

2020

## Artmaking to Inform Dialogue Across Spiritual Otherness in the Therapeutic Space

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Art Making to Inform Dialogue Across Spiritual Otherness in the Therapeutic Space

by

Caitlin Brosious, Emma Burgin, Andrea Dyer, and Maggie Knobbe

A research paper presented to the  
Faculty of the Department of Marital and Family Therapy  
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of the Arts in Marital and Family Therapy

May 6, 2020

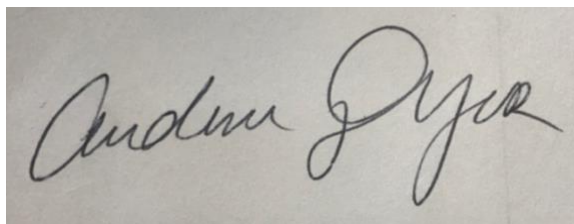
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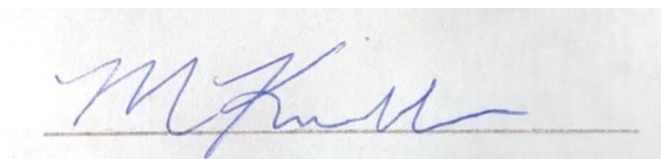
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Caitlin Brosious

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Maggie Knobbe

Research Mentor:

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Debra Linesch, Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC

### **Abstract**

This research was a preliminary pilot study meant to encourage further exploration on the intersection of art therapy, art making, spirituality, and dialogue. This study topic is an important area of investigation due to the long-standing challenges of interfaith dialogue, both historically and currently. An abundance of reviewed literature linking interfaith dialogue and dialogue through art making guided the research hypothesis, which states that the act of viewing and being viewed by the spiritual other through art making could deepen one's own spiritual practice, increase empathy, foster dialogue, and inform clinical work as psychotherapists. To explore this, the researchers held an explorative arts-based workshop, encouraging participants to use the art individually and in pairs to further reflect on their spiritual beliefs and experiences. In addition, the workshop allowed a space for participants and pairs to share and discuss their reflective art and personal spirituality, then create a dyadic art piece together. The qualitative findings revealed similarities for all eleven participants in both the art and written experiences, with universal themes and shared visual elements emerging. The analyzed data connected the universal themes with the participants' stated spiritual identity and evidenced experiences of connection in dyadic pairs. As future therapists, and art therapists, the researchers intended this preliminary pilot study to be a basis for further research and inspire wider exploration.

*Keywords:* Art Therapy, Spirituality, Psychotherapy, Dialogue, Interfaith, Spiritual Otherness  
Interfaith Dialogue, Faith Traditions, Imagination, Art Making.

**Dedication**

To one another...

"Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them,  
and it will change your life." – Amy Poehler

## **Acknowledgements**

With gratitude and thankfulness for

Our Friends and Cohort

For creating a safe and supportive community to dialogue

The Workshop Participants

For their openness, vulnerability, and desire to grow

Our Mentor

Debra Linesch, Ph.D.

For unwavering support, guidance, and strength throughout this challenging experience, her  
inspirational work and creativity, and instilling trust in the evolving research process.

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## Artmaking to Inform Dialogue Across Spiritual Otherness in the Therapeutic Space

### **Introduction**

#### **The Study Topic**

This research project focuses on the relationship between interfaith, spiritual dialogue and artmaking. The researchers intend to discover whether the act of viewing and being viewed by the spiritual other through artmaking can deepen one's own spiritual practice, increase empathy, foster more fruitful dialogue and potentially inform clinical work as psychotherapists. The researchers are interested in discovering in what ways and to what degree reciprocity exists in this kind of dialogue.

#### **Significance of the Study**

This study topic is an important area of investigation due to the complex and contentious nature of interfaith dialogue both historically and currently. Historical miscommunication between dominant religious faith traditions has resulted in unimaginable pain and suffering. This has contributed to static ideas of the spiritual other as something to be known rather than to be learned. The literature reviewed for this paper reveals a vital need for interfaith dialogue to incorporate a pluralistic approach. Pluralistic dialogue calls on the need to view "the spiritual other" with human dignity and as a worthy, unique individual. The researchers explore the potential for interfaith dialogue to use this pluralistic approach and engage from a place of learning. Many have studied the long-standing challenges of interfaith dialogue, but research into how art and its imaginative qualities can be used as an innovative approach to facilitate more effective dialogue is scarce. The researchers are personally invested in this topic as art therapists who recognize that all dialogue is in essence interfaith, as no two individuals share the exact same spiritual or faith practice. Though the discussion of faith is sometimes seen as unwelcome

in clinical practice, interfaith and spiritual dialogue can be seen as a microcosm for culture at large, making the exploration of more effective dialogue approaches of vital importance.

Therefore, this research makes an important contribution to the field of psychotherapy as the findings may yield information about an innovative approach to dialoguing with “the other.” In this way, there is practical use for the application to encompass not only interfaith and spiritual dialogue, but all types of dialogue, including psychotherapeutic treatment. The researchers intend to explore the relationship between interfaith dialogue and art making. This study is a preliminary pilot investigation which can be used as a basis for further research and wider exploration. This paper starts by examining the relationship that art therapists have with their own spiritual or religious upbringing and how they are able to use art to discuss it with others who might not share the same faith or spirituality.

### **Background of the Study Topic**

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of spirituality and art in psychotherapy and the impact of art on the therapist's clinical work in engaging in interfaith dialogue with clients. The importance of spirituality and religion in the field of psychotherapy has been frequently discussed. For instance, Koenig, King and Carson (2012) found that there is a relationship between mental health and religion or spirituality, which can create increased feelings of social connection and support, coping with life stress through meaning-making and solidifying a client's identity through their beliefs (Paloutzian & Park, 2014 as cited by Captari, Hook, Hoyt, Davis, McElroy-Heltzel, & Worthington, 2018). According to Captari et. al. (2018), integrating religion and spirituality into psychotherapy simply begins with the therapeutic relationship. In this way, the therapist acts as a compassionate and attuned figure for the client to internalize their experiences and mirror their spiritual relationship with not only a higher power or God, but their inner self. In this way, as Fehlnner (2002) states, psychotherapy can be thought of as a parallel to spirituality, as both consider the importance of inter and intra-personal relationships between the self and others. Moreover, Franklin (2018) suggests one of the ways in which psychotherapy and spirituality intersect is through the practice of contemporary mindfulness and the application of meditation. Similar to meditation, the act of art making can encourage and support this attunement to the therapeutic relationships and encourage the externalization of client's inner experiences. As clinicians, it is important to include spirituality and faith history in the holistic understanding and treatment of a person and is a consideration when facilitating processes of healing (Fehlnner, 2002).

The value of having a faith practice or spiritual practice in art therapy can be supported by the historical understanding of religions and their art practices as a way of healing. The

similarities between the religious traditions of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity's, art histories and artistic expressions emphasize the influence religions have on one another. Indeed, Soltes (2005) comments on these universal visual symbols and imagery that have been adapted within the context of history and each religious culture. Moreover, spiritual art making has informed many contemporary and modern artists, who use their faith and spirituality as part of their art practice, prompting artistic interfaith dialogue. While religious and spiritual art history and contemporary artists inform thinking about religious similarities, there are still many long-standing religious differences, that Michaelides (2009) identifies as creating prejudice in today's current cultural and political climate.

The importance and need for dialogue between religious and spiritual factions supports the consideration of interfaith dialogue literature. In its simple form, dialogue acts as a way to learn from someone else, through conversation (Massoudi, 2006 and Takim, 2004). According to Michaelides (2009) and Massoudi (2006), effective dialogue requires self-awareness of personal biases, assumptions, and beliefs and a commitment to be attentive, responsive and inclusive. Furthermore, Massoudi (2006) believes that interfaith dialogue can become particularly complex due to potentially ingrained and learned systems of belief and religion. Keaton and Soukup (2009) explain the importance of a pluralistic belief system in interfaith dialogue, as pluralism supports embracing religious or spiritual differences and learning from the religious other's perspective (Huang, 1995 and Takim, 2004). Therefore, communication research, such as Michaelides' (2009), suggests innovative and non-traditional approaches for interfaith dialogue to facilitate learning from the religious other. Indeed, the research comes full circle, in suggesting that dialogue requires the use of imagination and creativity to allow one to consider different perspectives and as Illman (2014) states is considered a prerequisite to thinking

empathetically (Michaelides, 2009). This suggested interconnection of creativity, imagination and empathy as a requirement for effective interfaith dialogue supports the use of art making in interfaith conversations and relationships, including therapeutic and clinical interaction.

According to Farrelly-Hansen (2001), art and spirituality both act as a way of healing and the act of art making can be akin to a meditative spiritual practice or form of communication. In addition, Franklin, (2018) describes the use of metaphors and symbolism in art, its reflection of how religious and spiritual symbols help to communicate and inform divine or spiritual worship in religions, and how these metaphors can act as a way to find inner awareness and communicate it. Two major art therapy studies, Lark (2005) and Linesch (2017), examine this intersectionality of art therapy, spirituality, and interfaith or intercultural dialogue. Lark (2005) discusses how art can be used as an additional language in research of large cross-cultural group dialogues, to emphasize and shift power between non-dominant culture groups and verbal languages. Lark (2005) calls for art therapists, as unique interveners, to lead multi-cultural discussions through art and to take social action in their communities. Furthering this intersectionality, Linesch (2017) investigates the parallels with interfaith dialogue and art therapy, having a group of interfaith women, from Christianity, Islam and Judaism, make art from sacred texts, engage in religious discussions with the religious others and then add to or make response pieces from these interfaith discussions. This article provides qualitative evidence for art therapy to facilitate interfaith dialogue.

This research has reviewed the intersection of art therapy, spirituality and interfaith dialogue in preparation for looking at the use of art making to help facilitate the interfaith dialogue between religious others in a therapeutic context, such as between a therapist and their client.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The literature review starts with an initial discussion about the definitions and terms used in the larger discourse of spirituality, faith, and religion. The review explores the intersection of spirituality with psychotherapy and art therapy and how art is used to communicate. The literature review structures this exploration through four faith traditions, including Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, investigating how art historically and contemporarily informs these religions. The review examines the Abrahamic traditions with the addition of Buddhism due to its recent popularity in psychotherapy research's emphasis on mindfulness. The researchers realize that this choice limits the scope and generalizability of the research study. The review provides a summary of these four faith traditions, highlighting their similarities and the contemporary need to expand interfaith dialogue. It then presents literature from the communications field regarding effective and genuine dialogue, and then explores existent belief systems that affect interfaith dialogue, including exclusivism, reductionism, relativism, and pluralism, recommending that pluralism is needed for effective interfaith dialogue. In connecting processes of dialogue with the use of spiritual art, the reviewers discuss the general literature's ideas about imagination and creativity as a necessary aspect of interfaith dialogue. The final section reviews the existing art therapy literature exploring the use of spiritual art making and art as a form of communication in dialogue.

### **Definitions**

This section defines language and terms that are used in this paper. Land (2015) explains that it is common practice to use and equate the terms religion, religiosity, faith, and spirituality interchangeably in contemporary discourse and literature. While this has been standard among

interdisciplinary fields including communication theory, art history, psychotherapy, religious studies, for the purposes of this literature review these terms are consistently defined. Land (2015) defines religion as “systematic body of beliefs or practices of an organized group of people who believe in certain doctrines or creeds concerning the universe and the relationship of humanity to the universe” (p. 20). Religion incorporates cultural, structural, historical and institutional influences and references rituals, dogmas, doctrines and structure (Land, 2015). The amount by which individuals feel that they belong to or identify with a religious group determines their level of religiosity. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (10th edition) defines faith as a “confident belief or set of beliefs in truth, value or trustworthiness of an idea, without actual proof” (as cited by Land, 2015). By identifying with or belonging to a religion people can communicate their expression of faith. Spirituality has emerged as a well-established phenomenon in contemporary culture. Spirituality is defined by Land (2015) and Fehner (2002) as that which is transcendent and draws one into relationship with someone or something greater than oneself and gives ultimate meaning to life. Illman (2014) writes that spirituality often emphasizes the subjective, meditative and contemplative experiences of inner transformation. Lawson (2002) explains how spirituality differs from religiosity in that it can exist outside of organized religion, as well as in conjunction with religion. In addition, Illman (2014) highlights the more nuanced aspects of religion, such as emotions, relationships, and subjectivities.

### **Spirituality and Faith in Psychotherapy and Art Therapy**

This section introduces the connection between spirituality and the field of communication as psychotherapy leading into art therapy. At its core psychotherapy is about relationships, connection, and communication. Fehner (2002) believes psychotherapy connects relationships between self and others throughout time. In this way, therapy parallels spirituality,

as both consider inter and intra-personal relationships through communication with the self, others and in the case of spirituality, something larger than oneself. According to Captari, Hook, Hoyt, Davis, McElroy-Heltzel, & Worthington (2018), the integration of religion and spirituality into psychotherapy begins with this therapeutic relationship and the therapist acts as a compassionate and attuned figure for the client to internalize their experiences and mirror their spiritual relationship with not only a higher power or God, but their inner self.

The psychotherapy literature expands on this connection between religion or spirituality and mental health, with Captari, et. al (2018), discussing how spirituality or religion in psychotherapy can increase a client's feelings of connection and support, as well as help with client's adjustment to life stressors, grounding them to their own beliefs and identity, and helping them to cope (Paloutzian, & Park, 2014). Assagioli (1965) implies that spiritual well-being is essential in counseling, claiming that while personal and spiritual development are distinct, they can often overlap and interact (as cited by Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992). As Pargament (2011) states, "When people walk into the therapist's office, they do not leave their spirituality behind in the waiting room and they bring their spiritual beliefs, practices, experiences, values, relationships, and struggles along with them." (as cited by Captari et. al, 2018, p. 1938)

Moreover, Captari et. al (2018) states that incorporation and contextualization of religion or spirituality into psychotherapy treatment can change the therapeutic process, benefit treatment interventions and outcomes, and for some clientele, religion or spirituality can be a source of their emotional or psychological issues. Fehlnert (2002) emphasizes the importance of including spirituality and faith history in the holistic understanding and treatment of a person as a consideration when facilitating processes of healing. This consideration encompasses a full



spectrum of relationships to spirituality spanning belonging to an organized religion to an absence of faith or religion.

Franklin (2018) suggests one of the ways in which psychotherapy and spirituality intersect is through the practice of contemporary mindfulness. Black (2011) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 1). The foremost application of mindfulness has traditionally been through the practice of meditation. In 2017, Lomas, Etcoff, Gordon, & Shonin discussed how Western cultures have de-contextualized and secularized this concept from its Buddhist roots, taking a complex set of beliefs and practices and funneling them into a simplified applicable spiritual philosophy. This philosophy has been applied to Western psychological concepts and theories, including psychotherapy and art therapy (Lomas et. al., 2017).

Art therapy is defined by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) in 2001 as “a human service profession that utilizes art media, images, the creative art process, and patient/client responses to the created products as reflections of an individual’s development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts” (p. 2, as cited by Lawson, 2002). In addition, AATA (2017)’s website states that art therapy “engages the mind, body, and spirit in ways that are distinct from verbal articulation alone and how visual and symbolic expression gives voice to experience, and empowers individual, communal, and societal transformation.” The use of art in a therapeutic context can encourage and support attuning to one’s inner experience and truth, and like meditation, art making can be a way to cultivate and support mental and physical health. In this way art making and art therapy intersects with spirituality, like psychotherapy, through intra and inter-communication and relationship building. These analogous concepts are inextricably linked, creating a foundation for the interconnection between

spirituality, psychotherapy, art, and art therapy with a detailed understanding of the way art informs religious and spiritual practices.

### **Religions and Art**

This discussion of religion and art reviews how art is used historically, spiritually, and contemporarily in the four religions of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. In this section, the researchers give a brief overview of the history of each religion, art's role or lack thereof in spiritual practices, and how contemporary artists use religion to further conversation about religion in the modern world and acknowledge that at many times these categories converge and overlap.

#### ***Buddhist Art Tradition***

As explained by Sarao (2010), Buddhism originated in India during the Third Century, B.C. and has been oriented around the fundamental ideologies of achieving enlightenment and mindfulness through meditation and by means of following the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha, originally a member of the warrior caste, became the Buddha after his own reported enlightenment and from then forth spread his teachings with the goal of eliminating human suffering. Bodhi, (1994) discusses the four noble truths and the eightfold path, central Buddhist systems written by the Buddha which outline lifelong practices focused towards this purpose. According to Lomas et. al (2017), Buddhism prevailed as a primary religion and expanded through branches, sects, and the migration of Buddhism into other countries in Asia, and eventually, the Western World. This spread, evolution, and schisms of Buddhism was affected inherently by the cultures of the countries in which Buddhism became a main religion in, as well as how the Buddha's original texts and beliefs were translated and adapted to fit within each of these countries dynamics. Highly noted in the development of Buddhism is the integration of

Buddhism in China in conjunction with the Taoist tradition that was dominant and paralleled Confucianism, which helped to perpetuate the development of the sect, Zen Buddhism, in Korea and Japan.

Early Buddhist art held aniconism within its artistic depictions, preferring to illustrate the Buddha with symbols that represented the Buddha himself, important events in the Buddha's life, or specific philosophies of the Buddhist beliefs. This can be exemplified through the re-occurring symbol of the wheel in Buddhist art, believed to be representational of the Buddha's first sermon. Huntington (1990) explains how the lack of imagery within early Buddhist art can additionally be seen as a representation of one of the foundational aspects of Buddhism, the cessation of existence contained and centralized in physical form by means of enlightenment. Because Buddhism is an ancient practice that spans tradition throughout several countries, aniconism and representationalism have evolved and shifted significantly throughout context, space, and time. Huntington (1990) highlights how this is illustrated in the documentation of how the exposure of the Greek and classical world was documented in creating an inspiration for Buddhists in moving from aniconism to the anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha himself.

It is relevant to note that according to the literature, mindfulness, meditation, central themes of enlightenment and the long-standing pillars of Buddhist beliefs and values are woven through the practices of Buddhism's spiritual practices and Buddhist art. Within Zen Buddhism, for example, the Buddhist aesthetic is focused through intuitive experiences that exemplify the concept of mindfulness, such as tea ceremonies, swordsmanship, flower arrangements and archery. Lomas et. al. (2017), states that within these practices for Buddhists, a mindful experience is the art itself. It is further identified that beyond the experience, the Buddhist

aesthetic includes simplicity that contains an undulating relationship between symmetry and irregularity. As discussed, the natural world is both irregular and symmetrical and generating this through art is meant to hold the wordless meanings of reality (Lomas et. al, 2017). Pilgrim (1989) examines the creation of mandalas, symmetrical geometric creations often composed of sand that represent the complexities of the universe through their symbolic patterned intricacies, as additional means of expression that are embody Buddhist beliefs and traditions, as their process perpetuates and includes a meditative practice and often demonstrates an ephemeral nature of physicality that is prevalent in Buddhism.

Contemporary Buddhist art further exemplifies how the aesthetics and proponents of a faith tradition can shift and develop over time. Today, as explained by Boyd (2019), Buddhist artist Tenzing Rigdol, born in Nepal yet a Tibetan native since infancy, utilizes Buddhist icons within his collages, sculptures, and paintings to make an entrance into a political debate as well as to address long standing traditions and human conflicts of the ego. His art has a focus on current political themes centralized around religion rather than the mindfulness or enlightenment core values of the faith itself. His materials include imagery that parallel the aesthetic of Tibetan religious scrolls which are used Buddhism education. In one of his most popular pieces, *My World Is Your Blindspot*, the Buddha icon is seemingly on fire, a nod to the protesters in Tibet who have set themselves on fire in the streets.

In the United States, contemporary Buddhist art by Las Vegas native James Stanford appears to be influenced by the traditional Buddhist pillars through his own American lens. As Stanford (2019) shares, his wide expanse of multimedia art is an expression of contemporary spirituality. Stanford's imagery are abstract meditational pieces (Stanford 2019) which include patterned geometric shapes that mimic the original method of the mandala, yet at times work

together to create an overall image of Buddhist imagery such as lotuses or Buddha icons.

Stanford himself shares that his influences are from Buddhist philosophy, traditions, and his own meditative and contemplative experiences. The motivation for his art appears to be his representation of his own experience within the world of this tradition, how it has shaped his own beliefs and practices, as well as an appreciation for the Buddhist world of thought and beliefs.

### ***Islamic Art Tradition***

The Met Museum (2001) explains that the religious practice of Islam is based on tenets called the “Five Pillars.” The first pillar is known as shahada (profession of faith), which is the belief that “There is no God but God, and Muhammed is the Messenger of God.” The second pillar is salat (prayer), which entails that Muslims pray 5 times a day facing Mecca. Zakat (alms) is the third pillar which is the Islamic law that requires Muslims to donate a fixed amount of income to needy community members. The fourth pillar is Sawm (fasting) which entails fasting during the daylight hours of Ramadan. The last pillar is hajj (pilgrimage), which requires that every Muslim who can, shall make a trip to Mecca. As mentioned in the first pillar, Muslims follow the Prophet Muhammed, who is believed to be the last prophet sent by God (Met Museum, 2001).

According to Bloom and Blair (2003), “Islamic” art differs from the artwork of such contexts as “Buddhist” or “Christian” in that it encompasses all art produced within Muslim culture and does not refer specifically to art made within the religious faith tradition. Many misconceptions exist regarding what is considered to be “Islamic” art as the term is hard to define and encompasses art from such a vast amount of space and time. First appearing in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Fertile Crescent, Islamic art encompasses most of the art produced over

the following fourteen centuries in the "Islamic lands," usually defined as the arid belt covering much of West Asia but stretching from the Atlantic coast of North Africa and Spain on the west to the steppes of Central Asia and the Indian Ocean on the east. Bloom and Blair (2003) reflect a consensus in research that suggests the term "Islamic," as a creation of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western scholarship, is heavily flawed and is largely used out of convenience.

The Department of Islamic Art at the MET Museum (2001) details how religious Islamic art, as with its Abrahamic counterpart Judaism, has a history of aniconism or non-figural representation. Both the Qur'an, the central religious text in Islam, and the Hadith, a narrative record of the life and sayings of the prophet Muhammed, refer to figural depiction. The Hadith makes the strongest statement on the topic, stating that image makers will be challenged and will fail to "breathe life into" their creations on judgement day. Though the Qur'an does not specifically condemn figural representation, idolatry is explicitly prohibited and use of the Arabic term *musawwir* (meaning "maker of forms" or artist) is used as an epithet for God. Interpretation of these religious texts has informed the prohibitive use of figurative imagery in the Islamic religious art tradition and reflects the belief that creation of living forms should be unique to God (MET Museum, 2001). Saeed (2011) writes Allah (God) is everywhere, is the source of all and knower of all things, and therefore is the source of all thought, all beauty and all art. However, Soltes (2005) presents about an apparent exception, in the form of floral and vegetal representation, known as the Arabesque, which are widely used in traditional ornamentation. Sutton (2007) suggests that Arabesque designs wish to convey an essence of rhythm and growth, embodying the unity of nature. Soltes (2005) goes on to explain how in the absence of figural representation, calligraphy can be found in abundance within Islamic art, as letters themselves become symbolic instrument. Seen in artwork of all Abrahamic religions

through illustration of holy texts, but particularly in Judaism and Islam with a lack of figurative representation, is emphasis on word. Highly stylized, often illegible use of calligraphy is an integral part of the sophisticated ornamental aesthetic which is a defining feature of Islamic Art (Soltes, 2005).

Sutton (2007) writes that though wide ranging in time, space and media, Islamic art, both secular and religious, generally presents with a distinctly recognizable unifying harmonious aesthetic making use of sophisticated ornamentation. Taluğ & Eken (2015) detail the basic components of Islamic ornamentation as calligraphy, arabesque (floral and vegetal) patterns, geometric patterns, and the addition of figural representation in secular art, which has historically flourished. Soltes (2005) writes, “through the use of ornamentation, Islamic art conveys a sense of God as paradox - utterly opposite from us, yet, as our creator, somehow like us” (p. 154). Through the use of visual oppositions, monumental/minute, infinite/finite, and contrast in form and color, Islamic art reveals the simple yet complex relationship between people and God (Soltes, 2005). These visual structures can be found across all Islamic art but most obviously within the architectural tradition, which is considered as the most important feature of Islamic art. Ornamentation creates a visual aesthetic wherein it is nearly impossible to locate a beginning and ending point, visually denoting the infinitude of God. Within Islamic religious architecture, structural elements themselves serve as frames to contain ornamentation, thus finitizing the infinite (Soltes, 2005, p.155). Considering the use of geometric patterns, The Department of Islamic Art at the Met Museum (2001), explains four basic shapes, or “repeat units,” from which the more complicated patterns are constructed. These shapes consist of circles, squares, star patterns which are comprised of square and triangles in a circle shape, and multi-sided polygons.

Saeed (2011) writes that Islamic art is full of inner meaning, symbolism, esthetical, metaphysical, cosmological significance, and suggests that the relationship between Islamic art and Islamic spirituality is deeply personal and intimate. Nasr (1976) describes the way in which interlacing patterns are the earthly reflection of the worlds above, the spiritual world. It is suggested that geometric patterns and numbers have a cosmic connection, representing the structure and archetypes of the cosmos. Islamic art is thought to embody the micro and macro, relative and absolute, finite and infinite, multiplicity and unity. Islamic artwork is therefore a representation of the workings of the inner self and its reflection in the universe (Saeed, 2011).

Modern day Islamic artists integrate traditional Islamic cultural experience with contemporary ideas and perspective. Shirazi (2012) writes about Iranian-Swedish contemporary installation artist Mandana Moghaddam, who uses her art to bridge cultural boundaries and inspire intercultural dialogue. Born in Tehran in 1972, Moghaddam sought asylum in Sweden as a teenager after her father was executed in the Islamic Revolution. Her work has been notably displayed at the 51st Venice Biennale, where she exhibited *Chelgis II* (2005), an installation featuring a large cement block suspended from the ceiling by four black braids. Ardia (2011) writes about Moghaddam's search for reconciliation and dialogue through installations like *The Well* (2008), which connected wells throughout the world by audio. Moghaddam draws from her experience of displacement, and feminist perspective to create works that explore communication, exile and Iranian femininity. Crux (2014) describes another contemporary Islamic artist exploring cultural and political issues through art. Palestinian multimedia artist, poet and activist Emily Jacir uses her platform to advocate for Palestinian rights and share the unique Palestinian experience with the world. *Ex libris* (2010-2012) explores Palestinian erasure through the photographs of 30,000 books taken from homes, libraries and institutions in 1948



during the creation of the state of Israel. *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (2001) was created over a three-month period while Jacir lived in New York. The artist opened her studio to people from all walks of life, Palestinians, Israelis, New Yorkers and artists alike were invited to embroider the names of the villages lost onto a large refugee tent (Crux, 2014).

### ***Judaism Art Tradition***

To begin the discussion on how Jewish art acts as a form of communication it is pertinent to briefly discuss the tenets of the religion of Judaism. Soltes (2005)'s discussion on the beginnings of Jewish art identifies four foundational elements of Judaism. The first is a belief in one all powerful, mighty, but also kind God, who is the creator of the universe. A second tenet is the sense of a unified peoplehood and the Jewish people being heirs to a sacred covenant with God. The importance of the five books of the Torah and the 613 commandments defines this relationship and connection to God as a third doctrine of Judaism. As Soltes (2005) explains, the fourth principle centers on the land of Israel and the destroyed ancient temples as the ideal space and place to worship. These four elements have been prevalent in Judaism throughout the centuries despite the changing civilizations and parts of the world Jews have lived and worshipped and have been reflected in the religious architecture and decor of synagogues, ritual and prayer materials, and written texts (Soltes, 2005).

Raphael (2016) & Gutman (1961) agree that traditionally, most scholars on Jewish tradition have thought that the more devout and purer Jewish worship was through more linguistic and aural pathways than through visual images. In Judaism, feelings of belief relate more to time than space and are often non-visual, as the image of God is not as important as the word of God. In addition, the second commandment from Exodus 20:4 states "You shall not

make yourself a graven image” and has been interpreted by many scholars as forbidding the Jews to make or worship “graven” images (Gutman, 1961, p. 162). Indeed, Raphael (2016) instead suggests that this belief that the Jewish religion banned production of visual art and practiced aniconism continued well until the 20th century in spite of historical evidence to the contrary (Raphael, 2009).

According to Soltes (2005), early Jewish art started with the creation of the first and second temples, which were destroyed, but became a symbolic influence for subsequent spaces of worship. In the ancient cities of Kfar Nahum and Katzrin synagogues were built to orient to the ancient temples. Many of these synagogues’ decorative schemas were syncretized with aspects from the Greek and Roman cultures and imagery becomes blurred. For instance, during this time, the modern Jewish star, or six-pointed star, was a pagan symbol of the female and male pubis interlocking (Soltes, 2005). Instead, one of the most symbolized imageries from this time period was the seven-branch menorah. This interconnection of the Jewish and Roman decoration is further emphasized in the ancient Roman town Dura Europus, in a synagogue that is lined with frescoes and mosaics. In these frescoes, there are human representations of biblical stories and figures with words in Greek and with figures wearing Persian inspired clothing. In addition, many of the figures are schematized in the similar style of early Christian and Byzantine art to look less natural in order to surpass the physical to get to the spiritual (Soltes, 2005).

Raphael (2016) describes that the intersection of Jewish art with the cultures around it along with visual representation, continued into the middle ages during which Jewish communities thought of art as “Hiddur Mitzvah” or the principle that one needs to aesthetically glorify God or the Torah through creation and enhancement of ritual objects. During this time there was an increase in adorning every day and ceremonial objects, instead of physical spaces,

with previous menorah and temple motifs. Soltes (2005) noted, this was in part due to the Jews becoming more of a minority community and focusing on objects they could carry. However, there are also many medieval synagogues in countries such as Germany, the Czech, and Spain. Interior decor for these synagogues depended on being located in either a Christian or a Muslim dominated part of the world and often mixed with these communities' styles.

Soltes (2005) describes that while moving out of the Middle Ages and into the 17th and 18th century, there was an overall decrease of religiosity of Europe and a move toward more secularist thinking with the reformation and enlightenment. This loosened the animosity between the Jewish, Christian and Muslim worlds, and allowed for an emancipated culture of local Jewish communities to increasingly express themselves in a non-Jewish world. In Eastern Europe especially, Jews experienced a golden age with the birth of reform Judaism in Germany and increasingly became part of the visual artists of the modern era (Soltes, 2005). Raphael (2016) explains that into the 19th century, European Jewish artists integrated into modern society, becoming painters, art dealers, and art collectors. A genre of Jewish painting began depicting traditional Jewish scenes, representing nostalgic lifestyles and the struggle to bridge the old world with the new, with artists such as Daniel Oppenheim and Isidor Kaufamn (Soltes, 2005 & Raphael, 216).

While the end of the 19th century saw a rise in European nationalist anti-Semitism, with Jewish art reflecting this increasing economic hardship and persecution, this was in conjunction with the rise of Zionism and the creation of a new national Jewish identity in Palestine and the creation of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem by Boris Schatz in 1906 (Raphael, 2016). Soltes (2005) describes how art made in Palestine instead reflected optimism

and a “new” day for the Jews, with a resurgence in religious and political Jewish symbols such as biblical subjects, the Jewish star, menorah, and connections to the Jewish ancestral land.

In juxtaposition with the growing anti-Semitism in the 20th century, there was also an influx of the prominence of Jewish artist becoming involved in the major artistic movements. According to Baigell (2005), up until the 1900’s Jewish artists had avoided showing Jewish experiences, culture or practice, but due to the large immigration influx from Eastern Europe in the early 1900’s, Jewish artists began to reflect these themes in their artistic practice. Many of the artistic themes showed genre scenes of the old world and immigrant life. Raphael (2016) reports that this increase in Jewish artists and Jewish imagery influenced the creation of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which opened in 1933 and promptly closed in 1938 with the rise of the Munich Exhibition of “Degenerate Art”, which included Jewish art. After the holocaust there was a revival in commissions for Jewish synagogues and artworks to create a new Jewish identity (Raphael, 2016).

At the end of the 20th century, with to the remnants of the holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel, there was a rise in Jewish nationalism and the formation of a new Jewish identity, including a rise in national Jewish art identity. This has encouraged modern art historians and religious historians to question, what is Jewish art and how is it used in the religious practice?

Raphael (2016), suggests that based on historical evidence to the contrary, that the idea of Judaism as being an aniconic religious tradition, due to the previously discussed second commandment, is a modern concept. In her discussion, she references such examples as the frescoes and mosaics from Duras Europas as evidence. However, despite this argued modern concept, many historians still argue that abstraction is the best creation method of Jewish art

(Raphael, 2016). To make counter-idolatrous images Jewish art used many approaches to visual art such as abstraction, trace, distortion and irony. However, this does not secure one art form that is more “Jewish” than others.

Indeed, Baigell (2006) argues that while Jewish artists have lived in America since the 18th century, there has been no review of any trends, patterns or iconography on what is Jewish about Jewish art, because there is nothing that makes Jewish art distinct. On the contrary, Hodin (1964) asked is there a Jewish art or only Jewish artists? He attempted to create a criterion that might define “Jewish art” as art produced by artist of Jewish descent, art with a Jewish subject matter, or art produced in a Jewish milieu. Ernst Cohn-Wiener stated that “what distinguishes Jewish art to its disadvantage from the art of other people is that in its formal foundations, in its style, it is as dependent as the people itself. It does not possess an absolute independence. The Jews have experienced the late Antique, the Islamic, the byzantine era, they have lived through the Gothic, the Renaissance and the Baroque age, they have created within the styles of all these periods in the same way as their modern painters have become impressionists, expressionists or abstracts” (as cited by Hodin, 1964). This argument that Jewish art is dependent on the social status of the Jewish people and influenced by the cultural time period poses that Jewish art can help reveal the soul and spirit of Judaism and that that it can visually represent not only religious and philosophical ideals, but also social and national Jewish experiences (Raphael, 2009).

Many art historians, including Rosen (2010), argue that it might be better to not question if there is a Jewish art, but rather when is art Jewish and for whom? Jewish art is still in its infancy and is lacking a self-identified Jewish aesthetic theology (Hodin, 1964 & Raphael, 2009). Therefore, how the modern religion of Judaism uses art as a way of informing practice, depends greatly upon the sect of Judaism, the time period, the cultural and social climate of the

time, and specific self-identified Jewish artist's concept of their own Judaism. Indeed, to better understand how art is used in more religious and spiritual practices, it might be beneficial to look at modern Jewish artist's art.

In some respects, Baigell (2006) claims that contemporary Jewish artists use of art mimics the history of Jewish art and the connection of Jewish spiritual practices with art in that modern and contemporary Jewish artists have used art as a way to identify as being Jewish and to individually renew their connection to the Jewish community, culture and religion. In this way, art became a space and way for many Jewish artists, especially American artists, to advance Jewish memory and survival and avoid assimilation into the American mainstream (Baigell, 2006). In this way, some modern and contemporary Jewish artists have created art with Jewish subject matter to explore their own religiousness and spirituality and to assert a Jewish identity. At the same time, many of these artists also identify as artists who are Jewish rather than "Jewish artists" to continue to protect themselves (Baigell, 2006). These artists discussed in this section include modern artists such as Marc Chagall and Mark Rothko and contemporary artist Archie Rand.

Marc Chagall was a prominent Jewish painter of the 20th century from Poland. Jeffery (2014) quotes Chagall expressing his method of painting as "to breathe my sign into my canvases, the sigh of prayers and sadness, the prayer of salvation, of rebirth" (p. 28). Chagall's art uses many explicit and classical Jewish imagery in conjunction with modern horrors, such as the holocaust. For instance, in his painting *The White Crucifixion* from 1938, Chagall juxtaposes Jewish and christen symbols by showing Jesus on a cross as a way to represent the victimization of all Jews. This painting was created after Kristallnacht and helps represent Chagall's personal expression of spiritual distress, looking at the darker parts of the Jewish experience (Jeffery,

2014). Another prominent 20th century painter, originally from Eastern Europe, was Mark Rothko. Like Chagall, Rothko grew up with a religious Jewish upbringing speaking both Hebrew and Yiddish, but his family immigrated to America in 1913 before WWII. According to Baigell (2006), Rothko was affiliated with the Ten Art Group, a group of Jewish artists, and taught at many Jewish institutions. However, his artwork distanced itself from any classical or overt Jewish imagery, and instead reflected an abstract reaction to the rumors and knowledge of the Holocaust. Many past and current art historians have interpreted his colored murals, specifically his stacked rectangles as having obscured Jewish context. For instance, the Seagram Murals from 1959 potential reference the colors of flames produced by concentration camps during the Holocaust (Baigell, 2006).

Moving forward to contemporary artist's Archie Rand is a generation removed from both Chagall and Rothko. Although Rand was brought up as Jewish, unlike Rothko and Chagall he was born in New York City after the Holocaust, during a much less vulnerable time to be Jewish (Baigell, 2006). This context has allowed Rand to self-proclaim that he is able to be more open about his Judaism and reflect more Jewish themes in his work. Since the 1970's Rand has been creating art based on Jewish subjects, with themes from the Torah, Talmud, Midrashim, and Kabbalah (Baigell, 2006). For instance, one of his current art murals, includes paintings of the 613 commandments in a comic-series style are arranged on a huge grid at the Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM.org, 2017 & Van Biema, 2015). This large-scale work of figuratively representing Jewish themes and biblical ideas highlight Rand's desire to bypass religious institutions and traditional rituals, as he identifies as a spiritual Jew, and to make a contemporary visual Jewish culture (Baigell, 2006).

### ***Christianity Art Tradition***

According to Finney (1997), as Christianity first grew as a religion, it's identity from an outsider's perspective appeared unclear in comparison to other religions such as Judaism, which preceded Christianity and from which Christianity has its roots. Belting (1994) writes that religious tradition needed a clearer identity before establishing imagery that defined Christianity. Finney (1997) explains how a culture can typically be identified through their produced materials, thus the little production of artifacts and material items left the identity of early Christianity as somewhat non-distinct as Christians blended into the cultural surroundings of their neighboring societies. As early Christians did not have much land or wealth, they also did not produce much art—and as they gained both of these in the third century, their material ability to produce cultural artifacts and create art grew as well. However, there is still a debate as to whether this lack of art in early Christianity can also be attributed to the idea of non-materiality that denies physical representations of the religion. Finney references Pope Clement I as describing art used as a visual representation to be a lie, deception, and thievery that steals the truth from God, as painting was only mimicking plants and animals. Over time this view changed, as Christians believed themselves to be superior to pagans that worshiped images that were representational, whereas Christians were able to recognize art as being art (Finney, 1997). Soltes (2005) notes that while Christianity's early roots might be similar to Judaism in the lack of production of art, Soltes describes the two religions as a sibling rivalry, which impacted how art is used in each tradition.

According to Soltes (2005) the earliest forms of Christian art usually include themes of salvation and eternal life, as most of the early art forms come from in and around Catacombs (Soltes, 2005). Emergent images from the Catacombs included the fish as a symbol of well-being and survival, the lamb as a symbol of sacrifice and Jesus, and the theme of a passage from life to



death as a kind of rebirth. As the Crucifixion became synonymous and recognizable to the way Christ died, over time the cross logically became the symbol that represented Christ. Through the intersection of the horizontal and vertical beams, the cross also came to symbolize the meeting of opposite realms such as heaven and earth, divinity and humanity, and life and death. The cross became a prominent metaphor in Christian architecture as well, used in churches and cathedrals as symbolism of physically entering the space of Christ's sacrifice (Soltes, 2005).

Representations of Christ's image transform as perceptions shift in society—most images in early Christianity depicted Christ as a beardless shepherd with a halo, whereas the Renaissance brought about a larger shift in imagery as Christ began to be shown to have a more human side (Soltes, 2005). Christian art in the Renaissance also shifted from hierarchical proportions, which portrayed Christ as larger in scale than other figures or humans, to more realistic and life-like proportions.

According to Jenson (2000), as Christianity became more defined, the meaning and use of art in spiritual practice also evolved. In contrast and also in conjunction to the idea that early Christians were able to recognize art as being simply just art in their production of images and representations of God or as a way of engaging in a mode of religion that was visual that could enhance both the verbal and written texts. Belting (1994) explains how Christians developed their iconography to express their religion in ways that publicly display their loyalty and devotion to their faith. These public expressions of faith are fundamental elements in many branches of Christianity as the images offer protection from God or the saint depicted in the image, and in return becomes a protected and sacred object. Not only do images support the religious texts and describe the narrative, many Christians believe displaying Christ or saints on

objects can elicit supernatural or miraculous effects, as their presence work through the imagery and thus emphasize the idea that these figures transcend time and permanence (Belting, 1994).

Modern Christian artists might incorporate these historic symbols of Christianity in their work not necessarily as a means of worship, but instead to create contemporary discourse through art, reflect their own religious practices, and in the case of Trina McKillen, use the imagery to strengthen her critique on the religious institution through the language of art. In her recent installation, *Confess*, McKillen uses Catholic iconography and symbols that she knows well as she grew up within the church. As Rapp (2019) states in her catalog covering the four series in the *Confess* installations, McKillen's pieces speak on behalf of survivors of clerical sexual abuse, and the name of the installation even utilizes the Catholic Church's language to call for change within the religious institution as the title asks for an admission of wrongness to be expressed. Through McKillen's social justice perspective, her artwork sparks awareness on the abuses of power within the church, offers healing for the survivors, as well as healing for herself as a member of the religion. The exhibition warrants more than just conversation about the art but prompts a conversation about how change can progress within the system of Catholicism in modern society.

As Rapp (2019) notes, McKillen's art pieces about survivors of clerical sexual abuse started in 2008, when she began making pillows in a process described by the artist as a personal coping ritual. The process for *Stations of Hope* began before McKillen knew what the creation of her pillows would be used for—instead the making of the “poultices” (which resemble bandages) became a contemplative practice that offered her own personal healing as she grappled with what was happening within the church, and she later found a use for the poultices within this installation. The name references the fourteen Stations of the Cross, and McKillen uses symbols

such as lambs to connect Christian themes to her message and as a place to offer viewers healing perhaps through recognizable or familiar images. McKillen spent around eight years creating a glass and marble confessional, *Bless Me Child for I Have Sinned* (Rapp, 2019). Going to confession is part of Catholic practice in which members of the church confess their sins to a priest, only in McKillen's transparent version she reverses the roles to imply that the Catholic church must confess their wrongdoings to the children who have been victims of abuse, and must do so in a transparent manner. Details in *Bless Me Child for I Have Sinned* reference Christian iconography and themes such as the cross, the lamb, the key to the kingdom of Heaven, the sacred heart, and the crown of thorns. McKillen created her own symbol, which also reference Christian themes, to become the symbol for her exhibition. In this, McKillen created the image of a snake blocking a keyhole—the keyhole representing the kingdom of Heaven, and the snake representing the scandal of the Catholic Church covering up the sexual abuse allegations and protecting priests (Rapp, 2019). For those familiar with Christian symbols, McKillen's installations offers a self-reflective perspective on the Church's current allegations, and for those unfamiliar with the iconography her work offers a place to begin conversation about the sexual abuse scandals from a religious and critical perspective.

Similar to McKillen's work, which offers a critical reflection of the Catholic Church in contemporary society, Serrano uses his art to create a critical conversation around the meaning and use of one of Christianity's most iconic symbols, and how it has evolved to be used in modern culture. Reflecting on the debate in early Christianity surrounding the idolization of representations of Christ in art, Andres Serrano's work sparked controversy that was in a similar context to this through his 1987 photograph, *Piss Christ*. Serrano identifies as both an artist and a Christian who was raised Catholic, and sees his work as an act of devotion, rather than the “anti-

Christian” blasphemy many called his piece according Serrano in an article Serrano wrote for the Creative Time Reports in 2015. For *Piss Christ*, Serrano created a Plexiglas tank and submerged a plastic crucifix in the tank as it was filled with Serrano’s urine, and photographed the scene (Serrano, 2015). Serrano was selected as one of ten artists for the Awards in the Visual Arts competition, and his piece, *Piss Christ*, first created controversy at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Serrano, 2015). While Serrano’s piece was part of this traveling exhibition, a journalist published a complaint in a local newspaper, which later influenced a Christian organization to campaign against the piece (Serrano, 2015). However, Serrano’s intentions were far from the controversial anti-Christian messages as some viewers speculated.

In a 2012 interview with Holpuch from the Guardian, Serrano states how the widespread and almost accessorized use of the imagery of the crucifix has changed the perception of it and, "When you see it, you're not horrified by it at all, but what it represents is the crucifixion of a man. And for Christ to have been crucified and laid on the cross for three days where he not only bled to death, he shat himself and he peed himself to death. So, if *Piss Christ* upsets you, maybe it's a good thing to think about what happened on the cross." In this way, Serrano’s work uses the symbols of Christianity to create a conversation about the meaning and relevancy of how this symbol is used in contemporary society. While growing up in the Catholic Church, Serrano often heard nuns reference the body and blood of Christ, and comment on how idolizing the representation of Christ was wrong, as these objects were not holy. Serrano calls *Piss Christ* a commentary on that paradox in that “perhaps it reminds some people to question what we unthinkingly fetishize (and thereby often minimize) in lieu of pondering seriously what the crucifix actually symbolizes: the unimaginably torturous death of Christ, the Son of God,” (Serrano, 2015).

### ***Summary of Faith Traditions***

In this section, similarities between the religious traditions histories and their art practices deepen the understanding of the universal elements of religion and religious art making.

Michaelides (2009) states that there is no unified religion, only unifying ideas of peace, love, truth and justice that are conceived differently. Moreover, Massoudi (2006) discusses that while each religion has its own histories and development expressed as rituals, sacred texts and languages of worship, they find similarities through the underlying aspects of being kind, compassionate, helpful, just, and leading a moral life. Therefore, religions are not closed systems--all inform one another and change and develop in the context of culture, time, and space (Michaelides, 2009).

Soltes (2005) includes the visual self-expression of the Abrahamic religions as changing and overlapping within the cultural context of one another, through adopting and adapting shared visual symbols and imagery and creating new interpretations from each religion. Through the previous discussion on Buddhist religion, it is understood that while not included in conversations about Abrahamic religions, this can also extend to similar changes seen in visual practices in Buddhism. In reviewing the faith traditions' art histories, spiritual art practices, and contemporary artists, the remainder of the paper discusses the literature supporting the connection to the spiritual nature of art. Contemporary artists, and spiritual art making practices exist at the interfaith threshold of the of this ever-changing dialogue.

### **Introduction to Dialogue**

The four previously mentioned faith traditions present a historical reference as evidence for long standing religious tensions and difficulties between these religions and the influence each religion has had on one another. This presents a rationale for genuine and effective

interfaith dialogue. Michaelides (2009) writes that in today's current political climate these long-standing religious differences fuel misrepresentation and prejudice. Similar to the previous discussion regarding the four religions' spiritual art, through the context of interfaith dialogue, this section highlights often overlooked similarities that exist between the considered religious traditions. This section focuses on the types of dialogue and the importance of quality dialogue, especially concerning interfaith communications.

According to Illman (2014), the Greek etymological definition of the word dialogue simply means conversation in any form. In 2011, Neufeldt broadens the discussion of possible dialogue to include political, theological and peacemaking. Yagi & Swidler (1993) define dialogue as "an encounter between two or more persons or groups of different views with the primary purpose of learning, not teaching" (as cited by Massoudi, 2006). In support of Yagi and Swidler, genuine dialogue is not coercive, nor is it a monologue, lecture, or sermon meant to force changing of views, instead it is a way to learn (Massoudi, 2006). Dialogue attempts to shift the "conversation of" to be the "conversation with" (Takim, 2004). Effective dialogue requires being in conversation with both the self and others. Dialogue is the negotiations of this tension, the space in between. Effective dialogue needs participants to be attentive, responsive, inclusive, tolerant and understanding of how one's education, upbringing and perceptions effect their biases, assumptions and beliefs (Michaelides, 2009 & Massoudi, 2006). It may be efficacious to regard dialogue as an ethical exercise, framed within a global context, which requires a commitment to self-awareness and self-discipline (Lark, 2005 & Illman, 2014).

### ***Interfaith Dialogue***

Massoudi (2006) writes that while dialogue encompasses a wide range of applications, interfaith dialogue is particularly complex and sensitive due to the deeply ingrained and personal

nature of belief systems. Huang (1995) explains that due to concepts of faith and beliefs being so personal, for the purposes of this paper the authors chose to use the term interfaith versus interreligious dialogue. In this way the paper can better focus on the individuals involved in dialogue's personal faith experiences rather than the individual representing a religious institution (Huang, 1995). In an effort to organize and navigate the complex landscape and scholarly discussion of interfaith dialogue, four essential ideologies will be discussed. Keaton and Soukup (2009) explain the roles of belief systems such as, exclusivism, reductionism, relativism, and pluralism within interfaith dialogue. According to Huang (1995), exclusivists often regard their beliefs systems as the unequivocal truth, closing themselves off from discussing similarities with the religious other and righteously focusing solely on differences. Keaton & Soukup (2009) explain that reductionism acknowledges other religions and religious practices into their own universal truth, but only understands other religions through their own religious lens thereby reducing other religions perspectives. Relativism also believes in a universal religious truth that all religious traditions seek. However, multiple authors agree that each religion manifests this truth through their own doctrines, rituals, and practices which are influenced by the fluid dynamism of time, place, culture, globalization, and personal interpretation (Keaton & Soukup, 2009 & Illman, 2014). Lastly, Huang (1995) explains how pluralism can be understood as the embracing and celebration of religious differences. A pluralistic view of dialogue helps to demystify the religious other and provides an opportunity to strengthen religious commitments and find inspiration. A pluralistic viewpoint is widely considered to be necessary for open and constructive interfaith dialogue.

Taking (2004), notes that historically, belief systems such as exclusivism and reductionism have not furthered interfaith conversation as they encourage religious isolation and

perpetuate divisive othering, thus maintaining tension between religious groups. Therefore, pluralism engages those involved in interfaith dialogue to increase sensitivity and learn another's perspective, with the understanding that an agreement is not the goal of dialogue (Takim, 2004). According to Illman (2014), there is a mutual and moral responsibility for participants engaging in pluralistic dialogue to view “the other” with human dignity and as a worthy, unique individual.

Takim (2004) describes how vital and critical it is to understand the history and the shortcomings of previous attempts at non-pluralistic interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue can be challenging due to barriers of trust associated with the historically inflicted pain and suffering both perpetrated by and on all religions. This can increase the likelihood of individuals involved in interfaith dialogue to feel victimized without reflecting on their part in the victimization of others. Multiple authors acknowledge that in this way, interfaith dialogues can potentially reflect and reproduce structures of power and sustain the silencing of each marginalized religion (Keaton & Soukoup, 2009 & Takim, 2004). Lark (2005) notes that despite these challenges, there is great importance in interfaith dialogue as it a microcosm for the culture at large. Michaelides (2009)'s considers how innovative approaches for interfaith dialogue can encourage change and expose individuals to a different vocabulary and ways of knowing and acting.

### ***Dialogue and Imagination***

This section introduces literature from outside the discipline of art therapy that connects the spiritual use of art and imagination as a precursor to successful interfaith dialogue.

Michaelides (2009) considers that what makes interfaith dialogue possible, “is not universal religious or ethical language, but the human capacity we call imagination (p. 456). Imagination is a human capacity that creates a platform for empathetic boundary crossing and allows us to



consider different worlds and perspectives (Michaelides, 2009). Moreover, Illman (2014) considers imagination to be a prerequisite of empathy, in that one needs to be able to think empathetically and imaginatively about the religious experience and perspective of others to create effective interfaith dialogue. Therefore, empathy, creativity, and imagination are intertwined and can allow those participating in interfaith dialogue to access the spaces in-between dialogue and understanding (Illman, 2014). This innovative approach of requiring imagination, creativity, and empathy for interfaith dialogue supports the use of art making in interfaith dialogue. This is an argument that provides a basis for considering the art therapy literature regarding art as a facilitator of communication interfaith dialogue.

### **Art Therapy Literature Review of Dialogue Through Art**

This section discusses art therapy literature supporting ways in which art can be used as language in dialogue, demonstrating the use of art, creativity, and imagination to facilitate empathetic inter and intra-personal communication. As previously stated, the existing research suggests that as a unique language, art is inherently creative and imaginative, which are necessary building blocks for effective dialogue. The art therapy literature focuses on how art emphasizes spirituality and creativity, personal metaphors and symbols, and how art is used as a visual language in large group cross-cultural conversation.

According to Farrelly-Hansen (2001), there is a storied relationship between art and spirituality, as both are inherently healing. In this way, creativity and faith have a cyclical relationship. Through the act of art making, faith becomes concretized and externalized as something to be experienced through all five sensory levels. In addition, Farrelly-Hanson (2001) suggests this process is almost meditative in its experience and that the use of art making can be an alternative form of communicating spiritual practice. Similarly, Lark (2005) suggests that

spiritual art can be powerful in making meaning during communication as it relies on metaphors and symbols. In agreement, Huss (2015) considers the ability of art, through the use of symbol and metaphor, to provide a less-threatening, distanced space to discuss emotionally charged content, which can often be a barrier to interfaith dialogue. Franklin (2018), further describes visual symbols as a way to access one's inner awareness, allowing for information to be shared, received, and understood.

Utilizing metaphor to communicate, Lark (2005)'s research examines art as another means of expression in large cross-cultural group dialogue. This study describes how verbal language is often the preferred form of dialogue for Western societies, however the use of only verbal expression is argued to be too linear, limiting, and confining, especially for those who are bilingual or don't come from the dominant culture. Art can be an additional language or way of getting information across, which is not dependent on words. Making art and verbally processing in a group can create a power shift in cross-cultural group discussions, such as interfaith dialogue (Lark, 2005). Art therapy and art therapists operate in a unique space, seamlessly moving between the visual and verbal expressions of dialogue. Lark (2005), calls for other art therapists to take social action responsibility and encourages them to facilitate dialogue to serve inter-cultural communities.

At the intersection of art, spirituality, and interfaith dialogue, Linesch (2017)'s study provides the foundational research to examine and investigate the use of imagery and it's parallels with interfaith dialogue and art therapy. This study explored a group of twenty-one women from the Abrahamic religious backgrounds living in Los Angeles. Each month, for seven months, the women were part of discussion revolving around selected sacred texts from each religion and prompted to create art response pieces. Afterwards they were put in groups of three

and asked to intimately share art and acknowledge possible themes or lack thereof. The art was gathered and examined qualitatively, identifying three emergent themes including increased vulnerability, dialogue expansion, and new ways of knowing. Linesch (2017)'s article provides qualitative evidence and a framework on how to effectively add elements of therapeutic art making into interfaith dialogue.

### **Conclusion**

The current literature review informs the need for further research looking at the intersectionality of psychotherapy, art, and interfaith dialogue. Linesch (2017)'s article sparked interest in the connection between art making and interfaith dialogue. While the researchers plan to model their methodological approach on Linesch (2017)'s categorization of themes from the art, the current study will further investigate the role of psychotherapy and psychotherapists experience with spirituality and religion. This additional literature informed and highlighted psychotherapy's connection with spirituality and the importance of spirituality in clinical practice, to expand on interventions for informal interfaith dialogue. Indeed, the research reviewed states the importance of creativity, imagination and empathy in successful interfaith dialogue (Illman, 2014, & Michaelides, 2009). The researchers wanted to expand and evolve Linesch (2017)'s study to look deeper into the use of how art making can inform dialogues with a spiritual other and how this can therefore inform art therapist's clinical dialogues.

### Research Approach

The research approach for this study involves qualitative methods that specifically include arts-based inquiry and focus group data gathering. As Sean McNiff (1998) suggests, art inquiry is an imaginative practice that can further research by using other modes of creative languages and thinking. The strength of using qualitative methods within this project is reflected in the writings of Lynn Kapitan (2018), in that the qualitative process allows for exploration and interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the literature reviewed for this study posits that it is not plausible to reduce the subjects' spiritual or religious identity into boxes. With art making and dialogue, inductive reasoning and the personal context of this research is best integrated with a qualitative approach. As Asawa (2009) exemplified in the study, *Art Therapists' Emotional Reactions to the Demands of Technology*, the focus groups and qualitative approaches created space for exploration of meaning. A focus group was chosen for this research based on the nature of interpersonal interactions, the multiplicity of the writing, and how the information is assessed (Kapitan, 2018). The ways in which the researchers plan to engage in this workshop implies participant action research. The researchers' parallel process aims to balance the power differentials within this study. This strategy will inform the research as the researcher's gauge and gather information by being included in the interactions within this focus group.

## Methods

### Definition of Terms

**Religion** is defined as “systematic body of beliefs or practices of an organized group of people who believe in certain doctrines or creeds concerning the universe and the relationship of humanity to the universe” (p. 20). Religion often includes rituals and doctrines, and is influenced by historical, political, institutional influences and structure.

**Faith** is defined as a belief or set of beliefs with which one has a consistent trust in without actual proof. People communicate their expressions of faith by identifying with a religion.

**Spirituality** is defined by Land (2015) and Felhner (2002) as that which is transcendent and draws one into relationship with someone or something greater than oneself and gives ultimate meaning to life. According to Illman (2014) spirituality embodies meditative, subjective, and contemplative experiences that occur during inner transformation and can exist outside of an organized religion as well as in conjunction with one.

**Mindfulness** is defined by Black (2011) as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 1)

**Art therapy** is defined by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) in 2001 as “a human service profession that utilizes art media, images, the creative art process, and patient/client responses to the created products as reflections of an individual’s development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts” (p. 2, as cited by Lawson, 2002). It is a

practice that is known to engage the mind, body, and spirit, uniquely and differently than verbal expression that can lead to personal and societal transformation.

**Dialogue** is defined through the greet etymological definition of the word which means conversation in any form (Illman, 2014), as well as including the idea of two or more people or groups of people interacting with each other with the goal of learning instead of teaching.

### **Design of Study**

This arts-based research informed by a focus group, interviews, and participant action approaches is aimed at exploring ones' own spiritual practice and philosophy in relation to identity as a clinical art therapist, as well as exploring how interfaith dialogue impacts empathy towards another person. The creation of art, both individually and as an interfaith dyad, will be used to integrate and synthesize these explorations. For this study, the four researchers will conduct a preliminary test of the materials in which they rehearse the mechanics of each directive before participating in the workshop. In the effort to eliminate power differentials, the researchers will then join in the vulnerability of being participants within the workshop, as they will invite their peers who are also members of the first, second, and third year cohorts of the Loyola Marymount University's Marital and Family Therapy with specialization in Clinical Art Therapy program. The arts-based workshop will consist of an optional resource sheet, an individual art piece with a short self-reflection, an interfaith conversation, a dyadic art piece with another self-reflection, and a group discussion.

The optional resource sheet will be given at the beginning of the workshop for participants to anonymously provide the researchers with demographic information. There will be no identifying information associated with the resource sheet, but will be reviewed in relation

to the participant's reflections and their art pieces created during the workshop. A folder will be provided for the participants to keep their resource sheet and art together. The resource sheet will provide blank spaces for the participants to share their age, ethnicity, sex, preferred gender identity, faith and or spiritual practice, and any other demographic information they would like to provide. The resource sheet will also have blank space for the two reflections that will be part of the workshop.

The first prompt of the arts-based workshop will provide about twenty minutes for each individual participant to make a piece of art about their own experience of spiritual practice. Next, the participants will be invited to write on their resource sheet a list of three to five words that describe their spiritual practice, or their art piece. This will allow for themes to emerge both visually and verbally and will help the researchers synthesize themes across the participants.

In the next part of the workshop the participants will pair up to form dyads and be invited to use this time to have a conversation about their pieces and share their list of words. This space mimics the therapeutic space in that spiritual others can simultaneously exist in interaction and dialogue with one another. The dyadic groups will then be invited to co-create a piece together that reflects a safe space where both could continue dialogue about spiritual otherness. In this process, the researchers are curious as to how each participant notices their partner, and thus will offer another reflection that will be the last part of the resource sheet. This last self-reflective, brief writing piece will ask for how it was to have dialogue through art with a spiritual other, how the workshop may prepare or inform the participant's clinical practice in working with spiritual others, and what words (if any) the participant would add or change to their brief list from the earlier reflection.

At the end of the workshop, the participants will be invited to have a conversation with the group as a whole to share how they felt the art impacted the dialogue—i.e. did the art help or hinder conversation. This larger group discussion will be audio recorded and will still remain anonymous and will only be used for the researchers to gather themes within the data.

### ***Sampling***

For this arts-based workshop, the researchers will invite both first- and second-year cohorts from Loyola Marymount University's Marital and Family Therapy with a Specialization in Clinical Art Therapy program. At the time of this study, the four researchers were a part of the second-year cohort. The researchers are using these participants as subjects of their study due to availability, and acknowledge the bias of only selecting students of Art Therapy within this study who have been exposed to the concepts of cultural humility and therefore may have a bias in ways to engage in interfaith dialogue and engaging with someone outside their culture.

### ***Gathering of Data***

For the purposes of this study, the data will be gathered during one two-hour workshop that will occur at Loyola Marymount University. At the end of the workshop, there will be art collected by each individual participant, and one art piece per dyad, as well as a resource sheet that includes demographic information and sections for two written reflections. The participants will be comprised of the four researchers and volunteers from the current Marital and Family Therapy and Art Therapy graduate students. To inform the participants of the research study, a flyer will be sent via email to all members of the cohorts about the purposes and intent of the arts-based workshop. The participants will be invited to anonymously provide demographic information, but will not have to provide any identifying information, and will have the freedom to leave at any time during the workshop. For the purpose of the researchers' ability to



synthesize themes and analyze the results of the workshop, they will provide a controlled amount of materials. For the individual prompt, participants will be provided with 11"x17" white and colored paper, oil pastels, markers, and colored pencils. In the dyadic groups, larger 18"x24" paper will be provided as well as patterned papers, tissue paper, oil pastels, markers, colored pencils, watercolor, and acrylic paint.

### ***Analysis of Data***



Data will be analyzed to investigate similarities, differences, and changes of themes within both the collected art and the written reflections. For the individual and dyadic art pieces, the researchers will use the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS) to analyze prominence of color, implied energy, space, and line quality within the images created during the workshop. The researchers will find themes within the written reflections and synthesize to find similarities or themes that emerged from the art, or ways in which the art was created. The data will be analyzed without any identifying information such as names to maintain confidentiality.

## **Results**

### **Presentation of Data**



The researchers engaged in a preliminary art making focus group for the purposes of practicing and rehearsing the mechanics of the workshop. By participating in the preliminary process, the researchers were able to assess the level of vulnerability and comfortability in using the materials, discussion, and art making about the topics with cohort-mates. The process allowed the researchers to empathize with the potential experiences of the participants and illuminated unknown and initial themes and biases towards the subject matter. As the researchers have made the decision to participate in the workshop with the intention of offsetting power differentials, the researchers acknowledge the possible influence of the preliminary process on their participation in the workshop. Table 1 and Table 2 represent the researchers art, five words, and written responses from the preliminary focus group.

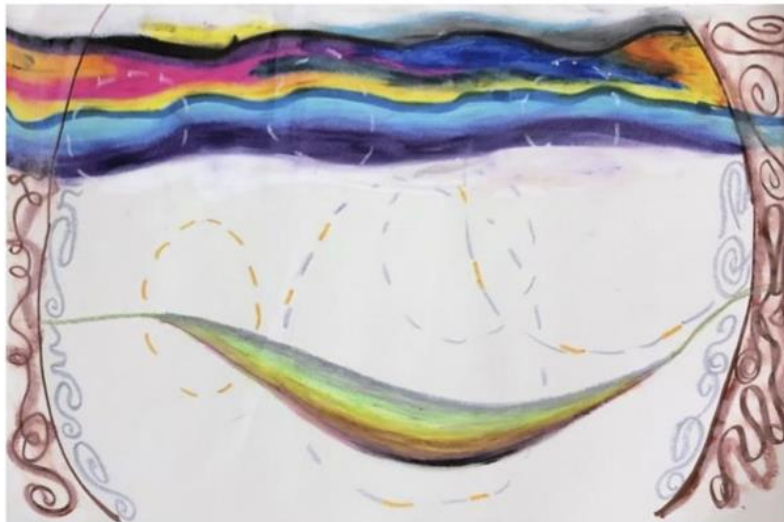
**Table 1. Preliminary Study Dyad A**

Participant A	Participant B
Five Words: Reflect, Contemplate, Connect	Five Words: influenced, opposition, dual, soft, reaching
<p>Art:</p>  <p>Question 1: N/A</p> <p>Question 2: : N/A</p> <p>Question 3: : N/A</p>	<p>Art:</p>  <p>Question 1: "It felt comfortable yet conflicting to me as I defined the spaces that feel structured, as well as the areas of unknown."</p> <p>Question 2: "I think It made me realize even further how much space there is for difference in a spiritual experience, as well as delving deeper into the emotions and processes that can be present in someone who is both sure or unsure of their spiritual path."</p> <p>Question 3: uncertain</p>

**Dyad A**

**Table 2. Preliminary Study Dyad B**

Participant C	Participant D
Five Words: Celestial, Overlapping, Hopeful, Uncertain, Layered	Five Words: Comforting, Uncontrollable, Unexpected, Grounding
Art:	Art:
	
<p>Question 1: "It felt comfortable to talk about my religious/spiritual upbringing with another, as I feel I have had to develop this identity and describe it to others my entire life. Ultimately, I feel conflicted in my identity sometimes, but feel confident in stating this and having an unsettled spirituality/religious practice. "</p>	<p>Question 1: "I personally haven't had a lot of conversations about spirituality outside of a small group of people I grew up with/my family, so it was interesting to have to conceptualize and verbalize these thoughts with someone outside of that, although I'm still comfortable with my cohort so it felt safe."</p>
<p>Question 2: "The workshop helped me to hear these different viewpoints in a space that feels safer and to express my experience out loud versus keeping it to myself. This will overall strengthen my own values and viewpoints and encourage me to be less afraid once I am sitting with a spiritual other in a clinical sense."</p>	<p>Question 2: "Sitting down and having a conversation about spirituality with another in a safe space allowed me to feel what a client might feel like sitting down one on one to share their ideas with another person--and I could see this process possibly being intimidating for a client so it definitely helped me to empathize with someone who might be sitting across from me."</p>
<p>Question 3: "I would add the word searching, instead of hopeful, and overlapping with repetitive."</p>	<p>Question 3: Add: expanding</p>

**Dyad B**

The focus group had a total of 11 participants, with eight participating in four dyadic groups and three participating in a triadic group. The triad included three of the researchers, as there was an odd number of focus group participants, therefore the fourth researcher joined a dyad group. All of the participants who recorded their age were within the range of 26-33 and all identified themselves as cisgender or female. Of the 11 participants, four identified themselves as white or Caucasian, one as multiracial, two Latina, one Jewish, and two did not record their identified ethnicity. Because all of the participants identified as women and belong in a somewhat homogeneous group of art therapy students and ages, the researchers decided to present the following non-demographic data in table format.



In tables 3 through 7 the data is presented by participant and dyadic groups, starting with participant one and two, and dyad one. Each table presents data in the order of the questions presented on the resource sheet. Firstly, participants were asked to identify three to five words describing their individual artwork and/or spiritual practice. Then participants were asked to discuss their art, five words, and spiritual views with their partner and create a dyadic art piece. After, each participant answered three questions:

1. How did it feel to have dialogue through art with a spiritual other?
2. How the workshop may prepare or inform the participant's clinical practice in working with the spiritual other?
3. What word (if any) the participant would add or change to their brief list from the earlier reflection?

These three questions guide the presentation of the data.





**Table 3. Data for Participants 1-2 and Dyad 1**

Participant 1	Participant 2
Five Words: History, Forgiveness, Unknowing, Inner-Peace, Journey	Five Words: Growth, Learning, Sense of Self, Continuing
Art: 	Art: 
Question 1: "It felt reassuring that I'm not alone in my spiritual experience. When I was young and going through a spiritual /faith crisis, I felt very alone. The dialogue sounded like our experiences were similar and helped me understand that everyone is on their own paths. My 1st art piece helped me realize that I was still holding onto some resentment, and talking about it helped me process those feelings."	Question 1: "I felt at ease. I felt a mutual respect which allowed me to talk freely about my perspective. There were times that we worked individually and times we worked together. We created from our own perspective and also created together. It was good to have someone with a different religious practice have the same feelings and experiences on a religious journey."
Question 2: "A major theme that comes up with and my partner is that we are striving to determine and define our spirituality for ourselves. The workshop could be useful in helping a client process their history and integrate it with where they want to go in terms of spirituality, and better define what makes sense to them in that journey. "	Question 2: "Just being open. Be open to their experiences and perspective. People will share more freely if they feel they will not be judged or looked down upon."
Question 3: "I would add the word "curiosity". I would remove the word "inner peace" and replace it with "understanding".	Question 3: Open, Non rigid

**Dyad 1**



**Table 4. Data for Participants 3-4 and Dyad 2**

Participant 3	Participant 4
Five Words: Connection, warmth, tranquility, empathy, passionate	Five Words: Structure, Connection, Fruit, Present, Alive
Art: 	Art: 
<p>Question 1: "Being able to dialogue through art with a spiritual other at the beginning was a bit intimidating because I wasn't sure if there was a right or wrong answer. However, as I was able to talk about my view and hear the other person's perspective it brought comfort to know there is no right or wrong."</p> <p>Question 2: "The workshop definitely opened up a lot of self dialogue for me. Being able to question and be questioned /challenged on why I may/or how I participate with the spiritual other; I believe it comes from within, and being open to understand others and their spiritual meaning is something I feel more open to and being able to meet the client where he/she is."</p> <p>Question 3: Eternal self Process</p>	<p>Question 1: "It very much felt like a parallel process. We both had an idea about what we wanted to create, gave each other the space to do that while in support of each other and came together to reflect."</p> <p>Question 2: It gave me insight into the fact that although therapist and client may be using the same language the meaning behind it is really what is at the core of the topic.</p> <p>Question 3: Parallel processing, Meaning making, Symbolism</p>

**Dyad 2**





**Table 5. Data for Participants 5-6 and Dyad 3**

Participant 5	Participant 6
Five Words: Peaceful, Unknown, Journey, Open, Euphoric	Five Words: Grey-areas, Lost, Finding, Chosen path, Searching
Art:	Art:
	
<p>Question 1: It felt really natural because we had a in depth conversation prior to the art, as well as explored our common themes and words surrounding our first piece. We made our art in silence and it felt like we recreated "the dance" we discussed earlier. The dance is the journey through spiritual exploration.</p> <p>Question 2: Allowing people to explore their personal spiritual experience without judgement. Often people come in with a complex spiritual practice that we dumb down into simple terms. The art can allow for that complexity to come out.</p> <p>Question 3: Complex, non-linear, self-aware, gray-space</p>	<p>Question 1: I really liked it. Dialogue was very open, fluid, and non judgemental. While our spiritual journeys have been very different, we found a lot of sameness. It made me feel ok to be in the place I'm in currently.</p> <p>Question 2: It could help one become aware of journeys and practices that are different from your own, as well as comfort levels relating to the topic that might differ from your own.</p> <p>Question 3: Woah, Wow, Challenge, Step forward/back, Scary/scared</p>

**Dyad 3**






**Table 6. Data for Participants 7-8 and Dyad 4**

Participant 7	Participant 8
Five Words: Recovery, Love, Service, Healing, Trust	Five Words: Explorative, Contemplative, Changing, Accepting, Reflective
Art:	Art:
	
Question 1: "Exciting"	Question 1: "If felt a bit out of my comfort zone but I enjoyed learning about my cohort-mate in a way I had not before. It felt like a profound interaction. I feel an energetic unifying force appear on the page that encompasses all of the words we had written to describe our practice."
Question 2: "Trusting the art is like trusting God - sometimes it's terrifying, because it requires 'Letting Go'."	
Question 3: Lovin self and other. Felt Sense. Mystery. Creative Energy= spiritual energy. Miraculous and vital.	Question 2: "the page/art space is such a valuable tool for interaction- it inherently creates vulnerability and allows each person to see and understand the other in a way they may not be able to with words alone. Very powerful space of connection!"
	Question 3: Add: Love

**Dyad 4**

**Table 7. Data for Participants 9-11 and Triad 1**

Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11
Five Words: Duality, Tension, Soft, Defined	Five Words: Evolution, Layers, Vibrant/saturated	Five Words: Expanding, Cyclical, Darkness, Mixed
Art: 	Art: 	Art: 
Question 1: It felt comfortable and enlightening in all the dynamics that gave us similarities or differences between us despite different religions.	Question 1: Fun and challenging yet freeing to create our metaphor and then just paint	Question 1: I felt it was comforting to do so with the same people in an actual different space. It was different to make art in a triad, considering three spiritual experiences and connecting with some parts of each and not relating to others.
Question 2: Finding connection through difference	Question 2: Being open and curious about other's perspectives	Question 2: I think it made me realize how strongly rooted these types of beliefs/values are and how for some it can continue to be a struggle through formation of this type of identity or belief system.
Question 3: Add: dynamic, expand, window	Question 3: Add: dynamic, expand, window	Question 3: Add: Dynamic, expand

**Triad 1**

In this section of the presentation of data, the researchers present a summary of the thirty-minute culminating dialogue during the focus group. The researchers derived data from the group discussion by listening to and transcribing the recorded audio tape. The researchers synthesized and summarized the course of the conversation, structure and general themes. The discussion began with the facilitators opening the space for a group dialogue in response to any aspect of the workshop. The facilitators prompted clients to think about how it felt to make art about the topic of spirituality. Participants identified feelings of intentionality, exploration, internal experience and personal journeys. The facilitators posed an additional question regarding representation of their identified words within the artwork. Participants reflected on the ways their words were represented in the piece, stating ideas about intuition, symbolism, and non-verbal communication.

The topic shifted when facilitators asked about the process of making art in a dyadic partnership. Participants again discussed nonverbal communication through the art and the supportive nature of interacting through materials. During this discussion, one dyad reflected on their differences in understanding the innateness of spirituality. The topic shifted back to art as a vehicle for symbolism, with some participants identifying feelings of fruitfulness, letting go while making art and experiencing an emergent unifying energy that created metaphors through the art. Other participants described feeling their dyad was a safe and trusted space to reflect through the art and engage in reciprocal connection.

The conversation shifted to visual elements of the dyadic art, with participants reflecting on similarities of warm and bright colors, fluidity, movement, wavy lines and circular shapes and communication and interaction with lines and colors. Facilitators continued this line of thought with deeper prompting regarding the media used during the dyadic creation. Participants

reflected on the use of unstructured and flowy materials, such as pastels and watercolors. The group reflected on the influence of the question on their choice of media. The conversation shifted to a discussion on the dyadic engagement, influence of familiarity with one another as cohort members, and how this experience might affect their clinical understanding and engagement. Participants continued to discuss themes of communication of meaning and respect. Some participants introduced the influence of their different faith traditions into the discussion of experiencing dialogue with their partner. The group dialogue ended with the discussion of humility with clients and the opportunity and power art affords clients to communicate intangible experiences and vulnerability.

### **Analysis of Data**

To begin analysis of the data the researchers chose to examine the resource sheet, individual art and dyadic art through a qualitative lens, looking for related and emergent themes. To deduce the art themes, the researchers originally attempted to adapt the FEATS scale, however it was decided this was too reductive and wouldn't allow for a larger discussion regarding themes in the art. An adapted FEATS scale was deemed unnecessary at this conjecture of research, as this is an exploratory research study. Instead, the researchers decided on a three-step process of analysis, in which formative questions guided the analysis:

1. What are the universal themes that emerged from all the data?
2. Do these universal themes relate to cultural and religious identity?
3. In what ways does the individual experience inform the dyadic art making?

These questions were derived from the researchers' wealth of data and the decision to analyze through this format is informed by the literature review regarding the role of art in different faith traditions, and the intersection of art and dialoguing with spiritual others. The scaffolding of the questions reflects the general format of the arts-based workshop and the answers are presented in

a sequential order with each section informing the next. The intention was to deepen the investigation for evidence regarding communication through art with the spiritual other.

The following subsections analyzes the data through the three questions.

### ***Universal Themes***

To identify universal themes in the data, the researchers examined tables 3 through 7, including the three to five words, individual art, questions one, two, and three from the resource sheet, the dyadic art, and the themes brought up in the final conversation. For development of themes, the researchers chose not to include the preliminary workshop data since the preliminary data, as described in the presentation of data, was meant to practice the workshop facilitation and structure. The researchers acknowledge the possible biases in theme identification due to their participation in both the preliminary study and the workshop. Therefore, to attempt to reduce researcher bias, themes had to be agreed upon unanimously by all four researchers and had to have enough evidence or criteria in the data to be considered. If there was not enough evidence or researchers did not agree, the theme was discarded. To be deemed a universal theme, the theme had to be evidenced in the data at least five times.

To categorize the art as evidence the researchers explored visual elements. The visual categories had to be evidenced in at least three pieces of art, and include art containing geometric shapes, art with visual movement, chromatic art, and art that fills the entire page. In looking at geometric shapes, the researchers identified a prominent visual use of circles and clear usage of either having circles or not. Two participants' individual art and three of the dyadic/triadic art had evidence of geometric shapes in their pieces. Art with visual movement was based on whether the art evoked a single focal point versus multiple focal points, causing the gaze to move around the page or to a certain area. The researchers found evidence for six participants'

individual art pieces and three pieces of the dyadic art. Chromatic art was defined as the use of multiple colors versus blacks and grays. All eleven pieces of individual art, and the four dyads and one triad all had at least three or more colors. Art that fills the entire page presents a lack of negative space and was evidenced by nine participants' individual artwork, three dyadic art pieces and one triadic piece. Table 8 is referenced as evidence in the following discussion of visual elements in the art.

**Table 8. Visual Elements Per Participant**

	Geometric/Circular Shapes	Movement	Chromaticity	Spatial Completion
Participants	# 2 Art	# 1 Art	# 1 Art	# 1 Art
	# 11 Art	# 4 Art	# 2 Art	# 3 Art
	Dyad 1 Art	# 6 Art	# 3 Art	# 4 Art
	Dyad 4 Art	# 7 Art	# 4 Art	# 5 Art
	Triad 1 Art	# 8 Art	# 5 Art	# 6 Art
		# 10 Art	# 6 Art	# 8 Art
		Dyad 1 Art	# 7 Art	# 9 Art
		Dyad 3 Art	# 8 Art	# 10 Art
		Dyad 4 Art	# 9 Art	# 11 Art
			# 10 Art	Dyad 1 Art
			# 11 Art	Dyad 2 Art
			Dyad 1 Art	Dyad 3 Art
			Dyad 2 Art	Triad Art 1
			Dyad 3 Art	
			Dyad 4 Art	
			Triad Art 1	

After assessing the visual elements within the participant's art, the researchers began looking for universal themes within the entirety of the data. The researchers took notice of the connection between the visual components of the art within the universal themes. The validity of this connection was cross-examined by comparing the evidence from each participants' specific art components with the written evidence from the deduced universal themes. Though validity was attempted, the researchers recognize the possible subjectivity, overlap, and biases in these criteria. Again, the universal themes deduced involved the researchers' unanimous agreement as well as at least five instances of evidence. Evidence could include the five words, the art, the

dyadic art, the answers to questions on the resource sheet, or the recorded final conversation. The three themes found are Personal Growth, Connection, and Metaphysical, as presented in Table 9. The researchers acknowledge that due to the universality of the themes and the subjectivity of art, there may be significant permeability and porousness between the boundaries of each visual element when used as evidence for universal themes. This may speak metaphorically to the ability of art to help communicate spaces in between, which may be difficult to access verbally.

**Table 9. Evidence for Universal Themes**

	Five Words	Individual Art	Dyadic Art	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Personal Growth	Participant # 1	Art with Movement	Art with Movement	N/A	Participant # 1	Participant # 1
	Participant # 2				Participant # 3	Participant # 3
	Participant # 4	Art with Geometric	Art with Geometric		Participant # 10	Participant # 4
	Participant # 5	& Circular Shapes	& Circular Shapes		Participant # 11	Participant # 6
	Participant # 6					Participant # 7
	Participant # 8					Participant # 9
	Participant # 9					Participant # 10
	Participant # 10					Participant # 11
Connection	Participant # 3	Art with Spatial	Art with Spatial	Participant # 1	Participant # 2	Participant # 2
	Participant # 4	Completion	Completion	Participant # 2	Participant # 3	Participant # 7
	Participant # 5			Participant # 5	Participant # 4	
	Participant # 7	Art with Geometric	Art with Geometric	Participant # 6	Participant # 6	
		& Circular Shapes	& Circular Shapes	Participant # 8	Participant # 8	
		Art with Movement	Art with Movement		Participant # 9	
Metaphysical	Participant # 1	Art with Movement	Art with Movement	N/A	Participant # 7	Participant # 5
	Participant # 3					Participant # 6
	Participant # 5	Chromatic Art	Chromatic Art			Participant # 9
	Participant # 6					Participant # 10
	Participant # 8					Participant # 11
	Participant # 9					
	Participant # 11					

Personal Growth was defined as a theme based on the evidence found in Table 9. This included twenty-one specific words used by eight participants to describe their art, such as journey, learning, self-process, recovery, explorative, and changing. Eight participants added words in response to question three, which also possibly indicate themes of Personal Growth, such as dynamic, inner peace, and meaning making. The inherent addition of these words also

reflects a pattern of personal growth throughout the arts-based workshop. In addition, four participants discussed in question two from the resource sheet, that through art making and dialogue they felt able to open-up about their process and used the process to reflect on their own growth.

Furthermore, the theme of Personal Growth may be seen in the visual elements of circular shapes and movement in both participants' individual and dyadic art. All eleven participants appeared to have some type of evidence for the theme of Personal Growth. Of that eleven, as seen in Table 8 and 9, six of the same participant's individual art and three dyadic art pieces showed evidence for movement, as the researchers defined it. When cross referenced with the resource sheet those same six participants displayed other forms of evidence within the theme of Personal Growth, which may suggest a connection between the use of movement in the art and the theme of Personal Growth. As seen in Table 8 regarding the art's use of geometric shapes and when cross referenced with the resource sheet, two participant's individual art, two dyadic art pieces, and one triadic art piece presented evidence. This may suggest a connection between the use of geometric/circular visual elements and the universal theme of Personal Growth. Additionally, when asked to discuss how it felt to make art on the topic during the culminating conversation, participants spoke of internal exploration through artmaking, being on a spiritual path, and using the art to reflect on their personal experiences, which supports evidence for the theme of Personal Growth.

The theme of Connection was again defined based on evidence found in Table 9. This included the answers to the eleven participants' answers on question one and two from the resource sheet. Participants discussed the dyadic experience as being significant for clinical work because of the comfort and support afforded by the parallel process of art making. For instance,



Participant # 9 stated “finding connection through differences,” and Participant # 1, “feeling reassured that I [she] wasn’t alone in my [her] spiritual experience.” In addition, five participant’s answers from question one described the dyadic conversation and experience of art making with another as, “mutual respect”, “working together to create”, as “non-judgmental” and “a connection without words.” Other evidence stems from six words by six participants’ chosen to describe their art, including service, trust, connection, and empathy.

Moreover, the theme of Connection may be seen in the visual elements of spatial completion and geometric/circular shapes. As presented in Table 8 and 9, nine participants appeared to have some type of evidence for this theme. Of that nine, seven of the same participant’s individual art, three dyadic art pieces and one triadic art piece showed evidence for spatial completion, as the researchers defined it. When cross referenced with the resource sheet those same seven participants displayed other forms of evidence within the theme. This may suggest a relationship between spatial completion and the universal theme of Connection. As seen in Table 8 regarding the art’s use of geometric shapes and when cross referenced with the resource sheet, only one participant’s individual art, two dyadic art pieces, and one triadic art piece presented evidence. This may suggest a loose association between the use of geometric/circular visual elements and the universal theme of Connection. During the culminating conversation, participants spoke of interacting and supporting one another through the art materials, feeling a unifying force and sense of trust, and non-verbal communication, which supports evidence for the theme of Connection.

Metaphysical, the final theme, describes words and answers that evoked a sense of unknown, mysticism and transcendence. Nine participants utilized sixteen words, such as euphoric, gray areas, duality, darkness, and tranquility, to describe their art making. Furthermore,

three participants added the word “expand” to this list after the experience. Participant seven described how art making can connect to clinical experience when discussing the spiritual other, because “trusting the art is like trusting God, sometimes it’s terrifying, because it requires letting go.”

In addition, the theme of Metaphysical may be seen in the visual elements of chromaticity and movement in both participants' individual and dyadic art. All eleven participants appeared to have some type of evidence falling under the visual element of chromaticity. As seen in Table 8, all participants' individual art, the four dyadic art, and the one triadic art piece showed evidence for chromaticity, as the researchers defined it. When cross referenced with the resource sheet, nine participants displayed other forms of evidence within this theme of Metaphysical, which may suggest a correlation. As seen in Table 8, regarding the art’s use of movement and when cross referenced with the resource sheet, six participant’s individual art, and three dyadic art pieces presented evidence. When cross referenced with the resource sheet, five of six participants displayed other forms of evidence within the theme of Metaphysical. Additionally, during the culminating conversation, evidence for the theme of Metaphysical included participant conversation regarding spiritual energy, emerging creative force, and transcending the verbal realm.

### ***Universal Themes and Religious/Spiritual Identity***

All eleven participants identified some type of religious upbringing. Due to anonymity and confidentiality the researchers did not look at the connections between specific participants, religious identity, and themes. Instead, the researchers chose to broadly look at the stated religious identities, review the data and reference where each participant fell in the universal themes. Since all of the participants had at least one piece of evidence based on Table 9, the

researchers considered the participant's main theme to be one that had two or more pieces of evidence for that participant. The researchers then unanimously put the participants into four categories, based on their stated religious identity. This includes one participant identifying as Christian; five participants identifying being raised catholic but currently culturally, non-denominationally, or agnostically practicing; three participants identifying as culturally or spiritually Jewish; four participants identifying with an ambiguous spirituality, all with different definitions. One participant fell into both the category of being raised Catholic and being culturally Jewish. The researchers then identified the prominent universal theme for each religious category, noting the ratio of participants and possible connections.

The most notable connection that emerged from this part of the analysis was that all five of the participants in the category of Catholic upbringing presented the most evidence for the universal theme of Personal Growth in comparison to other themes. Not only is this a notable finding, but the evidence of these participants being raised in one religion but currently practicing alternative forms or other denominations, denotes the action of personal growth. The universal theme of Personal Growth for this group of participants is interesting to compare with teachings of Catholicism, which emphasize the constant betterment and improvement of oneself, as a way to rid oneself of the original sin, and to elevate oneself towards heaven in the afterlife. Therefore, it is possible that this finding could relate to the ways in which being influenced by religion, either culturally or through familial ties, in one's formative years, may continue to inform current spiritual experiences and viewpoints.

Another emergent connection was the major universal themes presented by those participants in the category of cultural Judaism. This category of participants did not have the majority of evidence for one universal theme. Instead, two out of the three participants presented

the most evidence for the universal theme of Connection and two out of three participants most evidenced universal theme of the Metaphysical. It is possible that this could represent the diversity within the culture and religion, specifically capturing those who might identify as culturally Jewish, instead of belonging to a specific sect of the religion. It is interesting to note the highlight of the universal theme of Connection, as the Jewish religion culturally emphasizes the Jewish community, ancestral connection, and solidarity as a historically persecuted people.

Interestingly, the one participant who identified with both the Catholic upbringing and culturally Jewish categories, had the most evidence for both the Personal Growth and the Metaphysical theme. This participant may reflect the permeability of religious boundaries and experiences, resulting in the in-between space that prominently exists in interfaith communication and experience.

Out of the remaining four participants, who all identified with ambiguous spiritual practices and experiences, three out of those four had the most evidence pertaining to the universal theme of Personal Growth. These three participants identified spirituality differently, such as “searching”, “praying to whoever is out there,” and “spiritual but not religious.” However, under this umbrella of ambiguity, the connection to Personal Growth is possibly apparent through the inherent movement that can happen when one is seeking to define or understand their own spiritual experiences and existence. Those participants that have evidence in this category, pose another example of diversity within a similarly defined experience of spirituality. This may illustrate the existence of spiritual others who fall in those spaces in-between faiths and religions.

This second question or part of the analysis connects the universal themes discussed in the first section of analysis with the stated religious identities, to find possible evidence for

correlation between religion/spirituality and participants' artmaking experience. While these findings suggest preliminary connections, the researchers acknowledge the qualitative nature and the many limitations of the analysis. However, preliminary analysis and findings might suggest a connection between religious or spiritual experiences and identity with the universal themes found in the data. This prompted the researchers to continue exploring this connection of the in between, interfaith and spiritual other in the final stage of analysis.




### *Dyadic Analysis*

In the final section of analysis, the researchers compared elements of individual artwork with the dyadic artwork to examine any indication of change from the art making experience with the spiritual other. The researchers were interested in deconstructing the dyadic process and speculating in what ways the art might have informed, changed, or facilitated communication. The researchers examined and summarized all evidence from the individual experiences in comparison with the dyadic art piece, the addition of words, and the questions around the dyadic experience. Tables 10-14 were created for the purpose of collating and visualizing any apparent patterns or changes in the data.

When approaching analysis for Dyad 1, the researchers investigated any parallels or changes between the individual experiences, the dyadic process and final art piece. The analysis revealed that visual elements from both participant 1 and 2's artwork can be evidenced in their dyadic piece, as the dyadic piece shows a combination of chromaticity, spatial completion, and geometric shapes. In reference to the combination of visual elements in their artwork, both participants 1 and 2 answers to question 1 regarding the dyadic art making experience fell into the universal theme of connection. This could suggest that both participants felt a connection when communicating with the spiritual other or dyadic partner, and therefore unconsciously

utilized visual elements from one another's art. This may provide evidence for the researchers' hypothesis that artmaking can inform and facilitate dialogue between spiritual others.




**Table 10. Dyad 1**

	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Dyad 1</b>
<b>Visual elements</b>	Movement	Geometric Shapes	Chromaticity
	Chromaticity	Chromaticity	Geometric Shapes
	Spatial completion		Spatial completion
<b>Universal Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Connection	
<b>5 Words Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	
<b>Question 1 Theme</b>	Connection	Connection	
<b>Question 3 Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Connection	
<b>Art</b>			

When analyzing Dyad 2, the researchers explored any parallels or changes between the individual experiences, the dyadic process and final art piece. Most notably the analysis revealed the similarities between both participants, in their evidence for universal themes as well as the visual elements of art. For instance, the visual elements from both participant 3 and 4's artwork were continued to be evidenced in their dyadic piece, as the dyadic piece shows a combination of chromaticity and spatial completion. Furthermore, universal themes of Personal Growth and Connection continued to be evidenced throughout the majority of data for these participants. This may suggest multiple similarities between the participants, such as familiarity with one another, commonalities across spiritual, religious or cultural values, and in art making practices. This may reflect the possible limitations of the workshop, in which the researchers discussed the possible

biases arising from participants being from the same cohort, age group, gender and art therapy population. In addition, the analysis also may reveal the comfort in dialoguing with someone from a similar background or history. It is possible that this dyadic pairing presented more similarities regarding the research topic.




**Table 11. Dyad 2**

	<b>Participant 3</b>	<b>Participant 4</b>	<b>Dyad 2</b>
<b>Visual elements</b>	Chromaticity	Movement	Chromaticity
	Spatial completion	Geometric Shapes	Spatial completion
		Chromaticity	
<b>Universal Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	
	Connection	Connection	
<b>5 Words Theme</b>	Connection	Personal Growth	
	Metaphysical	Connection	
<b>Question 1 Theme</b>	No universal theme identified	No universal theme identified	
<b>Question 3 Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Connection	
<b>Art</b>			

When analyzing Dyad 3, the researchers explored any parallels or changes between the individual experiences, the dyadic process and final art piece. Similar to Dyad 1, the analysis revealed that the visual elements from both participant 5 and 6's artwork can be evidenced in their dyadic piece, as the dyadic piece shows a combination of chromaticity, spatial completion, and movement. In reference to the combination of visual elements in their artwork, both participants 5 and 6 answers to question 1 regarding the dyadic art making experience fell into

the universal theme of connection. Again, this could suggest that both participants felt a connection when communicating with the spiritual other or dyadic partner, and therefore unconsciously utilized visual elements from one another's art. This may provide evidence for the researchers' hypothesis that artmaking informs and facilitates dialogue between the spiritual other.

**Table 12. Dyad 3**




	<b>Participant 5</b>	<b>Participant 6</b>	<b>Dyad 3</b>
<b>Visual elements</b>	Chromaticity	Movement	Chromaticity
	Spatial completion	Geometric Shapes	Movement
		Chromaticity	Spatial completion
<b>Universal Theme</b>	Connection	Personal Growth	
	Metaphysical	Connection	
		Metaphysical	
<b>5 Words Theme</b>	Connection	Personal Growth	
	Metaphysical	Metaphysical	
	Personal Growth		
<b>Question 1 Theme</b>	Connection	Connection	
<b>Question 3 Theme</b>	Metaphysical	Connection	
<b>Art</b>			

When analyzing Dyad 4, the researchers explored any parallels or changes between the individual experiences, the dyadic process and final art piece. The analysis revealed that visual







elements from both participant 7 and 8's artwork can be evidenced in their dyadic piece, as the dyadic piece shows a combination of chromaticity, and movement. Interestingly, the dyadic artwork incorporated a new visual element, geometric shapes, which was not reflected in either participant's individual artworks. Moreover, both participants' overall universal theme was connection. While Dyad 4's evidence shows that the dyadic experience possibly informed the artwork made together, evidence did not reveal a significant or prominent theme in the written components of the data. In this way, Dyad 4's experience may provide evidence for the researchers' hypothesis that artmaking informs and facilitates dialogue between the spiritual other.

**Table 13. Dyad 4**

	Participant 7	Participant 8	Dyad 4
<b>Visual elements</b>	Movement	Movement	Movement
	Chromaticity	Chromaticity	Chromaticity
		Spatial completion	Geometric Shapes
<b>Universal Theme</b>	Connection	Connection	
<b>5 Words Theme</b>	Connection	Personal Growth	
		Metaphysical	
<b>Question 1 Theme</b>	No universal theme identified	Connection	
<b>Question 3 Theme</b>	Personal Growth	No universal theme identified	
	Connection		
<b>Art</b>			

When analyzing Triad 1, the researchers explored any parallels or changes between the individual experiences, the triadic process and final art piece. The analysis showed evidence of the three participants' similarities in their universal themes and visual elements of their individual art being reflected in their triadic piece. For instance, the visual elements from participants 9, 10 and 11's artwork can be evidenced in their triadic piece, as the triadic piece shows a combination of chromaticity, movement, and geometric shapes. This could suggest evidence for the researchers' hypothesis that artmaking informs and facilitates dialogue between the spiritual other. Moreover, the evidence from the participant's written words and answers suggest overall universal themes of Metaphysical and Personal Growth throughout the data. The researchers acknowledge that this may reflect possible biases, considering this Triad consisted of the three researchers who had previously participated in the preliminary workshop, and are familiar with one another's understanding and experience of the research topic.

Table 14. Triad 1

	Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11	Triad 1
<b>Visual elements</b>	Chromaticity	Movement	Movement	Chromaticity
	Spatial completion	Geometric Shapes	Chromaticity	Geometric Shapes
		Chromaticity		Movement
<b>Universal Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	
	Metaphysical		Metaphysical	
<b>5 Words Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	Metaphysical	
	Metaphysical			
<b>Question 1 Theme</b>	No universal theme identified	No universal theme identified	No universal theme identified	
<b>Question 3 Theme</b>	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	Personal Growth	
	Metaphysical	Metaphysical	Metaphysical	
<b>Art</b>				

### **Discussion of Findings and Meanings**

This research study intended to discover whether the act of viewing and being viewed by the spiritual other through art making can deepen one's own spiritual practice, increase empathy, foster more fruitful dialogue and in what ways it may inform clinical work as psychotherapists. The researchers originally hypothesized a possible connection between art making, with its imaginative qualities, and the facilitation of dialogue between spiritual others. This hypothesis was supported by the reviewed literature surrounding psychotherapy and spirituality, communication's dialogue, interfaith dialogue, and the intersection of art therapy.

Our research analysis preliminarily supported this hypothesized connection regarding meaning making through art, the relationship between spirituality and art making, and the role of art in the facilitation of dialogue with the spiritual other. Finding connections between these three concepts informed the structure of data analysis. Firstly, the researchers explored meaning making with art by examining the relationship between the visual elements of the art and the vocabulary of the written experience to further deduce universal themes of Personal Growth, Connection, and the Metaphysical. Next, the relationship between spirituality and art making was analyzed through connecting individual participants stated spiritual practice or religious faith with their prominent universal themes. Lastly, to examine the role of art in dialogue, the researchers utilized the data from the dyadic experiences of art making, as well as the written dyadic experience.

The data from the first analysis regarding synthesized universal themes found that four visual elements, chromaticity, movement, spatial completion, and geometric shapes, informed the three universal themes. The reviewed literature supports the importance of art's visual elements to allow for symbolic expression. Different from verbal expression, art's visual properties can allow for accessing an understanding, and the sharing of individual, communal

and societal experience (AATA, 2017 & Franklin, 2018). Since our research was heavily informed by Linesch 2017's study regarding interfaith art therapy, the first part of the researchers' analysis paralleled this process of finding three emergent universal themes.

The findings of three universal themes, Personal Growth, Connection and Metaphysical may indicate a strong relationship between psychotherapy and spirituality. As Fehlner (2002), states that therapy parallels spirituality due to the inter and intra-personal relationship and connection with the self and others, or a higher power. Personal growth and connection are inherently core tenets of the therapeutic experience. Indeed, Captari et. al. (2018), speaks further on the importance of connection and support, provided by metaphysical spirituality and therapy, utilizing the belief system to encourage growth. Art can be the vehicle that aids connection and communication about metaphysical or spiritual beliefs, providing opportunity to grow and strengthen inter and intrapersonal relationships.

The concept of these universal themes and visual elements are evident and important in both art psychotherapy, as well as in the major religious traditions. The literature review focused a great deal on how art informs the four faith traditions of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The researchers' analysis of the next set of data utilized this literature to explore if participants' faith traditions informed art making, and if art acted as a communicator about commonalities and differences in spirituality. Similar to the parallel of therapy and spirituality is the connection between art making and one's spiritual beliefs, evident in the use of symbolism and metaphor. Franklin (2018), describes this important use of metaphor and symbolism in spiritual art making as a reflection of communication with the divine and a form of worship. Indeed, the symbolic nature of art lends itself to spiritual worship, as Soltes (2005) describes the

use of universal visual symbols and imagery within each religion and culture, adapted throughout history.

Three main findings resulted from this part of the analysis focusing on the three most prominent spiritual identities of Catholic upbringing, cultural Judaism, and ambiguous spiritual practices. Most notably, the researchers found that all five of the participants who identified as having a Catholic upbringing presented the most evidence for the universal theme of Personal Growth. Also, these participants stated that they are currently practicing another form or denomination, which signifies change or acts of personal growth in their spirituality. The researchers likened this finding of Personal Growth for these participants to the teachings of Christianity, specifically Catholicism, which highlights and encourages the improvement of oneself, away from sin and towards heaven. The reviewed literature on Christian art, also informs this finding by discussing the importance of salvation and eternal life in representations of Christian symbolic art (Soltes, 2005).

Indeed, many Christians utilized art and production of images as a way to emphasize worship of verbal and written texts, developing this specific iconography to encourage the worship and devotion to the faith (Jensen, 2000). The researchers found in the visual elements of these participants art, very symbolic but abstracted representations. It is possible that the symbolic nature of the art for participants who identify as being raised Catholic, might have been influenced by this Christian iconography, as Belting (1994) states that art and images of saint's offer protection and are seen as sacred objects. Therefore, it is possible that traditional Christian iconographic art continues to have significant influence on those raised within this religious tradition, regardless of current religious or spiritual practices.

Another notable finding the researchers analyzed from the data was the major universal themes presented by those participants who fell under the category of cultural Judaism, Connection and Metaphysical. This thematic divide could indicate the diversity in the Jewish culture and religion. As Raphael (2009) states, Jewish art is influenced by current cultural context and can represent both religious ideals and social Jewish experiences. The researchers speculated that the finding of Connection as a prominent universal theme, may reflect the emphasis of a common Jewish ancestry and cultural identity, for both the Jewish religion and cultural heritage. Soltes (2005) describes how the importance of a unified Jewish peoplehood is one of the four elements of Judaism, including a belief in one god, five books of the Torah and a land of Israel. Moreover, many of the participants' art, who identified in this culturally Jewish category, reflected abstracted visual elements. It is possible that Jewish influence informed these participants art making, as Raphael (2016) suggests that because Jewish religion avoided making counter-idolatrous art, the culture instead utilized abstraction, distortion, and irony.

Within this finding, the researchers noted one participant who identified as both having a Catholic upbringing and being culturally Jewish, falling into both categories' themes of Personal Growth and the Metaphysical. Again, this participant may reflect the permeability of religious boundaries and experiences, resulting in the in-between space that prominently exists in interfaith communication and experience.

The last notable finding involved participants who identified with an ambiguous spiritual identity, with multiple definitions of their spiritual understanding and experience. These participants fell under the universal category of Personal Growth, which the researchers related to the diversity in those who fall into the spiritual in-between space. Through no direct correlation between the prominent universal theme and specific religious or spiritual identity

could be seen, the researchers found that Personal Growth may denote an inherent movement in the action of seeking out or defining one's own spiritual experience. The researchers also noted the plausibility that these participants were likely unconsciously influenced by a common societal understanding of religion, religious symbolism, and artwork. This influence may contribute to the emergence of common visual elements seen across religious and spiritual identities.

There is no immediate evidence or data collected connecting the religious traditions of Buddhist and Islamic art with this workshop. However, the reviewed literature further supports the findings of common visual elements seen across different religious and spiritual art. Similar to Christian and Jewish art, Islamic art is full of inner meaning and symbolism (Saeed, 2011). Soltes (2005) and Saeed (2011) writes that Islamic art makes use of ornamentation, including geometric patterns, to denote the infinitude of God and convey metaphysical and cosmological significance. Furthermore, the reviewed literature on Buddhist art presented and guided the development of the workshop as researchers noted a parallel between the therapeutic process and mindfulness with art. Due to the recent cultural rise of meditation and mindfulness popularity within the psychotherapy community, the researchers have included a discussion on Buddhism with the other Abrahamic religions. As Lomas et. al. (2017) writes, within Buddhist culture, experience and process itself can become the art, similar to the importance of the art making process in this workshop. Therefore, the researchers believe that including these traditions in the literature review was still imperative to inform their understanding for the workshop and for future workshops with other participants and their stated religious identity and communication through art. While the findings denote a connection between religious identity and understanding

influence on art making, more research is needed to explore the in-between and interfaith spaces found in the data.

For the final section of the analysis, the researchers considered all data including summaries of all the evidence from the individual experiences and compared them with the dyadic art piece, the addition of words, and the questions around the dyadic experience. The most notable findings from all dyads and the one triad revealed similarities in visual elements seen in individual artworks appeared to translate into the dyad/triad artworks. The researchers speculated that this finding may support the initial hypothesis regarding how artmaking can inform and facilitate dialogue between spiritual others. Michaelides (2009), considered that the most important aspect to create effective interfaith dialogue is the human imagination and that imagination allows for the creation of different perspectives and worlds, which creates the empathic understanding necessary for dialogue. Moreover, Illman, (2014) agrees with the need for imagination and empathy in interfaith dialogue and adds the importance of creativity to further access the in-between spaces of dialogue. It is possible that the use of art and creativity during this workshop helped to foster empathy for the spiritual other in the dyad and further opened space to a full spectrum of beliefs and spiritual experiences. As Farrelly-Hansen (2001) suggests there is a cyclical relationship between art and spirituality, in that artmaking invokes all five senses, is meditative and can be a way to communicate spiritual practice. This research and presented findings highlight the importance of harnessing imagination, creativity and empathy through art making, which may support the use of art making in interfaith conversations and relationships, including therapeutic and clinical interaction.

The last notable finding during this section of the analysis revealed that dyad 1 and 3 both had evidence supporting the universal theme of Connection for their understanding of the dyad



experience in addition to utilizing visual themes from their individual art in their dyadic piece. This could suggest that both participants felt a connection when communicating with the spiritual other or dyadic partner, and therefore unconsciously utilized visual elements from one another's art, again providing evidence that artmaking may inform and facilitate dialogue between spiritual others. The use of symbol and metaphor in art, as Huss (2105) writes, can break traditional barriers in discussing emotionally charged content in dialogue by providing a less-threatening, more open space. Sharing, making, and processing verbally in a group setting may allow for a more balanced power dynamic across the spiritual spectrum (Lark, 2005).

### **Conclusions**

This preliminary pilot study investigated the connection between the spiritual other, dialogue, and artmaking. While the literature revealed past exploration of interfaith dialogue and communication, the research on how art and its imaginative qualities can be used to approach and facilitate comfortable dialogue is scarce. As art therapists, the researchers acknowledge that all dialogue is in essence interfaith, as no two individuals share the exact same spiritual or faith experience. The reviewed literature represented the intersection of art therapy, spirituality and interfaith dialogue, and prepared the researchers to explore art making as a facilitator of interfaith dialogue between religious others in a therapeutic context, between therapist and client. As the discussion of faith is sometimes seen as unwelcome in clinical practice, this research makes an important contribution to the field of psychotherapy by thinking about innovative approaches to dialoguing with "the spiritual other." As a preliminary pilot study, the researchers recognize the limits of this research and anticipate that replication with a larger sample size may reveal additional and possibly varied findings. The researchers also acknowledge the possibility that communicating about this topic may have been influenced by both participants and

facilitators being art therapists. Important to note is the previous study on the topic of spirituality and dialogue in conjunction with the participation of the researchers in both the pilot study and the workshop, which may have contributed to biased analysis. Lastly, while the researchers own spiritual beliefs and experiences may have influenced their interest in pursuing this pilot study topic, it may have also influenced this research study at its core. Although this study was the first foray in connecting art making as a way of dialoguing with the spiritual other, the researchers, as art therapists, hope to continue the study and process of navigating the in-between and often uncomfortable or un-talked about spaces to promote the psychotherapeutic need for sitting across from those different from us.

### **Epilogue**

Reflecting on the thesis writing experience, the researchers wanted to share personal thoughts and comment on the connection of writing a thesis in one voice. The researchers' topic focused on the importance of dialogue and connection, which in the current worldwide context, feels like a vital and charged conversation. In the middle of the process of analyzing the data for this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the nation. The researchers were forced to analyze, interpret and finish the paper through virtual meetings and proceedings. As this greatly affected the researchers' personal lives, school year, and clinical experiences the researchers hoped to spend time discussing the impact and the process of dialoguing and finishing this paper amidst a pandemic.

Considering a project about connection and dialogue during this time of physical disconnection causes the researchers to think more about the process of communication and writing a thesis together in isolation. It was the researchers' original prerogative to write the paper together as one and was even more imperative and crucial once the necessary stay at home

orders went into place, causing this research paper to be completed via video chats. This grounding and driving force pushed the researchers to ponder the dynamic ways in which people connect across time and space. The abrupt shift into an unknown societal space feels similar to the discussed in-between spaces of dialogue. These in-between spaces can be uncomfortable and untimely, prompting existential thoughts and questions. How fitting that this research topic both emerged and fell into this in-between space for our society, when faith and spirituality may be a source of connection and comfort for many. These unprecedented times have informed the researchers own motivations and relationship with spirituality and how to approach these conversations in our current and future clinical work.

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**Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter**

Dear Ms. Brosious, Ms. Burgin, Ms. Dyer and Ms. Knobbe,

Thank you for submitting your IRB application for your protocol titled ***Spirituality and Artmaking in a Psychotherapeutic Dialogue***. All documents have been received and reviewed, and I am pleased to inform you that your study has been approved.

The effective date of your approval is **January 22, 2019**. Please note that if there are any changes to your protocol, you are required to submit an addendum application to the IRB.

For any further communication regarding your approved study, please reference your **new IRB protocol number: LMU IRB 2020 SP 07-R**.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Julie Paterson

**Julianne Paterson**  
Research Compliance Specialist  
1 LMU Drive, University Hall, Suite #1878  
Los Angeles, CA 90045  
Telephone: (310) 258-5465  
Email: [Julianne.Paterson@lmu.edu](mailto:Julianne.Paterson@lmu.edu)



## Appendix B: Informed Consent

### Loyola Marymount University Informed Consent Form

**TITLE:** Spirituality and Artmaking in a Psychotherapeutic Dialogue

**INVESTIGATORS:** Andrea Dyer, Caitlin Brosious, Emma Burgin, Maggie Knobbe;  
Department of Marital and Family Therapy with Specialization in Clinical Art Therapy;  
Loyola Marymount University; (310) 924-4924, (847) 420-2514, (513) 520-2609, (405) 612-6106.

**ADVISOR:** Debra Linesch; Marital and Family Therapy with Specialization in Clinical Art Therapy Department; Loyola Marymount University; 310-338-4562.

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate how the act of viewing and being viewed by the spiritual other through artmaking can deepen one's own spiritual practice, increase empathy, foster more fruitful dialogue and potentially inform clinical work as psychotherapists. You will be asked to complete two written reflections, one individual art piece, one art piece created as a dyad, and engage in interfaith dialogue as a group. The art and written statements will be collected at the end of the workshop, and the group dialogue will be audio recorded. The workshop will be completed in a two-hour time frame.

**RISKS:** Risks associated with this study include, discomfort in exploring spirituality, vulnerability with peers, and discomfort in disclosing personal demographic information. Group reminders of how to engage in respectful dialogue will be provided at the beginning of the workshop, and resources for Loyola Marymount University's Psychological Services will also be provided.

**BENEFITS:** increased sense of community with peers, increased empathy and understanding of peers and other cultures, building skills for engaging in respectful dialogue that can be applied to therapeutic and personal settings.

**INCENTIVES:** You will receive no gifts or incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Names will not be collected, and any identifying demographic information will be voluntary for you to provide. All research materials and consent forms will be kept in the primary researcher, Debra Linesch's office and on her computer, either in coded folders in her locked faculty office, and on a password protected computer. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting; however, we ask all participants to respect other participant's privacy and keep all information shared confidential.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled, your class standing or relationship with Loyola Marymount University.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. The summary will be available approximately around May 8, 2020. Art will be returned after the data has been analyzed in March of 2020. The primary investigators

will email the participants about the return of the art while maintaining confidentiality, and you may also be in contact to arrange pick up of materials. You may contact the primary investigators, Andrea Dyer, Caitlin Brosious, Emma Burgin, or Maggie Knobbe via phone at (310) 924-4924, (847) 420-2514, (513) 520-2609, (405) 612-6106, or via email at or via email at adyer1@lion.lmu.edu, cgbrosious@gmail.com, eburgin@lion.lmu.edu, and maggie.knobbe@okstate.edu.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed, I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

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**Participant's Signature**

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**Date**

**Appendix C: Flyer and Resource Sheet**

Please answer the following questions:

*(The questions asked below are for the researchers to better understand their participants and provide context to the participant's art and answers. All questions are anonymous and are not required to participate in the study).*

Age (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Sex (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender Identity (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Faith or Spiritual Practices (Optional):

\_\_\_\_\_

Other Information (Optional):

\_\_\_\_\_

**Art Making and Reflective Questions:**

3-5 Words to Describe 1<sup>st</sup> Piece of Art or Spiritual Practice:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Final Reflection Questions:

How did it feel to have dialogue through art with a spiritual other?

How the workshop may prepare or inform the participant's clinical practice in working with the spiritual others?

What words (if any) the participant would add or change to their brief list from the earlier reflection?



WORKSHOP:

# Spirituality & Artmaking

Please join us for a workshop  
exploring spirituality and artmaking  
in psychotherapeutic dialogue.

02.01.20 | SAT | 10 AM-12:30 PM

LMU MFT ART THERAPY STUDIO

rsvp at [adyer1@lion.lmu.edu](mailto:adyer1@lion.lmu.edu)