

Considering art as a political and social tool, this body of work encompasses the therapeutic potential of creativity.

Being a leader of weekly Art Therapy sessions for recovering drug and alcohol abusers, my intention for this work was to outline and honour the incomparable ability of art as an effective tool in improving mental health. The pictures shown reveal some of the outcomes of the sessions. NS NS (explain?)

In order to authentically demonstrate art as a therapy, I began by participating in activities carried out by service users in our previous sessions. Upon completing a free sculpting task, I made multiple cubes.

NS Recognising symbols in art as displaced wishes, Freud theorised that surrealists 'attempted to simulate effects of madness in automatic writing and art alike', thus opening art up to a whole new field of exploration. After exploring the meaning of a cube, I found that it has many interpretations which could all provide insight into my inner state. NS

Cubes can be seen as conveying a sense of stability and formality. As humans, we trust the shape due to it being seen as dependable and safe. Some companies (e.g. Microsoft) use the cube for their logos as it is said to have gravitas and it is deemed traditional or authoritative, thus creating the sensation that it is reliable and trustworthy. However, I was quick to question whether I could simply conclude that I felt I held these characteristics, or whether, in fact, I was seeking them. This sparked a new avenue of direction for me, allowing my work to then explore conceptual aspects of art, through the post-medium context, and its ability to convey significance through interpretation.

I was prompted to enquire further into artistic movements who intentionally encourage cognisance of deeper meanings and concepts behind artworks. Conceptual art is dissatisfied with the capitalisation of art, through forcing it to be purchasable and disposable objects. This highlights the importance of context. Resultantly, creative processes are no longer confined by pressures to produce what is typically known as a 'work of art' through aesthetic box-ticking. Combining the heightened conceptual importance (in this case; help) with the ability of art to encourage unfettered expression in the subconscious, I was then able to understand art's potential in a therapeutic context.

NS

Lin Tianmiao's installation "Badges" questions how women are perceived and defined by examining the way language constructs identities. Words such as 'Butch', 'Troll' and 'Trophy Wife' are stitched into silk, hanging from the ceiling on large embroidery hoops. This provides a sensation for the viewer of being overwhelmed and overcome by their invasive nature. Whilst my work was influenced by Tianmiao, encouraged to elicit a more contextualised approach in the presentation of my concepts, her intentional provocation of discomfort for the viewer was most influential. NS As a result, I wanted to create challenge as a part of my work. Hand-sewn text on a T-shirt, reading 'choose JOY', allows the viewer

to assign this choice to the individual wearing the T-shirt, distancing themselves from the invitation completely, OR acknowledge it as a personal decision to make. Either way, a challenge is created. To augment this challenge, with intention for the viewer to become active within the work, I then expanded my work further and introduced a participatory element through the physical. **NS** Providing a table laid out with chairs to sit at, needles, fabric, thread and instructions, I invited the viewer to sew into being what they would choose to behold that day onto a small patch of fabric. Thus encouraging engagement with a positive influence on mentality through the process of making. **NS** This interactive work was something I deemed more successful in demonstrating my concepts. Having seen the outcome of only a small engagement, **NS** it is apparent that this type of work has a lot of creative potential.

My work seeks to provide an invitation of advancement from the viewer's position as a passive consumer into becoming an active participant. Inspired by the post-medium context, I would like to develop this work further with more engagement from the viewer. I will explore artists who make participatory work and how they create dialogues between aesthetics and functionality through audience interaction. Acknowledging the risk in surrendering control to the viewer, it will be important to ensure that my work has clear outcomes, however, it could be that certain ambiguities enhance the work. After all, it remains unknown as to whether true freedom of expression can be defined. **NS** Thus, I will hold every creative thought lightly, allowing for mistakes to create possible directive suggestions.

Questions:

Have you thought about what the effect might be if someone wrote something negative?

So do you mean if someone were to write something like 'anxiety' after the 'today I behold' invitation? Usually, in an art therapy session, these activities would be preceded by others that attempt to influence the individual directionally towards choosing a positive option. And, through the power of process, you would expect to see this positive trajectory happen quite naturally, after focus has been placed on positive mentality and away from their struggles. However, I do recognise that currently, my artwork is not being conducted in a typical therapeutic setting, so I guess I think that this kind of honesty and vulnerability is something that is so important in the context of art therapy. Allowing an individual to be true to themselves and not confined by the instructions given is something incredibly freeing and, more often than not, provides the comfort in relationship between therapist and client that ultimately leads to future success. As a result, I wouldn't discount the work as useless, but I would be encouraged to recognise how this is actually leading someone closer to true freedom of expression.