

'Why artists use art as a coping mechanism'

Independent project

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This annotated bibliography will investigate a various academic research sources and make note of the ways artists use the form of art as a coping mechanism, to deal with any tragic life experiences they have endured in their lifetime. Also, from looking at academic sources, examples of methods artists use art to deal with their problems will be assessed upon and elaborated on. To determine whether art is an effective way for artists to use art to cope with and express any pain endured in their life to either help others to become inspired with their work or help themselves through tough times. By gathering research from books, websites, and news articles, the research conducted from these sources will allow me to gain a great understanding on the chosen topic and ensure a more accurate outcome on whether art is a great coping mechanism for artists dealing with mental health, loss of a loved one, physical health, or dealing with painful experiences. Art can also help people dealing with stress, depression, eating disorders, dementia and even PTSD. From artists creating art pieces it helps the viewers who are viewing their work to feel a sense of connection with the artists trauma which is visible in their artwork (Goodman, 2019). According to the Mental health Foundation (2024), art can single handily help someone express their emotions without having to talk to anyone or even do anything mentally straining to release their stress and pain from past experiences (Goodman, 2019). This is a great example of the good art can do for someone struggling with with any mental health issues.

Many artists around the world use art to create a sculpture, painting, drawing or many more forms of art to help deal with their problems or past trauma. An example of an artist who expresses his pain through art is Edvard Munch which created the 'Ashes' (1894) piece. Edvard paints a hopeless man sitting in the bottom corner with a green toned face indicates how toxic and sick that individual man is, and what is going through his head with his head in his hands, viewers can seen a man hiding from his true emotions and feelings. Both of their postures are a expressive way of showing art through a despair, powerful subject matter of male and female's relationships. Edvard used the deep depths of his own anguish as a source of material for his artwork. In addition to this, the use of the colour form, open and closed shapes, curved, outlined brushstrokes and many different contrasted colours that deliver a lot of tension to the viewers, is him showing the true pain he's going through in his work. Also, through illness and the untimely deaths of loved ones which he has gone through can be seen in his artwork. This type of artist used his trauma and anguish as self-motivation to create spectacular pieces which have become some of the most famous art pieces in the world (Gotthardt, 2019). Munch also experienced heartbreak which he endured from a woman he met in his twenties, from this pain he painted several works responding to the heartbreak (Gotthardt, 2019). The Ashes (1894) explores a woman who stands virile in the centre of the canvas, whilst a man cowers in misery on the side, a charred log can connect the two figures, which shows the fiery demise of love (Gotthardt, 2019). This art piece creating by Edward Munch can clearly show the amount of pain he was suffering with from heartbreak which he used to express his feelings in this particular art piece.

Furthermore, according to Wes Kilgore (2024) emotions can serve as a powerful tool for artists to gain creativity when making a piece of art. The most inspiring artwork often stems from the artists deepest human experiences endured. Such as love, joy, sorrow and anxiety, from this when looking at history numerous artists have harnessed their hardest personal struggles and therefore turning them into spectacular visual art pieces (Kilgore, 2024). This intimate connection between artists using their inner emotions and gaining creative output from it, has caused a rise in some of the most inspiring and emotionally compelling artwork known today (Kilgore, 2024). Another artist who has transformed their stress, mental anguish and used art as a coping mechanism is Frida Kahlo. She endured pain from being struck by a bus at the age of 18 which left her with serious persistent pain, she began encapsulating her pain through art (Evans, 2024). Kahlo painted the Broken Column (1944) after an unsuccessful surgery on her spine, she used the pain she was going through to create influential pieces (Evans, 2024). The message behind the Broken Column painting is pain and suffering which Frida expressed from suffering from anguish. The painting shows nails stuck into her face and whole body, a split is also seen in her torso. The nails in her face and body represent the affective appeal of pain for viewers to see. The colours of the painting are very balanced, there is balance because of the chaos on the woman and a calm simple background. There is a variety of different colours shown like brown, blue and green and the nails are different sizes. This famous painting by Frida Kahlo can clearly show the amount of suffering she had gone through which she uses as inspiration to create these painful looking art pieces, which she creates to help her cope with pain and anguish.

Reference list:

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