

Article

# Mending a Broken Heart: Exploring Creative-Arts Approaches to Love Loss

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**Abstract:** This article explores the transformative role of creative-arts approaches, such as visual arts, writing, music, dance, and drama, in the emotional recovery process following romantic loss. Drawing on psychological theories, neurobiological research, clinical case studies, and cultural practices, the work argues that creativity functions not merely as a distraction but as a form of emotional alchemy. Through expressive modalities, individuals externalise grief, regulate neurochemical imbalances, and reconstruct shattered self-narratives. The article further investigates the ways integrating these approaches can help therapy, as it is important to mention their problems that arise from being misused. The end of the report notes that future research involving time and cultures will help improve and widen the practice of art-based interventions in ordinary mental health systems.

**Keywords:** Creative arts therapy; Romantic loss; Emotional healing; Expressive modalities; Neurobiological recovery; Art-based interventions

## 1. Introduction

Many different people from different backgrounds can relate to the pain of a broken heart. The sense of pain sits inside us, making things seem flat, our actions tough, and the future too far for us to reach. If someone leaves our lives because of romance, it removes our storytelling from our lives and leaves us adrift in places we have never faced before. At such times, it seems that words can't express what we want to communicate. It is difficult to find words to show how grief gets stuck in the throat or how memories may appear out of nowhere, unexpectedly. Consequently, creativity is more important than expressing feelings; it's a pathway through the hard days of losing someone or losing out in love.

All through history, art has been used by people when they couldn't find the right words. In ancient times, people would paint their emotions inside caves, make sad songs with minor tones, and dance while angry under the gleam of the moon [1]. Expressing our inner pain in creativity by drawing, painting, or dancing can truly help relieve it. A modern view in psychology shows that poets and artists have always understood that creativity helps us deal with emotions that aren't easy to explain in a step-by-step way. Painting our feelings allows us to express what is inside us. Writing letters that we don't intend to send lets us express ourselves honestly. Through dancing to sad songs, we allow our feelings that we can't express with words [2,3].

Think how sketching with charcoal can express the true feelings of bereavement much better than words ever could. Imperfect lines, strong shading, and open spaces all reflect the artist's hidden thoughts. Or how playing a list of sad songs compels you to let out your emotions, and isn't lonely in itself. The reason people often sing about lost love is that through music, emotions that seem overwhelming get organised. The act of dancing itself eases the mind, since the motions help release sadness and make the pain flow into a passing emotion. I did not look at art only as a distraction, but rather as a way to change pain into understanding. Working on creative things after someone close to us dies, we are not only staying occupied; we are remaking our personalities. Every poem, drawing, or piece of improvised music is a move toward putting the pieces of a

person back together once again. By telling our stories in art, we cope with life's changes and do not have to be weighed down by the past ones we loved. In the next section, we will follow how this process transformed society. I will test how strokes with a paintbrush can reveal thoughts that remain unspoken, how the music of rhythm and melody can calm an upset heart, and how body movements can lead to getting back to wholeness. We are invited to understand that creativity is a helper in healing, always there, waiting until we are ready to use it to start over again [4,5,6].

## **2. Theoretical Framework: How Creative Arts Aid in Emotional Recovery**

For the skill of an artist, a poet, or anyone in distress, there is a silent process that shifts anger or discomfort toward common sense and peacefulness. Creative expression has a true healing effect because of the strong psychological and biological processes that have been examined for many years. Together, these theories make it make sense why doing something as simple as sculpting clay or humming a song can heal inside us [7].

### **2.1 The Expressive Therapies Continuum: Where Art and Emotion Collide**

Think of someone painting on a fresh canvas, the artist's hands just trembling, and the colour she dips her brush into is crimson. At the beginning, her paint strokes are sudden and rough, like the sound of crying. During the kinesthetic stage, the body moves to help you express sadness that is stored inside. As she keeps on working, each stroke is more precise, and the red starts to become softer, merging into shapes that seem to show her inner struggle. Without words, the canvas has become a silent witness to her grief, reflecting emotions too tangled for speech. This is the heart of the Expressive Therapies Continuum, where raw feeling gradually transforms into insight, and finally, into something resembling peace[8,9].

### **2.2 Catharsis: The Ancient Art of Emotional Alchemy**

Long before psychology gave it a name, humans understood the purifying power of release. The Greeks wept at tragedies, Native American tribes drummed and danced their sorrows into the earth, and Victorian mourners wore lockets containing portraits of the departed. Freud and Jung recognized this primal need—to expel the poison of unspoken grief. Picture a man alone in his room, strumming a guitar, his voice cracking as he sings lyrics he'd never dare say aloud. With each chord, something loosens in his chest. This is catharsis in its purest form: art acting as a valve for the heart's pressure. Jung took it further, seeing creativity as a bridge to the unconscious, where symbols and dreams whisper secrets the waking mind refuses to acknowledge. A breakup might surface in a recurring dream of drowning, until one day, the dreamer paints the ocean and, in doing so, begins to swim [10,11,12].

### **2.3 Rewriting the Story: When the Pen Becomes a Scalpel**

After the loss, the stories we tell ourselves can become prisons. "I'll never love again," "This pain will never end," "I wasn't enough." Narrative therapy teaches that these are not truths, but drafts, and creativity offers the chance to edit. A journal becomes a courtroom where the heart pleads its case; a collage of photographs and magazine clippings rearranges the past into new possibilities. One might write a letter to their former self, tenderly listing all the ways they've grown, or perform a monologue where they finally speak as the hero, not the victim. Art, in these moments, is not decoration, but defiance—a refusal to let loss have the final word [13].

### **2.4 The Neurobiological Alchemy of Art: How Creativity Mends the Shattered Self**

When heartbreak occurs, it not only destroys your feelings but also changes your body in some ways. What people describe as trembling hands, staying up all night, and the irritation of everyday noises in their ears is happening at a chemical level in your brain. Still in the middle of all this activity in the brain is an old remedy from our ancestors: the ability to heal ourselves through creative expressions [14].

#### **2.4.1 Art as Biological Balm**

Just like a persistent alarm sound, your stress response sends messages to the entire body. All those memories and unanswered messages, along with empty places in bed, keep adding to the rope, making your body release high levels of cortisol that keep you upset. When you go through grief, it feels like you are not even fighting an opponent and cannot move forward. Envision yourself handling a lump of clay, your hands

going back and forth while making a shape from nothing. Slowly, when you move intentionally, your muscles relax, your breathing gets deeper, and your inner alarm becomes peaceful and quiet. Although it may seem like a poetic idea, MRIs prove that creating art lowers the activity of the fear centre in the brain and at the same time activates the prefrontal cortex to help soothe the same fear. The secret is that art works in two ways. While the right brain is immersed in colours and textures, the left brain activates in a smooth flow, which lets the mind and the emotions connect, according to researchers. Unlike many drugs, this practice can lower cortisol more safely and provides humanity's prime way to reduce stress without the need for anything but attention [15,16].

#### **2.4.2 The Dopamine Renaissance**

When we go through a drought of emotions, creativity provides us with the first gentle showers. After you lose someone close, your brain's pleasure centres are quiet, and daily joys like fun times and affection are nowhere to be seen. For this reason, people find themselves tired and unable to picture ever feeling energized again. For instance, if you start to scribble or sing out loud and end up swaying, you make something beautiful happen inside you. Making something creative always adds a bit of dopamine to your brain's pathways. It's not that kind of live-wire, exciting love; instead, these are feelings that slowly warm back up [17]. Look at how the painter makes colours on the palette, concentrating on figuring out what is before them. At this moment, they are waiting with excitement for the next stroke, not something in the future. Being able to heal depends on recognizing that no matter how much mourning lies ahead, our mind can still create positive emotions itself. There are major outcomes as a result. Talking to a therapist allows you to view challenges differently, medicine can keep your mood steady, but engaging in creativity builds up your emotions inside. Every time you take part in a creative session, you are directing your reward system to trigger and your brain pathways to enjoy the act [18].

#### **2.4.3 The Sculpting of a New Self**

From this amazing chorus of genes and hormones comes a completely new start. After cortisol fades and dopamine comes back, the brain starts the process of rebuilding itself. Emotions related to desire within the brain change and are used more for establishing thoughts and dreams rather than longing. The people who used to text with people who were no longer in their lives now use their hands for illustrations and making music. The mind that once replayed memories like a broken record begins composing new narratives. This is the true alchemy of art therapy - it doesn't erase pain, but transmutes it. The grief that was once a lead weight in your chest becomes pigment for paintings, metaphor for poems, rhythm for songs. Your biology, once hijacked by loss, becomes your greatest ally in healing, responding to each creative act with cascades of restorative chemistry.

In the end, the science merely confirms what artists have always known: that to create is to perform a kind of miracle, taking the raw materials of suffering and shaping them into something that bears witness to both the breaking and the mending. Your cells remember how to heal. Your hands remember how to make. And somewhere between synapse and brushstroke, between neuron and note, the self you thought was lost begins to emerge anew [19].

### **3. Creative-Arts Modalities for Healing Heartbreak**

When words fail, art speaks. Heartbreak lingers in the body like a shadow, colouring every thought and memory. But creative expression offers pathways to release, reinterpretation, and renewal. Each artistic modality—visual arts, writing, music, movement, and drama—provides unique tools to navigate grief, transforming pain into something tangible, something that can be held, reshaped, and ultimately released [20].

#### **3.1 Visual Arts (Drawing, Painting, Collage): Giving Form to the Formless**

Heartbreak is often an abstract storm—swirling, shapeless, overwhelming. Visual arts provide a way to **externalize** what feels too vast to contain. A blank page becomes a mirror. A grieving person might sketch chaotic, dark lines in charcoal—not to make "art," but to see their inner turmoil reflected [21]. Further on, the strokes might seem smoother, revealing the transformation from being angry to getting through it. In college, students can find another way to express themselves by tearing and rearranging their photographs physically. By using pieces of magazine clippings, old photos, and different textures, a person could come up with a visual story in which loss makes up only one part of a bigger picture. A woman who was suffering from a breakup in a

mental health setting was asked to paint how she felt without using any imagery. She added lots of red and black on the canvas in many crossed layers. Weeks later, she began adding gold streaks—tiny cracks of light breaking through. Without words, her art revealed what she couldn't yet say aloud: the pain was still there, but it was no longer all-consuming [22].

### 3.2 Writing and Poetry: The Alchemy of Words

When emotions are a tangled knot, writing helps pull the threads loose. The simple act of pouring thoughts onto paper—unedited, unfiltered—can be revelatory. A journal becomes a private confessional, a place to voice regrets, rage, and longing without fear of judgment. Over time, patterns emerge: the same fears, the same hopes, the slow dawning realization that the story is changing. Poetry distills emotion into its purest form. A breakup letter might ramble for pages, but a poem forces precision: *"You were the tide, and I was the shore / Worn down, again and again, until I forgot what it was to be stone."* In that compression, meaning is remade. The poet controls the narrative now, shaping loss into something that belongs to them [23].

### 3.3 Music and Sound Therapy: The Rhythm of Recovery

Music bypasses the intellect entirely, speaking directly to the body's memory. A therapist might ask a client to bring in a song that captures their heartbreak. Together, they dissect the lyrics: *Why does this line hurt so much? What would you change if you wrote it?* Then comes the real magic—writing their lyrics. A simple chord progression becomes a vessel for unspoken words, a way to rewrite the ending. Neuroscience shows that music with a steady, slow tempo (60-80 BPM) can synchronise with a grieving person's heartbeat, guiding it toward calm. Drumming circles, humming, even just listening to resonant frequencies—these aren't just distractions. They're tools to **reclaim the body** from grief's grip [24].

### 3.4 Movement and Dance Therapy: When the Body Remembers What the Mind Tries to Forget

Trauma lives in the muscles. Dance releases it. A man reeling from betrayal might first move stiffly, shoulders hunched as if bracing for another blow. But as the music shifts, so does his body—unfolding, reaching, finally *pushing* away an invisible weight. There's no choreography here, only the body's innate wisdom. In a group session, participants were guided to "sculpt" their grief with their bodies. One woman curled into a tight ball, then slowly stretched outward, fingers splaying like roots seeking sunlight. Months later, she described that moment as the first time she'd felt her strength returning [25].

### 3.5 Drama and Role-Playing: Rehearsing for a Life After Loss

What if you could rewrite the script? In a therapy session, a woman reenacts her final fight with her ex—only this time, she gets to say all the things she swallowed down. The therapist guides her to switch roles, speaking as her ex, then as her future self-looking back. The scene becomes a crucible, burning away unfinished business. Another client spends weeks improvising scenes where he introduces himself differently: *"I'm someone who's learning to be alone without being lonely."* At first, the words feel like a lie. But with repetition, the neural pathways shift. The performance becomes reality.

These modalities are not escapes from grief, but **passageways through it**. Visual arts give pain a shape. Writing gives it a voice. Music gives it a rhythm. Dance gives it motion. Drama gives it a stage. And in the act of creation, the heart learns the most vital lesson: that even in breaking, it was never broken beyond repair [26].

## 4. Empirical Evidence and Case Studies: The Science and Soul of Creative Healing

Heartbreak is universal, but so is the human impulse to transform pain into something meaningful. Modern research and lived experiences alike confirm what poets and artists have always known: creative expression doesn't just document grief—it actively dismantles its hold on us. Below, we explore the rigorous science and poignant personal stories that reveal why art is more than a coping mechanism—it's a catalyst for rebirth [27].

### 4.1 Research on Creative-Arts Therapies and Grief

#### 4.1.1 Quantitative Studies: The Data Behind the Healing

Controlled studies measure art's impact with heart rate monitors, cortisol tests, and depression scales. The results are striking:

- **Art Therapy vs. Traditional Talk Therapy**

A 2019 randomized trial (*Journal of Affective Disorders*) found that participants in guided art therapy (45-minute sessions twice weekly) showed a **23% greater reduction in depression scores** compared to verbal therapy groups. The act of painting or sculpting allowed them to process emotions that words couldn't capture [28].

- **Music's Physiological Power**

Research from the *Journal of Music Therapy* (2020) revealed that group drumming sessions lowered participants' cortisol levels by **37%**, comparable to the effects of moderate exercise. Heartbreak often leaves people physically agitated; rhythm helps them "get back in sync." [29].

- **Writing's Long-Term Benefits**

A landmark study (*Pennebaker, 1997*) had participants write about traumatic experiences for 15 minutes daily. Months later, they not only reported improved mood but also **fewer doctor visits**—proof that emotional release strengthens immune function [30].

#### 4.1.2 Qualitative Findings: The Stories Behind the Statistics

Numbers tell part of the story, but interviews and case studies reveal the human texture of healing:

- **Narrative Therapy's Transformations**

In a 2021 study (*Arts in Psychotherapy*), divorcees created visual timelines of their relationships. Many initially drew abrupt endings ("a door slamming shut"), but through repeated revisions, began adding open windows, winding paths, and even new figures entering the frame. The researchers noted: "*Their art moved from verdicts to voyages.*" [31].

- **Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) Insights**

A qualitative analysis of DMT sessions (*Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy, 2018*) described how participants' movements evolved from "collapsed" postures to "reaching" gestures over 8 weeks. One subject reflected: "*I didn't realize how small I'd made myself until my body refused to do it anymore.*" [32].

#### 4.2 Personal Testimonies and Artistic Works

##### 4.2.1 Famous Artists Who Turned Agony into Art

History's most revered creators often forged their masterpieces in the crucible of heartbreak:

- **Frida Kahlo**

After being betrayed and physically shattered by Diego Rivera, Kahlo painted "**The Two Fridas**" (1939)—a double self-portrait where one Frida bleeds from a severed artery while the other grips her hand. The work became a visual manifesto: "*I am my soulmate.*" [33].

- **Pablo Neruda**

His "*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*" (1924) immortalized youthful heartache with lines like "*Love is so short, forgetting is so long.*" Neruda later admitted the poems healed him by "giving the pain a home outside my body." [34].

- **Lord Byron**

After a scandalous separation, Byron wrote "*Darkness*" (1816), an apocalyptic poem that mirrored his emotional freefall. Yet the act of writing it reportedly lifted his depression—he told a friend, "*I exorcised the demon by describing it.*" [35].

##### 4.2.2 Anonymous Breakthroughs: Real Voices From Therapy

Clinical settings abound with quieter but no less profound transformations:

- **The Collage That Spoke**

A 28-year-old man processing a blindsiding breakup assembled a collage from shredded relationship letters and subway tickets. His therapist noted: "*When he finally glued down the last fragment, he said, 'Now it's not mine to carry.'*" [36].

- **The Playlist as Progress Report**

A woman in music therapy curated monthly playlists tracking her grief. Her first was all minor-key ballads; by month six, it included defiant pop anthems. "*I didn't notice I was healing until I could dance again,*" she shared.

- **Psychodrama's Final Scene**

In a group therapy session, a participant reenacted her breakup—but this time, she delivered the parting words she'd never gotten to say. Afterwards, she reported sleeping through the night for the first time in



months [37].

### **4.3 The Verdict of Science and Soul**

Whether through double-blind studies or diaries, the evidence converges: creativity is neurological medicine and spiritual salve in one. It short-circuits rumination (quantifiably lowering stress hormones) while restoring agency (letting us author new endings). From Kahlo's brushstrokes to a teenager's angsty songwriting, the principle remains the same—what we create from our pain eventually creates *us* anew [38].

## **5. Challenges and Considerations**

### **5.1. Limitations of Creative-Arts Approaches**

Expressive arts can be helpful to emotional healing for some, but it's not suitable for all people. Since these ways of detecting rely on individuals' willingness and what they feel comfortable with, they can vary a lot. Personally, engaging in creative arts, being involved with music, or dancing comes hard to some, so such therapies may not appear accessible or welcoming to them. Lacking the right mental or emotional state, some people may find it difficult to participate in symbolic or abstract learning, so they might feel more frustrated or confused. The way culture values art and feelings can influence how successful using creative methods can be. Involvement in the arts might sometimes cause emotional problems, so it needs to be handled safely. As creative expression goes around the person's ability to use words, it may bring out feelings, old memories, or events they have not dealt with yet. When no therapeutic support is provided, the chance of being retraumatized is very high in creative exercises. From time to time, starting to draw or do something spontaneous can bring on strong feelings, memories, or make the artist feel detached from reality. When no qualified professional is there to help, the process could result in more negative effects than positive ones. So, although creative arts methods are promising, they work best when used wisely and by trained individuals [39].

### **5.2. Integrating Arts with Traditional Therapy**

Bringing creative methods into therapy, together with standard approaches, makes the process more effective and open to reach clients in many ways. It becomes especially helpful when people find it tough to say what they feel and think in words. Through creative artwork, people can express what is inside them silently, which helps them explore their feelings further when they attend talk therapy sessions. Clients could convey their troubles with mental pictures, actions, or sounds, and these can be handled using thought and behaviour strategies. CBT, DBT, or general counselling can make use of creative exercises to promote important goals in therapy. They can help a person to see illogical thoughts, express negative self-talk, or show what emotional regulation and a safe space mean. Moreover, activities related to art can help a person be more mindful and centred, which is why they go well with DBT's focus on skills. It is up to the therapist to manage how the combination of various techniques safely helps the client. They should create a safe place where clients can express themselves, pick the right materials and activities for the clients, and inspire clients to analyze the emotions and symbols they see. The therapist assists the client in seeing the personal meaning in the art instead of explaining the art for them, which helps increase self-awareness and independence. The therapist must also remain attuned to signs of emotional overload and be prepared to intervene when the creative process becomes overwhelming. Ultimately, the therapist acts as a bridge between artistic expression and psychological insight, helping clients translate their creative work into meaningful therapeutic outcomes [40].

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1 Summary of Key Findings**

The article emphasizes that creative-arts approaches are not merely supplementary to traditional talk therapy but serve as powerful, standalone modalities for processing and healing emotional pain, particularly romantic loss. Through detailed theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, it illustrates how visual art, writing, music, movement, and drama enable individuals to access and transform grief that is often too complex or painful to articulate with words alone. Key findings include the neurobiological evidence supporting the calming and restorative effects of creative activity, the ability of art to provide catharsis and reframe narratives of pain, and the consistent observation that artistic engagement leads to tangible improvements in emotional regulation, self-perception, and physical well-being.

### **6.2 Implications for Mental Health Practices**

The findings suggest that mental health practitioners should more widely incorporate creative-arts therapies into mainstream clinical settings. This integration can enhance treatment, especially for clients who struggle with verbal communication or are working through trauma. The article advocates for therapists to receive interdisciplinary training in expressive modalities and to adopt a more holistic view of healing, one that recognises the body, imagination, and emotions as essential elements in recovery. It also calls for a shift in clinical mindsets, encouraging practitioners to value intuitive, nonlinear healing processes alongside structured, evidence-based models like CBT or DBT. When properly facilitated, creative engagement can become a cornerstone of trauma-informed, client-centred care.

### 6.3 Call for Further Research

The article underscores the need for deeper scientific inquiry to establish broader legitimacy and application of creative-arts approaches. Two primary research directions are highlighted:

#### a. Longitudinal studies on art-based interventions

There is a strong call for long-term studies that track the psychological and physiological impact of creative therapies over time. Most current research captures short-term gains, but longitudinal data could better reveal how sustained artistic engagement affects resilience, relapse prevention, and overall mental health. Such studies would help validate these approaches as evidence-based treatments rather than adjunct or experimental options.

#### b. Cross-cultural comparisons of creative healing methods

Healing through art is a global, multicultural phenomenon, but most existing research is Western-centric. The article proposes comparative studies that explore how different cultures use artistic expression in mourning, coping, and recovery. Understanding the cultural nuances in how grief and creativity intersect could enrich therapeutic practices and promote inclusivity. It would also ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive and aligned with diverse value systems, enhancing accessibility and effectiveness across populations.

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