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EXPLORING ENGLISH THROUGH PSYCHOLOGY

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

As autumn brings rain and fog, along with a palette of yellow, red, brown, and purple leaves, we present an issue that touches on art in many ways. The colours so vividly displayed in nature have a history and influence on us, and we try to explore that influence. We also get in touch with artists' lives and their perspectives on art as it is and its impact on human personality and development. We also dive into topics such as art therapy and its usefulness in contexts you would not expect.

Because art is deeply rooted in our culture, it certainly has an influence on us. Most of us tend to associate art with intense emotions and individuals who experience them. As we interact with culture, our psyche is influenced (some even say that it is created by it). So, without a doubt, something in art resonates with something real in ourselves. Of course, not all art, as we also mention in this issue, resonates with us the way we would expect. Maybe that's the beauty of it? So I invite you to embark on this reading journey with an open and artistic mind.

And speaking of open minds, I would like to thank Mrs Agata Piotrowska-Mastalerz and Mr Andrzej Mastalerz for the opportunity to interview them. The insight and depth they brought to our interview were invaluable. I also want to thank the whole team for their work on this issue.

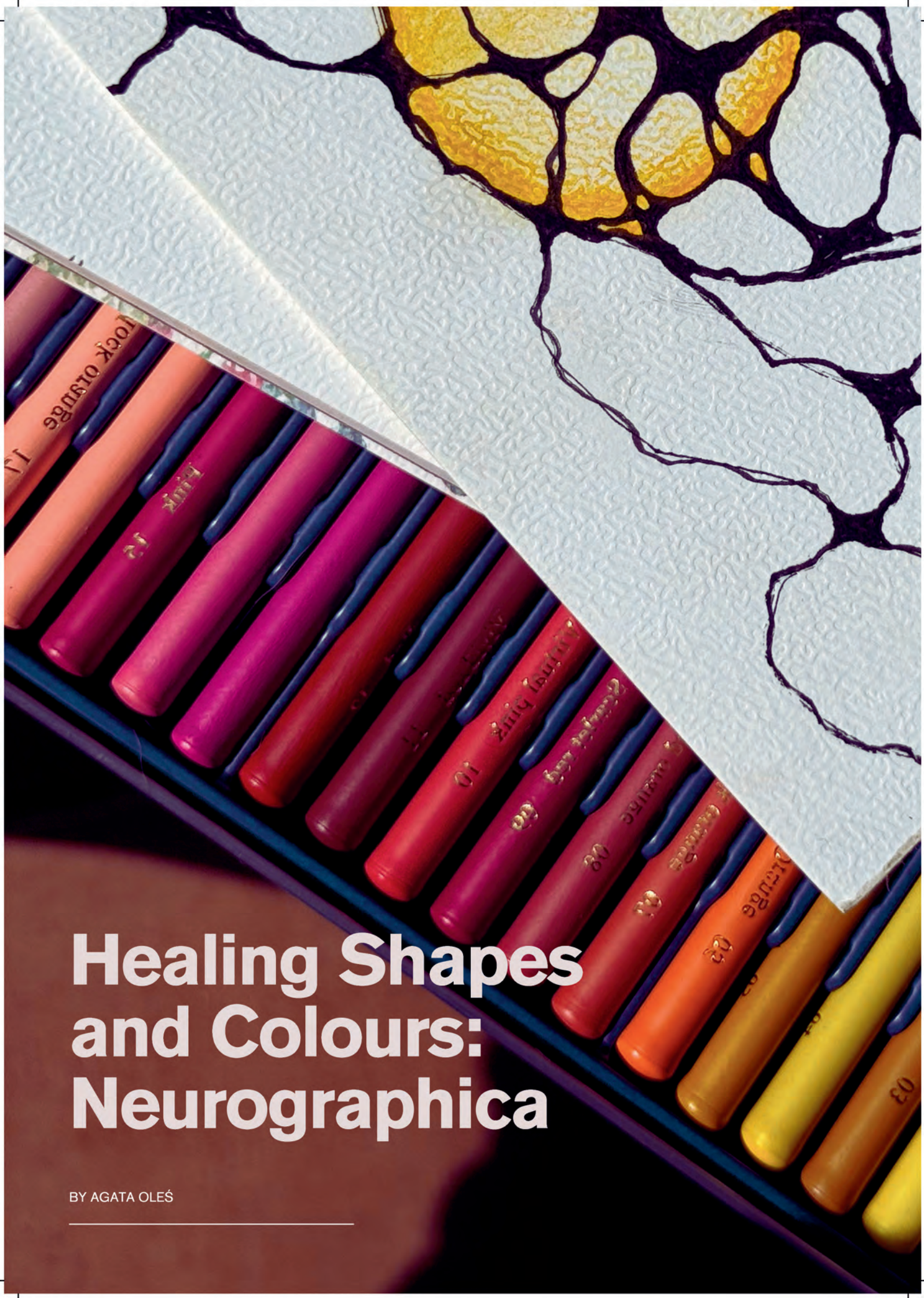
Enjoy the issue!



Jan Jolicki

Editor-in-Chief





Healing Shapes and Colours: Neurographica

BY AGATA OLEŚ

Neurographica is a drawing technique that helps you work through daily anxieties and negative emotions. "Neuro" refers to the brain and nervous system, and "graphica" indicates that it's a form of creative handiwork. It doesn't require any artistic skill and it's supposed to be simple and accessible for everyone. Neurographica works like a map of the brain, and you are the one creating it. It's a relaxing mindfulness practice that provides a sense of control over your emotions and future.

It was created by Russian psychologist and architect Pavel Piskarev in 2014. As a drawing enthusiast, he wanted to create something new and experimental. The name neurographica came to him during a flight to Israel, and the drawing practice developed from there. The creator believes neurographica has the power to shift our reality and shape it according to our wishes and desires, operating on a subconscious level.

The main idea is to create contemplative, mindful art using simple geometric shapes and lines. During the creation process, one ought to focus on the here and now, and then reflect on the outcome.

You don't need any special equipment—just a piece of paper, a pencil or pen, and something to colour with.

The first step is setting an intention: what emotion do you want to cope with? What goal do you wish to focus on? What challenge have you been dealing with lately? Next, draw a free-form shape across the paper. Let your hand guide you—no deliberate moves. Once you've created the core of your work, it's time to soften the intersections between the lines. No sharp corners should be left. You can add more shapes or enhance the ones that have emerged. Then it is time to fill in some colour.

Colours used in a drawing shouldn't be random, as each colour evokes different associations and has its own symbolic meaning. Colours affect our mood and can elicit emotions. For example, red is associated with anger, frustration and, in general, strong feelings. As the colour of fire, red can be energising and may also evoke fear. Blue, on the other hand, is calming and brings harmony. Yellow—the colour of optimism—brings hope and new energy. Green—the colour of nature—represents balance and health. It is calming and soothing. When creating a neurographic drawing, choose colours intuitively based on the emotions you are working with in that specific drawing. You can also vary the colour saturation to reflect the intensity of the emotions being expressed. Like in every art form, rules are just optional. Experimenting with colours and shapes brings as many benefits as intentional drawing.

Finally, reflect on your work, find the meaning of your creation, and let it be a process of self-discovery.

The final work resembles a network of neuronal connections and, practitioners believe, symbolises changes in the brain during the drawing process. The creators and popularisers of the technique claim that neurographica can help rewire existing neural connections and make it easier to adopt a new mindset. Because this technique is still quite new, such conclusions lack a solid scientific basis.

Neurographica is not a form of art therapy. It doesn't resolve problems from the past or help with mental disorders. It focuses on looking into the future, creating new chapters, and visualising desired achievements. Neurographica is based on the idea that if you're able to imagine something, you're able to achieve it. Another advantage is that it helps you notice, process, and better understand your emotions while immersing you in a calming art-making process. Creative expression and hands-on activities may promote relaxation and a sense of well-being. Regular practice can lower stress and build better coping skills. Nowadays, multiple courses and workshops are available for those who want to gain specialised knowledge and achieve even better results.

Neurographica is a great way to express your inner self through art, which helps you stop for a moment and take a break from hectic reality. It boosts creativity not only in an artistic way but also by helping you create new ways to deal with mental overload. Beginners may feel overwhelmed by wanting their drawing to be „perfect", but that shouldn't be the point. What matters is the process itself; however, the outcome can often surprise you positively. The method can be used throughout life as a relaxation ritual or help with minor mental breakdowns, but never as the only way of coping with severe mental disorders.

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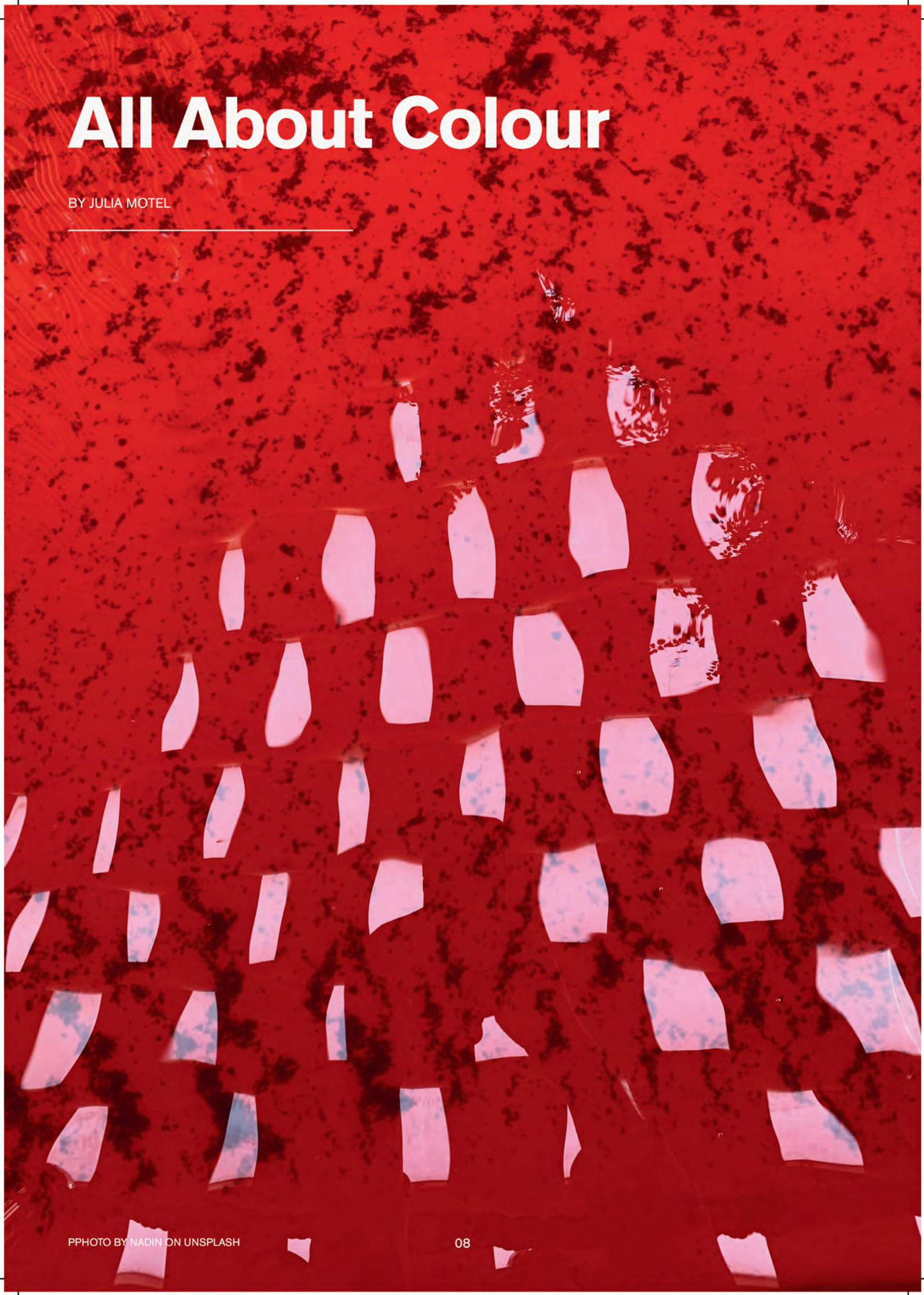
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Glossary

deliberate – intended or planned
evoke – to bring out a feeling, memory, or response
mindful – bearing in mind, aware
mindset – the way you think about things and approach situations
rewire – to change one's brain's patterns of thinking
soothing – making someone feel calm

All About Colour

BY JULIA MOTEL



PPHOTO BY NADIN ON UNSPLASH

One of the many things that come to mind when we speak of art is colour—most people have experienced colour for as long as they can remember; it surrounds us wherever we look, and it has been, and still is, used to convey certain ideas, moods, and emotions. We use colour to express ourselves through how we dress and how we decorate our rooms. Artists dedicate time to learning colour theory (a field that studies how colours interact, are perceived, and affect emotions, combining scientific approaches with artistic, subjective perspectives). Society has expectations built around colours—that particular ones are reserved for specific genders or those of a certain status. Some research suggests that certain colours may affect our moods, behaviours, and feelings. One of the most common first questions asked to break the ice is "What is your favourite colour?" It is safe to say, then, that colour is a big part of our daily lives. We all instinctively know what colour is, but a few questions may arise, such as: What is colour exactly? When do we start seeing colours and differentiating between them? How important is it in children's development? Does it actually affect us in a significant way? To answer these questions, we must go back to the beginning.

Before we talk about colour, we need to mention something else: light. Light is electromagnetic radiation, only a small part of which can be detected by the human eye through its photoreceptors. This part is known as visible light and consists of a range of wavelengths within the electromagnetic spectrum. Colour, in turn, is how the brain interprets visible light. Cones (one of the two kinds of photoreceptors) come in three types, and each one is activated by a specific range of wavelengths. This allows us to see a wide range of colours, from red and orange to indigo and violet. Although we perceive a wide range of colours, our colour vision is based on three primary colours of light: red, green, and blue.

The phenomenon of colour has fascinated people for a long time; the earliest theories of colour can be traced back to ancient times, with works by Aristotle and other great thinkers who believed colour was a mixture of light and darkness. Then there was Isaac Newton, the first person to fully develop a theory of colour based on a colour wheel (the discovery was made when Newton split a beam of white light using a prism, which produced the colour spectrum). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe challenged Newton's purely scientific approach and argued that colours are closely tied to human experience and psychological reactions; in doing so, he inspired many artists. Over time, existing theories were expanded and modified, but colour remained a major point of interest.

Moving on—the seedbed for the eye appears in the first few weeks of pregnancy; in the second trimester, the eyelids start to open, and the sensory cortex begins to develop; but only in the third trimester does it start working, and simple sensory preferences start to form. That is, during pregnancy, our bodies work tirelessly to ensure we are born with the ability and tools to see. As such (and contrary to popular belief), infants at birth can see, but mostly using their peripheral vision, as their central vision is still developing. At this stage, they are also really sensitive to bright light (you may notice the smallness of their pupils, which limits how much light enters the eyes). Interestingly, research suggests that infants may be able to detect some colour. However, the coloured stimuli must be highly saturated, relatively large, and of a certain hue to be detected. The study used red, blue, green, and yellow stimuli, with highly saturated, large patches of red (presented on a grey background) catching the attention of 75% of infants.

In general, the ability to distinguish between basic colours appears as early as 2 months, starting with red and green and then expanding to include blue and yellow. Research also shows that by 4 months, children can categorise colours in ways that mirror adults' colour categories. Typically, by 6 months, they can see the full spectrum of colour.

A while ago, in the online sphere, you may have encountered the term "sad beige mom"—the term refers to a trend of parents picking neutral colours (like beige, cream, and grey) for everything that has to do with their children: their nurseries, clothes, and even toys. Some justified it by saying that bright colours can be far too overstimulating for children. However, studies suggest that colour plays an important role in children's development. To begin with, highly contrasting colours, shapes, and patterns help support the development of optic nerves (which process visual images by transferring them from the eye to the brain). Muted colours and lower contrast can be harder to see and process. The more visual stimuli are provided, the more the baby's retina matures, and so does the optic nerve.

Language development is another area where colours can matter. As a baby grows, they might cultivate a preference for bright primary colours, since they're so attention-grabbing. This creates an opportunity to begin teaching the baby about the world around them, putting names to things early and supporting language development when they finally start talking. Studies also suggest that certain colours are linked to brain activity and stimulation. Children build associations between colours and specific objects, which helps them assess and define those objects. It can also help a child learn and increase their attention span.

Colours can also influence children's emotions and behaviours. Bright colours like yellow or orange evoke positive feelings such as happiness and curiosity. Some studies indicate that vibrant hues, like red, enhance alertness and energy. Bright toys, in this case, might encourage movement and exploration, supporting physical and mental growth. However, these associations are more common and may not hold true depending on the setting and culture.

The field of colour psychology—the study of how different colours affect mood, feelings, and behaviour—is still in its early stages. The effects of colour on an individual stem from biological reactions (like highly contrasting colours causing arousal), cultural meanings, and personal experiences. On average, warm colours (those in the red spectrum) can evoke feelings ranging from joy and warmth to anger and hostility. Cool colours (blue, purple, and green), by contrast, can calm but also cause sadness. One 2020 study explored associations between colours and emotions in 30 countries. For example, more than half of the participants associated black with sadness, red with love, and yellow with joy. The results suggest that emotional associations may have some universal qualities. Existing research has also found that colour impacts people in surprising ways, like white-coloured pills being linked to greater pain relief. While it's undeniably interesting, it's

vital to keep in mind that personal experiences and preferences can shape emotional and behavioural responses to colour.

Our fascination with colour is not new—it has been a topic of discussion since ancient times, with different theories and distinct approaches to studying it. We use colours in all sorts of scenarios: when we create, decorate, and express ourselves. They can influence early childhood development in various ways, from supporting visual development to aiding language acquisition. Some evidence suggests that colours can affect our feelings, moods, and behaviours, though this varies by culture, personal experience, and preferences. Much remains to be discovered about the psychological effects of colour, so if we give it time, something new may be waiting for us.

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Glossary

arousal – a state of increased alertness or energy
attention-grabbing – attracting notice and attention
attention span – the period during which you concentrate or stay interested in something
central vision – what you can see when you look directly at something, allowing you to see fine details
colour wheel – a circular diagram showing colours and how they relate to one another
cone – a type of cell in the retina that helps you to see colour and fine details
cultivate – develop and improve something
distinct – separate and different from something else
hue – the name or type of a colour, such as red, blue or green
mature (*verb*) – to become fully grown or developed
mirror (*verb*) – be similar to, imitate
muted – soft, dull or not very bright
optic nerve – the nerve that carries visual information from the retina to the brain
peripheral vision – what you can see around you without looking directly at it
photoreceptor – a light-sensitive cell in the retina that detects light
primary colour – one of the three colours, red, yellow and blue, that can be mixed together in different ways to make other colours
prism – a transparent object that breaks white light into the colours of the rainbow
pupil – the circular black opening in the centre of the eye
retina – the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye that sends visual information to the brain
seedbed – a situation from which something develops
stem from – to originate from or be caused by something
trimester – any one of the three approximately three-month periods into which a human pregnancy is divided



Fursuiting: A New Dimension of Theatre Therapy

BY PIOTR LUDWIŃSKI



If someone had seen a single person or group of people dressed completely or partially as animals or fantasy and anime creatures in the streets of Polish cities dancing, walking, embracing or playing with one another last summer, they could have thought that those people were "weird" or even "immature".

Why would someone dress as a blue fox with orange paws and behave like a small child, or dress as a grey hyena with a gun and act like a counter-terrorist? Those people were happy and expressed their true feelings and dreams, or they wanted to hide because they were ashamed of their weaknesses and had created a new self. They did not wear ordinary costumes that are available in a shop. The costumes were individually handcrafted with precise attention to detail, such as fur texture, shape, colour, pattern of ears, fangs, hair and paws, as well as the selection of materials. If it is a form of art and people wear them to be happy or serious, hide their weaknesses, or adopt a new identity, it is art therapy that uses elements of drama and performance.

The Furry Fandom is a community of people who are fans of anthropomorphic animals and other creatures that are humanised through speech, intelligence, and appearance. A member's identity in the Furry Fandom is expressed through a *fursona*—a name, an image, and a character that serves as an avatar. While a Fursona exists in the mind or digital space, its most representative and prestigious form is a fursuit: a custom-made, wearable costume that lets the wearer step out of imagination into physical reality and into the character's skin.

The International Anthropomorphic Research Project, known to the general public as "Furscience", led by Dr Courtney Plante, a social psychologist (at the University of Waterloo, Canada), is the

first scientific research project that takes up the Furry Fandom as a research object. Over the past decade, the project team has conducted large-scale studies with thousands of participants worldwide and used a mixed-methods approach, including survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews, standardised psychological and well-being scales, field studies (at conventions), and online surveys. They compared the results with a control group, including non-furries and members of other fandoms (e.g., anime, fantasy).

The findings published in their 700-page report (Plante et al., 2023) show that nearly all participants (over 95%) create their fursona, on average, 2 to 3 times over a lifetime, and approximately one-third (35%) identify their fursona's personality as identical to their own. What is more, about a quarter (25%) of participants have more than one fursona at a time, using them to express different dimensions of their personality. Although high prices and availability issues mean that around a quarter (25%) of participants own a full or partial fursuit, more than half (50–60%) express a strong desire to have one, making it a highly desirable medium.

Theatre Therapy is a form of art therapy that uses theatre as an artistic activity for physical, mental, and social rehabilitation, yet the crucial element for us is the self-expression of our feelings, emotions, and experiences, including their expression in a non-verbal way. The fundamental tool in theatre is the actor's body, because it is the first means of expression. In general, a costume is of minor importance for therapeutic aims (Niedudziak, 2012). However, as we can see, a fursuit is more than just a costume for the furry fandom. A fursuit, as the highest means of expression in the furry fandom, becomes the body for a member who has adopted their fursona as their own. A fursuit performs three crucial therapeutic roles:

Integrating Ideal Traits and Self-Improvement

Referring to E. Tory Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Theory, which distinguishes between the "Actual Self" and the "Ideal Self", and allows individuals to attribute traits that they lack in everyday life to their fursonas, Dr Plante's team found a positive correlation: those who identify with their fursona and perceive it as a representation of their "Ideal Self" tend to report higher psychological well-being and self-esteem. Physically wearing a fursuit and role-playing allow them to rehearse confidence in a safe environment, which facilitates the progressive integration of these traits into their daily identity (Plante et al., 2023).

Psychological Buffer and Emotional Release (Catharsis)

In theatre therapy, a key concept is aesthetic distance, in which a mask and costume separate the actor from the character (Niedudziak, 2012), which enables catharsis—safely working through fears and exposing repressed or rejected dimensions of the self without fear of rejection. Furscience studies suggest that interacting in a fursuit drastically reduces social anxiety and lowers excessive self-consciousness because others focus on the created character rather than their physical insecurities. Moreover, a striking 78.1% of those engaging in this community report that it helps them cope with everyday life stressors (Plante et al., 2023).

Development of Authenticity and Self-Awareness

According to role theory in drama therapy, fursuiting gives participants the freedom to safely experiment with their identity as well as social, emotional, or gender roles. Contrary to popular stereotypes of "immaturity" or escapism, comparative studies have found that members of the furry fandom do not differ from the general population in mental health and, in fact, more often exhibit a coherent and stable sense of identity than non-furries (Plante et al., 2023). Such safe self-exploration translates into higher "self-concept clarity", which leads to greater sensitivity to their own needs and the consolidation of self-worth and self-esteem.

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Glossary

anime creature – a fictional being or animal that appears in Japanese animation
aesthetic distance – a psychological mechanism in theatre therapy in which a mask or costume separates the actor from the character, creating a safe emotional space
anthropomorphic – having a human-like appearance or behaviour
catharsis – releasing strong emotions primarily through art
coherent – clear, logical, and easy to understand
consolidation – the process of strengthening and making something more stable
correlation – a connection or relationship between two or more facts, ideas, numbers, etc.
discrepancy – a difference between two things that should be alike
escapism – a way of avoiding reality by imagining exciting but impossible activities
exhibit – to show, demonstrate, or display a particular quality or characteristic
expose – to reveal or make something hidden visible
fursona – a character or alter ego that represents a person in the furry fandom
fursuiting – the practice of wearing or performing in a fursuit
humanise – make a character appear or behave like a human
rehabilitation – the process of optimising functioning and reducing disability in people with health conditions
rehearse – to practise a play, a piece of music, etc. before performing it; to repeat
repressed – kept in the unconscious mind, especially feelings, thoughts, or memories that are difficult to deal with

Art Therapy and Gestalt: Creativity as a Path to Awareness

BY MAJA DŻORDŻADZE

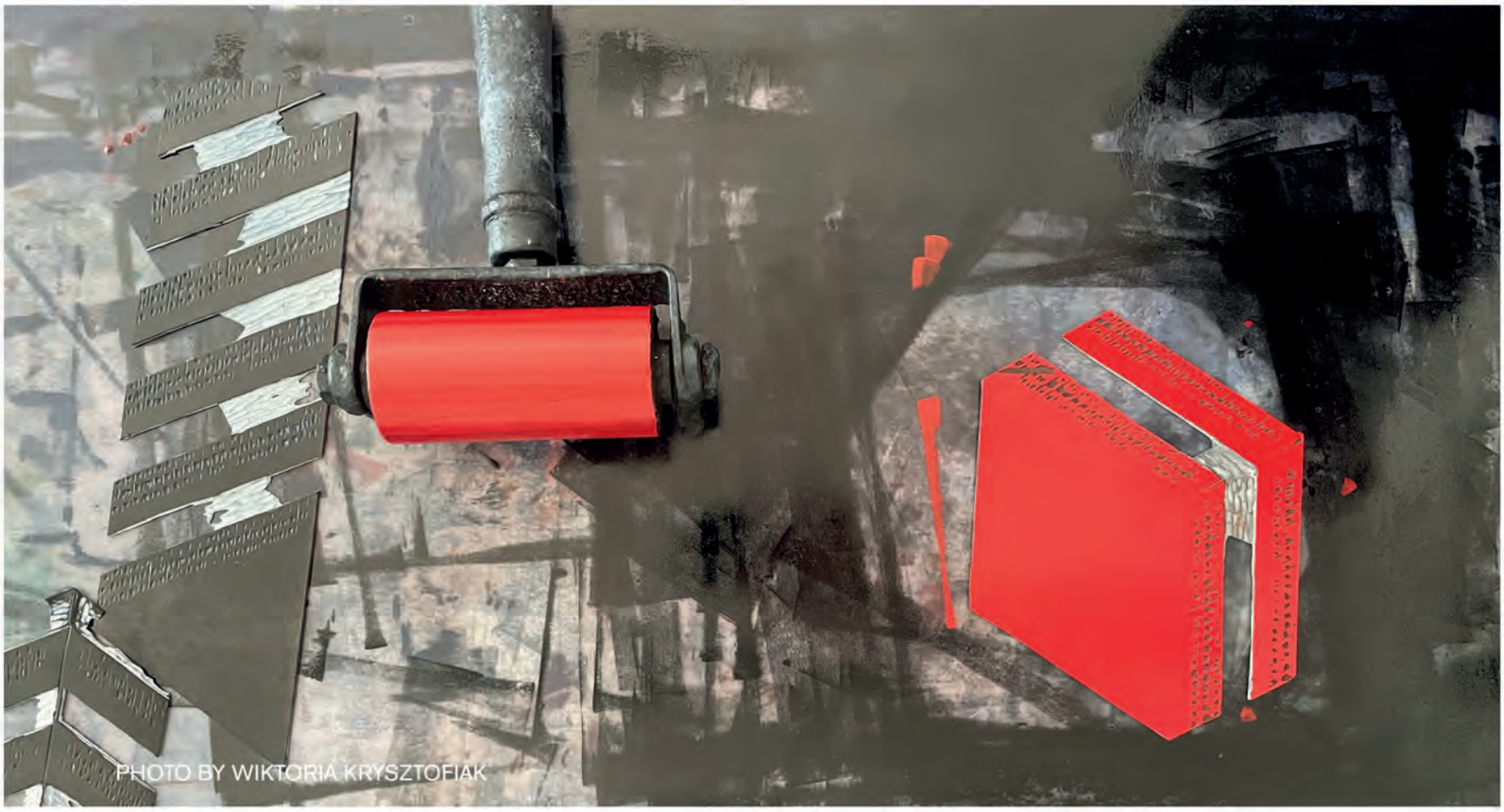


PHOTO BY WIKTORIA KRYSZTOFIAK

I am a final-year art therapy student at APS IEA (Instytut Edukacji Artystycznej APS), and through my own practice of self-art therapy, I have experienced its beneficial effects. I began my master's degree after many years of working in business, feeling professionally burned out and believing that I could no longer create, that I had forgotten how to do it, and that whatever I made would look terrible. Simply engaging with art and visiting exhibitions helped me open to new experiences, discover a new area of interest, and find a new field for learning and exploration.

For the first time in a very long time, I felt joy, satisfaction, and pleasure in creating, without worrying about whether anyone else liked what I was making. The creative process helps me recognise, name, and organise my own emotions. Finally, I feel that creative activities allowed me to overcome professional burnout and move in a new direction.

Alongside studying art therapy, I am also training in Gestalt psychotherapy, a humanistic, experiential approach developed by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls, and Paul Goodman in the 1940s and 1950s. It views people as integrated, whole systems rather than isolated sets of symptoms. Among other things, Gestalt focuses on how people experience themselves and how they remain in contact with their environment. One central concept in Gestalt psychotherapy is awareness. This includes the active process of paying attention to your physical sensations, emotions, and behaviours as they happen. Creative activities can be particularly significant in this context.

In his book *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*, Joseph Zinker writes: "The creative process is therapeutic in itself because it allows us to express and examine the content and dimensions of our internal lives."

Drawing, painting, working with clay, collage, and photography can help people express experiences that are not always easily accessible through language. In Gestalt psychotherapy, art can therefore become a tool for experimentation, deepening awareness, and exploring the process of contact.

This year, I am writing my master's thesis on the impact of creative activities on the experience of occupational burnout. In my questionnaire, I asked respondents whether, among other things, they were familiar with the concept of art therapy. Sixteen per cent of respondents—out of a total of 61 people who completed the questionnaire—said they were not. I therefore thought it might be useful to start with the basics.

Art therapy is a method of healing and personal development through art. It uses the creative process to help people express emotions that sometimes cannot be put into words. It is important to emphasise that participants in art therapy do not need artistic ability or prior experience. Most adults I know say that they cannot draw or that whatever they produce looks "ugly", and so forth. This is why it is essential to create a safe, attentive therapeutic relationship in which people have the space and support to experiment. The therapist does not focus on the aesthetics. The aim is not to create something beautiful, but to express what may be hidden in the unconscious—something we are unable to put into words.

According to the definition provided by the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy is a profession that uses the creative process to improve the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of people of all ages. The British Association of Art Therapists, in turn, defines art therapy as a form of psychotherapy that uses art materials as its primary means of communication.

Art therapy is a broad field that encompasses various creative approaches aimed at achieving specific therapeutic outcomes. These range from drawing and painting to sculpture, ceramics, music therapy, bibliotherapy, film therapy, and dance movement therapy. In a supportive environment, participants can create images, objects, and figures, as well as explore and share *their meanings*. This process can have many positive effects: helping people better understand and identify their emotions, broadening their awareness, supporting emotional regulation, reducing stress, and promoting relaxation. In turn, these changes may positively influence how people perceive themselves and relate to others.

In therapeutic practice, this means paying attention to what emerges in the "here and now": emotions, thoughts, bodily sensations, ways of speaking, behaviour, and what happens between both the client and the therapist. Artistic activity fits naturally into this perspective.

An image does not have to be treated as a symbol that the therapist must decode. What matters more is the person's experience while creating it and their present relationship with the finished work.

The therapist might therefore ask:

- What do you notice when you look at artwork?
- What happens to you while you are painting/drawing?
- Which element draws your attention the most?
- What would you like to do with this object now?

Gestalt psychotherapy also invites experimentation. An experiment is an experience co-created by the client and therapist, with the aim of deepening awareness and exploring new possibilities for contact.

In this sense, an art-based task can be particularly well suited to Gestalt therapy. For example, a therapist may invite you to experiment: "Draw what your anger looks like and then see what it would like to do." The aim is not to produce a "correct" drawing, but to initiate a process of experiencing and exploration. A conflict, an emotion, or a difficult memory can be represented visually. This allows the client to observe their experience from a certain distance without losing contact with it.

However, it is important to emphasise that creating an image does not, in itself, guarantee a therapeutic outcome. What matters is how the image is incorporated into the therapeutic relationship and the process of developing awareness. Creative activities engage perception, movement, attention, emotions, and cognitive processes at the same time. From a Gestalt perspective, this may support integrating different aspects of experience.

Incorporating artistic methods can be particularly useful in several areas.

Emotional awareness. Drawing or painting can facilitate more direct contact with an emotion. Instead of simply saying, "I am angry", the client can give their anger a specific form, observe it, and experiment with ways of expressing it.

Bodily awareness. Gestalt places great importance on bodily experience. Creative activity can engage the body through hand movements, pressure, pace, material choices, and sensory experiences.

Relationships with others. An image can represent how a client experiences their relationship with a partner, parent, child, group, or professional environment. This makes it possible to move from an abstract description of a relationship towards a more concrete experience of it.

Identity and self-perception. Collage, self-portraiture, or a series of images can be used to examine the question "Who am I?" and the tension between how the client sees themselves, how they would like to be perceived, and how they experience themselves in relationships with others.

One significant risk is interpreting artwork according to a universal set of rules. For example, claiming that a particular colour, shape,



PHOTO BY WIKTORIA KRYSZTOFIAK

or element of an image represents a specific emotion would be inconsistent with the principles of both art therapy and Gestalt psychotherapy. The meaning should primarily be determined by the person who created the work.

Artistic techniques should not replace the therapeutic relationship either. Participation in an experiment is voluntary, and the client can stop at any time. Not every client will feel comfortable engaging in artistic activities. Some people may experience anxiety about being judged. As I mentioned at the beginning, many people hold deeply ingrained beliefs that they lack artistic ability. This is why the therapist should present an artistic activity as an experiment, rather than a test of skill. It is essential to remain mindful of the experiment's purpose and, above all, the client's well-being.

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Glossary

attentive – paying close attention to something or someone
bodily sensation – a physical feeling in the body, such as tension or a racing heart
collage – a piece of art made by putting different pictures, photos, or materials together
decode – figure out or interpret the meaning of something
dimension – an aspect or part
emotional regulation – the ability to control one's emotions
encompass – to include or cover something
facilitate – to make something easier
incorporate – to include something as part of a whole
ingrained – so deeply fixed that it is difficult to change or remove
outcome – the result of an action or event
prior – happening or existing before something else
self-portraiture – the practice or art of creating self-portrait
the unconscious – the part of one's mind that works without one being aware of it



It's Ugly, so It's Beautiful: Why We Love Horror Art, or Don't

BY GABRIELA GAWŁOWSKA



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With the arrival of October, a lot of changes happen. I'd say it's the official end of summer and the beginning of fall and all that comes with it. It's time to return to university, get back into old routines, pull out comfy hoodies and sweaters, and prepare a delicious cup of tea (or coffee) to fight the cold and, most likely, the gloomy days ahead. It's also the time when we might start the countdown to Halloween! At this point, stores are packed with decorations featuring pumpkins, skeletons, spiders, cobwebs, vampires and everything else related to themes that get our adrenaline pumping. As a reader myself, I also see it as the time when we return to certain genres of entertainment – horror, thrillers, crime, true crime, and so forth – whether it's a book, a podcast, music or a movie. Yes, October brings out in us the want – the need – to sink our teeth into the dark arts. What makes us come back to stories that are often morbid and gory? Why do some people love them, and why do others not?

This form of art is represented by several movements, such as dark art, psychological horror art, surrealist art, and horror art. While this form of art goes by many names, the idea is shared: dark art is an approach in which artists use grotesque, disturbing, and macabre imagery to express themselves. This form of art is meant to challenge social norms and people's points of view.

There are some theories and speculations as to why people seek to experience this disturbing genre of art. According to *The Psychology of Fear* (2020), psychologist Glenn D. Walters gives three main reasons people like horror. "The first is tension, which producers and directors create by including elements of mystery, suspense, gore, terror, and shock. The next factor is relevance. Horror films draw from this factor by establishing elements that viewers will identify with. This often means universal relevance, which plays on the psychology of fear of death and the unknown,

or cultural relevance of social issues. Walters says that viewers also experience personal relevance, as they identify with the protagonist or condemn the antagonist" (*The Psychology of Fear*, 2020).

Mathias Clanses, a horror specialist, proposed that this desire is rooted deep inside us because of our ancestors (Vinney, 2026). As we know, back in the day, when survival relied heavily on a person's ability to hunt and avoid danger, hunting and avoiding danger were part of everyday life. Nowadays, when we don't have to worry about gathering food or finding shelter without being eaten by a dangerous animal, we still feel the need to activate the survival instinct we share with them. And what is better than engaging with art that is meant to provoke fear and give us that adrenaline rush? Not only do we get to face different dangerous situations, but we can do so in a safe environment. There's also the satisfaction and accomplishment afterwards, as a reward for "surviving" the danger. In short, it can be called experiencing "safe danger" (Odintsova, 2025).

Although it's closely related to the paragraph above, from a neurological point of view, contact with horror art can trigger our fight-or-flight responses because our brains can't immediately distinguish whether the jump scare signals real danger (*The Psychology of Fear*, 2020). This brings a rush of adrenaline, dopamine and endorphins, which makes our hearts start pounding and causes that pleasant buzzing numbness to wash over us seconds after the brain concludes we're not, in fact, in danger.

Humans by nature are very curious creatures. As much as we like safety, we also like to step into the unknown. Perhaps that's one reason we reach for this genre of art. Thus, it can help us explore the unknown and broaden our horizons, especially when we start to question the reality surrounding us (Röhm, 2025). On an emotional level, grotesque and disturbing content can cause us to feel many things at once, like disgust, fear, dread, fascination and maybe even a sense of beauty. It offers people a rollercoaster of emotions that can impact us on many other levels. For example, the awe inspired by the aesthetics of a surrealistic painting can inspire someone to create something on their own; or facing moral or social taboos expressed in the art can inspire people to confront topics we would rather avoid thinking about (Röhm, 2025).

The simpler answer is that we might like horror-related art forms simply because of the aesthetics they are associated with (Odintsova, 2025). Gothic and Baroque forms carry a sense of splendour that can enchant even those who aren't into art themselves. The tall, heavy structures reaching towards the sky, dramatic dark corridors lit only by the glow of a candle, and other images that come to mind when we recall those times became inspiring and aesthetically pleasing to many horror fans, despite being associated with fear (Odintsova, 2025).

The same can be said of modern horror films such as *It* and *The Conjuring*. Although they are packed with frightening elements that make us associate a red balloon or a nun with danger, people still find aspects of their visual aesthetics appealing. This appeal is strong enough to lead to various brand collaborations, such as the makeup collection inspired by *The Conjuring*.

However, as you might have noticed, my article points out reasons why people do like horror art. But what about those who don't? Why don't some people like this type of art? Based on the point above, it comes from personal reasons. Some people don't like the emotional baggage and discomfort or anxiety that is triggered by this particular type of grotesque art. Other than that, they might have low levels of sensation seeking, preferring to avoid adrenaline rushes and sticking to steady hobbies. We can't forget about people who went through a lot in life and don't want to face anything that is associated with their trauma or bad experiences. Aesthetically, some people may prefer to find peace in harmonious art that doesn't involve macabre or uncomfortable imagery.

In conclusion, horror art is a tool for artists to express themselves. It's meant to be awful, disfigured, unnerving and even disgusting. It's meant to confront and critique ideas, the state of the world and people. However, whether people like it depends entirely on them. There are two groups of people: first, those who seek intense sensations, want to experience the prickling sense of danger, and find those themes aesthetically pleasing; and second, those who prefer other forms of art because of their individual traits and experiences. In both of those cases, it's art, and as Henry David Thoreau has said, "It's not what you look at that matters; it's what you see."

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Glossary

awe – a feeling of wonder and amazement
draw from – to get ideas or inspiration from something
enchant – to attract someone or make them feel delighted
gory – involving blood or violence
jump scare – a sudden scare that makes you jump
morbid – related to death or disturbing things
numbness – the feeling of not being able to feel something physically or emotionally
prickling – an unpleasant feeling on one's skin, as if many small, sharp points were pushed into it
rooted in – based on or coming from something

Does Knowing the Artist Change the Art?

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA



Today, we are often flooded with disturbing messages on social media. How many times have you come across information of this kind about an artist whose work you really enjoyed? Did learning about it change the way you perceived their music, films, or books? For some people, learning about an artist's behaviour changes more than their opinion of the person behind the work; it can also change how they experience the work itself, often creating moral and psychological dilemmas. For us, this situation raises a question: to what extent can we separate our experience of art from our perception of the person who created it?

Separating art from the artist

For years, people have debated whether art can be separated from the artist. The biggest debates are around musicians and music producers (followed by book authors and actors), especially in the era of social media, where controversies surrounding artists can be widespread and are no longer dismissed as "just sometalk", as they might have been in previous decades.

Nowadays, many artists, despite repeated controversies that may have damaged their reputation, still enjoy a certain degree of success and remain profitable, even if their earnings have declined to some extent. This leads us to wonder what makes some fans withdraw their support while others remain loyal?

The answer may lie partly in the psychological relationship between artists and their audiences. People don't always judge public figures solely on the basis of their behaviour. Their decisions can also be influenced by emotional attachment, personal identification, and the meaning they associate with an artist's work.

When talking about morality, it's important to bring up the topic of moral compasses and moral judgments that, for some, mean that something is either "good" or "bad" (meaning you don't morally align with the artist) and nothing more; however, for some, there are things that aren't so definitive. You need to understand the subjectivity that comes with that and how people differ in how they express and apply their moral values. While some people consider certain actions unacceptable regardless of the circumstances, others take a more contextual approach, considering factors such as the person's intentions, background, or willingness to take responsibility. As a result, the same controversy may lead to very different reactions. However, moral judgment is only one part of the picture. Even when people agree that an artist has done something wrong, they may still disagree about whether this should change their relationship with the artist's work.

However, one important aspect people may forget is that the art we consume can become part of our identity and, by extension, reflect our interests, values, memories, or the communities we feel connected to. As a result, our artistic preferences can influence how others perceive us. However, there is an important distinction between enjoying someone's work and endorsing their behaviour. Although these two things may overlap, they are not necessarily the same. A person may appreciate a song's emotional impact or musical composition without agreeing with the artist's views or actions. Nevertheless, when an artist becomes controversial, their audience may find itself judged for continuing to engage with their work.

At this stage, it's worth mentioning social identity. This theory (H. Tajfel; J. Turner) helps explain why belonging to specific groups matters to how we perceive ourselves and others. Namely, fans often form communities that have their own symbols, language, customs, and sense of belonging. In such cases, criticism of a favourite artist may be perceived not only as criticism of a specific person, but also as an attack on something important to one's own group. However, it's worth remembering that not every fan reacts this way.

Another important observation is that people can react to controversy in various ways, and their reactions may vary by situation. Among others, we can distinguish fans who withdraw their support (by stopping listening to, watching, or buying a given artist's work), those who separate the work from the artist (they continue to enjoy the works while criticising the artist's behaviour), those who defend the artist (by questioning the allegations, justifying the behaviour, or considering it less significant than the artist's accomplishments) and those who offer conditional forgiveness (they resume supporting the artist after an apology, a change in behaviour, or the passage of time).

Based on this classification, some audiences separate their evaluation of the work from their evaluation of its creator. In contrast, others view financial support for the artist as an action with moral implications. At this point, it is also useful to mention the concept of cognitive dissonance (L. Festinger), which describes the tension that can arise when our beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours conflict. One way to cope with such a conflict is, for example, for the audience member to stop listening to the artist's music, to recognise that their work should be separated from their private life, or to attempt to downplay the significance of the allegations.

Controversies can also affect how audiences perceive artists who continue to collaborate with a problematic public figure. Even if these collaborators have not engaged in any wrongdoing themselves, their professional choices may be interpreted as a sign of support or indifference. This raises another question: to what extent should people be judged for the company they keep or the projects they choose to participate in? It's worth noting that working together does not always mean agreeing with the other person's views. The terms of the agreement, the nature of the project, prior commitments, or a lack of knowledge about certain events may also play a role. All of this ties into attribution theory—that is, the way we attribute causes of behaviour, intentions, and personality traits to other people. For example, the public may interpret a joint project as an expression of support for a controversial artist, even though the motives behind the collaboration are unknown to them.

Why do some artists survive public controversy?

One of the key factors contributing to an artist's sustained popularity is the emotional connection they have established with their audience. Through interviews, social media, and other forms of public communication, fans can feel close to artists they've never met. In psychology, this phenomenon is associated with parasocial relationships—one-sided bonds that can nonetheless feel meaningful to the audience. When controversy arises, this emotional bond can influence how fans interpret the available information. Some may be more inclined to defend the artist or give them the benefit of the doubt. In contrast, others may feel particularly disappointed because the person they admire no longer meets their expectations.



Another reason people may continue to appreciate an artist's work is the personal significance they attach to it. A song might remind someone of their childhood, an important relationship, or a difficult period they managed to overcome. In such cases, the work becomes intertwined with the listener's own memories and experiences. Learning something negative about an artist doesn't automatically erase these associations. Although a listener's opinion of the artist may change, the emotions and memories associated with the work may remain. This suggests that art can ultimately take on meaning partly independent of the person who created it.

A different explanation is the belief that a person's individual choices don't really matter. A fan might assume that choosing not to buy an album or attend a concert won't affect an artist who already has millions of fans. When many people think this way, individual decisions may seem insignificant, even if their combined impact could be significant.

Cultural and historical context is also relevant. An act that is widely condemned in one society may be viewed differently in another, depending on local norms, historical experiences, and the information available to the audience. However, cultural context should not automatically be treated as an excuse. It may help explain why a particular act occurred or how it was perceived, but it doesn't necessarily make the act acceptable.

It is also worth considering whether an artist's cultural significance can make them more resistant to public criticism. Some creators have produced works that have profoundly influenced a particular genre, artistic movement, or generation. Their contributions may be difficult to ignore, even when their personal behaviour raises serious ethical concerns. However, recognising an artist's historical importance doesn't necessarily excuse their actions. We can acknowledge their contribution to art while critically examining the harm they may have caused. The challenge lies in deciding how to preserve an honest account of art history without turning cultural significance into immunity from criticism.

When the artist disappears: anonymity and the perception of art

Sometimes not knowing who is behind a piece of artwork can offer an interesting perspective on the relationship between an artist and their audience. When we don't know who created a particular work, we may be more inclined to focus on its message rather than on the creator's personality or reputation. Still, anonymity does not necessarily eliminate bias. Audiences can still interpret a work through their existing beliefs or assumptions about the person who might have created it. In some cases, the mystery surrounding an anonymous artist may even become an attraction in itself.

When an artist remains anonymous, audiences may gradually develop their own image of the person behind the work. If the creator eventually reveals their face, the real person may differ from what audiences expected. That difference doesn't necessarily mean the artist has changed. Instead, it may reveal how much of our perception was based on assumptions rather than on actual knowledge. In some cases, this can affect the audience's interest in the creator, particularly when their public image has become an important part of the appeal.

Anonymity can therefore change the relationship between the creator and the audience, but it doesn't necessarily remove the creator from the interpretation of their work. Sometimes, not knowing who is behind a piece of art allows the work to stand more independently, encouraging audiences to focus on its content, form, and emotional impact rather than the creator's identity. In other cases, the absence of information about the creator may encourage audiences to develop their own interpretations of the work.

Can we ever fully separate art from the artist?

In summary, the reception of art is a complex process. It is influenced by the work's characteristics, audience members' personal memories, emotions, moral beliefs, and knowledge about the artist. At the same time, understanding the artist's influence on the reception of a work does not mean that we must accept the artist's behaviour or abandon our own moral judgments.

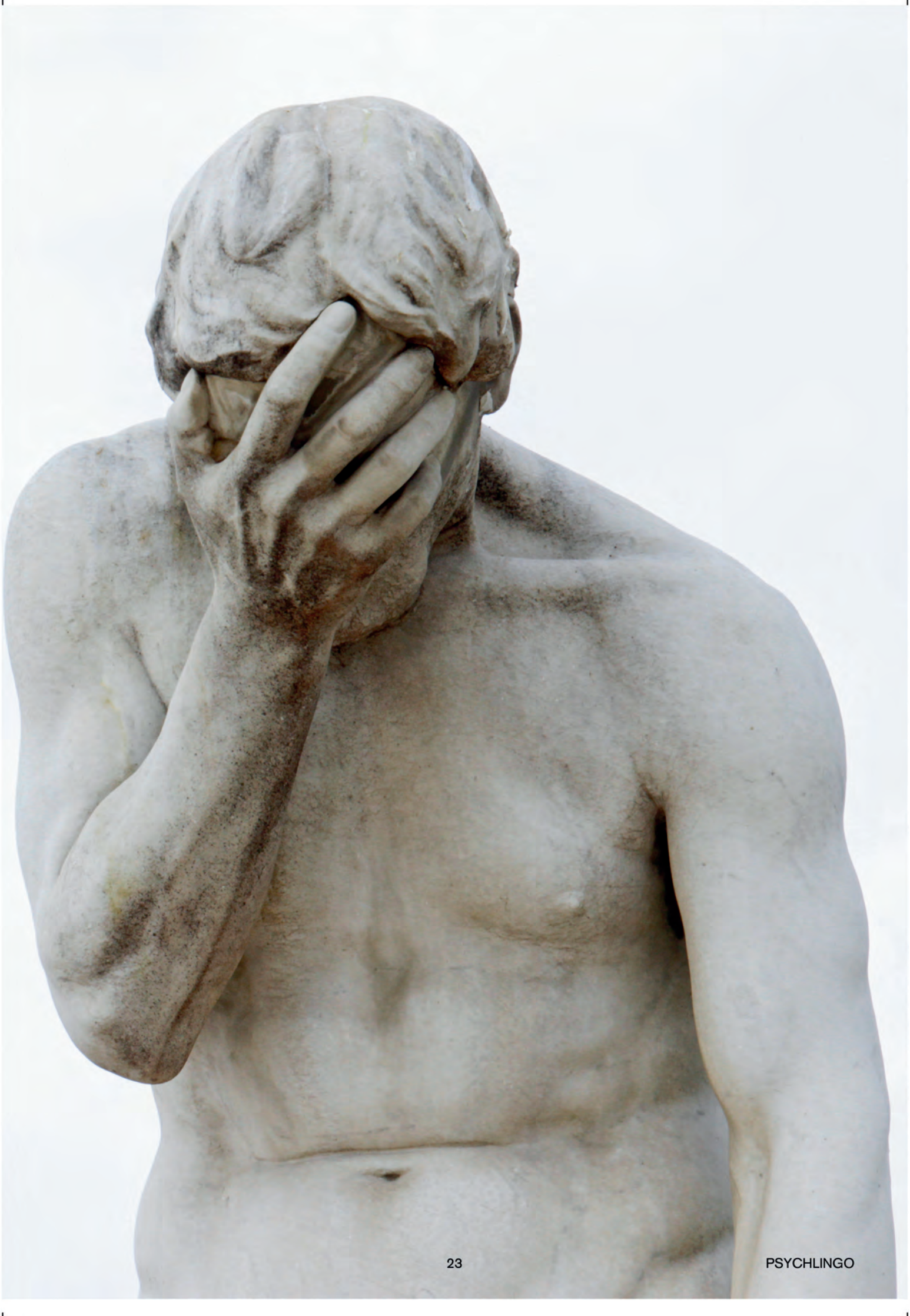
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Social Identity Theory (Henri Tajfel & John Turner); the concept of cognitive dissonance (Leon Festinger).

Glossary

allegation – a claim that someone has done something wrong, which has not yet been proven
distinction — a difference between two things
downplay – to make something seem less important or serious than it really is
endorse – to give support to someone or something
immunity – protection from something, such as punishment, blame, or criticism
implication – to suggest something without saying it directly
inclined – likely or willing to do something; having a tendency to think or act in a particular way
intertwine – to connect or mix two or more things closely together
overlap – to share some similarities or features, or to partly cover the same area
parasocial relationship – a one-sided relationship in which someone feels connected to a celebrity or media personality who does not personally know them
resistant – opposed to something, wanting to prevent something from happening
resume – to start doing something again after a pause or interruption
sustain – to continue something or maintain it for a period of time



What Rap Means in the Modern World

BY MAJA ZAKURZEWSKA



BY MIKA VÄISÄNEN, SELF-PHOTOGRAPHED, CC BY 3.0, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The genre of rap that we all know is usually associated with violence, drug use, overly sexual lyrics, or words that don't make sense at all. Particularly popular with the younger generation, rap is much more than just saying words fast into a microphone or slapping a poem onto a beat. Nowadays, many people choose rap because it lets them bleed their emotions out in a creative way.

Hip-hop music is about being yourself and expressing yourself in a way that's most like you. Rap has many styles and techniques, letting artists explore and experiment with different parts of their music. Not all rappers write about their personal lives and experiences. Some exaggerate or let their imagination run wild; that's the fun part.

For the audience, rap is often about relating to someone else through hardship or other situations. For example, take a look at American rapper NF's discography. He talks about loneliness, having suicidal thoughts, being abused, and his mother overdosing on drugs when he was young. NF also talks about interactions with his fanbase and how he'd heard from a few fans that his music was the reason they were alive. Sometimes relating isn't about experiencing the same things but about knowing that you're not the only person who's hurting out there.

Rapping. What do you think when you hear that someone's dream is to become a rapper? Words that come to mind are probably lazy, childish, or silly. The stereotypes and stigma surrounding rap are things not many people talk about. A negative attitude towards music of this genre can lead to embarrassment and discouragement among aspiring young artists. Not treating rap as equal to other music genres may come from ignorance and negative stereotypes.

"Music is music, but not when it comes to rap" might be something you hear. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but is it fair to voice them to people who might be hurt by them? When a person's ambitions are constantly laughed at and brought down, they might develop low self-esteem or socially isolate themselves, thinking they're worse than everybody else or that nobody understands them, so it's pointless to try and socialise. Even if we think someone's goals and dreams are unrealistic, we shouldn't be too harsh in expressing that. Rap as an art form can appeal to young, creative minds, who find it easier to express their feelings or ideas through lyricism and storytelling. Rhythm, flow, and tone of voice are all elements that can change how a song is interpreted. As a music genre, rap is flexible and can get very experimental. A beat to a rapper is what a blank canvas is to a painter—some people just refuse to acknowledge that.

We can't erase what has been done, and the same goes for the violence, vulgarity and misogyny present in a lot of rap music. While rap can be a place for honest emotional expression or a form of storytelling, sentimental tracks are often overlooked because listeners want adrenaline and something to scream their lungs out to. Some people focus more on the beat, rhythm or energy of a song, barely paying attention to what is actually being said. This can allow tracks with violent, vulgar or misogynistic lyrics to gain popularity without their messages being given much thought. At the same time, rap has become associated with a certain image of being cool and mature, particularly among younger listeners. For some young people, listening to music with explicit or provocative lyrics can become a way to appear older or fit in with their peers. In these cases, the appeal lies not only in the music itself, but also in the image that comes with listening to it.

Misogyny is unfortunately a big part of rap lyrics around the world. Researchers found that the most common misogynistic theme in rap music was the sexual objectification of women—according to Weitzer and Kubrin, whose 2009 analysis found that 67% of the examined rap lyrics sexually objectified women. Some people think that the reason rappers write misogynistic lyrics is to prove their masculinity to others, thinking of themselves as the "alpha male" who's above all others. Could overly sexual and violent lyrics really be caused by toxic masculinity? Yes. But certainly not all of them. However, the study examined only a sample of rap songs, so its findings may not apply to the entire genre.

Another recurring subject in rap lyrics is substance use, which can be portrayed in a variety of ways. A 2021 study that sampled the top 25 rap songs each year from 2006 to 2018 found that 72% of the songs referenced at least one substance, and 50% referenced illicit drugs. It's important to recognise that mentioning a substance isn't the same as glorifying it or encouraging others to use it, yet some songs portray substance use as desirable rather than harmful. Sometimes references to drugs or alcohol can be part of sharing personal experiences and pouring one's past onto paper.

From person to person, ear to ear, our interpretation of a song and its lyrics can differ drastically depending on our understanding, mood, or personality. Especially when a song uses a lot of metaphors and poetic language, our interpretations can vary, and I think that's what's beautiful about art.

What I love about rap music is the experimental use of different flows and tones as well as unconventional instruments or sounds. Lyrics can also be impactful for me. I value honesty, human emotions and experiences, and the artist's thoughts expressed through lyrics or instrumentals. Even if the lyrics are sad and heavy, I still prefer those over upbeat tracks that involve screaming in my ears about nothing. I admire all forms of self-expression in rap, but there's something especially beautiful about artists who speak their truth because sometimes the truest words are the ones on a sick beat.

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Glossary

entitled – having the right to do or have something
explicit – containing direct, offensive, or adult content
illicit – illegal or forbidden
misogyny – hatred of, or prejudice against, women
recurring – happening repeatedly
sick beat – a strong, catchy, or impressive rhythm in music
upbeat – lively and energetic

INTERVIEW WITH EXPERTS

BY JAN WOLICKI

Agata Piotrowska-Mastalerz, PhD—Polish theatre and film actress and academic lecturer specialising in speech technique and voice production. She has taught at the University of Warsaw, the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, and the Warsaw Film School.

Andrzej Mastalerz—Polish theatre, film, television, radio and dubbing actor, and director.



AGATA PIOTROWSKA-MASTALERZ, PHD



ANDRZEJ MASTALERZ

Jan Wolicki: You work in several different art forms, each of which requires you to create a particular kind of world. You create a world differently with your voice than you do on stage. What's the difference between these two ways of creating it?

Agata Piotrowska-Mastalerz: I think actors who work in radio tend to have an exceptional imagination, because you have to conjure up an image through words. Isn't that right?

Andrzej Mastalerz: Exactly.

APM: As the listener hears a story, images begin to form in their imagination. And the actor has only their voice at their disposal. That voice has to be filled with imagination. An actor needs a strong desire to reach the listener, as though telling someone very close to them something important. It's a kind of transfer of energy and imagination into the voice.

AM: Ours is a profession that, like any other, requires a specific set of skills. There are quite a few elements that need to be brought together. If we're focusing on the voice, we need imagination and speaking technique. Without that technique, we won't achieve an effect that satisfies either the listener or us. On top of that, we need a good command of spoken language, supported by technique. Without it, our expression is inevitably poorer.

Radio drama, for example, as well as the interpretation of poetry and prose, relies on two fundamental elements that are also essential in other art forms and in our profession. Because, first and foremost, this is a profession. One is an artist on occasion; a talented person can be an artist. Such a person can create art. A capable person carries out tasks. In exceptional circumstances, they can also become a creator. But that's beside the point.

JW: So you see it as a craft. But that raises another question. When it comes to getting into and out of a role, is it an automatic process? Is it simply a task? What about voice acting? Do you get into character, or do you just read the text?

APM: Is it automatic? I think that depends very much on the individual. But it's not automatic. Building a role is a process that takes time. You gather information about the character you're going to portray and search within yourself for emotions that will bring that character to life.

So, in a sense, the actor is an instrument. Our mind is an instrument, and our vocal apparatus is an instrument that we play, creating a role. But you can't simply put that instrument back in its case, go for a coffee, or go to sleep. You can't just switch it off automatically. You carry it inside you.

AM: Yes. Then, when we're talking about theatre, there's a stage that we call the performance phase, when the role is performed over and over again. That's when technique becomes important, because it allows you to go home, eat dinner and go for a walk without carrying the entire performance with you.

Let me explain with an example. Once, a friend of mine who worked as a camera operator asked me how many plays I was performing in at the time. I said four, and he was taken aback. There were times in our careers when we performed in as many as ten different productions in a single season.

I wasn't sure how to explain the process to him in the clearest possible way, so I tried this analogy: "You know, working on a role in a theatre production is a bit like taking a vinyl record and cutting grooves into it. Then, when it's time for the performance, you put one of those records on the turntable and play it. When the performance ends, you take it off, because you can't play two records on the same turntable at once. It's physically impossible." That doesn't mean, of course, that you can't perform in several productions in one day. You can be at the theatre, then work in

radio, and then go to a film set. But these are different environments, each requiring different skills and a different kind of concentration.

On stage, for example, you have to maintain your concentration throughout a two-hour performance. On a film set, you may need that same level of concentration for just a minute, for a single shot. If something goes wrong, you can stop and repeat the take. But in theatre, you can't do that; you have to keep going. In radio, too, if you make a mistake, you start again from the point where it happened. But the foundations are the same: the emotions are the same; only the means of expressing them are different.

And as for the process Agata mentioned, building a role can take several months. We think about how to create the character, how that person thinks. Here's where an interesting perspective comes in. People often ask us how we're able to memorise so much text. But memorising the lines is actually the simplest part of the process. The most fundamental part of building a role is creating the emotional fabric of the character we're working on.

I'm not talking about television series, where scripts are usually written primarily to convey information to the viewer. Life is the exact opposite. In real life, we communicate through fragments of what's inside us, of what lies within. We don't say everything we think, from beginning to end. We try to convey our thoughts and emotions in various ways, often using words that don't necessarily correspond to what we really mean.

We express our feelings in many different ways. Saying "I love you" isn't the only way to express love. A slap in the face can also express such feelings. It, too, can mean the same thing.

So, to return to the main point, creating this emotional map is what matters most. Words are simply a consequence of what's happening inside us. A word comes last, and it doesn't necessarily mean what it appears to mean on the surface.

APM: I believe that there's also a lot in common with psychotherapy from the perspectives of both the therapist and the patient. What matters most isn't always what is said. We often read between the lines. It's also about the psychodynamics of human behaviour and relationships.

Some actors say they approach their profession therapeutically because it allows them to express emotions without consequences that, in everyday life, they might find difficult to express or might not have the courage to show.

Many wonderful actors, including Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, emphasised that in everyday life they were very shy and struggled to form close relationships and to open up to others. Yet on stage, he could overwhelm an audience with his presence. So there's a therapeutic element to acting, too: the freedom to express things that might otherwise remain unspoken.

On the other hand, the audience can read between the lines and perceive the character as a whole. I think this is where we also see the difference between radio and theatre. On stage, you can tell a story through your body and your reactions.

AM: Because, unfortunately, silence in radio is...

APM: A hole?

AM: Sometimes it is a hole. That's why you can't overuse silence as a means of artistic expression. In theatre, on the other hand, there can be entire performances without words, such as mime productions. We've also performed in productions without words, and they were deeply emotional.

But returning to the question of getting into and out of character: as I said earlier, this is a specific profession, and you need certain natural aptitudes to work in it. Good physical fitness is essential, but you also have to be mentally resilient.

We're constantly being judged: after every performance, after every day on a film set. The evaluation never stops.

And yet this is a profession in which it's difficult to measure or assess objectively what happens on stage. That's also part of its beauty. We can constantly take on new challenges, and from my perspective, that's the only way this profession has meaning.

It's about constantly stepping outside your comfort zone, continually setting yourself new tasks and facing new challenges. That's the only way to create something new. If we stop doing that, we start living off past glories. We rely on things we already know will work. We remain in our comfort zone. But that isn't creative, and it can't lead to genuine creation.

So let's return to the question of natural aptitudes. You have to be mentally resilient and understand that you're going to experience failure far more often than you're going to win accolades. The real art lies in knowing how to get back up.

Every critical voice can make us think in terms of a failed attempt, a defeat or, in the worst case, a downfall. You have to be able to pick yourself up and try again.

Theatre makes this a little easier, because there's always another performance the following evening. We may have had a bad day; after all, we're only human. But tomorrow, we can try to do better and correct our mistakes.

The camera, however, is more unforgiving. What's been recorded can't be changed. It remains there for years, and we have to learn to live with that awareness. And then, best of all, we have to watch it.

APM: The qualities you mentioned are also very important when it comes to getting into and out of character. Sometimes the emotions become so intense, so overwhelming, that it is difficult to switch them off in the snap of a finger. That is where technique comes in.

AM: We learn this at acting school and then continue to develop these skills throughout our professional lives. We learn how to enter a particular emotional state and then how to leave it safely, knowing that we may have to repeat the process perhaps a hundred times, as happens with many stage productions. We need to

be able to do this without harming our mental or physical health.

For example, you can achieve a great deal simply through your breathing. You do not necessarily have to enter a particular emotional state; you can create the same effect through your breath alone. The audience then has the impression that we have genuinely and naturally reached that emotional state.

Personally, I am not a fan of naturalism. The audience needs a certain safety buffer, something that allows them to feel comfortable with what they are watching. They need to feel that the world presented to them is not a world that intrudes upon them or overwhelms them. It is a world they choose to let in, rather than one that takes over their lives.

Naturalism is a primitive means of expression. Take Raskolnikov, for example: we do not run around the neighbourhood with an axe. Instead, we imagine what motivated him and what was going on in his mind. Or we play Hamlet, and afterwards we have to go home and carry on with our lives.

APM: Albert Chmielowski said that art is imagination enclosed within a form. A dancer has movement, a sculptor has sculpture, a painter has a painting, and we, too, create a form for our characters.

AM: Art—that is, something artificial.

JW: So an actor needs a highly developed capacity for self-regulation. They need to be able to influence their own emotional state physically and control that emotional fabric each time they perform a role?

AM: Yes.

JW: This raises another question. If an actor has to create this emotional fabric and possess these skills, must they have a very clear understanding of who they are, so that their roles do not become an integral part of their identity? Or do those roles become part of them anyway?

APM: With every new role and every acting challenge, we learn more about ourselves. We discover things we never expected, things we did not know about ourselves. When we decide to become actors—a decision that is often made unconsciously—it is important to remember where we come from, what our roots are, and what has shaped us. We cannot escape these things, because we build on the foundations of who we are.

It is not about putting on yet another mask. It is about allowing those masks to fall away.

JW: So, in a way, it is about bringing together something that is already within us?

APM: Yes, but expressing it through different acting challenges.

AM: Our own emotions are the foundation on which we build the emotional lives of the people we portray. If we do not understand our own inner mechanisms, we cannot work in this profession.

JW: So this is a profession that requires self-awareness, openness and psychological resilience. I am reminded of a phrase you used in one of your interviews: "total deconstruction." Is this the difficult process an actor has to go through in order to become an actor?

APM: The word deconstruction has rather negative connotations. What matters is getting to know ourselves and understanding as much as possible about who we are.

AM: Those are two different things. I was talking about the creative process, in which deconstruction is ongoing.

APM: So you reset yourself and build yourself up again.

AM: Yes. Above all, it is about finding what is authentic within yourself. It means discovering emotions you never suspected you were capable of feeling, and recognising the need to create something new. It is a process of continual deconstruction.

APM: Several actors can play the same role, yet one captivates us while another does not. This raises questions about talent and the inner complexity that draws an audience in. It is also about that elusive quality we mentioned earlier—something that cannot easily be defined or anticipated.

We build on ourselves. We cannot separate what we create from our personality, from what we inherit from our parents, from our environment and upbringing, or from the skills we acquire as we grow up. What we create must be grounded in authentic emotions and sincerity, supported by technique. That is what enables us to engage an audience.

JW: So acting, the creation of a role, is inseparably linked to self-knowledge and sincerity. In that sense, it seems to have an almost therapeutic dimension. Today, I feel that this process of creating an emotional fabric extends into everyday life. Sometimes we struggle to step into the roles we play in daily life that of a passer-by, a student, for example. We find it difficult to separate who we are from the roles we play and to free ourselves from the feeling of being judged by others.

APM: As I said, theatre does have a therapeutic role in this respect. It is very much needed, for example, in education. To give you an example, we used to work with a group from a seminary, creating performances for an audience. The participants gradually opened up to one another. They became less self-conscious, grew more comfortable speaking loudly and talking about themselves, and began to build relationships. It is truly empowering. It helps people let go of stress and become more open to others.

In one of the places where I work, I observe something similar. When I arrive for classes in September, the participants seem to have a bucket of plaster on their heads. Then, as the months go by, little by little, pieces of that plaster fall away, and the people underneath begin to emerge.

JW: It would seem, then, that each of us could benefit from a little acting.

AM: Sometimes, when I am having a really bad day and someone

asks me whether I am an actor, I reply, "Like everyone else."

APM: People have needed theatre since antiquity—the theatricalisation of life, which we can observe everywhere: in nativity plays, at carnivals, and in many other forms.

AM: As you said, we all occupy certain roles in life. I would say that we act more often than we are our true selves.

JW: In that case, it is good to act sincerely!

AM: Exactly.

JW: Thank you both very much!

Glossary

accolade – an award or praise given for an achievement
aptitude – a natural ability or skill
art form – a way of expressing ideas, feelings or creativity through artistic activities, such as painting, drawing, dancing, music, sculpture, or writing
captivate – to attract and hold someone's attention or interest completely
conjure up – to create a picture in the listener's mind through words; make something appear as if by magic
elusive – difficult to find, catch, understand, or achieve
empowering – making someone feel more confident and in control
enclosed – surrounded or covered by something; inside a closed space
grounded – to be based firmly on something
inevitably – in a way that is certain to happen
in the snap of a finger – very quickly, almost instantly
intrude upon – to enter a place or get involved in a situation where one is not wanted or welcome
live off – to depend on or continue to benefit from something, often something achieved or obtained in the past
mime – the use of movements and gestures to express something or tell a story without using speech
nativity play – a play that tells the story of Jesus Christ's birth, performed by children at Christmas
naturalism – a style of art or theatre that shows life as it really is, without idealising it
plaster – a building material made from lime, water, and sand that is spread over walls and ceilings to create a smooth, hard surface
psychodynamics – the study of how unconscious thoughts, feelings and past experiences influence one's behaviour and emotions
resilient – able to recover quickly from difficulties or problems
safety buffer – a protective gap or reserve that prevents problems
theatricalisation – turning parts of life into performances, for example nativity plays, where people act out roles
turntable – a device used to play vinyl records
vocal apparatus – the parts of the body used to produce speech and sounds, such as the vocal cords, tongue, and lips





By Paweł Althamer - Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki / Zachęta National Gallery of Art,
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The Zachęta Phenomenon

BY JAN WOLICKI

I don't know about you, but every time I visit Zachęta—National Gallery of Art, I'm stunned. This time was no different. As you may well know, one can enter the gallery for free on Thursdays. So, as a student, it seems reasonable to take advantage of the opportunity. I have done so a few times.

I don't quite remember my first visit; only two images come to mind when I try to remember what I saw: the statue of Poseidon in an unconventional outfit (a few pieces of clothing thrown at him) and a tyre. But it's not your everyday car tyre. This one had wings. So, I suppose, a tyre belonging to Hermes? I remember the second one because it had "Dębica" written on it, and it's my hometown, so I had the illusion that I knew what was going on. The Poseidon statue, dressed as it was (if you can call it that), made me quite angry, which is probably why the image stuck in my mind.

The second visit was a bit more ... interesting. Yeah, let's leave it at that. Imagine this. You walk into a dark room with a small TV in the middle of it. In front of you, there are three rows of simple white seats. You sit down, and the film begins. The characters speak in a foreign language; you might think it's Arabic or something, but there are no people in the film. Instead, there are terrifying puppets made of glass.

You watch the drama unfold before you: people (I mean, puppets) fighting one another. And you have an uneasy feeling, as if something were wrong. Their big glass eyes look at you with no life in them, but they seem angry nevertheless, and when you watch the film, you understand virtually nothing (well, perhaps the historical context—the Crusades). All of it seems at least oneiric.

Every time you leave, the world outside (reality) seems impossible and irrationally beautiful (that's how it felt after watching that film). I thought that nothing could beat that. What else can you produce that could be more absurd and further removed from reality?

There were audio recordings of people having sex. Well, why not? There were also some big plastic figures with red lights, which I suppose were meant to convey a woman's pain. But then they brought out the big guns.

The last time I was there, there was an exhibition called "Following the White Tiger". The poster seemed like it was going to be about nature or something like that. "Well, let's see what they have come up with this time," I thought.

Most of the exhibition consisted of images of places like a trampoline park or a wall, where the artist took like a million photos and then, on an analogue camera, presented them as films. Fascinating.

But then I looked across the room, where there were films showing a guy making ice cream, another putting butter on his bread, and that was about it. But in the corner, there was a small video on the wall. At first, I thought it was a photo, but it was actually a slow-motion video. I came closer to get a good look because I was sure I wasn't seeing what I thought I was seeing.

Well, to describe the experience from a viewer's perspective: you walk into the gallery and see a man. He is well-dressed, and his face looks as if he were analysing at least Kant's conception of the categorical imperative. You look in the direction he is looking. You see an image. Wait. It's a film. On the wall, it looks so small that you get closer. When you get closer, you see a guy going to a TOI-TOI portable toilet. Very slowly. After at least a minute, he opens the door. Very slowly. Then the door closes. Very slowly. And then the whole thing happens again and again.

What an experience!

I have to say, I don't understand it at all. But if art is supposed to make you feel something, then the Zachęta Gallery will never disappoint. Every time I go there, I'm relieved that the world is the way it is.

Glossary

categorical imperative – a moral rule that, according to Immanuel Kant, everyone must always follow regardless of what they want
convey – to express a thought, idea, or feeling so that other people understand it
oneiric – like a dream, relating to dreams
unfold – to develop gradually

REVIEWS

BY JAN WOLICKI

Life with Picasso

Some of us, if not most, tend to glorify artists. We often think of them as people who have experienced something we never will and never could. And the "halo effect" kicks in. We no longer see artists as people, as human as the rest of us. And to our surprise, they still are. This side of the truth tends to hide behind the curtain, but we have always somehow sensed the impossibility of someone being nothing but talented, charismatic, and magnetic. Something has to be up.

And Françoise Gilot was there to see it. In *Surviving Picasso*, co-written with Carlton Lake, she shares her experience of meeting Picasso in person and developing a rather intimate relationship with him. After ten years of this relationship, one could say that she became something of an expert on Picasso's life. In that role, she shows us the darker, or perhaps more human, side of an artist's life: the difficulties, the emotional roller coaster, the aggression, the toxicity, the lack of empathy. All of this coexisted with his talent, charisma, and the personality of a genius, making him human.

She gives us insight into the private life of a historical figure, one of the greatest artists of all time. When you read this book, you feel as if you were there as a third party, like a friend of Françoise's, someone privileged enough to hear secrets about him that one isn't supposed to know. It's a book that somehow makes his life feel even more real, more immediate. As you read it, you sometimes get the feeling that you're not supposed to be there. And that's a good thing; that is exactly why you should read it.

The great are often hidden behind curtains woven from golden threads of history. But one should look behind them; there lies the meat! So enjoy; it may be short, but it's lots of fun.

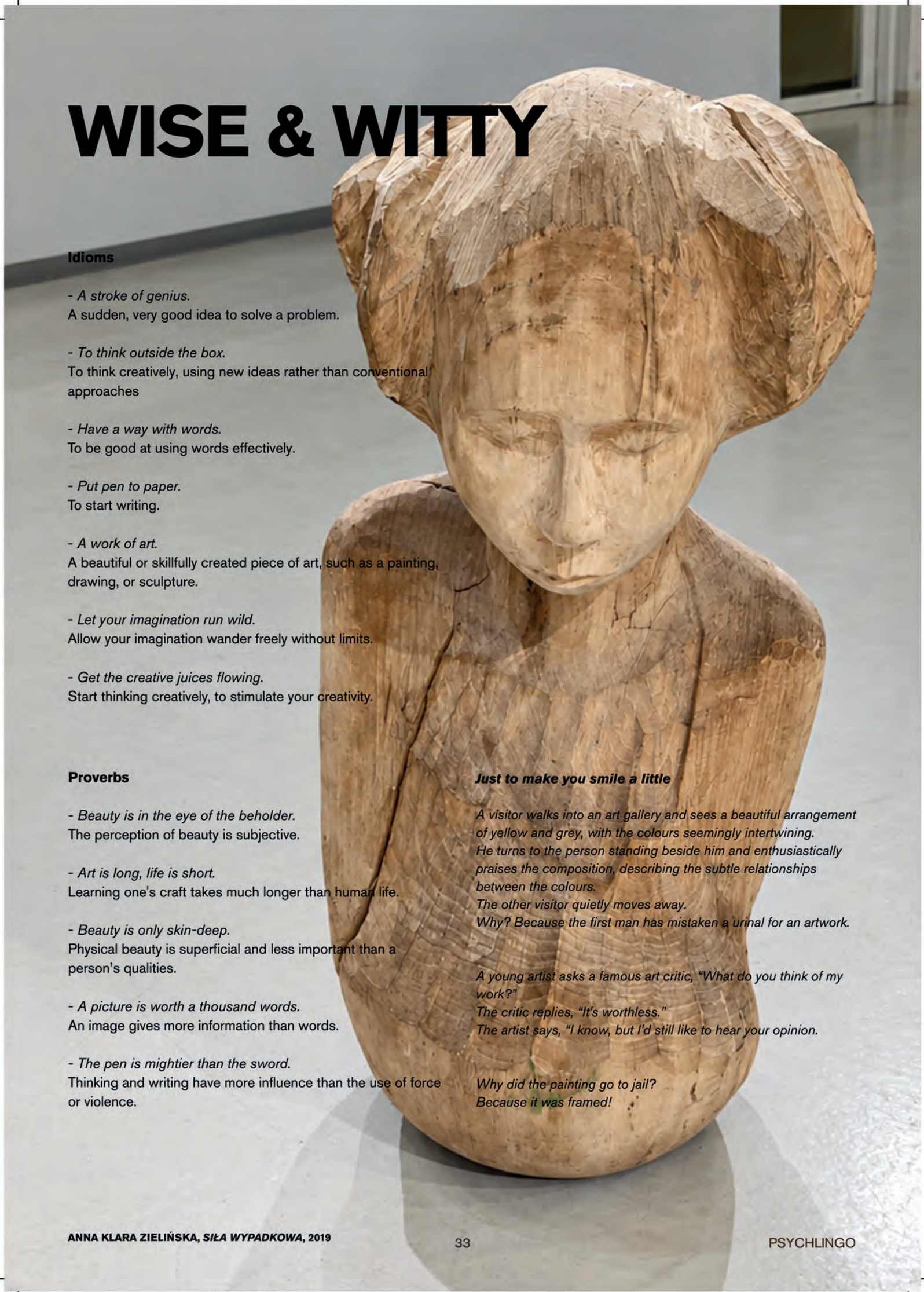
Frida

Pain. One could say that this is the main theme of the movie. Certainly, it is a big part of the protagonist's life. And who, you might ask, is the protagonist? Well, as the title says, her name is Frida, and those of you who are at least a bit into art may have an idea. Frida Kahlo. A Mexican artist whose life can easily be made into a dozen movies. Julie Taymor made unfortunately only one in 2002. But I think she did a phenomenal job. I watched it not knowing who Frida Kahlo was, and I'm thankful for that. At the beginning of the movie, I was introduced to a charismatic, energetic, and magnetic personality, brought to life by Salma Hayek. An aspiring artist. A bit witty and temperamental. You have to like her. And you empathise with her. I, for example, wanted to have her courage and strength.

But then you witness something that, because of the fullness she presents, hurts even more. And I think that's when the real movie begins: the struggle to endure pain while holding on to one's identity and will to live. There is such a lively feeling to the background. There is love all around, but it is never simple; it is complicated and dilemmatic at its core.

Politics, as it was an interesting time in history (Stalinism and so on). We all live in a world of political change and uncertainty in our relationships, and we all experience pain. I think this is what makes this film so immersive and emotional. So yeah. I strongly recommend it.

WISE & WITTY



Idioms

- *A stroke of genius.*
A sudden, very good idea to solve a problem.

- *To think outside the box.*
To think creatively, using new ideas rather than conventional approaches

- *Have a way with words.*
To be good at using words effectively.

- *Put pen to paper.*
To start writing.

- *A work of art.*
A beautiful or skillfully created piece of art, such as a painting, drawing, or sculpture.

- *Let your imagination run wild.*
Allow your imagination wander freely without limits.

- *Get the creative juices flowing.*
Start thinking creatively, to stimulate your creativity.

Proverbs

- *Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*
The perception of beauty is subjective.

- *Art is long, life is short.*
Learning one's craft takes much longer than human life.

- *Beauty is only skin-deep.*
Physical beauty is superficial and less important than a person's qualities.

- *A picture is worth a thousand words.*
An image gives more information than words.

- *The pen is mightier than the sword.*
Thinking and writing have more influence than the use of force or violence.

Just to make you smile a little

A visitor walks into an art gallery and sees a beautiful arrangement of yellow and grey, with the colours seemingly intertwining. He turns to the person standing beside him and enthusiastically praises the composition, describing the subtle relationships between the colours.
The other visitor quietly moves away.
Why? Because the first man has mistaken a urinal for an artwork.

A young artist asks a famous art critic, "What do you think of my work?"
The critic replies, "It's worthless."
The artist says, "I know, but I'd still like to hear your opinion.

Why did the painting go to jail?
Because it was framed!

ANNA KLARA ZIELIŃSKA, *SIŁA WYPADKOWA*, 2019

EXERCISES

Exercise 1.
Complete each sentence with the correct idiom or proverb.

1.
A: "I've got a great idea for a story, but I don't know how to start."
B: "Just _____ and words will flow onto the paper shortly."

2.
A: "What is this sculpture made from?"
B: "An old bottle, a can, and some pieces of metal."
A: "It looks amazing! I'd never have thought scrap could become art."
B: "That's the beauty of imagination. _____."

3.
A: "This picture doesn't stop to amaze me."
B: "Well, _____."
A: "You're right. Everyone has a different taste."

4.
A: "Wow! Who made this beautiful sculpture?"
Bl: "My brother. It's for the exhibition in Łódź."
A: "It's truly _____."
B: "Thanks. I'll tell him you said that."

5.
A: "Why are you writing an article about abstract art?"
B: "I want to show people that there's more to paintings than just nice views or pretty colours."
A: "Do you really think an article can make a difference?"
B: "Of course! _____."

6.
A: "Can we come up with an original idea for our collage?"
B: "Sure, why won't we create one using leftover fabric?"
A: "That's interesting. _____. But where can we get leftover fabric?"
B: "From the seamstress. I'm sure she has some."

Exercise 2.
Choose the correct option to complete each sentence.

1. Art therapy can help with emotional regulation by enabling people to express feelings that have been _____ for years. *repressed / rewired / cultivated*

2. Although Banksy's murals look so simple, their meaning is rather _____ and not easy to understand. *elusive / upbeat / empowering*

3. The painter deliberately used muted colours to create a _____ impression for the visitors. *attention-grabbing* / soothing / *morbid*

4. She managed to _____ the audience's attention through the fusion of sounds, colours and images in her artworks. *sustain / downplay / enchant*

5. Creating collages allows artists to _____ various materials into a single composition. *incorporate / overlap / intertwine*

6. The director used a mask to create aesthetic distance to allow the actors to explore their emotions without feeling personally _____. *exposed / resilient /*

7. Although it was just a university gallery, we were amazed by one particular sculpture, which created a mysterious, _____ atmosphere. oneiric / *attention-grabbing / empowering*

8. I was _____ right from the start by the singer's emotive voice. *conjured up / captivated / endorsed*

9. Listening to blues has a _____ effect on me. Whenever I have a difficult day, it helps me relieve stress. *empowering / soothing / morbid*

10. As the story _____, the reader started to understand the difficult past of the main character. *intertwined / unfolded / overlapped*

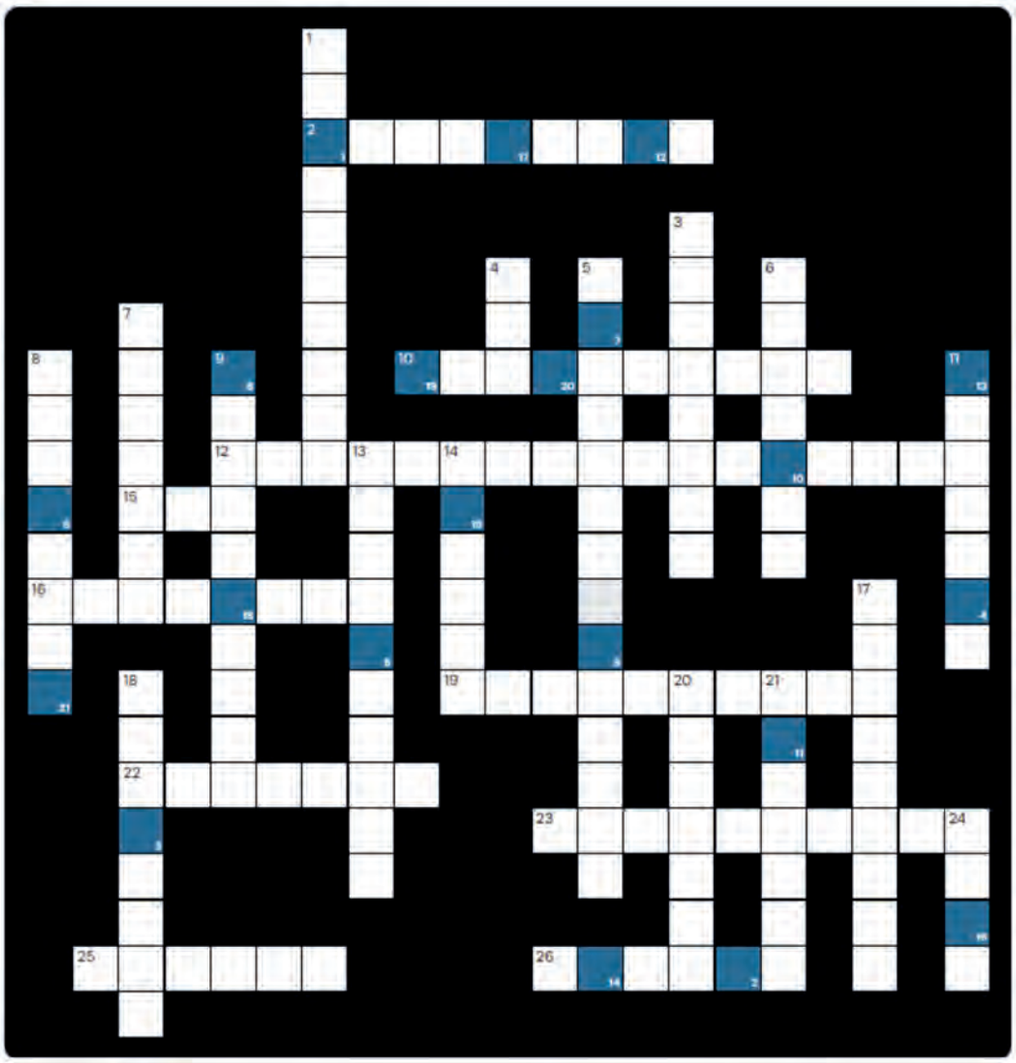
11. Be careful when choosing books for your son. This one contains many _____ scenes involving blood and violence, so it is not suitable for younger readers. *oneiric / gory / muted*



Exercise 1
1. put pen to paper; 2. One man's trash is another man's treasure; 3. beauty is in the eye of the beholder; 4. a work of art; 5. The pen is mightier than the sword; 6. Outside the box.

Exercise 2
1. repressed, 2. elusive, 3. soothing, 4. sustain, 5. incorporate, 6. exposed, 7. anthropomorphic, 8. conveys, 9. captivated, 10. soothing, 11. unfolded, 12. gory

Crossword Puzzle



HIDDEN SOLUTION



DOWN

1. to make something easier
3. a way of avoiding reality by imagining exciting but impossible activities
4. the name or type of a colour, such as red, blue or green
5. one of the three colours, red, yellow and blue, that can be mixed together in different ways to make other colours
6. a piece of art made by putting different pictures, photos, or materials together
7. to attract someone or make them feel delighted
8. an award or praise given for an achievement
9. to connect or mix two or more things closely together
11. the way you think about things and approach situations
13. a claim that someone has done something wrong, which has not yet been proven
14. to start doing something again after a pause or interruption
17. so deeply fixed that it is difficult to change or remove
18. making you feel calm
20. difficult to find, catch, understand, or achieve
21. illegal or forbidden
24. involving blood or violence

ACROSS

2. releasing strong emotions primarily through art
10. in a way that is certain to happen
12. turning parts of life into performances, for example nativity plays, where people act out roles
15. a feeling of wonder and amazement
16. a natural ability or skill
19. making someone feel more confident and in control
22. like a dream, relating to dreams
23. the practice of wearing or performing in a fursuit
25. to develop gradually
26. lively and energetic

SOLUTION: categorical imperative

PODCAST



Banksy's back with surprise daily street art of animals across London

You will listen to a recording about Banksy and his recent street artworks.

Exercise 1.
Decide whether the following statements are *True* or *False* based on the information in the recording.

1. Banksy's real identity is no longer a mystery.
2. Banksy's recent artworks have appeared only in central London.
3. A black goat was painted on an old industrial building in Southwest London.
4. Two elephants appeared on the walls of a newly built house.
5. The wolf painted on a satellite dish was removed by the local authorities.
6. Banksy transformed a glass police box into a fish tank.
7. All of the recent artworks were created on buildings.
8. According to Andrew Renton, Banksy's recent animal artworks are mainly political.
9. Acoris Andipa thinks Banksy's work can seem humorous at first but often has a deeper meaning.
10. Banksy has created artworks addressing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Exercise 2.
Fill in the gaps using the words below. One word is redundant.

catapult, *whimsical*, *trappings*, *high-end*, *high-flying*, *resonance*, *stance*, *stencilled*

1. The unexpected success of her debut novel _____ her into the limelight.
2. Despite his enormous success, the artist has never cared about the _____ of fame, such as luxury cars and expensive houses.
3. She works for a _____ art gallery that sells sculptures by internationally acclaimed artists.
4. The painter's artwork has a strong _____ with young audienced because it addresses issues that are close to their hearts.
5. He _____ a series of birds on the walls of renovated buildings.
6. The artist's latest exhibition reflects his critical _____ on anti-establishment movements.
7. The exhibition celebrates the work of some of the currently _____ artists.

Self-Reflection
Think carefully about the questions below. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Does art move you? If so, what is your favourite art form?
2. Do you think art should challenge the way we see the world?
3. Which appeals to you more, if either: a classical painting or sculpture, or an abstract artwork?



Key

Exercise 1
Key: 1. F; 2. F; 3. T; 4. F; 5. F; 6. T; 7. F; 8. F; 9. T; 10. T

Exercise 2
1. catapulted; 2. trappings; 3. high-end; 4. resonance; 5. stencilled; 6. stance; 7. high-flying

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

THE CASE FOR MAKING ART WHEN THE WORLD IS ON FIRE | AMIE MCNEE | TED



Did you know that ...

the word "catharsis", as we read in dictionaries and scholarly studies, is a word derived from Ancient Greek meaning "purification, healing"—an inner process of releasing accumulated emotions, relieving tension, overcoming conflicts and achieving spiritual growth? This process takes place through the expression of one's own experiences, including through art, or through deeply empathising with the emotions that arise from engaging with a work of art.

The concept of catharsis has played, and continues to play, an important role in various psychological theories. It is enough to mention, for example, Sigmund Freud.

Of course, one cannot overlook one of the particularly fascinating theories in the psychology of art. In his now-classic monograph, Lev Vygotsky argued that the fundamental aesthetic response consists of an affective reaction evoked by art—a reaction we experience as though it were real, but which finds its outlet in the activity of the imagination stimulated by the work of art.

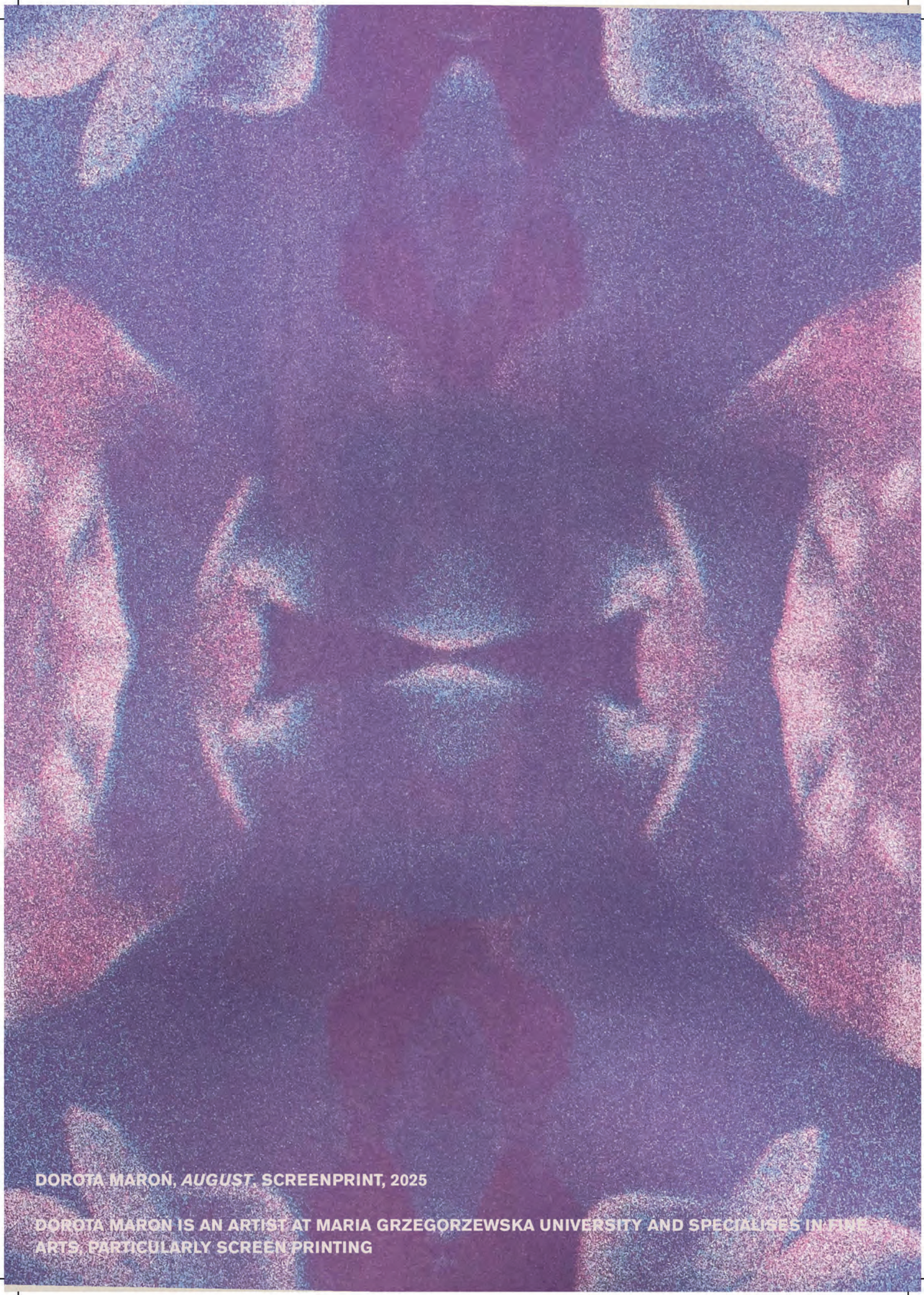
This primary outlet delays and inhibits the external, motor expression of the affect, as a result of which it seems to us that we experience only illusory feelings.

Art is based on the connection between feeling and imagination. Another distinctive feature of art is that, although it evokes opposing affects within us, it delays the motor expression of emotion (owing to the principle of antithesis). Through the collision of opposing impulses, it neutralises the affect associated with the content and form of the work and initiates a violent release of nervous energy.

The catharsis of the aesthetic response consists in the transformation of affects—in an explosive reaction that culminates in the release of emotion.

(See Lev Vygotsky, *The Psychology of Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974, particularly the chapter 'Art as a Catharsis'.)

BT



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