

Importance of art in the expression and understanding of physiological states



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1. Introduction

Through this research project I am hoping to find out the impact art can have on our psychological state. To do this I am setting a hypothesis for this project, which is 'the importance of art in the expression and understanding of physiological states', most of the initial research will be focused on art therapy and looking into artist who have used their work to express different psychological states.

Looking at this title I feel the best way to develop my research is by breaking it down into four different objectives that as a whole will help me to understand the importance of art in the expression of physiological states. The first object I have set is 'Identify the fundamental aspects of art therapy' this is so I have the background knowledge on this subject which will help me to understand the psychological aspects going forward. The next objective I have set myself is 'Discuss and explain the importance of Art in relation to helping understand physiological states' this will help me to understand the importance art can have in helping people who suffer from mental illness, from both the artist and viewers point of view. My next objective is to 'Identify the development of art movements that have involved the exploration of psychological states' this objective will help me to limit down the art movements which I need to look into artist from which leads on to my last objective 'Identify artists who have used their work to express emotional turmoil or mental illness'.

I have found looking into this topic a range of interesting links between how different artists both past and present have used their work to express

emotions. From my research I have also found that even through looking back on artist work such as mark Rothko's we can see the changes in his work mainly the darker colours he uses leading to the last collection he did before his deaths was mainly dark reds and blacks, looking at this now it is clear to interpreted this as how he was feeling and how his mental health was getting worse throughout his working career, was this choice in colour something he was aware of at the time or was it more of a subconscious decision. When starting to plan out this subject area I can see before starting that there are lots of different routes I could go down and develop further as this is a very extensive subject area, because of this I aim to cover elements that will help me to further understand the importance art can have in understanding mental illness.

2. Research methodology

Focusing on the methodology for this project most of the research I have collected is focused on the 20th century, this means that a lot of secondary research. Most of the information I have been able to collect and look into is sourced from books and online links. These books will be a more reliable source but here limiting to the information I could get which will led me to look online and at literature and book reviews and make sure the sources I have used are reliable. There are limited sources of primary research I could get one source I have used is going to galleries and seeing the work first hand.

I have develop some questionnaires for artists in collage to take part in around expressing their emotions in there work. This will allow me to develop

my awareness of why art is helpful to people who could be suffering from emotional turmoil or can give them a better understanding of the subject. It will also give me some quantitative information indicating variations in personal approach.

Looking at the research I have collected think I have collected enough to produce this report. My research was mainly focused online and from looking in books due to the subject matter I was focusing on, a lot of artist who I feel have used their art to expresses psychological issues where based in the expressionism movement as there was less of a understanding about mental health in that time period this lead people to express it in the only way they could, through there work. When I look at artist now who expresses this emotion a lot of them seem to be more playing into the stereotypes of mental illness such as using black and white. Other artists are just using a very similar style to the artists from this movement. Reading through the responses I got from my questionnaire I feel like this gave me a lot of information on how artist think about emotional states and different ways they express that in there art.

3. Report discussion

1. Identify the fundamental aspects of art therapy

2. Discuss and explain the importance of Art in relation to helping understand physiological states

3. Identify the development of art movements that have involved the exploration of psychological states

Looking through different art movements there are a couple which artists have explored psychological states such as impressionism, surrealism, expressionism, art nouveau and colour field. The first art movement I looked into further was expressionism which started in across Germany in 1905 and ended around 1933. Expressionism is believed to have started to go against popular work of the time. When looking at the beginnings of this movement a lot of the work has been inspired by symbolism. Some of the most influential arts in this movement include Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch and James Ensor. One of the key changes from this art movement was it challenged artists to paint from their own feelings and emotions rather than just painting what was in front of them as it is. This change allowed artists to experiment with different styles of painting such as using larger brushstrokes this helped to give the viewer a sense of what the artist was feeling. (Wolf, 2017)

One of the most famous paintings is recognised as being from the expressionism movement, which is 'The Scream' by Edvard Munch in 1893. When looking into Munch I found that through his work he expressed a range of different emotions which were all focused around death, agony and anxiety. With this painting Munch wanted to give the viewer a sense of anxiety which he felt when he was in the environment, which this painting was inspired by. He suffered from depression during his life and this wasn't a subject he shied away from in his work. Through his career his work became more and more personal to the events that were going on in his life by expressing his personal struggles through his work. His work didn't change

unit he had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized for eight months that it started to become more optimistic and simple drawings.

The next art movement I looked into was abstract expressionism this movement started in New York in the 1940s and 1950s. One of the ideas behind this movement was to include all styles of painting from people who fill the canvas with colour and abstract shapes to people who use expressive brush strokes across the canvas. This movement can be broken up into smaller groups, which make up this movement. Due to the time period of this art movement there was a large influence from the surrealist's artist in being able to express the unconscious thoughts and feelings through their work. Due to the success of this movement it quickly allowed New York to take over from Paris as being the city for modern art, making it a major city in the international art world. (Contributors, 2017)

Some of the most well know artist from this art movement included people such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline and Philip Guston. One of these artists who stand out to me for expressing feelings through their work is Mark Rothko. Looking at Rothko's work it is all on big canvases focusing on four colours at most. Using different brush stokes and layering the paint to help create different textures through his work, this was quickly seen as being an effective communication tool. Looking through his different series of work the colours used where picked to connect with the viewer's subconscious to give the area a peaceful and meditative space.

4. Identify artists who have used art to express emotional turmoil or mental illness

From looking into the different art movements I have found that as a whole they are based around the artist own expression it is hard to tell the psychological meaning in the work. There are lots of artist who have used there work to help with different emotional pains have such as Salvador Dali, Jackson Pollock, Edvard Munch (expressionism movement), Jean-Michel Basquiat who used his art as an escape from his childhood, his mother was mentally ill. Using art from a young age helped him growing up which is when he got in graffiti, as he was homeless at 15, this was how he created a name for himself before dying at 27. One artist who is hard to understand when looking into psychological issues is Vincent Van Gogh, there are lots of different sources, which give different views on this, but due to the time period he was alive there wasn't enough information on the subject of mental health. It is believed that he suffered from bipolar disorder, mental illness and depression.

One artist who stands out to me when looking into psychological issues is Mark Rothko. His work is known for expressing emotion in his signature style of coloured squares filling the canvases; he referred to his work as sublime. Rothko was part of the abstract expressionism movement based in New York but was also a main figure in the smaller movement know as colour field painting. The colour field movement started around the 1950's based from three main artists mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Clyfford still.

Throughout his lifetime there is very little record of psychological issues but looking at his early work it is mainly bright colours filling the canvas but in the later years it becomes very based around dark colours. One of his later collections of paintings is known as Rothko's Chapel paintings; this was

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made up of 14 wall-sized monochromatic black paintings. These paintings were installed in a non-denominational church in Houston, Texas. The way these paintings have been displayed shows Rothko's desire that his work would be viewed in lower lighting and close quarters rather than on large white gallery walls. (Artsy, 2017)

At the age of 66 Mark Rothko committed suicide in his art studio, New York by an overdose of anti-depressants and cutting his arms with a razor blade. When his assistant Oliver Steindecker arrived at the East 69th street studio on February 25th, 1970 he found Rothko's body covered in blood on the bathroom floor. When looking into what different people have said about his death at the time as well as more recent it is clear a lot of people were not surprised that he killed himself, stating that he had lost his passion and inspiration. Below are two quotes I have found from Rothko's career, which I feel show what he wanted to express in his work.

"The fact that people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions. The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when painting them. And if you say you are moved only by their color relationships then you miss the point."

"If you are only moved by colour relationships, you are missing the point. I am interested in expressing the big emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, doom."

(Rothko)

4. Bibliography

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