

MILLER BIO

Wendy Miller, Ph.D., ATR - BC, REAT, LPC

I am the co-founder of Create Therapy Institute, 1994 in Bethesda, MD and since 2001 in Kensington, MD. We offer clinical services in arts-based psychotherapy and trainings in expressive arts therapies and experiential approaches to learning. I am a founding member and first elected (past) Executive Co-Chair of the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA). An integrative thinker, my skills take me into the worlds of fine art, writing, psychology, expressive arts therapy, and mind-body medicine.

My studio is where I work with materials, creating mixed-media artworks with clay, glass, paper, wire, sand, and stone; as well, my office/studio is where I work with students, colleagues and psychotherapy clients through Create Therapy Institute. I have taught in various universities throughout the country for over twenty years in both fine art and expressive arts therapy. I have exhibited in California and the metropolitan Washington DC area, and published writings on creativity and identity, which include my visual and poetic art works and clinical findings with medically ill clients, international adoptive families and multi-culturalism. I continue research on the relationships among the arts, creativity and health, and currently, I am working on the book I began with my late husband, Gene Cohen, on our life together. This 2015 upcoming book through Oxford University Press is titled *Sky Above Clouds: Finding our way through creativity, aging and illness time*.

Having the institute and my art studio in the same building allows more time and space to engage in my own artwork and its connections with integration and healing. I am deeply informed by the cycle of seasons, by developmental processes in time, by my own cultural heritage, and by the power of arrangement and ritual.



Miller Art Studio (first floor) and Create Therapy Institute (second floor)

In designing my art and clinical practice studio, my architect listened to the type of work I do. She was so moved by some of the stories of the people with whom I creatively collaborate in the service of health, that she told me: “the work that you do is holy.” I don’t know if I understand what holy means, but I know that the gifts I experience with people are extremely special. The steps that transform are slow, and arduous; they are careful undertakings that happen millisecond by millisecond in one’s life, usually alone and outside the therapy office. The office is really a practice laboratory of intimacy and remembrance. Psychic history witnessed, recorded and recalled.

It is hard to separate out the strands of who I am as an artist and who I am as an expressive arts therapist. It is an integration where both types of exploration use materials, action, and the intimacy of our psyches. I am a creative detective. I walk with people through their inner landscapes, discovering and uncovering clues of body, mind, spirit, the arts and healing. Many of the people I see are living life under different conditions: medical illnesses, creation of family through international adoptions, physical, emotional and spiritual challenges which impact one’s sense of identity through change, grief and loss.

The primary question I ask is: What is taking place in the creative experience, and how is the creative expression related to healing? To be a creative detective, my therapeutic task is to help a person be in touch with what most enlivens them, and to risk to live from that place. This is the work I do in both art and therapy.

“Framed creatively, our wellbeing is our aliveness. This is the quantity that defines everything else. Health is the total aliveness of a system. Healing is anything that nourishes or challenges that system so that its total aliveness increases.”
(Charles Johnston)

Wendy Miller is featured in:

Retirement Living TV (2007). Healthline, Episode 2.85 *Art Therapy*, Miller interviewed by Dr. Kevin Soden.

Expressive Media, Inc. (2004). *Art Therapy with Older Adults*, excerpts from her work *Portrait of Pleasure Endeavors*, the story of Miller’s work as an artist-in-residence at Laguna Honda Hospital.

Strategic Implications International (1996). *Healing Through Art*, the story of the painter Darcy Lynn’s experience with lymphoma cancer.

Create Therapy Institute (1992). *Mind-Body Connections in Therapy: Perspectives From an Art Therapist, An Evening with Wendy Miller*.

MILLER ARTIST STATEMENT ON ARTWORKS

The enclosed three works are part of a series entitled **Sandscapes**. I see them as visual representations of the inner landscape of loss. Over years of facing cancer in my family, with the eventual death of my mother, father and husband, it became impossible for me to tend works of clay, as I could no longer meet the necessary timing of the material. I began to work with remnants of my pieces, wiring them into the paper, asking small reminders to hold the memory of the whole. I needed my materials to express the fragility of crackage; the beauty of small remainders; and the possibility of sustained hope. Sandscapes are records of relationship and remembrance: images as memories, reflections, and overlays of time. Finding an aesthetic to transport love, loss, connection and continuity became the goal of my art.



Wendy Miller, Sandscape I: Family Pillars, 21" x 17.5", paper, sand, ceramic, and wire



Wendy Miller, Sandscape II: Floating, 15" x 13", paper, sand, ceramic, wire, and wood



Wendy Miller, Sandscape III: Leaving, 15.3" x 22.3", paper, sand, ceramic, wire, and wood

MILLER STATEMENT ON EXHIBITING WITH ARTIST CLIENTS

I have invited two artist-clients to present their paintings in this exhibition with me. Within our therapeutic exchange, I share with both of them the experience of loss, and its accompanying existential trauma. We each have been challenged by chronic illness, accompanied in recent years, by the death of a beloved family member. For Patricia Skinner, her mother; for Janet Mathias, her stepmother and great aunt; for me, Wendy Miller, my mother, my father and my husband.

My clinical work with these two artist-clients has a particular quality. It is not only what we share in our process as art-makers, but also our challenges forging new identities in the face of deep loss. Our therapeutic sessions are not about MY losses, yet my lived experiences inform my work and accompany both my creativity and my therapeutic presence. There are many experiences in which a therapist makes a decision about self-disclosure. With the losses of both my mother and my father, seven years apart, and then a mere four years later, the loss of my own husband, all to cancer, I did not have a choice in the option of disclosure. My life revealed itself. My long-term clients supported me in their care, patience, insight, and understanding.

Both of these artist-clients have been working with me for many years. Our work is not only therapy – it is mentorship, relationship, shared guidance, psychosocial exchange, creativity, accompaniment, and love.

Unlike some art therapy sessions with my other clients, these two artist-clients seldom create art in my studio during our therapeutic hour. They certainly have done so at points in time, but it is not the format of our exchange. Their images emerge, and are part of our dialog: making, observing and reflecting on them is incorporated in our exchange. But each of us returns to the quiet and solitude of our own studios to create our artworks.

In exhibiting our art pieces for *Revealing the Light Within: The Healing Powers of Expressive Arts*, we are making a statement together – respect for our lives as women artists; shared meaning in the process of coming through the transformer of love and death, mixed with our own iterations of grieving loss; and an ownership of our roles, not only as artist-makers, but as artist-healers revealing the light and darkness of the human spirit.

There is no pain greater than the loss of a loved one; than the impact and concomitant experience of the illnesses that take place in our body's systems. When a loved one dies, the experience of death is a physical reality, but it is also an existential and spiritual reality. It changes everything about us cellularly, and therefore about how we work, how we share, what we see and what we are able to do. We live in a culture that wants us to resolve our grief long before we even come close; a culture that wants us to be healthy *now*; a culture that rewards the burden of silence rather than the gift of a listening patience in time.

Reclaiming the content of our art to not only allude to but include our stories of loss is a testament to grief shared and witnessed by another. In therapy and in art, we do have choices about our own imaginations. As Jeanne Achterberg writes, "*Imagination is the oldest medicine in the world.*" Exhibiting my own art in collaboration with Patricia Skinner and Janet Mathias is a gift of shared imagination.