My Journey in Art Therapy

I don’t clearly understand what I am thinking until I see what I have drawn.

Author Unknown
Survival Through Art

My art has been used as a first step to process the emotional issues of my life. Through art I could clearly understand my struggle and articulate how I felt about the struggles impact.

Charles Anderson
The Struggle

Acrylic Painting
The sun represents the overpowering pressure of opposition. Notice the arms and body postures for some individuals in the painting as they enter the struggle. One individual is about to overcome and in the process begins to sink into the earth. Another individual notices the person sinking and prepares to help the individual from sinking deeper.

Each individual in the picture represents many individuals who will one day overcome their struggles, but the impact leaves a sting that changes their view. A view of how they see themselves and the world around them for they will never be the same.

Charles Anderson
The Struggle
Obstacles

Doors were open for me but some were shrouded with barriers and stipulations that attempted to keep me from getting through the “open” doors. My personal stories include repeatedly hearing the following statements, “our reservations are full,” “the job has just been filled,” “the house your interested in no longer is on the market,” or “just sold but we have listings on the other side of town.”

Charles Anderson
Obstacles

Black and White Film – Digitally Enhanced

Darkroom Alterations
Window of Possibility

*Black and White Film:* Pictures of windows symbolize for me a view beyond my social and political confinements.

Charles Anderson
This window symbolized looking back at the old tire swing and recalling a happy childhood. I lived in a white farm neighborhood and as life progressed, racism became more evident and increasingly overwhelming.

Charles Anderson
Restaurant Entrance

Black and White Film-with color highlights:
The alley reminds me of the time when public accommodations such as restaurants, movies, and drinking fountains were segregated. Often times we could eat in some restaurants if we entered through the alley and ate in the kitchen.

Charles Anderson
Restaurant Entrance
Poverty

Black and White Film—with color highlights:

Although poverty is an economic condition that can touch anyone, this picture symbolizes the powerful impact poverty has had on me. Especially, when I saw people going through garbage cans. By today’s standards we were raised poor, but I didn’t realize it then.

Charles Anderson
Poverty
Learning Disability

**Hard Edge Acrylic Painting:**
This symbolizes what my learning disability looked like. It has had a major impact on my life and included several academic dismissals and criticism. For example, in high school I failed vocational auto mechanics and my high school counselor said, “I don’t know what to tell you if you can’t succeed on the vocational track.” I asked about college and he replied, “you won't last two weeks in college.”

It was easy to be stereotyped when you are an African American and an athlete. Being an art major didn't always help either.

Charles Anderson
Learning Disability
What’s in your Future?

Is our world a fiery ball of confusion and the solar system becoming fractured? At this point in my life there was racial unrest. Burning, beating in the streets, and war in Vietnam. I knew I would be drafted into the army soon and in the midst of this chaos, I was having difficulty in school again.

Charles Anderson
What’s in your Future

**Mixed Media Collage with paint, canvas strips and Styrofoam**

**Hard Edge Painting with aluminum honeycomb cover**
Different Perceptions

**Hard Edge Acrylic Painting:**
This picture represents my life coming together. My art was more positive. My Army career was successful teaching art, jewelry making, photography, and dark room techniques. In the army reserves I worked with soldiers suffering from emotional trauma.

After the army I was able to graduate from college on the Dean’s list, got married, and later in life was grandfathered in as an art therapist. It was my faith and my spirituality that turned my life around.

These paintings are all the same but different lighting can lead to different perceptions. In my experience, disagreements in life between one person's perception and another, life experience can be the basis for many current multicultural conflicts. For example, since I experienced applying the paint to the canvas and mixing the colors, I know the true colors. I am not confused about other’s perception. I must be respected for what I know from my life experience.

Charles Anderson
Different Perceptions
THANK YOU

I thank you for the opportunity to share our art work with you.

Charles Anderson and Greg Dawson
Cloudy Sunrise