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ART: THE EUPHORIA OF LIFE

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Abstract: Art connects us to the imagination and bridges the conscious and unconscious. It takes us into expanded states of consciousness, helping us understand our waking reality, mindfulness, alerted states, and dreamtime. Art creates a room in the soul where the messiness of life is tolerated, where animate the narration of life. The creative expression that you pursue through your art gives incredible meaning to your life. It helps you conquer your internal negativity; gives a boost to your self-esteem and leads to personal growth. Different art methods such as painting, music-making, or movement might be helpful for people with several mental illnesses. These creative processes give positive growth and stability to psychological stress.

Keywords: Happiness, Psychology, Communication, Non-verbal, Therapy, Creativity.

Introduction

“Creativity in and of itself is important for remaining healthy remaining connected to yourself and connected to the world”, says Christianne Strang, a professor of neuroscience at the University of Alabama Birmingham and the former President of the American art therapy association. The art process carries us free of conscious thinking and judging. This absorption in the process is what heals. It accesses another part of oneself, where the mystery of pain and relief of grief and anger and despair, longing and hope our present. Art sustains us through the experience of death, birth, professional stress, and family crisis. One does this work for personal health, yes, but for the larger fabric of value in the culture as well.

"Art takes us apart; Art put us back together again".

Art brings the soul back into life when our daily life, stress, and complications of written take the soul from ourselves. Art creates a room in the soul where the messiness of life is tolerated, where animate the narration of life. It is the place where we can replenish and experience both gardens and graveyards. It is a key to knowing who we are.¹ Through art making we have solved our problems, assuaged pain, faced losses, and disappointments and came to know ourselves deeply.

Art expression has also been promoted as helpful in releasing emotions. In psychological terms, this is known as Catharsis, the discharge of strong emotion for relief. The creativity of the human mind soon enters the 'art world' where they are treated as the profit and loss statements and art pieces as an object in the art marketplace. Since the 1950s are having developed into a profession spoiling whole industries which reflect the general fragmentation of work life in a society. Critics, journalists, art historians, curators, dealers, and collectors all vie for the role of the creator of meaning, while the artist stand mutely by, heroically isolated. Art therapy seemed originally a refuge; it confirmed our need to connect with others and communicate but gradually art therapy too, has embraced the ideal professionalism. This professionalism robs art of one of its most potent properties, the ability to dissolve boundaries and reveal our interconnectedness with one another, as well as reveal the dignity of our uniqueness.²

It has been observed that art has consistently been part of life as well as healing throughout the history of humankind. For example, the Egyptians are reported to have encouraged people with mental illness to engage in artistic activity, the Greeks used drama and music for its reparative properties and the story of King Saul in the Bible describes music's calming attributes. Later, in Europe during the Renaissance, English physician and writer Robert Burton theorized that imagination played a role in health and well-being, while Italian philosopher de Feltre proposed that dance and play were central to children's healthy growth and development.⁸

Art heals in a different number of important ways. First, the art can provide a diagnostic image of culture and the individual, and provide healing for mental and physical health. Aristotle observed that there are two instincts, basic to human nature 1) imitation; and 2) harmony and rhythm, and "even dancing imitates character emotion, and acting by rhythmical movement." Traditional healers were artists, and many contemporary healing practices draw on aspects of the Arts. Studies show the artistic endeavors provide both physical and psychological benefits and even help people live longer.³ It is also observed that while all of the expressive therapies involved action, each also has inherent differences, for example, visual expression is conducted to more private, isolated work and may lead itself to socialization when people collaborate on a song or in simultaneously playing instruments; and dance/movements after opportunities to interact and form relationships. In other words, each form of expressive therapy has its unique properties and roles in therapeutic work depending on its application, practitioner, client, setting, and objectives.

Expressive therapies have been sometimes labeled as 'nonverbal' therapies. They're actually both nonverbal and verbal because verbal communication of thoughts and feelings is a central part of therapy in most situations. However, for a child who has limited language, an elderly person who has lost the ability to talk because of a stroke or dementia or a trauma victim who may be unable to put the idea into speech, expression through art, music, movement, or play can be ways to convey oneself without words and maybe the primary form of communication in therapy.⁴ The creative art therapies became more widely known during the 1930s and 1940s when psychotherapists and artists begin to realize that self-expression through nonverbal methods such as painting, music-making, or movement might be helpful for people with several mental illnesses. Because there were many patients for whom the 'talking cure' was impractical, the art therapies gradually begin to find a place in treatment. In this world, many new inventions are taking place every day. Behind every invention, there is a hand of imagination. In fact, all creative activities and things are made by frustrated or confused minds which need to settle down and calm their mental stress. It is observed that the invention is a very wide term that includes all types of creation, whether it is poetry or a novel or architecture or sculpture or painting or music composition.⁵

The world 'Art' and 'Creativity' is associated with many misconceptions. There are a few people that may think we need to create sculpture and painting to be considered a real artist. And then there are others who think it is a talent; you are either born with it or not. A few more are of the opinion that they cannot benefit from art since they are not good at it. There may be some more who may feel only an art therapist can help you enjoy the therapeutic benefits of art. Art is a way to stress in the process of working with mindsets. Some individuals, often adults may be hesitant to engage themselves in art creation because they believe they are not 'creative' or cannot produce something that is 'artistic' but art creation is not only a job of an artist or only those persons who have creative minds to show the exact replica of their mental process. As a way of knowing, art doesn't demand that you change your life any more than trying meditation demands that you shave your head and enter the monastery. Each person's form of art-making practice will be unique, created a new form of endless possibilities. The gift of creativity is within each of us waiting to unfold. The result of one's journey is in no way comparable to any other.

Art can be created by anyone who is creative. That said, there is no one in this world that is not creative. If you have not created any form of art till now, it will only mean you have not tried doing it. Creating art is an absolutely rewarding feeling. You are giving life to something from within yourself... something original that you can share with the world... something that has a pure intrinsic value.⁶ We don't have to make a living out of our art. Instead, focus on expressing ourselves. Explore new ideas. Figure out different ways of completing a task. There are no rules to follow; we can create our own style. It is not about using color, texture, or lines; it is about expressing your feelings in a way that touches others. Art could be anything cooking... writing... photography... gardening... comedy. Art is what you make of it. It has no constraints. The definition is wide open. You don't have to worry about which art forms to pursue. Anything that comes naturally to you, vibes with your personality is right for you. The creative expression that you pursue through your art gives incredible meaning to your life. It helps you conquer your internal negativity; gives a boost to your self-esteem and leads to personal growth.

While you spend those hours alone with your creativity engaged in your creative task, you will find your mindset and your thoughts in the state of complete freedom, among anxiety, negativity, and stress. You experience a flow that cannot be expressed in words. Tom Jacob of Pacific Standard magazine says, "You don't have to be a master poet or painter to reap the emotional rewards. Even if the result of one's creative activities is frivolous, amateurish, or weird, the creative process that yielded them appears important to positive psychological development."

Now the question is how we can understand that we are going in the right direction when we are working with art and is art really helping our mental state or can we understand the difference between states of mind when we are linked with something creative and when not. To understand it in an easy way, let's concentrate on the concept called 'flow' which is basically, a mental state in which a person doing an activity that is potential by rewarding would be fully immersed in a feeling of "energized focus, full involvement and enjoyment" while doing that activity. According to an article on the Healthy Psyche magazine, becoming completely immersed can mean "losing a sense of how much time has passed and even forgetting about being hungry or tired." Further, it says that when we are in a state of 'flow' even if there are challenges in our environment we won't get overwhelmed or bored. The creative activity helps us enter this mental state of 'flow'.⁷

Art connects us to the imagination and bridges the conscious and unconscious. It takes us into expanded states of consciousness, helping us understand our waking reality, mindfulness, alerted states, and dreamtime. Sometimes there is 'Draw-a-person-test' this is for the clear picture of someone's mental state in which a patient draws a person who is visible in his/her own mind only. The results are based on a psychodynamic interpretation of the details of the drawing, such as the size, shape, and complexity of the facial features, clothing, and background of the figure. As with other projective tests, the approach has very little demonstrated validity and there is evidence that therapists may attribute pathology to individuals who are merely poor artists.⁸ Art's ability to flex our imagination may be one of the reasons why we have been making art since we were cave dwellers, says Girija Kaimal, professor at Drexel University and a researcher in art therapy. Art-making helps us navigate problems that might arise in the future. When we outburst our anxiety, disturbance, and problems in paper or in a way of any other art form, then we overcome that situation in our mind and focus on the solution of that particular disturbance and starting started to see the relaxed mind and clear pictures. The brain uses "information to make predictions about what we might do next- and more importantly, what we need to do next to survive and thrive". Because when we make art we are making a series of decisions, says Kaimal.⁹

If there is a relationship between creativity, art, solution, and happiness, then why do some creative people appear to be so lonely while doing something they love? Take painters, for example, why do they seem to torture. Well, Farida Kahlo, the famous Mexican painter has an answer to that,

"I am not sick. I am broken. But I am happy as long as I can paint".

This was her statement when she finished her painting called "My birth". This painting was an outcome of her bout with numerous miscarriages, the death of her mother, enduring polio, and having almost died from a car accident. On the contrary, there are plenty of famous artists who have produced highly creative work while they were deeply unhappy or suffering from poor mental health. In 1931 the poet TS Eliot wrote a letter to a friend describing his "considerable mental agony" and how he felt on the verge of insanity. Vincent van Gogh eventually took his own life, having written off "horrible fits of anxiety" and "feeling of emptiness and fatigue".¹⁰ So how are creativity and happiness linked? Does happiness make us more creative or does creativity makes us happy? Most of the research so far seems to indicate that a positive mood, enhances creativity, but others have challenged this argument with the statement that negative emotions can spank creativity and that "anxiety can focus the mind", resulting in improved creative output. A key factor that affects creativity is attention.

Conclusion: Finally, art is used with children, adults, groups, and families. As an "action-oriented modality", art provides "facilitation of an individual's discovery of personal meaning for their art expressions" and "a variety of avenues for children, adults, families, and groups to overcome emotional distress, reframe problems, resolve conflicts, achieve insides, change behavior and increase an overall sense of well-being."

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