



COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: **MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH VISUAL ARTS**

COURSE DATA

Degree	Diploma in Humanities and Global Challenges
Academic Year	2025-26
Credits	6
Course type	Elective
Departament	Psychology
Language of instruction	English
Name and email of instructor	Elena Serrano Drozdowskyj eserrano@comillas.edu

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Emotional distress and mental health problems occupy a prominent place within art, both for being a means of expression and communication of this discomfort, for facilitating its understanding, and for constituting a potential avenue for therapeutic intervention.

This course aims to explore the relationship of visual art with mental health from different perspectives, and its potential as an educational, therapeutic and social awareness tool.

This course will also delve into how visual art can be a very useful media to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of people with mental health problems and its psychopathology, as well as to combat social stigma.

Finally, from a theoretical point of view, we will examine the psychological aspects of the creative process that have a beneficial effect on mental health (foundations of art therapy).

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

TOPIC 1: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN VISUAL ARTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

TOPIC 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL BASES OF CREATIVE PROCESS IN VISUAL ARTS

TOPIC 3: EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS OF VISUAL ARTS IN PSYCHIATRY

TOPIC 4: PSYCHOSOCIAL APPLICATIONS OF VISUAL ARTS

TOPIC 5: FOUNDATIONS OF ART THERAPY AND ITS CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

METHODOLOGY

During the course, we will explore the relationship between visual arts and mental health through real life examples of artists and their artistic interventions. We will also delve in the theoretical bases of creative process and its relation with mental health well-being and the foundations of art therapy.

Besides, through the analysis of works of visual art, especially of a plastic and cinematographic nature, we will learn to identify psychopathology and the elements of the artistic visual language that can facilitate a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of people with mental health problems and its potential impact on social awareness.

Finally, through real case analysis, we will learn about clinical and psychosocial applications of art therapy.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Assessment type	Assessment criteria	Percentage
FINAL EXAM	Pass the exam with a 5 out of 10	50%
COURSEWORK	Discussion in class and upload in moodle	20%
HOME WORK	Individual and group homework. Class presentation and upload in moodle	30%

- Committing any serious academic misconduct, such as **plagiarism** of previously published material, or **copying** in the exam or any other graded activity, **will imply not being able to pass the course in the ordinary assessment period.**
- The use of **AI** to create complete works or relevant parts, without citing the source or the tool or without being expressly allowed in the description of the work, will be considered plagiarism and regulated according to the General Regulations of the University.
- At the beginning of the term the professor will announce the office hours for the course. Tutorials are an essential part of the development of the course, and students may attend tutorials during the course within those office times, but it is recommended that they are arranged in advance with the professor.
- Any non-face-to-face learning activity that requires the submission of an assignment/document, etc. will be submitted by the student through Moodle, always in PDF format.

- To be able to take the final exam, students must not have missed **more than one third of the classes without justification**. If this requirement is not met, the student may lose the right to be assessed both in the ordinary and extraordinary assessment period (art. 93-1 of the General Regulations). Failure to attend to the first hour of a two-hour lecture, means having missed the whole session in terms of attendance, regardless of whether or not the student the second hour.

STUDENT WORKLOAD (in hours)

CONTACT HOURS	OUTSIDE CLASSROOM	OVERALL
60	90	150

READING LIST / RELEVANT REFERENCES (MIN 12 REFERENCIAS)

Gary, R. (2019). *Art Therapy and Psychology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Practitioners*. Routledge. ISBN-10:0815355904.

Herrmann, U., Hills de Zarate, M., Pitruzzella, S. (2021). *Arts Therapies and the Mental Health of Children and Young People. Contemporary Research, Theory and Practice. Vol 1 & 2*. Routledge. ISBN-10:1032011572

Magsamen, S., Ross, I. (2023) *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*. Faber and Faber. ISBN-10:1805301209.

Mastandrea, S., Fagioli, S., Biasi, V.(2019). *Art and Psychological Well-Being: Linking the Brain to the Aesthetic Emotion*. Front Psychol. Apr 4:10:739.

Ryznar, E., Kelly-Hedrick, M., Yenawine, P., Chisolm, M.S. (2023). *Relevance of Visual Thinking Strategies for Psychiatry Training*. Acad Psychiatry. Feb;47(1):78-81.

Weddin, D., Boyd, M.A., Niemiec, R.M. (2005). *Movies And Mental Illness: Using Films To Understand Psychopathology*. Hogrefe & Huber Pub; 2nd edición. ISBN-10: 0889372926

DAS, S., Doval, N., Mohammed, S., Dua, N., Chatterjee, S.S.(2017). *Psychiatry and Cinema: What Can We Learn from the Magical Screen?* Shanghai Arch Psychiatry. Oct 25;29(5):310-313.

Chatterjee, A., and Vartanian, O. (2016). *Neuroscience of aesthetics*. Ann NY Acad Sci. 1369, 172–194.

De Souza, L.B.R., Gomes, Y.C., de Moraes, M.G.G.(2022). *The impact of visual Art Therapy for elderly with Neurocognitive disorder: a systematic review*. Dement Neuropsychol. Jan-Mar;16(1):8-18

Jay, E.K., Patterson, C., Fernandez, R., Moxham, L.(2023). *Experiences of recovery among adults with a mental illness using visual art methods: A systematic review*. J Psychiatr Ment Health Nurs. Jun;30(3):361-374.

Wigham, S. et al. (2020). *Using Arts-Based Therapies to Improve Mental Health for Children and Young People With Physical Health Long-Term Conditions: A Systematic Review of Effectiveness*. Front Psychol. Sep 25:11:1771.

Edgar, R., Marland, J., Rawle, S. (2015). *The Language of Film (Basics Filmmaking) 2nd ed*. Fairchild Books. ISBN-10:1472575245.
