

# When Art Heals

*"I was angry...No amount of therapy  
was helping me."*



Written by Mansi Dua

*For people who struggle to express themselves in words, art therapy is a powerful means of communication and can help in healing any mental health issue.*

In a dimly lit room, as the scent of aromatic candles surrounded us, well-kept secrets were shared and friends were made for a lifetime. I still remember the positive atmosphere of that room. After struggling with anger issues for years, Vrinda Malhotra is now a calmer person.

“I always had a troubled relationship with my parents and a lot of repressed anger, which increased after I completed Class 12. I had to skip a year because of health issues while all my friends were going ahead in their lives. I was so angry with everyone and just couldn’t forgive myself for falling ill. No amount of therapy was helping me.”

*“Art Therapy is like learning a new language.”*

In 2015, Malhotra experienced group art therapy for the first time with Vasvi Srivastava, and that, she says, changed her life. “I realised I was holding on to so many unnecessary emotions and started looking at things from a new perspective. I stopped blaming everyone for my problems, made some amazing friends and improved my relationship with my parents.”

### *Romancing with Colours and Art*

For people who struggle to express themselves in words, art therapy is a powerful means of communication. “Art therapy is like learning a new language that can be used as a safe way to express your deepest feelings and emotions,” says Vasvi Srivastava, founder of Abhyaantar.



Creating art helps people recognize and acknowledge feelings that have been lurking in their subconscious.

A psychologist by training, she started Abhyaantar Healing Arts along with Nishtha Sawant in 2016. The two of them facilitate art therapy and work towards helping individuals and groups to discover their authentic self.

“After being in the corporate sector for years, I could not feel a sense of purpose. Having an inclination towards drawing and painting, I knew how therapeutic it is and wanted to combine my knowledge and my passion to help people. That’s how I got into art therapy,” Srivastava says.

Sawant, who stays in Himachal Pradesh with her husband, speaks about the healing nature of art. “It feels empowering

when a client discovers the magic of art, the spark in their eyes is worth living for,” Sawant says she still revisits some of the activities. “Art is like a tool that will stay with you once you learn it, and you can use it and discover something new about along with Nishtha Sawant in 2016. “Having an inclination towards drawing and painting,

“I knew how therapeutic Art is and wanted to combine my knowledge and my passion to help people.” Srivastava says.

Art therapy is a relatively new concept and at a very nascent stage in India. Although art has always been used as a means of communication, Art Therapy, it only came into being in the



The clinical use of music assists in reaching goals such as reducing stress, improving mood, increasing focus and self-expression.

*“While talking, you have the power to keep certain things to yourself, but art cannot be manipulated.”*

mid-twentieth century. The term was first coined in 1942 by Adrian Hill, a British artist. Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer were the pioneers in the United States.

Expressive Arts Therapy is a mode of therapy that uses many creative art practices like music, dance, drama, visual arts and writing in counselling and therapy. It is extremely gentle and playful where the client feels empowered as the answers start coming from within. “People come with a mindset that we will give them a prescription or tell them what their artwork means, but that’s not how it works,” says Srivastava.





Warm colours can help boosting confidence and optimism.

## Be a child again

How does all this work? Take a crayon in your non-dominant hand and scribble like a child. Let your hand move on its own, don't control it and don't try to make any sense out of it. Once you are done, turn the paper in different directions and try to discern an image or a character in that scribble, have a dialogue with it and understand how it makes you feel.

This is one of the simplest exercises, but an amazing way to declutter your mind and find an answer to something you are struggling with. I still do it so many times, says Sawant.

Taneea Agrawaal, who experienced art therapy in 2015, says it was exhilarating. "I understood so many things about myself. Although I was not really looking for therapy at that time, I still loved everything it offered." Vasvi Srivastava explains that the most important thing in art therapy is to realise that you don't have to be an artist for this. "When we were kids, we got so disconnected with art and were told that art is a gift and not everyone is an artist. We need to understand that it doesn't matter what we create, but that we create something."

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## Four Art Therapy Exercises to Try



**1** Paint or draw those places you have the best memories about.



**2** Paint the weather in a way the reflects your current emo-



**3** Draw about an unjust issue that bothers or upsets you.



**4** Draw or paint about the things you enjoy eating or doing.