

From “Word Pictures: The Poetry and Art of Art Therapists”, 2004, by Bruce L. Moon and Robert Schoenholtz, Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Introduction

Written by Bob Schoenholtz

*Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting
which is heard and not seen.*

--Leonardo Da Vinci, Trattato Della Pittura Di Lionardo Da Vinci

Simonides calls painting silent poetry, and poetry speaking painting.

--Plutarch, Whether the Athenians Were More Warlike or Learned

History

This book is the culmination of a process which, for me, begins with the keynote address of the 1994 conference of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) in Philadelphia. The keynote speaker at this event was the poet Jimmy Santiago Baca whose readings were breathtaking in their perception, self discovery and revelation, and dedication to honesty. I left that presentation transformed with a fresh awareness of myself and my goals. Part of that awareness was to develop renewed energy and discipline for art making in whatever form necessary to fulfill the specific or general need for expression.

The particular event which gave rise to this book is an informal gathering after a day of meetings at the annual conference of the AATA in Milwaukee in 1997. In my memory, the discussion came around to ways each of us present express our creative urges. We discovered that most of us present sometimes use poetry for this purpose, in addition to the expected visual media. It was during that conversation that the idea arose to present our poetry together as a panel with the theme of how we use poetry in the context

of our art therapy practices. Included in that panel were Ellen Horovitz, Cathy Moon, David Henley, Bruce Moon, and myself, chaired by David and me. Each of us presented two poems which addressed the therapeutic process, the relationship with the client, or was written in response to a client. Each of us wrote in a different, personal way and our content varied as far as the parameters of the panel guidelines. I recall the experience of presenting those poems with the other members of the panel, to our art therapist colleagues, as exciting and satisfying.

Being focused on poetry within the context of art therapy led me to a categorization of such poetry under several headings: the concerns of the experience of doing therapy, the engagement in the therapeutic relationship, the response from me to the poetry and other art productions of clients, and the personal experiencing of aspects of the creative process. My offerings fell into two areas- response to the poetry expressions of a client, and self reflection about the processes of creativity. The following poem was conceived by way of response from me to a poem given to me by a client who chose this medium to imagine a commentary to her father.

A Song for You

Starting these slow lines for you in the park
a presence from behind is felt,
uncomfortably close, confirmed by the eyes of others.
Turning on the bench I find a specter
a street saint carefully offering a gift of water
to the lamppost near.
Then to the tree, the grass, the curb, and the pavement
all from a 7-11 soda cup, a slurpee,
jumbo size.

Crosses of sticks and string and beads
and a scepter of colorful cardboard and leaves
provide the meaning for his momentarily startling gifts to the Earth.

The pigeons know him as they gather and mill about
awaiting another smiling toss
of dry bread crumbs

Only then do I know what I try to write to you,
when I am reminded that where I sit is sacred ground

and my gratitude rises for the stones and squirrels and sun.

The passers-by and other bench-sitters
seem closer, more familiar
as I grope for words for the wordless
The mystic of the park chants a soulful R&B riff
his face awash with delight
nearing again with an offering for the cement from his holy cup,
pouring carefully in three deliberate drops, the mark of a moist heart.

And as that heart slowly disappears into the ground and the air
I know that I honor in you not only that which is strong and grows,
but, too, that which suffers and shrinks,
For of this do we all need more.

Bob Schoenholtz
Rittenhouse Square
Autumn Equinox

The second poem I read that day was one of reflection about the creative, self-reflective process,
a plea to a muse of the imagination.

COME TO ME

Come to me softly,
insinuating your presence,
on my skin,
and behind my eyes,
and in my marrow,
and most of all, the spaces between.

Come to me like a collision,
smashing your inevitability
on my complacency,
shredding my excuses,
stomping my reason
into the soil of decay and return.

Come to me like a kiss,
so hard and insistent,
as to render useless
the boundary of my body

to the flow of your
darkness and light
into flesh and bone.

Come to me in that way
which brings me to breathe,
to sing, to shiver, to jump and kick,
so salt tears displace soft skin
like warm rain
on yesterday's snow.

---Bob Schoenholtz, November 16, 1996

Rationale

It could be said that poetry is imagination in words - the expression in words of imagery and its flow. Poetry is the sister of painting, drawing, sculpting, and the other arts in that its mother is the same - the deep knowing which precedes language. If all the arts provide an avenue of expression to that deepest knowing, poetry is simply the one that does it with words.

In trying to find adequate expression for imaginal experiences I experimented with narrative writing; visual art in the forms of painting, drawing, and sculpting; and music. With writing, I described my experience as accurately and precisely as I could. While this provided an exposition of the facts, it was lacking in that there were more aspects of my experience for which I could find no words. With visual arts I also found a lack, although painting, drawing, and sculpture helped me to express other aspects of my experience, they had similar limitations as writing. I found these media to be very helpful in the expression of a relatively narrow aspect of a particular experience. This limitation is based in part it seems, on the structure of the medium, the internal logic of the mode of expression. Visual arts are built on the logic of form, space, color, line. Narrative writing is built on the logic of sequential time and description. Music and movement are built on the logic of the direct knowledge of atmosphere and pure experience. With language as its medium, the poetic form makes use of imagery and rhythm, not just

describing but creating or re-creating. With poetry, I can make use of elements from all the other expressive forms in a way which often can most closely describe my experience.

Poetry, whose material is language, is perhaps the most human and least worldly of the arts, the one in which the end product remains closest to the thought that inspired it.... Of all things of thought, poetry is the closest to thought, and a poem is less a thing than any other work of art ...

--Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

Language is certainly a part of my experience with imagery. As the flow of images passes through me, as I engage with the images, as I open to the sensations which accompany the experience of the imagery, I put my experience into dialogue in words with the images, and into descriptive language in order to induce the linear, rational aspects of my consciousness to remain present so that I may hold my intention in the moment and, later, my memory of the events. The experience is, like a dream, evasive without the constraint of language to fix it in linear time and memory. But the process of relating to the imagination is not, itself, in language. Language is a medium of expression for the imaginal, whether that be the language of words as in writing, the language of images as in the visual arts, or the language of movement as in music and dance.

Creative expression can be used either to describe experience or to evoke it, with the latter including its description embedded in the artifact of the process of discovery. Poetry uses words and their organization into language in a way which comes closest, for me, to describing my original experience. The poem will often not follow the linear sequence of the memory of the experience, nor every detail, but rather, often with the use of one or two prominent images and a feeling or two, the poem can be so constructed as to convey the atmosphere and the overall experience most fully. Perhaps this reveals my shortcomings in the use of the other modes of creative expression for it is clear that some can use these with great skill to convey experience.

The art therapists represented in this collection by definition must have skills in visual art expression but have chosen, in these instances, to use poetry to say what they must. I prefer to think that this simply shows how the various modes of creative endeavor may be suitable for one person, or one purpose, or another.

You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born....

-Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

An important aspect of all creative modes is the discovery of the image. In writing about writing, the late poet William Stafford (1978) said, “A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. That is, he does not draw on a reservoir; instead, he engages in an activity that brings him a whole succession of unforeseen stories, essays, plays, laws, philosophies, religions...” (p. 17). The act of creating in any medium can bring forth an image and an experience with it. While an art therapist commonly uses visual art media to stimulate imagery, poetry may also be used in this evocative way. Most of our experience with writing has been to describe an idea, thought, or feeling of which we are aware, the act of writing can also awaken the image. Just as the approach to the blank canvas offers a world of opportunity, so does the blank page.

In discussion of the common interests between the surrealist art movement and art therapy, Shaun McNiff (1992) wrote about “imaginal realism”, which he called a “direct engagement of inner movements” (p. 47) in the creative process. To begin to write without specifying content, but with the intention to reveal, especially to one’s self, whatever makes itself known, to risk one’s expectations for the direct experience of one’s deepest and broadest knowing, to provide only with intention the generous constraints within which knowledge may freely arise, is the process and product of such discovery writing.

*The first green night of their dreaming, asleep beneath the Tree,/God said, "Let meanings move," and
there was poetry.*

*--Muriel Rukeyser, *The Sixth Night: Waking**

All in all, poetry, like all expressive forms, has its characteristics which can make it suitable to fill the needs of someone who has something to say, whether or not they know what it is at the outset, and finds that a poetic form is the way which best fulfills that expectation. For me, the use of poetry is an exercise in the practical, leading to the experience of the sublime. The poetic form can be the most practical way to express an experience if I want to include the fullness of each moment, represent the experience of the flow of time, and include meanings the way they arise for me.

For me, the excitement of this book is in the multi-layered creative imagination of the many participants, for it is the imagination which brings forth the visual art, the poetry, even the book, itself. The use of the ten paintings in this book which were requested to respond to ten specific poems is an example of how expressive media may work together. The poet and the painter in each of these examples are not one in the same. So this is not an example of how one person might express the same idea two different ways. Rather, this is an example of how one artist responds to the expression of another in a different medium. What the painter experiences in the reading of the poem might not be exactly what the poet intended but what they get from that poem will influence nonetheless the ensuing painting. What is the meaning of a poem or of a responsive painting? Is the painting an expression of the same concepts meant by the poet? Maybe or maybe not. Is the painter following a process of description, or discovery, or both, as the poet may have? Although a poet or an artist may have an intended meaning in their work, I do not believe that meaning is merely intrinsic to the work. Meaning, rather, is in the mind of the observer, influenced by the work and always in the context in which it is observed. All these factors influence the

perceived meaning of any work of art. Perhaps these are some of the rich mysteries of the creative process. Either way, in the context of this book, what can be seen is the creative process in action.

... it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dreams birth concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

--Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

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