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Art as Therapy: Juxtaposition of colours inspired by sensory feelings into fiber sculpture

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Abstract

Art therapy is a relatively new tool in humanistic psychiatry. Art therapy is concerned with the human mind, that is, the emotional world of a human being, with the human soul. Encompassing all of these aspects in creation, play, beauty, communication, and intuition, artists transmit their emotional worlds through art, and spectators or readers let this world pass through their sensuality. Art can be viewed as a reflection of real-world events, emotions, and sentiments. Through feelings, art widens a person's inner world, motivates us, teaches us to be empathetic, and imbues a person with personality.

Keywords: Art Therapy; Fiber Sculpture; Juxtaposition Colours; Sensory Feelings

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1.0 Introduction

Art is the result of organising objects in such a way that they influence and affect one or more of the senses, emotions, and intellect. As an essential component of culture, art is recognised for its capacity to provoke specific emotional and cognitive experiences (Aprotosoai-Ifitimi, 2019), with psychology further examining the mental processes involved in such encounters (Prendergast, 2018). Human activities, creations, and modes of expression include music, literature, cinema, photography, sculpture, and painting. Art is "the use of talent and ingenuity in the creation of aesthetically pleasing objects, situations, or experiences that can be shared with others." Historically, definitions of art have evolved, focusing variously on its mimetic function, emotional properties, expressiveness, or its capacity to provide desirable aesthetic experiences (Dunér & Sonesson, 2016). Aesthetics is a discipline of philosophy that examines the social value of art. Both history and psychology examine how it affects individuals and generations. Artistic works have existed for nearly as long as humanity: from early prehistoric to contemporary art; indeed, the clinical use of arts for healing is an ancient feature of human cultural practices, dating back to the ancient Greeks and indigenous traditions (Brown & Cameirao, 2023). Yet, some definitions restrict the term to modern Western civilizations. Artworks are intentional, creative expressions of unbounded thoughts or ideas for the purpose of communicating with another individual. The term "art" refers to anything that inspires a person's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, or ideas.

Art therapy combines traditional psychotherapy concepts and practices with a knowledge of the psychological aspects of the creative process, most notably the emotional properties of diverse art materials. As an integrative mental health and human services profession,

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art therapy enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative processes, and applied psychological theory within a psychotherapeutic relationship (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020). This perspective includes the idea that the act of creating art is therapeutic; this is commonly referred to as art as therapy. Research indicates a positive impact of creative arts therapies on a wide range of psychological and physiological outcomes, including stress, trauma, depression, anxiety, and pain (Witte et al., 2021), with active creative processes significantly mediating positive effects on self-efficacy and well-being (Lange et al., 2018). While humans have used the arts to express themselves for thousands of years, and the clinical uses of art for healing have ancient roots (Brown & Cameirao, 2023), art therapy did not receive formal recognition as a professional specialization until the 20th century in the US and Europe. Pioneers like Mary Huntoon began working with war veterans in the 1930s, and the American Art Therapy Association was established in 1969 (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; Kirca, 2019).

The second tenet of art therapy is that art can be utilised to communicate symbolically. Art-based therapy is particularly effective in addressing implicit aspects of relationships, enabling communication on verbal, symbolic non-verbal, and subsymbolic levels (Gavron & Mayseless, 2018). The art image has a critical function in boosting verbal communication between the client and therapist, as well as in gaining understanding, resolving conflicts, addressing concerns, and establishing new perspectives, all of which contribute to positive changes, growth, and healing. Art itself can be considered a language, and metaphors are central to art therapy interventions, aiding in identification, conflict resolution, and the integration of personal narratives (Cao & Navarro, 2025; Morrell, 2011; Sheridan & Lith, 2024). Pictorial artifacts created during therapy can function as speech-acts, communicating conscious, subconscious, and unconscious processes (Gerge & Pedersen, 2017). This symbolic engagement through art is especially valuable for children who may not yet possess the verbal capacity to articulate their emotions (Gavron & Mayseless, 2018; Sampurno et al., 2020). In other words, art therapists feel that both the concept of art production as a therapeutic activity and the belief that art products convey therapeutic information are significant. Images can be used to convey thoughts and notions that are not fully articulated in words, providing opportunities for self-expression, emotional release, and psychological recovery ("A Critical Appraisal of Research in Arts, Health and Wellbeing," 2023; M., 2024). Numerous cultures have recognised the healing value of artistic endeavors, whether individual, collective, or cultural in nature. Historically, art and music have served as vital means for people in challenging circumstances to find meaning and resilience, intrinsically linking cultural identity with coping mechanisms (Bird & Clarke, 2020; Suryati et al., 2025). Arts- and culture-based strategies, by leveraging existing local resources, are increasingly recognized for their potential to support mental health globally (Golden et al., 2024). They began documenting their practice and developing a vocabulary and literature for art therapy.

Colour plays a key role in influencing emotions and mental well-being (Jonasuskaitė et al., 2020; Scott & Theodorson, 2019). Through chromotherapy, or colour therapy, light and colour frequencies are believed to affect human energy and mood, acting as a complementary or alternative approach to mental health (Azeemi et al., 2018; Fıdancı, 2025; Kriticka, 2023). Each colour carries unique vibrations that can stimulate physical and emotional responses, for instance, blue has a calming effect, while red can increase energy and alertness (Jonasuskaitė et al., 2020; Scott & Theodorson, 2019). Colours are thus used in art therapy to promote relaxation, balance, and healing by activating emotional awareness through visual engagement. Art therapy uses visual forms such as painting, sculpture, and photography to express thoughts and emotions beyond words, providing a safe, non-verbal way to explore inner feelings and psychological states (Abbing et al., 2018; Gruber & Oepen, 2017; Haeyen & Noorthoorn, 2021). It can help individuals recognise difficult emotions, integrate conflicting thoughts, and develop constructive coping mechanisms (Haeyen & Noorthoorn, 2021). In this study, the creative process reflects obsessive-compulsive disorder, not as a personal condition but as a metaphor for repetitive thought patterns. The artist channels emotional tension into structured forms, using colours and shapes to represent the cycle of obsession and release. Through this, the act of creating becomes therapeutic and transformative, promoting mindfulness and self-regulation (Abbing et al., 2018), and structured tasks within art therapy are particularly effective for emotion regulation (Gruber & Oepen, 2017). Fiber sculpture combines traditional craft and contemporary art practices using materials like yarn and cloth. Emerging after World War II, this art form evolved through weaving, knotting, and non-functional textile structures. Artists such as Lenore Tawney pioneered fiber as a sculptural medium. The tufting technique, central to this study, involves using a powered tufting gun to insert threads into a stretched fabric, creating textured loops or piles. This method allows tactile exploration of form, colour, and rhythm, translating emotional and sensory experiences into sculptural expression. Working with textiles and engaging in needlecrafts has been shown to positively impact mental health by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood, and increasing self-esteem (Lagadec et al., 2024; Saha et al., 2025). The tactile nature and repetitive motions of textile crafts provide a calming sensation (Saha et al., 2025), and fiber art, with its soft materials and varied textures, can alleviate anxiety and offer soothing psychological benefits (Ma & Zha, 2023), as can the role of visual digitalisation in a sustainable context (Legino et al., 2021).

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Review of Related Artworks

When it comes to art therapy and fiber sculpture, several local and international artists can serve as models for the creation of my end-of-year work. The artists were chosen for their similarities in terms of content or materials, as well as connections that could serve as a point of reference.

2.1.1 Yayoi Kusama

The artworks are influenced by the majority of Yayoi Kusama's works since they include elements such as line, characteristic, pattern, and most importantly, colour. It attracted to her because this aspect can be developed spontaneously and without the use of precision

measuring equipment while yet producing a beautiful creature. Kayo Samarium (born 1929) is a Japanese artist renowned as the "Princess of Polka Dots." Despite the fact that she makes a variety of works, including paintings, sculptures, performances, and installations, they all share one feature: dots. At the age of ten, she began seeing hallucinations that included flashes of light, fields of flowers, dots, and pumpkins speaking to her. These hallucinations appeared so vividly to her that they appeared to come to life and overwhelm her. She began painting at this time period, most likely in response to her hallucinations and concerns. Kusama moved to New York City in the 1950s, spending every penny she had on canvasses and paint since her obsessive-compulsive disorder was interfering with her relationship with her family.

2.1.2 Anne Samat

Anne Samat is one of the local artists whom the researcher might look to for guidance on material selection. After graduating from Malaysia's UiTM Mara in the 1990s, her graduation thesis works caught the attention of renowned glassmaker and painter Raja Azhar of Artcase Gallery. He instilled persistence in her and schooled her about the harsh realities of artistry. She absorbed it all and, to a degree, flourished. However, it was insufficient to satiate her unquenchable desire. The artist is a remarkable creature; she possesses and continues to possess an exquisite touch and an exquisite sense of art, and she has never become a carbon copy of anyone else over the years. Since the outset, she desired to shatter this vexing weaving taboo. She works with cultures and histories in order to convert them into something fresh and personal. Instead of the traditional Songket and Pua Kumbu, she uses more contemporary materials. As a result, the sculptures have surprisingly complex layers and designs. She creates works of art that she hopes are both forceful and kind. According to the news release, Samat's work is "a synthesis of tradition and modernism, combining and protecting the old with the new." On a physical level, this may be interpreted as a metaphor for her materials, she is weaving with the plentiful waste of our plastic present. However, Samat's "modernisation" contains other references. According to Malay tradition, metal is male, while cloth or textile is female. Numerous marriage traditions in Southeast Asia include a cross-gender exchange of metal and fabric. Samat's materials, metal braided with thread and plastic (a third, gendered material), address this gender divide. These effigies have a cyborg aesthetic, and they bear the traces of a creator whose cultural history clashes with her physical environment.

2.1.3 Toni Brogan

She is a weaver and an artist working with textiles. Additionally, she has always been fascinated to materials, texture, and various sorts of fiber; one of her first childhood memories is of wool and its warmth. She is particularly interested in texture and the tactile sensations created when different fibers come into contact with and against one another. She was initially drawn to weaving by its almost limitless creative possibilities, as well as the "no rules" techniques and free form approach that can be applied. Through exploration and growth, she helped me develop some of my own approaches, enabling me to make art that is wholly unique. The tremendous changes in seasons motivate me to work more with colour, from the frigid whites of winter to the dull browns of spring, the acid greens of summer, and the vivid combination of fiery reds/pinks/yellows and oranges of fall, all set against the stunning Catskill Mountains.

2.2 Visual Research and Studio Research

The visual research focused on exploring emotional responses to colours and forms inspired by sensory experiences. Through observation, sketches, and reference studies of artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Anne Samat, and Toni Brogan, the researcher examined how colour, texture, and pattern influence perception and emotion. The study analysed colour psychology and chromotherapy principles to determine the therapeutic potential of specific hues. Visual documentation and compositional studies guided the selection of colour juxtapositions that evoke calmness, balance, and introspection.

The studio research translated visual findings into tangible fibre sculptures, utilising tufting techniques. Acrylic yarn and monk's cloth were selected for their tactile and expressive qualities. The making process involved experimentation with weaving, layering, and cutting to achieve variations in texture and depth. Colours such as blue, green, and pink, symbolising tranquility, growth, and compassion, were juxtaposed to stimulate emotional harmony. Iterative studio practice allowed continuous reflection and refinement, culminating in a series of fiber-based relief sculptures that embody therapeutic expression through colour and form (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Implementation of creative inspiration into a compositional form on a fundamental level. (Source: Nur Alia Ismail, 2021).

3.0 Result and Discussion

Development of artworks that are based on personal experiences, yet in a positive way. The final piece is built on therapeutic colours and shapes; hence, blue, green, and pink are the primary colours in this work. The artworks featured colours as the primary theme. The colour of a sculpture is one of its most intriguing features. Colour can be used in realistic and abstract sculpture to add aesthetic beauty, set a mood, or elicit a specific feeling. For a long time, people's behaviour has been influenced in many ways by colours. Certain others

are well-known for their ability to encourage both physical and mental activity. Others report that they have a calming effect, while yet others say they promote both mental and physical activity in their patients. Even though it doesn't seem like it, colours have a deeper impact on our lives than we realise. It is believed that colours have healing properties due to their impact on the human mind and body. Alternative therapies like color therapy have grown in popularity throughout time and are now in high demand. The sculptures' shapes are influenced by geometric shapes like circles, organic curves, and other irregularities; they can be rearranged and rearranged just like emotions. Relief sculpture was the end outcome (see Fig. 2).

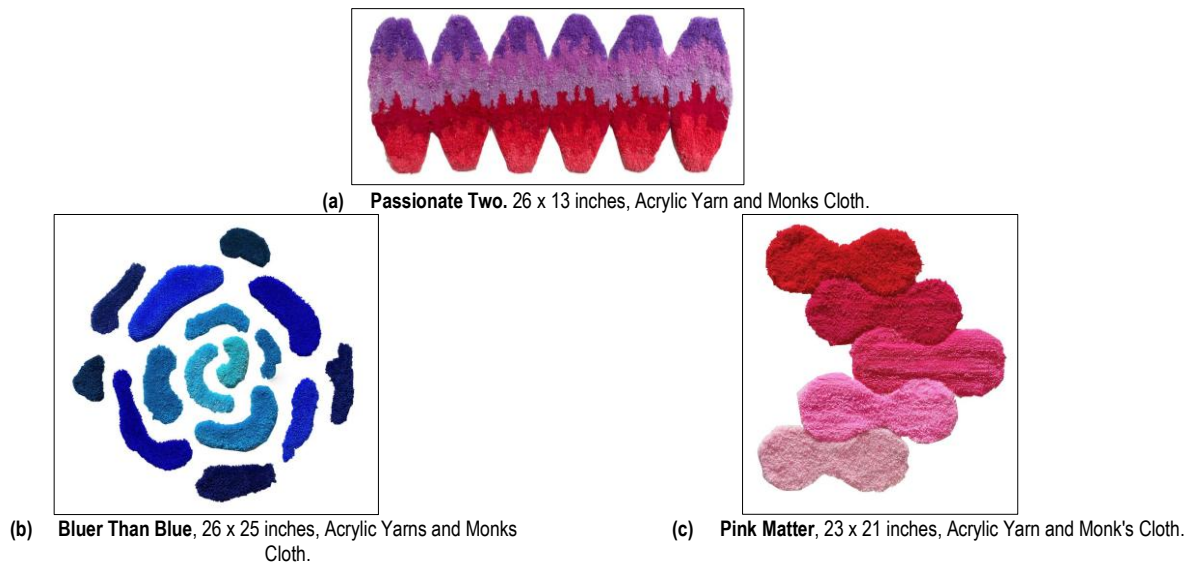


Fig. 2. The final artworks: (a) Passionate Two, (b) Bluer than Blue, and (c) Pink Matter. (Source: Nur Alia Ismail, 2021).

4.0 Conclusion

The effort resulted in a contribution to the area through the discovery of a new manifestation of art therapy within tufted sculpture, as well as the exploration of colour perception and geometric forms. In spite of the fact that the design is strongly reliant on current technology, the work illustrates the importance of considering the craft as inspiration rather than a definition of work in order to push the frontiers of design. As the colours and expressiveness of the tufting changed, so did the manner in which it was used. The use of art materials, the creative process, and the completion of an art project are all examples of art therapy as a human service profession in which therapeutic touch is accomplished. When people connect with art materials and learn something about this ailment, they will acquire personal knowledge and progress, regardless of the art therapy approach that is employed. All of these characteristics of art therapy are important, including nonverbal communication, metaphoric meaning, and connection orientation. Art therapy can serve both therapeutic and developmental purposes because of these characteristics, as well as the stages of the Expressive Therapies Continuum. Three degrees of activity must be performed to evaluate the aesthetics of something. The first stage is to evaluate the material's overall quality, colour, attitude, and several other physical responses to determine its suitability. Both techniques are used to turn observations into visually appealing forms and patterns. The third type of arrangement is one in which the arrangement is associated with earlier feelings and sentiments. To put it another way, emotions and sentiments are expressed through music. Art appreciation in the context of aesthetic pleasure needs emotional and psychological maturity on both the individual and the collective level. The same phenomenon happened when artists were inspired to create artworks because of their own health difficulties. However, despite its imperfections, this illness is a gift from Allah SWT, and we, as humans, must approach it from a good perspective because the consequences of viewing it from a negative perspective are horrendous.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This paper links art therapy with fiber sculpture, using colour and texture to express emotional and sensory experiences. Through tufting techniques, it introduces a therapeutic art form that promotes healing and reflection. The study highlights colour's emotional impact and shows how material exploration supports creative growth and mental well-being in art practice.

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