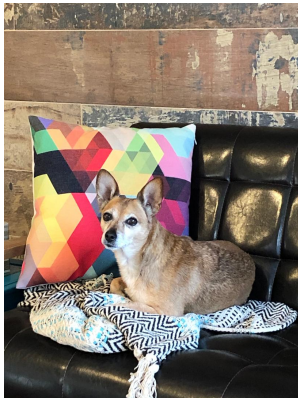




Art Therapist Spotlight Interview: Nissa Jackman, LMFT, ATR-BC

Nissa Jackman, LMFT, ATR-BC is an art therapist working in Colorado. She graduated from Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, CA with a Master of Arts degree in Marital and Family Therapy and Art Therapy.

From her website nissajackman.com “My professional background is as an Early Intervention Therapist for children on the Autism Spectrum; as a practicum trainee working with teens on the Autism Spectrum, and with children and their parents suffering from trauma and domestic violence; as a post graduate intern working with people of all ages suffering from trauma and attachment disruptions from unstable childhood homes, domestic violence, familial rejection, and grief from the loss of a parent; and later I worked at a hospital on both adolescent units for Inpatient, working with teens experiencing suicidal and homicidal ideation, and in Intensive Outpatient, working with teens and families dealing with a range of issues from anxiety and depression, to Autism Spectrum Disorder and psychosis.”



Interview

What originally drew you to the field of art therapy?

I had never heard of Art Therapy until a friend of mine told me that their mother was an Art Therapist. I thought, “What?! This is a real thing?” While working as an Early Intervention Behavioral Therapist for children on the Autism Spectrum, I kept thinking there was more that needed to be done for the families. Certain needs were not being met and that inspired me to look for a program as a therapist. It was serendipitous that there was an MFT and Art Therapy program where I was living at the time. I went to Notre Dame de Namur University for my degree out in Belmont, CA.

Can you tell us about the journey to Naropa?

I cannot really speak to this as I did not get my degree from Naropa. However, since moving to the Denver area three years ago, I have met many colleagues who went to Naropa, all of whom are highly respected in our field and who are doing amazing things in the community to make Art Therapy both known and accessible. It makes me think that Naropa has the kind of program that inspires their students to achieve greatness.

Can you talk about the power of art therapy in your life and your work?

I had been drawing and painting since early childhood. It had always been a coping tool for stress and anxiety for me. It's something that I can get lost in for hours if I let myself do that. Over the years I have used art as therapy and used Art Therapy to help me with life's stressors and help me process major life events.

In my work, I love that now that I have more experience under my belt, I can attune to my clients in ways that allow me to know almost exactly what it is they need from the art. Those are magical moments.

From your point of view, what is the most important thing to keep in mind when working as an art therapist?

It's important to remember that in addition to the reverence we have for the artwork itself, the art is just as important as any other document created. Confidentiality, privacy, maintenance and storage, all of that applies to the art as well.

What are some important self-care practices you recommend or practice?

If you can't do art, get outside and go for a walk.

Are you working on anything now that you're really excited about?

I have ideas for a few things, but they are still ideas. Right now I am focusing on building my private practice, which has been very slow going until recently. I think I have found my groove and want to capitalize on that.

How important is it to collaborate with your art therapy colleagues?

When I first arrived in Denver, I knew nobody. I contacted Violet Hive and they were so welcoming and invited me to be a part of their collective when I was first starting out. It inspired me to try doing private practice. They helped with referrals and emotional support and I am so grateful to have been a part of that. Something else I did was join the board on ATACO, which helped me feel more connected to the Art Therapy community.

How have your professional collaborations benefited your career?

When you collaborate, you network, and networking gets you referrals, and referrals get you clients. That part is pretty simple. The flip side of collaborating is the sense of

community you get, which can help with the loneliness of private practice, or the loneliness of being the only Art Therapist at an agency.

How would you like to see the field of art therapy evolve in the coming years?

I would love to not have to explain to other professionals what Art Therapy is. I can understand the average person not knowing, but for other mental health professionals to not know is nuts!

Is there anything you would like to see happen to support and expand the Colorado art therapy community?

I think we need to reach out more to communities outside of Denver and Boulder, and not so much in a way of inviting them to participate in things, but outreach to help support them. There are Art Therapists who may be the only one in their communities in rural areas or smaller towns. They must feel very much alone.

Is there anything additional you would like to share about yourself or your experience as an art therapist?

When I was a baby Art Therapist, my program was not great about teaching us how to introduce the art to a client. I was so nervous to try and would always fall back on talk therapy, especially with adults. I had to figure out what worked for me and what felt authentic. I had to find my voice as an Art Therapist. It was scary sometimes, because I lacked confidence in myself and in the field. As I gained more experience with Art Therapy, and did it more for myself, I found the value in it. Not just because my professors told me it was so great, but because I knew in my soul that it was valuable, valid, worthwhile, and powerful.