



The American Art Therapy Association Ethics Committee provides this series of “best practice” papers as non-binding guidelines to help art therapists interpret and apply the *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists*.

Exhibiting Client Artwork

"5.0 EXHIBITION OF CLIENT ARTWORK: Exhibiting artwork created in art therapy provides an opportunity for clients to show their artwork to the general public or those in their agencies who would not normally see their artwork...In preparation for an exhibition of client artwork, art therapists and clients or legal guardians (if applicable) weigh the benefits of exhibiting against the potential unintended consequences for the clients."

Exhibiting client artwork must be handled with great care and sensitivity. Spaniol (1990) recommended that for exhibits to be ethical, they must ensure:

- **opportunities:** seeing selves as artists and participating in society as artists
- **safeguards:** ensuring that clients are not manipulated, exploited, or shamed
- **empowerment:** involving clients in decision making regarding exhibit

As a means of following the guidelines included in the *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists*, art therapists should structure conversations with clients and a specific authorization for exhibition in a matter that balances respect for client autonomy with helping clients to make informed decisions (Vick, 2011). Questions to consider include:

- **Why exhibit?** Art therapists explore the reasons, motivations, benefits and drawbacks for clients who are considering exhibiting their artwork.
- **Which art to exhibit?** Art therapists seek clarification as to which of the client's art will be included in an exhibit, what it will be titled and how it will be described.
- **Is there a conflict of interest?** Art therapists discuss any potential for conflict of interests between therapy goals and monetary or notoriety incentives.
- **How does the client wish to be identified?** Clients should clearly state whether they want their names (full or first name only), initials, or anonymous. They should also decide how much identifying information (age, gender, diagnosis, etc.) they wish to have included.
- **Will the artwork be for sale and who will benefit from the proceeds?** Clients should be made aware as to how any profits will be distributed.
- **Where will the exhibit take place?** Art therapists help clients understand the possible range of audience at an exhibit, so that, clients can make an informed choice regarding participation.

References:

- Spaniol, S. (1990). Exhibition art by people with mental illness, process and principles. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 7, 70-78.
- Vick, R. (2011). Ethics on exhibit. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 28 (4), 152-158.