

"Art and Mental Illness"
Mary Stokrocki, Arizona State University
Mental Health Un-Conference 2020
May 12

Please note that much of Mary Stokrocki's talk is taken from 'A short history of mental illness in art,' by Jonathan Jones (13 Jan 2015). © 2020 Guardian News & Media Limited and its affiliated companies. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/christmas-charity-appeal-2014-blog/2015/jan/13/-sp-a-short-history-of-mental-illness-in-art>

[09:00] LV (lorivonne.lustre): Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionist is: LoriVonne Lustre

The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:

MG: Marylou Goldrosen / Mary Stokrocki

[09:01] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Welcome to my Presentation on Art & Mental Illness, characterized as

- Shattered Minds indicate the emotionally disturbed
- Shattered Bodies indicate the physically handicapped
- Shattered Schemes indicate the changing concepts one must develop to help others survive in our changing world

This comes from the work of Shaeffer-Simmern, H. (1948). *Unfolding of Artistic Activity: Its Basis, Processes and Implications*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

We see that we change the way we think over time.

Art has led the way in seeing mental illness not as alien or contemptible but part of the human condition – even as a positive and useful experience. Modern art has even celebrated mental suffering as a creative adventure.

This psychiatric modernism started with the “madness” of Vincent van Gogh and led to work by patients being discovered as a new kind of artist. Yet it has much deeper historical roots.

Albrecht Durer portrayed genius as melancholic as early as the Renaissance and Romantic painters identified with the “mad”.

Perhaps it is not hard to see why artists often show empathy for what society calls illness: Some people regard creativity as an irrational voyage. The idea of going outside yourself to see things afresh is probably as old as the torch-lit visions of cave artists and was expressed by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato when he wrote that poetic ecstasy is the only source of divine truth. “Madness is a gift from the gods”, as Plato put it.

My Presentation is inspired by Jonathan Jones’s (2015, Jan.) article, A short history of mental illness in art. The Guardian.

www.theguardian.com/society/christmas-charity-appeal-2014-blog/2015/jan/13/-sp-a-short-history-of-mental-illness-in-art

Thanks to Gentle for finding the article. I want to acknowledge Jones in preparing this presentation.

Since I prepare teachers to teach art, it's important for them/viewers to see how people normally develop from simple to complex. Here is a shot of Selma’s [30-yrs-old, mentally challenged] second crayon drawing, like a kid’s drawing of things lined up in a row perpendicular to a base/ground line.

In a special art program, Selma learned new ways of arranging her ideas—radial composition here. This is her first large crayon drawing [22 x22’], called Pond with Fish, bordered by trees.

People’s subject matter grows more real and versatile in time. This is from Shaeffer-Simmern (1948). *Unfolding of Artistic Activity*. University of California. In this book, Shaeffer-Simmern did related case studies of an emotionally disturbed teen (horse), retarded girl (tree & flowers), immigrants (cow), and even of business people making art. You don't have to be special to be part of these groups. Nice mixed groups.

Here is Frida Kahlo.

Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird (1940), Coyoacán [coyote village outside Mexico City

In some cases, some catastrophe interrupts learning/life, and people develop differently emotionally and physically. As a young girl, Frida Kahlo suffered a bus accident. Kahlo suffered pain and spent much of her life in hospitals and undergoing surgery. In her paintings, trees serve as symbols of hope, of strength and of a continuity that transcends generations [Wikipedia]

Researchers and historians believe that Kahlo suffered from an array of mental illnesses—from post-traumatic disorder, to bipolar disorder and developed a peculiar disruptive, unpredictable and intense personality. She was suicidal and depressed too. She spent a lot of time making art in bed.

Art has led the way in seeing mental illness not as alien or contemptible but part of the human condition – even as a positive and useful experience.

Modern art has even celebrated mental suffering as a creative adventure. This psychiatric modernism started with the “madness” of Vincent van Gogh and led to work by patients being discovered as a new kind of artist.

Van Gogh shown here

Yet it has much deeper historical roots. Albrecht Durer portrayed genius as melancholic as early as the Renaissance and Romantic painters identified with the “mad”.

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Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear, by Vincent van Gogh, 1889.

Vincent van Gogh was fascinated by a 19th century painting called *The Madness of Hugo van der Goes*. In this picture the medieval artist Hugo van der Goes – who in real life was confined to a monastery because of mental illness – broods in torment, while those around him despair of helping the afflicted man.

Van Gogh wrote that he sometimes identified with this painting. Here, shortly after cutting off his own earlobe, he scrutinizes himself as a man similarly afflicted. Or is he? Vincent’s eyes are crystal blue, his gaze acute and penetrating. He looks at his wounded face objectively, with deep truth. He is neither “sane” nor “insane” but a fellow human being who speaks to us with courage and honesty. Van Gogh had Meniere's Disease, an illness characterized by spinning sensations (vertigo), ringing in the ears (tinnitus), and hearing loss. Meniere was contemporary to Van Gogh. Too bad they did not meet.

In 1988, I visited the huge Van Gogh Museum in Zundert, in the Netherlands, when I was on sabbatical documenting teachers.

It was a great experience.

This image: Vittore Carpaccio – *The Healing of the Possessed Man at the Rialto* (c. 1496)

Painting by Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1460-1525), an Italian painter of the Venetian school, trained in the style of the Vivarini and the Bellini. Photograph: David Lees

This painting of everyday life in 15th century Venice reveals how mental illness was understood and treated in the middle ages. For the man taken over by a demon here is miraculously healed by a priest amidst the human drama of the Rialto bridge. It is sometimes called “*The Healing of the Madman*”, but “*possessed*” is closer to contemporary ideas about the mind. His suffering is neither a medical nor social problem, but a religious experience.

Next we have Matthias Grunewald – *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (c. 1512 - 16)

The Temptations of Saint Anthony and the Conversation between Saint Anthony and Saint Paul the Hermit, from the Isenheim Altarpiece, by Mathias Grunewald (1475-1528), oil on panel. Photograph: DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini/Getty Images

Look at the size of it. It is pretty big.

Late medieval artists were fascinated by the story of the early Christian hermit Saint Anthony the Great who was tempted by devils. For Grunewald, this becomes a truly personal and psychological terror, an image of a man whose sanity is under threat.

The infinite horrible shapes of the demons are like malformed thoughts. It is a compassionate work, for this is part of the Isenheim altarpiece, painted for a hospital that treated people with disfiguring illnesses. One of the devils has the sores and grey skin that appear in other parts of the altarpiece and evoke the illnesses treated there.

Does this swarming [crowded?] scene therefore portray the threat to mental health posed by extreme physical suffering? It influenced German expressionism and is to this day a masterpiece of the threatened mind. WHAT ILLNESSES CAUSE DISFIGUREMENT?

[09:14] Gentle Heron: leprosy causes the sores and skin issues

[09:14] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Likely leprosy

Next: Albrecht Durer – Melancholia (1514)

Johan Wierix; after Albrecht Durer, Melancholia. Engraving on paper, Scottish National Gallery. Photograph: Antonia Reeve

Melancholia, an angel here, was known and experienced in the middle ages, a darkness of the mind resulting from an unbalance of the humors.

That darkness is marked on the brooding face of Durer's spirit of melancholy. In her [Melancholia] despair appears unable to continue with her great works. She is to judge by her tools a mathematician, geometer, and architect: A Renaissance genius.

It is funny that she is portrayed as a woman.

Durer portrays through this emblem his own inner life and intuits the mind's complexity. For Melancholy in his eyes is the badge of genius - to aspire to know and create is to slump into despair. Unhappiness is noble, for Durer. This print is arguably the beginning of modern psychology.

This is an engraving on paper.

[09:16] John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): I love Durer's Young Venetian Woman https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_a_Venetian_Woman

[09:16] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Next: William Hogarth – The Rake in Bedlam (1733)

The insight of Durer that mental shadows are part of human life was lost on the founders of London's Bethlem Hospital. The notorious "Bedlam" was founded in the middle ages and may have specialized in mental illness as early as the 14th century.

When Hogarth in the 18th century portrayed a young man whose career of gambling and spending had led him there, it was a place where Londoners could come and look at the "mad".

Hogarth shows two "sane" women enjoying the spectacle of madness, which includes people who think they are kings and bishops. Of course, in Hogarth's view, the boundary between sanity and insanity is not that obvious at all.

This is one of my favourite pieces.

[09:18] Gentle Heron: Is it insane to be a voyeur at mental institutions?

[09:18] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Francisco Goya y Lucientes. The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (c. 1799). (Capricho No 43). Found in the collection of State Hermitage, St. Petersburg, RUSSIA. Photograph: Heritage Images/Getty Image.

Goya's depiction of a sleeping man – the artist – assailed by monsters of the night is an image of reason's frailty made at the end of the Enlightenment, the great 18th century movement that sought to change the world with encyclopedias, scientific demonstrations and the first factories.

Goya's pessimistic yet also compassionate view is that reason only ever rules part of our minds. It must share the world with nightmares.

At the dawn of the modern age, this great image echoes old depictions of the Temptations of St. Anthony, whose assailants have not gone away after all. DO YOU HAVE NIGHTMARES TOO? WHAT KIND?

[09:19] Gentle Heron: I think everyone has nightmares at times

[09:19] Eliza Madrigal nods

[09:19] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Next: Theodore Gericault – Portraits of the Insane (1822). Rouen- Study at Louvre, Paris

A woman addicted to gambling, Portraits of the Insane, by Jean-Louis Theodore Gericault (1791-1824). Photograph: DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini/Getty Images

In the Romantic age extreme states of mind and inner suffering were the stuff of poetry and art. This mood of introspection opens new eyes on mental health in Gericault's portraits of the "insane".

He painted ten of these, of which five still exist, all depicting patients of his friend Dr Etienne-Jean Georget. In this painting, there is deep respect and human sympathy for a woman whose illness seems mostly visible as deep unhappiness.

Escaping from stereotypes and prejudice, Gericault portrays mental illness as a part of the human condition that he himself - as an artist whose paintings dwell on death and violence - clearly feels close to.

Here Gericault is identifying. It depends on how you are interpreting the art and situation.

Next: Gustave Courbet – Self -Portrait (The Desperate Man) (c. 1843 - 45), French. political anarchism, and, having gained an audience, he promoted democratic and socialist ideas. The painting 'The Desperate Man' [REALIST] by French painter Gustave Courbet can be seen at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt/Main, central Germany, October 14, 2010. Photograph: FRANK RUMPENHORST/AFP/Getty Images.

In a moment of Romantic exhilaration Courbet portrays himself as a "madman", his face ecstatic and terrified. His desperate state of mind is not a shameful sickness but a badge of artistic pride.

In a tradition that goes back to Durer's Melancholia, but part of the new Romantic age, he equates genius and madness.

This face of desperation is the face of the 19th century avant garde, risking and even courting sickness with drink and drugs. Courbet looks like a character in one of Edgar Allan Poe's stories, his mind unravelling in a way the first modern artists were fascinated.

It is really incredible.

A lot of people know this artist and his work.

Edvard Munch – The Scream (1893)

People are amazed. Edvard Munch's 'The Scream' in Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

He was a Norwegian painter conceived in Kristiania. According to Munch, he was out walking at sunset, when he 'heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature'. Such madness is the modern condition in this work of art; The Scream is universal.

I am sure we can all relate as we tire of being confined.

This is how life today makes us feel, says Munch. Far from a pathology afflicting individuals, the desire to scream out in pain and isolation under the wobbly sky is a "sane response to an

insane world.” Munch takes the artistic revaluation of mental illness that started in the Romantic age to its logical conclusion: there is no Bedlam but the world itself.

Next: Josef Forster – Untitled work in the Prinzhorn Collection (after 1916) Outsider art is art by self-taught or naïve art makers.

We have many outsider artists today.

Once Munch and Van Gogh made “madness” a positive value in modern art, a key to visionary truth, it was only a matter of time before the medical profession too started to see new

connections between art and the mind.

Before his death in 1933, Dr Hans Prinzhorn assembled a collection of art by mentally ill patients that was the beginning of what is now known as “outsider art” (Wexler, 2012).

This example has the eerie power of Goya. From something to be depicted by artists, “madness” has become a source of artistic originality in itself. Museums can be very selective, even political and elitist; but they are changing to accommodate outsiders. The Artworld is constantly changing and looking for new ideas.

My colleague wrote an entire book on outside art.

Wexler, A. {Ed}. (2012). Art Education Beyond the Classroom: Pondering the Outsider and Other Sites of Learning. New York; Palgrave Macmillan.

Like the artworld, my avatar, the Lizard of ARS/ART, is constantly searching for a new art tail/tale. The lizard is an artist too.

[09:27] Gentle Heron: Marylou lives her art. Or her avatar does.

[09:28] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Contact information on the screen
Questions?

[09:30] Shyla the Super Gecko (krijon): thank you for the great presentation! I must go to an appt, but I'm glad I did not miss it!

[09:30] Eliza Madrigal: :)

[09:31] John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Nice artwork, love Durer :)

[09:29] Gentle Heron: Question- Can you tell by looking if art is outsider or insider?

[09:30] Marylou Goldrosen: The Idea of Outsider is political

[09:31] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Most of the work here is classic from history
Art is changing fast

[09:31] Marylou Goldrosen: Some of artists feel 'Crazy' at times!

[09:31] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Some of these artists are 'normal'

[09:31] Eliza Madrigal: they seem to be expressing for those of us who may not be as able to

[09:31] Jadin Emerald: QUESTION: I have read that van Gogh made some-hundreds of his paintings in the last three years of his life, is that true? and if so, that sounds somewhat like (clinical) mania to me

[09:32] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Van Gogh painted throughout his life. That painting is towards the end of his life

It may be that Van Gogh did not die as presumed

Right now we can view art online and do not have to go to a museum or gallery

Artists come in many types. What museums choose to show is often political

There are many types of art beyond painting -- even cooking
[09:34] Mook Wheeler: Marylou: "All of us are artists." -- Yes!!
[09:35] LV (lorivonne.lustre): Stranger Nightfire: Second life builders are artists
[09:34] Marylou Goldrosen: COLOR Is SO EMOTIONAL!
[09:34] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Do you know other famous artists you would like to share?
Type a name in chat if you know of someone

[09:35] Gentle Heron: Question- Is doing artwork helpful in times like these?
[09:35] Marylou Goldrosen: Absolutely!
[09:35] Gentle Heron: Why?
[09:36] Marylou Goldrosen: Coloring Books -- Making Madalas!
[09:36] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: If you can't draw, you can always colour
Mandalas are very popular. You can make them representative of yourself
Colour them and put them on the wall
[09:37] Stranger Nightfire: was a big part of Jung's therapy methods
Mandalas that is
[09:37] Eliza Madrigal: It was clever to link The Scream with our feelings of confinement in your presentation.
[09:37] Marylou Goldrosen: Thank You!
[09:38] Gentle Heron refers to this Virtual Ability blog article:
<http://blog.virtualability.org/2020/03/things-to-do-color-it.html>

[09:37] Marylou Goldrosen: Making videos on cell phone!
Photographing Nature
[09:37] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Photograph nature. Go for long walks -- it will help your state of mind
Art is also a comment on society. You can demonstrate something in art and some who get away with it
Can you think of an artist who was thrown in jail?
[09:39] Gentle Heron: artists who were arrested
<https://www.complex.com/style/2014/05/artists-who-were-arrested-for-their-art/>
[09:39] Lila (lilapea123): There is an imprisoned artist database online at
<http://voiceproject.org/campaign/imprisoned-artists/>
[09:38] Arianne (ariannejp): When I hear about politics and arts, I totally think about Banksy.
[09:38] Eliza Madrigal: artists often went to lengths to hide their true views

[09:39] Mook Wheeler: QUESTION: Marylou, if van Gogh painted hundreds of pieces in his last 3 years, does that sound like clinical mania to you? This was Jadin's question.
[09:39] Jadin Emerald: that's like 1 painting a day
[09:39] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Yes and no
Van Gogh spent the last 3 years of his life in his home town. His brother took over much of his life
His art was an outlet for him

[09:41] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: I want you to think about art and veterans
[09:41] Marylou Goldrosen: Mark Hogancamp!

[09:41] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: There was a famous outside artist
He started to make installations with dolls. Showing his experience of life in the military
camps in Germany

[09:42] Marylou Goldrosen: Marwencol!

[09:42] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: He was wounded in many ways, including being beaten
up by thugs after he came home

So you don't need to make things for art, you can arrange things

Thank you all so much for all we had to share here today

[09:43] Eliza Madrigal: Thanks for your presentation. Lots to consider

[09:44] Dark (darknesscallsme.firegrave): ...•°•... ☺ Applause! ☺ ...•°•...

[09:44] Mook Wheeler: Thank you!

[09:44] Gentle Heron: Thank you Marylou.

[09:44] Lila (lilapea123): Thank you! Wonderful, thought-provoking presentation!

[09:44] John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Thank you for the presentation

[09:43] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: Do we have any artists here? Anyone who would like to
share?

[09:43] Lila (lilapea123): I do SL photography

[09:43] Jadin Emerald: I have a tracing I made in the psych hospital once

[09:44] LV (lorivonne.lustre): LV: and thank you to Gentle. She is certainly an artist

[09:44] Gentle Heron: No way!

I will admit to being an ex-orchestra musician. The MS killed that though.

[09:44] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: I will stay here if anyone would like to talk
Thank you

[09:45] Gentle Heron: OK for those who came late, I will make a notecard of the text from
today.

[09:45] John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Thank you Gentle :)

[09:45] LV (lorivonne.lustre): Stranger Nightfire: Here is some art from a Marly Milena
SymMod activity

I was quite surprised at what came out. Bright and shiny, uplifting. I thought it would be dark
and depressing

I was in a dark place, and yet this was inside

[09:46] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: It was wonderful

[09:46] Eliza Madrigal: Reminds me of Yoyoi Kusama...

bright and vibrant, but she herself may have felt dark
interesting

[09:47] Marylou Goldrosen: YES!!!

[09:47] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: you do so many artistic things Stranger. Keep up the good
work

[09:48] Gentle Heron: You can find Marly's work in SL
and she does regular sessions.

[09:46] Jadin Emerald: here's something I did while in the psych hospital once:

<https://gyazo.com/Oa24632868c313afdb475ced550bd8ed>

[09:47] Mook Wheeler: Jadin -- like The Great Wave!

[09:47] Jadin Emerald: yes :)

[09:48] LV (lorivonne.lustre): MG: What is the session tomorrow?

GH: 10 AM with Shyla

[09:49] Gentle Heron: <https://virtualability.org/mental-health-symposia/mental-health-symposium-2020/>

There is the link for the sessions this week

[09:49] LV (lorivonne.lustre): GH: there will be more sessions for the final 2 weeks of the month as well

[09:49] Eliza Madrigal: Thanks everyone, this was great

[09:49] LV (lorivonne.lustre): GH: Thank you Marylou.

[09:49] John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Thank you again!

[09:50] Gentle Heron: Hope to see you all at other Un-Conference events

[09:53] LV (lorivonne.lustre): <<transcription ends>>