

My mental illness differ from normal thinking and

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My primary objective in this essay is to explore the methods that Vincent Van Gogh and Jackson Pollock share and differ by examining artistic elements such as technique and texture as well as the social backgrounds that each artist experienced which could then be used to explain the conflict that is represented in their artwork. This could also have contributed to how they both tragically committed suicide at an early age. Internal conflict is defined as psychological struggle within the mind of a human being which can be identified as a key component within both Van Gogh's and Pollock's work. Art is a form of release, a way in which they both expressed themselves and most importantly reveal their feelings towards their position in society. It cannot be denied that a number of well-known creative people, " primarily in the arts, have been mentally ill—for example, Vincent Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath, Robert Schumann, Robert Lowell and Virginia Woolf.

Symptoms of mental illness differ from normal thinking and behaviour, and creativity requires special or uncommon capacities" 3. Therefore I would like to apply this theory to both my artists and consider how far their mental health affected their artwork and how we interpret it from a modern day perspective. In addition, many art scholars have argued that the arts can have a positive impact towards the recovery of mental health. This could determine why the form of art is so intriguing and popular to the artists I have chosen to investigate. Therefore, the way in which they viewed art encouraged Van Gogh and Pollock to distance themselves from traditional artistic forms and face the daily struggles that they felt entrapped by, applying this chaos to the canvas in front of them to acknowledge their

issues. Both artists I have chosen have suffered from mental illness which I would like to analyse, taking into account the different time periods that each lived in and the cultural aspects which could have indefinitely contributed to their mental state, demonstrating conflict in their artwork from personal experience." Suffering is an intrinsic component of mental illness but, despite traditional romantic beliefs about creative people; such disruption seldom contributes directly to creative inspiration" 3. Jackson Pollock's artwork directly correlates with this as his art was bold due to how his personal life was filled with torment.

Pollock was a member of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s which underpinned an artistic revolution. In his work he began to desert typical brush and easel strategies and would fling paint from many angles and directions onto a canvas. His work was extremely expressive. By the time he began experimenting with his drip paintings he had constructed a brand new pattern of art which became an exclusive trend for Pollock only.

The splashes of paint were very dramatic and striking. From this you are able to visualise the level of strength and rapidness that Pollock carried out to create these quick dashes of paint. Also when looking closer at the detail of his drip paintings from an in depth perspective, they can be interpreted as a visual representation of his mind: the disorientation and discomfort which he coped with from being diagnosed with bipolar illness " as well as his later alcoholism, probably resulting in part from physical intolerance, gravely exacerbating the psychological problems that grew out of his father's absence and his mother's coddling¹." As an American artist living through the second world war, surrounded by the damaging effects caused by <https://assignbuster.com/my-mental-illness-differ-from-normal-thinking-and/>

this which could have had an impact on his artwork. Similarly to Pollock, Van Gogh suffered from mental illness, particularly tortured with psychiatric illness throughout his life which led to his suicide in 1890.

Given that Van Gogh was a highly religious individual, dedication to catholic faith, combined with the rapid pace of his art production, it is not surprising that many people, certainly modern day psychiatrists, believed that Van Gogh suffered from erratic bouts of mania throughout his life as a disturbed artist. He arose from the 19th century Dutch post-impressionist movement and became one of their most recognisable artists, known for his emphasis on vivid colours and the emotional impact of his paintings. His specific style included applying paint to the page very thickly which made his brush strokes stand out and created a rough texture on the canvases which could be carved into, commonly known as impasto. From this Van Gogh was able to demonstrate his emotions, particularly the negative energy that engulfed his inner self.

Perhaps he wanted to visually show the conflict between man and nature, the struggle of coping with mental health, which at the time had not been fully researched into. Van Gogh once said “ we spend our whole lives in unconscious exercise of the art of expressing our thoughts with the help of words 2.” Therefore, similarly to Pollock, art was a form of expression; the simplicity of using paint rather than words to shape his emotions was a huge factor for him. After World War II, New York City became prominent with new art ideas. “ This was in no small part because of the move, either permanent or temporary, of so many European artists to New York during the war. These avant-garde artists shifted discussion of what constituted art in America, and <https://assignbuster.com/my-mental-illness-differ-from-normal-thinking-and/>

touched off Abstract Expressionism, among other movements” 4. This was evident particularly in Pollock’s work as before his work was very mundane whereas after it transformed into vibrant colours and expressionist forms which stood apart from contemporary social art norms. It is evident that the war had an instant effect on Pollock and thus revealing the grief and damage in his paintings.

Pollock’s famous “ War” piece is the only one he ever titled which linked to pieces he produced earlier, around 1943-44. In this composition, “ the monstrous destruction of war is conveyed both by the fierceness of the graphic execution and by the imagery, much of which is camouflaged by the many linear motions, darkened and thickened and highlighted with flashes of red and yellow pencil to heighten the dramatic intensity. The work’s narrative is one of horrific proportions.” 5 The piece depicts a fragile human figure and bull being thrown on to a pile of waste. In other areas a disguised, manipulated figure is being tortured. This could link to work that Picasso has produced, particularly his piece called “ The Dream and Lie of Franco” where he etched into his work to create a similar idea of destructiveness.

The Artists Rights Society (ARS), based in New York, state that “ Pollock’s work engages with the history of art and offers a statement on the universal horrors of war, it also has a personal dimension, drawing on from the psychological language of Surrealism that fuelled his early works. ” This reinforces the idea that in any shape or form, Pollock’s work resembles conflict. The vibrant yellow and orange tones that he uses almost denote his feelings towards conflict and how he feels trapped in such a corrupt society; the only way to be freed is to engage in the frantic form of

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expressive art. There is a significant difference between the social events that took place during the different frames of time Pollock and Van Gogh were current in. For example, World War II was a relevant social event that had a negative effect on Pollock personally and therefore had an impact on the way in which he shaped his paintings. However, with Van Gogh it can be argued that there were multiple world events that took place during his life but they appeared to not have the same effect on Van Gogh as World War II had for Jackson Pollock. Even though the Crimean war, 1853 and the Franco - Prussian war of 1870 were current events, after analysing his work in depth it appears that none of his paintings styles or even subject matters were affected by such events.

In contrast, in 1872 Claude Monet created " Impression, sunrise" to express his concerns towards the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Therefore, in some respects both Pollock and Van Gogh differed due to how social events had shaped the way they interpreted their art. Thus mental illness seemed to be the key aspect that influenced Van Gogh pieces, particularly demonstrated in his " the Starry Night" (1889). Rather than having a small impact unlike Pollock, Van Gogh's mental state was evident in his subject matter that he chose to examine in his pieces. One of his most recognisable paintings, The Starry Night, displays the view outside Van Gogh's accommodation at an asylum in France , depicting vibrant swirls in the sky and a black building in the corner ." After he suffered from a mental breakdown which resulted in cutting off his left ear, Van Gogh willingly admitted himself to the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole lunatic asylum. Saint-

Paul-de-Mausole provided extra space for Van Gogh which he dedicated to his art⁸.

" Van Gogh intentionally exaggerated his brushstrokes almost as a cry for help. He wanted to demonstrate the prolonged suffering that he had felt throughout his life. Therefore, many were sympathetic towards him and understood why he presented his work in this way due to the society that he came from." The feelings of isolation Van Gogh must have experienced as a struggling and unappreciated artist before and after he entered the asylum are visible in *Starry Night* and literally colour the overall meaning of the painting⁶." Therefore, it can be implied that many of his works were fuelled by the isolation and neglect that he had felt throughout his life, causing anxiety or depression to appear in almost every element of his artistic practice. During Jackson Pollock's life, he was influenced by new developments in art culture. One of these was the rise of Abstract Expressionism, which changed the way he applied his artistic techniques to the canvas.

Throughout his work, Pollock applied the idea of " action painting" rather than " colour field painting" which were both key styles used by Abstract Expressionists. " The most famous of the action painters is Jackson Pollock, known for his drip paintings, where he would lay the canvas on the ground, and apply paint in thick layers using choreographed gestures" ⁴. Therefore this approach encouraged the freedom of art, straying away from contemporary art forms and urged artists to act spontaneously .

The idea of being spontaneous directly reflects the mind-set of Jackson Pollock; he often produced work that didn't take much planning but rather demonstrated his stream of consciousness through rapid brush strokes and simplicity of dripping paint onto a blank canvas. Pollock argued, "The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through".

This ultimately reinforces how he embraces the freedom that paint can offer him, linking to the idea of how it can allow him to express negative thoughts and feelings without hesitation or worry of what the painting will turn out like. Thus Abstract Expressionism made pollock abandon traditional composition, as demonstrated particularly from his drip paintings, there was no subject matter but random splashes of colour which are open to interpretation. Therefore, from a viewers perspective, Pollock's work was very unique as there were so many components within his pieces that spectators found it difficult to focus on one part as they didn't have an obvious central motif. In contrast, Vincent Van Gogh worked within an art movement called post Impressionism, alongside PaulGauguin, Paul Cezanne and Georges Seurat. However, compared to Pollock, his artwork always correlated with the style of Post Impressionism; whereas Pollock's work only appeared borrow from the style of an Abstract Expressionism. Both used various styles of painting and approaches to depict their disturbed view of society in different periods which included more shapes and swirls, eye catching and theatrical colours and sometimes symbolic content. This was particularly clear in Van Gogh's "the starry night" as various contemporary historians believed that the eleven stars had

a link to Genesis 37: 9 in the bible, primarily depicting Joseph as an outcast, which could be a reflection of how Van Gogh felt about his position in an unnatural society.

Therefore, Post-Impressionists began to adapt to a more Abstract Expressionism style by simplifying shapes and employing a variety of perspectives in their pieces. Van Gogh's numerous paintings called "Unknown sunflowers" in 1886 are evidence of a new form of simplicity. Here he uses materials including cloisonné enamel and stained glass to show the contrast between colours that are bold and mundane, abandoning the canvas. Leo Jansen, a curator at the Van Gogh Museum and editor of the artists states " I think he painted them for the sheer joy of it." Therefore it can be argued that painting flowers quickly gave him energy and confidence which made his series of sun flowers seem more beautiful than conflicted which other paintings of his did. Clearly to a degree the reform of post Impressionism made his work more positive and uplifting to both contemporary and modern day viewers. In conclusion, it is evident in both artists work that mental health shaped the way they formed their work. However, this was impacted by completely different issues and therefore made peoples perspectives of both their works different.

Their processes also varied as both pollock and Van Gogh employed different ideas and compositions which was encouraged by the reform in art movements of the time. In my own opinion I think that Pollock's style stands out more for its conflict nature due to his spontaneous work and rapid force when applying paint to the canvas. Given that both artists came from varied movements this made a distinct change on how they viewed their work and <https://assignbuster.com/my-mental-illness-differ-from-normal-thinking-and/>

therefore how they approached their art. From my perspective I think that Pollock's work is darker than Van Gogh's given the way he portrayed his drip paintings whereas Van Gogh's swirls were considered more expressive to others.

However, whilst Pollock did suffer from alcoholism, this did not effect the methods he employed greatly, whereas van Gogh's mental health took a heavy toll on him and therefore his artwork in a bigger way.