

# BARBARA DAVIS

## BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Davis, MSW, MFA, REAT, LCSW is a Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT) and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) with training in trauma informed expressive arts therapy, contemporary psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and mind-body medicine. Barbara has been practicing for over 30 years, 20 of those years in her own private practice.

Barbara has a Master of Social Work (MSW) and a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) from Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA. In addition, Barbara has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) from the Rhode Island School of Design. Barbara's post-graduate training includes a Certificate in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, a Certificate in Mind-Body Medicine, and a Certificate in



Trauma Informed Expressive Arts Therapy. Barbara is a Touch Drawing Facilitator and uses both Touch Drawing and Guided Drawing in her private practice, as well as in community workshops. After receiving her MSW, Barbara worked in addictions treatment programs, integrating the treatment of mental health disorders into traditional addiction treatment settings. In addition to her work as a therapist and expressive arts facilitator, Barbara has worked as a teacher of young children, part time faculty at the Graduate School of Social Work, Rutgers University, and served a supervisor, program director and director of a residential substance abuse treatment agency. Barbara has published a chapter on



*Group image from The Art and Yoga Body Mapping Workshop Series Spring 2021. We combined Yoga, Meditation, Music, Dance, Art Making and Writing.*



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trauma and psychoanalytic psychotherapy and has been a field expert and field reviewer for CSAT/SAMHSA's Treatment Improvement Protocols.

Barbara's long career as a psychotherapist and expressive arts therapist, specializing in trauma recovery and the integration of self, parallels the themes of the sculpture she makes. As both a therapist and artist, Barbara has always been fascinated by the relationship between insides and outsides, specifically how what is on the inside is, or is not, reflected on the

outside. She is particularly interested in the discrepancy between what is seen and unseen. This fascination is reflected in her work both as a sculptor as well as an expressive arts therapist, helping others to explore their inner worlds and find various ways to express that which has been hidden. Much of Davis's art explores the idea that parts - sometimes disparate and unwanted parts - make up a whole and are always present, even if unknown.

## WHAT DREW YOU TO THE FIELD OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS?

I first discovered the healing power of the arts as a high school student when my father was hospitalized with a life threatening illness. At that time I noticed that the only time I was free of worry was when I was engaged in a creative process. I understood immediately that this was not unique to me and that it was the creative process that mattered, not the art object that was being created. I made a decision at that moment that I needed to pursue a career in the arts, with a focus on health and healing. While the path to becoming a REAT took many turns, the seed was planted in 1980 - when few folks had heard of the expressive arts, and long before IEATA came into being!

As a teacher of young children, I regularly relied on the sensory experiences of art materials, - water, sand, paint, clay - along with the natural world and movement to help settle the children, process emotions, and teach new skills. Intuitively, I combined modalities - dance and paint; music and drawing, drumming and clay - and noticed the children responded well to these activities. At the time I didn't think about why it worked, just that it did.

While I worked for a long time as a talk therapist before becoming an expressive arts therapist, my dream of being an artist and art therapist never quite left me. And then something strange happened. In 2008, having never exercised regularly, I decided to train for a sprint distance triathlon. Standing at the starting line at sunrise of that first race I heard myself say, "If I can do this, then I can return to art." The thought startled me. I had all but given up on being an artist and art therapist. And I was





*Group of Three Flax Fiber  
Sculptures, 2024*

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surprised to hear the dream reappear under those circumstances. It really didn't make any sense to me at the time. What does triathlon have to do with the arts? Although I didn't understand the connection, I listened and I decided to start taking classes in the expressive therapies through various summits and institutes.

As I studied the Expressive Arts - originally and like many - not knowing there was a difference between Art Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy, I realized how

important movement had become to my well being. It dawned on me that participating in triathlon, in other words, exercising/moving regularly for a decade, had changed me. In terms of the Expressive Therapies Continuum, it was the movement - the swimming, biking and running - the Kinesthetic/Sensory Level - that helped me integrate the psychoanalytic training that focused on the Perceptual/Affective and Cognitive/Symbolic Levels of my experience. Suddenly it all made sense. In addition, when I think about how I make art, it has always been a very physical experience. I usually stand and use my whole body when drawing and painting and I make sculptures which have their own physicality - their own volume and weight.

While triathlon isn't for everyone, triathlon can be seen as a metaphor for the expressive arts. I was a triathlete, not a runner or swimmer or cyclist, and as in the Expressive Therapies, to be a triathlete one needs to be able to swim, bike and run but one does not need to be expert at any one sport. I can make sound or music without being a musician. I can write poetry without being a writer and I can use paint without being a painter. And so can the people I work with! In a triathlon there is a phase called "transition"; the space between swimming and cycling and cycling and running. This phase of the event can be the most challenging as the body must switch from one repetitive movement to another and the muscles generally don't want to cooperate. But it is in this transition that the body - and the mind - become stronger and more flexible. While it may feel uncomfortable at the moment, it is the ability to make this transition - to summon one area of strength on behalf of another part of self, that makes one a better athlete. This ability to transfer knowledge through multiple modalities helps us integrate our experiences, turning an "ah ha moment" of insight into deep knowing. For me, this correlates with the layering and intermodal approach of the expressive arts.

I have a natural tendency to integrate and find patterns, making my interest in a multi-sport such as



*Flax Nest on Branch, 2024*

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a triathlon and or a multimodal therapeutic approach such as expressive arts, a good fit for me. I'm not going to do just one thing. This inclination to combine, move between and say, "yes and" as opposed to "either or," helped me integrate mental health treatment into a traditional addictions treatment program early in my career and has helped me work with many traumatized folks for whom "traditional talk therapy" has not been enough.

## HOW ARE YOU IMPLEMENTING MULTIMODAL EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN THE DOMAINS OF THERAPEUTIC WORK, ARTISTIC PRACTICE, CONSULTATION, EDUCATION, AND ACTIVISM?

For the last decade I have been integrating the expressive arts into my practice as a talk therapist. I have found many people benefit from this addition to my practice, helping them to access states of being previously unavailable to them. For many, engaging in the expressive arts has helped quiet their cognitive responses so they can access a more embodied experience. I have found this particularly helpful when working with women with a history of trauma and with neurodivergent folks. While I often suggest some kind of movement, it could range from focusing on a finger to a whole body experience such as shaking, depending on the needs and abilities of the individuals. I use Bi-Lateral Guided Drawing (Cornelia Elbrecht) to help folks connect with their bodies, release traumatic responses, and process emotion. I also regularly rely on the techniques of Focusing Oriented Art Therapy (Laury Rappaport) and guided imagery to increase awareness of the internal felt sense. I have combined art making practices with yoga, meditation, and movement. In addition, I personally practice Touch Drawing on a regular basis, and facilitate Touch Drawing and other expressive arts workshops.

## HOW DO YOU ENVISION YOUR WORK AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE MOVING FORWARD?

My hope is to continue to offer Expressive Arts Workshops and Groups in my local community and online. During this time of great unrest and transition I believe we all benefit from tapping into our creative spirits and connecting with our communities and the natural world. While I absolutely believe in the benefit of insight oriented therapy, at this point in my career I am much more interested in finding ways to share the expressive arts in community. I have been offering classes at local yoga studios, churches, art centers, and schools. My hope is that this will continue so that I may reach a broader audience.



# WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT ROLE OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN YOUR REGION AND INTERNATIONALLY?

While there are many artists, therapists and other healing arts practitioners where I live, there are few expressive arts therapists. There are art classes and there are many healing modalities available - yoga, Tai Chi, music - but few professionals are trained in the intermodal approach of the Expressive Arts. Here I believe I have a unique opportunity to offer the community a deeper experience in the expressive arts, combining modalities and collaborating with others such as those that offer sound healing and yoga. My sense is that the Expressive Therapies have a larger presence in other parts of the country/world and I am hoping to help grow awareness of the Expressive Arts in my region and encourage more people to explore training opportunities.

## HOW DOES BEING A PART OF IEATA IMPACT YOUR WORK IN EXPRESSIVE ARTS?

I joined IEATA in 2019 and attended the Expressive Therapies Symposium at Endicott College, meeting IEATA members in person for the first time. Shortly thereafter the Covid-19 pandemic hit. IEATA-NE met online regularly during the early months of the pandemic. The chapter provided support, guidance around telehealth, and an expressive outlet for all who attended. It felt like a lifeline to me. The joy and passion for the expressive arts shared by the members helped to validate that this was the right place for me. I felt at home. We created the regional Newsletter Committee and for two years I was heavily involved in creating our quarterly Newsletter, Illuminations. Last year, I became one of the Co-Coordinator of our region. During the past 5 years members of IEATA-NE have become good friends and trusted colleagues. I look forward to my continued involvement with IEATA and to meeting more members of IEATA in person at the annual conference in June!



*Unfinished Mask made by participant of Finding Joy Within, an Expressive Arts Workshop Series, Spring 2022. We utilized a variety of art making materials, gentle movement, writing and guided meditation.*

# PARTING THOUGHTS...

*I believe the expressive arts have a key role to play in helping humanity navigate the great transition we are currently facing.*

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## PROFESSIONAL LINKS

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- [www.BarbaraDavisLCSW.com](http://www.BarbaraDavisLCSW.com)
- [www.BarbaraDavisStudio.com](http://www.BarbaraDavisStudio.com)

## EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND AFFILIATIONS

- BFA from Rhode Island School of Design: <https://www.risd.edu/>
- MFA and MSW Rutgers University: <https://www.rutgers.edu/>
- LCSW in NJ (inactive), Maine and Vermont - USA
- Certificate in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, Center for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis of New Jersey: <https://cppnj.org/>
- EXAT - Certificate from Trauma-Informed Practices and Expressive Arts Therapy Institute: <https://www.trauma-informedpractice.com/>
- Guided Drawing; Institute for Sensorimotor Art Therapy <https://www.sensorimotorarttherapy.com/>
- Certificate in Mind-Body Medicine from the Center of Mind Body Medicine: <https://cmbm.org/>  
The Center for Touch Drawing: <https://touchdrawing.com/>
- Focusing Oriented Art Therapy - Level 1: Focusing and Expressive Arts Institute <https://www.focusingarts.com/>