

ARTFULLY YOURS

An E-Book by Journals and Journeys

Compiled and Authored by Junko Ota

FOREWORD

Art therapy involves the use of creative techniques as a unique means to facilitate self-expression. Art is universally therapeutic, allowing for individuals to explore their emotions, improve their self-esteem, manage addictions, relieve stress, improve upon symptoms of anxiety and depression, and cope with a physical illness or disability, ultimately to channel themselves holistically and meaningfully.

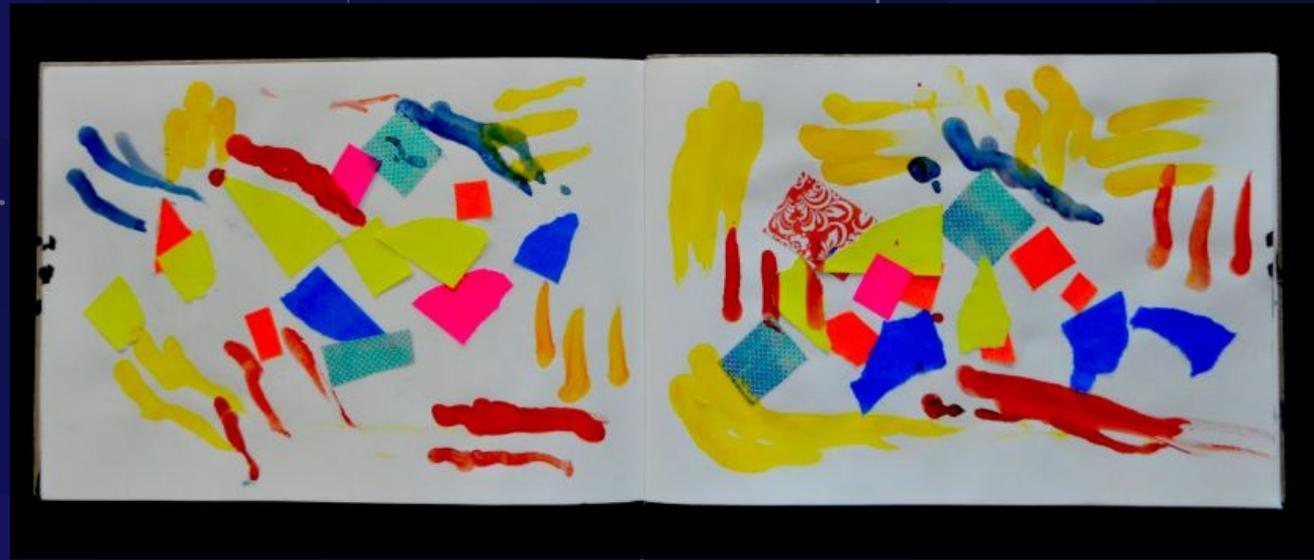
Art therapy is usually conducted under the supervision of art therapists, who carefully examine the psychological and emotional undertones of the artwork created, and analyse the associations between the creative choices and the interior landscape of the client. Additionally, art therapists often hope to "decode" the nonverbal messages, symbols, and metaphors often layered within the artwork, with the ultimate aim being to better understand their feelings and behavior, in an effort to reach out and resolve existing issues and difficulties. According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapists are trained to understand the roles that color, texture, and various art and media can reveal one's thoughts and feelings; the modes of doing so are diverse and subjective.

Change does not happen instantly; art therapists therefore recommend the concept of visual journaling as a way of processing and gradually tracking shifts in emotions and experiences over time. The journal acts as a 'safe space' for individuals to unashamedly and unreservedly express themselves as they are – anytime and anywhere – before going to sleep, on a bus ride to work, etc., not limited to a counselling session or a workshop. A single image or art work is, in reality, is just a snapshot of the moment – it is the journey (through a journal) that truly represents one's feelings and demonstrates growth.

Through Journals and Journeys we aim to incorporate art therapy – with an emphasis on visual journaling – to foster a culture of self-expression for autistic individuals who are uniquely marginalized in our society and often unable to find spaces to voice themselves. We believe that a nuanced understanding of ASD and a compassionate approach towards those diagnosed with this condition would facilitate change in the conventional mindset that regards them as 'dependent', and allowing them space to reflect on their own art and engage with the public on their own terms would make for an empowering experience.

The images that follow have all been created by artists at Ananda Action for Autism and Very Special Arts India (correct if wrong) through a series of workshops conducted by Journals and Journeys, and led by me. These thirty five images represent the work and expression of seven individuals, all on the Autism Spectrum.

Enjoy the journey!
Junko Ota



—SAHEB, 17

Saheb's work is wonderfully clever and suggestive. He has a masterful command on the paintbrush, best demonstrated through his remarkable depiction of a bird about to take flight in the last painting listed here, and his singular use of stark strokes of black to beget a sense of landscape and endless space. For Saheb, sadness is conveyed distinctly, a watered down work in blue and grey, conveying a confused and melancholic mood. His work reflects a deep understanding of negative space, a confident emphasis on movement (strong strokes and lines in the piece on happiness), and his paper collage especially shows an insistence on structure – the middle space surrounded by painted lines, juxtaposed with yellow. This joyful yellow is also present in his painting on happiness – infusing the piece with a precious innocence. Besides painting, this bright and quiet 17 year old is also a singer, and equally enthusiastic about both forms of art. t someone important said and can make the reader get inspired.”







—UDIT, 18

Udit's charming personality is reflected beautifully in his work. The first painting is insistent on covering space, and indicative of how all-encompassing a feeling happiness is to the painter – all pervasive, disordered, overarching. I love how there is no single dominant colour representing the emotion; rather it seems to be an overpowering sentiment, with different hues, that doesn't deny a range of other emotions. Happiness, here, is a product of a marvellous range. There is an evocation of the wild in depiction of his favourite place, which seems to be located at the outset of a jungle. The second piece – the one on sadness – is a work in muted tones, with lines drawn with careful disregard. It's akin to a thunderstorm, both literally and metaphorically, with flashes of orange, teal, grey and green throwing an air of liberation and a poignant melancholy...this artist is clearly a fan of nature. His collection is rounded off with a seated cat in green - much like the shy and observant painter himself!







—ANGAD, 24

Angad's energy is perfectly encapsulated by his vibrant pieces: a smattering and splashing of colour, a definite irreverence for form, an urgency of life pulsing through.

The piece of happiness, especially, is a buoyant expression of feeling, haphazard and disorderly, smeared in deep red – not different from how one experiences the emotion: in bursts.

This artist also has a penchant for adding a touch of definition, indicated by his use of stark black lines and curves that mark the paintings – or, considering the piece on sadness, using thick black brushstrokes to overshadow the painting. Also, the painter's conception of his favourite place is interestingly circular, and the painting itself is deliciously vague – is this a bird's eye view of the place itself or a more abstract imagination of such a place? It leaves the viewer curious and fascinated.

His collage stands out for its choice of using large black figures – a triangle and a rectangle – that add something solemn to the piece.







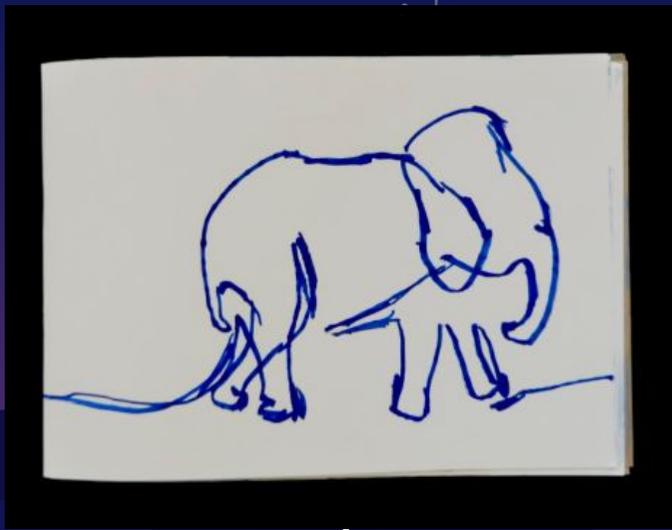
—GOKUL, 21

21 year old Gokul has a solid understanding of composition, and his works are infused with a sense of liveliness, with his effervescent personality bubbling through them. The fourth piece, particularly, is stamped in a refreshing yellow, adding a quaint and hopeful quality. The third painting in itself is quite telling: while was created in Delhi, it is strongly rooted in a deep yearning for the deep blue sea (and sky). The painter has made clever use of the available space; a strong streak of even strokes across the diagonal representing water, separating land and air on either side. There is an inherent understanding of balance reflected in this piece, that possibly points towards their own conception of happiness. It is a serene place.

Sadness is split over the two pages of this work: in two hues, two levels, with a black festering core in each. Two shades of blue have been beautifully blended together, and the circular strokes distinctly mark the mood of this painting. There are hints of warm colours beneath the cool tones – some underneath, some above, some beyond. Happiness, on the other hand, has more definition. The presence of stocky and vibrant rectangularly shaped figures round off this emotive piece.







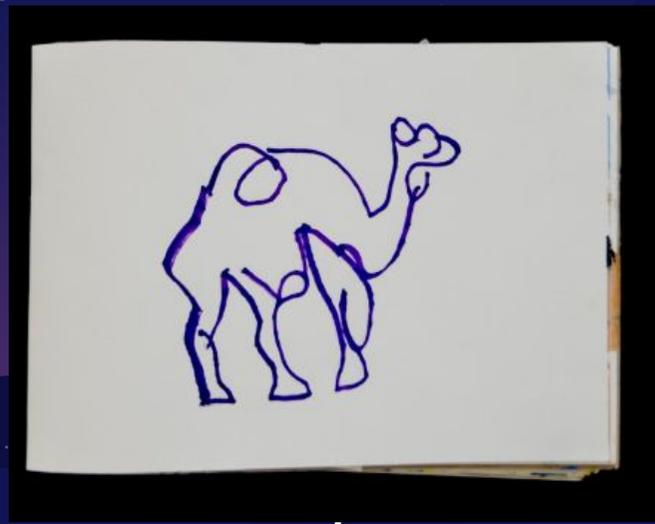
—ASHA, 39

39 year old Asha is bright, meticulous, and most definitely a perfectionist. I particularly admire her take on sadness, possibly one of the most visually appealing pieces in this collection. There are themes of blue infused with green, a lightness on the eyes, a heaviness in the mood. Asha's maturity comes through in each of the works displayed here. There is a pleasant gradient of feelings evident: Asha, it would appear, glides through life. While the pieces are themselves wistful as well as melancholic, there is an overall somber quality in terms of emotions and more. It graduates in different areas of the page, and in some of the pieces there is a sense of the bombastic and the unpredictable. The artist should pride herself on painting a collection that has a depth, style, and a range of dominant feelings.

It is interesting how the painting on happiness, in stark contrast with the other paintings displayed here, is the one most dependent on negative space with the least of colour. The aesthetic of the piece relies on minimalist patterns, with clear divisions in colour, exemplified by the three neat handprints in the denoted in primary colours. Finally, the gentle elephant at the end is deeply compelling, and symbolic of this very wise artist!







—ASHA, 17

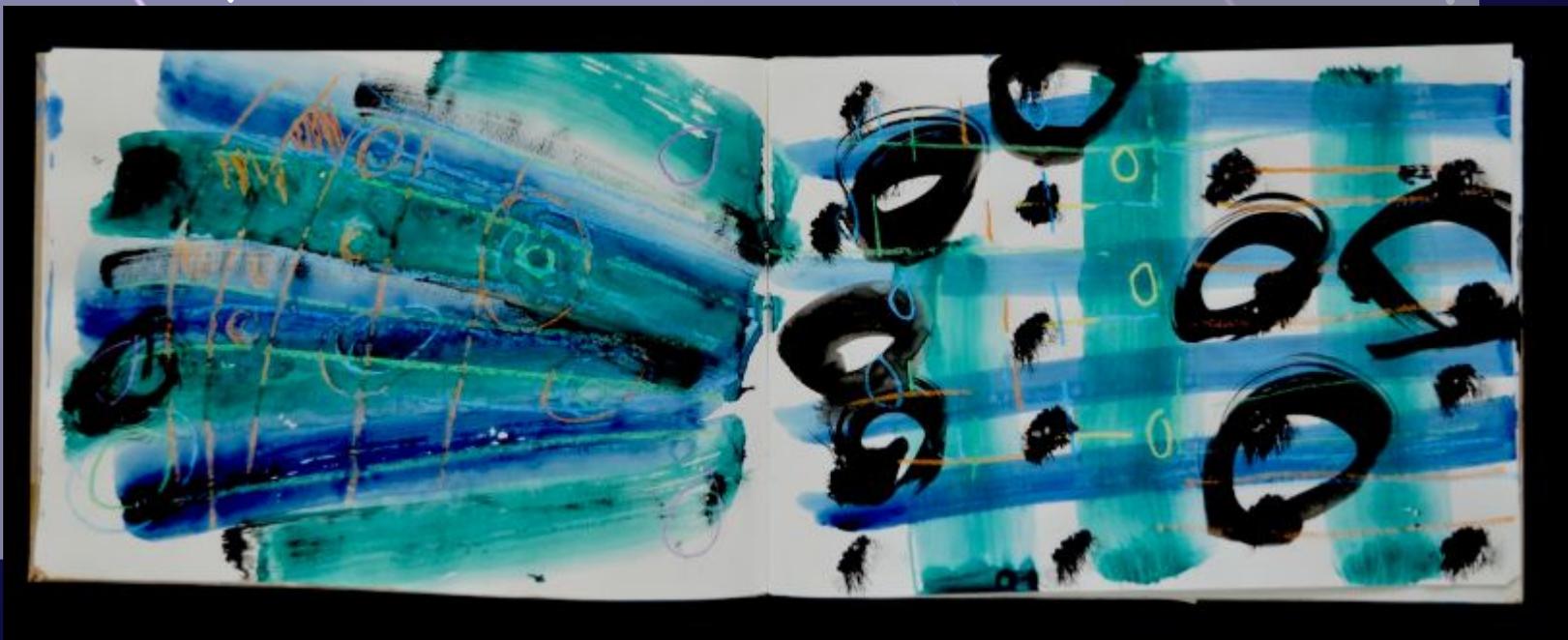
Asha is a thought provoking 17 year old, whose art dances through bold strokes and vibrant colours.

Interestingly, her work does not rely on negative space to confront and convey emotion – instead, she works on creative ways of taking space on paper, ranging from generous use of dots to even layering of colour to fill in the sheet. Her choice of colours is always bold – and always effective.

Very interestingly, sadness is perhaps most vitally conveyed in this artist's hand. It is not limp, not confused; instead, sadness is electric. It is in the touch of black, just hinted at the edges and through looming circular dots (reminiscent of noughts and crosses) within. Sadness is geometric – these are streaks of sadness. The artist extends the same clarity and simplicity to her depictions of happiness: handprints on centred on either page, holding down joy, containing it.

The use of lines display a clear sense of pattern, and the three red hand prints have been interestingly placed, with one fading into the edges. Perhaps hinting at the transience of happiness? We are always waiting for what Asha would paint next, and what she would make us think, feel and question.







—maya, 17

Maya has an intuitive understanding of tones and hues, and a knack for delightfully spacing out her inner turmoil. Happiness is curiously condensed in the center of each page, with overlapping shapes and colours, barely distinguishable handprints. In contrast, sadness spreads out and spills on to the page – but it is never overpowering or oppressing. There is a sense of calm amidst this all pervading ocean of blue and green: a trademark of her art. Her love for blue is evident throughout her work, and takes up most of the space in her 'favourite place' piece, a picturesque piece done with effortless mixing of colour, peaceful and soothing. There is hardly ever a sense of mistake or crossing boundaries, everything blends, everything exists as is.

What can a lonesome cow tell us about the state of affairs? It's a question worth pondering. I have personally been quite intrigued by the choice of a cow facing away from us, but that is just the kind of artist that Maya is – constantly surprising, a little wry, always a pleasure to behold.



