Dreaming While Awake, Processing with artist Matt Sesow

Chandra Coleman
1st Year Student

Early in the 2006 spring semester, the art therapy department held a colloquium featuring the fascinating Washington, DC artist, Matt Sesow. Matt Sesow is what one might call a visionary artist. Visionary art is also known as outsider art, art brut, or contemporary folk art. He has had no formal art training, but simply began painting in his early twenties. In addition to displaying his art, Sesow captivated his audience with a very open and engaging description of his life and his path to becoming an artist.

He is a man who has lived several lives. He was once a Peace Corps volunteer, a computer programmer, and a former Olympiad—all before the age of 40! Some people would consider him to be lucky to have experienced so much at such a young age; however, other people may consider him lucky to be alive.

When he was 8, his left arm was amputated after an airplane propeller struck him. His parents responded to this incident by keeping a positive attitude that the injury would never be allowed to hinder his life.

Learning How to Learn Supervision 101

Jennifer Padden
1st Year Student

The first colloquium of 2006 was especially useful for the GW Art Therapy program’s first year students. Many of us were mere weeks into our first internship experiences, still trying to navigate the unknown waters of art therapy. Although we relished the opportunity to finally get our feet wet in the fascinating work, there were also moments that felt more akin to drowning. Day to day practicum work gave rise to myriad unforeseen questions. How do I interact with my supervisor? How do I engage with the

Altering States of Being

Nora Stinley
2nd Year Student

On the sleepy Sunday afternoon of April 23rd, students of GW’s art therapy program, and individuals from the surrounding art therapy community began shuffling into the second floor classroom of Building L. As the participants chattered, much of the conversation turned into speculation of what exactly this open studio would be. People began pulling oversized button down shirts, old jeans, and ratty tee shirts from their bags. At this point, the topic of altered clothing began to dominate all conversation. As everyone settled into their seats, a woman stepped to the front of the classroom and introduced herself as Leslie Milofsky. She then began flipping shirts and skirts upside down and over her head. From there, the open studio took off.

Continued onto page 3
Beyond the Walls

The Art of Defying

Sarah Meadows
2nd Year Student

I was sitting in a movie theater admiring a larger-than-life projection of a stunning woman shake her ultra toned body while belting out the lyrics, “I’m hung up on you...” A lady sitting next to me made this comment to her friend, “She’s just too old for that.” I could not help but wonder what else this lady thought was inappropriate for women of Madonna’s age. I wondered what she had refrained from in her life that she deemed herself too old for. I then reflected on my own self-defeating mantras. While Madonna confessed to infatuation on the dance floor, this lady was confessing her own hang ups. Perhaps she could use some art therapy?

I confess to being infatuated with art therapy.

Continued onto page 4

Drawn from Building “L”

Statement of Purpose

Our goal is to provide a channel for communication among students, faculty, and alumni as well as introduce prospective students and the art therapy community to The George Washington University’s Graduate Art Therapy Program. Drawn from Building "L" will provide articles, commentary, notices, poetry, humor, and anything pertinent to art therapy. If you wish to be included in the newsletter or to respond to anything presented in this issue, please contact us.

Editorial Policy

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect those of The George Washington University Art Therapy Program or its faculty. Submissions are made with the understanding that they may be edited for space, grammar, and content.

Alumni Update

Please send us updated information and news!!

Co-Editors
Sheryl Jaffe & Rachel Kaplan

Faculty Supervisors
Heidi Bardot & Tally Tripp

Contributing Writers
Chandra Coleman, Erin Johnson, Sarah Meadows, Jennifer Padden, Nora Stinley

Contributing Artists & Photographers
Heidi Bardot, Meredith Cox, Sheryl Jaffe, Rachel Kaplan

Art Therapy Student Association, Faculty Advisor
Jordan Potash

Sheryl & Rachel can be contacted via e-mail at sijaffe@gmail.com and rachkap@gmail.com, respectively.
Matt Sesow

Continued from page 1

Despite this, he eventually went to college, earned a BS degree in computer/software engineering, and began a lucrative career as a computer programmer. Eventually, Sesow began painting in oils on weekends and evenings for fun. In addition to finding pleasure in this new-found activity, Sesow realized that by painting, he could work through the emotional bonds created by his childhood accident.

Through the presentation of his art and his discussion of life events, Sesow illustrated his journey as an artist, and how his paintings became a way of dealing with his childhood trauma. He eventually quit his full time job as a computer programmer and began working on his art full time. In 2001, Sesow held his first solo show at Corcoran Museum in Washington, DC. The show featured 45 works.

Sesow has painted with inspiration from nearly everything, from events in the news to reality TV shows. In 2003, he created a series called 31 days in July, a series of 30" x 40" pieces on chipboard. Each piece represents a day in July, and is influenced by the top news stories featured in the Washington Post. Some of his well-known pieces are Hellbound 3, Red Ants, and Nobody’s Pushover. His work has often been compared to the works of Jean Michel Basquiat and Willem DeKooning—whom he considers to be his influences. Often, Sesow travels abroad and creates paintings that reflect his interactions with the colorful people he meets and the places he sees. Regardless of where he is or what inspires him, his subject usually seems to reflect on his childhood trauma. His work can be described as a sketchy outbreak of colors matched with symbolic portrayals of haunting figures looming on canvases.

What makes this artist unusual is not that he has no right arm, but that he sells his artwork for a relatively inexpensive price. He is willing to part from his artwork for very little, and in an age where less is more, it is refreshing to come across a person whovalues the spreading of art to all.

What I internalized from Matt Sesow’s presentation of his life and work was that life is what you make of it. In a 2003 interview with artquote.net, Sesow was asked, “What advice would you give to an artist just starting out?” He replied, “Painting is very hard. Challenge yourself to paint badly. Shock yourself. Don’t tell people you are an artist. Get rid of all unnecessary expenses. Sell your car, cancel cable. You’ll only be able to keep one or two good friends. You’ll never retire. Buy a good fan, ventilate.”

For more about Matt Sesow and his work visit www.sesow.com

Altered

Continued from page 1

Leslie Milofsky is not only a magician with clothing, but also, she is a master at creating spectacular jewelry from the ordinary and bags from the mundane. Most fantastically, she is an alumna of GW’s art therapy program! That sleepy Sunday turned into a workshop of transformation, where old tee shirts became new fashion statements and skirts found new identities as funky tops. As the creative energy spread, old forgotten jeans became revived and Leslie willingly passed on more of her secrets. By the end of the workshop each person had at least one article to proudly display for the photo-op and all left feeling pleasantly surprised and greatly inspired!
Raising Awareness through Art Therapy

Erin Johnson Kemp
2nd Year Student

This spring, the Art Therapy Task Force was proud to co-sponsor The Suicide Awareness Day Resource Fair on Tuesday, April 11th. This event was hosted by GW-SPAN, an organization dedicated to raising awareness of suicide prevention in the GWU community. GW-SPAN is our university’s chapter of the national organization, SPAN-USA (Suicide Prevention Action Network USA). Since suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students, we were honored to be invited to this event, and anxious to work pro-actively with GW-SPAN to help students become more aware of the mental health resources available at our university.

During the Resource Fair, the Task Force facilitated the creation of a Lifeskeeper Memorial Quilt. Artists were provided with a fabric quilt square, fabric markers, and paints, as well as support and assistance from Art Therapy Task Force members. A wide variety of GW students and faculty had the opportunity to honor the loved ones they have lost to suicide by creating a quilt square in their memory. Since nearly everyone has been affected by suicide in some way, those who had not lost someone close to them were encouraged to express their general thoughts or feelings about suicide on a quilt square.

This summer, each of the fabric squares will be sewn together to create a finished Lifeskeeper Memorial Quilt dedicated to those lost to and affected by suicide. GW-SPAN and the Art Therapy Task Force hope to present the quilt at SPAN-USA’s National Awareness Event in September. The quilt will be displayed on the National Mall with hundreds of other quilts created around the country. Readers can find more information about suicide awareness, statistics, and upcoming events at http://www.spanusa.org/A_find-events1.html.

Defying

Continued from page 2
I see a need for it everywhere. I envision art therapy commercials alongside those for prescription meds and billboards and t-shirts asking, “Have you had your art therapy today?” I want to sculpt my cookie-cutter ear into an “art ear” so I can commute to class surrounded by sensual textures and imagery. Art therapy for road rage?

Besides defying ageism, Madonna encouraged women to demand the best in life in her song that repeated the words, “Don’t go for the second best baby...” Over the past two years, I have heard inspiring stories from classmates who sought their unique skills and knowledge to sites that had yet to discover the benefits of art therapy. Settling for second best was not acceptable. One of those students is Elizabeth Bapst. She has spent four years earning her degree and defying ageism.

Despite having to face serious illness, surgery, and then a relapse during the course of her studies, she is now about to reach her goal. “Giving up is not even in my vocabulary,” she says. This motto is fitting for the emotional growth that art therapy provides. While recognizing that limits can be healthy, maintaining self-defeating beliefs can hinder emotional growth. The ageism expressed by the lady in the theater is only one example of how people place limits on themselves and others. Elizabeth’s perseverance is proof that settling for second best is not good enough, but that it is important to construct personal limits rather than relying on the limits constructed by others or by society.

Elizabeth states her future goals, “I will continue on in my quest to share with others the benefits of creativity and art, self-exploration, and understanding...” So when job searches turn up bleak, it is crucial to remember how fortunate we are to be in a career so fulfilling and a career that can promote change on an individual and societal level.

Congratulations!

- Congratulations to recent graduates Sally Duvall, Kelly Fitzmaurice, and Kristen Kaufman, on their upcoming weddings!
- Kathleen Barron will be starting an art therapy program at Children’s National Medical Center, to be modeled after the Tracy’s Kids program at Georgetown Hospital.
Colloquia

resistant client? What should I do while the client creates art?

There is a gulf that lies between theory and practice. While course readings were able to present the work of art therapy in tidy chapters, the demands placed on us by our new practicum sites were decidedly more complex. What was once comprehensible was now unclear. Our black and white knowledge blurred into a grayish hue under the stark lights of the art therapy studio. For the most part, we were riveted by our new experiences. Nevertheless, many first years were yearning for a forum in which to air our unforeseen questions and concerns.

Then came the colloquium. Brilliantly timed and wonderfully executed, the evening was light-hearted and entertaining. There were skits and anecdotes, questions and answers, faculty and second year students a plenty to assuage our fears. More than that, however, it was a safe environment in which to share our newly arisen trepidations. Much akin to the way that a skilled art therapist creates a holding environment for her clients’ thoughts and feelings, those that led the colloquium provided a safe space for first years to reveal their uncertainties. Concerns were addressed and successes were validated. The support of the faculty and second year students was indispensable. Even more compelling, however, was the unspoken support we provided for one another. Indeed, the night fostered a group dynamic that would have made Yalom proud.

Alumni Updates

- Jordan Potash, MA, ATR-BC, a lecturer and alumna of the GW Art Therapy program, will be moving to Hong Kong in the fall. We wish Jordan the best of luck, although his absence will certainly be felt by all.
- Katie Bacon (05) is an art therapist at Riverside Hospital. Erin Brindel (05) is working with adults at Sibley Memorial Hospital, and Hanako Shishido (05) is an art therapist at PIW and is a research assistant in Northern Virginia.
- Kelly Fitzmaurice are serving as art therapist within one of the Kennedy Krieger programs, Kristen Kaufman is the art therapist at St. Coletta school in Alexandria, while Jill Scheidler (05) has continued serving some of the clients she encountered through her practicum internships. Lauren Edelstein (05) has also remained in the district, facilitating art therapy at school for at-risk youth.

Cameras Capture the Conference

Thanks to the generous financial support of Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, of the The George Washington University, 18 current art therapy students were awarded stipends to attend the annual American Art Therapy (AATA) conference. Entitled ‘The Art and Science of Creativity in Healthcare,’ this year’s conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia, from November 16-19, 2005, and highlighted the therapeutic use of arts within the healthcare continuum.

GW Art Therapy students, alumni, faculty, and friends reunite on Friday night, at the annual American Art Therapy Conference. Photograph courtesy of Heidi Bardot.

Students’ Dorothy Dvorachek, Rachel Kaplan, & Nora Stinley, presented ‘Neurological Maps of Function and Dysfunction Related to Mental Conditions,’ at the conference.

Students’ congratulate their professor, Paula Howie, ATR-BC, LPC, the newly elected AATA President at the conference’s closing reception, along with Heidi Bardot, ATR-BC,
Applying Cognitive-Behavioral methods to Art Therapy

Luisa Vargas Lugo
1st Year Student

I studied Psychology for five years in Venezuela. After my third year, I had to decide my specialization. I knew, since the beginning of my studies, that I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. I, at first, wanted to become a Freudian psychotherapist. However, after studying the general subjects and seeing the importance of an objective intervention, I decided that the cognitive-behavioral approach would be my best option.

I felt more comfortable doing interventions in a systematic way, in which one can evaluate and measure a client’s progress, just as the cognitive-behavioral approach does. Unlike the medical approach, which treats people as ill, the cognitive-behavioral approach refers to disruptive thoughts and/or behaviors.

I worked at the Classic and Operant Conditioning Laboratory doing research with small animals, and at the Child Laboratory, where I worked with individuals in pre-school. In the latter, we had three special-needs children and seven regular kids. On this job, I noticed how effective cognitive-behavioral techniques can be. Children with special needs were not treated according to their diagnosis; instead, their disruptive behaviors were treated and their learning process was trained.

I clearly remember the mother of a high-functioning child with autism. She was concerned because a psychologist told her that her child would not be able to attend a regular school. The child became a student in our class and after a couple of years, he was ready to start his first year at an elementary school. However, this psychological approach, like many others, has the problem of focusing on only one aspect of human beings.

During my training, I also wrote poetry, created art, and acted in theater. I would get together with a group of friends, all psychology students from different specializations, make art, and then process it. We felt that these activities were our way of self-exploring and self-expression. We were convinced that art was a healing process. At that point, we discussed using art in our practice, without even knowing that Art Therapy previously existed.

Later, I studied one semester of Gestalt psychology at the Venezuelan Institute of Gestalt. However, I never finished the training because there were still aspects of these theories that I disagreed with. When I received my bachelor's degree in Psychology, I decided to come to The United States of America to study English and pursue my master degree. Though, I was not sure what to study.

One of my teachers, who had been very open to different approaches, mentioned Arte Terapia (Art Therapy) to me because she was aware of my interest in art. I then researched this field of study and decided that this is what I would pursue my masters degree in.

I still feel that cognitive-behavioral is one of the approaches that best matches my way of thinking. However, discovering Art Therapy has been one of the best things that has happened to me, for both my personal and my professional life. I feel that Art Therapy allows for emotional and non-threatening expression unlike any other approach. It is amazing that I was able to discover the value of it in the way that I did.

The GW Art Therapy program supported the 26th Annual Chalk-In, Tuesday, April 25. This phenomenal event was first initiated in cooperation with the department. Sponsored by the University Counseling Center each spring, the event provides an opportunity for students to relax amid the stress associated with the end of the semester. The well-attended event is considered a campus tradition, closing down H St. between 21st and 22nd Streets for several hours mid-day.
WHO is Steve Lorenz?

Rachel Kaplan
2nd Year Student

Six years ago an Art Therapy graduate bestowed the information to her friend Steve, that there was a job opening in the GW Art Therapy department. Steve thought to himself, “what a great opportunity to continue my education while earning a living.” Obviously, Steve was then hired as the executive aide of the GW Art Therapy program.

Steve is an invaluable part of Building L. He knows the ins and outs and has become a stable and consistent face for students and staff to draw comfort from. But within the walls of Building L, there is a constant whisper and chatter... “who is Steve?” People want to know what lies beneath the enigma of this man, the only male staff in the building. Although there is plenty that can be said about the work he does as the executive assistant, we all know there is more.

Steve Lorenz was an English major at Washington College, in an interest in fiction writing and the critical study of American literature. In Spring of 2003 he obtained his masters degree in American Studies, with a concentration in folklore. And now, he is about to begin a Doctoral program in American Studies, which he was recently accepted into. Clearly, we have all been surrounded by an intelligent and passionate guy. He even wants to convert his 10-car garage into a learning center for lectures, visiting writers, and artists in residence. But of course, this learning center would have a pool table, movies, and a bar stocking his favorite beer, Yuengling. Smart, driven, and fun! Amongst his hard work with the Art Therapy program, Steve makes time for hobbies, such as woodworking and involving himself with anything that is related to folk art. Steve also considers the study of American literature of hobby of his, and he identifies Mark Twain as his favorite American author.

What are his dreams? Of course, the creation of the learning center is one. But also, Steve would love to have a publishing business, travel the world, and start a bunny farm. He currently owns one angora bunny, named Penny. She looks like a muppet, but, who doesn’t love the muppets? Steve has to cut his bunny’s hair (every month) but he has not cut his own hair since his was 18 years old. Steve asserts that his hairstyle should not be associated with some retroactive look to the 60s. It is a vague political statement. It allows him to stand out in the crowd and also, his long hair pays homage to the Native American culture.

Steve adds something special to the Art Therapy department, not just because of his hard work, but simply because he is male. As Steve stated, he can provide an “XY perspective.” Steve also provides a different perspective, as being a non-art therapist, but one that still respects art, art therapy, and the women he works with. Fortunately, Steve expects to stay with the department, as he appreciates working with people with a humanitarian focus and being associated with an advanced degree program that intertwines art and psychology. And of course, “Heidi is a great boss.”

So who is Steve? He is a writer. He is a teacher. He is a folklorist. His favorite color is red, but Steve pointedly denies any significance to this selection. So, as you all now know, he is special and unique in more ways than you all could have imagined.

This interview was conducted in collaboration with Sheryl Jaffe.

Art Therapy Auction & Concert Night

On Saturday night, March 11, the George Washington University Art Therapy Student Association, affectionately referred to as GWATSA, sponsored a celebration of the arts. Evening highlights included several musical groups, as well as an art auction featuring pieces from current art therapy students. Under the leadership of second year student Andrea Tree, the evening promoted awareness of the Art Therapy program, embodying the spirit of our community.

An open-art area provides concert-goers with an art outlet of their own, allowing those in attendance to enjoy an art experience.