporary world, boats provide the means of escape from untenable circumstances, with the hope of finding a better life.

We will explore these themes in the context of deepening our connections with the natural world by utilizing art materials provided by nature. Clay, sea shells, feathers, seed pods and wood, as well as other gifts gathered from nature, will be used to create our boats.

Through this use of a variety of natural materials, along with mindfulness experiences including poetry and movement, each participant will create a 'spirit boat'. These experiences have the potential to carry each of us toward a deeper sense of reconnection to ourselves and to each other.

We will end our workshop by participating in the creation of a three-dimensional group map, bringing our individual journeys together in an art therapy game. This interactive art therapy process, designed by the presenter, can be used in many group art therapy settings.

Our relationship to nature through eco-art therapy gives our clients opportunities for rich and multi-metaphoric connections to the earth. "What we most need to set out on that great ...venture is a clear recognition that art has a vital role to play in curing our environmental ills. It is the gentle discipline of the appetite." (Rozak, 1993, p 48).

Through our creative emersion in nature, poetry and movement, this workshop is designed to deepen our commitment to the concept of *takum olam* (to heal the world)



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which brought many of us into the helping professions. We can deepen our awareness of our interconnectedness through the use of artistic processes based in nature.

“When you do things from your soul  
The river itself moves through you.  
Freshness and a deep joy  
Are signs of the current”  
Rumi

### References:

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### Biography

**Ellen Speert**, MEd, ATR, REAT, is Director of the California Center for Creative Renewal She has specialized in creativity, women’s issues, loss and spirituality since 1981. She is past president of SDATA and active with American Art Therapy Association and International Expressive Art Therapy Association, presenting art therapy workshops and trainings in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. She has designed, directed and taught in two university post-graduate Art Therapy programs and has won numerous awards as a public speaker. Ellen is an avid gardener and artist.



### **Recent Publications**

Speert, E. (2025). **Spirit Boats**, *International Expressive Art Therapy Association Conference*, Beverly, MA,

Speert, E. (2024). **Spirit Boats**, *Expressive Therapies Summit*, Sedona, Arizona.

Speert, E. (2016). **Eco-Art Therapy: Deepening Connections with the Natural World**. *AATA blog*.