



The other Side!



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~ some people are artists, some themselves are art.

Art is commonly regarded as one of the ‘blessings’ of civilization, whereas mental illness is often viewed as one of humanity’s unkindest misfortunes. A mental illness is often viewed through the lens of its limitations which are imposed on those who suffer with it.

Despite apparent differences between them, the notion that creativity and mental illness are closely related has persisted.

After all, there’s a thin line between the art of madness and the madness of art!

There is no great genius without a mixture of some madness.

Perhaps influenced by the romantic notion of their time, back in the 18th and 19th centuries, psychiatrists began to notice the spontaneous art done by some of their patients in the barren mental asylums.

Many renowned names in the world of art have dealt with mental illness such as

depression, bipolar disorder, seizures, schizophrenia, anxiety, mania etc. In all probability, the most famous example of the “mad artist” stereotype would be the famous painter- Vincent

Van Gogh! He once quotes, “I put my heart and my soul into my work and lost my mind in the process.”

The Van Gogh schizophrenia, an example which is famously quoted in the world of psychiatry.

On a superficial touch, it’s about a patient who cut off his ear and presented it to his lover due to varied judgment owing to his mental condition.

With advancing science, we now have enough reason to believe that his art and actions were not just a consequence of his condition but rather a form of expression, of his thoughts and talents.

One of the lesser known facts about Van Gogh is that he started painting at the age of 27, which was considered quite late for an artist. During a career which lasted only over a decade, he created 2100 pieces of art, an astonishing number for any ordinary artist. Interestingly, his works included many self-portraits. Though the reason could be that owing to his poverty he couldn’t afford models, it also gives the viewers an idea of his self-perception, a dive right into his mind.

Suffering from manic depression, he used colors not just to express but also alleviate his mood. He had developed a fixation on the color- yellow. “The Yellow House” and “Sunflowers” both were painted during this

time. They also happen to depict his rooted belief that yellow was the happiest color on his palate. As he said in one of his letters to his brother, “yellow stands for the sun”. This color is warm and vibrant, it is connected to the light, the sun, life and optimism. It stands the most in a painting full of colors, not only because it observes easily the other ones, but also because it has a power that human eyes can’t really handle. Researchers believe that might have been the result of medical or neurological conditions able to cause a predominance of yellow in vision (xanthopsia). He would often ingest yellow paint while at work to overcome his mood swings. His actions seem to make sense now that we have enough evidence of his episodic depression (painting "the sunflowers")



the sunflowers "starry nights"

His greatest work is often regarded to be the painting - “starry nights”.

What seems to be a night landscape with the valley houses and surrounding mountains, is also a depiction of the artist’s hopes, lighting up a dark gloomy

night. The painting was one of his final works while he was admitted in a mental asylum shortly before he died. It’s inspiration comes from the view outside his window, the beauty he saw despite the presence of bars from that little opening. His imagination of hope is indeed a deep dwell into his mind.



"starry nights"

The painting leaves a hint of satisfaction on the viewer, remind us that the sky is lit even in the darkest of times. His style of painting is often regarded to be a result of schizophrenia, the blur thick strokes and his use of contrasting colors which blend yet strike out to the eye at the very first sight. He had always believed in his art and continued to believe that art was his niche in the world. It wasn’t simply Van Gogh’s mental state that was influencing his artistic style. Those influences might have played a small role, but his painting style is also a reflection of the outside influences on his life - where he was living and the other artists he was interacting with at the time.

Shortly after painting this masterpiece , Van Gogh would commit suicide.

His art however, would live on for generations to admire, relate to and ponder upon. It’s an insight into his thoughts which might not have been conveyed by him but nevertheless, persisted in his head. He was a genius of a painter, and he might have had a touch of mental illness, but he wasn’t simply ‘the mad painter’.

Art therapists who see such expressions in the clinical settings may recognize them as “meaningless doodles” that are typically crumpled or discarded by their makers. Unfortunately, neither art therapists, psychologists, nor others who study the relationship between art and psychopathology have written much about it.

Perhaps this is because they are less visually alluring and are seen as the simple scratchings of the intellectually impaired, overmedicated or untalented.

Researchers believe that these throw-away creations offer an opportunity for uncovering an important but difficult to verbalize aspect of their maker’s inner experiences.

Creativity can be a positive outlet for people in mental distress, with art therapy increasingly prescribed for victims of trauma.

“Some days I’m Van Gogh’s Starry Night other days I’m his suicide letter. But everyday I’m his eyes, seeing this world painfully beautiful ,the way it is.”