

**The role of Art therapy in fostering Resilience Using a Logotherapy approach: Insight
through Holocaust Paintings**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how art therapy, guided by a Logotherapy approach, contributes to fostering resilience. It focuses on the research question how can paintings help promote resilience and foster the search for meaning.

To explore this, a documentary featuring drawings created by Holocaust survivors is utilized. Art therapy is employed as a bottom-up approach to showcase the role of paintings as a means of self-expression. Three Holocaust paintings are analyzed to demonstrate how their colors, brushstrokes, and content aid in externalizing and processing traumatic experiences. Simultaneously, Logotherapy is utilized as a top-down approach to interpret these artworks and find meaning within them. The thesis delves into the three core principles of Logotherapy by examining the artists' comments about their paintings retrieved from the documentary. This exploration reveals how discovering meaning can contribute to promoting resilience.

In conclusion, the thesis discusses how art therapy and Logotherapy can work in tandem to help individuals process information, strengthen their sense of self, and provide a sense of purpose in life, thereby promoting resilience. The study acknowledges the limitations of this research and proposes potential avenues for future investigations.

The role of Art therapy in fostering Resilience using a Logotherapy approach: Insight through Holocaust Paintings

Art is one of the earliest forms of communication and a fundamental aspect of human culture and expression of creativity, imagination, and emotional depth (Kandel, 2012). Creativity can be a vital component of how people overcome challenges and develop resilience (e.g., Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016), as creative modification of experiences may allow for positive adaptation to adversity (Metz & Morrell, 2008). Art therapy indeed is effective in the context of psychological trauma and has shown to be helpful in processing and integrating traumatic experiences (Schouten et al., 2015; Bitonte & De Santo, 2014). Despite the beneficial effects of art, this therapeutic tool is not used or understood as well as it deserves. This thesis outlines how art therapy can foster psychological resilience via meaning making using a Logotherapeutic perspective, which roots in the healing process among Holocaust (or Shoah) survivors, as I shall outline in the following.

Creativity has been defined as the human capacity to develop original work, theories, or thoughts to solve problems (Metzl & Morrell, 2008), and typically involves restructuring aspects of one's life and imbuing them with renewed meaning. One influential resilience theory was proposed by the Neurologist and Holocaust concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl (2006) who claimed that one's ability to cope with challenging situations depends on one's attitude to life and ability to find meaning. Frankl's future-oriented psychotherapy called Logotherapy aimed to strengthen resilience by finding meaning and purpose in life, for which humans were stimulated to identify their values, passions, strengths (the noological dimension), and to transform life's challenges into opportunities for growth (Frankl, 2006; Hlavek, 2022).

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Logotherapy recognizes individuals as an inseparable tridimensional entity encompassing biological, psychological, and noological aspects (Hlavec, 2022). Based on Frankl's (2006) observations, Logotherapy emphasizes that individuals can discover purpose and assume responsibility for their actions through creativity, experience, and attitude. Frankl noticed this phenomenon during the Holocaust and conversations with other survivors, where engaging in artistic endeavors enabled them to *bring something meaningful into the world*, thereby accessing their spiritual essence that remained unaffected by their emotional and physical limitations and traumatic past (Hlavec, 2022; Silveira & Mahfoud, 2008). Through the process of art creation, individuals can freely express themselves and explore novel and diverse scenarios beyond the confines of their current lives (Ratusznei & Rabuske, 2019).

The primary objective of this thesis was to address the following research question: *How can painting help promote resilience and foster the search for meaning?* In order to explore this question, a preliminary examination of visual processing pathways and their correlation with artistic expression and perception is presented. Following this, the concept of art therapy is introduced, including its methodologies, and an evaluation of the efficacy of art therapy in the context of psychological trauma is conducted, highlighting its compatibility with Logotherapy. Subsequently, an overview of Logotherapy and its underlying theory of resilience is provided. Additionally, a methodology involving the utilization of a documentary featuring drawings created by Holocaust survivors is introduced to exemplify how art served as a means of self-expression, offering valuable insights that contributed to the survivors' resilience. Finally, the thesis concludes by presenting an analysis and discussion of the theoretical material, along with proposing promising avenues for further research.

Theoretical Framework

Art Therapy

Myth and Logos

Symbolic thinking has been present in human civilization for thousands of years (Miyagawa et al., 2018). In Greek civilizations, myths served as symbolic representations of human existence and suffering; *Myth*, meaning 'story,' and *Logos*, meaning 'reason' or 'meaning,' were and are often seen as contrasting concepts (De Luna, 2021). However, Myth and logos can also be viewed as complementary approaches to understand the world as each provide unique insights and perspectives (Bouvrie, 2002). The Greeks started to use objective logic and evidence-based reasoning (logos) around 2.6 thousand years ago, replacing the mythical tales focused on elusive and tragic aspects of humanity (De Luna, 2021; Powell, 2004). Myths rely on storytelling, symbolism, and metaphor to convey meaning, and root in cultural, historical, spiritual, and religious factors (Hoyt, 2009). On the other hand, logos is a pragmatic and forward-looking mode of thought that underlies planning, monitoring, organizing, and integration of information (Powell, 2004).

Bottom-up and Top-down processes

Humans acquire knowledge about the world through their senses, and it is through reason that we understand *how* we acquire this knowledge (Styron, 1980). The processing of vision occurs in a series of information processing steps in which humans transform and enrich the previous one (Kandel, 2012). The low and intermediate levels of information processing occur simultaneously by means of bottom-up processing. Meanwhile the high level-visual processing is top-down when the brain integrates the visual information with relevant information from previous experience, which allows for conscious visual perception to take place, and the interpretation of meaning (Kandel, 2012). These two processes occur in different ways and refer to different aspects of perception. While the first two allows us to

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identify color, form, shape, background and outline, and change, the high-level visual processing permits one to make sense of emotions and find meaning (Kandel, 2012).

Sensing artwork

Our senses allow us to interact with our environment and internalize the information necessary for our cognitive processes to occur (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982). Therefore, stimulating sensitivity and awareness of the senses increases our opportunity for learning. When making art, one needs to use sensory information and bring together aspects of their environment to create a new meaningful picture. Perception, on the other hand, is more than the sum of its sensory inputs, and is also influenced by one's attitudes, beliefs, and emotions (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982; Larsen et al., 2000). Hence, when looking at an artwork we are given not only a picture but also a part of the artist, how the perceiver thinks, feels and sees the world. So, symbolic figures act as an external representation of internal processes.

Art a nonverbal communication

Seeing precedes words. The perception of the world around us is internalized at a very young age, before one can explain or describe specific concepts (Berger, 2008). Therefore, painting is a way to symbolically represent aspects of ourselves that we can't verbally recognize, if only because we may lack the words or terms to describe it. Additionally, painting may help us access traumatic memories and emotions that are often blocked from our conscious awareness by allowing them to be expressed in a nonverbal way (Grise & Breeuwsma, 2013). In this sense, art may be a way to explore the internal world, bring repressed emotions and feelings to awareness, and communicate meanings embedded in the unconscious (Lantz, 1993). Art therapy seems to catalyze therapy as it facilitates psychological outflow and provides one with an emotional outlet for catharsis, which may improve one's mental health and well-being (Kandel, 2012).

Art as a portal of self-expression

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The goal of art therapy is to provide a safe and non-judgmental environment with unconditional listening and guidance for reflection where the person can be authentic, spontaneous and imaginative, to unlock their creative potential (TED, 2021). Consider a white canvas, as a blank space, where everything is possible. One can use the space to freely express oneself and consider every possible color, material, pattern, movement, and each choice may reveal something about one's inner feelings and cognitive processes (e.g., emotions). Art creation then holds the potential to help one convey aesthetic qualities toward the self and others through a process of becoming aware of one's artistic identity (Van Lith, 2015), which can broaden and enrich one's meaning-making process and insight.

The creative process of art-making can thus be used to improve and enhance the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of individuals and encourages self-expression, self-awareness, and personal growth (Hicks, 2020). By engaging in the art process one can delve deeper into one's mind and use visual language to externalize their inner emotions and engage spiritual reflection and meaning awareness (Lantz, 1993). In art, the result is important yet in art therapy the *process* of creation is key (Ratusznei & Rabuske, 2019). Artistic creation acts as an intermediate in the therapeutic relationship as it allows people to express conflicting feelings and can help them to find their personal strengths and meaning and foster psychological resilience (Novo et al., 2021), as I now shall explain.

Art therapy and its mediums

Art can be used as a portal to self-exploration, as the symbolic guide of the soul during the transition or journey, e.g. to help information pass between domains. Art therapy is a non-verbal way of communicating through expression of emotions, promoting self-awareness and personal development (Novo et al., 2021). According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982):

“No art expression is possible without self-identification with the experience expressed (e.g., drawings, paintings, music, dance...) as well as with the medium by

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which it is expressed (e.g., brushes, pencil, clay, guitar...). This is one of the very intrinsic factors of creative expression. If we do not identify with these forces, art expression loses the very essence of its nature—its creativity.” (p.29)

Creativity can be explored through artistic mediums such as plastic, musical, dramatic, body, playful and literary expression (Laranjeira & Querido, 2023). Each of these mediums carry unique characteristics that can stimulate one’s creativity in a particular way. It is the role of the therapist to provide the necessary tools for the person to allow them to experiment and find the medium that best fits their individuality and what has to be expressed. Given the important role of visual imaging in human thought, this essay will be focused on the therapeutic benefits of plastic artistic mediums - specifically paintings - for mental health and well-being.

Art Therapy Effectiveness

Art therapy is a complex process, as has been outlined, but the key question is whether art therapy is effective, and therefore review the literature on art therapy effectiveness in the context of mental illnesses. Although the practice of art therapy has been existent for many years, and most studies show therapy effectiveness for a variety of symptoms and disorders, some studies did not find effects or remained inconclusive (see Van Lith, 2016; Slayton et al., 2010). Key to this thesis is that art therapy can help to decrease trauma symptom severity (0.76 [0.07, 2.87]) (Schouten et al., 2015), and a narrative synthesis of 15 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of art therapy to ameliorate anxiety (1.95 [0.30,3.22]) (Schouten et al., 2015), depression, and phobias showed significant positive changes in 10/15 studies (67%) (Uttley et al., 2015), or weak support in three RCTs to reduce anxiety (e.g., Abbing et al., 2019).

The heterogeneous results with regard to art therapy effectiveness may stem from a variety of factors such as variety in therapeutic methods and control conditions, small sample

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sizes, different follow-up intervals, and characteristics of the study population (Schouten, 2015). Often the authors do not provide sufficient information about the methodology of the therapy chosen, or the structure and length of the treatment (Reynolds et al., 2000), to be able to meaningfully compare their results. The diversity of this literature makes it difficult to specify why and when art therapy is useful and which effects generalize, which requires future work to untangle. The very nature of art therapy is to allow freedom for the client to self-actualize and grow emotionally and spiritually in their own way and time (Eaton, 2007). Therefore, the unstructured and unconstrained character of the therapy is essential for the person to unconditionally express themselves. In this regard, it is more important to focus on one's individual experience and qualitative insight acquired by one individual through art therapy than on its generalizability to other individuals. The effectiveness of Logotherapy is reviewed below, after I introduced the tenets of Frank's approach.

The principles of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Third Viennese school of psychotherapy

Logotherapy was founded during the 1930's and it is considered by some authors as "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" after Freud's Psychoanalysis and Adler's Individual Psychology (Frankl, 2006; Längle, 2019). Frankl diverged from Freud and Adler on their anthropological understanding of humans. Freud argued that the "will to pleasure" was the primary human motivation, while Adler focused on the "will to power" and Frankl perceived the "will to meaning" as the key aspect of human existence (Längle, 2019).

According to Frankl (2006), man's search for meaning was their main motivation in life, and not a secondary rationalization of instinctual drives. By adopting a future oriented approach, Logotherapy changed the focus from the past as reflected in vicious cycle formation and feedback mechanisms that oftentimes perpetuate neurosis (anxiety/depression), to the formulation of a positive future that makes life worth living (Frankl, 2006). This approach

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liberates people from their negative cycle by allowing them to recognize their freedom and responsibility to act upon challenging situations.

Noological dimension

Frankl characterized his therapeutic approach as a "psychotherapy in spiritual terms" (Pereira, 2015). However, it is important to note that the concept of spirit or *Geist* in Logotherapy does not carry any specific religious connotation. Frankl deliberately employed the term "noological" to prevent any misinterpretations, as it is more aligned with anthropology rather than theology. Within the framework of Logotherapy, the term Logos represents the notions of meaning, spirit, and humanity. This concept draws on the work of philosopher Max Scheler (Pereira, 2015), who argued that understanding the spiritual essence of a being and recognizing its existential detachment from the physical aspects facilitates its freedom and separability (Scheler, 2003). As a spiritual being, individuals possess the ability to distance themselves from their biological and psychological conditions, allowing them to perceive themselves objectively and make independent choices in response to life's circumstances (Pereira, 2015). Similarly, Frankl asserts that spiritual freedom empowers individuals to endure even the most severe psychological or physical hardships, as the spiritual dimension enables them to transform automatic reactions into autonomous responses.

Spiritual unconscious

Within Frankl's Logotherapy, the spiritual unconscious occupies a central position as it encompasses an unconscious purpose that enables individuals to discover the distinct, specific, and authentic meaning of their lives (Carvalho, 2021). Humans engage in symbolic narratives when they find themselves in situations that push them beyond their comfort zones and require adaptation. In these instances, each individual is compelled "to enter the [symbolic] cave they fear [in order] to find the treasure they seek" (Campbell, 1949). According to Frankl, every person possesses a unique purpose that brings dynamism and

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transformation to their existence. This movement is not driven by an impulse to achieve homeostasis, as proposed by Freud, but rather by an inherent attraction that does not infringe upon one's freedom of choice (Carvalho, 2021).

The spiritual unconscious offers one the opportunity to live in alignment with this purpose yet it does not dictate one's path, as individuals remain free and responsible for their choices. Recognizing this meaning requires attentiveness to one's intuition, which serves as a guiding force. While psychotherapy aims to bring instinctual facts to consciousness, logotherapy attempts to bring spiritual realities to awareness (Frankl, 2014). Imagination plays a vital role in perception, and serves as a foundation for rational decision-making. Hence, art can serve as a pathway for exploring one's existence, allowing the spiritual unconscious to manifest itself. Therefore, art becomes a medium via which the spiritual unconscious can find expression and manifestation. Note the parallel with Freudian psychoanalytic theory which describes the unconscious mind as a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories, allegedly kept outside of conscious awareness as being too threatening or disturbing to acknowledge (Larsen et al., 2000).

Freedom of will

The three fundamental principles of Logotherapy are: (1) freedom of will, (2) will to meaning and (3) meaning of life. *Freedom of will* refers to one's freedom to choose his attitude towards their instincts or towards the environment. Frankl (2006) contrasts freedom of choice to freedom of will because no one can dictate to you what you *want* to do therefore your *will* is free. There are three ways in which conditioning can influence one's free will: the instincts and the character (psychological conditioning), the heredity and the body (biological conditioning) and the social and physical environment (sociological conditioning) (Pereira, 2015). Although you may not always be able to change your biological, social or

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psychological situation, you can, with awareness, change how you are going to act upon that situation.

Frankl described this view in his experience in the concentration camp where he:

“In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution), but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature” (Frankl, 2006, p. 55)

Will to meaning

The second principle of Logotherapy is *will to meaning*. Frankl refers to Nietzsche's words "He who has a why [reason] to live for can bear with almost any how" (Large & Nietzsche, 1889, p.6). According to Frankl (2006), having a *why*, an aim or goal in life, served as a way to bear the *how* of their existence in the concentration camps. Frankl states that it does not matter what we expect from life, but what life expects from us. Each individual is constantly questioned by life and it is our responsibility to find the answer and achieve it through the right action, according to Frankl. Each individual is seen as a singular and unique being and the meaning of life differs between people and over time. The fulfillment of this meaning can only be accomplished by the individual themselves, as they alone possess the ability to attain a significance that aligns with their own will to meaning. Therefore, Logotherapy sees in responsibility the very essence of a man (Frankl, 2006).

Noogenic neurosis and resilience

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When this will to meaning is frustrated, one can experience existential frustration, which can result in what Frankl called *noogenic neurosis* (Frankl, 2006). They differ from psychological neuroses because they have their origin in the noological dimension of human existence. Although existential frustration can result in noogenic neurosis, not every conflict is necessarily neurotic, and some amount of conflict can be healthy and normal.

For Frankl a man's search for meaning may arouse tension rather than equilibrium (Frankl, 2006). He states that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension between what one has achieved and what one ought to achieve. This idea relates to Hegel's dialectical method which states that tension between diverging thoughts is a prerequisite for evolution (Styron, 1980). The tension created by two opposite extremes is necessary, so that a new form of thinking can be created to accommodate the two contrasting ideas. That is, the tension between being and not being is resolved through *transformation* (Styron, 1980).

Human suffering can be transformed into human achievement when it grows out of existential frustration (Frankl, 2006), which can arise when humans grapple with life's inherent difficulties, such as isolation, lack of purpose, the inevitability of death, or the burden of personal responsibility. Suffering is a form of confronting one's existence, and it is within moments of crisis that individuals have the potential to undergo transformation, development, and foster *resilience*. Hence, existential frustration can serve as a catalyst for personal growth, self-awareness, and accomplishment, on the condition that individuals can discover meaning or purpose in their suffering and alter their perception and response to themselves and their circumstances (Frankl, 2006). What a man needs is not a tensionless state but the striving for a (personal) goal, and this requires existential analysis (logotherapy).

Meaning of life

The last principle of Logotherapy is the *meaning of life*. Since the meaning of life is subjective and relative, the most important thing is not the general meaning of life, but the

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specific and individual meaning of each person's life. In that sense the role of a logotherapist is to widen the visual field of the patient, allowing them to visualize the whole spectrum of potential meanings in life. It is the patient's responsibility to find the meaning of their life and self-actualize. According to Frankl (2006), true self-actualization or fulfillment of one's potential is not achieved by focusing solely on oneself or one's own needs and desires, but arises as a byproduct of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence refers to the act of going beyond oneself, by seeking meaning and purpose beyond one's own individual existence. It involves directing one's attention and efforts towards something greater than oneself, such as contributing to the well-being of others, pursuing meaningful goals, or engaging in acts of service or creativity.

According to Frankl (2006), when individuals shift their focus from their own needs and desires to something larger and more meaningful, they experience a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. By self-transcending, individuals connect with something greater than themselves, and tap into their inherent capacity for growth, meaning, and self-actualization. In that sense, self-actualization is not a direct goal but a result of engaging in activities that extend beyond oneself. This is what the World Health Organization (WHO) describes as the ability to meaningfully contribute to one's community as a key aspect of social well-being and identity (WHO, 2023).

This meaning of life is not something to be determined objectively, but rather something that each individual must actively create and pursue based on their unique circumstances, values, and experiences (Frankl, 2006). Meaning can be found in three main ways: (1) creating endeavors, (2) love and relationships, or by (3) one's attitude toward suffering and life changes (Frankl, 2006). This essay will focus on the first aspect (creating endeavor) to explore meaning and this is going to be exemplified through the use of paintings

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from holocaust survivors. I acknowledge that many theories on meaning in life exist (e.g., Ryff et al., 1989), but this discussion falls outside the scope of my thesis.

Logotherapy and Effectiveness

Logotherapy has been proven effective in reducing death anxiety (Hajiazizi et al., 2017, $F=20.21$, $p<0.01$), lower depression levels of university students (Robotmili et al., 2015, $F=198.69$, $p<.001$), improve physical ($t= 2/13$, $p<0.05$) and psychological health ($t= 6/58$ $P<0.001$) for PTSD patients (Shoaakazemi et al., 2012). The studies emphasize that finding meaning in life can be an effective coping strategy to deal with challenging situations (Southwick et al., 2016). Learning to adapt to harness and learn how to manage and grow from stress is essential in building one's resilience (Southwick et al., 2016).

Methodology

This literature review aims to answer the research question *how paintings can help to promote resilience through the search for meaning?*. The analysis will examine the bottom up and top-down processing of Holocaust Art. For the bottom-up investigation, Art Therapy will be employed, while Logotherapy will be utilized for the top-down analysis. As my source of data I used the documentary "As Seen Through These Eyes" directed by Hillary Helstein (2008). This documentary portrays holocaust survivors who provide firsthand accounts of the concentration camps, the art they created in the camp, and they discuss the meaning of their art.

For the bottom up analysis I will interpret the paintings made by the holocaust survivor Karl Stojka in 1989. To support my interpretation, I will refer to Eric Kandel's book, "The Age of Insight" (2012), which explores the connection between art and psychology in the works of Viennese artists from 1900 onwards. This book is particularly relevant as it establishes a similar historical and geographical context for Stojka's paintings. By undertaking

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this analysis, my aim is to illustrate how the colors, brushstrokes, and content in Stojka's paintings serve as tools for self-expression, gradually leading to a deeper self-understanding.

For my top-down analysis, I will delve into the significance of Holocaust art by examining the testimonies of survivors regarding their paintings, as documented in Helstein's film (2008). Drawing from Viktor Frankl's (2006) book, "Man's Search for Meaning," I will utilize it as a primary resource to illustrate how the survivors' artworks embody the three principles of Logotherapy. By studying the meaning they discovered through their art, I aim to demonstrate how art therapy and Logotherapy can be synergistically employed to facilitate individuals in their quest for personal growth, psychological resilience, and the search for meaning. The integration of these two approaches will provide a creative and meaningful framework for analysis, utilizing both the context and narratives of the witnesses.

Analysis

The Bottom up Approach: Holocaust art as a tool for self-expression

Holocaust art can be a powerful tool for self-expression through processing and conveying personal experiences, providing emotionally cathartic release, reclaiming personal narratives, engaging with historical memory, and fostering connection and dialogue (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982; Kandel, 2012). For survivors, descendants, and artists, creating Holocaust-themed artwork provides a means to express their personal experiences, emotions, and reflections related to the Holocaust. The art created by Karl Stojka after being released from the concentration camp is used to explore these themes.

Karl was born in Austria in 1931 and lived with his parents and his five siblings in his tribe of Lowara Roma who lived as itinerant horse traders (*Karl Stojka on Auschwitz*, 2021). In 1941, Stojka's father was murdered in the Dachau concentration camp, and in 1943 the Gestapo took the 11 year old Karl out of school and deported him and the rest of his family to Auschwitz-Birkenau (Helstein, 2008). Of his five siblings, only two survived. After Karl

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Stokja was freed from the concentration camp (April 24th, 1945) he started to paint the reality he had experienced there and thematized his life story as a persecuted Roma.



Figure 1. Fear at Auschwitz-Birkenau June-July 1943, 1989

Oil on canvas

*Art as Memory – the Documentary Canvases of Karl Stojka, a Roma in
Auschwitz-Birkenau . (2015). Sarah*

Matthias. <https://www.sarahmatthias.co.uk/articles/art-as-memory-the-documentary-canvases-of-karl-stojka-a-roma-in-auschwitz-birkenau/>

Figure 1 portrays the Roma in line to enter the concentration camps, their faces look scared and confused. The black, thick and bold brushstrokes of the outline of the people are contrasted with the colorful and vivid clothes they wear. The colorful clothes symbolize the vivacity and colorful character of the Roma. In the documentary by Helstein (2008), Karl states “I am gypsy, gypse is color, life”. The colors are used in most of Karl’s paintings and serve as a way to reclaim a personal narrative representing the identity and spirit of the Roma.



Figure 2. The gypsy camp Belle at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1989

Art as Memory – the Documentary Canvases of Karl Stojka, a Roma in Auschwitz-Birkenau . (2015). Sarah

Matthias. <https://www.sarahmatthias.co.uk/articles/art-as-memory-the-documentary-canvases-of-karl-stojka-a-roma-in-auschwitz-birkenau/>

As historical time progresses the colors of Karl’s paintings become less colorful and more red and black (Figures 2 & 3), which may represent the switch from a colorful to a dull and ashy life. Figure 2 shows the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp with no one inside and red and black smoke coming out of the chimney of the gas chamber. In the documentary Karl mentions that “the color in Auschwitz was red. Only red, only fire. And still today I got this fire, I see this fire. Nobody can take it out from me. Only maybe death, when he comes to me he takes it away, this fire” (Helstein, 2008). The red and black smoke that comes out of the chimney is contrasted with the cold colors from the sky and the black from the floor (see

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Figure 2). The color red may represent blood and death, yet it is still the only vibrant color in the canvas, which may refer to the last breath of life that was being carbonized in the gas chamber. The different use of color in his paintings may reflect his emotions and provide an outlet for the release of intense emotions (Kandel, 2012).

Karl's vigorous application of paint in his works may show the intensity of the artist's feelings and sense of urgency of expression. The visible texture may represent the emotional depth of the artist state, allowing the viewer to connect with the raw and visceral emotions portrayed in the artwork (Kandel, 2012). It may symbolize the artist's self-assuredness and the desire to make a bold visual impact. In fact Karl mentions: "I made over 100 pictures, I don't want to forget everything you know. My life in a concentration camp was really bad and I like to make these pictures for the world" (Helstein, 2008). This shows how Karl's art was not only a way to convey his personal experience and provide cathartic release, but also a way to engage with historical memory in a personal and meaningful way.

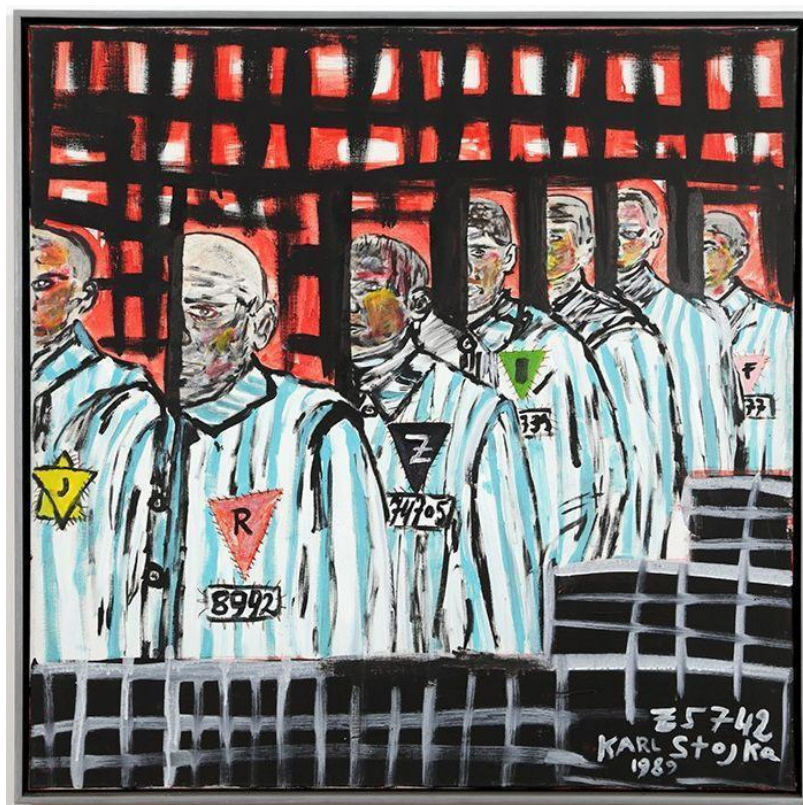


Figure 3. Half people, half faces, 1989

*Art as Memory – the Documentary Canvases of Karl Stojka, a Roma in
Auschwitz-Birkenau* . (2015). Sarah

Matthias. <https://www.sarahmatthias.co.uk/articles/art-as-memory-the-documentary-canvases-of-karl-stojka-a-roma-in-auschwitz-birkenau/>

In Figure 3 only half of the faces of the people are visible and the other half is hidden behind a red and black grid. The representation of only half faces of the people may show how they were treated as half humans during the Holocaust. The only half of the body that is visible to the viewer contains the number and symbol that they went by inside the camps (e.g., the yellow star, or red or black triangle.). This may symbolize the only part of themselves that the Nazi acknowledged, which was their race and categorization, whilst their individual half, where lies their humanity and uniqueness, was engaged and trapped behind bars. The paintings may communicate and help understand Karl's experience of dehumanization during the holocaust.

As seen through the eyes of Karl Stojka, Holocaust art is a tool for self-expression which allows individuals to confront their own histories, emotions, and identities in relation to the Holocaust. In that sense, the artwork, its color, brushstrokes, symbolic content, can serve to process human suffering from bottom-up. Through their creative expression, artists contribute to the collective memory, can challenge historical narratives, and provide a platform for healing, remembrance, and dialogue.

Logotherapy and Art Therapy

Logotherapy can be complementary to other therapeutic approaches (Frankl, 2006). While the body and mind can be approached through biological and psychological interventions, the spirit of a person cannot be fragmented, and represents their spiritual essence. Therefore, integrating Logotherapy with other therapeutic modalities facilitates a

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more holistic recovery by addressing the biological, psychological, and existential dimensions of the issue at hand.

Art Therapy can be an effective tool for self-exploration, and allows humans to externalize and process internal struggles. Meanwhile, Logotherapy can help individuals reflect on their artistic creations and discover deeper meanings within themselves via their art. Therefore, Logotherapy can enhance Art Therapy's therapeutic effect by exploring the meaning in their artistic expression.

Top-down approach: Logotherapy

Holocaust Art and the expression of human spirit

Holocaust art reflects the resilience, endurance, and strength of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable suffering. Logotherapy recognizes the inherent capacity of individuals to find meaning and purpose, even in the most adverse circumstances, and Holocaust art can be seen as an embodiment of this spirit. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982) a creative product remains meaningless unless the individual can relate himself to it. That is, art without self-identification are "façades without substance, masks without life, condemned to die" (p.26). Within the artworks lies the expression of the human spirit where we can find meaning and purpose.

Holocaust art and freedom of will

The Holocaust art reflects the resistance of individuals who refused to succumb to dehumanization and oppression. Through their art, these artists asserted their humanity, and aimed to preserve their individual voices and agency in the face of extreme adversity. Their creative expression became a form of resistance against the forces that sought to devalue and destroy them. In the documentary, the artist and holocaust survivor Frederick Terna states that "hen life is regimented to the endlessly gray, being in front of a white rectangle and arranging plants... I am in total control. I was the one who decided what goes here, there, the mood, the

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outline, the composition... It was an escape. And that was true for all art. The way you performed was not controlled by anybody but yourself" (Helsetein, 2008, see Figure 4). Art served as a way for them to express their spirit and humanity even in such horrible conditions. When painting the artist is in control and is free to represent their reality as they perceive it. In this sense the Holocaust Art allowed them to externalize their *freedom of will*, unraveling their deepest spiritual realities, and bringing them to awareness. Friedl Dicker, an artist and educator at the Theresienstadt, said that "the most important thing to expect from creative drawing is the expression of all powerful freedom" (Helsetein, 2008).



Figure 4. An Echo of Cinders by Frederick Terna, June 2003, Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in, Collection of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Terna, Fred. (2023). Museum of Jewish Heritage — a Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Retrieved June 11, 2023, from <https://mjhnyc.org/in-memoriam/terna-fred/>

Holocaust Art and will to meaning

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Frankl states that individuals have a deep-seated need for meaning and that this need serves as a primary motivator in human existence. Even in the face of suffering and adversity, individuals can find meaning and purpose, which can provide them with the strength to endure and overcome challenges. The art made in the holocaust may represent such will to meaning by providing them a sense of purpose and fulfillment. According to Sammuel Bak, survivor of the Guetto Vilna, "the people needed [art] simply for the sake of their own soul, identity, survival, they needed culture, they needed something to give meaning to their lives" (Helsetein, 2008, see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Samuel Bak, *Icon of Loss, Burning* (2008; oil on canvas, 122 x 152 cm)

Baratta, I. (2022, January 27). *Samuel Bak, the artist of childhood lost in the Holocaust. And the museum dedicated to him.*

Finestre Sull'Arte. Retrieved June 11, 2023,

from <https://www.finestresullarte.info/en/works-and-artists/samuel-bak-the-artist-of-childhood-lost-in-the-holocaust-and-the-museum-dedicated-to-him>

The art depicting the Holocaust evokes internal turmoil. Frederick Terna stated that "painting these things is catharsis and very dangerous. I don't paint these things easily

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because it required me to immerse myself in memories and feelings that are far from positive” (Helsetein, 2008, see Figure 4). Despite the internal struggles, the artist persisted in this endeavor because the purpose behind it became more significant than the challenges faced. In a sense, his suffering was transformed into resilience as the creation process provided meaning to his existence.

Numerous Holocaust artists expressed that a primary purpose behind their artwork was to serve as first hand witnesses to the atrocities they experienced (Hlavec, 2022; Helsetein, 2008). Simon Wiesenthal, survivor of the Janowska concentration camp said: “if they have found it (the artworks)? Oh immediately they’d have killed me. I make it as a witness” (Helsetein, 2008, see Figure 6). Similarly, Yehuda Bacon, another holocaust survivor, emphasized the importance of preserving the drawings made in the concentration camps, stating that they may hold significance for others, and that now was the time for people to learn from them. These artists sought to give voice to their experiences, ensure that the truth was not forgotten, and educate future generations about the Holocaust's profound impact. In this sense having a clear sense of why one exists and what they are striving for enabled them to endure and overcome even the most challenging and difficult circumstances they encountered, it provided them with a sense of strength and resilience.



Figure 6. Symphonia Diabolica Mauthausiensis by Simon Wiesenthal 1945

“KZ. Mauthausen”, by Simon Wiesenthal – Linz-Vienna, 1946 – Dedication Handwritten by Wiesenthal. (2023). Kedem Auction House Ltd.

Retrieved June 12, 2023,

from <https://www.kedem-auctions.com/en/content/kz-mauthausen-simon-wiesenthal-%E2%80%93-linz-vienna-1946-%E2%80%93-dedication-handwritten-wiesenthal>.

Holocaust art, meaning of life of self-transcendence

Lastly, this review will cover how this Holocaust art reflects the last principle of Logotherapy, namely, finding *meaning of life*. Frankl (2006) states that in order for self-actualization to occur one has to engage in self-transcendence, which was done by the holocaust survivors (e.g., in the documentary “As seen through these eyes”) via their paintings and testimonies, also to speak for the people that did not survive the Holocaust. Ella Weissberger who survived Theresienstadt camp asked to “please remember my friend because they are not here to speak for themselves (...) [and explained that] I am here so that is what I do now speak in their voices” (Helsetein, 2008). Samuel Bak likewise said that “the boy is as far as I carry today the survival of those many that did not survive” (Helsetein, 2008, see Figure 5). Through their testimony we can see that their artistic creation around the Holocaust theme goes beyond them externalizing their inner struggles, as the preservation of these memories served them as a deeper source of purpose and meaning. By actively seeking and cultivating meaning in life, individuals can enhance their well-being, find inner fulfillment, and navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and purpose (Frankl, 2006; Hlavek, 2022).

Conclusion and further considerations

This review aimed to address the question: *how paintings can contribute to the promotion of resilience through the search for meaning*. It utilized the analysis of paintings to illustrate the potential of Art Therapy as a valuable tool for self-expression. The colors,

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brushstrokes and content of the images are a symbolic representation of their memories capturing the essence of their experiences, emotions and sensations that may be difficult to be expressed in words. Painting allows individuals to externalize their inner experiences in a tangible and visible form facilitating a better understanding of their experiences and making them more accessible for exploration and reflection.

Complementarily, Logotherapy allows people to reflect on their paintings and support the search for meaning in challenging circumstances. By engaging in a reflective process, individuals could gain insights into their strengths, values, and source of resilience, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves. Individuals could explore existential questions, reframe their experiences, and find purpose and significance to their lives allowing them to better cope with stressful situations. Paintings act as a medium for introspection, self-discovery and insights that foster resilience and a sense of meaning.

In summary, Art Therapy offers a means of externalizing our internal processes, enabling a more objective view of ourselves. Through self-distancing, individuals can detach themselves from their emotions, facilitating the processing and integration of traumatic experiences. On the other hand, Logotherapy assists in assimilating traumatic experiences by fostering a search for meaning through reflection and interpretation. Discovering a self-transcending meaning in one's life experiences provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment, which in turn helps individuals endure challenging circumstances and cultivate resilience.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this paper. Firstly, the essay focused on individual cases, and it remains unknown whether these interpretations would generalize to a broader population. While this limits generalizability, it also reflects the subjective and personal nature of these experiences, which may be challenging to measure using standardized scales. Secondly, the review primarily drew on Frankl's perception of

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resilience, recognizing that there may be other perspectives worth exploring. Moreover, the interpretation of Karl's paintings is subject to biases, which may affect the validity of the results.

Nevertheless, this paper provides a foundation for further exploration and study. Further studies might benefit from exploring whether paintings also would help to promote resilience in a different contexts and population. It may also be meaningful to investigate counterexamples, examine cases in which art did not foster resilience. This additional information would contribute to a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms by which art can promote resilience. Furthermore, conducting qualitative research using coding systems could uncover patterns, generate theories, and enhance the overall quality and validity of findings in this field.

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