

## Art as a vital human function

As part of our series of articles regarding Art as an educational tool in medicine, we will now approach aspects underscoring art as a vital function of human beings.

In their daily interaction with the world, men experience different emotions, which may not always be openly disclosed (repression), resulting in introversion and, as a consequence, in the development of emotional stress and inner conflicts. However, those emotions, in their relentless struggle to become expressed, eventually manage to come to the surface in a transactional manner (sublimation), either adopting a beneficial form (work, recreation and creativity in general) or a harmful one (symptoms) (Freud-Jung).<sup>1,2</sup> For this reason, creative extroversion, together with its escape route from the restrictions of reality and the establishment of a space of freedom make up the essential core of any artistic expression, and “art” is any act or human work capable of communicating emotions (Tolstoy).<sup>3,4</sup>

Therefore, it is understood that art is a vital need of human beings (Joyce), a rule of inner necessity (Kandinsky), comparable to lung ventilation, blood flow, reproduction and nutrition, because it is a healthy escape route for the undecipherable contents of the mind (Donington).<sup>1,2,5-7</sup>

Artists manage to express, by means of an imagery (symbolic language) resulting from a combination of feelings and fantasies, not just their own emotions, but also those of others (the audience), a phenomenon known as the contagion theory of art (Tolstoy), and that is based on the symbolic effectiveness carried out by their work (Levi-Strauss).<sup>3,8</sup> This way, contained emotions (introversion) find a route for expression and inner stress fades out, both in the creator (artist) and in the ones enjoying the creation (audience), because for the audience a work of art acts as a gateway for their own emotions. For this reason, true art does not need to be beautiful or understandable, it just needs to be capable of generating an emotion, that is to say, to effectively reflect the human emotional eternity (Wagner).<sup>3,4,6,7</sup>

In this sense, human life itself is an artistic expression: Great Art, which encompasses

all forms of art, including conventional art (painting, sculpture, music, literature, poetry, and filming) and science, which is none other than a form of art directed towards the analytical study of the world and the collection of verifiable information about it.<sup>8,9</sup>

Other functions of artistic pursuit include the facilitation of non-verbal communication, cognitive exploration, playful activity and also being a source of pleasure. Precisely due to these features and because it is arranged around a rhythmic structure, it has been contemplated that the biological foundations of art lie in animal courtship games; however, unlike animals, men channel the energy that is left over for their biological life into their cultural (symbolic) life, which is exactly where men display their art (Spencer).<sup>10</sup>

In consequence, the great writer Fernando Pessoa states that the existence of art is the clearest demonstration that biological life is not sufficient for men.<sup>11</sup>

To sum up, artistic work, taken as the effective conveyance of emotions, is vital for human beings as a means of catharsis, communication, knowledge, joy and pleasure, both at an individual and a collective level. ■

*Carlos G. Musso, M.D., and Paula A. Enz, M.D.*

School of Medicine, Instituto Universitario del Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires, Argentina

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5546/aap.2016.eng.292>

### REFERENCES

1. Freud S. Obras completas. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo; 2003.
2. Campbell J. Jung. New York: Penguin; 1976.
3. Tolstói L. ¿Qué es el arte? Buenos Aires: El Ateneo; 1949.
4. Rodin A. El arte. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo; 1946.
5. Joyce S. Mi hermano James Joyce. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo; 2000.
6. Kandinsky V. Sobre lo espiritual en el arte. Buenos Aires: Need; 1999.
7. Jacob PW. Ricardo Wagner y su obra. Buenos Aires: Peuser; 1950.
8. Burguera Rozado J. El reencuentro con la eficacia simbólica. *Big Fish*. 2012. Kindle version.
9. Bunge M. Epistemología. Barcelona: Siglo Veintiuno; 2014.
10. Colombres A. Teoría transcultural del arte: hacia un pensamiento visual independiente. Buenos Aires: Del Sol; 2005.
11. Pessoa F. Máscaras y paradojas. Barcelona: Eldhasa; 1996.