

Why you should read the PM!

Daniela M. Vogt Weisenhorn

Have you ever asked yourself why you read Philatelia Medica? Yes, to obtain information about our specialised philatelic field, but perhaps also to learn something new. Does reading Philatelia Medica perhaps also have something to do with our overarching theme this time - our psyche - our behaviour? When I ask this question, the answer is probably YES. But how does reading in general influence our lives, our psyche?



Relaxed reading reduces stress (Spain 2004)

First of all: reading here means "real" reading, i.e. in-depth and lengthy reading, rather than the short snippets of information that we often receive via the Internet today.

This reading reduces stress, according to a study by the University of Sussex. Tests put participants under stress, which increased their heart rate. They then sat down and read. The heart rate and tension decreased significantly. Of course, this may simply be due to the forced sitting down for reading, but a survey shows that many people can relax best when reading.

conducted at the New School in New York City, reading also increases the ability to show empathy. Another study by the National Endowment for the Arts showed, among other things, that people who often read books are more open to other cultures, more accepting of them and more likely to judge them positively than people who do not read. Reading apparently promotes the thought processes needed to empathise with others and develop compassion.

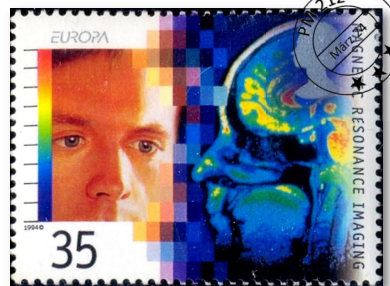
According to a 2013 study



Reading promotes empathy for others. (Gibraltar - CEPT - Integration 2006)

This "correct" reading also increases the performance of our brain. Data collected from more than 3,600 people by a research group at the University of Michigan (USA) was interpreted by researchers at Yale University. In analysing their study, they refer in particular to "correct" reading, which is encouraged when studying books. Here the brain has to establish complex connections, scrutinise them critically and establish links between different chapters and the real world. This requires the formation of new connections in our brain, which has also been demonstrated in MRIs. By reading over a longer period of time, you can increase your thinking ability and better protect yourself from

the negative effects of age-related cognitive decline. At the very least, it should be able to compensate for some of the signs of ageing in verbal skills.



Reading causes changes in our brain that are visualised by MRI (Great Britain 1994)



Reading may prolong life and hopefully prevent the German Society for Human Dying from being utilised. (BRD EMA 1991)

The researchers at Yale University also discovered from this data that subjects who read a book for at least half an hour a day over several years live two years longer. It did not matter whether the subjects favoured novels or non-fiction, poetry or prose.

Reading "correctly" is also said to have a preventative effect with regard to possible dementia in old age. However, this only applies to lifelong reading and not if you only start reading at retirement age. A study published in 2021 shows that a high level of cognitive activity, such as reading, can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease in people over 80 by five years. Why? It is assumed that reading increases the so-called cognitive reserve, which is a kind of mental library. You could imagine that everything we learn and know is like a book on a shelf. If this pool of books becomes very large through reading, even if many books disappear due to dementia, there are still enough other books that serve as alternatives and keep



Reading can also slow down the progression of Alzheimer's disease. This disease is the subject of the above sheet. The background and the composition of the sheet are full of symbolism. The background is formed by forget-me-nots drawn with faint blue lines. They are flowers that symbolize dementia and their delicate depiction expresses transience. The chaos in the brain of a dementia patient is symbolized by the chaotic arrangement of the stamps on the sheet. The central figure in the foreground of the single stamp depicts a sick old man who is vaguely drawn and whose face is barely recognizable. This is intended to illustrate his fading personality. The old man is being embraced by a younger person. It could be a beloved grandchild, a member of the nursing staff or a reminder of the past (Belgium 2020)

You can read anytime and anywhere. Libraries make it possible to read books at a low monetary cost, and in some areas there is even a library bus that brings books to remote areas. The unconventional booklet on the right from Spain depicts a bibliobus. The entire design of the Bibliobus booklet with a stamp is conceived like a book in which you can leaf through and read the titles of literary works, e.g. *Blindness* by José Saramago, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, the funny cartoons in the story of *Mortadelo and Philemon* by Francisco Ibáñez Talavera and *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. On these unique pages, we see

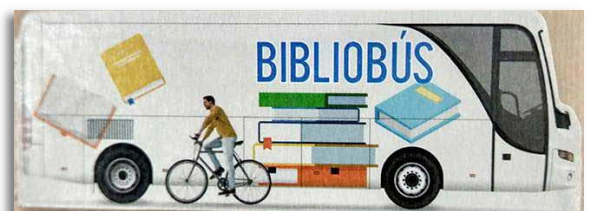
the library - i.e. our mind - functioning well. This theory could also explain why the preventive effect of reading has to begin in childhood - in other words, why we have to start building up and expanding our library at an early age.

However, one word of caution should be added here: Not all scientists believe in the above theories, but they do concede that reading is good training for the brain, gives us support in difficult times and can revitalize us in old age. And these alone are good reasons to read *Philatelia Medica*..

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Literatur:

- <https://archiv.gesundheitsstadt-berlin.de/wa-rum-lesen-gut-fuer-die-psyche-ist-und-das-leben-verlaengern-kann-13123/>
- <https://www.aok.de/pk/magazin/wohlbefinden/motivation/wie-gesund-ist-lesen-wirklich/>
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/do-reading-puzzles-and-similar-activities-really-stave-off-dementia>
- <https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/macht-uns-lesen-gesuender-studien-auf-dem-pruefstand-sw2-wissen-2020-10-22-100.html>



The creative essence: the art of mentally ill artists

Daniela M. Vogt Weisenhorn



In the world of art, there is a fascinating connection between genius and the struggle with the psyche. Throughout history, mentally ill artists have aroused both admiration and curiosity. Their work raises questions about the nature of creativity, the influence of the psyche on art and the role of society in dealing with mental illness.

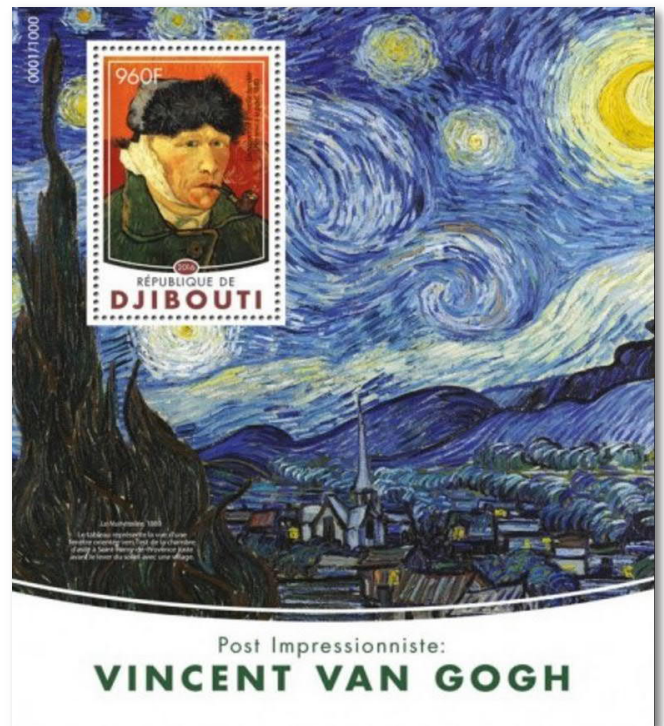
A look at history shows that the understanding of this connection is constantly changing. While artistic recognition and mental illness were seen as incompatible during the Enlightenment, Romanticism brought the emotional world of the artist to the fore.

The art world is also rich in stories of artists whose lives have been shaped by mental health challenges. These artists have not only created significant works, but have also sparked a profound discussion about the relationship between mental health and creative

In 2010, the Icelandic Post published a series of so-called Outsider Art or Art Brut. Although this term often refers to works by artists suffering from mental illness, an extended definition is art by autodidacts. The series includes paintings by Sólvi Helgason (1820-1895), who is described as a mentally ill vagabond, Karl Dunganon (1897-1972), possibly also mentally ill, and by Ísleifur Konráðsson (1889-1972) and Sigurlaug Jónasdóttir (1913-2004), both of whom I found on the internet about mental illness

expression. Some of the most fascinating and influential artists of the 19th and 20th centuries belong to this group.

One outstanding example is **Vincent van Gogh**, whose life was characterized by emotional highs and lows. Van Gogh's intensive use of color and his expressive brushstrokes made him one of the most important artists of modernism. His works are not only masterpieces of painting, but also an



Probably one of the most famous "outsider artists" was Vincent van Gogh, who even cut off one of his ears in his madness (Djibouti 2016)

expression of his inner turmoil and emotional pain.

Louis Wain, a British artist who became famous for his humanized cats, is also counted among this art movement. He was a master of animal portraits, humorous cartoons, sketches and paintings. An artistic feature of his later life - which he spent in a psychiatric ward - were color-intensive patterns, including those of cats, which helped Wain to new popularity in the psychedelic era.



Louis Wain's cats, originally simply humanized, became increasingly fantastic towards the end of his creative period (see: Tomé e Príncipe 2000; Maldives 2017)

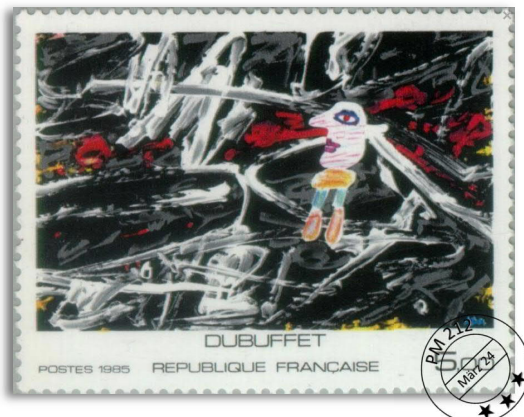


Registered cover from Switzerland with first day cancel dated 10.5.2007 to France. The stamp with the "flower" shows a painting by Adolf Wölfli, who suffered from schizophrenia. The other stamp shows a painting by Carlo Zinelli, also a representative of Art Brut.

suffered from depression and drug addiction, used his art to express his personal struggles and social concerns.

An important term associated with the art of mentally ill artists is Outsider Art or Art Brut. This term, coined by **Jean Dubuffet**, refers to works of art created outside of traditional artistic norms, therefore often by people with mental disorders or intellectual disabilities. Art Brut offers a space for unconventional and authentic forms of expression that often have a profound emotional resonance.

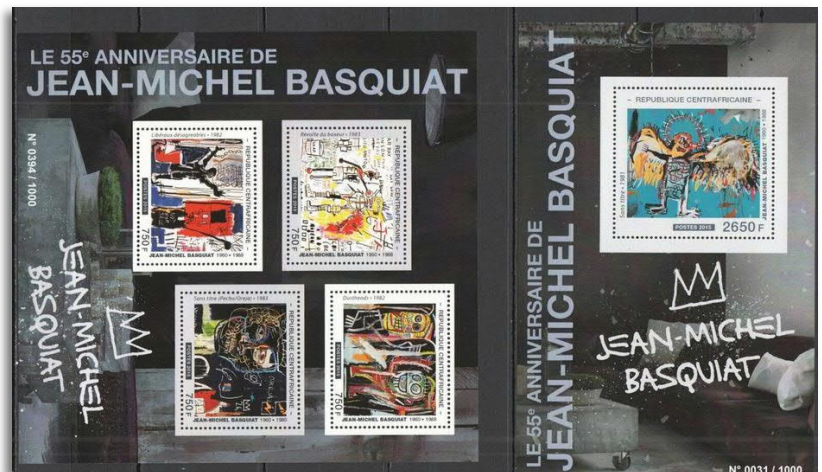
The integration of Art Brut into psychiatric treatment methods enables therapists to explore new ways of supporting their patients. Through the creation and viewing of artwork, patients can express their feelings, recognize unconscious conflicts and develop alternative coping strategies. Overall, Art Brut plays a crucial role in psychiatric treatment by utilizing creative expression as a means of self-healing and personal development. By recognizing and appreciating the creative abilities of patients, self-esteem and self-efficacy are promoted.



Jean Dubuffet coined the term Art Brut (France 1985)

In the 20th century, **Adolf Wölfli**, a Swiss artist, created an extensive collection of drawings and collages during his stay in a psychiatric institution. Wölfli, who suffered from schizophrenia and hallucinations, created complex and detailed works that reflect his rich inner world.

Another impressive example is **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, an American artist known for his expressive paintings and graffiti art. Basquiat, who



The graffiti artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, who died very young, is also an Art Brut artist (Central Africa 2015)

Art Brut also has an important influence on the perception and attitude towards mentally ill people in society. The presentation of Art Brut works in galleries and museums helps to reduce prejudice and stigmatization and to raise awareness of the diversity and uniqueness of artistic forms of expression.



Art Brut has found its way into museums and art galleries...

were no longer created spontaneously, but at the suggestion or even under the guidance of a psychiatrist or therapist. The works created in this way were deliberately placed on the art market. As a result, art brut - contrary to Dubuffet's original concept - must now be seen as an established artistic scene in its own right, which is linked to all areas of the art world in a variety of ways.

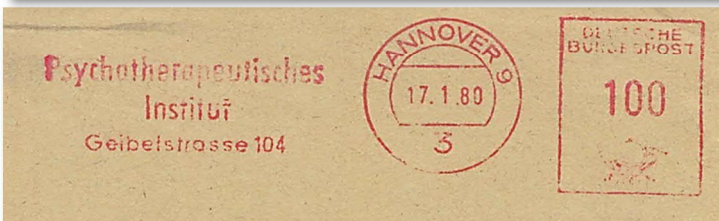
Psychiatry therefore has a complex relationship with the art of mentally ill artists. While some pioneers such as Walter Morgenthaler and Hans Prinzhorn recognized the creative potential of these patients as early as the 1920s, clinics today often still find it difficult to promote artistic talent appropriately. Yet art in psychiatry has a transformative power. It creates spaces of health and normality within psychiatric institutions and contributes to correcting the image of the mentally ill in society.



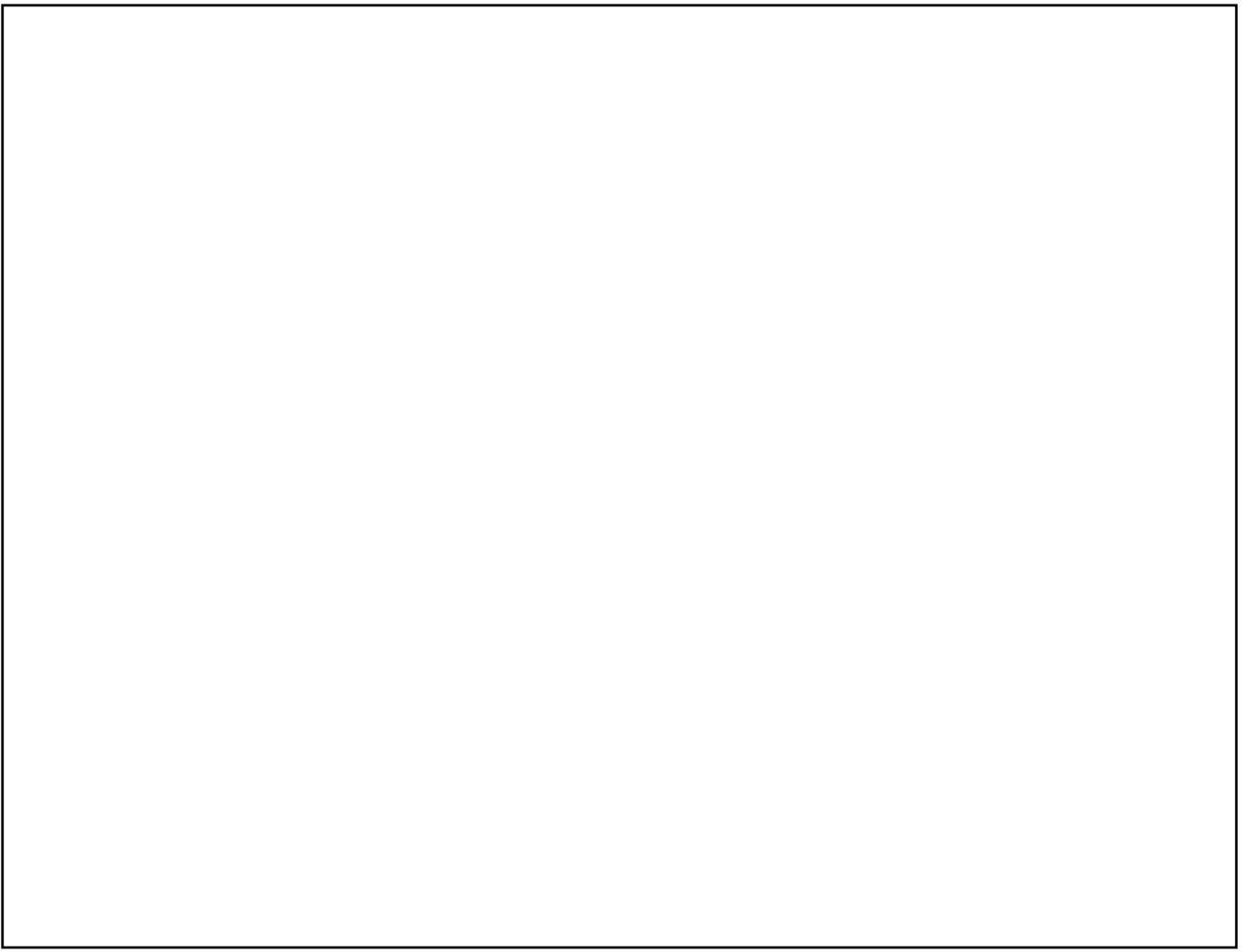
... and is therefore also subject to the laws of the commercial art trade (Württemberg postcard - postal stationery 1890 - from Reutlingen to Paul Bayer Kunstverlag Dresden Blasewitz)



In summary, the works of mentally ill artists raise important questions about the nature of creativity, the influence of the psyche on art and the role of society in dealing with mental illness. Their works are not only expressions of suffering, but also of hope, resilience and the universal human experience.



In psychotherapy, art therapy using artistic techniques such as painting, drawing, sculpting, designing, sculpting and building is now recognized worldwide (EMAs)



It's maddening

Clemens M. Brandstetter



In some situations, we think the headline of the current article, mumble it to ourselves or shout it out loud. The nervous people among us, often driven by high blood pressure, do it more often than the calm or the unstressable. The writer is impatient with others and especially with himself and the

Even if you would like to scream, calmness helps to keep your blood pressure in check (Hungary 1969; Laos 1957; San Marino 1978)

technology that tries to control him. As the deadline for the printing of our magazine approaches, I am also under pressure to do something now. Hic et nunc, as the Latin says. Many retirees - including me - think that they have more time at this stage of their lives. No, I have to disappoint everyone, it's not like that. From the other office, Daniela calls out to me "why don't you write a post with ChatGPT" - well, I have to say, if I'd had that at my disposal when I was at school, I would have had even more free time: And so now the artificial intelligence about "It's maddening":



Artificial intelligence is also in demand in medicine (Saudi Arabia 2023)



A look at the daily madness

The expression "it's maddening" is probably familiar to many of us, and it often seems that daily life confronts us with situations that test our patience to the limit. From crowded traffic jams to endless to-do lists, everyday life can sometimes make us feel like we're losing our minds.

In a world that is constantly on the move, we tend to become overwhelmed by the many demands. The constant accessibility of technology, the hectic pace of modern working life and the constant flood of information can be downright overwhelming. It's no surprise that the pressure of everyday life often leads to stress.

But perhaps there is also an opportunity in this madness. Instead of being discouraged by the challenges, we could try to take a different perspective. The madness of life could also be an opportunity to get to know ourselves better, recognize our limits and master the art of serenity.

It could mean that we learn to prioritize and focus on what is really important. Maybe we can even inject a little humor into the madness and realize that not everything has to be taken so seriously.

In a world that often makes us feel like we are losing our minds, the real challenge could be to find our inner compass and stay in control of what we can influence. So when it's



Social media, the new possibilities of information technology make everything, but also us, permanently accessible, which increases our negative stress level and thus we also get the feeling: everything is maddening) and we can become depressed (Curaçao 2011, Lithuania 2015, India 1993, Germany 2001)

"maddening" again, it could also be an opportunity to pause, take a deep breath and face life's challenges with a smile. Sometimes in the craziness of everyday life lies the opportunity to discover our own strength and resilience."

So much for the machine's view. It's remarkable that the machine doesn't know that the sharp "S" has been abolished in Switzerland. In the past, this always stressed me out, with or without, plus a spelling reform every few years. I stayed calm and got rid of this letter in my computer correspondence. I don't miss it!



A healthy inner compass that helps us to identify the situations that we can influence and control and to simply smile at problems helps us to overcome them (Poland 2014)