

**Analysis of Paintings by Children with Autism as an
(Art Therapy Effort)**

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Abstract

This study aims to obtain the characteristics of the appropriate creative process in art therapy. Through this descriptive analysis, the characteristics of the appropriate work created through the art therapy process will be discovered. The main focus of the study is to analyze the paintings of autistic individuals studied through the art therapy process. This study used a descriptive qualitative research method, namely analyzing the works of 9 autistic children in Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. The main focus of the study was to collect qualitative data through interviews, questionnaires, and observations covering the process of representation of the work, namely: (1) the process of objectification, (2) the process of symbolization, and (3) the process of expression. The technique of analyzing the painting is related to the use of symbols and ways of expressing. The results of the study show that the process of creating the work is carried out through an unexpected process, achieving visual surprise (aha Erlebnis), honesty in expressing inner thoughts (silent expression), incidental and spontaneous expression (spontaneous expression). However, in some of the individual works studied, visual achievements were found that did not reflect honesty and spontaneity (spontaneous expression). This is likely due to the role of teacher and parent intervention that directed towards a good final result so that it did not reflect the honesty of the child's work

Keywords: Autistic, Art therapy, painting

I. INTRODUCTION

Autistic children experience various communication challenges, both verbally and in writing. They face difficulties communicating and socializing with others. A diverse and diverse social environment can create difficulties for autistic children in understanding. They also face various difficulties in regulating their emotions. Their inability to adapt to their environment can lead to emotional turmoil. They tend to express their emotions uncontrollably when they are feeling unwell. This requires a special approach to therapy. One common therapeutic approach for autistic children is art therapy. Art therapy can be implemented by engaging children in visual activities to create a sense of enjoyment. According to Monty Satiadarma, in his YouTube channel, Art Therapy: Art Therapy Precautions, Part 1, it is explained that art therapy specifically emphasizes fine arts activities, or visual arts. This is due to the different aspects of using different parts of the brain

compared to other arts. However, this does not exclude art therapy through other arts, such as music, dance, or movement.

Face views art therapy as a form of therapy involving a creative process to help individuals express themselves and overcome emotional problems. According to him, the essence of art therapy lies in the combination of art and therapy, with the primary goal of achieving therapeutic change.

In this study, art therapy focuses more on visual activities (painting). In art therapy, the emphasis is on the process, carried out directly by the artist using his or her hands. Therefore, the works created do not use technological media, such as digital technology. In art therapy, the observation process goes beyond the results. Researchers will uncover the creative process to obtain data related to the characteristics of art as therapy. A child's inner state can be expressed in a painting through exploration that produces serendipitous visual results. In psychology, this is known as an *aha Erlebnis*, a sudden (visual) discovery (also known as inventive art). This sudden visual discovery process can be part of art therapy. In art therapy, individuals are expected to discover aesthetics through incidental processes. Incidental processes are processes that produce unexpected results.

In art therapy, the medium becomes a visual expression space for autistic individuals who generally face difficulties with verbal language. They often have difficulty communicating their thoughts to others. Therefore, parents must be able to understand the emotional feelings of children with autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Art therapy management must be appropriate for children.

Through painting therapy, autistic children can more freely express their thoughts through visual language, enabling them to understand their thoughts and desires. Art therapy is a method, strategy, tactic, or technique for therapy that utilizes artistic activities, such as drawing, clay sculpture, or painting, which function to release emotions, a process known as catharsis. Painting can be a medium for expressing feelings, expressions, and even unconscious thoughts or thought patterns in autistic children. For autistic children who have difficulty conveying meaning or feelings through words, (visual) art provides an alternative communication tool. Besides being a means of releasing emotional tension, visual activities (painting) through art therapy, a form of experiential therapy, hold a special place in therapy for autistic children and adolescents because it is accessible and non-threatening. Traditionally, art therapy is used to increase self-esteem and self-awareness, foster emotional resilience, enhance social skills, and reduce stress (American Art Therapy Association, 2017). Furthermore, painting strengthens memory, enhances focus, trains fine motor skills, and indirectly teaches children to interact with their environment. The selection of a case study analyzing paintings in children with autism was motivated by the need to understand the inner world and emotional expression behind the creation process. The author will explore the process and background of the creation of these paintings. This study will reveal the conditions of children with autism. Children on the autism spectrum generally face challenges in communication, social interaction, and emotional expression, making alternative approaches such as art a highly relevant channel of expression. Painting, as a form of visual expression, can express the artist's thoughts symbolically and expressively, unlike the limitations of verbal language. This research is crucial for understanding more deeply how painting can be an effective form of communication for autistic children. The results can be used by therapists, teachers, and parents as a reference in designing more empathetic and tailored educational interventions.



Figure 1. Painting by Giberus Panqya Wisesa entitled My Fish

Furthermore, other findings also open up opportunities for the development of more personalized and empathetic intervention methods through art therapy (painting). Painting analysis can be an additional diagnostic tool or evaluation of the emotional development of autistic children. Through painting analysis, an empathetic understanding of the inner world of autistic children can be achieved. The author can trace the inner world of autistic children through the symbols they use, thereby fostering a more humane, inclusive approach to care and education. The results of this study are expected to encourage the development of art therapy in Indonesia. The author hopes this research can pave the way for the development of evidence-based art therapy programs in special schools or therapy centers. Many people say that paintings containing elements of *aha erlebnis* can elicit a person's expression because in...The painting can display the splashes that are so prominent in paintings by autistic children. However, the problem with the work of children with special needs, especially those with autism, is that the works tend to be more naturalistic, realistic, and surreal. Therefore, many parents of students with autism expect more from the painting than from the process of creating the artwork, which prioritizes the *ah-ah-erlebnis*. Therefore, many paintings at GIK (Geographic Information Center) do not emphasize expression.

The author will explore the process and background of the creation of the painting. This study reveals that children on the autism spectrum generally face challenges in communication, social interaction, and emotional expression, making alternative approaches such as art a highly relevant channel of expression. Painting, as a form of visual expression, can express the artist's thoughts symbolically and expressively, unlike the limitations of verbal language. This research is important for understanding more deeply how painting can be an effective form of communication for autistic children. The results can be used by therapists, teachers, and parents as a reference in designing more empathetic and tailored educational interventions.

A. Understanding Autism

Autism comes from the word "auto," meaning "alone." People with autism appear to live in their own world. They can be grouped according to their behavioral disorders, including social interaction disorders, communication disorders, motor behavior disorders, emotional disorders, and sensory disorders (Sutadi, 1997). Autism can be defined as a brain disorder that results in the loss or reduction of a person's ability to communicate, relate to others, and respond to their environment (Hartono, 2002).

Child psychiatrist Leo Kanner (1943) described the "strange" symptoms in detail found in 11 of his young patients. Leo Kanner observed numerous similarities in the symptoms observed

in the children. A particularly striking feature was their apparent preoccupation with themselves, seemingly living in a world of their own. their own world.

According to Monty Satiadarma, quoted from his YouTube content, someone with a mental disorder is lonely even in a crowd. The term "autism" means living in their own world. They can feel alone even in a crowd.

The term "autism" means living in their own world. They can feel alone even in a crowd. Some adults also exhibit symptoms of autism, so the term "early infantile autism" is used to distinguish them.

He hypothesized that these children likely suffer from an inborn error of metabolism. This metabolic disorder prevents a person from socializing with those around them. However, at that time, medical equipment was not as sophisticated as it is today, so Kanner was unable to prove his hypothesis (Budhiman, 2001; Hartono, 2002). The majority of autistic children exhibit inappropriate behavior. The term visual aids can be used to describe a variety of objects that help autistic children communicate more easily and maintain their behavior. Pictures are effective visual aids in communicating what's in their world as they try to understand the stimuli they receive (Kidd, 2011).

B. Understanding Painting

The most commonly heard definition states that art is all forms of beauty created by humans. According to this line of thought, art is a product of beauty, a human endeavor to create beauty that brings pleasure (Sudarso, 1976). According to the Everyman Encyclopedia, art is anything people do not out of basic needs, but rather anything done solely out of a desire for luxury, pleasure, or spiritual needs.

According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, art is any human action that arises from emotional life and is beautiful in nature, capable of moving the human soul. K. Miharja, on the other hand, defines art as a spiritual human activity that reflects reality in a work of art that, through its form and content, has the power to evoke certain experiences in the recipient's spiritual realm (Rotua Magd). Theoretically, art can be divided into two categories: utilitarian art and purely aesthetic art. Utilitarian art includes architecture and design. Meanwhile, pure aesthetic art includes sculpture or carving, and graphic art. Painting is a language of expression of artistic and ideological experience that uses color and line to express feelings, appreciate emotions, movement, illusion, and illustrate a person's subjective state in a two-dimensional space (Susanto, 2002). Etymologically, the word "art" comes from Malay, meaning "thin, very fine." Some also believe that the word "art" comes from the Sanskrit word "san," which is associated with offerings or sacrifices in the form of dance, singing, or the construction of buildings for the gods, according to Hindu teachings. This word "san" later evolved into "sani," which ultimately became "arti" (PKMM: 1972, 13). Another opinion holds that the word "art" comes from the English word "genius," which, among other meanings, refers to a person possessing extraordinary intellectual and creative abilities or talents.

Because great artists are considered geniuses, this is how the term "genius" evolved into "arti." According to Dr. Hadjar Pamadhi, M.A. (Hons) understanding art can be seen from the value, the work system (physical) and even the aesthetics of the work itself, the aesthetics built on this rationality as a reinforcement for the hegemony, the aesthetics in the artwork have a close relationship with the system of the artwork. Many people assume that the close relationship between aesthetic values and the system of the painting is that people know how to understand art today in terms of the value and system of the physical work and even

aesthetics, artwork in physical form can display hegemony and aesthetics in this artwork is considered to be the ruler in politics, economics, religion and culture' (Hajar Pamadhi, 2015).

C. Understanding Art Therapy

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art as the primary medium for expressing thoughts, feelings, and inner experiences. In the context of children with autism, art therapy is an effective approach in helping them communicate and manage their emotions, especially since many of them have limited verbal communication. Through visual media, such as drawing, painting, collage, or modeling clay, children can express their inner world freely and authentically.

Since ancient times, humans have used art as a form of self-expression. Art serves not only as an aesthetic tool but also as a medium for catharsis, healing, and the expression of deepest emotions. In a psychological context, art often serves as a bridge that allows someone to convey emotions or traumatic experiences that are difficult to express verbally. For children with autism spectrum disorders, this is especially relevant because they often have difficulty understanding, expressing, and managing their emotions conventionally. Art therapy provides an opportunity for children with autism to learn to recognize and express emotions in a healthy manner. Art therapy also serves to soothe emotions.

When they are able to understand and express their feelings, the potential for aggressive behavior or social withdrawal can be minimized. Furthermore, art activities also create a natural social interaction space where children can collaborate, share tools, or simply talk about their work, all of which are highly beneficial social exercises. Art therapy can be practiced individually or in groups and can be combined with other therapies such as speech, occupational, and behavioral therapy. This is important because this approach is flexible and fun, making it a non-threatening therapy method for children. In other words, art therapy is not only a means of expression but also a holistic healing tool. It works not only on emotional aspects but also on cognitive and social aspects, making it a valuable therapy option in helping children on the autism spectrum reach their full potential.

There are seven main elements of visual art used in the art therapy approach: line, shape, space, texture, value (light and dark), color, and composition. Each of these elements has its own psychological meaning that can provide insight into the emotional and psychological state of the individual undergoing therapy.

1. Line: The type of line used—whether smooth, rough, curvy, bold, or broken—can indicate emotions such as calm, anger, or confusion.
2. Shape: Symmetrical shapes can indicate a need for order, while abstract or irregular shapes can indicate emotional confusion or disorder.
3. Space: How a child fills the space on the medium (paper or canvas) reflects how they see themselves in relation to the outside world.
4. Texture: The use of rough or smooth textures indicates the child's level of comfort or tension.
5. Value (dark/light): The use of contrasting light and dark can reflect emotional dynamics and inner tension.
6. Color: Bright colors like yellow and green can indicate happiness or enthusiasm, while dark colors like black or gray can reflect sadness, anxiety, or fear.
7. Composition: The arrangement of elements in a work of art reveals the child's thinking patterns and approach to structure.

By observing these elements, art therapists can gain a deeper understanding of a child's mental state. This interpretation is then used to design an appropriate therapeutic approach, both individually and in groups. Art therapy also helps develop various aspects of autistic children's development, such as fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, concentration, and the ability to complete tasks. This creative process can also boost children's self-confidence and self-esteem, as they feel valued for the work they produce, regardless of their verbal abilities. Furthermore, art therapy provides an opportunity for children with autism to learn to recognize and express emotions in a healthy manner, according to Dr. Hajar Pamadhi, M.A.(Hons), in the process of creating artwork (representation) in the Kreatoseniman-channel YouTube videos, there are three important stages that play a role in building meaning and depth of artistic expression:

- a. objectification,
- b. symbolization,
- c. expression.

These three are interrelated and form a creative and reflective process that helps individuals, especially children with autism or other communication disabilities, express their thoughts and feelings visually.

1) Objectification (Visual Object or Observed Theme)

According to Dr. Hajar Pamadhi, M.A. (Hons), when selecting objects to paint, artists have many considerations. The choice of objects refers to the four pillars (Hajar Pamadhi) that underlie the choice of objects:

- a) Pillar of Belief,
- b) Pillar of Culture,
- c) Pillar of Economics,
- d) Pillar of Politics.

- a) The pillars of belief in the selection of painted objects are based on the aspects of faith referenced by the artist. For example, a Muslim artist will choose objects depicting people wearing hijabs or Islamic symbols. A Christian artist will choose objects that refer to Christianity, for example, Christian symbols like crosses or Church
- b) Economic Pillar: Artists choose objects based on economic considerations or interests, for example: An artist painting nine koi fish because the number 9 represents economic luck in Chinese culture (Feng Shui). To achieve good luck, the painting must be placed in the right location. This is one of the artist's works that was not created with Feng Shui in mind.
- c) Cultural Pillar: Artists choose objects based on their culture. For example, artists choose objects related to culture, such as wayang (wayang) and traditional Serita (traditional drama).
- d) Political Pillar: Artists choose objects related to politics. For example, artist Djoko Pekik paints paintings criticizing the government and politics.

2). Symbolization (transforming objects into symbols)

Symbolization is the process of transforming tangible objects into symbols that are deeper and more meaningful. In art therapy, symbolization allows someone to communicate abstract or difficult-to-express concepts, such as fear, pleas, peace, hope, security, or spirituality.

Artists express their symbols in their paintings. Symbols can be realized in forms that:

- a) Iconic

- b) Indexial³⁷
- c) Arbitrator
- d) Culture
- e) Universal

A symbol is a sign based on a convention, regulation, or mutually agreed-upon agreement. The meaning that emerges in a symbol requires mutual agreement (convention). Arbitrary in nature (agreement), its meaning is not always apparent from its form, but is agreed upon by a particular group. Symbols are important media in communication, culture, and social identity, because they allow humans to express their ideas representatively. In the discussion of symbols, symbols are signs related to culture. Culture can be defined as a whole of interrelated semiotic habits. These habits provide a kind of efficiency to the world where everything can be a sign. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) believed that humans think in signs. Literally, in analyzing a painting, the author is dealing with signs. It can be explained that humans only think in signs. In addition, he also saw signs as elements in communication. This means that, when viewed from a painting, the object is a cultural sign. Paintings as signs can be observed for meaning. In the process of interpreting a sign, we can understand the cultural background, which is the ideology that develops and is used in the use of the sign. These signs can be interpreted in different ways. Their meaning depends on the cultural context of the society that accompanies them. Therefore, in interpreting signs in a culture, we must understand the cultural background, namely the cultural conventions of the society that supports the sign. Charles Sanders Peirce defined the cultural background as the totality of institutionalized rules, agreements, and customs that we call codes.

3. Expression (Expression of Emotions and Spirituality)

Expression is the core of art therapy, a way for individuals to express their emotions, feelings of catharsis, thoughts, and inner experiences through artwork. In this context, expression is not limited to basic emotions such as sadness, happiness, or anger, but also involves:

- a) spiritual expression
- b) spontaneous expression
- c) silent expression

Spiritual expression reflects a person's relationship with transcendental values or their faith. In the case of an autistic child or individual depicting a woman wearing a hijab, this expression may include:

- a) Love for religion
- b) Admiration for a devout figure
- c) Searching for the meaning of life through religious symbols
- d) The need to feel close to God
- e) Spiritual experiences in everyday life

This spiritual expression is important in art therapy because it often reflects emptiness, stress, or deep-rooted trauma.

In a crisis of meaning or spiritual disconnection. Through art, individuals can rediscover their connection to themselves, their social environment, and something greater than themselves (God or universal values). Spiritual expression is something related to the spirit or passion to find faith, hope, and meaning in life.

Spontaneous expression, such as smiling, laughing, crying, and frowning, is essential to human life. Spontaneous expression is essential in art therapy as an effort to express inner communication. Spontaneous expression can be therapeutic in calming emotions.

Silent expression is an expression within humans that reveals hidden hopes or desires. Sigmund Freud's theory explains that hidden desires are part of the human subconscious that can influence an individual's behavior and thoughts.

D. Principles of Art Therapy

One of the main principles of art therapy is providing a space for individuals to freely express their emotions, a process that is unpredictable and safe through the medium of art. For children on the autism spectrum, this principle is especially important because they often have difficulty communicating their feelings verbally. Through art therapy, children can channel pent-up emotional tension, such as anger, frustration, fear, or anxiety, into drawings, colors, shapes, or other creative movements. This process allows for catharsis, a release of emotions that produces a sense of psychological satisfaction and relief. This catharsis helps children feel more emotionally comfortable, reduces the frequency of emotional outbursts, and creates a calmer state of mind. Furthermore, art therapy values each child's unique way of expressing themselves, without demanding a final outcome, allowing them to access the therapeutic experience without pressure. Thus, the principles of art therapy not only help children with autism express themselves but also serve as an important tool for maintaining emotional stability, calming emotions, and preventing more serious mental health problems later in life.

E. Implementing Art Therapy

In the principles of art therapy, freedom of expression is the primary foundation that distinguishes this approach from other conventional therapy methods. Children, especially those on the autism spectrum, often struggle to express their feelings and thoughts verbally. Therefore, art therapy creates a safe space for them to express their emotions through visual language, a language that doesn't require words but can convey a profound sense of meaning. When children play with colors, shapes, lines, and symbols in the process of painting or creating other works of art, complex biochemical processes occur in the body. The eye captures colors and shapes, and this information is then processed by the brain through the visual and limbic nervous systems, which are closely connected to the emotional center. Certain colors can evoke specific feelings; for example, red can trigger enthusiasm or anger, blue evokes calm, and yellow evokes joy. This is why art can be an effective emotional bridge, especially for children who struggle to express themselves verbally.

Visual language has a limitless wealth of meaning. A bold, sharp line can represent anger or anxiety, while a soft, circular stroke can reflect calm or compassion. Therefore, a single painting can be interpreted in various ways depending on the emotional context of its creator. In this context, art therapy does not assess the work from an aesthetic perspective, but rather the creative process and inner expression that emerges during its creation. Children are given the freedom to express their thoughts on media such as canvas, paper, clay, or even recycled materials. This process serves as a crucial means of emotional release (catharsis), as pent-up or unexpressed emotions can negatively impact a child's mental health, triggering emotional outbursts, aggressive behavior, or social withdrawal.

Through art therapy, children can feel heard and understood without having to speak. This creates a sense of security, comfort, and trust in their surroundings. In other words, art becomes a language of the soul, bridging the child's inner world with the external world. This therapy also trains concentration, fine motor skills, decision-making, and builds self-confidence when children see their work appreciated. The principles of art therapy emphasize that

Every scribble, scratch, and color is a valid form of self-expression. Therefore, art therapy is not only a form of emotional therapy, but also a holistic approach that addresses the psychological, cognitive, social, and even spiritual aspects of a child's development.

F. The Aha-Erlebnis Theory

The Aha-Erlebnis Theory, or "Aha Moment," explains the phenomenon of sudden, profound insight or understanding, often occurring after a period of mental block or struggle to solve a complex problem. The term was coined by German psychologist Karl Bühler in the early 20th century to describe a moment of surprising discovery or realization.

Key Concepts of Aha-Erlebnis

- 1) Sudden Insight: This is the essence of Aha-Erlebnis, the "aha" or "eureka" moment where a solution or understanding of a problem emerges spontaneously.
- 2) Impasse Period: This moment often occurs after someone feels stuck or unable to find a solution through repeated analytical approaches.
- 3) Behavioral Change: An "aha" moment can shift the problem-solver's experience from evaluation to action and result in greater confidence in the solution found.
- 4) Subconscious Processes: Some research suggests that insights ("aha" solutions) may rely on subconscious processes, making them unaffected by the cognitive load that limits conscious processes.

G. Understanding Catharsis

Catharsis comes from the Greek word katharos, meaning "to cleanse" or "to purify." The theory of catharsis was first introduced in 1960 in the Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, entitled "The Stimulating Versus the Catalytic Effect of a Vicarious Aggressive Activity." The concept of catharsis theory is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which states that suppressed or repressed emotions can lead to excessive emotional outbursts. Therefore, there is a need to channel these suppressed emotions (Nisrina Rahmawati, 2020). According to Joseph Breuer, catharsis/cleansing occurs when an individual can express the emotions accompanying a traumatic event. Catharsis is known as the release of pent-up emotions.

In psychology, catharsis is defined as a means of releasing emotions in a positive way and enabling one to carry out daily activities with a sense of well-being. The concept of catharsis is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which states that pent-up emotions can lead to excessive emotional outbursts. Therefore, the need to channel pent-up emotions can lead to an explosion of digested emotions. The theory of catharsis is derived from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. According to Freud, humans are driven by two instincts: eros and thanatos. Eros is the constructive instinct, and thanatos is the destructive instinct. Essentially, humans are aggressive, enjoying destruction, killing, and destroying.

Aggressive impulses are certainly not entirely acceptable by society. Freud stated that inhibited aggressive forces can explode at any time because they have fire-like properties that can harm, injure, and have a terrifying effect on everyone. Many people must work to reduce, suppress, or even eliminate it altogether. Through sublimation and fantasy, people channel aggression, much like a car exhaust emits a buildup of exhaust fumes. Art, religion, and ideology are these exhaust fumes. So are fantasies, dreams, and jokes. Constructively channeling aggressive impulses is called catharsis. (Sri Wahyuningsih 2017).

Freud's theory of the unconscious, as follows:

- 1) Id: The id is the part of the subconscious that contains basic, instinctive desires, such as those for food, sex, or safety.
- 2) Ego: The ego is the part of consciousness that functions to control the id and fulfill desires in a manner consistent with social norms.
- 3) Superego: The superego is the conscious mind, containing moral and ethical values learned from the social environment.

The theory of catharsis and the unconscious also uses art theory as a basis for works, namely painting with its automatism and surrealist characteristics, as well as visual theory of the elements of color, shape, point, line, plane, and size.

and the theoretical design principles of unity and balance. Artists also referenced are Andre Masson, who used automatism techniques in his work; Wassily Kandinsky, who drew inspiration from the shapes and lines applied in his work; and Erica Hestu Wahyuni, whose use of contrasting colors conveys a feeling. (Abdul Muhid Nugroho, Cucu Retno Yuningsih, and Iqbal Prabawa Wiguna, 2024).

H. Study of Controlling Emotions

Emotions are intense feelings directed at someone or something. Emotions can be expressed when feeling happy about something, angry with someone, or afraid of something. According to Goleman (1995), an emotional intelligence expert, and taken from the Oxford English Dictionary, the term emotion is defined as any activity or turmoil of the mind, feelings, passions, or any intense and overwhelming mental state. He further stated that emotions refer to a unique set of feelings and thoughts, a biological and psychological state, and a series of tendencies to act. Meanwhile, emotional intelligence is a person's ability to recognize, manage, and control emotional fluctuations within themselves. One of the challenges experienced by autistic children is difficulty managing emotions.

Their emotions tend to be unstable, for example, suddenly without reason, they can throw tantrums, scream, hurt themselves, and hit others nearby. The inability to express feelings or convey what they want makes them easily angered. They express emotions inappropriately to the stimulus they receive, such as laughing out loud at the sight of a swaying tree or leaf or crying/excessive sadness, when that is not appropriate.

I. Relevant Research Studies

In recent years, art therapy approaches have gained increasing attention as an effective intervention method for children with autism. Research by Johan Sutarjo (2023) revealed that free-form painting activities applied to Autistic children at the Kaliwungu Special Needs School in Kudus were able to improve their ability to express emotions and stimulate social interaction. Using qualitative descriptive methods, this study demonstrated that paintings function not only as a visual medium but also as a significant nonverbal communication tool

for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In line with these findings, Devina Anggreini (2018), in her research at Galuh Handayani Elementary School in Surabaya, described the visual characteristics of paintings by autistic children. She found that the use of bright colors and repetitive and simple shapes reflected the children's psychological condition and level of social-cognitive limitations. A literature review conducted by Lailatul Ummah (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of art therapy in reducing hyperactive behavior in children with autism. Based on a synthesis of various previous studies, she concluded that art therapy not only helps regulate emotions but also facilitates social and cognitive development. A similar finding was found in research by Fitri Evita, Sofi Andriyanti, and Syafriyandi (2023), which used a participatory approach in art therapy activities at Buemily homeschooling.

This study demonstrated that structured therapy can improve concentration, self-confidence, and reduce deviant behavior in children with special needs.

Furthermore, research by Valentin Bauer and colleagues (2024) highlighted the interactive collaboration between music and painting in a multisensory environment through the Music Traces program. This study demonstrated that the active involvement of autistic children in combined visual arts and music activities can improve social participation and nonverbal communication, emphasizing the importance of an inclusive and multisensory environment in art therapy practice.

II. METHOD

The author uses qualitative research methods involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that cannot be measured numerically, often referred to as "qualitative" research. Creswell explains that this is an approach to investigating and understanding the meanings associated with individuals or groups within the context of social or human problems. This research focuses on understanding the group's culture and the evolution of population behavior patterns over time, with observation and direct involvement in community activities as the primary elements of data collection. In qualitative research, questions and procedures are developed based on data obtained through community observations, which are then analyzed inductively. The primary focus of this research is on the data collection process and giving meaning to the results. Therefore, in achieving in-depth analysis, it is important to pay attention to the power of words and sentence structure in the research report.

Qualitative research focuses on qualitative phenomena, such as the motivations behind human behavior. For example, "Motivation Research" is a type of qualitative research that is essential for understanding the motives behind human actions. In behavioral science, qualitative research plays a key role, especially when the goal is to uncover the motives behind human behavior.

The instrument used was an observation sheet compiled based on qualitative observation guidelines according to Sugiyono (2017), which covers aspects of visual activity (color selection, shape), facial expressions, gestures, and emotional dynamics during the painting process.

No	Aspects	Indicators	Observation	Interview	Documentation

1	Visual Aspects	Colors used	☐	☐	☐
2	Thematic Aspects	Elements of shape and line	☐	☐	☐
3	Technical Aspect	a) Theme/Implied message b) Painting	☐	☐	☐
4	Contextual Aspects	Artist's background	☐	☐	☐

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

In the art therapy process, it is better to. Prioritize process over results. A process is a series of systematic steps, or clear, achievable stages. Repeatedly. A process is a sequentially planned activity within an activity. In the process of painting, a series of actions, creations, or processing are carried out that produce a work of art. Output, on the other hand, refers to the result of this process. Output is the opposite of input. In other words, output is the result of an input that undergoes a specific process, resulting in something called output. In the activity of painting, the output is the resulting painting. In art therapy, the process involves visual exploration of color and shape, thus discovering new things. This process of discovering new things will produce unexpected results, resulting in a pleasing visual outcome. In psychology, this is known as aha Erlebnis. This process produces visual surprises, resulting in visual satisfaction or catharsis. This is where a person releases their inner turmoil and expresses their emotions without a specific goal.



Picture 2. Painting by Mahesa Damar Sakti entitled Blue and Red which has aha Erlebnis

From the author's observation, the work that most emphasizes the aha Erlebnis aspect is the painting (graphic) work created by Mahesa Damar Sakti entitled Biru Merah. This work emphasizes the aha Erlebnis in terms of composition because Mahesa's work is more non-formal due to the problems experienced by Mahesa in the inability (motor) to draw objects in the form of figures, humans, animals, plants, and human activities. Furthermore, Mahesa has a verbal language disability, making it difficult to communicate with others. Visual and

auditory arousal is a person who is excited by the sound of machinery, leading to spontaneous expression.



Figure 3. Joshua Raphael Prakoso's work entitled The Owl which created an aha Erlebnis because it created hard scratches.

Another work featuring spontaneous expression is Joshua Raphael Prakoso's "The Owl." This work emphasizes the expressiveness of the linework and composition, highlighted in the painting. The spontaneous expression highlighted in Joshua's work is evident in the texture of the work. The object under study expresses honest feelings expressed through spontaneous expression. This work possesses a strong element of communication, as the subject has difficulty communicating verbally.

The painting "The Eiffel Tower" by Fardha Affidayana Kusuma Affandi creates an aha Erlebnis, although its form tends more toward architectural structures, influenced by Affandi's grandfather.

The works of Gilbert, Kaleb, Sandhy, Reynaldi, Ruben, Fardha, and Cindy exhibit hidden expressions, making them less suitable for art therapy. They are more realistic, lacking prominent splashes or unpredictable aha Erlebnis expressions, thus prioritizing the result of the painting.

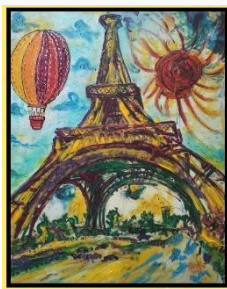
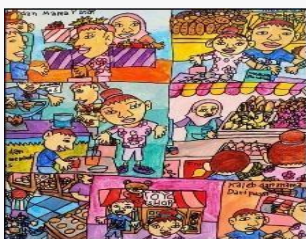


Figure 4. Works that cannot be interpreted as art therapy are:

a. Kaleb Wirayodhya Hermawan's work entitled "Kepasar," b. Sandhy Salman Wahyudi's work entitled "Arwana," c. Reynaldi Kristian Nugroho's work entitled "Kupu Kupu," d. Ruben Rotty's work entitled "The Red Dragonfly," e. Fardha Affidayana Kusuma Affandi's work entitled "Tower Eiffel," f. Cindy Widhoretno's work entitled "Jakatarub."

In art therapy, it's best to use your hands to paint directly (hands-on). This process trains a child's fine motor skills, resulting in a sense of satisfaction and improved motor skills. Hands-on painting can be achieved by printing or stamping onto a canvas. The child interacts directly with the canvas and paint. Parents sometimes teach their children to be "too hygienic," meaning they don't want their hands to get too dirty when painting. They end up using brushes or other materials, which can lead to suboptimal art therapy results.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this thesis journal, I summarize the results of the previous chapter's research, analyzing the paintings of nine participants in the "I'm Possible Express Yourself" exhibition at GIK UGM, May 17-23, 2025. The researcher revealed that the autistic children exhibiting this exhibition faced challenges in the process of creating their paintings, particularly in the aspect of outlines. Not all autistic children possess strong verbal skills. They generally possess non-verbal skills, enabling them to express their inner states through visual aspects (paintings).

The author has observed the visual characteristics of the paintings studied, including the important formal aspects assessed, namely the process of creating the artwork.

Texture, gradation, expression, outline, emotional lines, composition, shape, color, sketches, the presence of figures, and strokes. Formally, the visual aspects are understood to demonstrate the inner expression of autistic individuals.

The most frequently appearing visual element (representation) is symbolic, as 6 of the 9 symbols displayed are iconic and indexical, representing the feelings of autistic individuals in the paintings. Color is the most dominant element in these artworks. Consequently, many autistic artists emphasize highly expressive and contrasting colors in their paintings. Nine autistic individuals demonstrate their own distinctive use of contrasting colors.

The author found obstacles in art therapy activities due to the overly dominant role of parents, teachers, and those around them in directing the objects being painted. The works created by autistic individuals follow the direction of others too much, preventing them from expressing their visual expression honestly. Unexpected feelings or "aha" moments do not emerge in the works. Some individuals are directed to paint in a naturalistic style, which cannot yet be called art therapy

V.SUGGESTION

The author recommends that the nine exhibitors participating in "I'm Possible Express Yourself" who have verbal problems or difficulties study sketches or outlines to provide aesthetic value to paintings based on the principles of objectification, symbolization, and expression, along with the principle of "aha Erlebnis." "Aha Erlebnis" refers to sudden discoveries, or what is known as inventive art, thus enhancing the silent expression depicted in the painting. Art therapy does not necessarily require individuals to become artists, so they should not feel afraid or anxious about poor-quality drawings.

The most important function of studying art therapy is to encourage and encourage individuals to express themselves and their thoughts, dreams, aspirations, sadness, stress, and

anxieties through the process and products of art—creativity that does not require high artistic quality, allowing for a release of expression. The form can be a work of art that has a shape, form, lines, proportions, which are chaotic or have a very abstract nature, have scribbles, color compositions, or non-naturalistic works.

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