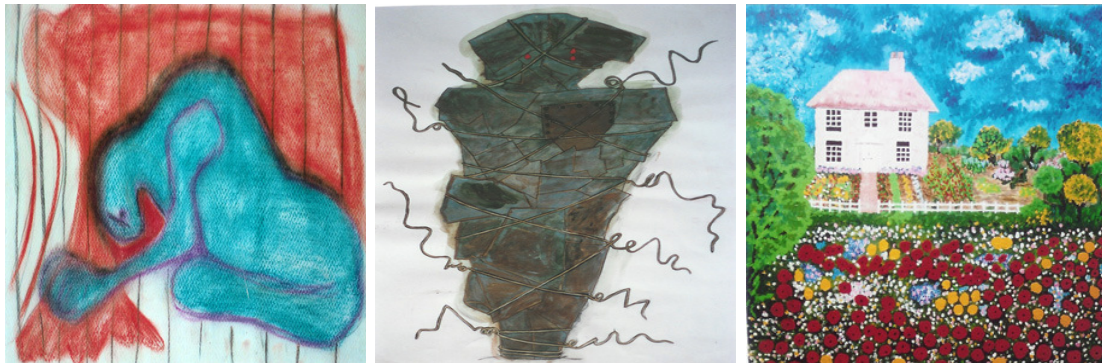




SHOW & TELL Caroline Bruce



Looking For Grace



An Example of the Use of Art for Therapeutic Purposes

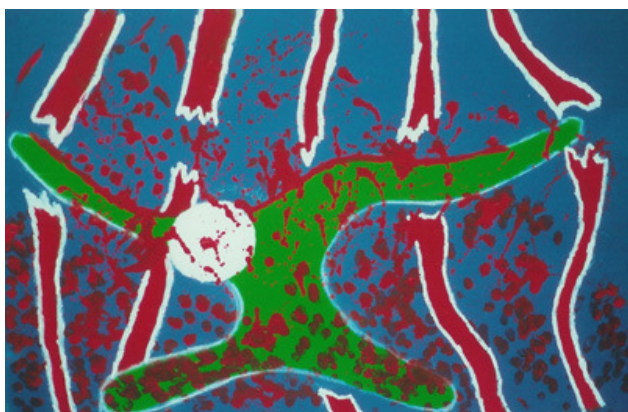
by

Caroline Bruce

Like many people, I used to think that psychotherapy was always about talking. Now I know it's not. I was never any good at talking about myself, in fact I found it extremely difficult - I needed another way and art did the talking for me

(Images and text © Caroline Bruce)

when it mattered. The art part of me got fed up with sitting on the sidelines watching me spend my time struggling with "talking therapies". Yes, they can be very helpful but sometimes another way can be better. Producing pictures made me feel positive, as if I was getting somewhere, in contrast to all the negativity I felt around talking to a therapist. I felt as if I was finding my own way and it was good, it was empowering.



My story, 'Looking for Grace' describes a period in my life when I was psychologically "stuck" and suddenly started getting images for how I felt. I turned these into paintings, pottery and models which eventually helped bring about the transformation I needed.



My first experience of using art for therapeutic purposes occurred one day when I had an image for something I had been feeling for quite a while and I suddenly set about making a picture of it. It took me quite some time to get the image on the paper as I saw it in my mind. The picture was very precise and carefully planned and drawn out, then painted. It had to be just right. This was the

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moment when things started moving from within to without and it was very significant. As I went along, the pictures became more spontaneous. In some cases, it was the process of doing the picture that was therapeutic and in others, it was the end image that helped. Sometimes I already had the image before I started painting and just needed to get it out and down there, in front of me, so I could see it and do something with it. It made me feel better. Sometimes I started painting with no idea of where I was going or of any image for how I felt. At some point along the way I saw the picture. The pictures burst out regularly as if I had given myself permission to paint whatever I wanted, however daft it seemed. These pictures were mine and I was not bothered about what anyone else thought of them. For the first time in my life I had something of my own that meant something to me, that I was proud of and which no-one could spoil. The paintings got bigger and the paint thicker, big bold strokes of the brush, palette knife, fingers, feet...all sorts. It was a huge catharsis...out it all came.



The first part, of 'Looking for Grace' describes briefly the events of my life so far, the "Outside Story", to give an idea of my background and what may have caused me to experience the problems I had which resulted in the need for the art.

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One day, I started painting with my fingers, working very fast and urgently, different colour all over the hardboard. It felt right although I had no idea where it was going or even if it was. Once all the colours were there and I felt as if I had done enough, I stepped back to get a better look. After a while, I turned the board upside down. Normally my pictures have a definite top, bottom, left and right from the start and there they stay, so this was an unusual thing for me to do. I stepped back again and there she was! A little girl with a bright red face and huge angry fists. She was so cross and absolutely full of energy. I painted her in more so she could be seen better and gave her a mop of yellow hair because I knew for sure that's what she was supposed to have. She was angry, noisy, stamping her feet, clenching her fists and making lots of noise about all the things she didn't like...aged 4!



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There is then the "Inside Story" which is concerned with the therapeutic part of my life relating to the art.

The art enabled me to understand myself better; to see the parts of myself that needed attention. I was stuck and going mad with frustration at not being able to break through what I saw as a great wall. I thought I needed a huge, destructive hammer to knock a hole in it and then I'd be able to see what was going on. It didn't quite work like that. The art arrived and the wall somehow disappeared so the hammer wasn't necessary.



The second part of 'Looking for Grace' consists of the art (86 colour plates) and accompanying writings, which reflect my thoughts and feelings about the images as I produced them.

The pictures tell their own story, and I hope this book is a clear and coherent example of the hidden order that can emerge from just going along with whatever comes up and trusting that the resulting apparent chaos has a meaning and a purpose and will sort itself out.

(Images and text © Caroline Bruce)



The object of this book is to give an insight into the therapeutic use of art from the point of view of the person doing it thereby providing an alternative to the usual published writings of people working in art therapy and related fields.



Looking for Grace' is currently available as a CD-ROM
Contact kwammanga@tiscali.co.uk or Tel 01425 270940
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