

# Art Therapy Helps You Realize that 'Self-Expression' Can be Conscious and Unconscious

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**Abstract:** As for one's personality, there are times when one says, "I don't notice it, but others do," and this is one of the factors that interfere with human relationships. People often do not notice the difference in their unconscious behavior when they are working on someone who they are interested in and someone they are not interested in. The following is the example of how art therapy has changed a person's life (for the better) by "becoming aware" of what he or she usually transmits or expresses, especially what he or she "unconsciously expresses" and becoming "conscious" of it. As an example, when I asked the participants to draw a picture of a "pet" as a simple word, and then to name the pet, I found a common tendency in each of them.

**KEYWORDS:** art therapy, unconscious, resentment, personality, information, influence, reaction, compartmentalization

## 1. Purpose

Self-expression is the act of communicating one's feelings, thoughts, etc. to others. It is the output of one's "information" (various elements such as speech, behavior, appearance, atmosphere, work, family, etc.) as well as the input of others' responses to it. In this process, information that you are not aware of or do not expect to come across is included. As a result, people become angry at the reality in front of them, saying, "This cannot be so," and are unable to accept the reality. When there is a problem, the person is bewildered by a bolt from the blue, but others think inwardly, saying "I knew this was going to happen" (See the blind area in Johari Window).

## (1) Visualizing your mind

Others cannot point out feelings that you are not aware of. It is important to become aware of one's "unconscious" and make changes for a better life by becoming conscious of it. The

purpose of art therapy is to visualize your mind in order to become aware of the "unconscious". (I am not a medical professional, so I am targeting very ordinary people who have self-control of their minds. The themes of the paintings and their interpretations are based on many paintings over the years.)

## (2) Unconscious to be visualized from the drawn diagram

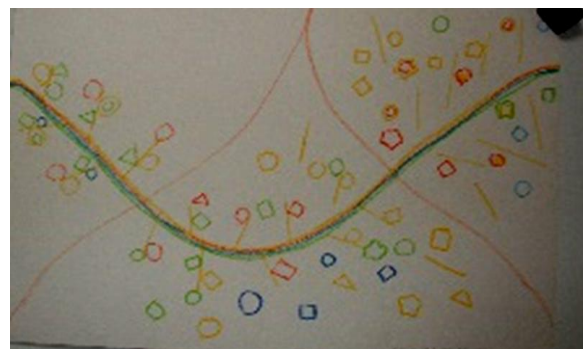


Figure 1. Male 60s, Theme: "Past, Present, and Future"

\* Intentions of the theme

By using the past as a starting point, it is easy to

unconsciously create an image of the future from their hands. When given a theme, it is not a matter of deciding, "Let's draw it this way". The hand moves on its own. This may be because past experiences have taken root in the mind and body as a response.

#### Interpretation of figure

##### ① His comments

"I want to gradually enrich the relationships I have." The more the painting moves toward the future (right side), however, the further away from the line the geometry (symbols of various beings) is. When I asked his opinions after some time, he said, "I was surprised. Maybe in a deeper sense I am already sick of family and relationship. But it kept floating in and out."

##### ② Art Therapist's comments (hereinafter AT)

It is to help them recognize these feelings. If he/she isolates himself/herself in later years, he/she does not blame himself/herself or others. If the person feels good about it, that is all that matters. It is important to protect the person's emotional dignity. However, It suggests that if the person is aware of this, the direction of his or her life may become more peaceful. It can happen that a person gradually finds a state of mind that allows him or her to see the good in relationships that he or she had found unpleasant. Instead of finally realizing the risk of destroying a relationship in real life (which you unconsciously want to do), it makes sense to anticipate it with pseudo-art therapy and experience it when you still have the energy to change your feelings.

## 2. Methods

(1) Knowing the "unconscious" is necessary for better living.

Emotions are reactions to influences from others. We tend to think that we cannot change our normalized reactions because of our personality.

It is necessary to trace back to the unconscious to understand why we react in the same pattern to the other person's words and why we become uncomfortable. Reactions are complex and making from various past events. Using 16 color crayons, the participants are asked to draw a diagram in about 2 to 3 minutes according to the theme given from the AT.

##### (2) Unconscious system

①The individual is completely unaware of it.

② Occasionally, he/she feels anxiety, anger, or sadness that is difficult to explain. The person is dimly aware that there is some reason, but is too afraid to access these feelings. They are somehow aware of the possibility of mental and physical withdrawal from their workplace and family by becoming aware of them. (Looking at the artist's art is deeply related to this unconscious manifestation. In some cases, looking at an artist's painting gradually descends the stairway to the depths of the mind.)

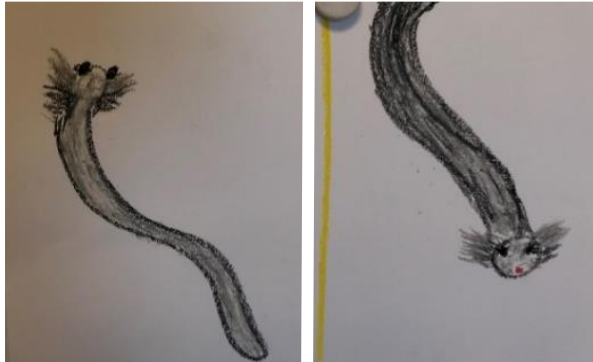
③ In order for one to approach the realm of the unconscious, there must be an environmental safety that allows the mind to spontaneously release itself. Quiet environment and AT are not only technical, but also emotional calmness is important. For example, it is the same as not being able to express one's true feelings to a fickle and scary parent or teacher. One of the fears people have of other people is that they are emotionally narrow-minded and dismissive of other people's ideas and opinions. In this case, they always unconsciously choose to say and do things within the limits of what the other person is willing to accept. This leads to a relationship in which information cannot be shared. The fear of a particularly fickle person is that they are inconsistent in their thinking and cannot read the standard line of dialogue.

(3) Theme of the picture

\*Themes of the drawings: The themes of Figure 2 to 5 are the same.

The left is "Just a pet. On the right is what if I had given it a name (information)?"

Figure 2. 50s Female in 2016



Left ◀ ▶ Right

Figure 3. 20s Male in 2016



Left ◀ ▶ Right

Figure 4. 30s Female in 2016



Left ◀ ▶ Right

Figure 5. 50s Male in 2016



Left ◀ ▶ Right

Intention of the theme: A pet with a name might have a certain facial expression, personality, and affection, which is a high level of interest in the subject, and that pet can be read in the picture compared to an ordinary pet.

### 3. Results

#### (1) Interpretation of Figures 2 to 5

① When named, the pet's face turned toward himself (Figure 2), its face became larger (Figure-4), and the number of items in the painting increased (Figure 3, Figure 5). Naming (more information) means more familiarity and more responsibility. (Figure 3, changing the water in the tank) It is interesting to note that out of the four respondents, two of the men increased the items in the painting. Figure 5 shows that if one is given a name, one can be in a safe state (i.e., loved by the other person), but at the same time, one can also feel the "difficulty" of assuming the opposite position of having to conform to the values of the other person. When interpreted in an "expanded" sense, people tend to increase information about people they like, follow the movements of people they like with their eyes, and memorize the words of people they do not like.

② Naming is not only fun, but it is also a responsibility. Because of getting close, this information also causes stress and tends to lead to feelings of hatred, anger, and sadness. The reason why natural control of emotions (not moral or otherwise) is necessary is that with people with whom we live together, the information there is dense, including physical information, and emotional outbursts can occur. We accumulate information that allows us to blame the other person because we are close to them. Anger due to this accumulation can happen to be directed at a complete stranger. Negative information about emotional trauma tends to be "compartmentalized," but it is easy for it to become apparent to everyone when triggered by

trouble. A child's name reflects the parent's consciousness, such as "Takao (filial piety)" or "Masako (wanting the child to live in a right way)" in Japanese.

## (2) Interpretation from other figures

Here are some examples of how changes in the time of life bring about changes in the painting.

### ① Figure 6: Theme "On the Table"

\*The intention of the theme:

The balance between who we see ourselves as seen by others and what we want on the inside may be depicted unconsciously.

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Interpretation of the figure

The painting is fantastical, it seems nobody is living, such as the outside of the window, the picture, and the candles (Figure 6). The artist's comment: "I want to be a person who do what they want to do more, not who I am now."

### ② Figure 7: Theme "On the Table"

\*The intention of the theme:

Same as Figure 6

\*Interpretation of the figure

The room is filled with plants, a light to illuminate the hand, a clock, writing utensils, and other objects that manage and create the present moment.

The clock, in particular, shows that the students are not spending their time vaguely thinking, "I have to do something," but rather they are valuing the times.



Figure 6. On the Table: 50s Female.



Figure 7. On the Table: 50s Female  
(same as figure 6)

### ③ Figure 8: Theme "My Current Mood"

\*Intention of the theme

It is easy to come up with what occupies one's mind most at the moment in terms of sensation.

Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10 are the common theme.

Interpretation of Figure 8, 9, and 10

The artist seems to be somewhat unrealistic (Figure-8), spiritual (interest in the sky above the earth), and at the same time, she seems to want to cherish stability and a freer and more natural mind (a sense of symbiosis with nature, such as wind), as the towel is held up in a pinch. From there, they voluntarily begin to relate to society and have the following goals, and in Figure 9 and Figure 10, they feel the need to properly perform the skills and cleaning that are necessary to achieve these goals.



Figure 8. "My Current Mood" 40s Female in 2006



Figure 9. 50s Female in 2017



Figure 10. 50s Female in 2019

From the above picture, a certain amount of time has passed before the unconscious desire is made conscious and it is expressed in reality. It is not a start from wanting to do something concrete, but a desire to "like oneself more," and it takes time to find a subject to be involved in. It is a symbol of the affluence of the times that people want to be active as themselves after they have finished raising their children and other activities.

### (3) Theme/"Anger"

#### \*Intention of the theme

Anger is easily recognized by the individual, but it is often a trait that is easily manifested and of which the individual is unaware. It can be fundamentally changed by changes in experience.

#### \* Interpretation of the diagram

Lines with colorful speed (Figure 11) emanate from the black mass in the center. There is anger across diverse items (diverse colors) from "eruption type" to some degree of patience. He is balanced and even objective, but the fact that the screen is full is worrisome. 4 years later, Figure 12 is greatly changed and controlled, and according to him, he wants people to notice his anger in the areas where the yellow is showing. There is less empty space below and more stability than above. Control is not an energy of positive thinking, morality, or common sense, but from a rationality of making himself happy. After 2018, he felt the need to be some kind of producer and began to produce more art.



Figure 11. Anger. 50s Male in 2018



Figure 12. 50s same person and theme

### (4) Theme

Left: Influenced by others

Right: Influencing people

#### \*Intention of the theme

Those who are influenced are easily aware of their influence, but those who give influence are less likely to be aware of it. If we can see this tendency, it is expected that we will be more aware of our own power.

#### \*Interpretation of figure

Compared to Figure 13, which is very active, Figure 14 shows little movement. It is difficult to notice the influence that anyone has on others. Noticing this can bring objectivity to one's expression and reduce unfairness in terms of others in interpersonal relationships (e.g., being hard on others and soft on oneself).





Figure 13.  
Influenced by  
others. 50s Male  
in 2022



Figure 14. Influencing  
people. Same person  
as Figure 13

### (3) Process for action

→ Since it is unlikely to come true, seal it off  
→ Emotions sway unstably  
→ Reality feels heavy (becomes critical of others)  
→ Draw it up → Realize that it was ambiguous  
→ Feel like responding to the manifestation  
→ realistically get on with it → appreciation for  
self that created the current environment and  
appreciation for family and others is also born.  
What he wanted to do was to "nurture and  
express my own talents on my own through  
steady efforts, and to sublimate my dislike for  
myself into a point of beauty. The foundation is  
self-reliance.

### 4. Discussion

The following observations can be made from  
the results of the above drawings.

Permission to publish all figures has been  
obtained.

(1) Knowing the "unconscious" changes the ways  
we live.

① Through art therapy, unconscious information  
that influences our actual life is revealed in our  
drawings.

② Unconsciously, if you want to be free from ties  
with others, for example, when you go out, you

choose to be in poor physical condition based on  
your information. People who want to go out will  
give priority to the pleasant feeling of meeting  
people, even if they are actually not feeling well.  
Many people hesitate to move toward  
self-actualization to become happier. It is better  
to take time instead of acting immediately when  
you consciously want to do something.

(2) The desire to do something creates a healthy  
life.

① Whether there is a path of endeavor that only  
you can take becomes important as you age.  
Making vague desires conscious tends to increase  
politeness toward life.

② To complain about the current situation  
unnecessarily is to miss the opportunity to  
challenge.

(3) It is not always good to talk about whatever  
you desire.

It is important to "wait" time for them to warm  
up inside you and feel as if they are about to  
hatch. Desires have the power to connect you to  
the outer world, but if you are not aware of them,  
you will increase excessive interference with  
yourself and others. Being sensitive to one's  
conscious and unconscious mind is the way to  
care for others. It is important to face your true  
feelings about whether or not this is what you  
really want.

(4) By getting older, behavior gets limited.

Therefore, past experiences (property) are  
transformed into reactions that boil down to the  
mind. The way of understanding past experiences  
needs to be broadened and changed.

(5) Human information is affected by the energy of the  
times

① Coal era (solid)

→ Absolute patriarchy = geographical and blood relations

## ②Petroleum era (liquid)

→ Fluid, urban-rural interaction = nuclear family, economic ties

## ③ Nuclear power and wind power (gas).

→(freedom, individual to individual, SNS) = consciousness ties.

Relationships are more pneumatic (virtual).

Personal information transcends the real person.

Consciousness and unconsciousness are easily reflected in reality.

## References

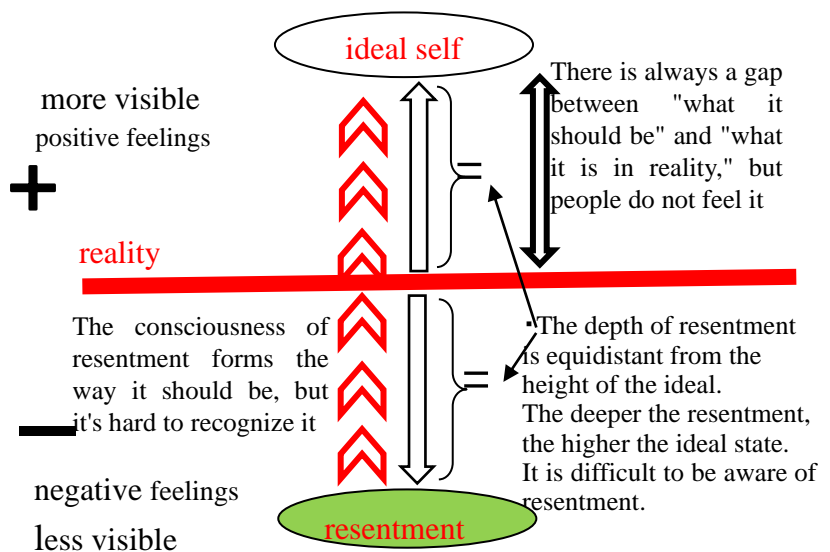
(1) To "make the best use of a person" is to become an edge for the other person to realize and reflect on a certain cause of the other person's life and change, like a midwife. (Quotes Club Socrates, July 05, 2019)

(2) "Kurosu Method" (Seize the Future Each One Desires) (Mie Kurosu. 2020.\_Bungeisha.)

(3) Johari's Window (Asami Kuru. 2012. Asahi Press)

(4) Art and nature secretly cooperate to make human beings healthy. (Setagaya Art Museum Concept)

A material prepared by Mr. Y, the participant, and his comments  
The greater the "resentment" we have, the higher the ideal becomes. This makes it difficult to make it a reality, and also increases the "resentment," and reality becomes a wall against which one cannot take a step forward. As a result, it is easy to go in the direction of destroying reality. I never thought I had feelings of resentment. I did a lot of research on the mind, but after some time, I fell down again. I think the reason is that I did not receive my "resentment" feelings.



Material prepared by Mr. Y