

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Art Therapy Conference 2016 – Opening Address

Kevin Jones

Welcome to the second international art therapy conference to be held here at Goldsmiths. We hope that the conference will provide a rich balance of theoretical and experiential learning, art practice and the power of the image. It will also present a chance to meet up with old friends and colleagues and to meet new people and make new contacts. It is a great pleasure to see that we have so many delegates from all over the world and we look forward to the contribution that will be made from these multiple international perspectives. In this address I want to say a few words about Social Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), the department in which Art Therapy sits at Goldsmiths and the provide a few thoughts on the significance of holding such a conference at a time when austerity and the increased marketization of Higher Education is challenging the values and role of the university in society.

STaCS hosts professional trainings in Social Work, Community Development and Youth Work and the Therapies, including Art Psychotherapy, Dance Movement Psychotherapy, Counselling, and Psychosocial Studies. We host two research centres, the Faiths and Civil Society Unit and the Centre for Community Engagement and Research, which in their different spheres work in the local, national and international communities developing professional practice and community engagement. Within this diversity of provision,

STaCS shares a common set of values, which include a commitment to Social Justice, Equality and Diversity and developing Anti-Oppressive Practices in our different professional settings. In all of these areas, our teaching integrates theory and practice through placement based work, which is strengthened and informed by our research in which we have leading practitioners in the field. Research in STaCS includes investigating quality of particular interventions, social policy and the impact of our work in the wider professional and public field and on community engagement and evaluation. Our students and staff work with some of the most vulnerable children, adults and older adults in society and developing and sustaining relationships is at that heart of our departmental ethos. It is this work of sustaining relationships and providing secure spaces and services over a period of time that is often most threatened by economic and social pressures like the introduction of student fees and the reduction of public services, which can lead to finance driven and instrumental approaches to recruitment, teaching, research and practice.

Goldsmiths has to work within this context and hold the tension of working within the economic and social pressures while preserving what it is that makes us Goldsmiths, a university that encourages an encampment among the trees on the open space of the green field and seeks to provide a space for the marginalized, the unvoiced and the unimagined. In STaCS it is no different whether you are a trainee in Social Work, Community Development and Youth work or an Arts or Verbal Therapist of whatever description, market forces and the rise of consumerism are changing the shape and values of health, education and voluntary sector services. The challenge this presents us as academics and trainers is that of ensuring that the space we provide here will help students qualify as graduates who can leave the university feeling confident in working in this new environment as creative and reflective practitioners equipped with a strong set of values that will orientate their work in a challenging public sector context. I suggest that this conference is a perfect example of what a university should be doing and say that if we lose sight of a conference like this then we are losing sight of what a university is for. Here there is an invitation to you to come into this space and create

something through our mutual and creative participation in the rich round of papers, experiential sessions and art events. It's a space in which we don't quite know what will emerge, where people come together in their common creative interests and purposes and put together something that means something to them that can be taken back out into the life of the world.

Within STaCS we are very aware of the importance of trying to develop and keep this kind of space open. The staff of the art therapy programme are to be congratulated for providing a conference in which we can come together and create something that can sustain ourselves in our creative activities and working lives. One of the particular contributions made by Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths is to provide a space where the dynamic influence of unconscious processes in their social contexts are revealed in the interrelations between large and small group work, in individual therapeutic work and in relation to the image. The recognition of unconscious dynamics in shaping social and individual interactions is all the more important at a time when economic and social pressures can constrain the spaces which are necessary for these processes to reveal themselves. The importance of unconscious processes in art practice, art works and in the therapeutic encounter will now be highlighted in different ways through our keynote speakers Grayson Perry and Patrick Casement. I offer Grayson and Patrick a very warm welcome to Goldsmiths and to finally once again thank you all very much for attending the conference.

Kevin Jones is Head of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS) and Senior Lecturer in Art Psychotherapy.