

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: WHEN EMOTIONS BECOME A CARE

Maria Grazia Spurio

Educational and Psychological Center "Genius Academy", Roma, Italy

SUMMARY

Visual arts enable the artist to present to the viewer their internal subconscious thoughts. There is a connection between the artist and the viewer. This is so with famous artists, but also with patients who create artworks. This link between artist and viewer can be used in therapy to explore the artist/patient's interior self. This understanding between artist and viewer can, in therapy, become an expression of caring.

Key words: creative arts - visual arts - art therapy - psychiatry

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The history of the creative and visual arts is intertwined, from ancient times, with that of health and mental wellbeing. From the Greek theater, which can be considered a sort of 'therapeutic support-art', to psychoanalysts such as Freud and Jung, who considered the work of art an expressive form of the unconscious, and derivative of the process of sublimation of basic instincts, to the founder of art therapy in America, Margaret Naumburg, who identifies the artistic material with an instrument of interpretation and resolution of internal conflicts.

Art therefore, can be considered as means of supporting the ego, a healing factor, and an instrument for reconciling emotional conflicts. By artistically elaborating one's own experience, educating oneself to creative transformation, could mean filling the gray roads of rationality with the colours of the emotions. Art therapy may be used both in the medical-psychiatric context and also in rehabilitation, as well as in education-prevention contexts. In the medical field, art therapy has proved to be an excellent tool for the emotional regulation of patients suffering from chronic diseases, or anticipating major surgery or a medical procedure, the most common examples being those aimed at children and oncology patients. The success obtained in the psychiatric field has led to the addition of art therapy to the rehabilitation field for subjects with neurological damage.

In the field of prevention, art therapy can facilitate the creation of a space in which to meet oneself in an authentic way, express one's emotions and deal with one's most profound and unaware aspects of personality. The task of the sensible professional, in this case, is to accompany the patient, in a prepared and careful way, in the exploration of himself/herself, using this tool so intrinsically linked to his emotional sphere. Thus this becomes a journey made through individual expressive technique, sometimes unconsciously, but also one of careful observation.

The same painters can be considered great artists, just because they are able to impress in their creations

the notable emotional experience that pervades them, so that the common man succeeds to enter into a sort of emotional symbiosis with the emotional world of the artist. A bridge of connection develops between those who create and those who enjoy the creation, that is mysteriously established, in spite of all rationality. Thus arises an aesthetic experience where no logical rule exists anymore, and where, only thanks to the strong emotions evoked, it is possible to realize one of the highest forms of emotional transmission full of contents and therapeutic potentials. When we talk about great artists we think of the school of belonging or the technique used, not necessarily about deepening the psychological aspect hidden behind the works.

For example Cézanne, the Monte Sante-Victoire became his obsessive thought: he had always happily painted the landscape of his Provence, but in the last period the mountain was painted in an almost obsessive way, so much so that he dedicated over fifty works to it. Magritte, through the elaboration of the thought represented in 'The collective invention', a work from 1935 in which a naked woman, half fish, is mute and lies dead on the seashore, seems to have been helped, albeit on an unconscious level, in the mourning of the mother. A depressed mother, disappeared in the middle of the night from her bedroom, distressing images, often revisited in the artist's works through continuous references to open wardrobes and abandoned female nightwear. After hours of feverish research she was found dead from suicide by drowning, with the nightgown on her face. The observer of these works of art can therefore be encouraged, in a free and conscious activity of mirroring, to bring out emotions that, thanks to the support of the professional, can be accepted and re-interpreted in a functional way.

This is the starting point for the realization of the union of art and psychiatry, thanks to the great therapeutic value of the art world. This therapeutic value is sublimated in the strong emotions conveyed by the aesthetic experience, which allows, thanks to the special and mysterious connection of souls, to penetrate into the extraordinary emotional world of the others.

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Correspondence:

Maria Grazia Spurio, MD, PhD, Psychotherapist
Educational and Psychological Center "Genius Academy"
Via Carlo Arturo Jemolo, 83 00156, Roma, Italy
E-mail: dott.m.g.spurio@hotmail.it
Web: www.mariagraziaspurio.com - www.unchainyourmind.org