

ATOL: Art Therapy Online

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Visual Representation Piece:

Injury

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Fig. 1: Thomas, (9 years), 2023, "Wound", glue and acrylic paint, approx. 4 x 3 cm,

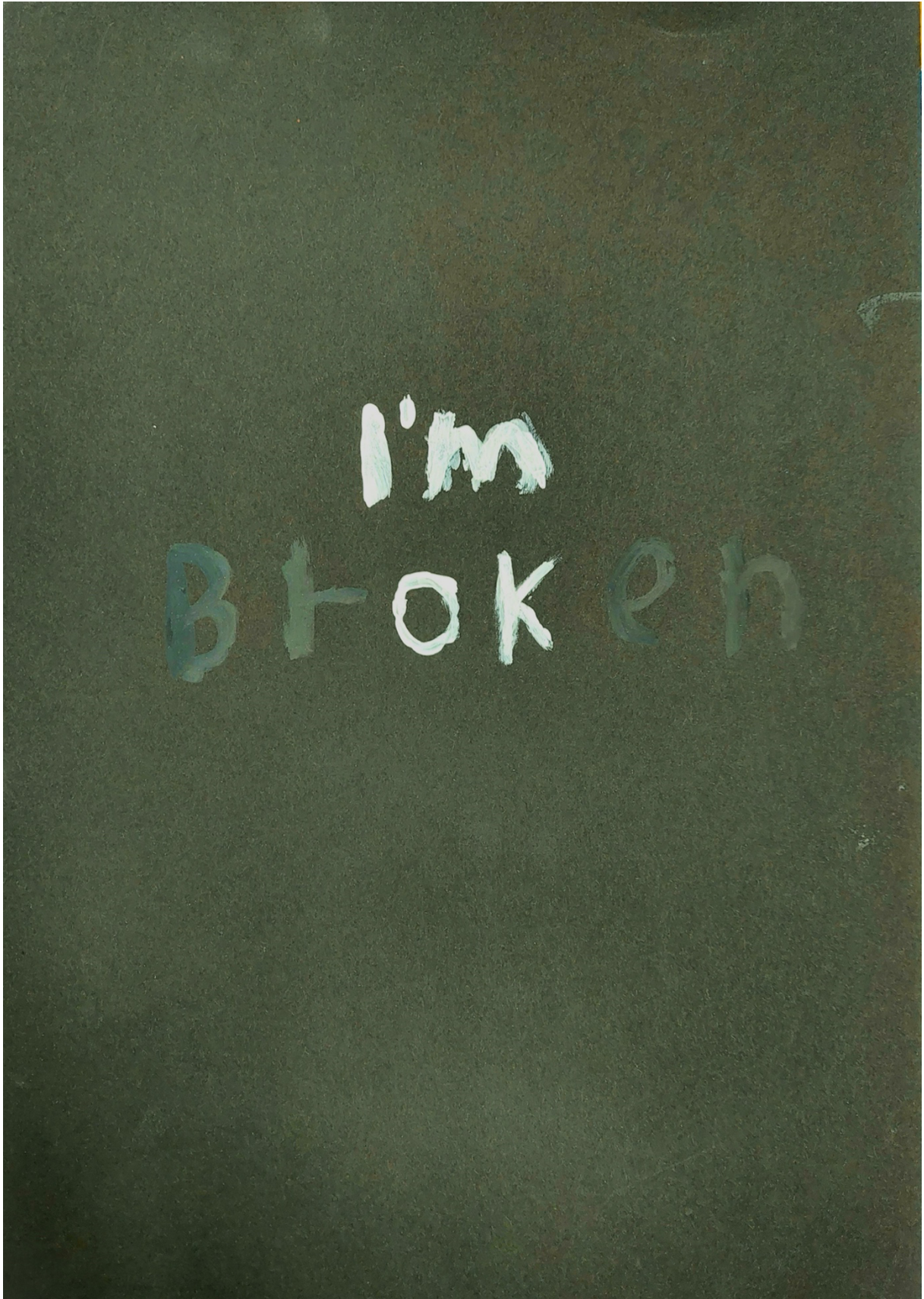


Fig. 2: Marius, (12 years), 2023, "BrOkEn", acrylic paint on black paper

Both works come from my art therapy practice in a primary school in Berlin. Thomas and Marius have been coming to me for art therapy for about a year. Thomas created a kind of trompe l'oeil wound in the palm of his right hand using a self-made mass of glue and red colour. (Fig. 1). After completing it, he said: "I'm going to scare my father with this [wound]. I'll take a saw out of his toolbox for it." However, this did not happen as the "wound" faded over the rest of the school day.

Thomas is a talented draughtsman, he is very motivated and wants to be an artist. He is hyperactive, impulsive and often stands out in class due to his rebellious behaviour. When he showed me his "wound", I was deeply impressed by the realistic depiction. I had never seen work like this before in my art therapy practice. The directness and radical nature of the work immediately reminded me of the performance artist Marina Abramovic. In her early creative phase, the Serbian performance artist often used her body and tested boundaries. She deliberately inflicted injuries on the viewer that she inflicted on herself or others. But I am also strongly reminded of the crucifixion of Jesus here.

Marius, another boy from my art therapy group session, created the painting "BrOKen" (Fig. 2).

Marius tends to be a quiet boy who works with concentration and usually comes to art therapy with an idea. Here he used different shades of colour for the play on words. The sentence element "I'M OK" is applied in a much lighter colour than the remaining letters for BROKEN, which seem to disappear in the dark tone of the paper. The letters "I'M" have also been applied with a thicker brushstroke compared to the remaining letters. I discovered the same play on words in the media, but I don't think it loses any of its power, knowing that Marius didn't come up with it himself.

Both works express something vulnerable in very different forms. The "wound" seems to provoke, triggering a direct reaction in the viewer. In the play on words, the injury is hidden more subtly. Language is central here. It crosses "BROKEN" with "I'M OK", so the direction remains open.

Biography

Christin Herm (born 1977) studied art therapy at Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin and has been working as an art therapist (M.A.) in Berlin since 2019. She gained experience in several psychiatric hospitals, among others. Since 2020, she has been offering art therapy in Berlin schools for children who stand out for their behavior, have a psychiatric diagnosis and/or refugee children. Prior to that, she worked for several years as a social pedagogue (Dipl.) with children and young people from precarious life situations. She has been artistically active for more than 20 years and has participated in several exhibition projects.

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