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News

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235 (214) 688-3404

CONTACT: Susan Rutherford
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/349-7820

*****Psychiatrist analyzing process of
artistic creativity.

DALLAS--"Some artists create with joy, others with anger. But they all create with pain and they all create out of need."

Examining the creative process is Dr. Salomon Grimberg, faculty member of The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School's Department of Psychiatry and chief of inpatient psychiatric services at Dallas' Presbyterian Hospital. Referred to as a psychiatric art historian in addition to his other professional roles, Grimberg says that creativity can be understood in psychiatry as well as in art history, although the approaches differ.

"The creative process for artists can be a way of mastering internal conflicts--disturbing images that are within us all.

"We, in our field of psychiatry, don't necessarily deal with pleasantries--we often deal with the monsters that we carry around with us all our lives."

Picasso and Braque are artists about whom Grimberg has written and lectured. Applying psychoanalytic theory, he approaches their art as something from which to learn about their lives.

"The art of Picasso," he says, "is characterized mostly by powerful portraits of women. Although he painted other subjects, he primarily used as models women with whom he was having a relationship at the time. In the beginning of the relationship the portraits were done in a realistic academic manner. But often as the relationship progressed, the models were transformed into horrible monsters.

"There seemed to be an uncanny resemblance between Picasso and his work," says Grimberg. "His personality would abruptly tilt from one extreme to another. He could just as easily go from kind to vicious, from generous to stingy or from quiet to explosive. Throughout his life he surrounded himself with a court of people who praised and complimented him and I think for whom he felt, at best, intense ambivalent feelings. From these people he demanded constant worship, and any evidence of independence was interpreted as an act of betrayal. Even with his children he acted this way. Just before their adolescence he stopped seeing them because he said at this time people start developing a mind of their own. Needless to say, Picasso was an unhappy man."

Grimberg, who was chief resident in psychiatry at Southwestern, trained as a child psychiatrist at Children's Medical Center of Dallas and is still serving there in that capacity.

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The Mexico-born doctor is also an avid collector of art. He worked in one of Mexico's leading art galleries while receiving his medical training in Mexico City. And he has written on modern art for catalogs of artists exhibiting their work in Mexican galleries and art museums, as well as writing articles on major art exhibitions for Mexico City's newspaper "El Sol de Mexico."

Not all artists paint images that are disturbing to them, says Grimberg. "It seems that for Braque, painting was a tremendous pleasure and the work of Matisse was done with great joy. I believe that both Braque and Matisse loved to paint and painting for them was a fulfilling, happy experience.

"But that perhaps was not the case with Picasso, who painted almost compulsively as if he had a need to control objects. He found that the best way to control them was by recreating those images that were disturbing to him--like a child does in a playroom."

Grimberg explains that the child in a playroom recreates scenes in order to master them because he or she might have felt helpless as they were happening. "Art can become a way of mastering internal struggles and painting them can be a way of exorcising them. These are images that at one time became part of our inner lives and since then have continued to bother us. One example of this could be a shocking experience such as the death of a parent or being beaten as a child. This could leave a scar that marks a person's psyche. Some people show more evidence of scarring than others, some less, and some are scarred beyond recognition. Some people can be 'blinded' by the damage and so they are unable to feel empathy for others. Yet other people are wounded so badly they develop a more keen understanding of human beings. All of this can emerge in the work of a great artist."

Grimberg says that we "can't disassociate the artist from the work of art." There are two messages that one may perceive in fine art, he says. "The one tells us about the personality of the artist and the other deals with the universal experience that touches all.

"Not everybody is open to experiencing a good work of art because there is so much bad art around. This is because people are easily satisfied with superficial art. Seeing good art can be a painful process. It is an emotional experience and most people are afraid to feel. So they filter their emotions by protecting themselves with their intellects.

"What makes art powerful is the slice of intimacy that the artist leaves in his work."

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