

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Exhibition Review by Naomi Perry

A Personal History of Art Therapy in Less than 100 Objects
35 Chapel Walk Gallery, Sheffield 10th to 15th September 2018

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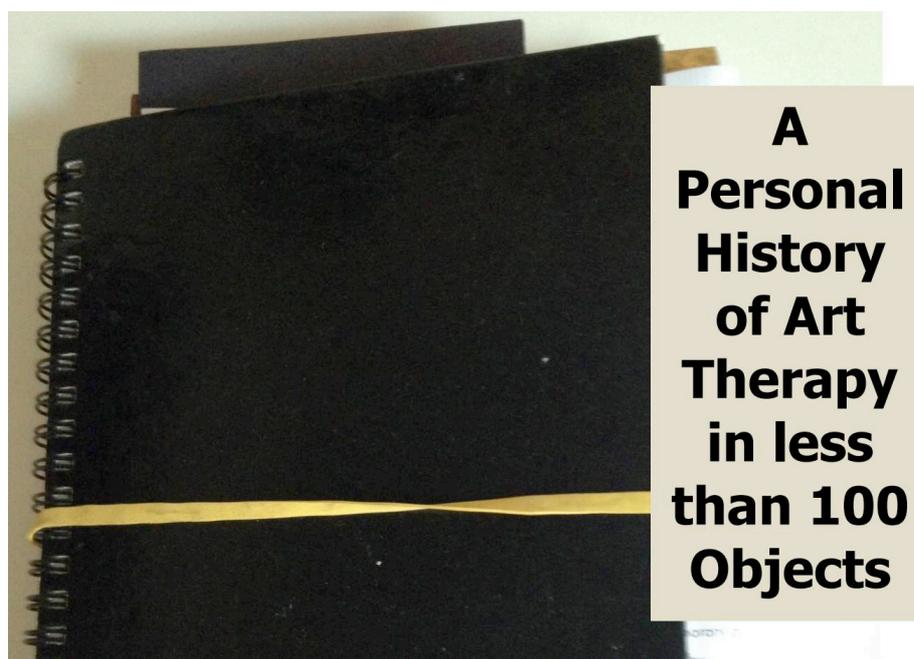
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There are few words publicising the exhibition but enough to raise interest in '*A Personal History of Art Therapy in Less than 100 Objects.*' The image of a notebook, its spine strained by its contents, is secured from prying eyes by a single band of rubber. The contrast of the natural tan of rubber and the dark book cover, enhances the mundane.

When I think about personal objects and especially of history, my thoughts are taken back to my childhood and visits to my grandparents' house. I spent many exciting hours with my sisters searching the recesses of cupboards, fascinated by the strange and obscure 'stuff' that was revealed by our efforts. More recently are visits to antique emporiums and bric-a-brac shops. Packed to the rafters with artefacts, which are made more emotive by the sensory overload, the imagination is fired. Perhaps not knowing what stories really lie behind the often worn, chipped or faded objects is part of the appeal but in this exhibition we are given an insight into what often remains private.

Inspired by a Radio 4 series that explored the history of the world in less than 100 artefacts (MacGregor, 2012), Dave Edwards has curated an exhibition belonging to the world of art therapy. He is intrigued by the idea of how selection and order of objects can represent something beyond the reason of their making. Participants are mainly, but not exclusively, art therapists with whom Edwards has been acquainted. Included are contributions from John Henzell, Andrea Gilroy, Helen Greenwood and from more recently qualified therapists, Katya Sommer and Jo Casey. The brief: to submit an image of an object together with no more than 500 words explaining the reason for your selection.

The first and most obvious question when entering the gallery space is where are the objects? The contrast of what is anticipated and the reality of the exhibition are considerable.

Around the white walls of the gallery are hung a series of A4 picture frames. As you might imagine, the selection of original objects is diverse but this is not immediately apparent. The original object is transformed into an image, thereby creating a new entity. For the most part the new objects are identical in size and aesthetic to one another and closer scrutiny is required to discover the individual and personal stories of each exhibit. This altered state restricts our sensory interaction and gives greater significance to the written word. The narrative accompanying each image does not disappoint and reveals fond, intimate memories of significant relationships, of inspiration and memorable times in life. It is the story and less the object that inspires us to reflect on our own lives and the mementos we gather.

Some objects are timeless; others more revealing of the influences of advances in the profession yet what unifies this disparate collection is the significance of objects in our lives, 'who we are, individually and collectively, may be defined by the objects we possess' (Edwards, 2018).

Perhaps the unifying way the 25 different contributions are presented facilitates a cohesive theme and a retrospective of the profession to be achieved successfully by Edwards. What is more demanding of the viewer is the time required to get the most from what is on offer. During the process of writing this review, I have wanted

to return to the individual stories and to reflect longer on the objects; the girls with no eyes (Stein); the travel paint palette (Richardson); the Roneo Machine (Gilroy), and to contemplate what stirs in my own mind. The concept of the exhibition is inspiring and one that would be of wider interest beyond the profession. Perhaps a further transformation as a series of postcards, a book or an online gallery and podcasts could be the next stage for what could be an ever-growing collection!

Biography

Before training as an art therapist, Naomi followed her childhood dream to travel the world and experience first hand the diversity of humankind. Returning to study Glass design and later Fine Art, Naomi went on to work for many years in social housing. She is particularly interested in working with children and families who are most hard to reach. Currently a lecturer on the MA Art Psychotherapy Practice within the Northern Programme she also co-facilitates the Foundation Course in Art Therapy. She has experience of working in the NHS, specialist foster care and the private healthcare sector and also maintains a small practice working with children and young people within educational settings.

References

Edwards, D. (2018) *A Personal History of Art Therapy in less than 100 Objects* (Exhibition). Held at 35 Chapel Walk Gallery, Sheffield.