Art & Medicine: 
Diagnosing the Canvas

American College of Physicians
Florida Chapter
2013 Scientific Meeting
October 5th, 2013

John Sinnott MD FACP
Chairman, Internal Medicine
University of South Florida
Michelangelo, *Creation*, 1534
Suk. I, *Neurosurg.* 2010; 66
Michelangelo “The separation of light from darkness”
Suk, I. Neurosurg. 2010; 66
“The separation of light from darkness”
What is Art?

“Art is symbolic expression”

“Nothing is as it seems”

King Lear 1:1, Shakespeare ~1600
How Old is Art?

Floriensis, Neanderthalis and Denisova coexistent species produced no known art.

~200,000 BCE  Sculpture - Morocco
~100,000 BCE  Blombos Cave - SA
~30,000 BCE  Cave paintings - Spain

…the product of *H. sapiens*. “Art reflects the evolution of symbolic thought”

Art vs. Science

• Science is “We”; art is “I”
• Science builds on the past; art often rejects the past
• Science progresses; art changes
• Science reassures; art disturbs
Painting:

• What makes a masterpiece?
  – Virtuosity
  – Innovation
  – Vision

How Do We Look at a Painting?

- Subject
- Technique
- Symbolism
- Space + Light
- Personal Taste
- Historical Style

Barbe-Gall F. *How to Look at a Painting*. Frances Lincoln: 2011
Rembrandt van Ryn, *Self-portrait*, 1659
Diseases:

- Rhinophyma
- Rosacea
- Seborrheic dermatitis
- Xanthelasma
- Depression (?)
How We See a Painting: THE BRAIN

Image → Retina → Electrical impulse → Brain
Neuro Optic Pathways

a) Parvo – lines (Kemp, 1990)
b) Blob – color (Zeki, 1990)
c) Magno – space (Hubel, 1995)
Ivan Albright, *Self-portraits*, 1982
A “magic realist”
Ivan Albright, *Self-portraits*, 1983
How We See a Painting: OUR CONSCIOUSNESS

“Paintings are magnificent illusions.”

(Espinel, 1998)
Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*, 1664
Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*, 1664
Patients
Wyeth, Christina’s World, 1948
Munch, *Self-portrait after the Spanish Flu, 1919*
The Role of the Doctor
Albrecht Dürer, *Christ among the Doctors*, 1506
Van Gogh, *Portrait of Doctor Gachet*, Digitalis purpurea, 1890
Art: A Product of Illness

- Genetic- biologic basis of creativity
- Association with mental illness
- Association with physical illness

Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889
Paul Klee, 1879-1940
William Utermohlen, *Self-portraits with Alzheimer's*
The story of art and medicine is....

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