

NAFA Alumni Solo Spotlight Series

Art Therapy and Metamorphosis

Calvin Pang

BA (Hons) Fine Art, 2012

Diploma in 3D Design (Furniture Design), 2011

Art Therapist, Assisi Hospice



1. Thanks for accepting this interview, share with us where has your creativity taken you after graduation from NAFA?

To spaces and places further than I can ask or imagine. After graduating in 2012 from my Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Fine Art, I collaborated with a fine art classmate for an art installation and received venue sponsorship from The Substation.

I subsequently found a working relationship with a local art gallery in 2015. I was then commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum to create an installation work and have participated in various artist residencies across the region. Since 2018, I am gainfully employed as a registered art therapist in a healthcare institution, the Assisi Hospice, after graduating with a Master of Arts (Art Therapy) from LASALLE College of the Arts.

From where I am now, I do think that it is more than what I can ask or imagine, the journey always looks better in retrospect somehow.



2. You majored in 3D Design, Fine Art and Art Therapy through your education. What prompted each transformation and how do these stages interlink as building blocks to your career?

3D DESIGN (Furniture Design)

The immediate answer would be about the questions I am asking at the different stages of my life. When I was pursuing my Diploma in 3DD, I pondered the personal question 'if a coffin substantiates as a furniture'. This question, which led to my final graduation work, is a response to a wooden coffin I encountered in an art gallery on our department's study trip during the Tokyo Design Week in 2010.

Throughout my diploma journey, I had the privilege to take on multiple cross-disciplinary electives (CDE) in fine art, graphic design and theatre. This exposure and exploration widened my perspectives and appreciation for different art forms, as well as triggered questions about my own views of how art and design may differ, and perhaps co-exist.

Study trip to Tokyo Design Week 2010



FINE ART

My decision to pursue a degree in Fine Art came ironically through conversations with a visiting lecturer from Loughborough University who was giving a talk at NAFA. I asked him about the differences in the degree programmes offered then, namely 3D Design: New Practice and Fine Art. He responded with another set of questions, "Are you more interested in your own problems? Or are you more interested in other people's problems?" I got my answer right there.

BA (Hons) in Fine Art, Class of 2012



ART THERAPY only came into the picture later when I did an art installation as a response to the loss of my parent. I presented the work 'What we are constantly losing' at SingaPlural 2015 and ended up with stories of strangers sharing about their own grief and loss.

Those encounters made me think about the possibility of using art as a form of emotional container to express feelings which can be hard to verbalise, and the whole notion of how art making can be empowering for people.

I then registered for the art therapy postgraduate programme at LASALLE the following year and by 2018, received my credentials as a registered art therapist, all the while with my studio art practice running concurrently.

FULL CIRCLE

I believe it is somewhat a cycle 'back to the start' for me to reach where I am today as a practicing arts therapist, stemming from my diploma graduation work which was about a 'vessel' that facilitates tender departures for us.

The decade long journey does look better in retrospect, though the process can often feel unnerving and messy as it is unfolding.



3. Art Therapy is a possible career path for fine art majors, please share with us more on your work as an art therapist, where are you based and what is a typical day like for you?

I am currently practicing as an art therapist at the Assisi Hospice. The hospice approach to care is one of a total pain approach, where the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of an individual is supported by different members of the clinical team.

I am privileged to be a part of the interdisciplinary clinical team working together to care for these individuals with life-limiting illness and support their loved ones.

A typical day would look like (but not restricted to) this...

0730 – Coffee

0800 – Catching up on case notes of the patients

0900 – Patient engagement in the ward

1200 – Lunch and coffee

1300 – Preparation for groups at day care / finishing case notes for the morning sessions

1330 – Groups at day care / Patient engagement in the ward

1500 – Finishing case notes for afternoon sessions

1600 – Team meetings / Administrative matters

1730 – Goodbye work, hello home



Photo by: Assisi Hospice

4. How does an aspiring art therapist get started in Singapore? What are some certifications to attain?

To practise ethically and legally as an art therapist, it is mandatory to have a master's degree in art therapy from an approved and accredited art therapy programme.

In Singapore, the only local course offered is the MA Art Therapy Programme at LASALLE. It is a two-year, four semester full-time postgraduate level training programme spanning a range of psychotherapeutic concepts, theories and practices. It is the first of its kind to be developed and implemented in Southeast Asia. The programme is formally approved by the Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapy Association (ANZACATA).

Graduates are eligible to apply for professional registration (AThR) with ANZACATA. It may be possible to apply for professional membership with other international art therapy organisations and registration authorities. A first degree in fine art, visual arts or design would be advantageous.



5. What are some simple techniques for a layman to seek respite through the art during these trying times?

I think this depends on an individual's comfort level with art materials and accessibility to the arts. For some, playing a musical instrument would provide respite while for others, perhaps doodling randomly in their own sketchbooks.

However, for individuals who may be apprehensive about the creative process, perhaps they could consider these.

Colouring

There have been recent research supporting that colouring activities can help in anxiety-reduction (Ashlock et al., 2019). What might seem catered for children can work wonders for people of all ages. The printed outline on a colouring page provides some level of safety and supportive structure while allowing you to focus on applying the colours of your choice in sections you have selected, all at your own pace. While this does not equate to clinical art therapy, patients I have journeyed with sometimes do remark that engaging in colouring activities allows them to not think about their pain.

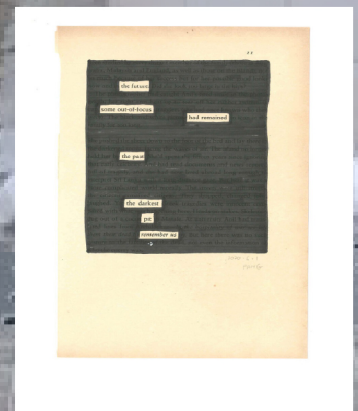
Altered book

Should you prefer words over images, you might want to consider using an old book you have or a purchased book from a second-hand bookshop as your 'art material'. Altered books is an approach in art therapy where a published book is transformed into a piece of visual art through creative processes (Chilton, 2007). I have personally applied the blackout poetry approach in old books and enjoyed it quite a bit. It is essentially poetry 'written' by colouring over parts of an existing text, so that only selected words remain visible, thus creating a poem.

Books make for a portable and accessible art material in a way. With altered books, the book (now an art object) becomes a container for a parallel process and a metaphor about how our lives are 'altered by experiences' (Chilton, 2007, p.63).

The Present

Blackout poetry during COVID-19 Circuit Breaker in Singapore.
Presented as part of 'The Quarantined Canvas' in Warhol's Room
(Online gallery) by Intersections Art Gallery, Myanmar & Singapore



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Instagram/Linkedin pages!

The creative process
celebrates a way of
investigating an issue, a way
of understanding a question
and a response to a subject.

Sometimes,
this happens all at once.

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