

Book review

Assessment in art therapy

Edited by Andrea Gilroy, Robin Tipple and Christopher Brown

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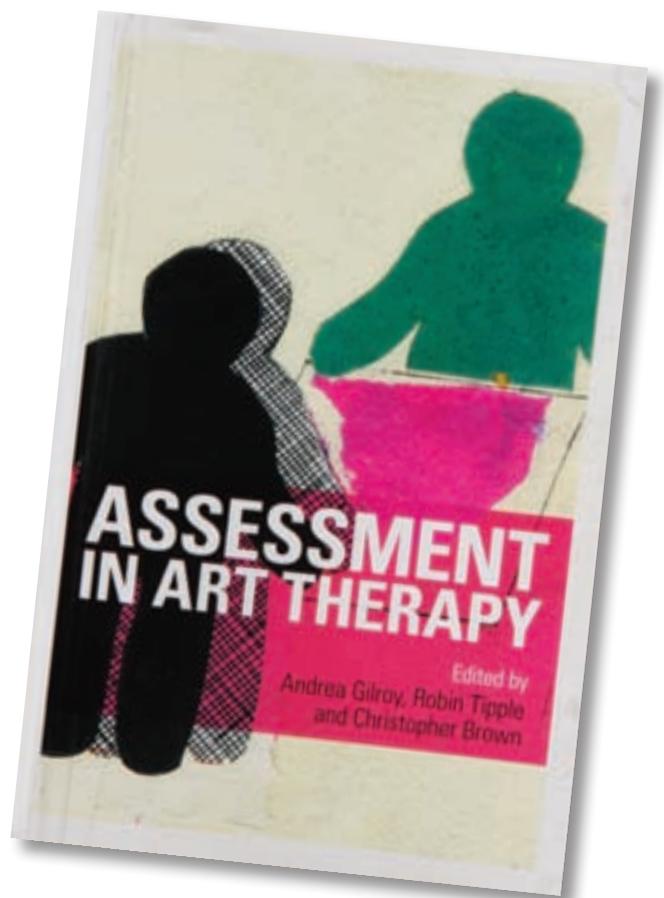
Reviewed by Sandra Drabant

As an art therapist, I regularly utilise art-based assessments in my workplace, Mater Child and Youth Mental Health Services. During the 'assessment phase', I conduct and report on two formal art therapy assessments, essentially to provide further information to the multidisciplinary team and to inform the young person's treatment plan. The book *Assessment in art therapy* validates the work I do, yet challenged me to reflect on the approach and model of assessment that I use in my clinical practice.

This book has much to offer both the recently graduated and the experienced art therapist as it inspires and encourages the development of clinical guidelines for art therapy assessment. Vignettes and case studies presented by art therapists expose the reader to a variety of discussions on how art-based assessment determines suitability for treatment, taking into account the social and cultural context, populations and treatment facilities in which the authors practise.

However, readers should be aware that if they are seeking a book that will provide specific guidelines for art-based assessments or for the implementation of a particular art therapy assessment, this book does not offer that. As the authors state, "Our aim in this book is to explore [the] diversity of practises in art therapy assessment [...] thus we have not distilled art therapy assessment guidelines and criteria for practitioners use" (p.1).

The introduction informs the reader that the chapters have been written by art therapists



from 'both sides of the Atlantic', UK and USA. Brief reference is made to the influence of the health system of each country on the implementation of art-based assessments. It was refreshing to read the editors' observation that art therapy assessment approaches do not reflect the stereotypes for which each country is generally known. Generally speaking, in the USA, art-based assessments inform diagnosis and, in the UK, they inform treatment.

Part I consists of six chapters, three each by art therapists in the USA and the UK, which

discuss therapeutic work with clients of all ages. Within these chapters, the reader learns about institutional contexts and teams in a variety of settings. The influence of specific theories and approaches are discussed, including a qualitative postmodern inclusive approach, post-structuralist theory, a psychodynamic framework and studio-based models with a focus on the process of art-making.

A key issue addressed in Part I is evidence-based practice, with suggestions given for how evidence-based practice could be developed. This topic provokes questions such as: Does art need to be made in an initial art therapy assessment or should the 'therapy' in the art therapy assessment be the focus? How do therapists utilise directive and non-directive approaches? What are key goals for assessment? What considerations need to be taken into account for an assessment report? How does videoing an assessment add to the information gained?

Part II consists of seven reports from art therapists (three from the USA and four from the UK) about their practice. Each author addresses the subheadings: Here's where I work; Here's what I assess; Here's what I do; Here's an example. Each chapter concludes with references.

Contexts and populations include secure settings; inpatient units, where the aim of assessment is to evaluate risk of harm; a forensic secure unit, where the art therapist used object relations theory to understand the client's internal world; a learning disability inpatient unit; a community mental health team; private practice with an autistic boy; and a bereavement service for children and families where the Silver Draw-A-Story assessment was used to assess progress.

As a reviewer, I found this section the most interesting and engaging. I felt invited into the art therapist's room because of the convincing descriptive narratives used to illustrate the initial art therapy assessment session. The examples were realistic, demonstrating the difficulties and challenges that confront the

therapist and client at the initial meeting. The diversity of settings and populations presented in the reports make it highly likely that readers will find settings and populations similar to those they have experienced themselves.

Part III of the book consists of five chapters (three American and three British authors), the first of which compares art psychotherapy to a series of performance art pieces entitled *Nightsea crossing*. The other authors in Part III write about different structures, procedures and criteria that they have developed in their own models of art therapy assessments. Once again the reader is given an honest account via case narratives about the interactions between therapist and client. This is all framed within literature reviews that closely connect the therapist's theory to practice.

Assessment in art therapy is a valuable book that will have the art therapy reader thinking critically and analysing their own assessment practice. It is aimed at the reader who has a solid understanding of art therapy theories and practices more so than one with little knowledge of the field. While the representation of both American and British art therapists in this text can be appreciated, it gives rise to a question about how art therapists in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore conceive and implement art therapy assessment.