

# An arts-based approach as an alternative to verbally focused therapy for people living with ongoing pain. Privileging a slow and aesthetically resonant therapeutic relationship, with the material and nonmaterial world.



## A form of mending through therapeutic arts-based inquiries

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### INTRODUCTION

Pain, traumatic experiences and surgical alteration can cause the pained part of the body to feel disconnected from the whole body. Disgust, fear and alienation can also be experienced. This poster presentation leads the viewer through my experience of disconnection to reconnection. The mending occurred during cycles of arts-based research inquiries.

### METHOD

Straddling qualitative and post-qualitative research, the arts were central in what I came to know. As a lived experience researcher, the research was “an interconnected space... journeying between the researcher and the researched” (Burnard, 2016, p. 16). Sustaining my ability was paramount, requiring a delicate, care-filled holding. Several inquiries reflexively built upon each other.

### RESULTS

Across time and arts-based inquiries, I developed an ability to return to ‘feeling into’ my ‘whole body’. The sensation of a gentle skin quiver in my right arm during arts-making was the indicator of where moments of mending occurred, including care given to art forms that represented my right arm, which in doing so resulted in me caring more for my arm. I moved from seeing my mended arm as disgusting to being in awe of the surgical mend and noticing beauty. I was no longer a body *with* pain but a body *in* pain. The shift in my relationship with pain and my body enabled compassion and a change in pain self-management.



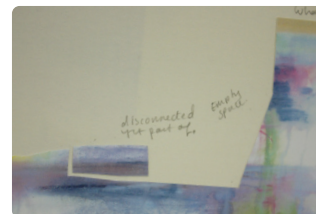
My skin was touched from a distance, by an artist with therapeutic presence.

Drawn x-ray of my broken arm by Barb Miles.



By my hands.

I saw the shape of my reconstructed elbow in a wash of purple colour.



I saw my altered arm in a discarded grouping. In the abstract, I saw my surgical hardware.



A frottage print on medical weave, shading my pain. My fingers touched gently the pain I avoided touching.



Shock. An arm that didn't match her body—an arm made from medical weave, covered in hope.



Shock. Colour flows beyond her shoulder. Stitched 'water-way veins'—my metaphoric connection to blood flow—all over her body.

#### Disconnection

A second accident, a second mending of my right arm— I could no longer 'feel into my whole body'. My right arm felt separate, 'apart from the whole'. Failed attempts to connect. Frustration. Screws locked into my bones. Unfamiliar. Sadness. Disability. Pain. Dis-ease.

#### Reconnection

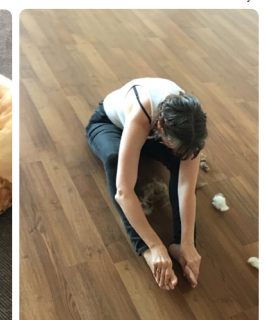
Skin-quivering moments during arts-making inquiries, layered one upon the other, like an ancient manuscript, the palimpsest. What mattered rose to the surface to be seen and felt, damage slowly mended through these interactions of touch.



Stitched golden veins across the elbow of a therapeutic garment—awe and beauty.



A movement score, wearing *The Shirt*, feeling the point of reconnection.



No longer a body *with* pain but a body *in* pain—compassion and whole body awareness.