

THE OLD MASTERS ART COLLAGE
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LEARNING
ABOUT ONESELF

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a specific art therapy technique--the Old Masters Art Collage--could be used for the purpose of suppling demonstrable change in self-perception. Prior to this study the OMAC, although used in a variety of settings where the focus was on personal understanding and growth, had never been experimentally tested.

The plan was to use the OMAC as an intervention on only half of the selected population. All of the population would be given pre and post tests. These tests were to be a standard personality test. The Personal Orientation Inventory was chosen as the standard personality test because of its non-threatening character and because it had been specifically designed to measure healthy rather than unhealthy traits.

The population for the study was 30 male and female high school students taken from two psychology classes. The distribution between males and females was uneven.

Ten null hypotheses were developed to compare differences in the test results by groups, by sex, and between groups. The data from the standardized tests were analyzed on three different types of computer programs. More personalized and subjective data were derived from a short questionnaire given to each of the 30 subjects at the

completion of the entire process and analyzed by the statistical binomial test for differences in proportions.

On the basis of these results, four hypotheses were accepted and six were rejected. It was concluded that the Old Masters Art Collage art technique can produce demonstrable change in self-perception.

CHAPTER 1

THE OLD MASTERS ART COLLAGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LEARNING ABOUT ONESELF

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of a specific projective art technique on an individual's self-perception.

The Old Masters Art Collage was created for use in classrooms and workshops where personal growth and discovery was the focus, by Senior Associate of the Palo Alto Psychosynthesis Institute, Tom Allen. Until now the Old Masters Art Collage (OMAC) has not been formally tested as a technique for eliciting change in self-perception. Mr. Allen has given both permission and encouragement to test its results experimentally and write them up as a Masters Thesis.

This lack of a formally based structure is characteristic of the multiplicity of art techniques currently used in individual and group psychotherapy settings. As a result, there is today a drive by many serious art therapy practitioners to institute experimental testing, in order to establish more understanding of the various therapeutic results obtained with the increasing number of media and techniques. Dr. Ernest Harms (1895-1974), as a psychiatrist and Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Art

Psychotherapy, writes of this situation:

Although what we designate today as art psychotherapy has, in some form or other a two-hundred year history, it has not as yet been consolidated into carefully developed and adjusted techniques . . . We need to develop from the bottom up, a solidly confirmed scientific field of art psychotherapy.
(Winter, 1973, p. 1)

Background of the Problem

The creative expressions of normal and abnormal individuals have, since the beginning of the modern era of psychological investigations, been used to identify mental conditions. Early psychiatrists like Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926), and Eugen Bleuler (1857-1930), used drawings and handwriting samples of their mentally deranged patients for diagnostic purposes.

The interconnected problems of how mental health and artistic creation are related, and how fantasy, images, and symbols function in both dreams and works of art, have long been debated. Like many psychological connections having to do with the unconscious, the issues were first studied and written about at length by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who was much intrigued by the phenomenon of the creative artist. He considered that the writer's ability to fantasize and the painter's ability to produce powerful visual symbols (i.e. "great Art"), were related to the symbolic image-making process of dreaming, and that both were products of neurotic repressions of sexual material

into the unconscious (Freud, *Collective Works*, Vol. IX, 1960).

A classic of ex-post facto artistic psychoanalytic literature, Freud's (1910) study of Leonardo da Vinci, demonstrates the author's attempts to relate the artistic production of one of the Renaissance' greatest geniuses to an aborted psychosexual development in which Oedipal relationship to his natural mother was never resolved. Based on selected paintings intertwined with fragmentary childhood memories found in notebook jottings, Freud's study though masterfully presented, was not able to support its thesis due to its author's lack of art historical facts. Schapiro (1956), art historian, scholar and critic, undertook an indepth investigation of Freud's analysis forty-six years after its publication and was able to point out the factual errors as well as some methodological shortcomings of psychoanalytical procedures when used in historical investigations of people as well as works of art. Schapiro quotes Ernest Jones, pupil and biographer of Freud, who comments of his master's venturing into art history that in his conclusions about Leonardo, Freud 'was expressing conclusions which in all probability had been derived from his self-analysis and are therefore of great importance for the study of Freud's personality' (Schapiro, 1956, p. 178). With the broad general principle of being able to discover much about an artist by studying his work, Schapiro agrees:

"The intimate personality of the artist which

lies hidden behind his work, can be divined from his work with more or less accuracy" (Schapiro, 1956, p. 173).

Carl Jung (1875-1961), Freud's contemporary and founder of the school of Analytical Psychology, continued Freud's interest in the problems of artistic creation and contributed a reinterpretation of Freud's theories about art. For Jung, the repressed material of both dreams and artistic creation was not pathological. The symbols and images surfacing in both represented the potential source of healthy personality integration, stored away by the individual in his unconscious. These powerful yet ambiguous factors represented the psychological machinery which transmit energy from one layer of the psyche to another. Rather than being some sort of sign which disguises something already known, Jung felt that symbols located below the level of man's conscious mind, were natural and spontaneous products of both the personal and the collective unconscious. They appear in dreams not as meaningless or stupid images, but as means of elucidating (as do analogies) something still unknown or in the process of formation (Jung, 1964, 1966).

Of our contemporary highly intellectual and rational approach to personal, natural and technological problems Jung comments:

Modern man does not understand how much his "rationalism" (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numerous symbols and ideas) has put

him at the mercy of the psychic "underworld". He has freed himself from "superstition" (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying the price for this break-up in world-wide disorientation and dissociation. (Jung, 1964, p. 94)

These two views put forth by Freud and Jung regarding art and its creators, stem from a very ancient dual-branched tradition flowing through Mediterranean and Western civilization. Soothsayers and magicians, oracles and visionaries have long been revered, as well as feared, for their special sort of supernatural power. For the Greeks, musicians and poets were considered to have a close connection with unseen forces called Muses. Their special talents were considered to be close to those of the philosopher, and all, in turn, with the gods themselves. At the same time, painters and sculptors were carefully separated off from the other creative artists whose material was less corporeal. Visual artists were classed as mere artisans, often coming out of the slave class. It is likely this distinction had a connection with the primitive notion that representational images carry special magical potency within themselves, and that he who possesses such an image, possesses special power over that which it represents.

Both the Hebrew and Mohammedan cultures reflect the Eastern taboo against visual iconic representations. In Judeo-Christian history, the interdict continues both

through the written word forbidding graven images in the Old Testament, and later in the 8th and 9th century period of Byzantine iconoclastic destruction, where wanton annihilation of religious representational art was carried out by Imperial order (Kris, 1965).

Reflecting this suspicion of, and bias against, the artistic person who lives to create rather than to intellectualize, the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) in a speech presented to his native Academy of Sciences one year before his death, rephrased primitive man's position in modern scientific terms:

Now, gentlemen, let us turn to the following question. When we analyzed the nervous patients in the neurological clinic, I came to the conclusion that there are two specifically human neuroses--hysteria and psychasthenia; I related this conclusion to the fact that man offers two types of higher nervous activity, namely, the artistic type, consequently analogous and close to that of animals, which also perceive the external world in the form of impressions exclusively and directly by means of receptors, and the other, intellectual type, which functions with the help of the second signaling system. Thus the human brain is composed of the animal brain and of the purely human part relating to speech. It is this second signaling system which is beginning to prevail in man. It can be assumed that under certain unfavorable conditions, when the nervous system is weakened, this phylogenic division of the brain takes place anew; then probably one individual will use predominantly the first signaling system while the other will use predominantly the second signaling system. And it is this that divides men into artistic natures and purely intellectual abstract natures. (Kris, 1965, p. 589)

Against this highly rational intellectual statement about what the human being should ideally aim toward, is

Jung's comment regarding his valuing of man's ability to create fantasies.

It is in creative fantasies that we find the unifying function we seek . . . All the functions that are active in the psyche converge in fantasy. Fantasy has, it is true, a poor reputation among psychologists, and up to the present psychoanalytic theories have treated it accordingly. For Freud as for Adler it is nothing but a "Symbolic" disguise for the basic drives and intentions . . . although fantasy can be casually explained and devalued in this way, it nevertheless remains the creative matrix of everything that has made progress possible for humanity. (Jung, 1966, p. 290)

In the increasingly humanistically-oriented nineteen-seventies there is emphasis on the use of art work with healthy normal clients seeking ways of learning about themselves in order to grow.

Mary Lee Hodnett, Professor of Art at the University of Texas, writing of the therapeutic power for both pathological and healthy people, and for the need for more trained therapists in the field says:

Art therapy, a synthesis of art and psychology, should be first of all considered as a form of psychotherapy which has unique potentialities for personality support and enhancement. The field . . . extends from locked psychiatric wards across a broad range of less severe psychotic levels, from deeply neurotic through mildly neurotic persons and into school classrooms. There is no way of knowing how many people could be helped to fuller, richer, more interesting lives through the arts since opportunity for finding this out has never been possible. As yet art therapy is too small and incomplete both in theory and in numbers of informed people who could tackle the job systematically. (1973, p. 75)

Margaret Frings Keyes, a San Francisco therapist who uses art therapy as one of her major tools for both

individual and group work in private practice, says of the special function of art as psychotherapy:

Art therapy does not answer the questions. It only provides a process to clarify and deepen the questions, an awareness of how the individual here and now participates in creating his life conditions, and it points to some options that might be chosen (1974, p. 4).

Significance of the Problem

It would seem from the increasing bulk of literature on the subject, that the general philosophical set regarding the place of art and the creative personality has shifted in psychological valuing. Today's view of the role of art and its potential therapeutic place has shifted from pathological diagnosis to integrative healing. Moving from the pre-Freudian and traditional psychoanalytic concept in which both art and creative artists were viewed as exciting but slightly suspect when placed on a continuum of the rational, sane and stable social order, today's increasingly humanistic psychology has in part returned to a much earlier, even primitive, viewpoint.

Utilizing recent neuro-surgical findings on the two distinct functions of the right and left brain hemispheres as an indisputable point of departure, psychologists today tend to recognize the need to recapture a more balanced relationship between the intellectual, rational way of thinking and the intuitive, acausal one. Robert Ornstein in The Psychology of Human Consciousness (1973) discusses

the research of Joseph E. Bogen and G. William Domhoff, which showed through a variety of experiments that the civilization of Western man has been dominated by a reliance on the left side of the brain. It is this hemisphere which controls lineal thought, the right hand, speech and logic, and analytic cause and effect processes. The right brain hemisphere which controls receptive and non-lineal intuition, the left hand, diffuse and simultaneous gestalt perceptions, and creative processes in general, has until recently been neglected in Western civilized man's quest for scientific progress. In the West where many different occupations and disciplines involve a concentration on verbal logic and lineal reasoning, science and law have been emphasized at the expense of the more intuitive human mental involvements.

In the last chapters of his book, Ornstein discusses a variety of methods for activating these neglected right hemisphere functions. Sufism, zen, yoga, and various forms of meditation (disciplines long cultivated in the Eastern world) are presented as modes of discipline which need to be understood and adopted by Western man in order to achieve a healthier balance of consciousness. In order to avoid further unintentional ecological and social crises, spawned through an over-reliance on scientific thinking, Ornstein recommends re-integrating the total human consciousness through actively seeking to integrate the polarities

provided by the two hemispheres of the human brain (Ornstein, 1973b).

Prior to these recent neuro-physiological discoveries, a vanguard of scholars, thinkers and writers from a variety of fields had already begun to set forth ideas in opposition to the traditional scientific mode. For these people, somehow the artist stood out as the new hero. His creative thinking rather than that of the traditional solver of social and industrial problems became the focus of a whole new literature.

The genius of Albert Einstein was found to be somehow akin to that of the artist, for Einstein was quoted as describing his thought processes as being a kind of "combinatory play" involving "certain signs and more or less clear images", either visual or muscular, the results of which he then translated laboriously into words and abstract signs capable of being communicated (Arnheim, 1966, p. 287).

Devoting several books to the problems of perception, the nature of images, and visual thinking, psychologist Rudolph Arnheim, who has chaired both the American Psychological Association and the American Association for Aesthetic Philosophy, speaks of his conclusions regarding the importance of visual imagery in all productive thought.

My earlier work taught me that artistic activity is a form of reasoning in which perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined . . . (an artist thinks with his senses . . . A review of what is known about perception, and especially about sight,

made me realize that the remarkable mechanisms by which the senses understand the environment are all but identical with the operations described by the psychology of thinking. Inversely, there was much evidence that truly productive thinking in whatever area of cognition takes place in the realm of imagery. (Arnheim, 1969, p. 3)

As Arnheim sees it, through art man counteracts the impoverishments of vision that result when any one of the levels of reality is viewed in isolation of others, and thus art encourages the synthesis of conception. It is this ability to synthesize in conception which Arnheim calls true human wisdom (Arnheim, 1966).

Sir Herbert Read distinguished British scholar, writer, critic and philosopher, presents his long life's thesis that the entire course of human civilized history grows out of man's capacity to retain and develop the perceptual image inside his consciousness; from this is derived the faculty to erect the basis of an intelligence specifically and uniquely human. For Read, art has been and still is the essential instrument in the development and unfolding of human consciousness (Read, 1955).

Jerome Bruner (1962) in his little book, On knowing: Essays for the left hand, speaks of this curious Western dichotomy between the art of creation and the science of order and fact.

Since childhood, I have been enchanted by the fact and symbolism of the right hand and the left--the one the doer, the other the dreamer. The right is order and lawfulness, le droit. Its beauties are those of geometry and taut implication.

Reaching for knowledge with the right hand is science. Yet to say only that much of science is to overlook one of its excitements, for the great hypotheses of science are gifts carried in the left hand. Of the left hand, we say that it is awkward and, while it has been proposed that art students can seduce their proper hand to more expressiveness by drawing first with the left, we nonetheless suspect this. The French speak of the illegitimate descendant as being a main gauche, and though the heart is virtually at the center of the thoracic cavity, we listen for it on the left. Sentiment, intuition, bastardy. And should we say that reaching for knowledge with the left hand is art? (Bruner, 1962, p. 2)

Working the other way from this, the Swiss Psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach (1884-1922) proceeded from the unprecise dreamlike qualities of art to knowledge of a clinical and psychological value when in 1911 he combined his interests in perception, art and clinical psychology into his now-famous "inkblot" diagnostic tool. The projective and interpretive findings from the Rorschach test by now have become standard operating procedure in the clinical setting.

In 1935, Dr. Henry A. Murray (1893-) developed at the Harvard Medical School Clinic a second projective diagnostic test which utilizes art to elicit psychological knowledge about a patient's inner psyche. The Thematic Apperception Test, commonly "TAT", consists of twenty cards which contain pictures suggesting human situations to which the patient responds with a verbal story. Though Rorschach's inkblots are abstract forms and Murray's TAT pictures represent figures and situations, in each case it is the

approach to human personality and growth, involves a comprehensive psychological and educational view of the holistic personality. Around 1911 Italian psychoanalyst Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) publically began to present findings and theoretical material derived from his psychoanalytic practice and studies. Though one of the pioneers of Freudian psychoanalysis in Italy, Assagioli came to feel that Freud had not given sufficient weight to a holistic view of the human animal (Assagioli, 1971).

The very name "Psychosynthesis" indicates its founder's wish to place his theories and beliefs in complement to Freudian psychoanalysis. His system works to integrate therapeutically the aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of holistic personality. His methods give special attention to the underdeveloped intuitive sense of Western man. The practice of Psychosynthesis has today concentrated on developing and refining a more inclusive concept of man, drawing from new discoveries and developments in education, psychology, anthropology, physiology and transpersonal psychology (Ornstein, 1973b).

Assagioli's European published work is vast. Recently published works in the United States include two Viking-released books, Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques (1971), and The Act of Will (1973).