

ART OF HEALING AND ART OF PAINTING

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Introduction

The 20th century is called an age of contradictions. It was accompanied by psychoanalysis, working on the borderline between conscious and unconscious. In the 20th century the art of painting focused on the contradiction between visible and hidden meanings, too. This poster shows a selection of paintings and portraits created by Austrian artists, some of them physicians themselves. It demonstrates, that art is pursuing the same issue as psychoanalysis.

Why should the "image" of physicians in the painting of the 20th Century be studied? Did their reputation, self-esteem and appearance change in public view in those 100 years? And if so, how and why? Which kind of representation and self-representation were chosen earlier and which today? Are the paintings on which members of the medical profession are represented, whether as portraits, whether in the exercise of their profession, representative for the medical profession of modern age?

Are the ambiguous demands on physicians reflected in the artistic representations?

A quite important question concerns the motivation. Why do physicians paint? One part of the "medical" art, which I will present in this work, was done by physicians, that means by "insiders". From a psychological point of view I think it's justified and interesting, because we find the special – sometimes unconscious - requirements for the doctor in his painting.

Maybe the "artistic work" and creativity while painting has a salutary effect on the "doctor's soul". The great tension, which must be incorporated in the medical profession, can be projected into art and has a feedback effect on the doctor - painter. Is the confrontation with illness and death on the road of resuscitation the antithesis of creativity and vitality?

Ten paintings: Art and Psychology

I have selected ten works of art that I would like to present under artistic and psychological aspects.

- "Medicine" by Gustav Klimt
- "The Physician and Physicist Dr. Hugo Koller" by Egon Schiele
- "The Friends" by Oskar Kokoschka
- "Sigmund Freud" by Karl Iro Goldblat
- "Alfred Adler" by Valentine Adler
- "Theodor Billroth" by Werner Horvath
- "Josef Mengele" by Werner Horvath

There are also three pictures from me: "Dyad", "Triad", "The Myth of Sisyphus"

"Medicine"



"Medicine" is one of the famous faculty-paintings with which Gustav Klimt was commissioned in an ambivalent manner by the authorities of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. It should "decorate" monumental staircases in the venerable building of the University of Vienna. They actually knew in advance that there would arise problems with Klimt, who has been considered as an "enfant terrible" for a long time. The picture is allegorically representing "medicine". It provoked a harsh negative reaction in the Viennese public. For Klimt did not sublimate reality but showed disease, physical decay and poverty in all its ugliness. On the other hand it had an immense erotic aura, and Klimt's social and cultural pessimism was subtly noticeable. As if physical decay, eroticism and social critique

had nothing to do with medicine (and painting)?

The Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel discussed in his 2012 book "The Age of Insight " these questions:

Klimt was charged with portraying „the victory of light over darkness“. He exhibited MEDICINE in 1901. It is a highly metaphorical painting and found to be unsatisfactory by a number of faculty members. The mural was alternately criticized for being too erotic, too symbolic, and too difficult to understand. Moreover, the bodies Klimt painted were considered ugly.....

The murals were provocative not only in their content, but also in their composition. Artists since the Renaissance had created paintings that simulate a realistic, three-dimensional space, with the painting acting as a window through which the viewer can enter into the scene. Klimt took a different approach. In MEDICINE, the figures are rendered in three dimensions, but their placement relative to one another is not three-dimensional. The figures are stacked one on top of another in a vacuous, horizonless space; as a result, the mural is more a visual stream of thought than a coherent, three-dimensional image. Rather than being a scene that the viewer can step into, the picture feels more like a dream; in fact, it resembles Freud's description of the unconscious in dreams as „disconnected fragments of visual images“. Thus, instead of presenting a realistic depiction of the external world, Klimt captures the fragmentary nature of the unconscious psyche in a way not previously depicted by other artists.

The most important figure in the picture is Hygieia, the daughter of the god of healing, Asklepios. There is a second female figure, a pregnant woman, hidden, not gorgeous, not bright. Klimt's composition presents one of the basic claims of art, the hidden behind the visible, and above all, the demonstration of "breaks" of the past and the future. This discontinuity will be visible in all these pictures as a state of stress in the painting itself or in the conscious and unconscious experience of the viewer. The fault line in Klimt's painting is between the magnificence of the daughter of a God and the misery of the woman and her destiny in the offside.

"The hidden behind the visible" is the subject of psychological analysis of art in general. The psychotherapist is driven by a theory while the artist works intuitively. Another reason to compare the two professions: They express unconscious intrapsychic states in the "outside", the therapist with his language and the artist with his work. The challenge for the artist is the question whether to be " alone " with his inner world or to "stand or fall" in the variety of possible relationships and conflicts. The first constellation corresponds with a dyadic, the second one with of a triadic structure of relationship.

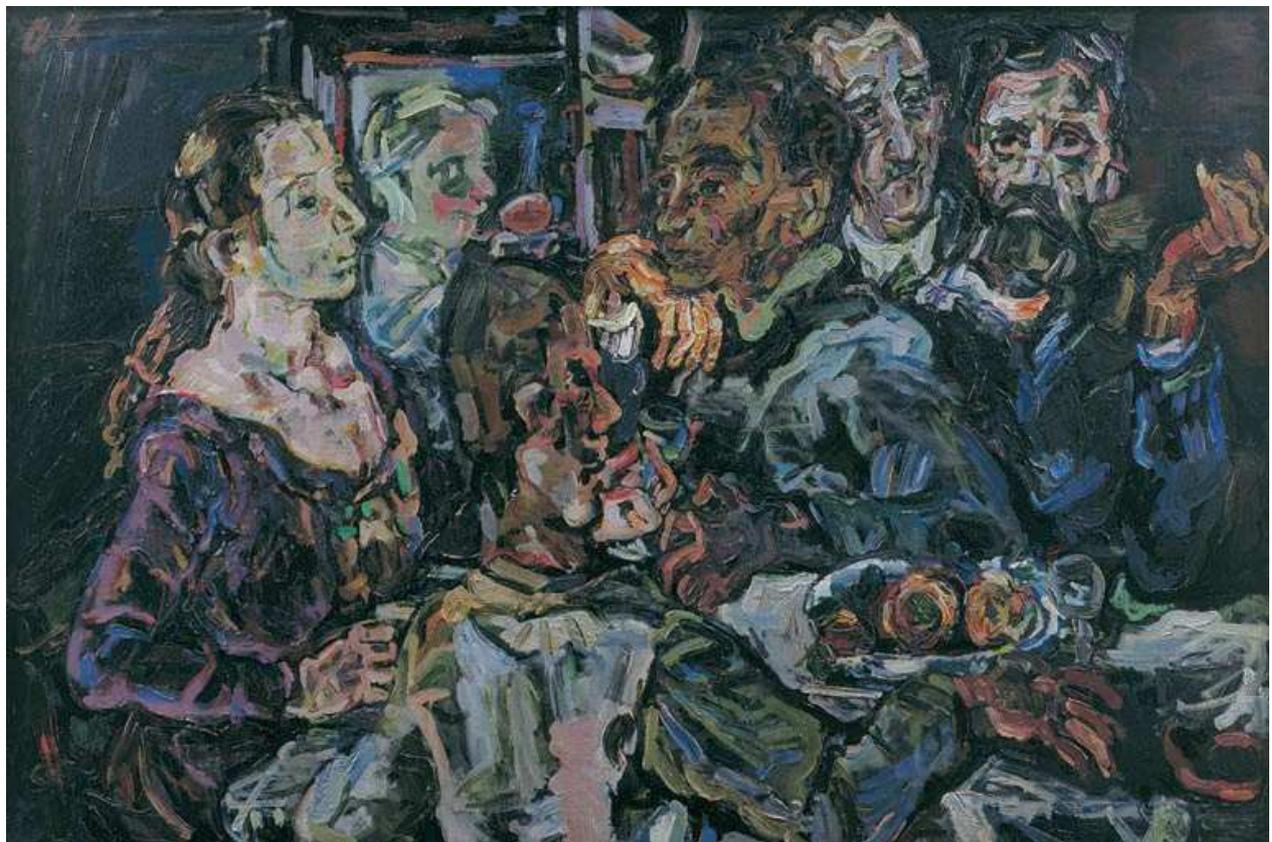
"The Physician and Physicist Dr. Hugo Koller"



Egon Schiele is the painter of the next picture. The title is "The Physician and Physicist Dr. Hugo Koller". The perspective of the portrayed is quite unusual for Schiele. Because of the view from top to bottom the skull and forehead of the seated physician are in the center. Thus Schiele emphasizes the intellect, also illustrated by the open book on the knees and all of the many books piled all around. The books surround the doctor. But here a fraction could be suspected, a "reverse" or "flip side". Because usually Schiele's portraits give a perspective from bottom up. Thus sexuality but also despair and death are the main themes of Schiele. But the portrait of Doctor Koller holds the "barrier" (Freud 1908), which is built up by books and intellect. The barrier keeps the unconscious taboo and "outside". At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century the painters were at least familiar with the work of Freud, especially when they came from Vienna. Some internalized psychoanalytic knowledge of the unconscious. Schiele at least tended to be one of them. Given the subject of a "barrier" ("displacement", Freud 1916/1917), the question arises why hundred years ago a respected member of society engages Egon Schiele to paint the responsible physician and physicist. Schiele was attracted by extremes already in his early

years as an artist. Most of his paintings deal with erotic, almost pornographic subjects, but also with poverty, disease and death. Should Schiele just have been hired because of the opposition to Dr. Koller? This could mean that not only the "displacement" (Freud 1915) became a defense mechanism, but that the defense has been developed over projective processes. This means that all maladjusted, instinctual, aggressive, sexual had been projected on the painter and could there be elaborated further. The numberless books are an "intellectual" wall. Probably projective identification was necessary to keep out incompatible contents. Schiele, the cross-border artist, offered unconsciously the proscribed thoughts and impulses to all involved. The wall of books was probably not all "clean". Their suspected contamination is indicated by their chaotic arrangement and the red margin.

„The Friends“



The third picture shows a scene from a military sanatorium in Dresden, Saxonia (Germany). It was created by the Austrian painter Oskar Kokoschka. The scene is formed by a round of people showing the nearest friends of Kokoschka during his stay at the sanatorium. In military hospitals it was common to treat the wounded soldiers with electric shocks to terrify and frighten them. This "therapy" should be even more terrible than the fights and atrocities of war. Thus the wounded and suffering were pushed back to the front as soon as possible. In contrast, in this sanatorium Kokoschka was treated with psychotherapy with the intention to cure his war trauma and to protect him to put himself at risk.

The portrayed physician who is seen on the far right with an impressive beard, is Dr. Fritz Neuberger. He had forced the suicidal Kokoschka to stay at the hospital. By his medical opinion the painter was prevented to return to the Eastern front. The two poets portrayed to his left were able to escape from military service by staying at this clinic, too. Neuberger

was probably pacifistic, but above all, very fascinated by art and by the artistic disposition of his patients. One of the poets turns to his neighbour, the actress Käthe Richter. Her presence was eminently helpful for Kokoschka. Her face is bright and she seems to overlook the table and the situation.

The artist has portrayed himself back view, but he is identifiable in profile. His expression is serious and his complexion dark. He does not interact with the others. Retrospectively he had described these friends being very supportive in his painful situation. Kokoschka was desperate because of his very stressful partnership with Alma Mahler-Werfel, an “amour fou” (Meier 2005). He had taken his way to the front on his own.

I am impressed by the extraordinary commitment of the portrayed physician. He supported the painter and the poets. At risk of Kokoschka`s suicide he integrated him almost like a member of the family. The "half-round " of the characters and his hand position illustrates this "invitation". Neuberger`s support for the artist was undramatic, but substantial. His assistance is still above "ordinary" doctor-patient-relationships.

„Sigmund Freud“



Hardly any scientist or philosopher changed the image of the world like Sigmund Freud did, the father of psychoanalysis. Freud not only developed a method for treatment of mental disorders, but psychoanalysis became a cultural critique and a philosophical attitude as well. It acted as a "bridge" for many human disciplines of the 19th and 20th Century.

Freud discovered, that unconscious mental processes exist; that unconscious mental conflict can give rise to psychiatric symptoms; and that those symptoms can be alleviated when the memory of the underlying, unconscious cause is brought into the patient's conscious mind. (Eric Kandel, S 47).

Society was "offended" by psychoanalytical findings: Discovery of infantile sexuality; pessimistic notions of mass psychology, the "Ego" is not the "master in its own house". In my opinion many paintings of the 20th Century correlate to Freud's theories.

The painter of this portrait of Sigmund Freud is Karl Iro Goldblat, a contemporary artist. He was a member of the commune experiment "Friedrichshof", which was initiated by the Viennese actionist Otto Muehl. Goldblat developed his own style.

In his portrait the painter deals with death and with Freud's long fight against cancer. The colours are cool and associated with ice and loneliness. Freud's head is particularly affected. In frightening and painful phases of his life Freud sought refuge in his brain, his wisdom, reason and intellect.

In my view, the "fault line" that embodies internal contradictions, is not only between conscious and unconscious, but even more between a pessimistic and an optimistic view of the world, embodied by a dual concept of drives. Until his death his concept of libido and death instinct was very important for Freud.

„Alfred Adler“



Alfred Adler, the founder of Individual Psychology, was a student of Freud in Vienna. With C.G. Jung he was the second major dissident of the psychoanalytic movement. Adler belongs to the pioneers of the theory of „Relations between Objects“ and „Narcism“, with his concept of „Inferiority“ and "Overcompensation". In contrast to Freud's psychoanalysis, individual psychology is oriented more on experiences of real life and traumas. Individual Psychology has been integrated in different therapeutic approaches worldwide. The "fault line" (Balint 1970) corresponds to his split from Freud's psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis puts greater emphasis on the study of unconscious processes while, on the other hand, Alfred Adler's individual psychology promotes the idea of real trauma. The portrait was created by Adler's daughter Valentine, who died in 1942 in a Soviet camp. This work is the only one that I present, which was created by a close relative. It gives a subjective impression. The psychiatrist seems to be internally oriented, but still has a warm presence. The viewer comprehends that this portrait is less representative and not symbolic, but subjective and individual, which is the concept of individual psychology, too.

" Theodor Billroth "



The sixth painting represents the famous Viennese surgeon "Theodor Billroth". It is a work of Werner Horvath, a contemporary artist and radiologist. The painting shows Horvath's typical constructivist style with very bright, brilliant colors. The viewer's eye is directed through the "window" into the brain of the surgeon and the operating theatre is emerging. Life of surgeons and perhaps doctors generally takes place there, in the role of helping and saving lives. The break I was looking for, runs along a line of separation between power and powerlessness, sadism and empathy, help and abuse. Billroth is the "good guy", a sharp contrast to the doctors who committed incredibly cruel crimes in the name of medicine in the period after Billroth, in the dark days of the Nazis. But how clear is the dividing line anyway? Each surgeon commits an assault when he works with the scalpel. Each intensive care physician has to ponder if and when he finishes treatments to prolong life for terminally ill patients. This way of exercising power requires an integrated personality. Theodor Billroth is one of them. He was a "famous" doctor not only because of his techniques in gastric surgery which he had introduced and which are still used, but because of his sense of responsibility and his integrated personality.

" Josef Mengele "



The physician, shown in picture seven, which is also created by Werner Horvath, is very well known, too. But he represents a maximum of negative fame, a person without scruples and without conscience. It is the infamous physician of the concentration camp "Josef Mengele", called "the death angel of Auschwitz". The picture shows only his head, which is painted completely split, and the whole person Mengele was divided. Painted with contours is only the left part of the face, while the right side and the right eye show abstruse and inhuman

forms. Mengele is the personalized sadism. His power is absolute, his narcissism is unlimited. Fading behind him we see the victims, those four figures, who have a human face in contrast to the offender, but appear "meaningless".

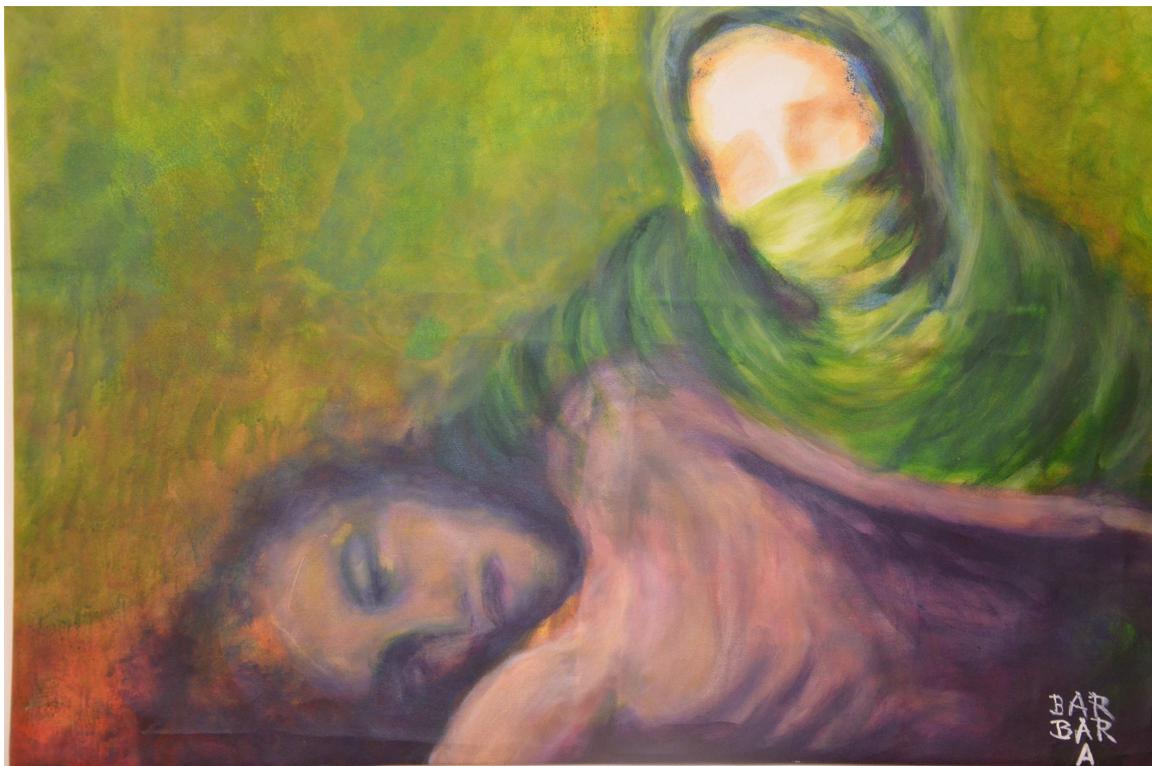
Mengele was the personification of the "ramp" at Auschwitz, the Lord of the dreaded triage. He decided over life and death within seconds. The bright colors of the image do not produce vivid emotions, but dread and horror. The break is apparent in two ways: Mengele is divided by his disturbed personality. But the viewer cannot escape the break: looking away is not an option!

Excursus on Dyad and Triad

Art always takes place in a field of tension between dyad and triad. Even if the artist is still alone with the empty canvas, it is a dyadic situation only superficially. The "void" is already populated with pictures, moods and characters in the unconscious (triadic).

Basically, all human relationships are structured triadic, because every child has two parents. Nevertheless, it is useful to hold on to the concept of a dyad. In practice, the distribution of dyadic and triadic relationship is very asymmetric and subjective. The concept of the dyad is particularly suitable for the assessment of the intensity and speed of regressive processes.

"Dyad"



I am the painter of the last three pictures. The title of the first image is "Dyad". I was inspired by Michelangelo's Pietà. It shows the death of a young man in a woman's arm, an intensive care physician, who remains faceless. The young man does not die in the arms of the mother. This death is a dyadic event, but this dyad of dying does not include options that can provide a mother - child dyad like playing and cuddling and holding and containing. These

experiences of relationship are completely absent in the depicted situation. And it is precisely the intensive care that needs a "face" to make the anonymity of suffering or dying bearable. This means to include, not to exclude illness, so here, too: to allow no break. The resolution of the boundaries within the dyad is presented through the indistinct contours. This is achieved by the use of a sponge instead of a brush for the application of colour. The depth of the regression corresponds to the choice of colours, red and green mainly.

"Triad"



I understand the picture called "triad" as a contrast. The triad refers to the divine Trinity, to something sacred. Sacred, as it often occurs in the operating theatre. The two figures in the foreground, a female and a male surgeon, are focusing on their work, which may take place in that sacred atmosphere. Breaks we can see here, too. Many doctors who work in operating theatres know the phenomenon that a "holy" mood can turn into a "secular" or even "vulgar" mood abruptly. Jokes are told or they fool around. We can explain this reaction as a defensive phenomenon, a break. "Triad" is associated with existential situations, with birth and death. A "dyad", a relationship between two people, is opened for a "third party" because of the birth of a child. This changes the relationship completely. A continuing reflection on the relationship is the consequence and a daily challenge (Ermann 1985). The figure in the middle, pale and indicated, could represent the real or fantasized child. But the medical profession becomes a triangulation in many partnerships and can "replace the partner".

The awareness of being separated of the two figures (the third remains undetermined in comparison) is emphasized by precise brush strokes and sharp contrasts to the surrounding.

" The Myth of Sisyphus "



The image of "The Myth of Sisyphus" (Camus 1946) is the result of my reflections about Albert Camus. His lifestyle - elegant, mysterious, chain-smoking, inclined to alcohol - could fit for a physician of intensive care medicine or anesthesiologist, too. In his work "Le Mythe de Sisyphus" there occur existential themes (suicide, death, hopelessness and futility) in a prominent place. Camus is one of the main protagonists of the philosophy of existentialism. He remarked that we can turn to other philosophical issues only when the question of suicide was clarified. This is a significant hidden cynicism that has a protective function. Taken to the extreme this attitude is described in his novel "The Stranger" (Camus 1946). The title is a metaphor for "The Stranger inside of us", the separated, the eliminated, not yet or no longer integrated. Similar attitudes are often found at anesthetists and doctors of intensive care medicine. Identified with this „Stranger“ I have painted a portrait of modern Sisyphus. Anyway, it is an alarming fact that among anesthesiologists and psychiatrists, the rate of suicides is extremely high.

Final Reflection

I selected these ten paintings. In my research I was surprised how few representations of this subject exist in Austria. I wanted to present three famous artists (Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka). Based on these paintings I demonstrate not only the

"physician" or the theme "medicine", but also the context of the beginning of the 20th Century. It is artistically and psychologically important to look for defensive structures and fault lines. For sure Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka were provocateurs and cross boundaries and therefore artists who made hidden visible.

The other pictures have a relation to modern medicine and have all been created by contemporary artists. The neighborhood of the portraits of Theodor Billroth and Josef Mengele is intended. Good and evil are contiguous and we should never stop to remember. One painter is an actionist artist who immersed in the theme of development of personality and psychoanalysis. And some pictures are created by physicians who paint and know medical life as insiders.

Finally I would like to thank Werner Horvath and Karl Iro Goldblat. They gave me the permission to publish their paintings that I have discussed in this article.

Summary

These ten paintings I presented are esteemed on the one hand on an artistic, on the other hand on a psychological level. I discussed mainly a phenomenon, which is part of painting in particular, but also of art in general: Breakings, discontinuity, faults, displacement and splitting off are brought into a discourse to be "nameable". The painting can simultaneously "disguise" and "reveal". At the same time it is obvious that only a very small extract of art and history could be elaborated.

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