



Regional Event  
International Association  
for the Study of Dreams



# ***Dreams and Artwork in My Cancer Journey***

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF DREAMS  
All slides posted on my website: [jaynegackenbach.ca](http://jaynegackenbach.ca)

# Abstract

- Examines relationship between dream content, creative artwork, and breast cancer journey.
- Analyzed dreams across three phases: before, during, and after cancer.
- Artwork reviewed for symbolic parallels.
- Findings highlight shifts in dream themes, frequency, and symbolic imagery.

# Dreams and Cancer

- DeCicco et al. (2010): Breast cancer patients' dreams include more illness-related elements.
- Wellisch & Cohen (2011): Nightmares in cancer patients involve recurring themes.
- Burk (2015): Characteristics of cancer warning dreams (conviction, vividness, dread, disease-specific symbols).



# Art and Cancer

- Barnett & Vasiu (2024): Art making supports emotional regulation.
- Puetz et al. (2013): Creative art therapy improves anxiety, depression, pain, QOL.
- Ünal & Erdoğan Yüce (2025): Reduces anxiety/depression; no effect on fatigue.
- Nainis et al. (2006): Art therapy reduced cancer-related symptoms.
- Pernambuco-Holsten (2019): Patient example—art provided expression beyond words.



# Dreams & Art Relationship

- Forrer (2021) claims “all creativity is rooted in dreams.”
- Weir (2025) did not include dreams or sleep in a review article about art and the mind in APA’s *Monitor on Psychology*
- Gackenbach (2023) did a systematic quantitative analysis of about a decades worth of art and dreams and found no relationship.
- However, she did find a relationship between her art and dreams in a qualitative analysis of selected works.



# Breast Cancer Journey: Key points

- Green et al. (2000): Outcomes predicted by demographics, **trauma history**, support—not treatment!
- Prior to diagnosis I experience the death of my mother, a stroke resulting in dementia in my only sibling and the death of her husband. All within 11 months. Three years later:

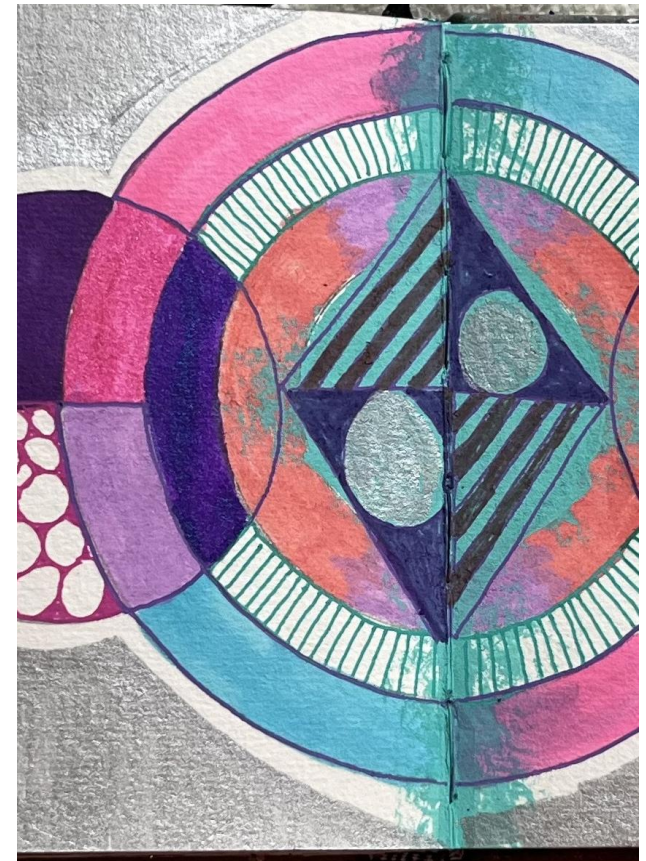




# Breast Cancer Journey: Key points

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- Mammogram Feb 28, 2024 (suspected cancer as compared to mammogram taken 3 years earlier)
- Ultrasound and Biopsy March 18, 2024 (confirmed cancer)
- First Lumpectomy and sentinel lymph node removal May 10, 2024 (both breasts)
- Bone scan, CT scan, MRI, and PET scan (June and July, 2024) (because all 3 sentinel nodes cancerous)
- Second Lumpectomy with lymph node removal July 29, 2024 (18 more nodes removed and 12 cancerous)
- No chemo thus I began naturopathic (intravenous Vit. C) and rebranded (ivermectin) therapies on my own
- Radiation Oct 14 – Oct 31, 2024
- CT scans clear of cancer (Nov 2024, Jan 2025, and Aug 2025)



# Method: Data Sources

Dreams grouped into 3 phases:

Phase 1 (3 months): 24 dreams pre-diagnosis.

Phase 2 (8 months): 96 dreams during treatment.

Phase 3 (3 months): 18 dreams post-cancer.



Art grouped similarly:  
29 (pre), 39 (during), 25 (post).



# Method: Procedures

- ChatGPT-5 used as analysis software under guidance of author (OpenAI, 2025)
- Dreams coded quantitatively and qualitatively.
  - Hall & Van de Castle (1966) content analysis (HVDC).
  - Jungian thematic interpretation (Jung, 1966; Hillman, 1979; Lockhart, 1990).
- Artwork reviewed for symbolic parallels

# HVDC Reliability

- Comparison of ChatGPT-5 vs. student coding for 2 HVDC categories.
- Close alignment in aggression and friendliness counts.
- Suggests adequate reliability for broad HVDC categories.

2015.16 honors students studies dreams and 2 HVDC scales co... • Saved to the PC

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	Email	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	Friendliness
1																		
2	ersonk229@mymacewan.ca	andersonk229@mymacewan.ca	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
3	kakt5@mymacewan.ca	kakt5@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
4	rm42@mymacewan.ca	bakerm42@mymacewan.ca	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3
5	ntt22@mymacewan.ca	harristt22@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	erd8@mymacewan.ca	beckerd8@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
7	tttn@mymacewan.ca	bissett@mymacewan.ca	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
8	p@mymacewan.ca	bliss@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	me7@mymacewan.ca	braunme7@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	mnar3@gmail.com	brennan3@gmail.com	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
11	ksr22@mymacewan.ca	brooks22@mymacewan.ca	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	WNT75@mymacewan.ca	BROWNNT75@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
13	ssis22@mymacewan.ca	hurgiss22@mymacewan.ca	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
14	poss@mymacewan.ca	campos@mymacewan.ca	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	ettea2@mymacewan.ca	caouettea2@mymacewan.ca	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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17	ac30@mymacewan.ca	derlac30@mymacewan.ca	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
18	chler@mymacewan.ca	doogchler@mymacewan.ca	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
19	g6	dong6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
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Sheet1

Ready Accessibility: Good to go

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# HVDC: Characters & Animals

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- Male characters stable (~46–50%).
- Female characters rose during cancer (38%), declined post (33%).
- Family members consistently higher than norms (peaked at 45%).
- Animals
  - above norm (18%): Cats/kittens early, absent post-cancer.
  - Shift toward archetypal animals post-cancer.



# HVDC: Interactions, Activities, & Emotions

- Aggression steady pre- and during (38%), rose post (56%).
- Verbal aggression doubled norm post-cancer (33%).
- Success acts declined; failure/misfortune elevated.
- Strenuous activity highest pre-diagnosis (38%), declined later.
- Mental activity above norm but declining (83%→61%).
- Fear/anxiety stable; anger/confusion rose post-cancer.
- Joy and sadness consistently above norms.
- Sexuality elevated (21–28% vs. 12% norm).



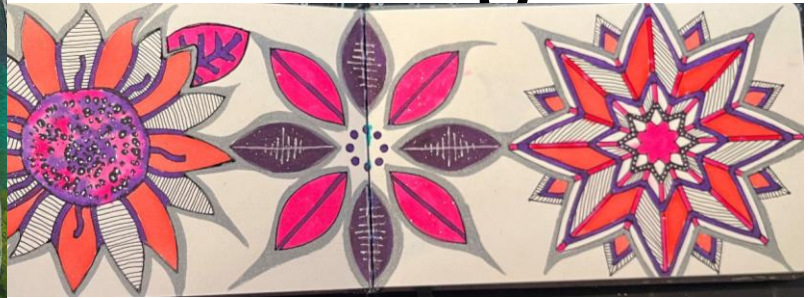


## Jungian Dream Analysis: Jung, 1966; 1975

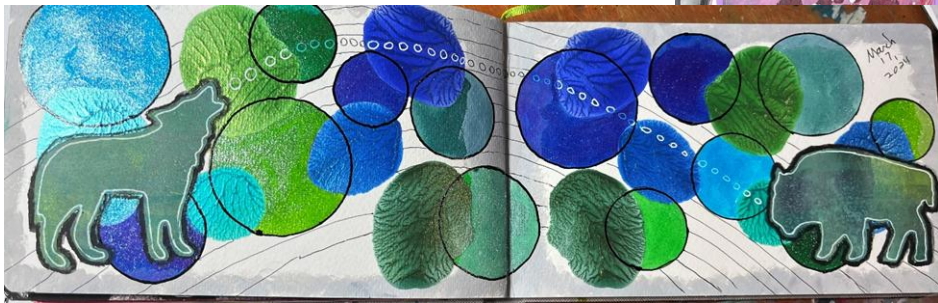
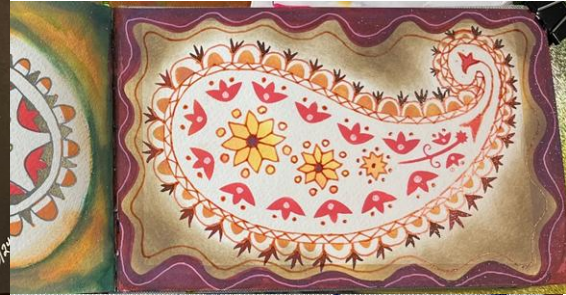
- Themes of death, archetypal imagery, symbolic transformation.
  - Precancer: animals as fragile companions; eros joyful.
  - Cancer: animals endangered, archetypal; eros conflicted.
  - Post-cancer: symbolic/archetypal animals; eros ambivalent.



# Selected Precancer Images













# Jungian Art Analysis

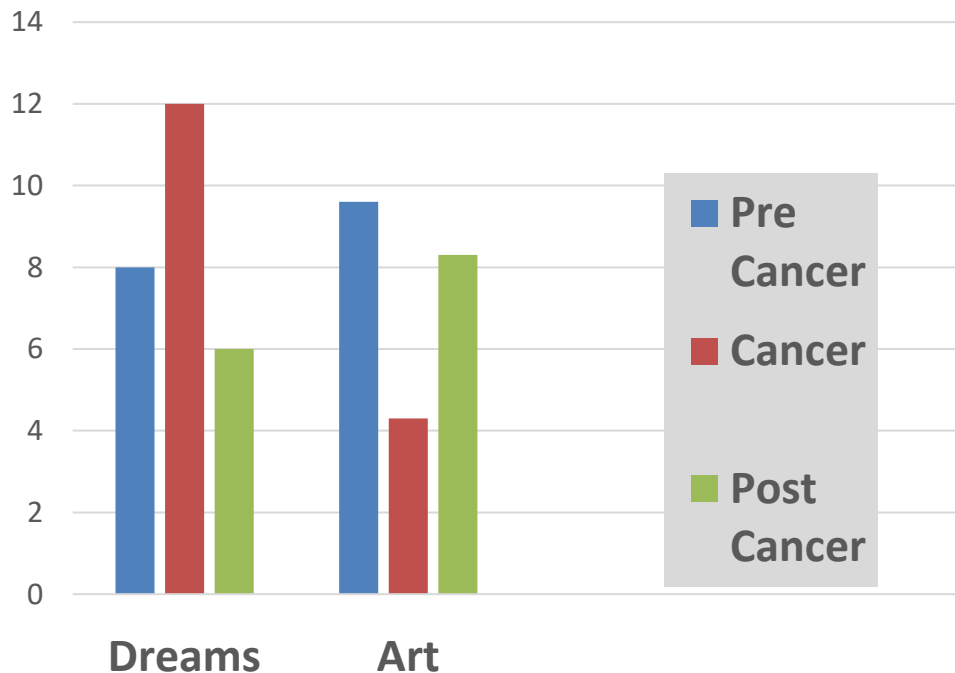
Pre-diagnosis: exploratory,  
symbolic range, curiosity.

During cancer: bodily forms,  
instinctive survival imagery.

Post-treatment: ritualized,  
symmetrical, protective forms.

Shift from experimentation to  
embodiment.

# Number of Dreams and Art Making Experienced during 3 Time Periods



- Fewer art pieces per month during active cancer period
- More dreams per month during active cancer period
- likely due to cancer brain (first time with cancer all you can think about is cancer) and cancer fatigue (Bower, 2014)



# Cancer Warnings, Diagnosis, Prognosis

- Precancer dreams: tsunami (alert), kitten's nipple bleeding (somatic warning).
  - Additional warnings: edema, alien merge, amputation, flooding.
- Diagnostic dream: breast pain after 1<sup>st</sup> surgery.
- Prognostic dreams: risk vs. survival themes.
  - Positive prognostics clustered around times of surgeries and radiation.





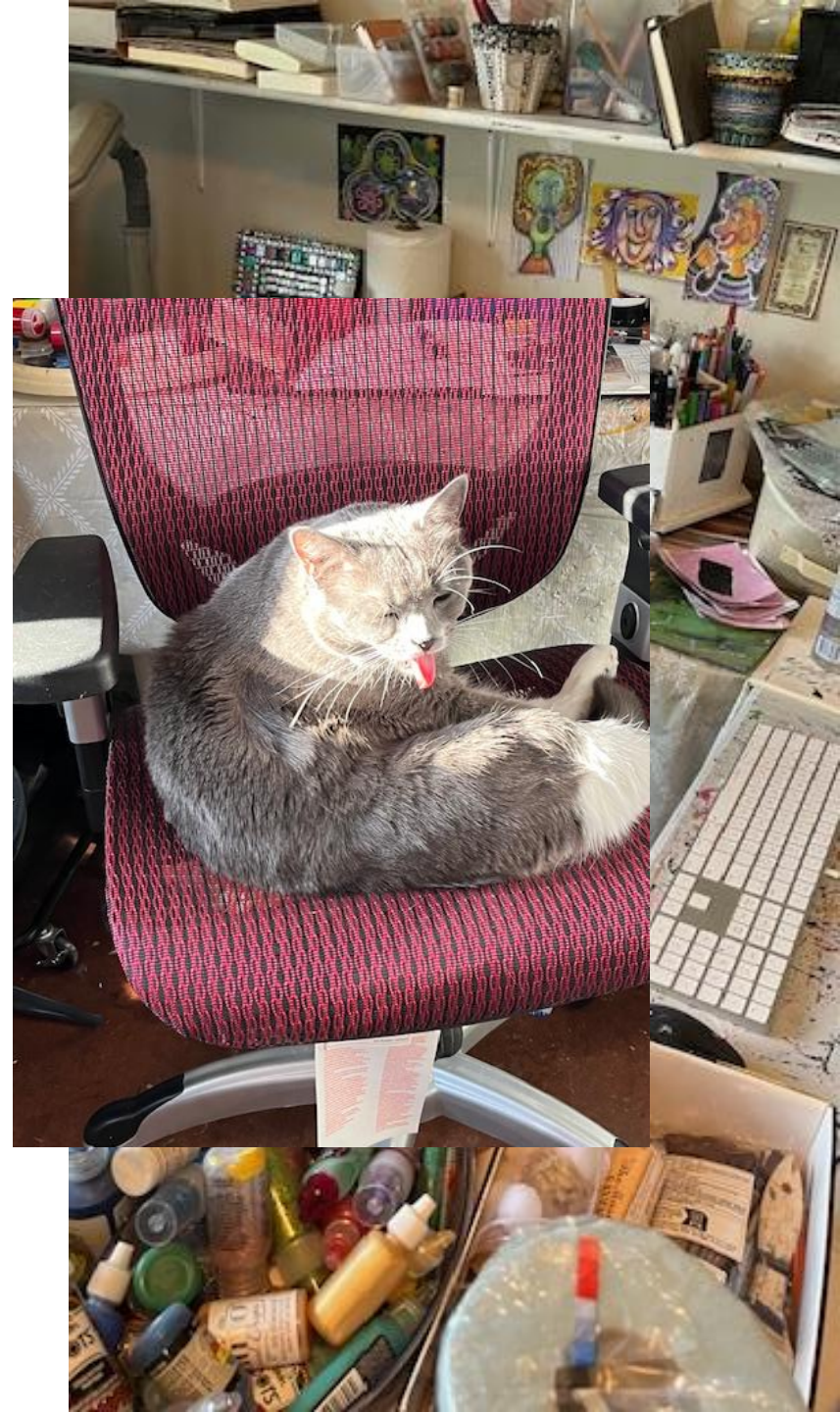
## Discussion: Integrating Findings

- Verbal aggression post-cancer reflects individuation and boundary-setting.
- Animal imagery: instinctual/archetypal energies, turbulence, transformation
- Dreams showed upheaval, artwork provided continuity and order.
- Divergences reflect medium differences: involuntary vs. volitional.




# Divergences & Explanations

- Success acts decreased, individuation emphasized.
- Artwork production dropped—possible fatigue and energy constraints.
- Dreams mirrored turbulence, artwork embodied containment.
- Complementary roles: dreams dramatize, art stabilizes.



# Conclusion

- Dreams and art offer complementary views of cancer journey.
- Dreams: upheaval, archetypal confrontation, boundary setting.
- Art: containment, symmetry, integration.



On my 79<sup>th</sup> birthday (May 2025) I dropped my watch, and it shattered. I had dropped it many times before and nothing happened. I bought a new watch for a new time; the ending of the spine injury from radiation!

# the beat goes on ...

- I found out in August of 2024 from a bone scan that I might have cancer on my frontal skull.
- ChatGPT-5 highlighted this dream as possibly diagnostic :
  - Sept 11, 2024 — Dreamt ... there was a **scar or a feather laid across my right eye**, top to bottom – then I was thinking about a list related to cancer care and it was written on the **base of my spine**
- Nov 2024 - Had an usual negative reaction to radiation treatment in my spine
- Sept 10, 2025 had a dream of a neck having a large incision on the right side
- Later that day radiologist confirmed cancer on my forehead bone
- Is this all continuity hypothesis (Schredl, 2003) and/or something else?



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