

MAPPING THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE: AN ARTS-BASED HEURISTIC SELF-
INQUIRY INTO INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS-GUIDED COUNTERTRANSFERENCE
RESPONSE ART IN ART THERAPY PRACTICE

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An Arts-Based Heuristic Self-Inquiry Research Project

in

The Department

of

Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Art Therapy Option)

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2025

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This research paper prepared

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Entitled: Mapping the internal landscape: An arts-based heuristic self-inquiry into Internal
Family Systems-guided countertransference response art in art therapy practice

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies: Art Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to
originality and quality as approved by the research advisor.

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August, 2025

ABSTRACT

MAPPING THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE: AN ARTS-BASED HEURISTIC SELF- INQUIRY INTO INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS-GUIDED COUNTERTRANSFERENCE RESPONSE ART IN ART THERAPY PRACTICE

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This arts-based heuristic self-inquiry explores how Internal Family Systems (IFS) guided response art can support countertransference (CT) awareness and professional development in an art therapy intern. Drawing on the shared foundations of IFS and art therapy (including creativity, externalization, and a non-pathologizing stance) this study uses a parts-mapping exercise to guide post-session art making as a reflective tool. Over the course of clinical training, the researcher-participant created response artworks informed by the IFS framework, followed by journal reflections. The data was analyzed through Moustakas's six phases of heuristic inquiry, with particular focus on the illumination and explication of internal processes. Findings suggest that IFS-guided response art offers a valuable method for deepening self-awareness, enhancing CT management, and fostering professional growth in novice art therapists. This study contributes to the emerging literature on integrative models in art therapy and highlights the importance of creative methods in early therapist development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor Heather McLaughlin for your guidance and feedback throughout this project. Your support was appreciated as I navigated this process.

To my cohort, thank you for being such a supportive, insightful, and inspiring group to move through this journey with. I have learned so much from you and your presence made the harder parts feel more manageable.

To my family, thank you for cheering me on, even if you had no idea what I was actually doing. Your belief in me (and confusion about my research topic) meant the world. As it turns out, the embarrassment of being forced to explain this project to strangers at your gatherings really did help me figure out what I was trying to say. It also fueled many stress dreams.

And to my partner, thank you for being by my side through it all, for your patience, encouragement, and the many ways you made space for this work to unfold.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Countertransference (CT) refers to the therapist's emotional reactions to clients, which are mainly shaped by personal history, unresolved issues, or unconscious processes (Gelso & Hayes, 2002; Hayes et al., 1998). These reactions are common in clinical work and, when left unexamined, can impact therapeutic outcomes, especially for new therapists learning to navigate the emotional complexities of the therapeutic relationship (Cabaniss et al., 2011; Cartwright et al., 2015; Levenson et al., 2023). While verbal and theoretical approaches are typically used to teach CT management, many trainees find these methods limiting (Cartwright et al., 2015). Response art, a reflective process where therapists create art in response to sessions, offers an alternative that is more embodied and intuitive, helping to externalize and process internal reactions (Fish, 2017; Nash, 2020).

Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a psychotherapeutic model that conceptualizes the psyche as made up of distinct parts, each with its own perspective, feelings, and role. This model emphasizes the importance of developing relationships with these parts from a centred, compassionate Self (Schwartz, 2021). In this inquiry, IFS serves as the framework for understanding and engaging with my internal responses. Response art, used here as a tool for therapist self-reflection, is guided by IFS principles to help externalize and explore these parts in visual form. Prior research has shown that IFS can support therapist self-awareness and reflection (Mojta et al., 2013), which informed my decision to apply this model to response art in this study.

As an art therapy intern, I often found myself overwhelmed by post-session feelings that were difficult to name or understand. I would leave sessions with lingering images, emotions, or bodily sensations that didn't feel fully mine or fully the client's. While response art helped me begin to explore these reactions, I sometimes reached a point of stuckness, recognizing the feeling without knowing what to do next. I turned to IFS as a way to move deeper, mapping these responses onto inner parts and engaging with them more intentionally. This blend of artmaking and parts work became a powerful tool for reflecting on CT and growing as a therapist.

The Need for Structured, Arts-Based Approaches to Countertransference for Emerging Art Therapists

Countertransference has been extensively documented in the clinical literature (Abargil & Tishby, 2022; Cabaniss et al., 2011, pp. 233-234; Gait & Halewood, 2019; Gelso & Hayes, 2007; Gelso et al., 2002; Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002). However, there remains a lack of structured arts-based strategies specifically designed to support new therapists in identifying, exploring, and regulating these complex responses (Cartwright et al., 2015; Deaver, 2012; Drapeau, 2014; Levenson et al., 2023, Miller, 2007; Nash, 2020). While art therapy literature describes creative practices for processing countertransference, such as response art and visual journaling, these methods are often open-ended and intuitive (Fish, 2012; Drapeau, 2014; Malchiodi, 2003; Miller, 2007; Nash, 2020). For trainees who are still learning to make sense of their internal experiences, this lack of structure can feel overwhelming or unclear (Cartwright et al., 2015; Gait & Halewood, 2019; Nash, 2020).

Existing pedagogical approaches frequently emphasize open and spontaneous art making, verbal processing, and theoretical instruction (Fish, 2012; Malchiodi, 2003; Nash, 2020; Miller, 2007). These approaches may not fully resonate with trainees who benefit more from a blend of structure, creativity, and embodied methods (Cartwright et al., 2015; Drapeau, 2014; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010; Nash, 2020).

This project addresses that gap by investigating how the integration of Internal Family Systems (IFS) with post-session response art can offer a structured yet creative method for engaging with countertransference as it naturally emerges in clinical training. Despite the compatibility of the IFS psychotherapeutic model and the art therapy modality (Lavergne, 2004; Sabados, 2024), and the documented benefits each offers for countertransference reflection and emotional regulation (Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; Deaver, 2012; Nash, 2020), their integrated use as a reflective tool for art therapy trainees has not yet been studied. This research explores that intersection through an arts-based heuristic self-inquiry using IFS-guided post-session response art to examine CT experiences and their impact on professional development. It seeks to illuminate how this approach can support therapist insight, regulation, and compassion in navigating the emotional terrain of clinical training.

This project is guided by the research question: *How can IFS-guided post-session response art processes support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and developing practice?* It explores how response art informed by parts work can offer a meaningful, embodied strategy for processing CT and fostering growth as a therapist.

Purpose

The purpose of this heuristic self-inquiry is to explore how IFS-guided post-session response art can support countertransference reflection and professional development in an art therapy intern. This topic is particularly relevant for student art therapists who are learning to navigate the emotional complexity and ambiguity of early clinical experiences.

Countertransference can be particularly disorienting for new therapists, who are often still developing the capacity to interpret and hold space for their internal responses (Drapeau, 2014; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010; Nash, 2020). While these reactions are rich with therapeutic insight, they can be difficult to navigate without accessible tools (Latts & Gelso, 1995; Robbins & Jolkovski, 1987). By integrating IFS with response art, this study offers a structured yet creative way to engage with countertransference as it arises naturally in clinical work. The process explored here may hold relevance for art therapy training, offering a model that blends intuition with structure to support reflection, emotional regulation, and a more grounded therapeutic presence.

I approached this project by utilizing the research methodology of arts-based heuristic self-inquiry, a method that utilizes a structured approach to experiential engagement, intuitive insight, and creative reflection (Moustakas, 1990; Leavy, 2020). I generated data through post-session sketchbook reflections, four weekly IFS-guided response paintings based on a selected sketch, journaling, formal analysis, thematic analysis, and a final creative synthesis painting. Following Moustakas' (1990) six phases of heuristic inquiry, I strived to trace how countertransference activations emerged, evolved, and shifted through a blend of post-session response art and guidance through internal parts work. This approach offered a structured yet

intuitive lens for exploring how the integration of IFS and response art can support emotional processing, reflection, and the development of a more grounded therapeutic presence.

This project responds to the need for structured, creative strategies to help art therapy trainees explore and tend to countertransference. While response art and IFS each offer valuable tools, their combined use as a reflective method for therapist development remains underexplored. This arts-based heuristic self-inquiry investigates how IFS-guided post-session response art can support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and emerging clinical practice.

Overview of Chapters

The following chapters trace the development of this inquiry: Chapter 2 reviews literature related to countertransference, response art, and Internal Family Systems as they relate to new therapists. Chapter 3 outlines the arts-based heuristic methodology guiding the research. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Chapter 5 offers a creative synthesis of emergent themes, integrating image and text. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the research question, reflecting on their implications, limitations, and relevance to the field of art therapy. Chapter 7 concludes with a synthesis of insights, contributions to the field, and suggestions for future research.

Key Terms and Definitions

Trailheads: Emotions, sensations, thoughts, impulses, beliefs, or other cues that arise from internal parts and indicate areas of activation (Schwartz, 2021, pp. 24–25).

Garlic cloves: A metaphor used in IFS to describe a group of interconnected parts within the self. Each clove represents an internal system of protectors and exiles within a larger whole (Schwartz, 2021, p. 27).

Post-session response art: Art created after a therapy session to explore, contain, or reflect on the therapist's internal responses or the session's emotional residue (Fish, 2012; Nash, 2020).

Parts-mapping: A visual and symbolic method of exploring the internal relationships between parts as defined by IFS (Schwartz, 2021, pp. 26–27). This process helps identify patterns within internal systems.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on CT, response art, and Internal Family Systems (IFS) that are used as the basis for this research. Building on the foundational rationale outlined in the introduction, the review focuses on sources aligned with the study's integrated method and heuristic design. Selected literature addresses reflective arts-based practices, CT awareness in new therapists, and the application of IFS within or alongside art therapy.

The Importance of Countertransference

In a study using a panel of eight therapists, Hayes et al. (1998) found that all participants reported experiencing CT in about 80% of their sessions, underscoring how common these reactions are in clinical work. Building on this, Hayes et al. (2011) emphasized that CT is not only frequent but also a consistent feature of therapeutic practice, with awareness and management of CT emerging as key predictors of treatment outcomes.

In a series of 18 qualitative case studies, Hayes et al. (2015) found that CT can both hinder and enhance therapeutic effectiveness, depending on how it is handled. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Hayes et al. (2011), which reviewed 21 studies, found that while unmanaged CT is generally linked to poorer outcomes, effective management can lead to positive therapeutic gains.

Friedman and Gelso (2000) argue that when therapists can manage their CT, they are less likely to act out their own feelings in ways that disrupt the therapy. More recently, Abargil and Tishby (2022) found that therapists' awareness of their CT, regardless of whether the feelings

were positive or negative, played a significant role in client improvement. Clients of therapists with higher CT awareness showed faster progress and more effective outcomes.

Together, these studies suggest that a therapist's capacity to recognize and work with their countertransference can have a significant impact on the success of therapy.

Countertransference and the New Therapist

The researcher-participant of this heuristic self-inquiry is an art therapy intern at a private practice during this project. As a result, research on countertransference awareness for new or trainee therapists is an important part of the scope of this literature review.

Multiple authors have explored the particular relevance of CT management for new and trainee therapists (Cabaniss et al. 2011; Cartwright et al., 2015; Levenson et al. 2023). Gait and Halewood (2019) in their exploratory study write that due to the novelty of the trainee's experience, they are still in the process of developing the self-awareness and reflective skills that would render CT-generated anxiety manageable. Without a clear framework for identifying and processing their CT experiences participants in the exploratory study found themselves emotionally overwhelmed (Gait & Halewood, 2019). Researchers also found that it was problematic for trainees to be introduced to the theoretical construct of CT before clinical experience (Gait & Halewood, 2019). This is supported by Hofsess and Tracey's (2010) findings that a trainee's ability to conceptualize CT without understanding their own personal experience of it may be associated with increased occurrence of CT. It is not simply a matter of understanding the concept itself, practitioners must also investigate further systemic approaches to engaging with personal experiences of CT to increase their ability to effectively manage it (Cartwright et al., 2015).

For future research, research indicates that exploring effective methods for teaching countertransference outside of traditional methods could be valuable (Drapeau, 2014; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010; Nash, 2020). This is supported by evidence showing that trainee therapists differ in their levels of CT awareness and in their abilities to understand and manage these reactions (Latts & Gelso, 1995; Robbins & Jolkovski, 1987).

In a follow-up with the trainees in Cartwright et al.'s (2015) pilot study of a method for teaching clinical psychology trainees to conceptualize and manage countertransference, trainees were able to articulate how they may manage CT after the verbal training program, but scored the program lower on its ability to aid them in managing CT. This suggests that written and verbal methods of teaching CT may not be embodied enough for new art therapists to fully grasp the personal elements of this phenomenon.

Response Art as a Means of Enhancing Self-reflection and CT Awareness for New Therapists

Response art has long supported art therapists in processing emotional responses, cultivating self-awareness, and strengthening professional identity (Fish, 2012; Wadeson, 2003). Nash (2020) presents a practice innovation paper that conceptually explores the evolution of response art as an emerging approach in art therapy. Nash's (2020) study found that revisiting and refining response art allowed therapists to better address challenges in the therapeutic work and continue engaging with unresolved material brought up in sessions. He highlights how a systematic reflection on these images between sessions fosters a deeper understanding, cultivates curiosity, and enhanced empathy, aligning with Fish's (2012) earlier findings on the benefits of response art for therapists. Nash (2020) confirmed in his paper that post-session response art can contain the visual dynamic energy in a way that allows the art therapist to continue processing

effects and remaining reflexive. The study offers insights into how regularly engaging with response art helps therapists manage the emotional complexities of their work, fostering self-regulation, professional growth, and resilience in their practice (Nash, 2020).

Deaver and McAuliffe (2009) conducted a qualitative study exploring the impact of ungraded visual journaling among art therapy and counseling interns. This study aimed to understand how visual journaling affected self-reflection, CT awareness, and anxiety management. The study found that journaling was especially helpful in identifying personal challenges with certain clients and in processing moments when interns felt particularly connected to their clients' experiences. This study highlighted that visual journaling supports self-awareness, particularly around CT.

Following up on her 2009 study with McAuliffe (2009), Deaver (2012) utilized a mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive look into reflective visual journaling for therapy interns. The study followed eight art therapy and counselling interns over a 15-week period, documenting their experiences with visual journaling to track its impact on self-reflection, CT processing, and emotional regulation. Interns reported that this method facilitated case conceptualization and helped them understand and manage CT. Incorporating visual journals into their professional development was particularly effective for enhancing both reflective and emotional processing skills during the early stages of their careers.

Deaver's (Deaver & McAuliffe., 2009; Deaver, 2012) studies underscore the value of visual journaling in art therapy education. Visual journaling offered a space for reflective practice, allowing interns to process emotional responses through a combination of art and text. This approach is affirmed by Hofsess & Tracey's (2010) research on the stages of professional

development in therapy, which found that personal experience and understanding of an individual's own CT experiences are more related to positive therapeutic outcomes than simply having a conceptual awareness of CT. It also complements existing art therapy research suggesting that response art helps therapists externalize their emotional reactions, creating a space for self-reflection, processing, and containment of complex emotions that arise during therapeutic encounters (Fish, 2012; Malchiodi, 2003).

Internal Family Systems (IFS) and New Therapists

Mojta et al (2013) used a phenomenological approach to explore the impact of IFS training on seven new marriage and family therapists. Through semi-structured interviews, the researchers found preliminary empirical support for the benefits of IFS with new therapists. All seven participants reported that IFS offered them an approach to focusing on their internal processes which in turn had multiple positive effects on their therapeutic work. The increased self-awareness gained from their IFS training was attributed to an enhancement of the therapeutic relationship, a higher awareness of CT, their ability to model internal awareness for clients, and a better understanding of clients' internal systems. Mojta et al.'s (2013) study suggests that integrating IFS into other therapeutic modalities holds valuable elements for new therapists and their CT management.

A Brief Caution for New Therapists Learning IFS

While I was unable to locate literature directly critiquing the implications of IFS training for new therapists, broader concerns about models that privilege internal experience offer important insights. The clarity and accessibility of IFS can make it particularly appealing to early-career therapists; however, this simplicity may contribute to an overemphasis on

intrapsychic processes while underrepresenting the broader systemic forces that shape individual experience (Distiller, 2022). In their respective writings, psychoanalyst and feminist theorist Benjamin (1995) and psychoanalyst and clinical psychologist Sehrbrock (2020) caution that therapeutic models lacking a social justice lens risk reinforcing individualistic narratives and overlooking the roles of power, privilege, and collective trauma within the therapeutic space.

Although IFS includes the concept of "legacy burdens," the model does not consistently foreground how these burdens are created and maintained by systemic conditions such as racism, colonization, and intergenerational violence (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020, p. 246).

This concern parallels critiques in art therapy literature, particularly Talwar's *Art Therapy for Social Justice* (2019), which challenges healing models that focus on the individual and overlook structural inequities (p. xii). By calling for intersectional reflexivity and critical consciousness, Talwar draws attention to the risk that heavily individualized approaches can, without a social justice lens, obscure the sociohistorical roots of client burdens. From this perspective, there is a need to support early-career IFS practitioners in connecting internal parts work with external realities and grounding intrapsychic healing within broader contexts of power, privilege, and collective trauma (p. xiii).

Importantly, this is not to suggest that IFS ignores sociocultural factors altogether. Distiller (2021) acknowledges that the model can account for the ways external systems shape internal dynamics. Schwartz (2017) also points to IFS's nonjudgmental and collaborative orientation as aligning with values of mutuality and inclusion. Still, IFS's attention to social context often depends on the therapist's intentional incorporation of complementary frameworks, something that may be underdeveloped in newer practitioners still forming their critical lens.

IFS as a Reflective Training Tool in Supervision

Building on early studies that explored the value of IFS for new therapists (Mojta et al., 2013), Reed (2019) addressed a notable gap in the literature by investigating how IFS might inform clinical supervision. Prior to this, only one article had explored the application of IFS in supervision contexts (Rosenberg, 2013).

Reed's (2019) constructivist grounded theory research involved surveys and interviews with certified IFS supervisors, highlighting how the model supports supervisees in navigating clinical impasses, deepening case conceptualization, and strengthening therapeutic presence. Participants emphasized the role of unblending and accessing Self-energy in helping supervisees become more attuned to their internal systems and more effective in session. Unblending refers to stepping back from intense reactions to observe them with greater clarity (Reed & Wooten, 2023, p. 16), while Self-energy describes the grounded, compassionate state that supports presence and connection in clinical work (Wonder, 2023, p. 111).

While the small sample size and exploratory nature of Reed's (2019) research methodology limit its generalizability, Reed's findings suggest that IFS holds promise as a supervision framework that supports embodied, compassionate, and reflective clinical training.

A small but art therapy-relevant, element in Reed's (2019) research is his use of open-ended memo-writing as a method of reflection and meaning-making. Described as "a space for the researcher to freely explore, discover, and learn" (Reed, 2019, p.82-83), this approach parallels visual mapping processes common in art therapy (Fish, 2012; McNiff, 2018), suggesting potential for integrating structured art-based practices as a way to facilitate

understanding and increase opportunities for insight when exploring new uses for relatively new modalities.

Furthering this work, Reed and Wooten (2023), in their chapter on IFS-informed supervision, propose a structured model that centers Self-energy, unblending, and parts-awareness as key supervisory competencies. Positioned as both a clinical and pedagogical framework, their model emphasizes embodied therapeutic presence and the development of reflective capacity in both supervisors and supervisees. These aims closely align with the goals of this arts-based heuristic inquiry, though applied in a different setting.

Traces of Art Therapy within Foundational IFS Texts

While IFS has increasingly been integrated with other therapeutic approaches (Lavergne, 2004; Miller et al., 2007; Pici-D'Ottavio, 2023; Sabados, 2024; Willey, 2021), creative methods have been embedded in the model since its inception (Schwartz, 2021). In one of the foundational texts of the modality, Schwartz (2021) introduces a drawing-based parts-mapping exercise early on (pp. 26–27), highlighting the model's inherent alignment with visual expression. This exercise serves as a pedagogical tool to foster self-awareness and clarify key IFS concepts. The incorporation of artmaking in Schwartz's work mirrors broader research on the use of arts-based strategies to help therapists process complex internal experiences, including CT (Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; Deaver, 2012; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010).

Notably, IFS's view of creativity as a quality of the Self resonates with the inherently creative nature of art therapy (Sabados, 2024; Schwartz, 2023, pp. 47–49; Schwartz, 2021, p. 98). Schwartz (2021) also describes a state of internal flow that emerges when parts are in harmony (p. 143), a concept closely aligned with the creative flow described in the Expressive

Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2019, p. 10). In both models, spontaneous engagement in artmaking fosters deep self-connection and insight. These shared elements reinforce the potential of integrating IFS and art therapy into a meaningful and embodied approach to therapist reflection—especially when navigating emotional and relational complexities such as CT.

Integration of IFS and Art Therapy: Shared Alignments

Although research directly integrating the IFS model with the art therapy modality is limited, a few studies highlight shared theoretical foundations between the two approaches (Deacon & Davis, 2001; Lavergne, 2004; Sabados, 2024).

Deacon and Davis (2001) propose using family sculpting to integrate experiential interventions with IFS. This technique allows clients to physically represent their internal system and the relationships between Self and parts. By making the internal system tangible and interactive, sculpting supports boundary-setting, emotional release, and systemic harmony, all of which can enhance the IFS process and therapeutic outcomes. Each of these benefits could reasonably be implemented as support for the themes of CT management and professional growth to be explored in this research project.

Lavergne (2004) presents one of the earliest published examples of formally integrating art therapy and IFS through their case study-based conceptual article. In his treatment of adjudicated teenage girls with trauma histories, Lavergne found that art therapy provided a medium for differentiating and unburdening parts, while IFS offered a structured framework for internal work. He identifies three key alignments between the two modalities: both are non-pathologizing, encourage externalization, and use creativity to engage the unconscious. While Lavergne's work centers on a specific client population, the rationale behind his integration is

relevant to this research. Just as Lavergne's approach helped clients name and manage emotional responses, this study explores how IFS-guided response art may support new therapists in understanding and regulating CT. This is not to suggest that all trainees have experienced trauma, but rather to acknowledge that CT activations can arise from unresolved internal wounds (Gelso & Hayes, 2002).

Sabados (2024), a practicing art therapist and certified IFS therapist, offers a clinically informed conceptual framework for integrating art therapy and IFS in trauma work with clients. She proposes that the synergistic relationship between these two models can facilitate profound and effective healing for individuals who have experience with chronic traumas, singular traumatic events and micro-traumas alike (Sabados, 2024). As art therapists are routinely exposed to the trauma of others, in turn activating their own internal responses (Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002), this suggests that IFS can be an effective method to remediate some negative effects of CT.

Sabados (2024) builds upon Lavergne's (2004) research of the three key alignments between IFS and art therapy, by instead proposing six key alignments between these two approaches. The six key alignments as proposed by Sabados (2024) are; (1) externalization, (2) creativity, (3) visualization, (4) somatic awareness, (5) relationship, and (6) witnessing. She also notes a shared emphasis on creativity, both as a quality of the Self in IFS and as a foundational element of art therapy (Sabados, 2024; Schwartz, 2021; Schwartz, 2023).

Bridging the Gap: IFS-Guided Response Art for Countertransference and Growth in Art Therapy Interns

Effective CT management is essential for therapists at all levels of experience (Abargil & Tishby, 2022; Gait & Halewood, 2019; Gelso et al., 2002; Hayes et al., 2011; Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002). When left unresolved, CT can impair therapeutic outcomes, particularly when client material activates the therapist's own emotional wounds (Drapeau, 2014). This is especially relevant for new art therapists, who are still developing the self-awareness and internal capacity to recognize CT as an embodied, relational experience (Latts & Gelso, 1995; Robbins & Jolkovski, 1987).

Reflective practices such as journaling and response art have been shown to support the externalization and regulation of CT-related emotions (Alger & Gushwa, 2021; Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; Deaver, 2012; Nash, 2020). Internal Family Systems (IFS) training has also been found to enhance CT awareness and emotional insight among early-career therapists (Mojta et al., 2013). While both response art and IFS individually support emotional processing and professional development, their combined use as a structured reflective practice for art therapy interns remains unexplored in the literature.

This study builds on the premise that IFS-guided response art, specifically artmaking informed by a parts-mapping exercise (Schwartz, 2021, pp. 26–27), may offer meaningful support for novice therapists navigating the emotional complexities of clinical work. Prior research highlights the compatibility between IFS and creative methods (Deacon & Davis, 2001; Schwartz, 2021; Lavergne, 2004; Sabados, 2024; Schwartz, 2023; Hinz, 2019), while also affirming the value of response art for managing CT (Deaver & McAuliffe., 2009; Deaver, 2012;

Nash, 2020). However, there is currently no research examining the integrated use of IFS and response art as a reflective tool for therapist development.

This project aims to fill that gap through an arts-based heuristic self-inquiry, in which the researcher-participant, an art therapy intern, uses IFS-guided response art to explore CT activations and their implications for clinical presence and professional growth. In doing so, this study responds to calls for more creative, embodied approaches to therapist training and CT reflection (Chilton & Scotti, 2014; Deaver, 2002; Drapeau, 2014; Gelso & Kline, 2022; Leavy, 2020; Nash, 2020; Sabados, 2024; Wadeson, 2003), and contributes to the evolving dialogue on integrative, self-reflective practices in art therapy education.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology I used to explore the central research question: how IFS-guided post-session response art can support countertransference reflection and professional growth for new art therapists. The subsections that follow outline the arts-based heuristic self-inquiry framework that shaped this study and explain why it was well suited to both the research question and my position as an art therapy intern. Combining arts-based research with heuristic inquiry offered a structured yet flexible process for artmaking, reflection, and analysis. This approach supported my exploration of countertransference responses through IFS-guided response art.

Research Question

This research is guided by the central question: *How can IFS-guided post-session response art processes support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and developing practice?*

Theoretical Framework

This project employs arts-based heuristic self-inquiry, a qualitative methodology that combines arts-based research (ABR) with heuristic inquiry to explore the personal experience of a broader phenomenon through systematic artmaking (McNiff, 1998; Moustakas, 1990).

Researchers using this methodology incorporate artmaking into their self-inquiry as a means to gather and analyze data related to their research question (Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990). The integration of arts with heuristic self-inquiry provides a dynamic and focused approach to engaging with unconscious information revealed through the art-making process, making it especially pertinent to the field of art therapy (Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990).

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research (ABR) is a methodology that engages art-making processes to explore, represent, and communicate research insights (Leavy, 2020). ABR can be conducted using many creative approaches such as music, film, performance, poetry, or visual arts (Leavy, 2020). It is often employed in fields where subjective experiences and emotions are central, such as art therapy, social work, healthcare, and education (Leavy, 2020, p.236 - 255). ABR can act as both a means of representing findings and generating data through creative practice (Leavy, 2020). By combining academic rigor and artistic processes, ABR can facilitate a deeper understanding and emotional resonance of the complex concepts being studied (Leavy, 2020; Barone & Eisner, 2011). Research suggests that approaching CT through this methodology can yield additional or complementary insights to previous quantitative or qualitative studies that touch on IFS, CT, art responses, and new therapists (Mojta et al., 2013; Nash, 2020; Drapeau, 2014).

The use of ABR elements such as art responses allows for an enrichment of subjective knowledge and an openness to varied outcomes (Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990). For the purposes of this research project, the researcher will be engaging with their experience of CT as an art therapy intern through sketching and a repeated IFS-guided painting experiential (Deaver, 2012; Nash, 2020; Schwartz, 2021, p. 26 - 27). Using elements of ABR in this research project provides a means of exploring the complex and nuanced topic of CT (Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 2018).

Heuristic inquiry

Heuristic research aims to illuminate and explore the subjective, intuitive and personal dimensions of individual experiences (Moustakas, 1990). In heuristic inquiry, the researcher-

participant immerses themselves in their topic of question through six stages of this methodology: (1) Initial Engagement, (2) Immersion, (3) Incubation, (4) Illumination, (5) Explication, and (6) Creative Synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher-participant illuminates their own experiences with the studied phenomena as a means to generate and interact with data (Moustakas, 1990). At the same time, due to the complex nature of human experiences, the researcher-participant maintains reflexivity and is open to the full range of insights that emerge from their inquiry (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002). The data generated from a heuristic inquiry should not only be a means to describe the researcher-participant's experience but should also facilitate growth and transformation for them (Moustakas, 1990). A more in-depth explanation of the six stages of the heuristic inquiry process will be outlined in the section on data collection procedures.

Arts-Based Heuristic Self-Inquiry and its Applicability to this Project

Arts-based heuristic self-inquiry (ABHSI) is a methodology that combines the creative depth of arts-based research with the structured, reflective process of heuristic inquiry (Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990). It uses artmaking and analysis while following the six systematic stages outlined by Moustakas (1990). This approach is particularly effective for exploring phenomena that require both subjective engagement and creative expression (Leavy, 2020, Moustakas, 1990). The goal of this research method is not to create generalizable data but to present information gained from one's own inquiry to expose personal truths, deepen understanding of subjective experiences, and provide rich, contextual insights that resonate with others who may share similar experiences or interests (Moustakas, 1990). As such, this method aligns naturally with the individualized nature of the CT for art therapy interns (Hayes et al., 1998; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010).

Research shows that CT awareness and management is a subjective experience, which means it must be studied using subjective methods (Gelso et al., 2002; Gelso & Hayes, 2007; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010). Due to CT's personalized nature, it is necessary for the participant-researcher to study their own experiences to generate data (Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990). Approaching the research question of this project through an arts-based heuristic self-inquiry methodology provides an appropriately flexible and nuanced exploration of the embodied, personal, and complex experiences of CT, especially for art therapy interns (Deaver, 2012; Nash, 2020; Hofsess & Tracey, 2010). There is currently a gap in the research for art therapists using IFS to guide their own CT post-session response art, despite multiple researched alignments between art therapy and IFS (Lavergne, 2004; Sabados, 2024). Therefore, it's important to remain open and flexible to whichever professionally relevant insights emerge in this new intersection. A new therapist's experience of creating response art and/or engaging with IFS methods is deeply personal and therefore unable to be appropriately researched through objective or generalizable methodologies (Deaver, 2012; Mojta et al., 2013; Nash, 2020; Schwartz, 2021).

Moreover, Moustakas' (1990) six stages provide a systematic framework for artmaking, journaling, and analyzing data. This structure allows for a mirroring of the reflective practices' art therapists use with clients while providing a rigorous process that makes it applicable to research (Sabados, 2024). In short, this methodology produces reliably qualitative results while remaining consistent with the profession's ethos (Leavy, 2020; Malchiodi, 2003; Moustakas, 1990; Sabados, 2024).

By integrating artistic exploration within the phases of immersion, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, ABHSI becomes a dynamic tool for generating and interpreting data, particularly for understanding the integration of IFS, response art, and CT

management for an art therapy intern in private practice (Leavy, 2020; Moustakas, 1990; Schwartz, 2021). The use of art responses can facilitate the externalization of unconscious material, which is often intrinsic to the experience of CT (Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002; Malchiodi, 2003). Post-session art responses have been widely used by art therapists to engage with and process their activations and personal experiences of session (Nash, 2020, Deaver 2012).

The incorporation of IFS with this process offers a unique way to externalize activating emotions and create artistic representations as a form of containment and reflection (Deaver, 2012; Schwartz, 2021). Through this combination of systematic inquiry and creative practice, this project aims to deepen the understanding of CT management using IFS guidance in art therapy and its role in fostering professional growth for new therapists.

Ethical Considerations

As this research project focuses on CT and art responses, it is necessary to consider appropriate limitations and supports. This project will not serve as a form of self-therapy. Considering the possibility for self-therapy to bleed into this project, a plan has been developed to address any deeper personal activations. The researcher has previously engaged in 3 years of personal therapy with a trauma-informed therapist. This previous therapeutic work has left the researcher in a stable place to approach this work. Additionally, in the case that the researcher becomes overwhelmingly activated, the researcher-participant has developed a plan for immediate short-term counselling, active listening, or longer-term therapeutic support if needed.

Application of Methodology in this Research Project

This arts-based heuristic self-inquiry applies Moustakas' (1990) six stages (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis) as a structured framework to investigate the research question, "How can IFS-guided post-session response art processes support an art therapy intern's CT reflection and developing practice?"

Initial Engagement

In the initial engagement stage, the researcher-participant first familiarizes themselves with the chosen art materials: acrylic paint and 16 × 12 canvases. These materials were chosen for their alignment with the researcher-participant's established skillset and ability to support intuitive, embodied expression (Allen, 2022). Familiar materials will reduce technical barriers and facilitate the translation of inner experiences into visual form while fostering a more authentic and meaningful exploration (Allen, 2022).

The researcher-participant also deepens their understanding of key concepts relevant to the inquiry, including countertransference, response art as used by art therapists, and parts work within the IFS framework. This preparation involves studying foundational texts by IFS creator Richard Schwartz, such as *No Bad Parts* (Schwartz, 2021) and *Introduction to Internal Family Systems* (Schwartz, 2023), to establish a theoretical foundation for the inquiry, as the researcher-participant has not yet received formal training in this model, and it was not part of their master's program.

Immersion: Literature Review and Data Collection

In the immersion stage, the researcher-participant conducts a comprehensive literature review on topics relevant to the research question, including CT, response art, and IFS. The review will also explore the relevance of these topics to novice therapists, as well as their intersections and gaps within the field of art therapy and related disciplines, as outlined in the Literature Review section.

Following the completion of the literature review, the researcher-participant will begin four weeks of data collection during their practicum, utilizing two forms of artmaking: (1) daily intuitive post-session sketches and journaling to capture CT activations on practicum days, and 2) weekly in-depth IFS-guided art-making sessions focused on a deeper exploration of a selected activation from each week.

A more detailed examination of the two art-based data collection methods follows, highlighting how each contributed to capturing and exploring the participant-researcher's CT experiences and mapping their relevant parts.

Daily post-session practices. Over the course of four weeks, the researcher-participant will dedicate 10–15 minutes directly after every second client session at their practicum to document internal sensations through intuitive sketches and notes. These brief entries will serve as immediate containers for emotional and sensory experiences, preserving details that might otherwise fade from memory (Allen, 2022). They will also provide a way to capture latent CT material that may not yet be fully articulated (Allen, 2022). At the end of each week, one sketch will be selected as a trailhead for deeper exploration during the weekly IFS-guided parts-mapping session.

Weekly in-depth IFS-guided art-making sessions. Each Saturday during the four-week immersion phase, the researcher-participant will set aside three hours for an arts-adapted IFS parts-mapping self-reflection session (Schwartz, 2021, pp. 26–27). These weekly sessions will expand upon one selected activation sketch (or trailhead) for deeper exploration. In IFS, trailheads refer to emotional or bodily cues that signal activation, while “garlic cloves” represent systems of interconnected parts (exiles, protectors, and managers) surrounding those cues (Schwartz, 2021). The response artworks will visually map the selected trailhead’s internal system using acrylic paint on 16 × 12 canvases, paralleling Pat Allen’s (2022) intention-witness approach but applying an IFS-specific lens. Sessions will follow a consistent structure of material setup, a warm-up reflection, the adapted parts-mapping exercise, and post-session journaling (see Appendix A).

Post-art-making journaling will be completed on the researcher-participant’s personal laptop, guided by Mojta et al.’s (2013) five IFS-informed queries and additional reflective questions. A detailed outline of these prompts and their purposes is provided in Appendix B. This blended journaling approach aims to foster introspection and deepen understanding of the relationship between internal parts, CT, and clinical experience.

Incubation

In the incubation phase, the researcher-participant will intentionally step back from the art responses and journals for four weeks. This phase involves a purposeful pause, allowing the unconscious to process the material without active analysis (Moustakas, 1990). This distance is expected to create space for new insights and deeper understanding to emerge naturally. (Moustakas, 1990). Although the researcher-participant will pause direct data collection, they

will remain indirectly engaged with the study's themes through ongoing clinical work and coursework.

Illumination

In the illumination phase, the researcher-participant will revisit the response art paintings and journals, documenting any insights that naturally emerge (Moustakas, 1990). The paintings will be placed in a visible location within their living space for two weeks to encourage ongoing reflection. Emerging insights will be recorded using the Notes app and later transcribed into Word documents. Journals from the immersion phase will also be revisited and organized into tables to support clarity.

Explication

Paintings created through the IFS-guided art-making process, along with corresponding journal entries, will be analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidelines. Formal elements of the artwork will be examined using descriptive methods informed by Glatstein's (2009) art analysis framework. This dual-layered approach will integrate thematic insights from reflective and illumination journaling with structured visual analysis, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of the creative and reflective processes.

Creative Synthesis

A final artwork will be created as a cohesive synthesis of the insights and themes that emerge throughout the research process. As described by Moustakas (1990), this phase invites the researcher-participant to integrate discoveries into a unified, imaginative form. While earlier

stages focus on exploration and analysis, creative synthesis will draw on intuition, symbolism, and embodied knowing to express meaning beyond language.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the arts-based heuristic self-inquiry guiding this research and its applicability to the central research question. Grounded in Moustakas' (1990) six phases and informed by principles of IFS and art therapy, this approach supports a structured, iterative, and embodied process of noticing, engaging with, and reflecting on internal responses that arise in early clinical work.

This project integrates artmaking, journaling, creative synthesis, and both formal and thematic analysis as core components of the inquiry process. This combination provides structure and flexibility, making it well suited to examining the researcher-participant's experience of using IFS-guided response art to gain insight on CT management and early career development.

With the structure and rationale of the methodology now established, the next chapter turns to the findings that emerged through this layered inquiry into how IFS-guided post-session response art can support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and developing practice.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from my arts-based heuristic self-inquiry, which explores how IFS-guided post-session response art can support an art therapy intern's CT reflection and developing clinical practice. Drawing from recurring visual motifs, symbolic imagery, and thematic patterns, I explore how this layered process contributed to greater emotional clarity, internal system awareness, and clinical integration.

Following a brief overview of the data types and analytic approach, I introduce four core meta-themes that emerged across the immersion, illumination, and explication phases. These themes are illustrated through selected artworks, journal excerpts, and reflections that trace my shifting relationship to CT material and highlight the value of combining IFS and art-based practices in early therapist development.


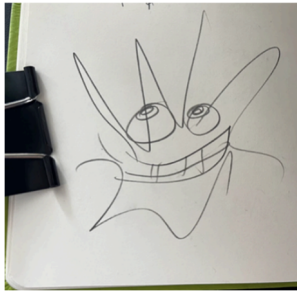
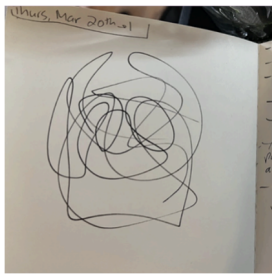
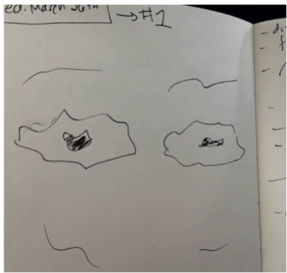


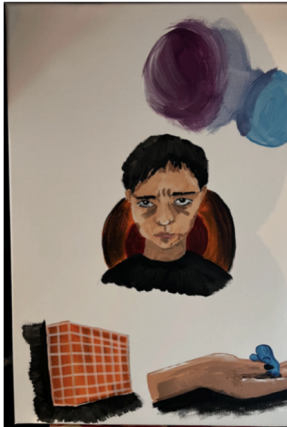

Data Analysis and Materials Produced

The data collected for this study consists of seven components: (1) sketches and brief journals generated from 10–15 minute visual journaling immediately following every second session (see Figure 1); (2) four paintings created through the IFS-guided response art process (see Figure 1); (3) four journals written during these IFS-guided sessions (see abridged versions in Table C1, C2, C3 and C4); (4) additional journals produced during the illumination phase; (5) formal descriptions of the IFS-guided artworks based on Glatstein's (2009) framework (see Table D1, D2, D3, D4, and D5)); (6) thematic analysis notes (see Appendix E); and (7) the final integrative artwork developed during the creative synthesis phase (Moustakas, 1990).

After generating response art across four weekly sessions, thematic analysis unfolded through a layered, iterative process. By revisiting weekly response art, journals, formal analysis, and illumination entries, I identified weekly themes (see Table E1), recurring cross-cutting themes (see Table E2), and synthesized them into broader meta-themes (see Table E3). Figure 1 displays selected daily post-session sketches alongside their corresponding parts-mapping paintings, offering visual context for how initial CT activations evolved into more developed representations of internal systems. This process supported reflection on my CT responses and clinical development through IFS-guided artmaking.

Figure 1

Chosen sketchbook images and their corresponding parts-mapping responses over the 4-week immersion period

Week	1	2	3	4
Chosen daily intuitive post-session sketches from that week				
Weekly parts-mapping paintings based on selected post-session sketches of that week's CT activations.				

Parts-Mapping Response Art to Externalize Countertransference

This parts-mapping response art process offered a structured and multifaceted approach to externalizing my CT activations. By combining visual, verbal, and embodied methods, I was able to create space between myself and the internal systems driving my reactions. This multimodal approach offered a richer and more layered form of reflection than post-session response art alone.

The art-making process helped implicit emotional material to surface, and enabled me to visually map internal dynamics. Recurring visual motifs such as flaming sponges, cages, and blue figures helped me identify protectors and exiles and offered insight into how these parts responded to CT trailheads. Seeing the entire system mapped out in front of me made it easier to step back and recognize whether my reactions were tied to the present moment or rooted in earlier wounds.

Initial journaling during parts-mapping sessions gave me the language to explore the roles and needs of each part. Guided by Mojta et al.'s (2013) five reflective queries, I engaged with parts as distinct entities. At times, I felt stuck or too close to what I had portrayed, but the structured prompts created distance and clarified each part's function within the system. Returning to journaling during the illumination phase, after time had passed, let me revisit the art and earlier reflections with a clearer perspective.

Embodied awareness also played a central role in this process. As I mapped trailheads and explored their related parts, I became more attuned to the physical sensations that accompanied my CT activations. Over time, familiar bodily cues such as tightness, sinking, or bracing felt less overwhelming and instead served as internal signals I could observe and respond

to with greater awareness. This shift supported a more grounded and self-led approach to managing CT material.

Overall, moving between visual, verbal, and embodied modes of reflection helped me feel less entangled with my responses. I became more able to recognize them in the moment and more curious about the internal systems influencing my emotions and reflections.

Witnessing Parts with Curiosity: From Reactivity to Reflection

A core shift that emerged through this process was my growing ability to witness internal parts with curiosity and compassion rather than reactivity or avoidance. Early in the process, I often depicted parts facing away from the viewer (see Figure 2), reflecting my own discomfort and reluctance to engage with them. Journal entries from this stage revealed themes of fear, embarrassment, and self-criticism about my CT responses. The linework in these early paintings was tight and controlled, conveying a sense of emotional pressure and danger on more vulnerable parts.

Over time, my relationship to these parts began to soften. Brushwork became more fluid, and parts started to make direct eye contact with the viewer. In Weeks Three and Four, the first-mapped parts were no longer hidden but appeared angry or scorned, confronting the viewer directly (see Figure 2). This visual shift suggested a new willingness to face emotional discomfort with presence and honesty, marking a turning point in how I related to my parts.

Figure 2

Shifting Posture and Gaze in First-Mapped Parts Across Weeks

A



B



C



D



Note.

(A) Week One: a faceless blue form part turned away from the viewer, suggesting avoidance and emotional distance.

(B) Week Two: a part trapped within a cage, symbolizing containment and restriction.

(C) Week Three: an angry, scorned figure meeting the viewer's gaze directly, signaling emotional charge and readiness to confront.

(D) Week Four: another confrontational figure, reinforcing the growing assertiveness and visibility of internal parts over time.

This evolution was echoed in other recurring symbols. For instance, the representation of hands shifted from tension to care over time. In Week One, a hand is shown holding a flaming sponge with visible strain (see Figure 3). I described this action in my journal as “icky” and “fraught with tension.” By Week Three, I painted a hand gently supporting a small blue figure (see Figure 3). I wrote, “I feel sad for this part. I too want to offer a hand to hold it up.” This moment captured an emerging sense of empathy for parts that had previously gone unnoticed or unacknowledged.

Figure 3

Symbolic Shift in the Representation of Hands from Week One to Week Three

A



B



Note. (A) In Week One, hands are shown tensely gripping a flaming sponge, reflecting discomfort and emotional precariousness. (B) In Week Three, a hand gently supports a small blue figure, symbolizing a growing sense of care and empathy toward vulnerable parts. These paintings illustrate a shift in the internal tone from guarded tension to compassionate connection.

This act of witnessing reflected one of the central contributions of the IFS framework: learning to approach internal parts with compassionate curiosity, even when they arise in moments of clinical tension (Schwartz, 2021). The IFS-guided response art process offered a structure to revisit CT activations from a more grounded and open stance. Over time, this practice helped reduce my anxiety around CT and shifted my perspective from avoidance to meaningful engagement.

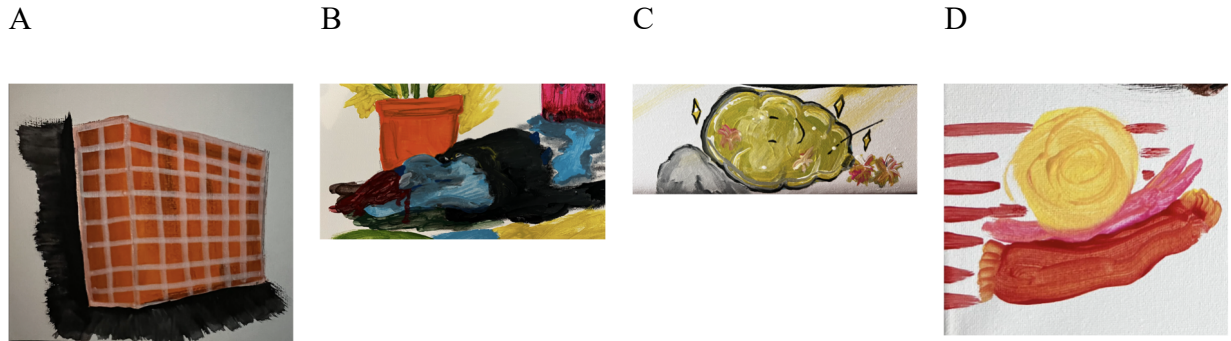
Differentiating Therapist and Protector Parts: Awareness of Imposter Syndrome

Throughout the process, I became increasingly aware of how protector parts tied to performance and perceived competence surfaced in response to CT activations. These parts often stepped in from a place of fear or self-doubt, revealing a pattern consistent with imposter syndrome. Outwardly, they appeared calm and composed, but internally, they were driven by anxiety, perfectionism, and fear of inadequacy.

This dynamic appeared symbolically across multiple artworks. For example, a brick wall represented the urge to guard against vulnerability, while a blue figure turning away from the viewer captured an internal withdrawal. A deflated smiley-face balloon pierced on a rock conveyed the collapse that followed emotional suppression, and a snail forced onto a flying carpet reflected the pressure to override slowness. Together, these images (see Figure 4) illustrate how protector parts attempted to manage my emerging imposter syndrome and maintain clinical functioning.

Figure 4

Protector Parts Managing Emotional Exposure: Symbolic Representations of Guarding, Withdrawal, Collapse, and Pressure to Perform



Note: A brick wall, a blue figure turned away from the viewer, a deflated balloon, and a snail symbol reflect protector parts shaped by imposter syndrome.

In one journal entry about the smiley-face balloon, I wrote, “This part is afraid that if it doesn't remind me to hold face, I will deflate.” This metaphor reflected how certain protectors shielded me from relational vulnerability and perceived external judgment in my role as a novice art therapist. Over time, I noticed this theme recurring across multiple artworks and journal entries. Many of my parts avoided authentic engagement with reactions out of fear that doing so would expose me as inadequate. This fear reinforced patterns of avoidance, keeping me from sitting with potentially useful emotional cues.

As the process unfolded, I traced moments when protectors stepped in as manifestations of imposter syndrome. Earlier artworks depicted protectors expressing shame or withdrawing from parts that attacked my credibility as a new therapist. In contrast, later artworks signaled a shift toward greater compassion, balance and directness, as CT activations tied to feelings of inadequacy became easier to recognize and hold with curiosity rather than avoid.

For example, the spiral in Week 4 and the blue figure cradled in a hand in Week 2 illustrated this transition toward a compassionate, self-led stance. This was in contrast to the earlier artworks, which were rooted in fear or performance. These images symbolized acts of holding and openness to discomfort, marking a movement away from tightening and avoidance. This progression demonstrates how IFS-guided response art helped me differentiate imposter syndrome-driven reactions and respond to them with greater presence, supporting my growth as a developing art therapist.

From Compartmentalization to Integration: Mapping Internal Systems to Support Relational Presence

Throughout this process, I began to notice how compartmentalization operated both visually and psychologically as a strategy for managing CT activations. In the early stages, fragmentation was especially clear. The painting from Week 1 featured segmented color fields connected only by small rickety black bridges, reflecting my internal effort to keep emotional content separate and manageable (Figure 5). As the weeks progressed, this strategy showed up symbolically through imagery such as cages, walls, and spirals acting as protective forms attempting to contain emotional intensity without entirely suppressing it. One journal entry described a part “trying to hold my inner emotions in a loose form of containment.” Another journal entry described a part as acting like a 'color key,' helping me identify similar emotional tones across other parts through its use of color. These reflections pointed to an internal system carefully monitoring what could be tolerated and what needed to stay hidden.

Figure 5

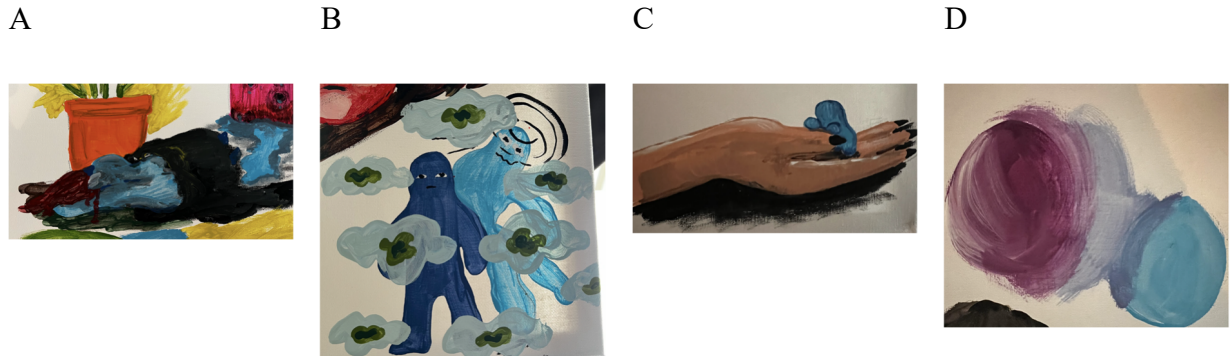
Detail from Week 1 Painting: Rickety Black Bridges Linking Segmented Color Fields as a Symbol of Emotional Compartmentalization



Over time, I began to relate differently to these compartmentalized parts. The artwork shifted, and so did my experience of the system as a whole. Symbols that once appeared isolated or reactive started to reappear across compositions with softer edges and more continuity. The recurring presence of blue figures laying down, emerging from clouds, or gently held, signaled a through-line of emotional witnessing and connection (see Figure 6). These parts no longer seemed solely protective; they invited contact and visibility.

Figure 6

Blue Figures as Symbols of Evolving Internal Relationship: From Compartmentalization to Emotional Witnessing and Connection



Note. This composite figure presents recurring imagery of blue figures across the weekly response artworks. (A) Week 1: A blue figure is shown laying down, partially obscured and surrounded by black, representing a heavy emotional state. (B) Week 4: Blue figures emerge from clouds, one making direct eye contact, signaling a shift toward visibility and emotional openness. (C) Week 3: A vulnerable blue figure is held gently in an open palm, reflecting empathic support. (D) Week 3: Blue and purple orbs appear to blend; brushstrokes are soft and delicate.

Color symbolism also helped trace this movement. Yellow consistently marked moments of clarity and insight, such as the snail shell in Week 4, the lighthouse beam in Week 2, the smiley-face balloon in Week 3, and the yellow color swatch around a growth symbol in Week 1 (see Figure 7). Red, on the other hand, appeared in moments of urgency and emotional charge, including the angry tomato, the burning sponge, the red mark near the neck of a scorned child, the red magic carpet forcing the snail to move faster, and the red lining of a cage to contain a symbol of joy (see Figure 8). Through repeated engagement with these symbols, I began to recognize how emotional states were no longer isolated events. They moved across time and compositions, gradually integrating into a more coherent system.

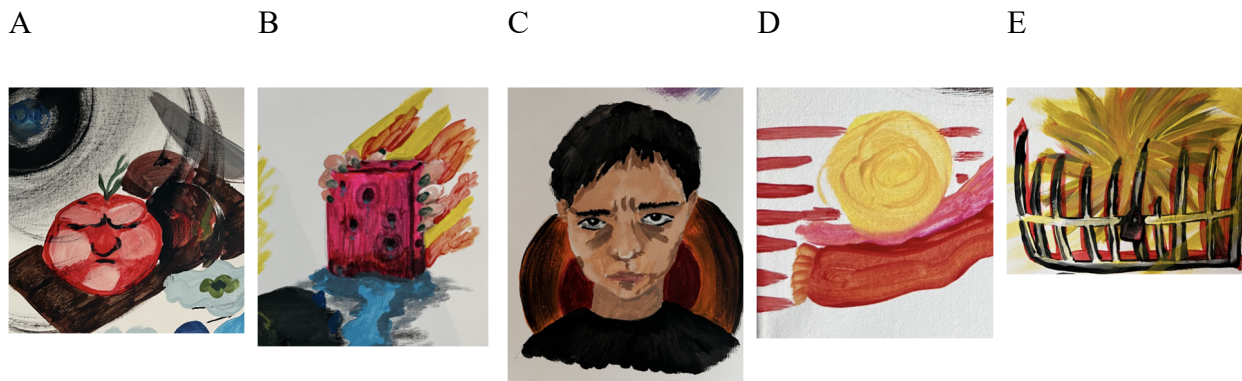
Figure 7

Yellow as a Symbol of Clarity and Insight Across Weekly Paintings: The Snail Shell (Week 4), Lighthouse Beam (Week 2), Smiley-Face Balloon (Week 3), color swatch around growth symbol (Week 1)



Figure 8

Red as a Symbol of Urgency and Emotional Charge: The Angry Tomato, Burning Sponge, Red Mark on the Scorned Child's Neck, Red Magic Carpet Forcing the Snail to Move Faster, and Red Lining of a Cage Containing Joy



By the illumination phase, my reflections revealed a shift in tone and capacity. I wrote about having “greater patience with parts” and “more comfort sitting with discomfort.” The discomfort itself had not disappeared, but my relationship to it had changed. I could remain present without collapsing into avoidance or overwhelm. Through the repeated cycle of naming, externalizing, and returning to these parts, I built a deeper and more compassionate relationship with myself. This movement from compartmentalization to integration not only supported my ability to stay with CT material, it also strengthened my confidence in navigating emotional complexity as a developing therapist.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that IFS-guided post-session response art offered a structured and creative process for accessing, externalizing, and reflecting on CT dynamics. Through symbolic imagery, parts-mapping, and compassionate witnessing, I developed greater emotional clarity, a stronger therapeutic identity, and increased confidence as a developing clinician. This highlights the potential of combining IFS and response art as a reflective practice to support the professional growth of emerging art therapists.

Chapter 5. Creative Synthesis

This chapter presents the creative synthesis painting that concludes this arts-based heuristic self-inquiry. It offers an overview of how insights from the immersion phase, response art, journaling, and analysis were distilled into a single integrative artwork. The chapter begins by describing the conceptual and material process of creating the final piece, highlighting symbolic elements drawn from earlier phases. It then explores how the completed work reflects the inquiry's central research question and the growth that emerged through the process.

The final painting (see Figure 9) integrates recurring symbols and emotional threads from earlier sessions, including the snail, smiley-face balloon, and tomatoes, each representing internal parts, protectors, or emotional states encountered through the IFS-guided art process. Fragmented images displayed across television monitors reference previously explored material, suggesting that certain CT activations continue to replay in subtle, patterned ways. The central figure holding a camera reflects my emerging witness consciousness, signaling a more grounded and observant relationship with my internal system. The reactions displayed across separate screens create both distance and integration, allowing me to observe them as distinct while also holding them as part of a whole. The central figure holds both the tool for documenting CT activations and the technology that allows me to witness them more clearly through different screens. Revisiting this painting now, I see the inclusion of technology as more than literal; it has become a metaphor for the structure IFS provided in helping me witness and organize my CT responses.

The whole composition conveys an emerging sense of internal coherence and integration. Creating this final painting felt both clarifying and emotionally layered. As I worked,

I noticed a shift in how I related to the images and symbols that previously carried tension or fragmentation. Parts that once felt scattered and defensive now appeared beside each other, sharing space and forming new connections. When I look at them on the same canvas, I notice a growing capacity within me to witness and hold them collectively. This experience mirrors the IFS principle of self-led integration: rather than silencing or eliminating parts, the process invites coexistence and mutual recognition (Schwartz, 2021).

Taking more time with this painting than previous weekly works also shaped the process. The ability to step away and return with fresh eyes allowed for deeper reflection on creative decisions. It also gave the painting a narrative quality that suited my way of making meaning. This extended engagement mirrored how professional growth often unfolds, not in isolated moments but through sustained, layered reflection.

This artwork illustrates how the integration of IFS and response art offered a tangible, structured approach to deepening self-awareness, regulating emotion, and cultivating a more confident, reflective therapeutic presence. I expect that I will return to this painting and the process that created it as a grounding reminder in my future practice. It represents the value of ongoing reflection and the growth that becomes possible when I meet my internal system with curiosity and care.

Figure 9

Creative Synthesis Painting



Conclusion

When I revisit the completed painting, I see how it gathers the emotional threads and symbols explored throughout the process into one image of coherence and connection. It represents a growing sense of internal balance, as parts that once felt scattered now begin to relate to one another. Creating this piece felt grounding and tender. It gave me space to witness my CT responses and begin integrating them with greater curiosity and compassion.

In response to the research question, which explores how IFS-guided post-session response art can support an art therapy intern's CT reflection and developing practice, this creative synthesis highlights the value of combining the structured clarity of parts mapping with the expressive freedom of artmaking. This process fostered emotional insight, deeper internal connection, and a more self-led therapeutic stance. As I continue to develop as an art therapist, this artwork serves as a quiet reminder that reflection is both messy and meaningful, and that lasting growth often unfolds through sustained engagement with exploratory processes like this one.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This chapter discusses the key insights and implications of this arts-based heuristic self-inquiry. Grounded in my unique position as a student-therapist engaged in a time-bound practicum, I entered this process with a mix of curiosity, uncertainty, and a deep desire to understand the emotional undercurrents shaping my professional development. My familiarity with artmaking, IFS, and symbolic expression provided meaningful entry points into this work, while my positionality and the constraints of graduate training shaped the boundaries of the inquiry. In what follows, I return to the research question, reflect on the process and its limitations, and consider how this framework might (or might not) support other emerging art therapists navigating countertransference and professional development.

Returning to the Research Question

This arts-based heuristic self-inquiry set out to explore the question: *How can IFS-guided post-session response art processes support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and developing practice?* At the outset, I struggled to make sense of my CT reactions. Like the novice therapists described in Nash (2020), Deaver (2012), and Mojta et al.'s (2013) research, I often felt vague and uncertain about whether my emotional responses were mine, the client's, or part of the therapeutic dynamic. The structure of this research helped transform this uncertainty into a deeper awareness and understanding.

IFS offered a framework for interacting with my CT activations, while response art offered additional externalization and a visual container to give form to these parts. Journaling provided space to deepen the externalization process, explore emerging material, and document insights. Over time, using IFS-guided post-session response art helped me shift into a more

curious stance toward my CT reactions, allowing me to hold them with greater compassion and clarity. This shift echoed Nash's (2020) assertion that response art can facilitate emotional regulation and deepen therapeutic presence.

Reflections on the Research Process

At the start of this project, I leaned heavily on literature to understand CT and IFS. While helpful, it wasn't until I began making art that the inquiry truly came alive. The act of externalizing internal parts through image, gesture, and metaphor made unconscious dynamics more accessible. IFS-guided parts-mapping added a layer of structure that allowed me to revisit and dialogue with these internal systems from a place of self-leadership.

Navigating the simultaneous demands of learning, practicing, and reflecting during practicum, my engagement with this process was shaped by both the constraints and possibilities of that context. Due to the structure of my practicum, hour demands and a dense caseload, I was only able to complete post-session sketches after every second session. I remain curious about the impact of having time to sketch after every session.

My comfort with symbolic thinking and fluency in artmaking materials contributed to a sense of ease in this process, making the work feel both intuitive and meaningful. Furthermore, my identity and relational history inevitably informed how I made sense of CT material, shaping not only what emerged in the art but also how I interpreted it.

As I moved through this layered process, I noticed patterns I had not expected, such as the recurrence of particular symbols or emotional tones across weeks. In hindsight, the final two paintings seemed to represent the same garlic clove system. If I were to revisit this research, I would extend the immersion phase to better track how internal systems may repeat or even

evolve over time. This would provide deeper insight into how repeated CT activations reflect unresolved part dynamics and shifting internal configurations.

Implications for Art Therapy Practice

These findings suggest that integrating IFS with response art could offer a replicable and supportive framework for art therapy interns to reflect and relate to their CT material.

Embedding IFS-informed structure into post-session response art and reflective practices within supervision or graduate curricula could help emerging therapists engage with their internal responses more compassionately, while cultivating habits of self-inquiry and emotional regulation. In contexts where this method is applied, working alongside a trained supervisor could further enhance safety, containment, and meaning making throughout the process.

That said, I offer this process not as a prescriptive model, but as one possible pathway. Its resonance may depend on the therapist's comfort with symbolic thinking, artmaking, and internal dialogue. While this combination of IFS-guided reflection and post-session response art was meaningful and accessible to me, I recognize that others may be drawn to different methods of processing CT.

Still, the process outlined here may serve as an adaptable scaffold for therapists seeking to deepen their reflective practice. Rather than a fixed protocol, I see it as an invitation to creatively explore how IFS structure and creativity can be harnessed to support CT management, emotional regulation, and reflection in the therapeutic role.

Validity and Limitations

This inquiry prioritized authenticity, emotional honesty, and process over generalizability, consistent with arts-based heuristic methodologies (Moustakas, 1990; Leavy, 2020). The layered approach of visual art, journaling, illumination writing, and formal analysis enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings by allowing themes to emerge across modalities.

Even so, this research is inherently limited by its subjectivity and the short timeline of the immersion phase. As a solo researcher engaging with personal material, my interpretations are shaped by my unique context, training, emotional bandwidth, and the structural realities of a time-limited practicum. The limits of the supports available to me throughout this process, particularly a lack of access to faculty supervisors formally trained in IFS, also influenced its depth and scope.

My identity and relational history played a role in shaping how I understood and responded to CT material. For instance, I am naturally drawn to symbolic and narrative expression, which may have made this process feel more intuitive to me than it might for someone who leans toward more verbal or kinesthetic reflection. This inclination could have led me to unconsciously privilege coherent storylines or recurring images over more fragmented or ambiguous material. This could have biased my inquiry towards what felt personally meaningful in my professional development.

Similarly, my prior comfort with metaphor, parts work, and artmaking shaped how I accessed and related to the material. The choice to work primarily with pencil and acrylic paint on canvas may have shaped the emotional and aesthetic tone of the process. These materials aligned with my strengths and supported access to the work but may also have narrowed the

expressive range. Using a wider variety of media across the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) could have surfaced different parts or generated alternative insights. These preexisting preferences may not translate for others with different learning styles or training backgrounds, which underscores how contextual and individual factors limit the transferability of these findings and highlight the importance of researcher positionality in arts-based heuristic work.

Future research could extend this method over a longer period or include multiple therapist-participants to explore how IFS-guided and CT-related response art practices evolve across different stages of professional development. As previously noted in the *Implications for Art Therapy Practice* subsection, it may also be valuable to investigate how this process could be adapted and facilitated with the support of an IFS- and art therapy-trained supervisor. Such guidance could help reduce initial ambiguity and foster greater clarity for new therapists engaging with the process. I suspect that my early IFS-guided art responses may have been shaped, at least in part, by my own nervousness in attempting a novel approach without that kind of support.

Synthesis of Discussion

This discussion chapter revisited the research question, reflected on the research process, and considered the broader implications, limitations, and future directions of this arts-based heuristic self-inquiry. Despite the specific constraints of a graduate-level internship, the process offered meaningful insights into how IFS-guided post-session response art can support professional development. The findings suggest that this approach may support emerging therapists in engaging more compassionately with their CT during clinical training. At the same time, this work underscores the importance of researcher positionality, material sensitivity, and

methodological flexibility. Further exploration is needed to examine how this approach might be adapted across diverse therapeutic contexts and therapist identities.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore how Internal Family Systems (IFS)-guided post-session response art might support an art therapy intern's CT reflection and developing professional identity. Guided by an arts-based heuristic methodology, this inquiry asked: *How can IFS-guided post-session response art processes support an art therapy intern's countertransference reflection and developing practice?*

Engaging in this arts-based heuristic self-inquiry helped me transform vague discomfort into greater clarity around my CT responses. I began this project feeling unsure of how to interpret the emotional residue that remained after client sessions. Through the structured use of IFS-guided response art and reflection, I developed tools for identifying, externalizing, and dialoguing with internal parts that were previously difficult to access. This process enabled a shift from confusion to increased clarity, suggesting that IFS-guided response art may function as a bridge between felt emotional residue and meaningful therapeutic insight.

The symbolic visual language that emerged in the weekly paintings included recurring figures, shifting color fields, and layered metaphors. These elements allowed me to observe patterns I had not previously recognized. The insights that followed helped me approach CT with more self-awareness, curiosity, and compassion. If I were to continue this work, I would extend the process over a longer period to better trace how internal systems change over time and to more clearly distinguish between repeated activations and evolving part dynamics.

This process reaffirmed that professional development is not limited to gaining knowledge or clinical techniques. It also involves looking inward with openness and honesty. IFS-guided post-session response art became a meaningful practice for supporting emotional

regulation, reflection, and a deepened sense of therapeutic presence as I continue to grow in my identity as an art therapist. As I enter a profession centered on witnessing others, this process reminded me of the professional value in making space to witness myself.

This project contributes to the field of art therapy by proposing a flexible and integrative framework for reflective practice that centers emotional regulation, creative process, and internal dialogue. While therapists across multiple modalities are trained to notice CT, there is a gap in the research on actively integrating structured art responses with IFS. This study offers one such approach, potentially enriching how therapists-in-training access, process, and regulate their CT activations.

By combining IFS exercises with response art, this study offers one possible model to support art therapy interns in engaging their countertransference responses with increased embodiment, compassion and curiosity. It also highlights the value of incorporating IFS-guided arts-based reflection into clinical training and supervision in the future.

As a single-case self-inquiry conducted over a short period, this study is inherently limited in scope and generalizability. The findings are shaped by my unique positionality, including personal history, therapeutic training, and prior fluency with art materials and metaphorical thinking. While these factors deepened the inquiry, they may not resonate with all emerging therapists or be directly transferable across contexts.

Future studies might explore how IFS-guided response art can be adapted for use in supervision or group training contexts, particularly across different stages of professional development. As the researcher-participant, I conducted this inquiry during the second year of my art therapy master's program, which is a relatively brief, formative, and context-specific

period in an art therapist's career. Including multiple participants or extending the timeline could offer further insight into how IFS-guided art responses shift over time and how this process may support professional development and reflective capacity. Ultimately, this study affirms the value of integrating personal process with structured, IFS-guided response art to support countertransference reflection and the development of a more grounded, compassionate therapeutic presence.

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Appendix A

Structure of Weekly IFS-Guided Response Art Painting Sessions During the Immersion Phase

Duration	Activity
10 min	Setup: 16 × 12 canvas, acrylic paints, paintbrushes, water container, and a printed copy of the adapted IFS parts-mapping exercise, sketchbook entries from this week.
15 min	Refamiliarizing with sketchbook entries from the week, choosing an activation sketch to elaborate on.
10 min	Warm up: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mindful breathing, remembering and connecting with the bodily sensation of the chosen activation sketch
2 hours	Mapping out parts according to Schwartz's (2021, p. 26) mapping your parts exercise.
25 mins	Journaling the experience through subsidiary prompts and exploring the five queries with each depicted part (Mojta et al., 2013): <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How does this part show up for you?2. How do you feel toward this part?3. What is this part trying to do?4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?5. What does this part want for the entire system?
10 min	Cleanup and closing: Putting art supplies away and photographing art created.

Appendix B

IFS queries and supplementary questions for guiding post-art-making journaling (Mojta et al., 2013).

Query	Purpose
1. How does this part show up for you?	To find and focus on this part while promoting sensory awareness.
2. How do you feel toward this part?	To encourage a sense of differentiation.
3. What is this part trying to do?	To get to know this part's role within the system.
4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?	To inquire about this part's fears.
5. What does this part want for the entire system?	To approach the part's reason for creating this activation with a lens of curiosity.

Supplementary Questions

- What does the trailhead linked to this activation/countertransference experience look like?
- Describe their visual representations and their relationships on the page.
- What is this garlic clove showing me about my inner experience of this activation/countertransference experience?
- What insights into my therapeutic practice can be gained from witnessing these parts through response art?






- Are there elements of these insights that I can use to better my approach and become more present with my clients?
 - What visual elements become present when engaging with the parts of me that are present during this activation?
 - What insights am I gaining that could be useful in using this exercise with clients?
-

Appendix C

Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Paintings and Journaling Summaries

Table C1

Abridged Journal Entries from Week 1 of Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Paintings: Summary of Identified Parts and Responses to Queries

Week 1					
Part	1	2	3	4	5
Image					
1. How does this part show up for you?	Tension felt at the intersection of my neck and head.	Full body heaviness	An opening of the chest and a hopeful activation. This part energizes me.	A feeling of differentiation between my chest and my two arms. I feel so aware of them as thirds.	A sensation to shift my eyes from side to side, slight tension in my hand as I do so.

Week 1

2. How do you feel toward this part?	I feel a sense of caution toward this part, empathetic to its effort to contain, yet aware of its instability.	I feel sad for this part. I also feel frustrated with this part and want to get up and take action.	I feel hopeful towards this part; it energizes me and makes me think of hopeful possibilities.	I feel confused about this part and firm boundaries	I feel distant from this part. I desire to see and feel it more clearly, but it feels elusive,
3. What is this part trying to do?	This part is attempting to hold my inner emotions within a loose, flexible container.	This part is trying to send me into freeze to avoid the intensity of the emotions being held.	This part is trying to remind me that challenging emotions do pause and that there is growth to be found there. This part is trying to keep me positive.	This part is trying to express itself without becoming overwhelming. It creates internal separation.	This part is trying to push me to make connections.
4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?	This part is afraid that without the efforts to hold it up, emotions will flood in, and the substance inside will be wrung out.	This part fears that if I do not lie down and stop moving, that I will become unstable and dangerous as a therapist.	This part is afraid that I will shut down if it doesn't alert me.	This part is afraid that if was not acknowledged, it would merge together and become unknowable.	This part is afraid that if I don't find the answers now that I will lose them forever.






Week 1

5. What does this part want for the entire system?	This part wants the entire system to be able to maintain its order, despite the tension it holds.	This part wants the entire system to not engage with scary things.	This part wants the system to zoom out and refocus on space and possibilities.	This part wants to be seen by the system and integrated into the whole. It functions almost like a color key, flagging where its presence can be found in other parts.	This part wants to alert the system of the possibilities of connection.
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Note. Queries pulled from Mojta et al. (2013) and images created by the researcher-participant using an adapted parts-mapping exercise (Schwartz, 2021, p. 26).

Table C2

Abridged Journal Entries from Week 2 of Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Paintings: Summary of Identified Parts and Responses to Queries

Week 2					
Part	1	2	3	4	5
Image					
1. How does this part show up for you?	Opening of the chest, expansion, creation of space, and energizing.	A tightness in the front of my shoulders.	A deep inhale as I notice my weight on my chair.	This part shows up for me as a narrowing of my eyesight and a clenching of the jaw.	A pressure in my temples followed by a release.
2. How do you feel toward this part?	I feel happy for this part. I admire its vulnerability.	I feel a sense of alarm, as if I've done something wrong. It brings fear with it, and I find myself intimidated by its presence.	I feel sad and empathetic towards this part. I look at this part and feel that it is doing its best while experiencing the tension	I feel tense towards this part, I look at its uprightness and it makes me feel intimidated by its seriousness.	I feel uncertain about this part. It feels outside of mt sight. I feel curious yet confused.

Week 2

of deflating against this
rock

3. What is this part trying to do?

This part is trying to celebrate and connect

This part is trying to contain and rein in part 1. It pokes and prod's part one while locking it away. It seeks to make my 1st part uncomfortable.

This part tries to hold both tension and positivity at once, acknowledging its own suffering while clinging to hope. It offers loose containment, allowing fragments of Part 1 to trickle out so they don't suffocate. Though well-intentioned, it knows it can only hold so much before it begins to fade.

This part is trying to provide rigidity and a narrow focus, duty, and order. It is trying to give structure and a procedural approach.

This part is trying to tell me to broaden my perspective. It wants to encourage me to notice things that I don't know yet

4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?

This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me, I would miss out on an opportunity to celebrate

This part is afraid that I would lose control and become out of touch with reality, sporadic, unthoughtful

This part fears that if it doesn't alert me to fleeting moments of positivity, I won't carry them with me. It puts on a positive face as it deflates, afraid that without this reminder, I will too.

This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me of a need for a frame that I would become lost in my inner world.

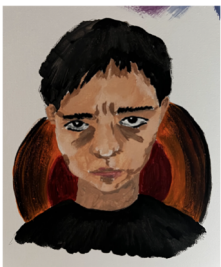



This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me, I would become stuck on what is directly in front of me.

Week 2					
5. What does this part want for the entire system?	This part wants to expand and provide a fluffy cushioning for the whole system	This part wants to ground the rest of the system and keep it separated. It wants to remind the rest of the system that unchecked emotions can be dangerous.	This part wants the whole system to acknowledge bittersweetness.	This part wants the entire system to be illuminated; it wants to expose parts of the system that it deems worthy of its light.	This part wants the system to be reminded that there is more to it if it zooms out.

Note. Queries pulled from Mojta et al. (2013) and images created by the researcher-participant using an adapted parts-mapping exercise (Schwartz, 2021, p. 26).

Table C3

Abridged Journal Entries from Week 3 of Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Paintings: Summary of Identified Parts and Responses to Queries

Week 3				
Part	1	2	3	4
Image				
1. How does this part show up for you?	This part shows up for me as tension behind my eyes and a clenching of the jaw	A desire to physically close myself off. To cross my arms and legs.	A sinking feeling in my chest, like an exile, a child part longing to be seen, held, and acknowledged for its efforts.	This part shows up for me as a deep sigh and the sensation of a soft, transparent barrier encasing my body.
2. How do you feel toward this part?	I feel avoidant of this part. I feel that I don't want to look it directly in the eyes even though it looks directly at me. This part feels childish to me.	I feel a desire to see past this part. I feel as though this part is so rigid, and I want to massage it.	I feel sad for this part, I too want to offer a hand to hold it up. I want to take it from the holding hand and lay it in an environment where it can explore and meet similarly sized figures.	I feel proud of this part for maintaining its shape while not closing itself off to the purple orb.




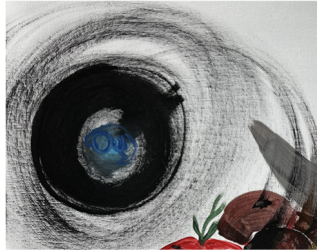
Week 3

3. What is this part trying to do?	This part is trying to express an imbalance in the relationship.	This part is trying to protect me by putting up a wall.	This part is trying to be independent while still holding onto the safety of the hand's embrace. It is trying to peek out to see if it is safe.	This part is trying to seek connection without losing its individual components.
4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?	If this part is afraid that if it didn't alert me, I would be taken advantage of.	This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me, I would become hurt.	This part is trying to alert me to the risk of being revictimized, it is trying to alert me that there is still a part of me that is scared to explore for fear of being wounded. It is trying to alert me to the childhood wounds that are still present.	This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me it would merge into one blue and purple mass. It is afraid that I will lose myself.
5. What does this part want for the entire system?	This part wants the entire system to become enraged, as this is a more comfortable emotion to feel.	This part wants to protect the system by providing a strong wall that emotions cannot pass through. It wants the system to remain stuck behind an impermeable containment. It wants to stop the system from letting anything in or out.	This part wants the whole system to seek out support, and not to close itself off.	This part models the value of flexible boundaries, reminding the system that rigid containment feels isolating, while none at all creates chaos. It encourages the system to pause, regulate, and return with less intensity, gently reassessing what belongs to the present rather than the past, with self-compassion.

Note. Queries pulled from Mojta et al. (2013) and images created by the researcher-participant using an adapted parts-mapping exercise (Schwartz, 2021, p. 26).

Table C4

Abridged Journal Entries from Week 4 of Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Paintings: Summary of Identified Parts and Responses to Queries.

Week 4				
Part	1	2	3	4
Image				
1. How does this part show up for you?	Glazing of the gaze, softening of focus	A sharp tension in the neck and eyes, like an elevator drop, jolting me back to the present.	My tongue pressed firmly on the roof of my mouth.	Release of my tongue and easing muscle tension, showing up as a sense of floating in the unknown, without force, just soft light glowing.
2. How do you feel toward this part?	I feel a desire to join this part	I feel both uncomfortable and appreciative of this part. However, I wonder about its rush.	I feel ashamed of this part.	I feel both comfort and fear toward this part; it's peaceful to float, but unsettling not knowing what surrounds me.

Week 4

3. What is this part trying to do?

This part is trying to separate me from reality.

This part is trying to increase the intensity and pace

This part tries to stop me from impulsively making overly direct comments in an attempt to rush therapeutic insight.

This part is trying to surrender.

4. What is this part afraid would happen if it didn't alert you through these bodily sensations?

This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me of how far I have mentally drifted from the current moment, I would forget to ground myself.

This part is afraid that if it didn't strong-arm me into the present with aggression that I would fail at being a therapist. It uses harshness to get its point across.

This part is afraid that if it didn't alert me, I could become harmful to the client.

This part is afraid that I would become stuck if it didn't alert me to release myself to the moment.

5. What does this part want for the entire system?

This part wants the entire system to be protected in a haze,

This part wants to scold the system for not being perfect at all times. It wants it to be 100% productive and Perfect at all times.

This part wants the entire system to keep its impulses in check. It looks directly at the viewer, challenging them so that they don't reach for the knife.

It wants the entire system to just relax. It wants the system to stop feeling like it is being hunted for sport.

Note. Queries pulled from Mojta et al. (2013) and images created by the researcher-participant using an adapted parts-mapping exercise (Schwartz, 2021, p. 26).

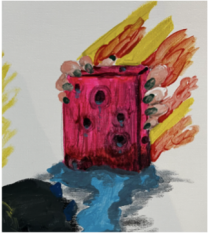





Appendix D

Formal descriptions of the IFS-guided artworks based on Glatstein's (2009) framework

Table D1

Formal Element Analysis of the Week 1 Parts-Mapping Painting (Glatstein, 2009). Brief excerpts.

Week 1: Elements/Principles and Observations

Part	1	2	3	4	5	Total Composition
Image						
Line	Loose, expressive brushstrokes contour the forms without sharp definition, adding softness and motion.	Loose and gestural, with thick brushstrokes that define the woman's form in a flowing, organic way.	Loose, fluid lines define the plant's stems and leaves, with irregular, organic brushstrokes that suggest movement.	Loose, broad, and gestural brushstrokes. Soft, irregular edges	Thick, bold black lines form two sharp bridge shapes.	Loose, expressive brushstrokes and gestural lines define the plant, figure, and color mounds, while sharp, linear marks distinguish the black bridge-like shapes.
Value	Moderate contrast emphasizes texture and slight depth, particularly in the sponge holes and base.	Low to moderate contrast, soft midtone blending in the figure.	Subtle contrast appears as bright yellows and greens offset the darker pot and plant base.	Subtle value variation is visible due to brushstroke density and opacity.	Stark contrast between black forms and bright colors enhances visibility and importance	Moderate contrast. Dark figure and black marks contrast with light color fields; subtle variations within brushstrokes.

Week 1: Elements/Principles and Observations

Shapes	The geometric sponge contrasts with organic hand shapes and flame-like background marks	Organic shapes dominate in the woman's body, hair, and plant, using irregular forms.	Primarily organic shapes (leaves, flowers) contrast with the geometric rectangular pot.	Large, organic shapes in green, blue, and yellow fill the canvas with irregular forms.	Vertical and horizontal lines of geometric black forms contrast with organic shapes of mounds.	A mix of geometric (sponge, plant pot) and organic shapes (plant leaves, figure, color mounds) creates visual variety.
Forms	Limited three-dimensionality; flat areas suggest symbolic rather than realistic form.	Limited sense of three-dimensionality; colors and overlapping shapes suggest layers rather than realistic form.	Minimal three-dimensionality; flat color application suggests simplified, symbolic forms.	Flat.	Flat but grounded, solid color and defined edges contrast with flowing color mounds. Appear more grounded and deliberate.	Minimal sense of depth or three-dimensionality; the work emphasizes flatness and symbolic layering over realistic form.
Space	Shallow depth; overlapping forms create layered effects without strong spatial recession.	Shallow spatial depth; overlapping elements create some layering, but space feels compressed.	Shallow space with little depth; overlapping elements (leaves, background) create slight layering.	Mounds are adjacent and layered slightly, but do not suggest depth or realistic spatial relationships.	The black shapes are embedded within the color fields yet interrupt the flow, suggesting a separation or division of space while also bridging mounds.	Shallow, flattened space with overlapping elements (plant, figure, sponge) suggests limited depth and emphasizes symbolic composition.

Week 1: Elements/Principles and Observations

Color	Bold, saturated hues dominate. Warm yellows and reds contrast with cool blues and dark tones.	Dominated by cool blues and blacks in the figure, contrasted by the warm orange of the flowerpot and yellow background.	Dominated by earthy and vibrant tones (green stems, yellow flowers and background, and an orange-red pot).	Bright green, vivid blue, and vibrant yellow. The colors are distinct and unblended, creating strong visual separation.	The stark black of the shapes contrasts sharply against the bright green, blue, and yellow backgrounds, making them visually prominent.	Bright, saturated colors dominate. Vivid green, blue, yellow, pink, orange, and red create distinct zones and emotional impact. Black is sparingly used for sharp contrast.
Texture	Implied textures suggest a porous sponge and smooth hand through uneven paint application.	Thick, visible brushstrokes imply a tactile, almost heavy surface, especially in the figure's body and hair.	Visible brushstrokes imply texture in plant and background; pot remains smooth.	Subtle through visible brushwork, giving each color mound a rough, layered appearance.	Flat black shapes contrast with textured color mounds, creating visual tension.	Implied texture through visible brushwork, especially in color mounds and blue figure. The paint application adds a tactile quality.
Balance	Asymmetrical balance; visual weight is heavier on the right side due to hand and background strokes.	Asymmetrical, the large blue figure on the lower half balances with the plant and pot at the top left.	Asymmetrical yet visually balanced by the spread of leaves in multiple directions and the stable form of the pot.	Asymmetrical but stable. Green and yellow flank the composition, while blue occupies the center, creating visual equilibrium.	The black shapes are symmetrically placed.	Asymmetrical yet balanced, with large shapes (plant, sponge, figure) anchoring the top and color mounds with black bridges balancing the lower portion.

Week 1: Elements/Principles and Observations







Contrast	Strong contrasts between warm and cool colors, and between organic and geometric shapes.	Strong color contrast (warm vs cool) and light/dark contrasts create visual tension	Moderate contrast between warm (pot, background) and cool (leaves) colors.	Strong color contrast exists between the warm yellow, cool blue, and fresh green. The separation of colors adds visual energy.	High contrast exists not only in color (black vs color fields) but also in texture and form (rigid vs loose).	Strong color contrasts (warm vs cool) and sharp contrast between soft color fields and rigid black shapes create dynamic tension.
Movement	Directional brushstrokes and flowing paint create upward and circular eye movement.	Curving, gestural lines of the figure create a downward and resting movement across the canvas.	Curving stems lead the eye upward and outward, creating a gentle sense of motion.	Directional brushstrokes, especially in the central blue mound, guide the eye upward.	Guides the eye horizontally and creates a pause between flowing colors.	Directional brushstrokes and central blue path guide the eye from bottom to top.
Emphasis	Bright pink sponge is the focal point,	The blue figure is the focal point.	The orange pot anchors the composition, while the plant's upward growth draws attention.	Blue mound is emphasized through its size, position, and the way it is framed by the green and yellow fields.	Bridge-like shapes become focal points due to their bold color, sharp edges, and interruption of the otherwise soft composition.	Multiple focal points emerge: the pink sponge, central blue figure, and lower black bridge-like shapes, each emphasized through color and placement.
Pattern	Repetition of sponge holes and layered strokes adds subtle pattern.	Loose repetition of color and brushstroke direction adds subtle rhythm.	Repetition of green leaves and yellow flowers.	Subtle repetition occurs in the brushstroke application.	Subtle repetition between the two similar black shapes.	Repetition of brushstroke types and bridge-like forms.

Week 1: Elements/Principles and Observations						
Proportion	The oversized sponge and hand dominate, suggesting symbolic or emotional weight.	The oversized figure suggests symbolic weight	Naturalistic proportions; plant and pot relate to each other in a believable scale	Color mounds dominate the composition equally, each occupying significant space and balancing each other out.	Small in scale, yet disproportionately strong in visual impact due to their contrast and placement.	The scale of the forms (large color mounds and small black shapes) creates visual hierarchy and draws attention to both expansive and minute details.
Unity	Consistent brushwork and cohesive palette unify contrasting elements.	Cohesive color palette and loose brushwork create harmony across contrasting areas.	Harmonious palette and flowing brushwork create cohesion.	Unified by consistent brushwork and harmonious palette, linking the three mounds	Repeated black forms create cohesion, linking green and yellow mounds while maintaining distinct zones.	Despite variety in shapes and colors, the cohesive brushwork, palette, and repeated motifs tie the elements together into a unified whole.

Note. Formal analysis of the painting created during the parts-mapping response process. Adapted from Glatstein's (2009) formal analysis framework.

Table D2

Formal Element Analysis of the Week 2 Parts-Mapping Painting (Glatstein, 2009). Brief excerpts.

Week 2: Elements/Principles and Observations						
Part	1	2	3	4	5	Total Composition
Image						
Line	Loose, sweeping, and dynamic brushstrokes radiate outward in multiple directions, creating a sense of energy and flow.	Bold, vertical black lines form the rigid cage, contrasting sharply with the soft, dynamic yellow and red brushstrokes in the background. Cage lines are rigid and uneven	Fluid, rounded lines define the balloon, contrasting with the jagged and rough lines of the rock and sharp, tense piercing marks	Clean, curved lines shape the lighthouse, while loose yellow strokes create contrast. Angular black lines add structure through railings and windows.	Loose, flowing, and curved lines define the leafy shapes. Brushstrokes vary in thickness, creating organic edges and suggesting natural growth.	A mix of loose, gestural lines (yellow light rays and green foliage) and sharper, defined lines (cage bars and lighthouse edges) create visual tension and variety.
Value	Subtle value shifts occur within the yellows and reds, with darker strokes creating slight contrast and visual layering.	Strong contrast between the dark cage and light background enhances separation and focus.	Moderate value shifts in the balloon's shading add depth, while dark outlines and piercing marks increase contrast.	Strong contrast between dark black details, bright yellow light, and light tones on the lighthouse bands. Subtle value shifts provide depth to the structure.	Moderate value range within greens. Lighter highlights and darker greens create subtle depth and variation.	Moderate within elements, stronger overall. Bright yellows contrast with dark cage,

Week 2: Elements/Principles and Observations

						lighthouse, and balloon.
Shapes	Organic, irregular shapes emerge from the intersecting strokes. There are no clearly defined or geometric shapes.	The cage creates geometric, repeated vertical shapes, contrasting with the organic and radiating shapes in the yellow burst.	Organic shapes dominate, with the soft balloon and rough rock contrasted by sharp, geometric diamond shapes around the balloon.	Geometric and organic shapes combine. The lighthouse has a cylindrical form with horizontal bands, while the rock hill and foliage are more irregular and natural.	Organic, irregular shapes resembling leaves or foliage. No geometric forms are present.	Both geometric and organic shapes are present. The cage and lighthouse introduce structured, angular forms, while the foliage, yellow burst, and balloon are more organic and freeform.
Forms	Lacks realistic form	Flat presentation, but layering creates depth. The cage appears in the foreground while the yellow burst recedes.	Slight illusion of volume in the balloon through color variation and highlights. The rock remains flat and textural.	Slight suggestion of volume in the lighthouse through curved shapes and light shading. Background elements remain flat and symbolic.	Flat with minimal shading, though layered strokes give a faint sense of dimension.	Some elements (lighthouse, balloon) suggest volume, but the composition emphasizes flatness and layered arrangement over realistic depth.
Space	Shallow pictorial space; overlapping brushstrokes create slight depth, but the	Shallow space created through overlap	Shallow spatial arrangement. Overlapping elements (rock,	Shallow space overall, but layering	Positioned at the edges, the shapes frame the	Shallow depth with layered elements, but no realistic

Week 2: Elements/Principles and Observations

	composition remains largely flat and abstract.		balloon, flowers) create limited depth but maintain a flat, illustrative feel.	creates some sense of depth.	composition, enclosing the scene.	recession. The composition remains symbolic and flat.
Color	Dominated by warm yellows, with accents of red and touches of greenish brown. The palette evokes warmth and movement.	The black and pale-yellow cage introduces stark contrast. The red accents at the cage tips and throughout the burst connect the two layers visually.	Dominated by muted yellows, grays, and subtle pinks and reds in the mini part 1's. Black outlines and piercing marks create strong accents.	Dominated by deep reds and whites on the lighthouse, bright yellow in the background light, and green foliage. Black accents add visual weight and definition.	Predominantly greens, with subtle variations from dark to light green and occasional yellow undertones.	Vibrant yellows, deep reds, and greens dominate the palette. Black accents in the cage, balloon outline, and lighthouse details create strong contrast.
Texture	Implied texture through visible, directional brushwork. The surface appears soft yet energetic due to varied stroke pressure.	The cage, while flat, appears rougher due to visible paint strokes.	Implied texture in the soft, smooth balloon and rougher, more angular rock. Brushwork varies subtly to suggest different surface qualities.	Implied texture through brushstrokes, especially in the yellow light and rock hill, creating variation between smooth and rough areas.	Implied texture through layered and visible brushwork. The strokes suggest softness and natural movement.	Visible brushstrokes imply texture in the yellow burst, foliage, and rock hill, while the smooth lighthouse contrasts with the rougher background.
Balance	Asymmetrical, yet visually balanced	Asymmetrical but balanced.	Asymmetrical balance, large yellow balloon against small rock.	Asymmetrical but balanced. The vertical lighthouse is visually anchored	Not fully balanced, only present on 3 corners.	Asymmetrical but stable, with the heavier left side (cage, burst,

Week 2: Elements/Principles and Observations

				on the right, while sweeping yellow light balances the left side.		balloon) balanced by the lighthouse and green foliage on the right.
Contrast	Subtle contrast between red/browns and yellows	High contrast in color (dark cage vs bright background) and form (rigid vs flowing).	Strong contrast between the soft, rounded balloon and sharp elements (rock, piercing line, diamonds), with muted yellow and gray adding subtle tension.	High contrast between the solid, structured lighthouse and loose, dynamic yellow light rays. Also strong contrast in color and tone.	Moderate contrast	High contrast in color (bright vs dark) and form (rigid vs fluid). This tension draws attention across the composition.
Movement	Strong sense of movement as strokes radiate outward and curve around the composition, guiding the viewer's eye in multiple directions.	Vertical cage bars restrict eye movement, creating visual tension.	Eyes follow the direction of the piercing line into the balloon, which directs attention across its form and toward the flowers on the right	Yellow brushstrokes suggest outward movement, directing attention from the lighthouse across the canvas.	Curving brushstrokes lead the viewer's eye gently around the outer edges of the canvas	Strong movement as yellow rays push outward, cage restricts, and curved lines guide the eye between focal points.
Emphasis	Central burst of denser brushwork draws focus	Black cage is the main focal point, emphasized by its contrast and central position.	Pierced balloon is the focal point, emphasized by its size, color, and dynamic interaction with the piercing element.	Lighthouse is the primary focal point due to its size, central placement, and color contrast. The radiating yellow light	Subtle in emphasis, serving more as a framing and grounding element rather than a focal point.	Multiple focal points: the cage/burst cluster, the deflating balloon, and the lighthouse. Placement, color,


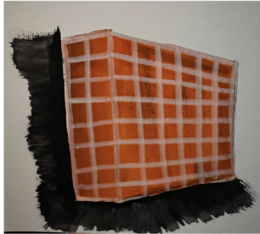


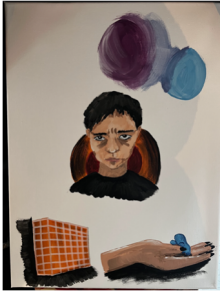
Week 2: Elements/Principles and Observations

				reinforces this focus.		and contrast highlight these areas.
Pattern	Repetition of curved, sweeping strokes	Repetition of vertical bars	Subtle repetition in the diamond shapes and curved lines of the balloon	Repetition of horizontal stripes on the lighthouse and radiating yellow lines in the background creates rhythm.	Repetition of leaf-like forms	Repetition of linear marks (yellow rays, cage bars, lighthouse bands) creates rhythm and ties separate elements together.
Proportion	Central burst occupies most of the space, creating a sense of expansion and dominance within the composition.	Cage appears oversized relative to the yellow burst, amplifying its symbolic or emotional weight	Oversized balloon dominates the composition, while the rock and flowers are proportionally smaller but still significant.	Lighthouse dominates in scale, emphasizing symbolism; rock and background are secondary.	Large but undefined. Suggested growth in foreground.	Large forms (cage, lighthouse, balloon) dominate; smaller details add nuance and balance.
Unity	Achieved through consistent brushstroke style, warm color palette, and harmonious flow of movement.	The connection of red tones in both the cage and burst, along with the layered composition, creates cohesion despite contrast.	Cohesion is achieved through consistent brushwork, muted color palette, and balanced distribution of elements.	Cohesion achieved through repeated colors, consistent brushwork, and integration of structured and organic forms.	Consistent color, shape, and placement help to integrate the composition's edges with the central imagery.	Unified by cohesive palette, consistent brushwork, and interconnected flowing forms

Note. Formal analysis of the painting created during the parts-mapping response process. Adapted from Glatstein's (2009) formal analysis framework.

Table D3

Formal Element Analysis of the Week 3 Parts-Mapping Painting (Glatstein, 2009). Brief excerpts.

Week 3: Elements/Principles and Observations					
Part	1	2	3	4	Total Composition
Image					
Line	Soft, blended lines shape facial features, while sharper lines define hair and garment edges. Subtle, directional brushstrokes add structure to facial planes.	Straight, repeated grid lines define the brick wall, while loose, gestural black brushstrokes surround it.	Smooth, elongated lines shape the hand, while soft, rounded contours define the blue form. Loose strokes emphasize the shadows below.	Soft, curving brushstrokes define the circular forms. Edges are diffused and loose, blending gently into the background and each other.	Varied use of line throughout. Clean, controlled lines define the brick wall and hand, while loose, gestural brushstrokes shape the abstract circular forms and portrait background.
Value	Wide range of values. Dark eyes, hair, and garment contrast with midtones in the skin and brighter highlights on the forehead and nose.	Moderate value shifts within the brick wall and more intense dark values in the black brushstrokes enhance contrast.	Moderate value range; highlights and shadows on the hand and blue object create depth and separation from the background.	Subtle value variation within each form. Deeper purples and blues fade gently into lighter, translucent edges.	Strong contrast between dark accents (hair, shadow, nails, brick wall edges) and lighter background. Subtle gradation adds depth in the hand and circular forms.

Week 3: Elements/Principles and Observations

Shapes	Primarily organic shapes form the face, hair, and garment. The circular background introduces a geometric element that frames the figure.	Dominantly geometric with the brick wall. The black brushstrokes introduce irregular, organic shapes around the form.	Organic shapes dominate, with the hand elongated and natural, and the blue object rounded and abstract.	Organic, rounded shapes dominate, with overlapping circles creating fluid and soft boundaries.	A mixture of geometric and organic shapes. The brick wall and circles round the face introduce structure, while the abstract forms, portrait, and hand offer softer, more irregular shapes.
Forms	Light and shadow create depth in the face, while the flat background highlights its dimensionality.	Perspective and shading suggest slight volume in the brick wall, though the composition remains mostly flat.	Shading on the hand and highlights on the blue object suggest subtle form.	Directional brushwork and layering create a slight sense of form, movement, and volume.	Some elements suggest volume (hand, portrait face, abstract forms), while others (grid, background) remain flat.
Space	Shallow space pushes the figure forward against the flat background, emphasizing psychological presence	Shallow depth; the form appears pushed slightly forward, while the background remains flat.	Shallow spatial depth. The hand is foregrounded, while the background is flat and unembellished.	Shallow space. Overlap and transparency suggest slight depth, but the composition remains largely flat and atmospheric.	Shallow space overall. Elements are layered and spaced apart, creating a collage-like arrangement that emphasizes conceptual over realistic space.
Color	Earthy tones (browns, blacks, reds, oranges) convey warmth and emotional weight, while light skin contrasts with dark hair and clothing	Warm orange fills the grid, deep black surrounds it, and soft white lines create subtle transitions.	Warm, naturalistic skin tones contrast sharply with the cool blue of the small form. Black is used for fingernails and shadows	Limited palette of purple, blue, and soft neutrals, with overlapping areas subtly blending to enhance harmony.	A muted but diverse palette. Warm tones in the portrait contrast with the cool blue and purple forms and orange grid. Black provides grounding throughout.

Week 3: Elements/Principles and Observations

Texture	Implied texture varies: soft, blended brushwork on skin contrasts with rougher, more textured strokes in hair and background.	Implied texture through layered brushstrokes, smooth in the brick wall and rough in the black surrounding areas.	Implied smooth texture on both the hand and blue object, with visible brushwork adding slight surface variation, especially in the shadow area.	Forms appear soft and painterly.	Implied texture varies: smooth in the hand and brick wall, more textured and expressive in the circular forms and portrait brushwork.
Balance	Symmetrical composition with the face centrally placed. Background arcs add subtle asymmetry and dynamism.	Asymmetrical but visually balanced. The structured brick wall contrasts with the black containment, creating tension and equilibrium.	Asymmetrical but balanced through horizontal orientation.	Asymmetrical but balanced. The larger purple form on the left is visually offset by the smaller blue form on the right.	Asymmetrical but visually balanced. Heavier forms (portrait and brick wall) anchor the lower half, while abstract forms float above, distributing weight across the canvas
Contrast	Strong contrast between dark features and lighter skin tones. Background colors contrast subtly with the figure to provide separation.	Strong contrast between the brick wall and expressive black brushwork, as well as between warm and dark hues.	Strong contrast between the warm hand and cool blue form, as well as between the soft shapes and dark fingernails and shadows.	Moderate contrast between cool and warm hues, and between more saturated centers and lighter, softer edges.	High contrast between colors, textures, and shapes. Structured vs. organic forms and warm vs. cool hues create visual tension.
Movement	Directional brushwork in the background and facial shadows guide the eye toward the figure's intense gaze	Grid structure leads the eye across the brick wall, while the loose black strokes create energetic peripheral movement.	Shape and positioning of the hand guide the viewer's eye toward the small blue form.	Curving strokes and overlapping placement guide the eye in a gentle circular motion between the forms.	Eye moves fluidly from the abstract forms at the top to the central portrait and down to the brick wall and hand, guided by how the elements are visually linked through placement, color, and alignment.


Week 3: Elements/Principles and Observations

Emphasis	The eyes are the focal point, enhanced by sharp contrast and central placement	Brick wall is the focal point	Blue object becomes the focal point due to its color contrast and placement at the hand's end.	Deep purple form acts as the primary focal point, while the blue shape offers a secondary point of interest.	Centrally placed portrait is the primary focal point, while surrounding elements act as symbolic extensions or supporting visuals.
Pattern	Subtle repetition in background arcs and hair strands adds rhythm without distracting from the figure	Repetition of grid lines creates a regular pattern	No overt pattern	No formal pattern	Subtle rhythm emerges through repetition of curves (abstract forms, hand, portrait) and grids (brick wall)
Proportion	Proportions are slightly exaggerated for expressive effect, particularly in the eyes and forehead.	The large brick wall dominates the composition, with the surrounding black elements playing a supporting role.	Hand is large and dominates the composition; the small blue form adds delicacy and intrigue.	Larger purple shape anchors the composition, with the smaller blue form creating visual variety.	Proportions are intentionally varied. The hand, portrait, and abstract forms are larger relative to the grid, emphasizing their emotional or symbolic weight.
Unity	Unified through consistent earthy color palette, centralized composition, and cohesive brushwork	Unified by limited color palette and the interplay of contrasting line styles and shapes.	Unified by limited palette, consistent brushwork, and connection between hand and blue form.	Unified by harmonious palette, soft brushwork, and consistent shapes and edges.	Unified through repeated use of earthy and muted tones, consistent brushwork, and relational placement of distinct symbolic elements.

Note. Formal analysis of the painting created during the parts-mapping response process. Adapted from Glatstein's (2009) formal analysis framework.

Table D4

Formal Element Analysis of the Week 4 Parts-Mapping Painting (Glatstein, 2009). Brief excerpts.

Week 4: Elements/Principles and Observations					
Part	1	2	3	4	Total Composition
Image					
Line	Soft, rounded contours define the figures and cloud shapes. Subtle, loose brushwork adds texture to the clouds. Thin black lines create swirling motion above the blue figure's head.	Loose, flowing brushstrokes define the yellow shell, pink snail, and red carpet. Horizontal red lines add direction and rhythm	Expressive and varied. Soft, curved lines shape the tomato face, sharp edges define the knife, and loose horizontal strokes form the cutting board.	Dynamic, gestural circular brushstrokes create a swirling spiral pattern. Lines vary in thickness and intensity, producing energy and movement	Varied use of line throughout the composition. The black spiral features gestural, circular lines. The knife introduces sharp, straight lines. The figures and snail are outlined with soft, rounded contours. Floating clouds and background marks include loose, organic lines.
Value	Moderate value contrast. Dark figures stand out against light clouds. Dark green cloud centers add subtle focal points.	Low to moderate contrast; tonal shifts within the yellow shell and pink snail create gentle variation	Moderate contrast. Light highlights on tomato and knife contrast with dark shadows on the cutting board.	High contrast. Deep blacks at the outer edges gradually lighten toward the center, where blue punctuates the composition.	High contrast in black spiral and knife; softer shifts in figures and clouds. Contrast emphasizes focal points like the tomato and spiral.

Week 4: Elements/Principles and Observations

Shapes	Shallow space. Overlapping clouds and figures suggest layering without realistic depth.	Organic shapes dominate: the rounded yellow shell, curving pink snail, and fluid carpet shape contrast with the more linear red background lines.	Organic and geometric contrast. The soft, round tomato contrasts with the angular knife and cutting board	Organic, rounded form dominates. The spiral suggests both circularity and depth, with layers folding inward toward the blue center.	Mix of geometric and organic shapes. Organic forms dominate with rounded tomatoes, clouds, figures, and snail shell. Geometric shapes appear subtly in the knife, grid-like flying carpet, and linear background marks.
Forms	Minimal modeling; mostly flat color application with subtle variations in brushstroke and layering.	Subtle form. Overlapping and spiral curves suggest depth, though the image remains mostly flat and stylized.	Moderate form. Shading adds dimension to the tomato, while the knife and board suggest slight spatial depth.	Moderate form. Tonal shifts and a glowing blue center suggest volume and inward pull.	Moderate suggestion of form through shading and layering. The spiral suggests depth inward, the tomato has modeled highlights, and the figures and snail remain mostly flat and symbolic.
Space	Shallow space. Overlapping clouds and figures suggest layering without realistic depth.	Shallow space. Overlapping of snail, carpet, and background lines creates layering, but depth remains minimal.	Shallow space. Overlapping knife, tomato, and board suggest layering, but depth remains minimal.	Illusion of space created by concentric, receding spiral lines. The blue center appears deeper, pulling the viewer inward.	Shallow, symbolic space; layered but flattened. Overlapping forms suggest planes, yet objects remain stacked, prioritizing symbolic over realistic depth.
Color	Cool palette of blues and greens dominates. Darker navy and lighter turquoise differentiate the two figures, while muted greens and whites define the clouds.	Warm, vibrant palette. Yellow, pink, and red dominate; yellow shell contrasts softly with pink snail and red carpet and lines.	Warm tones dominate. Reds and pinks define the tomato, browns the cutting board, and cool grays the knife blade.	Monochromatic. Black and gray dominate; bright blue center contrasts sharply with the dark spiral.	Diverse but harmonious palette. Cool tones (blue spiral, figures) contrast with warm tones (red tomato, pink snail, orange grid). Greenish clouds and muted brown wood tones balance the composition

Week 4: Elements/Principles and Observations

Texture	Implied texture through varied brushstrokes in the clouds and layered application on the blue figure.	Implied texture through visible brushstrokes, particularly in the layered application on the shell and carpet.	Implied texture. Rough cutting board, smooth knife, and soft, painterly tomato.	Implied texture. Rough, layered spiral with dry-brush marks creating tactile depth.	Implied texture through brushwork. Rough, layered strokes in the spiral and cutting board contrast with smoother, more fluid painting in the snail and cloud elements.
Balance	Asymmetrical but visually balanced through cloud distribution and figure placement.	Asymmetrical but balanced. Large shell and carpet are offset by evenly spaced background lines.	Asymmetrical but balanced. Large tomato is offset by the diagonal knife.	Radial and symmetrical. Spiral creates a stable yet dynamic focal point.	Asymmetrical yet visually balanced. Heavier visual weight at the top (spiral, tomato, knife) is balanced by lighter, playful forms below (snail and clouded figures).
Contrast	Moderate contrast between dark figures, soft clouds, and light background. The swirling black lines add sharp contrast and energy.	Moderate contrast between the vibrant forms and lighter background; soft rather than dramatic.	Moderate to strong contrast. Organic tomato contrasts with angular knife; light and dark areas enhance depth.	Strong contrast. Dark spiral contrasts with light blue core; rough brushstrokes contrast with soft center glow.	Strong contrast in areas (black spiral vs. white background; angry tomato vs. neutral surrounding elements). Also contrast between organic shapes and the rigid knife/cutting board.
Movement	Swirling lines and dispersed clouds guide the eye rhythmically around the composition.	Spiral shell, flowing carpet, and background lines create gentle directional flow.	Diagonal knife guides the eye across the board toward the tomato face.	Spiraling lines guide the eye inward, creating circular motion toward the blue core.	Spiral draws eye inward, diagonal knife directs attention across canvas, clouds and flowing shapes guide eye toward lower figures and snail. Movement is playful yet tense.



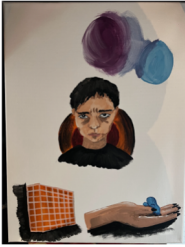

Week 4: Elements/Principles and Observations

Emphasis	The two figures are the central focal points, emphasized by their solid color and placement amidst the light, soft clouds.	The yellow snail shell serves as the focal point, highlighted through color, placement, and circular motion.	Tomato face is the focal point, emphasized by color, size, and expression.	Luminous blue center is the focal point, emphasized by placement, contrast, and spiral lines.	The tomato face and black spiral are primary focal points due to color, size, and central placement. Secondary emphasis on clouded figures and snail through positioning and surrounding marks
Pattern	Repetition of cloud shapes creates rhythm and visual cohesion.	Repetition of red lines adds rhythm and guides the eye.	Subtle repetition in wood grain and curved lines of the tomato	Repetition of circular marks and rings forms a rhythmic, hypnotic pattern.	Repetition of curved forms (spiral, clouds, snail shell) creates rhythm and cohesion across the composition.
Proportion	Figures are large relative to the clouds, giving them dominance in the scene.	Exaggerated yellow shell emphasizes symbolism; snail and carpet scale support playful abstract style.	Slightly exaggerated facial features heighten the tomato's symbolic presence.	The spiral dominates the space, emphasizing its symbolic and visual importance.	Playful and symbolic proportions. The tomato and clouds are oversized, emphasizing their narrative or emotional weight.
Unity	Consistent color palette, repeated cloud motifs, and soft brushwork.	Unified through warm color palette, repeated shapes, and harmonious, fluid brushwork.	Unified by harmonious colors, interacting forms, and consistent brushwork.	Unified through a limited color palette, repeating circular forms, and cohesive gestural brushwork.	Unified through cohesive brushwork, color harmony, repetition of organic shapes, and interplay of symbolic imagery across all areas of the canvas.

Note. Formal analysis of the painting created during the parts-mapping response process. Adapted from Glatstein's (2009) formal analysis framework.

Table D5

Formal Element Analysis of Full Compositions Across 4 weeks (Glatstein, 2009). Brief excerpts.

Full Compositions Across 4 Weeks: Elements/Principles and Observations				
Week	1	2	3	4
Image				
Line	Loose, expressive brushstrokes and gestural lines define the plant, figure, and color mounds, while sharp, linear marks distinguish the black bridge-like shapes.	A mix of loose, gestural lines (yellow light rays and green foliage) and sharper, defined lines (cage bars and lighthouse edges) create visual tension and variety.	Varied use of line throughout. Clean, controlled lines define the brick wall and hand, while loose, gestural brushstrokes shape the abstract circular forms and portrait background.	Varied use of line throughout the composition. The black spiral features gestural, circular lines. The knife introduces sharp, straight lines. The figures and snail are outlined with soft, rounded contours. Floating clouds and background marks include loose, organic lines.
Value	Moderate contrast. Dark figure and black marks contrast with light color fields; subtle variations within brushstrokes.	Moderate within individual elements, but stronger overall due to juxtaposition of bright yellows and darker cage, lighthouse, and balloon outlines.	Strong contrast between dark accents (hair, shadow, nails, brick wall edges) and lighter background. Subtle gradation adds depth in the hand and circular forms.	High contrast in black spiral and knife; softer shifts in figures and clouds. Contrast emphasizes focal points like the tomato and spiral.

Full Compositions Across 4 Weeks: Elements/Principles and Observations

Shapes	A mix of geometric (sponge, plant pot) and organic shapes (plant leaves, figure, color mounds) creates visual variety.	Both geometric and organic shapes are present. The cage and lighthouse introduce structured, angular forms, while the foliage, yellow burst, and balloon are more organic and freeform.	A mixture of geometric and organic shapes. The brick wall and circles round the face introduce structure, while the abstract forms, portrait, and hand offer softer, more irregular shapes.	Mix of geometric and organic shapes. Organic forms dominate with rounded tomatoes, clouds, figures, and snail shell. Geometric shapes appear subtly in the knife, grid-like flying carpet, and linear background marks.
Forms	Minimal sense of depth or three-dimensionality; the work emphasizes flatness and symbolic layering over realistic form.	Some elements (lighthouse, balloon) suggest volume, but the composition emphasizes flatness and layered arrangement over realistic depth.	Some elements suggest volume (hand, portrait face, abstract forms), while others (grid, background) remain flat.	Moderate suggestion of form through shading and layering. The spiral suggests depth inward, the tomato has modeled highlights, and the figures and snail remain mostly flat and symbolic.
Space	Shallow, flattened space with overlapping elements (plant, figure, sponge) suggests limited depth and emphasizes symbolic composition.	Shallow depth with layered elements, but no realistic recession. The composition remains symbolic and flat.	Shallow space overall. Elements are layered and spaced apart, creating a collage-like arrangement that emphasizes conceptual over realistic space.	Shallow, symbolic space; layered but flattened. Overlapping forms suggest planes, yet objects remain stacked, prioritizing symbolic over realistic depth.
Color	Bright, saturated colors dominate. Vivid green, blue, yellow, pink, orange, and red create distinct zones and emotional impact. Black is sparingly used for sharp contrast.	Vibrant yellows, deep reds, and greens dominate the palette. Black accents in the cage, balloon outline, and lighthouse details create strong contrast.	A muted but diverse palette. Warm tones in the portrait contrast with the cool blue and purple forms, and orange grid. Black provides grounding throughout.	Diverse but harmonious palette. Cool tones (blue spiral, figures) contrast with warm tones (red tomato, pink snail, orange grid). Greenish clouds and muted brown wood tones balance the composition.

Full Compositions Across 4 Weeks: Elements/Principles and Observations

Texture	Implied texture through visible brushwork, especially in color mounds and blue figure. The paint application adds a tactile quality.	Visible brushstrokes imply texture in the yellow burst, foliage, and rock hill, while the smooth lighthouse contrasts with the rougher background.	Implied texture varies: smooth in the hand and brick wall, more textured and expressive in the circular forms and portrait brushwork.	Implied texture through brushwork. Rough, layered strokes in the spiral and cutting board contrast with smoother, more fluid painting in the snail and cloud elements.
Balance	Asymmetrical yet balanced, with large shapes (plant, sponge, figure) anchoring the top and color mounds with black bridges balancing the lower portion.	Asymmetrical but stable, with the heavier left side (cage, burst, balloon) balanced by the lighthouse and green foliage on the right.	Asymmetrical but visually balanced. Heavier forms (portrait and brick wall) anchor the lower half, while abstract forms float above, distributing weight across the canvas	Asymmetrical yet visually balanced. Heavier visual weight at the top (spiral, tomato, knife) is balanced by lighter, playful forms below (snail and clouded figures).
Contrast	Strong color contrasts (warm vs cool) and sharp contrast between soft color fields and rigid black shapes create dynamic tension.	High contrast in color (bright vs dark) and form (rigid vs fluid). This tension draws attention across the composition.	High contrast between colors, textures, and shapes. Structured vs. organic forms and warm vs. cool hues create visual tension.	Strong contrast in areas (black spiral vs. white background; angry tomato vs. neutral surrounding elements). Also contrast between organic shapes and the rigid knife/cutting board.
Movement	Directional brushstrokes and central blue path guide the eye from bottom to top.	Strong movement as yellow rays push outward, cage restricts, and curved lines guide the eye between focal points.	Viewer's eye moves fluidly from the abstract forms at the top to the central portrait and down to the brick wall and hand, guided by how the elements are visually linked through placement, color, and alignment.	Spiral draws eye inward, diagonal knife directs attention across canvas, clouds and flowing shapes guide eye toward lower figures and snail. Movement is playful yet tense.

Full Compositions Across 4 Weeks: Elements/Principles and Observations

Emphasis	Multiple focal points emerge: the pink sponge, central blue figure, and lower black bridge-like shapes, each emphasized through color and placement.	Multiple focal points: the cage/burst cluster, the deflating balloon, and the lighthouse. Placement, color, and contrast highlight these areas.	Centrally placed portrait is the primary focal point, while surrounding elements act as symbolic extensions or supporting visuals.	The tomato face and black spiral are primary focal points due to color, size, and central placement. Secondary emphasis on clouded figures and snail through positioning and surrounding marks
Pattern	Repetition of brushstroke types and bridge-like forms.	Repetition of linear marks (yellow rays, cage bars, lighthouse bands) creates rhythm and ties separate elements together.	Subtle rhythm emerges through repetition of curves (abstract forms, hand, portrait) and grids (brick wall)	Repetition of curved forms (spiral, clouds, snail shell) creates rhythm and cohesion across the composition.
Proportion	The scale of the forms (large color mounds and small black shapes) creates visual hierarchy and draws attention to both expansive and minute details.	Large forms (cage, lighthouse, balloon) dominate; smaller details add nuance and balance.	Proportions are intentionally varied. The hand, portrait, and abstract forms are larger relative to the grid, emphasizing their emotional or symbolic weight.	Playful and symbolic proportions. The tomato and clouds are oversized, emphasizing their narrative or emotional weight.
Unity	Despite variety in shapes and colors, the cohesive brushwork, palette, and repeated motifs tie the elements together into a unified whole.	Unified by cohesive palette, consistent brushwork, and interconnected flowing forms	Unified through repeated use of earthy and muted tones, consistent brushwork, and relational placement of distinct symbolic elements.	Unified through cohesive brushwork, color harmony, repetition of organic shapes, and interplay of symbolic imagery across all areas of the canvas.

Note. Formal analysis of the painting created during the parts-mapping response process. Adapted from Glatstein's (2009) formal analysis framework.

Appendix E

Tables Supporting the Thematic analysis process of weekly response art, journals, formal analysis, and illumination journals to synthesize data into mate-themes

Table E1

Emergent Themes Identified in Weekly IFS-Guided Parts-Mapping Compositions

Week	Key Visual/Emotional Qualities	Emergent Themes
1	Compartmentalized, divided colour fields; fragmented and tense black forms; horizontal flow.	Compartmentalization, divided experience, striving for control and regulation.
2	Symbolic tension between restriction (cage), radiance (yellow burst), and guidance (lighthouse); organic yet confined.	Holding and tension within the therapeutic frame, desire for liberation/containment balance, navigating uncertainty.
3	Confrontational and scorned facial expression; juxtaposition of rigid and soft forms (block vs. hand); deep saturation and colour contrast.	Anger and scorn, frustration with pacing, polarity of rigid vs. fluid responses, holding complex parts.
4	Playful yet chaotic imagery; conflict (knife, angry tomato); fantasy and avoidance elements (snail on flying carpet); swirling vortex.	Navigating discomfort and protection through play/deflection, frustration/overwhelm, internal conflict, seeking positivity to avoid discomfort.

Note. These themes were identified via journaling, formal analysis, and intuitive thematic analysis of weekly IFS-guided parts-mapping paintings (Glatstein, 2009; Moustakas, 1990; Schwartz, 2021).

Table E2*Cross-Cutting Themes Identified Through Response Art, Journaling, Formal Analysis, and Illumination*

Theme	Description	Example Evidence
Holding the Therapeutic Frame	Internal parts emerged that prioritized maintaining professionalism, containment, and control during sessions.	Imagery of cages, lighthouses, gridlines; journal references to “performing” and “keeping it together.”
Tension Between Control and Fluidity	Visual and emotional contrasts appeared between tightly controlled imagery and more loose, spontaneous expression.	Tight black forms contrasted with free-flowing paint; journal noting “letting go of perfection.” Multiple paintings begin with clearly defined symbols for parts while ending with more abstract forms/brushstrokes representing parts.
Compartmentalization of Emotional Experience	Emotional states were visually and internally divided, suggesting protective segmentation of parts or feelings.	Bridge-like dividers; sponge and cage imagery; journal phrases like “shaky containment,” “mini versions trickling out,” and “system dividing.”
Navigating Discomfort (Seeking Positivity and Avoidance)	<p>Protective parts emerged, using humor or symbolic imagery to soften or distance from discomfort.</p> <p>The researcher-participant often moved toward uplifting imagery or reframing discomfort, sometimes as a protective strategy to manage emotional intensity.</p>	<p>Snail on flying carpet, angry tomato; playful metaphors in the art; journal noting use of humor to avoid emotional overwhelm.</p> <p>References to “not wanting to lose the positive,” “deflating balloon holding a smile,” and visual use of soft glow, humor, or bright tones to soften discomfort.</p>
Frustration with Pacing	Multiple parts emerged that felt irritated by perceived slowness or stagnation in the therapeutic process.	Angry/scornful face in Week 3; journal entries describing “wanting to move things faster” and feelings of inadequacy. Snail symbol in week 4, Walls and cages appear as possible symbols of stuckness.

Use of Color Symbolism	Specific colors (especially blue, yellow, red) took on symbolic meaning related to protection, excitement, or being charged with negative emotions.	Repeated blue figures (e.g., reclining woman, figure in hand, figures behind clouds) and glowing blue centers; yellow elements used to signal excitement, curiosity, or positive regard (e.g., yellow burst, searchlight on lighthouse, smiley-face balloon); red elements associated with tension, urgency, and rigidity (e.g., angry tomato, flames around sponge, red near neck of scowling child's face).
Noticing the perceived ages of parts within and across systems	Recognizing the developmental age of parts deepened reflection, fostering self-compassion and insight. Particularly in distinguishing between younger protectors and those formed in the researcher-participant's emerging therapist role.	Journal references to "9-year-old me," "teenage part," or "older protector"; symbolic features in art suggesting youth or early relational wounds.
Imposter Syndrome	Feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy emerged in response to clinical challenges, often tied to internal parts questioning competence or authenticity.	Journal reflections expressing fear of "not being good enough" or "being seen as unqualified"; critical inner voices; imagery of tension or deflation (e.g., pierced balloon, divided parts, haziness),
Emotional Growth and Integration	Later artworks and journals revealed increased fluidity, relational awareness, and self-compassion.	Softer brushwork, plant imagery, overlapping parts, direct gaze from figures; journal references to "greater patience with parts" and "more comfort sitting with discomfort."
Titration of Focus and Searching	The researcher-participant engaged with difficult material gradually, using symbolic imagery to represent a cautious, exploratory search for insight and connection.	Partially revealed or distant figures (e.g., sponge releasing slowly, blue figures behind clouds, figure held in hand); lighthouse scanning outward; journal reflections on "not diving in too fast," "letting things emerge," and "not rushing clarity."
Varying Accessibility of Parts	Some parts were easier to engage with than others, revealing internal differences in readiness, emotional charge, or protective resistance.	Journal reflections noting difficulty "seeing" or staying with certain parts (e.g., anger, shame); easier access to younger or compassionate parts (e.g., blue figure in hand); Week 4 described as "more challenging to engage with."
Motifs and Thematic Patterns	Recurring visual symbols, colors, and emotional tones suggested persistent internal patterns and CT activations across weeks.	Repeated use of blue figures, spiral forms, cage imagery, and distant focal points; journal entries noting "returning feelings" and "recurring emotional charges."

Witnessing as a Transformative Function	The process of observing parts through art and journaling enabled emotional distancing, clarity, and internal connection.	Imagery of open eyes, calm gazes, or hands gently holding figures; journal reflections describing “stepping back,” “noticing without judgment,” or “making space.”
Symbolic Discharge of Emotion	Symbolic imagery allowed for the externalization and processing of intense or difficult affect states.	Red flames, pierced balloon, swirling vortex, angry tomato; journal phrases like “getting it out,” “it feels safer in the image,” or “pouring the feeling.”
Navigating Clinical Role Identity	Visual and emotional motifs reflected the tension and growth associated with developing a therapist identity.	Lighthouse as guidance, gridlines and cage as containment, smiley-face balloon as performance; journal notes on “holding it together” or “being seen as competent.”
Emergence of the Self-As-Therapist	A growing sense of internal clarity and differentiation between personal parts and the developing therapist identity supported professional integration.	Journals referencing “stepping into the adult role,” “being more present,” or “holding both the part and the client”; central or stabilizing figures in imagery.
Creative Distance as Regulation	Artmaking provided emotional space, allowing intense feelings to be externalized safely and processed reflectively.	Journal entries noting that “it felt safer to paint than talk,” or that insight came “after putting it down visually”; symbolic release forms like the vortex or sponge.
Emotional Ambivalence and Multiplicity	Opposing feelings and internal conflicts were expressed simultaneously, highlighting the complexity of CT experiences and the coexistence of multiple truths.	Visual contrast between rigid and soft forms, or bright and muted colors; journal reflections like “I care and I’m frustrated” or “this part wants closeness and space.”
Parts Protecting Against Relational Vulnerability	Protective parts activated in response to perceived relational exposure, judgment, or inadequacy in clinical encounters.	Imagery of walls, cages, or figures turned away; journal notes about “putting on a face,” “hiding my uncertainty,” or “feeling shut down after supervision.”
Curiosity and Compassion Toward Parts	A shift toward observing internal experiences with openness and care emerged over time, supporting healing and professional growth.	Journal references to “being curious instead of critical,” “softening toward this part,” or “asking what it needs”; calming imagery, softened brushstrokes, open posture.

Note. This table presents cross-cutting themes that emerged through post-session IFS-guided response art, journaling, formal analysis, illumination writing, and intuitive processes. This process draws on the principles of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Table E3*IFS-Guided Meta-Themes Supporting CT Reflection and Developing Practice*

Meta-Theme	IFS Contribution	What Emerged	Integrated Themes	Implications for CT Reflection and Therapist Development
Parts-Mapping Response Art as a Multi-Pronged Approach for Externalizing CT	Provided structure to identify trailheads and visually map internal systems, enabling symbolic exploration of CT.	Emotional distance and safety through art allowed unconscious transference material to surface for reflection.	Titration of Focus and Searching; Creative Distance as Regulation; Symbolic Discharge of Emotion	Helped externalize CT dynamics without overwhelm, supporting a structured, visual way of accessing implicit content and building reflective capacity for emerging therapists.
Witnessing Parts with Curiosity: Shifting from Reactivity to Reflection	Encouraged a Self-led stance of curiosity, allowing nonjudgmental engagement with CT-triggered parts.	Parts were witnessed and expressed through image and journal, supporting deeper emotional and relational insight.	Curiosity and Compassion Toward Parts; Varying Accessibility of Parts; Emotional Ambivalence and Multiplicity	Fostered emotional resilience and reflective presence by modeling how compassionate curiosity can interrupt fusion with reactive parts and promote insight.
Differentiating Therapist and Protector Parts: Awareness of Imposter Syndrome	Helped distinguish therapist identity from reactive or performance-driven protector parts.	Art and journals revealed how protectors manage relational discomfort or imposter fears.	Emergence of the Self-As-Therapist; Navigating Clinical Role Identity; Imposter Syndrome	Clarified the difference between therapist presence and protector-driven responses, strengthening confidence and self-awareness in the clinical role.
From Compartmentalization to Integration: Mapping Internal Systems to Support Relational Presence	Made visible how protective systems segment emotional content to manage intensity and exposure.	Divided space and withheld parts in imagery reflected internal compartmentalization; journals noted growing awareness of this.	Compartmentalization of Emotional Experience; Holding the Therapeutic Frame; Use of Color Symbolism	Showed how IFS-guided art can reveal internal boundaries and move toward integration, enhancing the therapist's ability to remain grounded and present in emotionally charged moments.

Note. This table presents four meta-themes synthesized from weekly response art, journaling, formal analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Each theme illustrates how Internal Family Systems (IFS)-guided response art supported the researcher's reflection on countertransference and professional development during clinical training. This process is grounded in the principles of heuristic inquiry, which emphasizes self-reflection, embodied knowing, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990)