



## **The Piece to Peace Project:**

Art therapists demonstrate good will with a focus on art, youth violence and community service.

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Albuquerque, NM*--Over one thousand art therapists from across the globe will convene in Albuquerque, NM at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 to participate in a very special project which is set to occur during the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual American Art Therapy Conference.

**"The Piece to Peace Project"** is a violent toy de-construction and transformation that will take place in the association's open art studio during their annual scientific meeting. Magnificent sculptures made from this process will be donated to two Family Service Centers in Albuquerque; Barrett Foundation, Inc. and PB&J Family Services, Inc. Both agencies focus on building healthy futures for women, children and families.

"We do not represent what folks generally think of when asked about their impressions of the typical conventioner" said Sue Loesl, AATA conference chair and art therapist from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "The AATA makes it a priority during the very early stages of conference development planning to identify ways in which the organization and it's members can demonstrate good will, offer service and give back to the community which hosts their annual conference."

"It is natural for art therapists to address issues of social concern through creativity, art making and human interaction" said Robin Valicenti, developer of the art therapy Piece to Peace Project and licensed art therapist from Villanova, Pennsylvania. "Taking apart violent images and creating aesthetically pleasing non-violent images is a win/win situation."

The impetus for this project arose from the AATA Art Committee's mission as a socially responsible and aesthetic way to call attention to the epidemic of youth violence while creatively connecting with the conference host city's community. Violent toys were collected across the nation by many art therapists and will soon be used as art materials with the intention of creating

peaceful non-violent imagery. Professional sculptor and art therapist Brian Tepper from New York City will be in the studio to help guide the transformation. Qualifiers of what constitutes a violent toy, as defined by a parent to parent advocacy group The Lion & Lamb Project, were based on the following criteria: 1) toys which promote violence and aggression as the best way to settle disputes, 2) toys which depict violent actions as fun, harmless, and "cool". 3) toys which encourage children to act out aggressive scenarios, 4) toys which foster aggressive competition. 5) toys which depend on "enemies" that need to be "destroyed" by children.

The art therapists, along with the aforementioned parent to parent advocacy group, believe that attitudes about violence as "entertainment" can be changed over time just as attitudes about drunk driving, smoking, and childhood obesity have changed. Bringing awareness to the issue may help promote action and changes in society's perception of the contributing and precipitating factors regarding youth violence. Just as it has become "uncool" to pollute and to litter, we are working to change the awareness and tolerance level for violence as a "cool" theme for toys and other entertainment products for children.

It has been noted that many Public Health and Children's Organizations such as the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians have developed policy statements regarding the impact of entertainment violence on children. Youth violence is a serious national problem for our children and families.

Violence is not child's play and these art therapists plan to do their best to support social responsibility, creative problem solving and community action while calling attention to a very serious situation in our society. This meeting of art therapists will bring positive creative energy to Albuquerque and leave the city with objects of art to be enjoyed by many for years to come.

The American Art Therapy Association, (AATA) Inc., was founded in 1969 and develops and promotes educational, professional, and ethical standards for the practice of art therapy. AATA provides information to its members and the public regarding the field of art therapy through publications, a scholarly journal, conferences, and a web site ([www.arttherapy.org](http://www.arttherapy.org)).

For more information about the Piece to Peace initiative please feel free to contact Robin Valicenti. MCAT, ATR-BC, LPC at American Art Therapy Association (AATA), 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria VA 22304, 888-290-0878 or [info@arttherapy.org](mailto:info@arttherapy.org)