

The Fabric of Memory: Story Cloth as a Healing Tool for Trauma

Tally Tripp

While traumatic memory is typically held as a fixed and rigid experience, working creatively with narrative textiles can provide an important sensory and healing response for effective trauma recovery. Across cultures, there is a long-standing tradition of creating story cloth to convey important social, personal and collective narratives. Through simple layering of fabric, incorporating basic stitching and embroidery, the narrative textile or story cloth can help a survivor express, respond to, and manage traumatic experiences.

The story cloth depicts significant life events and can help express and contain traumatic experiences. Some examples include the powerful appliqued tapestries (arpilleras) of Chile, the elaborate Hmong textiles from Southeast Asia, the African printed ankara cloth, the 'troubles' textiles of Northern Ireland, and traditional patchwork quilts from Native and African American cultures. Incorporating a diverse range of artistic styles, materials and techniques, the common denominator in these creations is that trauma narratives can be expressed, seen, heard and remembered. Typically, the story cloth is created in a group setting that lends an affirming experience to the artist's handiwork.

This workshop will provide an opportunity to engage in a story cloth 'circle' where participants will work individually and collectively with an assortment of textiles and threads in a range of color, pattern and texture. We will practice basic meditative stitching techniques designed to facilitate a mindful and regulated response to evocative material. Using several prepared fabric swatches, we will experiment with story cloth design and create miniature personal tableaux. Participants are encouraged to bring small scraps of fabric or embellishments (beads, buttons, etc.) to further personalize their artwork. There will be time for questions throughout the workshop and an opportunity for sharing the personal and/or collective stories that may arise.

Biography

Tally Tripp is a registered, board certified art therapist and licensed clinical social worker whose private practice specializes in experiential approaches for the treatment of psychological trauma. Tally is the Director of the Art Therapy Clinic at the George Washington University (Washington DC) where she is a Professor in the Art Therapy Program. Tally is Certified in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Intensive Trauma Therapy (ITT). She has conducted numerous trauma trainings and workshops nationally and internationally with a focus on incorporating experiential approaches for managing trauma. As an art therapy consultant for Common Threads Project (NY) Tally has taught story cloth technique in the US and the DRC. She is a Fellow and Board Member of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISST-D) where she is the founder and Chair of the Special Interest Group on Creative Arts Therapies.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Tripp, T. (2019). More than an image: Revisiting the Ulman Personality Assessment Protocol, Special Issue History of Art Therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 36(3), 133-140. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2019.1649546

2020: *Creative Techniques for Grounding, Resourcing and Containing in Trauma*
Ferentz Institute on- line all day conference (Oct. 2020)

2019: *Keeping the Body in Mind: Affect Regulation for Trauma Survivors*, Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis (ICP+P) Short Course, Washington DC
½ day conference (Nov. 2019).

2019: *Common Threads Training* for professionals in the method of Story Cloth and Art Therapy/ Somatic Psychotherapies with vulnerable populations, 4-day training, NY, NY (Nov. 2019).

2019: *Safe Place Collage: An Art-making Protocol for Managing Traumatic Stress*, European Society for Trauma and Dissociation (ESTD) biannual conference workshop, Rome, Italy (Oct. 2019).