

Early Psychosis Intervention Programme Singapore, art psychotherapy open studio: A year in review, 2016–17

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Abstract

In April 2016, the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme (EPIP) at the Institute of Mental Health Singapore decided to set up an art therapy open studio on its mixed inpatient ward. This article reviews a full year of activity of the open studio sessions as an innovative and relatively new project in the Singaporean context of inpatient closed wards in psychiatric care. The article examines a definition of the open art studio against the backdrop of local Singaporean politics, the geography of the space used, and the art media contents. It describes a typical weekly session, looking at motivations behind patient participation, recurrent patterns in the use of art media, and patient interaction and project reception in the ward at large. The author also considers her constantly shifting role as an art therapist: throughout the year, within the three-hour session, and as an outsider to the EPIP multi-disciplinary team. The cultural differences revealed by being a Western therapist in an Asian therapeutic setting are discussed as well. Lastly, through a compilation of patient evaluations, the author reflects on the possible benefits and consequences of the EPIP open studio, and expresses a hope that the format will continue, enabling the open studio experience to grow and thrive in Singaporean mental health institutions in the future.

Keywords

Art therapy, Singapore, inpatient psychiatric care, censorship, cultural differences.

Patient looking at the art therapist's clay bust of a woman

P: *She looks from another time. She's from the olden days. What do you think?*

AT: *Hmm I don't know, she just emerged really. What time would you say she's from?*

P: *I think Victorian (silence). But what is she saying to you?*

AT: *Wow, that's a good question, I hadn't quite finished so I didn't have a good look at her yet.*

P: *But I know what she is saying!*

AT: *Oh yeah? What's that?*

P: *I think she is saying: Hello there and welcome here, how are you feeling today?*



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