

ART THERAPY AND THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LOTUS: WORK ANALYSIS OF RESURRECTING

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Abstract

Art, as a language of human experience, embodies both spiritual and therapeutic dimensions. This paper explores the essence of art as a unique form of personal expression, highlighting its role in connecting the inner metaphysical world with the outer material reality. It particularly examines the therapeutic potential of art, with emphasis on the lotus as a symbolic metaphor of resilience, rebirth, and purity. Drawing upon literature on abstract expressionism, action painting, and art therapy, the study situates art within a broader psychological and cultural framework. Fieldwork included the documentation of lotus flowers from nurseries in Punjab and the creation of mixed-media paintings integrating calligraphy and symbolism. The visual analysis of artworks demonstrates how the lotus, emerging from muddy waters, mirrors the human journey through suffering toward growth. Ultimately, the findings affirm that art therapy not only provides a channel for healing but also offers a space where adversity can transform into strength and beauty.

INTRODUCTION

The artist defines the essence of art as a unique form of personal expression. Art connects the inner sensitive and metaphysical subjective world with the outer materialistic and physical objective world. Through exploring and expressing the inner world visually, artists create a bridge between these two realities. The work of art conveys the inner truth, stimulating the audience's attention and encouraging self-reflection. Art therapy, as an integrative mental health and human services profession, enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative processes, applied psychological theories, and shared human experiences. It enables individuals to visually express thoughts, feelings, and emotions, making it a helpful practice not only for trauma survivors but for anyone seeking healing and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW / CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Art and Spiritual Expression

Philosophers and artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock demonstrated how abstract art becomes a spiritual experience, evoking emotions beyond material form (National Gallery of Art, n.d.; Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). Action painting and abstract expressionism emphasized emotional intensity and inner expression (The Art Story, n.d.-a; The Art Story, n.d.-b).

Art Therapy as Healing

Art therapy has been defined by professionals as a psychotherapeutic method that enhances emotional well-being through creative expression (GoodTherapy, n.d.; Art Therapy Blog, n.d.). Research confirms its therapeutic value in addressing trauma and psychological struggles (SID.ir, 2021).

Lotus Symbolism

With a history of more than 1,400 years, the lotus flower is a powerful symbol in Indian art and in Hindu and Buddhist iconography. It represents purity, perfection, rebirth, and spiritual growth. Growing in muddy waters yet blooming beautifully, the lotus symbolizes the triumph of spirit over obstacles (Kumari & Perera, 2023; Khokhar, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

To explore lotus symbolism, the artist visited multiple rivers including Sutlej, Ravi, and Chenab. However, due to erosion and flooding, naturally growing lotus flowers were difficult

to find. Therefore, the artist conducted fieldwork at the largest nurseries in Asia, located in Pattoki (District Kasur, Punjab), where lotus flowers are cultivated under controlled conditions. The artist also engaged in mixed-media painting using acrylics, enamel, and poster colors, integrating calligraphy as a metaphor for memory and emotional expression. Figures 8–13 include original photographs of lotus flowers, while Figures 18–21 showcase therapeutic artworks created by the artist.

RESULTS / VISUAL ANALYSIS

Photographic Observations



Figure 1: *Lotus Seeds/Makhanas or foxnuts Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*

Figure 2: *Lotus Flower Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*





Figure 3: *Lotus Flower Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*

Figure 4: *Lotus Flower Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*





Figure 5: *Lotus Flower Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*

Figure 6: *Lotus Flower Capture by Rafia Arshad Digital Resource Artist collection 2022*



Figures 1-6 depict lotus flowers and seeds, symbolizing purity rising from muddy waters. These photographs were collected as digital resources and document the metaphor of struggle, rebirth, and spiritual awakening.

Formal Analysis of Therapeutic Artworks



Figure 7: *Therapeutic Art* Rafia Arshad (2022) Mix Media on Canvas. 36x48 Inch Artist's Collection

- **Line:** Combination of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines to create depth.
- **Texture:** Smooth textures using cool color combinations.
- **Color:** Blue, black, yellow, and white. White lotus symbolizes mental purity.
- **Chiaroscuro:** Brightness of lotus adds glow to the painting.
- **Composition:** Central placement of lotus makes the work visually strong.



Figure 8: *Therapeutic Art* By Rafia Arshad (2022) Mix medium on canvas. 48x60 Inch

Artist's Collection

- **Line:** Free-flowing lines representing natural beauty.
- **Texture:** Smooth surface with sharp edges for emphasis.
- **Color:** Blue, black, green, and pink; contrasts enhance the frame.
- **Chiaroscuro:** Highlights lotus and calligraphy equally.
- **Composition:** Balanced interplay of text, calligraphy, and lotus flower.



Figure 9: *Therapeutic Art* By Rafia Arshad (2022) Mix medium on canvas. 48x60 Inch

- **Artist's Collection Line:** Contrasts of smooth curves and angular lines.
- **Texture:** Illusion of tactile surfaces through layered paint.
- **Color:** Red, green, blue, black, and white with strong contrasts.
- **Composition:** Lotus dominates bottom half while calligraphy fills the top.

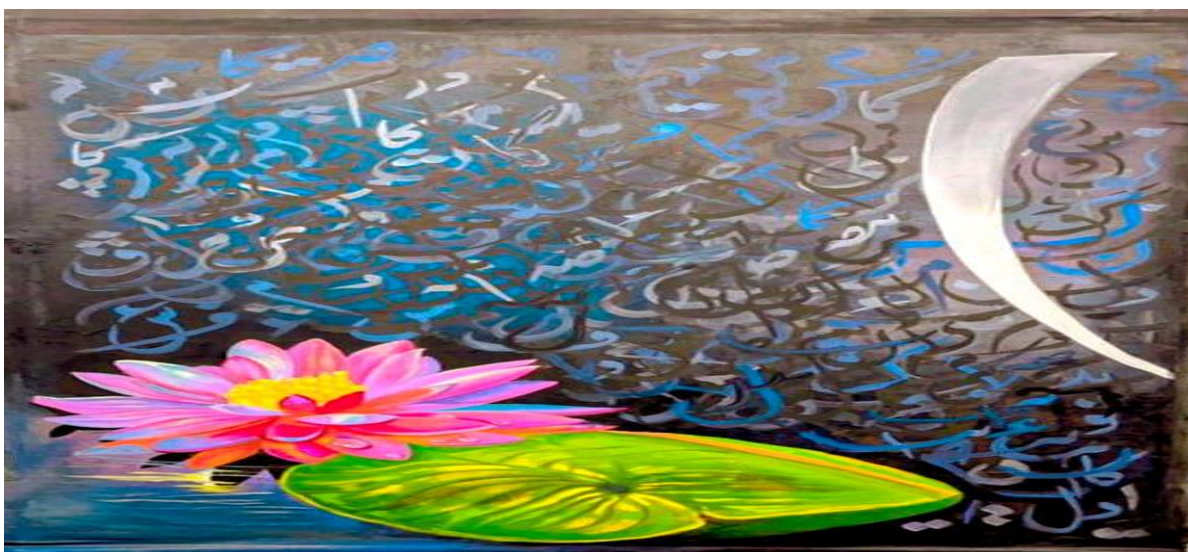


Figure 10: *Therapeutic Art* By Rafia Arshad (2022) Mix medium on canvas. 48x60 Inch

Artist's Collection

- **Line:** Thick and thin lines flowing naturally.
- **Texture:** Illusion of texture created by paint and calligraphy.
- **Color:** Soft combinations creating balance and harmony.
- **Composition:** Lotus and calligraphy divide the narrative into sections.

CONCLUSION

Art therapy, as a branch of humanistic psychiatry, uses creativity as a pathway to healing. The lotus metaphor demonstrates how adversity is essential for growth, and how beauty can emerge from pain. Through colors, calligraphy, and symbolism, the artist highlights the coexistence of positive and negative emotions in human life. Ultimately, art therapy empowers individuals to embrace challenges, find resilience, and discover inner beauty. Just as the lotus opens its petals one by one, human beings grow through life's difficulties, gaining wisdom, compassion, and strength.

DISCUSSION

The lotus flower serves as a metaphor in art therapy. Mud symbolizes challenges, uncertainty, and pain, while the blooming flower represents resilience and rebirth. Just as the lotus thrives in muddy waters, individuals can transform suffering into strength (Hanh, 2014). The therapeutic artworks represent the artist's personal struggle as a fresh graduate during the Covid-19 outbreak, navigating uncertainty and a difficult job market. The lotus, emerging from adversity, becomes a personal and universal symbol of hope. Art therapy provides a safe space for individuals to process trauma, emotions, and self-identity. By using metaphors such as the lotus, both therapists and clients can explore personal narratives of suffering and healing.

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