THE TRANSFORMING POTENTIAL OF ART AND IMAGINATION
23. Nordic Art Therapy Conference
21.-24.5.2026 Tampere, Finland

When Bodies Sound: The Unexpected as a Space for Imagination and Transformation

Eliana Danzi, Italy
PhD student at the University of Palermo

"All things are so very uncertain, and that's exactly what makes me feel reassured"
Tove Jansson

The relationship between sound and corporeality reveals deep symbolic, aesthetic, and relational dimensions, offering a pathway to explore the transformative potential of imagination. In educational, artistic, and art therapeutic practices, body and sound become instruments of knowledge and change. This workshop draws inspiration from the Kierkegaardian leap of faith - an act of trust toward the unexpected. When facilitators learn to receive rather than to control, stories and emotions emerge spontaneously, finding expression through sound. Body percussion will serve as the primary medium for this exploration - a corporeal art form that transforms body sounds into music, integrating movement, rhythm, and relational awareness. It offers an embodied and participatory learning space in which sound itself becomes the object of inquiry: where do you come from? What do you harmonize with? How do you transform? Within this perspective, musicality is understood as a universal yet uniquely personal competence, rooted in aesthetic and sensorimotor experience. Improvisation, play, and unpredictability become strategies for cultivating flexibility and the capacity to respond to others and to the world with openness and responsibility.Through a multimodal and embodied approach, participants will engage in a shared creative experience and reflect on how imagination, activated through the sounding body, can foster connection, evoke stories, and facilitate empathic understanding of self and other.

Eliana Danzì *is primary and secondary school teacher, musician, and trainer in the fields of pedagogy and music education, as well as a certified expert in the Orff-Schulwerk methodology.*
Her passion for body music has led her to participate in workshops in Italy, France, Germany, Senegal, Brazil, and Greece. She conducts body percussion workshops and seminars for major Italian music institutions and associations and collaborates as a speaker with INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, and Educational Research).

She is currently pursuing a PhD in Technologies and Methods for University Education at the University of Palermo. Her research lies at the intersection of pedagogical sciences, embodied theories, and music in secondary schools, with a particular focus on how embodied experiences contribute to learning, including abstract concepts.

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Rediscovering Creativity and Inspiration Through Play: Simple Games in Art Therapy with Children and Youth

Epp Sussen, Estonia
Visual arts therapist, NGO Ojaveere, Editor-in-chief of ELTÜs magazine: ELTÜ ajakiri | Eesti Loovteraapiate

Many children and young people approach their first art therapy session with hesitation. They often believe they are "not creative" or fear making mistakes. In such moments, even simple creative activities or coloring can feel overwhelming. This is where play becomes a powerful therapeutic bridge. In my practice, I have discovered that games — even something as familiar as tic-tac-toe — can serve as a gentle and inviting entry point into creative expression. When combined with small artistic elements, these playful interactions help clients reconnect with their imagination and experience the joy of creating without fear of judgment.

In this workshop, participants will explore and experiment with a selection of simple, adaptable games that support clients in rediscovering their creativity. Together, we will reflect on how playful, low-pressure activities can foster a sense of safety, agency, and curiosity in art therapy sessions. The focus will be on practical examples that encourage clients to engage with art materials freely and to let their personal experiences inspire further creative work.

Epp Sussen *works daily with children and young people at the Ojaveere Mental Health Centre and as part of the rehabilitation team at Rapla Hospital. Epp holds a Master's degree in Art Therapy from Tallinn University and has also trained in the Person-Centred Approach through APPCA. She is a member of the Estonian Association of Creative Therapies and serves as the editor-in-chief of the association's journal. Additionally, Epp represents their organization within the European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT). She finds that her clients continue to surprise her and teach her something new in almost every session. She is deeply grateful for their trust and for the opportunity to accompany them on their journeys of growth, expression, and healing.*

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Facilitating Emotional Well-being and Memory through the Transforming Potential of Drawing and Imagination

Unnur G. Óttarsdóttir, Iceland
The Reykjavik Academy, The Icelandic University of the Arts, Continuing Education Department of University of Akureyri

The emerging role of drawing as a transformative tool that enhances both memory recall and emotional integration will be explored in the workshop. Grounded in recent research, the session highlights how drawing facilitates long-term retention of words, not only for those who struggle with word-based memorisation but also for those who initially excel at it. Drawing creates a bridge between the drawn encoded words and the conscious memory through the symbols and shape of the image.

The application of memory drawings in therapeutic settings for traumatised children will be examined. Trauma can fragment both memory and narrative continuity, making it difficult to create coherent stories of self. Yet through imaginative art-making, children often rediscover their capacity to shape and reframe personal experiences. The process of transforming inner images into visible form enables integration of fragmented memories, supports emotional well-being, and enhances their capacity for learning. In this way, drawing and imagination become catalysts for transformation, bridging past experiences and new possibilities for meaning and growth.

Case material will illustrate how memory drawing can be integrated into art therapy, offering a dual function: fostering emotional well-being while strengthening memory-based learning. Participants will be invited to engage in an experiential drawing activity to explore how drawing transforms the act of remembering.

*Dr **Unnur G. Óttarsdóttir** has practised art therapy in various institutions for over thirty-five years. She is also a researcher at the Reykjavik Academy. Unnur has taught art therapy in universities and associations internationally. She is the chair of an educational committee for the Icelandic Association of Art Therapists, which is working toward setting up an art therapy education. She serves on the steering group of the Research Committee at the European Federation of Art Therapy, and she sits on the board of the Reykjavik Academy. Unnur is one of the leading scientists on the subject of memory drawing. Her work has been published worldwide, covering topics such as art therapy, memory drawing, drawing to connect, research through art, and grounded theory methodology.*
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Cardamom Bun Workshop: Meeting with Inner Children

Mari Lindfors, Finland
Art psychotherapist (MoA, MSc), Psychotherapist

The aim of the workshop is to create a space for listening to one's own needs and meeting oneself and others with compassion. Cardamom bun dough, a material often associated with care and nurturing, is used for image-making.

The workshop begins with led tuning into the body, followed by silent baking. Participants are invited to freely shape their inner child. The workshop is divided into two 45-minute sessions. The second part begins with an encounter with the warm bun figure. Then, each participant is invited to place their figure into a collective installation, followed by a shared reflection.

The workshop is underpinned by art psychotherapy, psychophysical psychotherapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and compassion-focused therapy. Its core idea is that through embodiment, gentle presence, art and play, we can access needs that often go unnoticed and unmet. It also aims to offer an experience of heartful social connection and sharing.

The roots of this workshop go back to 2002, when I presented the Bread Babies -performance in Athens as part of my Master of Arts studies and later at a performing arts festival in Dublin 2010. Work with bun figures continued in 2016 at the Nordic Art Therapy Conference in Helsinki. The proposed workshop focuses on compassion and embodiment.

***Mari Lindfors** is a psychotherapist with a background in Art Education (MoA) and Art Psychotherapy (MSc). Through supplementary training, she has specialised in psychophysical psychotherapy, also known as body psychotherapy.*

Mari has worked as an art therapist since 2011 and as a psychotherapist (CBT) since 2018. Two years ago, she moved her practice from a psychotherapy center in Helsinki to a private office in Porvoo.

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LandArt as a Door Opener to Inner Landscapes

Ruth Hol Mjanger, Norway
professor in drama, art and culture and master student in arts therapy, ARTografer, NLA University College

This outdoor workshop invites participants to engage with the theme "Paths in Life" through a site-responsive, art therapy intervention based in artistic practice. The intervention begins with an encounter with glass sculptures named Expressions of Breath — objects that evoke presence. A reminder of the invisible community we share through the air. Participants then embark on a silent, collective walk, carrying the sculptures.

At a selected site, participants are invited to attune themselves to the landscape. In response, each participant creates an individual Land Art piece, shaped by the dialogue between inner experience and outer landscape. The process culminates in a reflective sharing, followed by a silent return walk to the conference venue.

Note: The thematic focus may shift in resonance with the qualities of the site, allowing the workshop to remain open to site-specific information.

The workshop builds on interventions developed during Mjanger's practical training sessions in the arts therapy master's programme in 2025. The design and theoretical foundation of these interventions are currently in progress as part of her semester assignment and will be completed in time for the conference in May.

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***Ruth Hol Mjanger** is a professor in drama, art, and culture at NLA University College in Oslo, Norway. She has extensive experience within A/R/Tography, working across roles as artist, researcher, and teacher, and has held multiple leadership positions. She has worked in teacher education for over two decades, with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary and international collaboration.*

Ruth's artistic practice is in the artist duo Frantzsen&Mjanger, in partnership with Maria Almås Frantzsen (visual art/glass). Together, they draw on interdisciplinary competence to move beyond conventional glassmaking, merging craft with performative, contemporary art. www.frantzsenmjanger.com

In both artistic and educational contexts, Ruth's work often approaches the threshold of therapeutic practice. In 2024, she commenced a master's degree in arts therapy at OsloMet to cross that threshold with professional competence. She is particularly interested in outdoor art therapy, inspired by friluftsliv—the Norwegian outdoor tradition.

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Face and Facing

Kari Heikkilä, Finland
trainer psychotherapist (individual-, pair-, family- art- and group therapist; group analyst, CEO Psykoterapiakeskus Mielekäs Oy Psychotherapy Center Mielekas Ltd

In this traditional workshop, participants create portrait drawings using a graphite stick. The portrait is drawn from a frontal view on an A4 copy paper, which is attached to the back side of a drawing board. The drawer cannot see the image while drawing.

A series of portraits is produced in rapid succession—typically 12 drawings. Each image takes 5 to 15 seconds to complete. The purpose is to draw spontaneously, allowing the images to emerge freely and intuitively. The images become associated with the person's current life situation, as reflected through the face drawing. Discussion questions arise from the impressions created by the images, in a here-and-now situation.

A related variation involves creating portraits on A3 paper using black watercolor applied with a thick brush. In this version, the participant can see the image as it develops. A group dialogue follows similarly.

An alternative approach is to conduct a collective drawing session at the beginning and/or end of the conference, in which all participants draw a face using graphite sticks. With well-planned facilitation, the session can be completed in approximately 5–15 minutes. Each drawing board holds two A4 sheets of copy paper—one on each side—and participants work in pairs, either simultaneously or in alternating roles. One participant may guide the other through the process with simple verbal instructions for example: "Draw a face from the front."

***Kari Heikkilä** holds a Master of Education degree and has worked as a school counselor, a primary school teacher, and a teacher of mathematics and visual arts. He also has more than 25 years of experience working as a psychotherapist. Kari began as a family therapist and has since completed further training in individual and art therapy, as well as a seven-year training in analytical group psychotherapy.*

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