

Creating a deeper awareness of the healing activity of the I-being

Light, Color and Darkness Therapeutic Painting and Charcoal Drawing

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I am not I
I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.

Juan Ramón Jiménez ¹

In all our expressions we show a little of who we are. When we paint and draw freely, we express ourselves, we share some of our feelings, thoughts and even deeper inner physical activities. Artist and therapist Liane Collot d'Herbois was already able at a young age to "read" many of these expressions in people's paintings. She realized that many forms and color nuances in paintings were expressions of conditions of health and illness. Encouraged by anthroposophic physicians, with Ita Wegman MD as her mentor for 15 years, Liane Collot d'Herbois studied the origin of color, of light and of darkness. She saw their relation to the human being in health and illness and developed a method for Therapeutic Painting.²

The basis of all that I have to say consists of two things: the cosmic threefoldness of light, colour and darkness and the human being as the microcosmic threefoldness of spirit, soul and body, of thinking, feeling and will. Liane Collot d'Herbois³

The interactions of spirit, soul and body, of thinking, feeling and will in the human being adhere to the same laws as the interactions of light, color and darkness in the atmosphere in the sky. The creative processes of light and darkness, of spirit and will, take place in the cosmos and in the human being. When light and darkness meet and interact, ever changing colors and forms, life, and levels of consciousness come into being.

We find expressions of these activities in paintings, and in charcoal drawings of atmospheric interactions of light and darkness.

For example:

- 1) The extent and source of consciousness in our thinking, feeling, and willing.
- 2) The states of harmony and/or disharmony in our nerve/sense system, rhythmic system, metabolic will system, and the relations they have to each other.
- 3) The connection we have with the earth, air, and light.

Light areas in the charcoal drawings are expressions of central nervous system activities, thinking, and experiences we know as waking consciousness. Dark areas in the charcoal drawings are expressions of activities belonging to the metabolic system, of warmth, and sleep consciousness. The many interactions of light and darkness creating color are expressions of the rhythmic system, of feelings, and dream consciousness.

When in the threefold human being these interweaving activities work creatively and in harmony with each other, health is experienced. Disharmony results in discomfort, illness, and hindrances to healthy development. Disharmony shows in drawings and paintings as distorted

images of the lawful threefoldness of light, color and darkness. Therefore, in the practice of therapeutic painting we start with several sessions in which clients draw and paint freely with minimal guidance. Adults draw with charcoal and paint with watercolor. An assessment of these free/artistic drawings and paintings together with knowledge of the client's health concerns indicate therapeutic exercises which would be appropriate. After the assessment, self expression changes to guided therapeutic paintings and drawings.

The following is an example of a therapeutic process:

Mrs. B., 62 year old, inquired about therapeutic painting: She had been diagnosed 10 months prior with breast cancer. From the start this diagnosis challenged her to find treatments she felt she could agree with. She embraced treatments to heal physically and also those which would help her to find understanding of herself and her destiny.

Chemo therapy and Iscador injections were the treatments she received when she started with therapeutic painting.

The chemo therapy had caused loss of hair and eyelashes and loss of her sense of taste. She felt herself to be in a mental fog and lacked clarity, which was troubling her very much because she had to decide on the next steps of her treatments. New information nearly everyday about what would be the best treatment was exhausting her and at times too much to handle. Too much to consider and feeling too tired, she had much doubt, was fearful and wanted for all this to just go away.

Would adding therapeutic painting to her already busy schedule of therapies and treatments be too much? I asked her to consult with an anthroposophic physician. With his recommendation Mrs. B. started with the assessment. She created two drawings and two watercolor paintings over a period of three weeks. For the first charcoal drawing she was asked to create an image of light shining into darkness creating visible space; for the second drawing an image of darkness moving towards the light. The source of the light would not be in the picture.

Both sessions started with a conversation about light and darkness, in ways we might see this in the sky before sunrise or after sunset, by the light of a candle or from a flashlight. After a demonstration of charcoal drawing technique, she was encouraged to create the images in the way they made sense to her.

For the paintings on moist paper, she had the choice of fourteen liquid watercolors: colors noticeable in sunrise and sunset including several earth colors and black. Mrs. B. was encouraged to paint what ever she liked with as few, as many or all the colors available. To free her from her trained and established painting style, I asked her for her second painting to paint something she would consider ugly.

During the assessment many aspects in both charcoal drawings and paintings can be checked.⁴ We will look at the following in the free charcoal drawings:

- 1) Where does the light enter the drawing, has the light direction, is it strongest close to its source, becomes weaker away from its source until it dies out?
- 2) How much light activity is there in the upper 1/3, center, and lower 1/3 of the drawing?
- 3) What is the quality of the light: shining, dull, hard? Is it transparent and does it create space by radiating light into the darkness?
- 4) Does the light indicate clear, waking day consciousness or dreamy consciousness?
- 5) Does the darkness rise towards the light and/or recede away from the light?
- 6) Is the darkness formed or atmospheric?
- 7) Are there gradations of lighter and darker areas?
- 8) Does the darkness reflect the light—how and where?



first drawing



second drawing

In the first drawing there are light forms that appear strong, hard, immovable, and do not radiate light into the darkness. The darkness appears hard and flattened, does not move to and away from the light, and does not reflect the light.

In the second drawing where darkness is supposedly rising towards the light, the light shines in front of the darkness, interferes with the movements of the darkness. The darkness shows much form, appears as heavy and hardened substance.

In both drawings there is much light activity showing in different areas, cutting into and interfering with the upbuilding, nourishing activities of warmth and darkness, interfering with the transforming metabolic activities.

For the assessment of the free paintings we ask:

- 1) Which colors are used, where are they placed on the paper, and what is their quality?
- 2) Is there a light filled space between the warm and cool colors?
- 3) Are there three levels into space: connection with the earth, air and light?



first painting



second painting

In the first painting most notable are the cold turquoise and viridian-green with warmer orange right in the center. These are surrounded by the warmer indigo, cobalt blue, magenta and violet. The colors are strong and clear with soft transitions. The round parallel movements were repeatedly painted without interruption. Cool light colors come forward and warm colors recede in the back. Earth colors were not used. Three levels into space are not there. The image is like a round disk in space.

In the second free painting (painted as an example of ugliness) there is a mixture of earth colors in the lower part; burnt sienna and sap green together with the warm dark colors magenta and vermillion. The warm colors continue a little higher; yellow, orange, and above these darker violet and carmine. Much lighter, white small areas show in several places in the earth colors and in the warmer colors.

The charcoal drawings and paintings reveal the direction for the therapeutic drawing and painting exercises. These are:

- 1) The first step is to leave out the light forms which interfere with the movements of the darkness (or colors).
- 2) The light will be drawn from the center top of the paper downward into the darkness, strongest close to its source, becoming weaker and dying out into the darkness.
- 3) The darkness behind the light needs to be drawn with gradations of lighter and darker areas, with movements towards and away from the light, and with the darkness reflecting the light.
- 4) The darkness moving in front of and towards the light needs to become lighter, closer to the light.

All this counts as well for creating atmospheric images in colors.

In addition the colors need to be painted according to their true quality, movement, and place. Specific colors move towards the light, others have their place behind the light, and the lightest colors can indicate the light itself.

Drawing and painting in this way strengthens the I-being, enabling it to direct and take part in the health giving, creative activities of the threefold human being.

Therapeutic painting is more relaxing and less strenuous than charcoal drawing and was the choice to start with. Mrs. B. felt physically depleted from the chemo therapy and emotionally stressed out from having to decide the next step for treatment. Her longing for color was much stronger than for charcoal drawing. Needed were warmth and nourishment to give strength, release of tension, ability to breathe out, and clarity of thinking to help her feel secure making the next big decisions. To give support in these areas while staying true to the colors she used in her free paintings, the following colors were used in the therapeutic painting exercises.

Burnt sienna and sap green were used in the second free painting.

Our physical connection with the earth gives strength and hope. So do earth colors when we paint them according to their archetypal quality, movement and place. The earth colors also have a connection with our metabolic will system, with our processes of warmth, and nourishment.

Cobalt blue, cobalt violet and violet were seen in the first free painting.

When we look up into the sky we perceive space. We can follow with our eyes the powdery blue and soft violet color of the sky. It reaches high into the sky, very far and wide. At the same time it creates a gentle boundary and does not enclose us. We can feel safe to breathe out into this space, into these colors. When painting these colors we find the possibility for out breathing physically and on a soul level.

Turquoise, viridian green and yellow appeared in both free paintings.

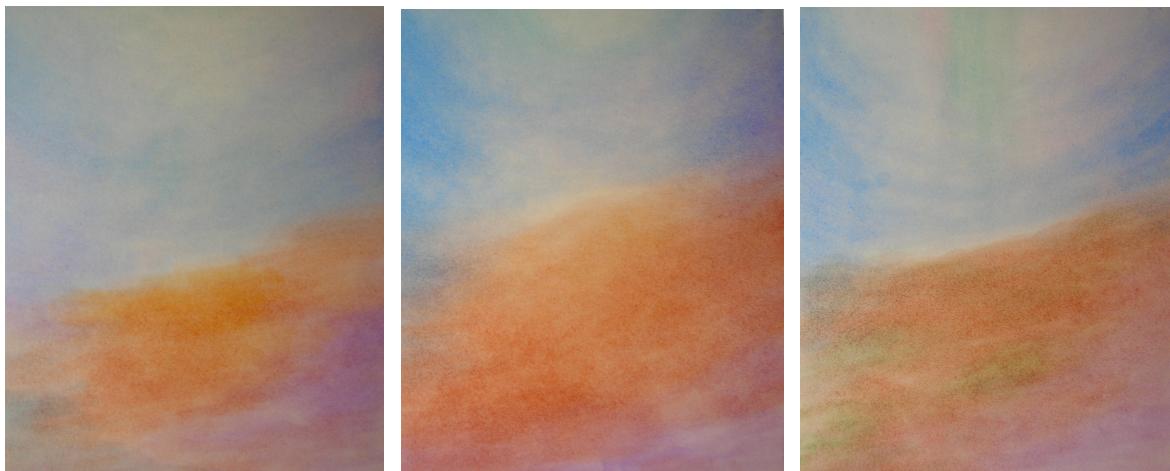
For clarity of thinking we need waking consciousness. We need inner light.

The choice for the light was a very pale viridian green. This green can be seen as "*the green flash*" around the rim of the sun at sunrise and sunset and/or as a flash from the horizon up into the sky when the sun is just below the horizon. This green appears to be more pure light than the light of the sun. The light can be painted like a lighter atmospheric area high in the center of the painting or like a ray of light from the center top of the painting down over the blue.

Mrs.B. was directed to paint the colors in specific places, in the specific movements and quality for each color. The earth colors burnt sienna with sap green in the third painting are rising gently towards the light. The cobalt blue and violet are both painted to provide space and a supporting boundary. The light in the first and second painting is high in the atmosphere where

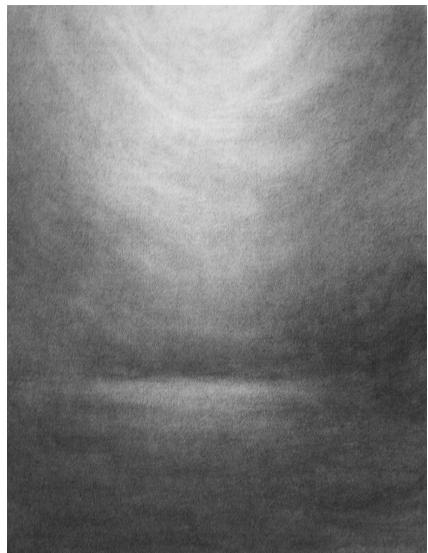
it meets the cobalt blue. In the third painting the viridian-green is a ray of light shining down into the blue atmosphere. The rising earth colors were painted more successfully than the cobalt blue for space and boundary above the earth colors.

The following are images of guided therapeutic exercises.



When Mrs.B. came for her third painting session she had made the decision to have surgery, which would include bi-lateral mastectomy, with or without removal of sentinel lymph node, reconstructive breast surgery, and removal of her ovaries. She appeared strong, up beat, positive and ready for the next steps in her healing process.

A therapeutic painting/drawing course is generally recommended once or twice a week for six weeks. Mrs. B. was able to fit three painting sessions into her busy schedule, before her first surgery. The following therapeutic charcoal drawing was done by her two months after the surgeries. Since her surgeries and completion of chemo therapy she continues a healthy life style filled with nourishing activities.



In this therapeutic guided drawing exercise Mrs.B. worked with the intention to create a light filled space, without light activities interfering with the nourishing qualities of the darkness of substance. The light is drawn with direction and intention to stimulate the darkness (the metabolic system) to healthy movement. This is an image that accords with the cosmic laws of light and darkness in which the I-being performs its healing function.

Whenever a conscious change is made in the charcoal drawings and paintings, the I-being is active in guiding the human being to better health. Drawing and painting images of lawful interactions of light, color and darkness may provide any of us with a formidable challenge to stay with our intention while facing the often overpowering feelings to express ourselves (our likes and dislikes). This is an active process which takes courage, a good sense of humor, objectivity, and patience. Light, darkness, and color

exercises are known for their therapeutic value and are useful as a path for self development.

They open the door to a deeper awareness of how to work with the healing activity of the I-being. In his poem, "I am not I," Juan Ramón Jiménez writes of "the one who will remain standing when we die". This is our I-being which exists before our earthly life and which, with our help, directs us to healthy, creative activities in body, soul and spirit.

Light, Color and Darkness Therapeutic Painting and Charcoal Drawing is known in Europe as Collot d'Herbois Painting Therapy and is recognized as a medical therapy.

1. "I am not I" by Juan Ramón Jiménez, page 31 In *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry*, by Arthur Zajonc (Lindesfarne Books 2009)
2. *Light, Darkness and Colour in Painting Therapy*, by Liane Collot d'Herbois (The Goetheanum Press 1993)
3. In *Light, Darkness and Colour in Painting Therapy*, page 15-20, by Liane Collot d'Herbois (The Goetheanum Press 1993)
4. *Diagnostic and Therapeutic Elements in Light-Darkness-Color* by Chantal Bernard and Janny Mager, page 37-44 (Rudolf Steiner College Press 2009)