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THE UNCONCIOUS MIND: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ART
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SOTHEBY'S INSTITUTE OF ART
THESIS DISSERTATION FOR MASTER'S IN ART BUSINESS

Table of Contents

I.	Abstract.....	4
II.	Sigmund Freud and the Introduction to the Unconscious Brain.....	7
III.	Hanz Prinzhorn and <i>Artistry of the Mentally Ill</i>	12
	A. Expressionist Movement.....	11
IV.	The Prinzhorn Collection.....	18
V.	The Surrealist Movement.....	19
	A. Max Ernst: Frottage and Grattage.....	31
VI.	The Dadaists and Anti Rationalism.....	35
VII.	Contemporary Examples of the Unconscious Creative Process: Louise Bourgeois.....	40
VIII.	Modern Science and the Unconscious Creative Process.....	44
IX.	Conclusion.....	47
X.	Works Cited.....	51

List of Figures

Figure 1: Edvard Munch,, 1894, *Anxiety*,. Oil on canvas11

Figure 2: August Natterer, “*World Axis and Hare*”, 1911, pencil.....16

Figure 3: August Natterer “*Air Apparition;*” *Hallucination*, pencil.....18

Figure 4: Joan Miró, *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, July 1923-Winter1924.....20

Figure 5: Max Ernst, *The Fugitive from Natural History*, published 1926, charcoal.....22

Figure 6: Max Ernst, *Forest and Dove*, 1927.....23

Figure 7: Hans Jean Arp, *Sculpture to be Lost in the Forest*, 1932, cast 1953-8, bronze.....26

Figure 8: Hans Jean Arp, *Constellation According to the Laws of Chance*,1930, paint on wood.....27

Figure 9: Louise Bourgeois, *Conscious and Unconconscious*, 2008, Fabric, rubber, thread, and stainless steel.....29

Figure 10: The Salience Network, Source: MichaelAshcroft.org.....32

I. Abstract

The insights brought to society about the unconscious mind can be solely credited to Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking works that were published in the early 1900's. Specifically, the concept of the unconscious mind being a driver for human behavior was a unique theory that Freud introduced to a society that had never considered this possibility before this. The realization and acknowledgement of the unconscious mind as relevant to analyzing human behavior including art inspired other scholars and individuals in the field of psychology to explore a more nuanced understanding of human motivations.

His novel ideas about human behavior emerged at a time when the world was beginning to reject hyper-rationalism and embrace the exploration of representing more emotionally charged experiences that a human can have. Coinciding with Freud's publishings was a movement and emergence of Expressionism within the world of fine art." Expressionism was an emerging genre of art which represented the more subjective and emotional experiences of human life, and at the same time departing from the hyper-rational and literal representations traditionally known to be the defining elements of fine art at that time. At around the same time Hans Prinzhorn' wrote "*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*." This paper published and observed the aesthetics and talents of artworks made by patients who inhabited mental institutions at the turn of the century. It was the first time that the creative works of a group of individuals removed from society were approached as fine art. Prinzhorn was a psychologist who took an interest in the artwork of the mentally ill. e. Both Prinzhorn and Freud were endlessly curious about the intersection between the unconscious, artistic production, and broader societal implications. Prinzhorn contributed significantly to understanding certain commonalities between art, unconscious mental processes at work in mental illness and in the artistic process, and the birth of subjectivity. The groundbreaking work of early psychoanalysts and the emerging awareness surrounding the unconscious mind's relevance in art led to the contextualizing and understanding of major fine art movements such as the Surrealist movement and anti-rationalism or Dadaism. Surrealism came as almost a direct response to the findings of Freud and Prinzhorn in the early 1900's. The founder of the core group within the

movement was Andre Breton, a French creative writer and theorist who led the Surrealist Movement beginning with the publishing of the *Surrealist Manifesto*. The goals of the practices leveraged by surrealists were to express the true functioning of thought without the constraints of aesthetics which society preferred. The primary means of accessing the function of thought was by tapping into the conscious mind and representation of dreams which Freud acknowledged as purely subconscious symbolic representations. Following Surrealism came the development of Dadaism which served as a reaction to not only the groundbreaking publishings in psychology at the time, but also in response to the first world war and rapid industrialization. Dadaism embraced nonrational representations of life and the human experience, rejecting reason as a means of coping with the world around them. Many of the artists which participated in either the Surrealist or Dadaist movements share considerable overlap in the aesthetic choices representations in their work.

This paper will delve into the evolution of the unconscious mind's relevance within major artistic movements and processes throughout the 1900's and still persisting in contemporary art today. Touching on the evolution that proceeded from Surrealism to Anti Rationalist and Dadaist movements in the fine art world, we will observe how the unconscious mind has influenced much of the fine art we still consume today. Using the contemporary writings of Elkhonon Goldberg's book, "*Creativity*" we will understand and explore that while the unconscious mind is an incredibly important piece within the creative process, modern science has enabled us to expose that what is maybe most crucial to creativity is the interaction which exists between the unconscious and conscious functions of the brain during creativity. The common thread through psychoanalytic explorations of unconscious motivation and a modern neuroscience take on the creative process is that combinations of known and unknown mental processes that are rooted in emotions constitute the bulk of how art is conceptualized, made, and enjoyed.

The unconscious mind's role in the artistic process serves as a crucial element in understanding the origins of some of the most famous and well known fine art movements today. Starting with the Expressionist movement coinciding with Freud's publications, to the Hans Prinzhorn's publication of "*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*" in 1921, a psychological thread can be drawn between these works and the

surfacing themes within the Surrealist Movement, Anti Rationalism, the Dadaists, and much of contemporary artwork today. To compare the modern findings on the unconscious mind's relevance in creativity we will observe Elkhonon Goldberg's, "*Creativity*." Goldberg's work is important to this paper because it reveals that based on modern science, we know that there is actually a dialogue between the conscious and unconscious functionings of the mind at play to generate the creative process. The findings within the book, "*Creativity*" by Goldberg, are a modern representation of the ideas and themes that figures such as Freud and Prinzhorn were trying to grapple with in the early 1900's.

II. Sigmund Freud and the Introduction to the Unconscious Brain

In the early 1900s, Sigmund Freud emerged as a prominent figure, shaping what we knew at the time about the human mind and human nature. Freud is most renowned for his publications on psychoanalysis and more specifically his findings on unconscious behavior. Psychoanalysis is a psychological method and framework that was used for treating and analyzing not only mental illness but human behavior in general. This framework was built through the lens with a focus on instinctual drive, sexual repression, unconscious processes of the mind, and the significance behind moments of free association, or the analysis of dreams. Prior to the emergence of Freud's works, views on the human psyche were limited to primarily two approaches, one view which saw the brain as rational and controlled by societal laws and science, and another more common-sense approach to psychology which focused on relating thoughts and feelings to human behaviors.¹ Freudian psychoanalysis was a considerably different approach to what was well established at the time, focusing primarily on the concept of the unconscious. Freudian analysis was one of the first examples of a psychology which was not purely rooted in the laws and limitations of neuroscience that was accessible at that time.

Freud's findings changed what was seen initially as a source of forgotten memories to what was now being argued as something which permeated every aspect of the human experience. Freud also identified two modes which the brain functioned in and called them the primary processing mode and the secondary processing mode.² This made the clear distinction between which types of behaviors fell under the workings of the unconscious mind versus the conscious mind.

¹ "How Freud Shaped the 20th-Century Mind." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 26 Nov. 1989, www.nytimes.com/1989/11/26/weekinreview/ideas-and-trends-how-freud-shaped-the-20th-century-mind.html.

² "Freud and the Unconscious." *BPS*, The British Psychological Society, 19 Jan. 2024, www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/freud-and-unconscious.

The distinction between brain function was well established in Freud's well known piece of writing, "*The Interpretation of Dreams*" written in 1900. The mind was presented as split between primitive urges and desires, and societal norms or what was deemed appropriate and acceptable. These processes were named by Freud, the primary and secondary processes. The distinction between the two represents a toggling between urges and instinct within a world where society constantly filters behavior. The primary process, also known as the unconscious mind, is dictated by impulses, seeking of gratification, and urges. The secondary process is dominated by the ego and occupies the more conscious realm of brain functioning. The secondary process, according to Freud, is a filter between the more primitive urges which exist within the unconscious mind into behavior that is socially acceptable. "*The Interpretation of Dreams*" also provided theories on the analysis of dreams as a tool towards accessing unconscious contents of the mind. Freud argued the unconscious mind had an impact on behavior in both waking and sleeping states. To Freud, dreams were the visual representations of our repressed urges and instincts via the route of symbolic abstraction. The new presentation and construct of the way our unconscious mind impacts us, was brought to light at a crucial time within the world where art and thought was moving away from the literal and more towards a realm which embraced a spectrum of human emotion. Freudian thought and psychoanalysis inspired a moment in history where one was allowed to interpret and embrace their emotional reaction to something. In an artistic context this generated a departure from the figurative and literal and a journey towards the emotional and abstract, known more specifically to this moment in time as the Expressionist movement.

Freud further explained the specifics surrounding the primary and secondary functionings of the brain in his paper published in 1923, called "*The Ego and the Id.*"³ This paper elaborated on the way that the ego, or secondary process acts as a mitigator to the more primitive and instinctual drives surrounding desires for needs such as, sex or hunger, to be met. A central theme to much of Freud's theory was

³ Freud, Sigmund, et al. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. the Ego and the ID and Other Works*, Vintage, London, 2001.

focused on the notion of repressed and blocked desires and urges which generate anxiety and distress. The importance of the secondary process is to filter out the more regressive or irrational tendencies generated by the repressed primitive drives and urges to create societally acceptable behavioral solutions. This was one of the first times that it was suggested that not is there a distinction between conscious and unconscious processes within our brain, but the two may actually converse and interact to impact our behavior.

In addition to this, Freud stated that the unconscious played a highly crucial role in the creative process of an artist. To Freud, the artist had the unique ability to channel their unconscious fantasies into what was a more socially acceptable and particularly enjoyable form of expression for the public. Additionally the artist needed to express themselves creatively as a means of mitigating psychological distress. Freud was one of the first to suggest that Art could therefore serve as a coping mechanism for those dealing with psychological distresss. In addition to this, was a theory that creative expression may lead to the reconciliation of the dissonance and tension found between the unconscious mind and reality.

The insights Freud provided surrounding the unconscious mind and the influence it has on human behavior came at a critical time and heavily impacted the way we analyzed not only behavior but human expression. Freud suggested that some of the greatest artworks of all time exist as “unsolved riddles to our understanding” conjuring “intellectual bewilderment” and “overwhelming admiration.” In the introduction of a paper that Freud wrote on a statue of the biblical figure, Moses, by historic Italian artist, Michelangelo, Freud stated that psychoanalysis was essential to understanding the intentions behind both a work of art and the artist.⁴ Without psychoanalysis there would not be a deeper understanding for the emotional and psychological elements to any given artist’s work or expression. In this essay, Freud suggests that the artist actually aims to evoke in the viewer the same emotional states and “mental

⁴ Freud, Sigmund, and Benjamin Nelson. *On Creativity and the Unconscious: The Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, and Religion*. Harper Perennial, 2009.

constellations” which inspired their creative expression in the first place.⁵ This process however, is not at all feasible without psychoanalysis, which Freud also invented at the turn of the century alongside a movement towards emotional awareness within society and the arts. Without the application of psychoanalysis, one could not fully grasp the intentions and emotions which drove an artist to create any given work. Freud suggested that without psychoanalysis “true comprehension would remain elusive.”⁶

The concept of psychoanalysis hugely impacted society’s understanding of human nature, providing more clarity around the roots of human behavior, urges, and emotional states. However, despite the groundbreaking theories Freud provided, what was overlooked by Freud is a crucial element that has since been uncovered as modern neuroscience and psychology has evolved: humans have an inherent instinct to relate to other humans. Furthermore the human must relate to their caregiver to get their needs met in the formative years of their life. Modern science has recognized that humans are not just driven by primitive urges and drive but also have the tendency toward interpersonal connection and relationships. This was the primary piece of information overlooked by Freud in the development of his theories on human behavior and psychoanalysis. The relationship between the infant and, specifically, the mother is crucial in fulfilling these interpersonal and instinctive needs. This is also known in modern psychology today as a “two-person psychology” which accepts the interpersonal nature of human life.

Fundamentally, Freud’s insights on the unconscious mind and the interactions between the primary and secondary processes provided a crucial theoretical framework for understanding and interpreting the roots of fine art which emerged alongside the invention of psychoanalysis. Specifically, art that is emotionally charged, less figurative, and more psychological, became directly reliant on Freud’s

⁵ Freud, Sigmund, and Benjamin Nelson. *On Creativity and the Unconscious: The Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, and Religion*. Harper Perennial, 2009.

⁶ Freud, Sigmund, and Benjamin Nelson. *On Creativity and the Unconscious: The Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, and Religion*. Harper Perennial, 2009.

theoretical framework in the interpretation of the psychological states which led the artist to create. As stated by Freud himself, “the artist’s intention, insofar as he has succeeded in expressing it in his work and in converting to us, grips us powerfully.” Without the basis of psychoanalysis for understanding, it is possible humans would not be able to appreciate or acknowledge some of the emotional intricacies which are portrayed by the artist. Psychoanalysis is crucial to the full and in-depth understanding of great works of art. Freud’s gift to the artworld was in highlighting the role of psychoanalytics in dissecting the unknowns of artistic expression and improving our appreciation for human behavior and the way we empathize with one another as is generated by the arts.

III. Hanz Prinzhorn and *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*

The emergence of Hanz Prinzhorn's work, "*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*," in 1922 also made a significant impact on the exploration and findings of what we know about the unconscious mind's role in artistic expression. Reliant on the foundation laid by Freudian psychoanalysis, Prinzhorn developed a collection of artworks from institutionalized, untrained, psychiatric patients, which provides unique further insight into the depths of the process behind human creativity and coping with psychological distress. By analyzing the creations of untrained individuals grappling with mental illness, Prinzhorn sought to further uncover what was known about unconscious drive and its importance within artistic expression.⁷ Prinzhorn's publishing of, "*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*" drew a profound thread between unconscious behavior and its role within the process of creative expression. The Prinzhorn Collection almost serves as an extensive case study for Freud's earlier theories and findings. Prinzhorn's publication was a profound reiteration of the idea that the unconscious mind is crucial in the drive towards creative expression. The intersection of art and psychology had reached a groundbreaking moment due to the new perspective and insights offered by Freud and Prinzhorn publishings in the early 20th century.

Hanz Prinzhorn, born on June 6, 1886, in Hemer Westphalia, emerged as a crucial figure in the exploration, and publications, on the intersection between art and psychology.⁸ Prinzhorn's relationship to art began with his study of art history in Vienna, while at the same time studying medicine and psychiatry. Prinzhorn's background in not only the history of art but also psychiatry provided him with unique overlapping knowledge which he could apply when observing his patients express themselves creatively. Hans Prinzhorn's publication of "*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*", circulated throughout Germany in 1921,

⁷ "Hans Prinzhorn's Artistry of the Mentally Ill (1922)." *The Public Domain Review*, publicdomainreview.org/collection/hans-prinzhorn-s-artistry-of-the-mentally-ill-1922/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

⁸ "Hans Prinzhorn's Artistry of the Mentally Ill (1922)." *The Public Domain Review*, publicdomainreview.org/collection/hans-prinzhorn-s-artistry-of-the-mentally-ill-1922/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

and marked a historical moment for the intellectuals and newly published theories within the world of fine art and psychology.⁹ The timing of these findings on the unconscious mind as well as the creative expression of those suffering from mental illness landed amidst the aftermath of a very traumatized world post World War I. The war had only ended in 1918, and more officially with the Treaty of Versailles at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The fighting had spanned across four years and left Germany in a civil and economic crisis along with a very destabilized Europe. With millions of people dead and wounded, the layers of emotion and universally felt trauma and loss, created an incredibly vulnerable society. People were primed towards being more attentive to their own psychology and to wonder about the explanations behind what drives the behaviors of their own and others. This was without a doubt what brought about a shift within the world of art specifically and is some of the primary inspiration behind the Expressionist movement.

Those who were receptive to Prinzhorn's findings could not deny a noticeable overlap between the works collected by Prinzhorn and the works of contemporary avant-garde artists, specifically the movement of Expressionism. The intersection between these genre's of what was initially deemed outsider art created an important and historic point of reference in the departure from traditional artistic norms. Traditional art seemed to neglect subjectivity and a spectrum of emotional experiences in a way that more avant garde movements of the time did not.

⁹ "Hans Prinzhorn's Artistry of the Mentally Ill (1922)." *The Public Domain Review*, publicdomainreview.org/collection/hans-prinzhorn-s-artistry-of-the-mentally-ill-1922/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

A. Expressionist Movement

Expressionism first emerged around 1911, and was a fine art movement which was characterized by a huge divergence from the well established conventions surrounding traditional art at the time.¹⁰ Expressionism generated directly in response to much of the social unrest and excessive industrialization which was experienced in the few years leading up to the first World War.¹¹ Expressionist artists held practices which centered around representing their own inner experience of life and as a result of the influence that psychoanalysis had on society this movement directed itself at representing the unconscious mind. The crucial overlapping element which relates Expressionism to the development of the unconscious mind's importance throughout the creative process was the mutual rejection of representing reality as objective. This rejection of objectivity was responded to with intentional representation of subjective emotional experiences. One was used to understand the other when it came to the analyzing and processing of the Expressionist Movement alongside publications like Prinzhorn's work, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*.

One of the most well known and iconic artists within the Expressionist movement was Edvard Munch who created well known paintings such as *The Scream*, depicted for the first time as a drawing in the late 1890s.¹² Edvard Munch is considered one of the founders of what was known as "modern expressionism" at the time due to his tendency to intentionally distort reality and depict somber or emotional scenes. Much of Munch's work is said to represent the distinct isolation and depression

¹⁰ Content, Isabella Meyer(Head of. "Expressionism Art - A History of the Expressionist Movement." *Art in Context*, 10 Feb. 2024, artincontext.org/expressionism-art/.

¹¹ The Editors of ARTnews. "Subjective, Dynamic, and Religious: On the 'practically Unknown' Artist Edvard Munch and German Expressionism, from 1950." *ARTnews.Com*, ARTnews.com, 18 Nov. 2019, www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/subjective-dynamic-and-religious-on-the-practically-unknown-artist-edvard-munch-and-german-expressionism-from-1950-5887/.

¹² The Editors of ARTnews. "Subjective, Dynamic, and Religious: On the 'practically Unknown' Artist Edvard Munch and German Expressionism, from 1950." *ARTnews.Com*, ARTnews.com, 18 Nov. 2019, www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/subjective-dynamic-and-religious-on-the-practically-unknown-artist-edvard-munch-and-german-expressionism-from-1950-5887/.

represented by the Expressionist movement and as residue of a world during and post World War. What was emphasized and seen clearly through the case of this artist was more efforts to represent unity through mutual empathy, and find connection through a more real and raw lens of the experience that is being human. Munch wrote in a diary entry from 1889:

*“No more interiors with men reading and women knitting shall be painted. They must be living people who breathe, feel, suffer and love...”*¹³

This is the essence of the paradigm shift taking place in the world at the time – a break away from the formal and normal and an embracing of representing the raw and tumultuous nature of the human experience.



Fig 1. Edvard Munch., 1894, *Anxiety*.. Oil on canvas.

¹³ The Editors of ARTnews. “Subjective, Dynamic, and Religious: On the ‘practically Unknown’ Artist Edvard Munch and German Expressionism, from 1950.” *ARTnews.Com*, ARTnews.com, 18 Nov. 2019, www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/subjective-dynamic-and-religious-on-the-practically-unknown-artist-edvard-munch-and-german-expressionism-from-1950-5887/.

One of the prime examples of the shift in the world of culture through the Expressionist movement can be seen through Edvard Munch's, *Anxiety*, a piece created just before the turn of the century in 1894. The painting depicts somewhat of a universally felt depression through the use of distorted colors and figures. Using the same landscape which he depicted, *The Scream*, onto, this piece is another representation of potentially a similar or evolved set of feelings depicted in the panicked individual within the first painting, which was made a few years prior to this piece. The painting, *Anxiety*, creates an almost confrontational situation, where instead of the ability to observe the individual panicking like you can in, *The Scream*, this painting depicts a far more claustrophobic perspective as there are somber looking bodies filling the foreground, middleground, and background. The anxiety is almost unavoidable in, *Anxiety*, whereas, *The Scream*, allows the viewer to remain a witness. The claustrophobia created by the crowd and the empty look on their out of focus faces does generate feelings of inescapableness and an encroaching lack of control of one's own environment. The fleeting nature of the woman's face in the foreground, that is most decipherable out of all the figures, creates a strange effect of vagueness when representing this individual in totality. This disillusioned and unclear version of society represented by Munch, was processed through a lens which had a pivotal understanding of the human mind, the artistic process, and a more emotional, rather than literal, experience of life which was established in the early 1900's.

The reason the Expressionist movement and its artists were important in coinciding with the publications of Freud and Prinzhorn works on the subconscious, is due to the fact that it provides evidence towards a universal shift in the way we perceive art and the human experience on a broader level. Expressionist art served almost as the preliminary visuals to the themes within the writings that Freud and Prinzhorn would publish in the early 1900s. The emotional atmosphere at the time was one that was absorbing more information about the emotional process, the subconscious process, and the artistic process as they all relate to one another. Through analyzing Expressionist art, we begin to see the initial prioritizing and

investment in representing the emotional experience of humans within artwork. Expressionism is one of the primary examples of the initial emergence of the avant-garde movement within fine art. In fact, Expressionism may be considered, by some, the very first avant-garde movement as its origins date back to 1905. The Avant Garde can be defined as a “*movement driven by a desire to challenge the artistic status quo and push the boundaries of what was considered acceptable in art,*” and can be assumed as a direct reaction to the the incredibly rapid changes happening at that point in history on a spectrum from societal to technological matters. There is no coincidence in the timing of the emergence of Expressionism, along with Prinzhorn and Freud’s theories as they were all indisputably related to one another due to the unprecedented nature of that moment in history. The early 1900’s were an incredibly pivotal point of creative experimentation and the beginning of a reconfiguration of what was deemed traditional on an artistic and psychological level. Expressionism’s roots were found in what was a common goal to reveal psychological truths through the representation of subjective emotional experiences while at the same time rejecting objective representations of reality.

IV. The Prinzhorn Collection

The Prinzhorn collection, which was made up of the works collected over the course of many years observing patients within institutionalized settings, contained drawings, paintings, and sculptures made unprompted by the patients Prinzhorn worked with. Being the patients of asylums for reasons varying from criminal behavior to extremely manic behavior to some of the first diagnosis of schizophrenia, these individuals were “unpracticed persons” creating simply as a means to cope. The works made were developed within the atmospheres of incredibly isolating, harsh, and brutal settings removed from society and any knowledge or practice in art.

The importance of *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, lies in the fact that what it was asking society to consider was simply unheard of before this publication. To take seriously, and to analyze the aesthetics or skill of artworks made by patients of a mental institution was a foreign concept to most of the world in the early 1900's. Prinzhorn stated with profound respect the undeniable skill and demonstration of creative expression that these works displayed and served as somewhat of a social pioneer, offering a change in perspective of not only where these works came from by how and why they were produced. A group of individuals that were initially removed and rejected from society gained new esteem from society for their creative talents and inventive approaches to coping with emotional distress.

Prinzhorn's publishings served as a reiteration of the unconscious mind's role in creative expression and as a driver of human behavior. The works and findings of Prinzhorn's observations within mental hospitals can be used as a case study for the argument that states creative expression serves as an outlet for the contents of the unconscious mind and for unconscious emotional expression. Artistic expression was an unconscious, somewhat automatic, coping mechanism for emotional distress experienced by those suffering from mental illness or isolation within the hospitals they were subject to living in. The more raw and unfiltered moments within these hospitals were often drivers behind the motivation for a patient to create and express themselves as no one prompted this behavior. Creative

practices within the settings that Prinzhorn collected works from naturally just evolved amongst patients as an unconscious response to distress.

The primary themes which suggest a subconscious element to this collection of works are those which challenge tradition, uproot conventional knowledge of artistic talent, and represent more subjective experiences. Through advocating for the recognition of these individuals as talented despite being removed from society, Prinzhorn drew a common thread between a universally experienced urge to express oneself and the ability art has to transcend notions of sanity.

It is important to contextualize the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, in order to understand its groundbreaking nature for its point in history. The Prinzhorn collection was established during a time when the Nazi regime was beginning to not only influence but take control of Europe. The work that Prinzhorn published on the observed individuals within psychiatric settings was published in 1921. By the early 1930's, the Nazi party had gained significant influence over a majority of Germany and the power dynamic within Europe.¹⁴ The party had grown a significant following and rise in support over the mid 1920's right around the time that Prinzhorn's publishings on psychiatric art were being circulated. By January of 1933, Hitler had taken power and a systematic obliteration of all things the Nazi party did not consider purely German or Aryan had begun.¹⁵

In 1937, the Nazi party even infiltrated the sphere of fine art within Germany and put on an Exhibition of precisely what they deemed to be unqualified as fine art. Specifically associated the term "degenerate" art with the works within the show, a quarter of the illustrations in the exhibit were works

¹⁴ "The Nazi Party and Hitler's Rise to Power." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Nazi-Party/The-Nazi-Party-and-Hitlers-rise-to-power. Accessed 16 May 2024.

¹⁵ "The Nazi Party and Hitler's Rise to Power." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Nazi-Party/The-Nazi-Party-and-Hitlers-rise-to-power. Accessed 16 May 2024.

from the Prinzhorn collection.¹⁶ These works, specifically, were used to explicitly state that works of this kind were dangerous to Aryan society. In 1939, Aktion T4 was implemented by Hitler, one of many systematic euthanization programs enacted towards groups of individuals the Nazi party felt threatened by.¹⁷ Unfortunately, six artists from the Prinzhorn collection were murdered as a result of this plan.¹⁸ Aktion T4 was a program specifically targeting individuals with mental and physical disabilities, and patients of psychiatric facilities were seen as financially burdensome to supporters of the Nazi party. Within the Nazi facilitated exhibition which was titled “Entartete Kunst,” which translates to “degenerate art”, were also well established artists from the Surrealist movement such as Max Ernst, Expressionist influences like Paul Klee, and any art considered abstract in a offensive manner such as Wassily Kandinsky.¹⁹ Amongst the exhibited works was also a space set aside for Dada art which was specifically threatening to the Nazi party due to its fundamental goal towards irrationality. It seemed to be that many of the art movements which were most threatening to the Nazi party were those which represented more raw and unfiltered human experiences.²⁰ The works which relied on the processes of non order or automaticity were deemed to be degenerate processes due to their intentionally unfiltered representations of life.

¹⁶ Schildkraut Joseph J. “Beyond reason: Art and psychosis: Works from the prinzhorn collection.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 157, no. 12, Dec. 2000, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.157.12.2068-a>.

¹⁷ “Euthanasia Program and Aktion T4.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/en>.

¹⁸ 11, English, Charlie. “Remembering the Artists Who Were among the Early Victims of Nazi Death Camps.” *Literary Hub*, 3 Aug. 2021, lithub.com/remembering-the-artists-who-were-among-the-early-victims-of-nazi-death-camps/.

¹⁹ “‘Entartete Kunst’: The Nazis’ Inventory of ‘Degenerate Art’ · V&A.” *Victoria and Albert Museum*, www.vam.ac.uk/articles/entartete-kunst-the-nazis-inventory-of-degenerate-art. Accessed 16 May 2024.

²⁰ “Hans Prinzhorn’s Artistry of the Mentally Ill (1922).” *The Public Domain Review*, publicdomainreview.org/collection/hans-prinzhorn-s-artistry-of-the-mentally-ill-1922/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

While all the case studies provided by Prinzhorn in, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, provide intriguing insight that speak to the role of the unconscious mind in the creative process, there is one specific patient whose work we will use as a case study for this argument. It is important to note that the individuals which Prinzhorn selected to reference in his work “*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*” only touched on the works of ten individuals which Prinzhorn deemed masters within the collection. Prinzhorn chose these individuals based on their overt talent and quality of work. Within Prinzhorn’s writings, he dedicated extensive time analyzing and understanding the lives and creative expression of these specific individuals. This collection and group of individuals provided inspiration for following genres of outsider art to being accepted and given the validation it deserved.

The life of August Natterer, who was born in 1868 developed at a relatively normal rate up until his mid adult life when he started experiencing mania and schizophrenic hallucinations. Natterer was the youngest of nine children and there were no prior reports of mental illness within the family including on the side of his parents. It was observed that by 1907, Natterer experienced a huge decline in motivation and ambition and lost interest in what seemed to be almost “anything.” No longer experiencing the normalcy of the life of an electrical engineer, August Neter was admitted as a patient following the intensification and frequency of the experience of hallucinations. The same year that Natterer began losing ambition and experiencing depression, Natterer experienced his most profound episodes of hallucinations which were made up of thousands of visuals of what he claimed was “the last judgement.” The contents of these apparitions and visions which came to him so intensely were direct inspirations for the works he produced throughout this distressing psychological experience. One of the most famous works produced by Natterer which portray “the last judgment” hallucination was a two part series of works titled “Witch’s Head Landscape.” While these two works were not included in *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, they are wellknown works within the Prinzhorn Collection that speak to the way that creative expression was a means of coping with psychological distress and the inexplicable visions which Natterer would experience.

Many of Natterer's drawings contained somewhat of an inexplicable and nonsensical nature to them, the same way much of Surrealism rejected the hyperrational nature of much of fine art up until then. In addition to the inexplicable origins of the images he would we create, the explanations that Natterer would provide for them carried a sort of dreamlike and nonrational quality to them. Prinzhorn wrote in regard to a series of drawings by Natterer,

*"They do not represent known objects which are secondarily bearers of symbolism; instead, they are realistically senseless and base their right to exist purely on schizophrenia experience, not on a 'reality' accessible to other persons as well."*²¹

There was a truly baffling element to the configurations and contents of many of Natterer's works but if asked about their origins, Natterer seemed to be able to provide explanation. What this shows us is that one's subconscious experience and attempt to translate that experience can only be most understood by the individual whose mind were the origins to these subjective experiences to begin with. Specifically using the example of Natterer's piece titled, *"World Axis and Rabbit,"* Natterer states that the entire picture itself had "predicted the World War." The image had come to him through another hallucination and vision that he experienced while coping with a schizophrenia diagnosis. (page 168 *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*)

²¹ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.



Fig 2. August Natterer, “World Axis and Hare”, 1911, pencil ²²

In an attempt to explain the origins of this piece Natterer stated that the rabbit represented “*the uncertainty of good fortune.*” ²³ Without much reasoning for how this vision predicted the beginning and end to the First World War, Natterer stated that he had known everything in advance because of this vision. Somewhere within the experience of this hallucination it was stated that the “head of Jupiter” had appeared, known as the “god of war.” Within the description of the work that Natterer provided he explained how the rabbit appeared first to jump off of a cloud in the sky and then transformed into a zebra and eventually a donkey.²⁴ The nonsensical explanations provided by Natterer for many of the pieces within the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, speak to the dreamlike and surreal nature of the visions he experienced as an individual suffering psychologically. While there is very little reason found in these descriptions, we can sense a direct relationship between the artist and the contents of their unconscious mind as the driving inspiration behind most of these works. When trying to understand some of the words

²² Natterer, August. “World Axis with Hare, 1911 - August Natterer.” *Www.Wikiart.Org*, 1 Jan. 1970, www.wikiart.org/en/august-natterer/world-axis-with-hare-1911.

²³ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.

²⁴ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.

Natterer provided Prinzhorn with in his work, one is reminded of the writing style developed by the Surrealists known as “Automatism” which this paper will mention later on.

Netterer’s behavior as observed within the hospital he was a patient at stated to vary based on the shifts in his mood. Netterer would mostly create when he was experiencing more “expansive” and grandiose symptoms of psychosis and even paranoia at times. The more grandiose moods typically generated an urge within Natterer to “invent” and create. When asked about the origins of his various drawings and artworks, Natterer explained that to him, the drawings were “air drawings,” or translations of the visions which would come to him through hallucinations onto paper. The lacking explanation of their origins suggest a direct relation to the subconscious due to the absence of reason surrounding their origins. Natterer stated that the drawings had been “drawn by people centuries ago” and were “transmitted to him.” It was also stated in Prinzhorn’s writings on Natterer that as soon as the visions were translated to paper, he would stop experiencing them.²⁵ This suggests there were significant therapeutic benefits to creatively expressing oneself while coping with mental distress. It seemed that through the ability to express the visions Natterer was having onto paper, an externalization of the unconscious mind and psychological distress had taken place. Prinzhorn does suggest that we are weary of accepting these creative works by Natterer as the direct truth of the experience of his hallucinations, but at the same time the very essence of the piece that is unknown between the viewer and what Natterer really experienced speaks to the Surrealist movement. There is a subjective nature to what it is Natterer is trying to put onto paper and at the same time this is what makes his works feel evocative of Surrealist tendencies. What is left open by the translation from Natterer’s subconscious to the paper is the ability for subjective interpretation. These works invite the viewer to project their own reality onto an experience whose origins feel unclear to not only the viewer but the artist as well. There is a universally felt subjectivity to the works of the artists in Prinzhorn’s publications and Natterer’s “air drawings” are a strong example of the

²⁵ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.

correlation between the processes which motivated this work and that of the Surrealist movement.

Prinzhorn wrote,

*“One is reminded of the shapes assumed by baked goods in boiling fat, and of intestines or abscesses. It is precisely this variety of forms suggested in a human face, which accounts of the horror of the total impression.”*²⁶

The opportunity for the projection of varying experiences which are unique to a range of individuals is a fundamental element of both psychiatric and surrealist fine art genres. Through observing August Natterer’s raw creative expression, we are able to observe the interplay of the conscious and unconscious mind and how both are relevant to an inherently creative process which exists in human nature. The suggestion of form without the explicit execution of the subject onto the paper speaks to a process which leaves room for subjectivity and projection. This is a clear point of overlap in process between the works of psychiatric patients and fine art movements which dominated not only the mid 1900’s but even contemporary art today. The roots of this process stem from not only a desire to cope with the contents of the unconscious mind but also a reliance on the unconscious mind as a driving component within the process of creative expression.

²⁶ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.



Fig 3. August Natterer “Air Apparition;” *Hallucination*, pencil ²⁷

In conclusion, Hanz Prinzhorn’s greatest contribution to history was undeniably made by the connections and observations which were then published in *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, and circulated throughout Europe. Prinzhorn’s commitment to understanding human suffering and the distress of coping with being an outsider led to an eye opening realization and appreciation for those who had been removed or rejected from society. Prinzhorn gave way to a deeper understanding and respect for an artistic process and its therapeutic benefits which have left a persisting impact on art movements throughout history and even today. The works which Prinzhorn collected all spoke to a subconscious universal human impulse to create and express. This was an interesting find especially within the context of his focus on schizophrenic patients, as he believed that the practice of creative expression counteracted the isolating impact of having schizophrenia. There is a common contemporary thread between psychiatric art and fine art movements whose artistic processes lie in leveraging the subconscious, the emotional, and the irrational mind,

²⁷ Prinzhorn, Hans, et al. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*. Martino Fine Books, 2019.

V. The Surrealist Movement

The emergence of Surrealism can be directly linked to the publishing of the Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, written by André Breton, who was heavily influenced by not only Freud's insights on psychoanalysis and the unconscious but also Prinzhorn's findings on artworks by the mentally ill.²⁸ The Surrealist Manifesto was a set of guided thought and principles which served as the groundwork for the literary and fine art movement that we know to be the Surrealist Movement. Both Freud and Prinzhorn directly impacted and inspired the groundwork for the formal principals within the Surrealist Manifesto and the core group of Surrealist artists. The Surrealist Manifesto can be considered somewhat of an intellectual response or conversation between the groundbreaking publishings within the world of psychology at the time and the world of Fine Art, as all three individuals existed within the same intellectual climate. The essence of that climate was one which was leaning away from a hyperlogical outlook on behavior and reality, and more towards an emotionally relevant way of seeing the world and specifically art. André Breton was deeply fascinated by Freud's writing on dreams and the more irrational part of the brain.²⁹

Breton's initial experiences with Freud's writings took hold during his time studying medicine and working within psychiatric wards during the First World War. As a student of psychology he took specific interest in the manifestations of mental illness and the new findings surrounding distress, hysteria, and schizophrenia within institutional settings at the turn of the century. This interest in the irrational mind directly overlapped with much of Prinzhorn's work and curiosities which inspired "*The Artistry of*

²⁸ Sabom, Clint. "The First Manifesto of Surrealism." *Surrealism Today*, 20 Dec. 2022, surrealismtoday.com/bretons-surrealist-manifesto/#google_vignette.

²⁹ "André Breton." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., www.britannica.com/biography/Andre-Breton. Accessed 16 May 2024.

the Mentally Ill.” Breton’s primary interest which drove him towards the publishing of not only the “*Manifeste du Surréalisme*”, but also a newspaper dedicated to promoting the artworks of the Surrealist movement – his primary focus and interest is how to express unconscious contents and thought without the interference of reason or control. The heart of Breton’s goal was to push back against what the bourgeois society repressed.³⁰

In the early 1920’s, Breton began practicing an experimental type of creative writing – one that leveraged more irrational thought and valued stream of consciousness being projected directly onto the page without filter. By 1924, Breton solidified his ideas and thoughts on the unconscious mind’s relevance to the creative process through this publishing of the *Surrealist Manifesto*, or the *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. The primary goal was to express the true form and functioning of thought without any control or reason filtering its expression. This came at a moment where not only was the goal to leverage and access the unconscious mind, but also as a more powerful means of rejecting the hyperdependence on rationality within the Bourgeois society.

Within the Surrealist Manifesto, Breton formally defined Surrealism as the following: “psychic automatism in its pure state” aimed to express the unfiltered functionings of thought, free from rationality or moral considerations.³¹ The primary feeling within the Surrealist movement was an ultimate rejection of traditional artist norms which championed formality and representation. Through the practice of processes like Automatism, which is a term rooted in physiology to describe automatic processes of the body like breathing that we do not consciously control, the Surrealists created drawings and writings based off of free associations and out of context visual suggestions. The Surrealist Movement embraced

³⁰ *Introduction to Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary 1926-1938* | Moma, www.moma.org/audio/playlist/180/2387. Accessed 16 May 2024.

³¹ Sabom, Clint. “The First Manifesto of Surrealism.” *Surrealism Today*, 20 Dec. 2022, surrealismtoday.com/bretons-surrealist-manifesto/#google_vignette.

spontaneity and saw the unconscious mind as vital to their creative process. Using techniques that are specifically correlated to the Surrealist Manifesto, Automatism was seen as one of the main means of leveraging and connecting the artist's hand with their unconscious mind.³² The goal was to blur the divide between the daydreaming mind and the mind which functions in reality. In the practice of writing it would involve writing whatever came to mind as quickly and automatically as one could, and in the context of making art it manifested in the creation of collage, photo, painting, and drawings.

One of the most well known painters practicing Automatism and other subconscious processes within the Surrealist movement was Joan Miró. Miró was revered by Breton for his iconic and dedicated approach to the Surrealist depiction and processes. Much of Miró's practice and artworks were created through the process of spontaneous drawing and unconscious associations guiding his imagery and leading him to produce incredibly vague yet familiar landscapes.



Fig 4. Joan Miró, *The Hunter* (Catalan Landscape), July 1923-Winter 1924 ³³

³² "Surrealist Techniques: Automatism (Article)." *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/dada-and-surrealism/xd974a79:surrealism/a/surrealist-techniques-automatism. Accessed 16 May 2024.

³³ *Joan Miró. the Hunter (Catalan Landscape). Montroig, July 1923-Winter 1924 | Moma*, www.moma.org/collection/works/78756. Accessed 16 May 2024.

Using the specific example of Miró's, *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, created directly alongside the years that the *Surrealist Manifesto*, was published, we can see a clear example of the suggestive figures and uncanny objects which are specific and unique to the Surrealist Movement. Through the process of depending on the spontaneous and uncanny to depict the landscape that Miró was hoping to reproduce, you find a space filled with human and animal-like parts alongside a more flattened and dream-like depiction of the life they inhabit.³⁴ The representation of “the hunter” using stick-figure representation shows a heavy reliance and dedication to leaning on the suggestive shapes that the canvas holds. This painting is a great example of the move away from the literal and a giant leap towards the imagined, mysterious, and fragmented parts of human life. Miró's primary intention in the process of making many of these paintings was creation without conscious reasoning as a means of revealing the pathology within the human. We know that the human body and behavior exists within this painting but it is the vagueness and enigmatic quality to the shapes which create a Surreal effect. It is one of many translations of the unconscious experience onto the canvas.

³⁴ Joan Miró. *the Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*. Montroig, July 1923-Winter 1924 | Moma, www.moma.org/collection/works/78756. Accessed 16 May 2024.

A. Max Ernst: Frottage and Grattage

Another significant process which drove the imagery and effect of the unconscious within the art of the Surrealist Movement, was systematized by the famous Surrealist artist, Max Ernst. The two processes which Ernst heavily relied on to create his Surreal works were named Frottage and Grattage. This process relied heavily on the use of familiar surfaces and textures to recreate the uncanny and dreamlike effect within a piece of artwork.

Frottage was the process of putting a piece of paper over a textured surface such as the grain of wood, and rubbing over it with a medium like crayon or charcoal to create an imprinted pattern outside of the artist's direct control and conscious organization.³⁵ Frottage taps into the unconscious by the means of creating suggestive shapes and imagery in a surface which was picked up on the paper through the process of rubbing. These unexpected, yet familiar shapes would be incredibly unique to much of Max Ernst's drawing and painting works. Ernst would use the patterns made by Frottage to riff off of and automatically continue executing the image the pattern was suggesting as far as he could perceive. This was one more way of projecting unconscious associations onto imagery that came from no place of formality or traditional artistic roots. To Ernst, the "arbitrary markings" which came from his use of frottage made more explicit his "visionary capacities" and triggered visions of odd figures and landscapes.

³⁵ Tate. "Frottage." *Tate*, www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/frottage. Accessed 16 May 2024.

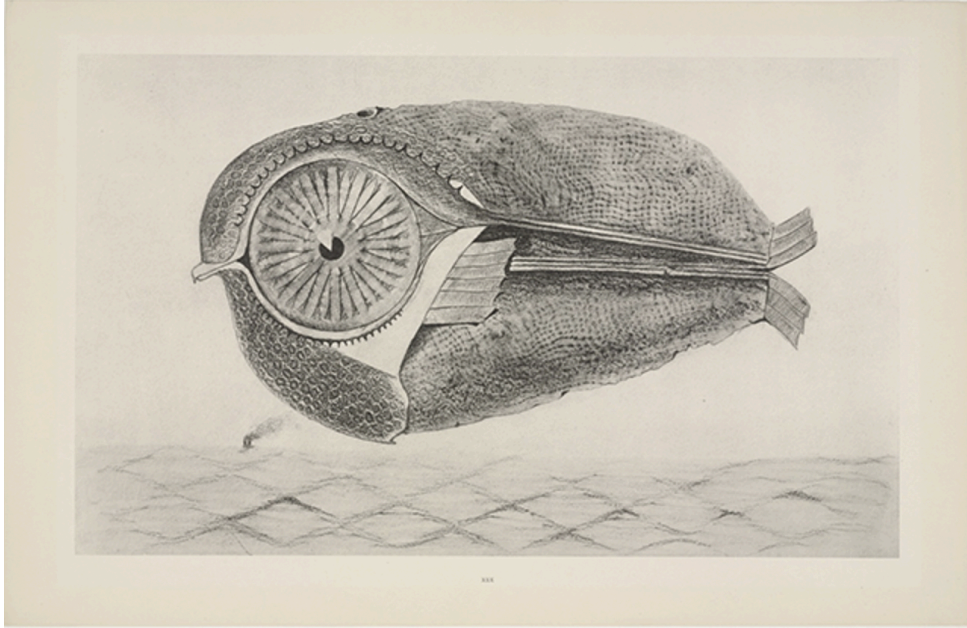


Fig 5. Max Ernst, *The Fugitive* from *Natural History*, published 1926, charcoal³⁶

Uses of the frottage process are made visible in a series of drawings which were published by Ernst in 1926. This specific piece titled “*The Fugitive*”, contains the texture and pattern of what seem to be many different surfaces. Through the depictions of these oddly familiar patterns and textures, the odd life-like form takes on a contradictory role where the textures which we knew as stagnant and nonhuman, now appear to be containing an odd version of life which we have never seen before. Despite not knowing what this creature is, the elements and pieces which the creature is made of feel familiar, which simulate the effect and experience of a dream or hallucination.

The process of grattage is essentially to create the same effect as frottage but with paint. The word “grattage” translates to “scraping” in French. This process involves laying down multiple coats of paint to the canvas, along with textured objects and then scraping across the surface to see what patterns and suggested forms remained.³⁷ Just as the process of frottage would create oddly familiar objects which

³⁶ Max Ernst. *the Fugitive (L'Évadé) from Natural History (Histoire Naturelle)*. c. 1925, Published 1926 | Moma, www.moma.org/collection/works/94254. Accessed 16 May 2024.

³⁷ Tate. “Grattage.” Tate, www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/g/grattage. Accessed 16 May 2024.

suggest something we almost understand, grattage plays in the same vein of the uncanny. Both of these processes are an artistic embodiment of Automatism as they could exist within the artistic process. Furthermore, frottage and grattage were two incredibly successful processes which leverage the unconscious contents of the mind onto the canvas. Through welcoming the odds of chance or accidents, these processes also allowed for the unconscious projections varying depending on who was viewing the work. The presence of potential and surprise are key to both the tendencies of the unconscious mind and the Surrealist movement.



Max Ernst, *Forest and Dove*, 1927³⁸

In this profound example of grattage by Max Ernst, *Forest and Dove* is one of many surreal works by Ernst made using Automatic processes in the 1920's. Having treated the surface of the canvas using grattage, you can see the shapes of the bones of a fish which create the odd and ominous forest within the frame. These bone-like structures make us wonder about the different elements which created

³⁸ Tate. "‘Forest and Dove’, Max Ernst, 1927." *Tate*, 1 Jan. 1970, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ernst-forest-and-dove-t00548.

the piece that we assumed was so straightforward at first glance but with a little more attention to detail we see its origins stem from something far more psychological. The odd tension between the smaller forms which made the larger form bring us to a surreal experience of what we know about what the piece is telling us. At first it may seem simple in regards to the feeling its provoking, but when you are able to identify that the components which make up the piece are not what you thought they were you begin to question what it is the work is actually trying to say.

What is fundamentally linked between the emergence of psychoanalysis, Artistry of the Mentally Ill, and the Surrealist movement is the acknowledgement and appreciation for the contents and behaviors which correlate to the unconscious mind. In the Surrealist Manifesto Breton states that the primary goal of the movement was to “reconcile the real and the dream.” It seemed to be a crucial part of an artistic process which also attempts to cope with the distressing realities of the unconscious mind and human nature. It was overtly stated in the manifesto that the unconscious drove the inspiration for the genre of artwork that made up the Surrealist movement and the practices it developed. The same disregard of the rational mind in the context of creative expression was directly observed by Prinzhorn within the creations of institutionalized patients he worked with. Both the Surrealist Movement and the works that make up the Prinzhorn collection are demonstrations of a type of artistic expression which represents the emotional atmosphere that the artist occupied when making the work intending to provoke some of the same experience for the viewer. This artwork speaks more to human nature and emotional experiences than the previous works that were revered at that time in history. These works were far less literal and inverted the original intentions of realism and figurative painting traditions. At the same time these works are far more provocative and speak to the specific emotions of human life and the way we experience it at all levels. There is something to relate to and familiar about the works which honor more emotional subject matter and this is the impact that unconscious leaning artistic methods had on the trajectory of fine art.

VI. The Dadaists and Anti Rationalism

We can observe a certain amount of evolution and continuity within the conscious mind's role in the creative process that follows the Surrealist movement known as Dadaism. The unconscious mind plays an important role within Dadaism and overlaps with Expressionism and Surrealism in the same effort to reject conventional notions of art as a means of challenging the way we observe reality. There is a mutual rejection of objectivity which relies on the inspiration guided by the unconscious mind that exists between these three major art movements as well as artworks within the Prinzhorn collection. There is an incredibly interesting overlap between the unconscious process which drives and inspires the artworks in institutionalized individuals and the intention behind the creative process honored by the Dada movement. The key piece to this overlap being the embracing of a specifically "primitive" feeling or experience within their process and artworks. The evolution made from the publishings on psychoanalysis, to Prinzhorn's publishings on art of the mentally ill, to then the Surrealist and Dadaist movements all rely heavily on themes of the unconscious mind to inspire the incredibly creative works that came out of these movements both scholarly and artistic. The overlap in primitive nature of the Dada movement and the Prinzhorn collection show a unique side to the unconscious mind, one that is far more elementary and primal than our rational brain. What defines primitive is a sense of unfiltered and slightly unpalatable nature to a certain behavior or experience, likely unaccepted by society. The Dadaists were incredibly intentional about stepping away from the well established aesthetics which society was widely accepting of and instead, portrayed a more raw and unfiltered version of life and human behavior. The goal to portray a more primitive version of the human experience stemmed from the motivation to communicate the authentic inner feeling states of the creative individual rather than a literal translation of the physical world.

One of the primary and strongest examples of Primitive art within the Dada movement is through the observation of the artwork of Hans Jean Arp. Hans Arp was a French-German sculptor and painter, who was also incredibly well known for his collage works. Some of the major themes of Arp's work include transformation, organic abstraction, and growth and relied heavily on chance and the unconscious contents of the mind in his creative process. Arp's work tends to overlap with the genres of both Surrealism and Dadaism as he lived a life where he experienced the historic transition between the two, and we are able to observe that through his work. Arp is an incredibly interesting figure in the art world, as he harnesses the very essence of the unconscious mind's role in creation on a wide spectrum of levels. Arp's specific attention paid to primitive presentations of the human experience draws a very direct thread to the process which inspired the artists within the Prinzhorn collection, as both processes let their intuition and inner experience guide the work. At the same time, Hans Arp was also able to leverage symbolic elements and aesthetic choices used by both Surrealist and Dadaist fine art movements. We can observe a blend of both Surrealism and Dadaism in Arp's biomorphic sculptures which were made to

intentionally induce various free associations amongst its viewers.



Fig 7. Hans Jean Arp, *Sculpture to be Lost in the Forest*, 1932, cast 1953-8, bronze ³⁹

Through observing Hans Arp's Sculpture titled, *Sculpture to be Lost in the Forest*, we understand Arp as an artist whose practice spanned across many historic art movements but the common focus is a reliance on the unconscious functioning of the mind to direct his process. This work was made in a semi-automatic approach to creating the shapes which he played with and adjusted until he was satisfied. This process is a great example of the unconscious mind driving creativity until there is an intuitive satisfaction with what has been made or expressed by the artist. One of the most poignant quotes by Arp which speaks to this very concept is when he said, "*I work until enough of my life has flowed into its body.*" This sculpture presents very similarly to many of the shapes and visual suggestions made within

³⁹ Tate. 'Sculpture to Be Lost in the Forest', Jean Arp (Hans Arp), 1932, Cast c.1953–8." *Tate*, 1 Jan. 1970, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/arp-sculpture-to-be-lost-in-the-forest-t04854.

Surrealist artworks. The semi-automatism which drove the creative process is something we associate with many of the practices within Surrealism associated with creative writing and drawing. The nonclarity which the forms take on allow for a certain amount of projection which, of course, varies on a human to human basis. The inspiration stems from Arp's lifelong interest in organic forms and growth in nature. While the information within the title contextualizes us in a natural environment, the rest is left up to interpretation. This is one of the key effects that much of the art driven by the unconscious mind has on its viewer and audiences. The associations that we experience upon viewing this sculpture of Arp's bring us to the natural world but what is unique about the effect of the Surrealist and Dadaist process is that it brings each viewer to their own specific associations of the natural world. The process used to follow intuition over rational control is a powerful artistic tool.

Another unique example of the connection that Arp's body of work has to the unconscious processes of the mind is through the example of the painting, "*Constellation According to the Laws of Chance*," which Arp created in 1930. It is easy to understand how Arp's reaction to a hyperirrational world took form within his artwork through pieces which are titled like these. The title itself suggests a process rooted in randomness and a natural order which directly correlates to the ambiguities of what takes place in our irrational mind. The forms in the painting are mere suggestions of a naturally occurring constellation which can only be recognized through the information provided by the title. The heavy emphasis on abstraction in much of Arp's work was meant to simulate the same randomness and chance which occurs in nature. While this piece shows a certain continuity of Arp's interest in biomorphic and abstracted forms it carries the same effect which allows for individual experiences to be projected onto the suggested forms in the frame. This piece was a specific part of a study of "Constellations" which Arp completed through explorations in wood reliefs, paintings, and sculpture.



Fig 8. Hans Jean Arp *Constellation According to the Laws of Chance*, 1930, paint on wood

VII. Contemporary Examples of the Unconscious Creative Process: Louise Bourgeois

Following the evolution and development of both Surrealism and Dadaism came the artists who fell in between and across the span of both movements. There are many artists whose lifespan took place over the course of time which allowed their work to exist within multiple genres, making it hard to pin them down. There were many artists who are deemed Surrealists or Dadaists without ever proclaiming themselves to be associated with these groups or moments in art history. Despite the varying levels of involvement or associations with these movements, much of what tied these artists to Surrealism or Dadaism, is the unique reliance on the unconscious mind and an intuitive approach to their creative process.

Louise Bourgeois is the final demonstration of an artist whose practice depended deeply on the unconscious mind to generate inspiration. Bourgeois was born in 1911 in Paris and lived an incredibly traumatic childhood which heavily impacted her mental health over the course of her 98 year long life and drove her creative impulses.⁴⁰ As a means of coping and confronting many of the traumas of her life, Bourgeois approached art as a secondary vehicle for psychoanalysis, using her creative process as a means to understand her own experiences with psychoanalysis in therapy.⁴¹ Through a desire to explore and understand her own distress, Bourgeois developed a body of work that undeniably occupied the intersection between psychology and art. Her process depended greatly on leveraging the unconscious contents of her mind to generate creativity and ideas, very similarly to the process of the artists within the Prinzhorn Collection. Both Bourgeois and the artists in the Prinzhorn Collection are instances where creativity helped process and cope with the distressing elements of life as well as anxiety and fear. Bourgeois often acknowledged that her process was a cathartic process which allowed her to confront

⁴⁰ Moma | Louise Bourgeois: *The Complete Prints & Books* | Biography, www.moma.org/s/lb/curated_lb/about/biography.html. Accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴¹ Marin, Diana. "Louise Bourgeois: Art and Psychoanalysis." *The Uncanny Archive*, 15 Feb. 2022, uncannyarchive.com/louise-bourgeois-art-and-psychoanalysis/.

trauma, anxiety, her experience as a woman, and childhood loss. To Bourgeois, creativity was a “gift of sublimation” unique to the artist which became accessible through tapping into the unconscious contents of the mind.⁴² However at the same time, this process mirrors a certain tormenting, as the artist endures a repetition of their personal trauma for the sake of creative production. Bourgeois is one who was deeply understanding of the spectrum of emotion that any individual was able to experience and through her work formed an incredibly powerful example of how to cope with her own life and trauma through the means of creativity.

In one of many exhibitions throughout Louise Bourgeois’s career, a direct thread was drawn between Bourgeois’s work and Freudian psychoanalysis. In 2021, the Jewish Museum in New York City presented an exhibition by Hauser and Wirth on Bourgeois titled, *Louise Bourgeois: Freud’s Daughter*.⁴³ This exhibition explored the relationship between Bourgeois’s creative practice ranging from a medium of sculpture to writings, and Freudian psychoanalysis. This show underscored that perhaps more than any other artist of the 20th century, did Bourgeois consistently engage with psychoanalysis as a key driver of her own practice. In the eyes of Bourgeois, and as this paper argues, without psychoanalysis there would be no direct access, or even awareness, of the unconscious mind. The most profound example of Bourgeois’s intention to represent the unconscious mind within her own process is through a sculpture she made towards the end of her life in 2008, titled, *Conscious and Unconscious*, which was a part of the 2008 exhibit at the Jewish Museum. According to Bourgeois,

“...the successful realization of a sculpture functions to make conscious what was previously unconscious – and discharge unwelcome or unmanageable instinctual impulses.”⁴⁴

⁴² Schiller, Britt-Marie. “The primitive edge of creativity: Destruction and reparation in Louise Bourgeois’s art.” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 65, no. 2, Apr. 2017, pp. 221–250.

⁴³ “Louise Bourgeois - Freud’s Daughter.” *Hauser & Wirth*, www.hauserwirth.com/viewing-room/25849-louise-bourgeois-freuds-daughter/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴⁴ Pink, Gail. “Modern Art Monday Presents: Louise Bourgeois, Conscious and Unconscious.” *The Worley Gig*, 23 Oct. 2021, worleygig.com/2021/11/01/louise-bourgeois-conscious-and-unconscious/.

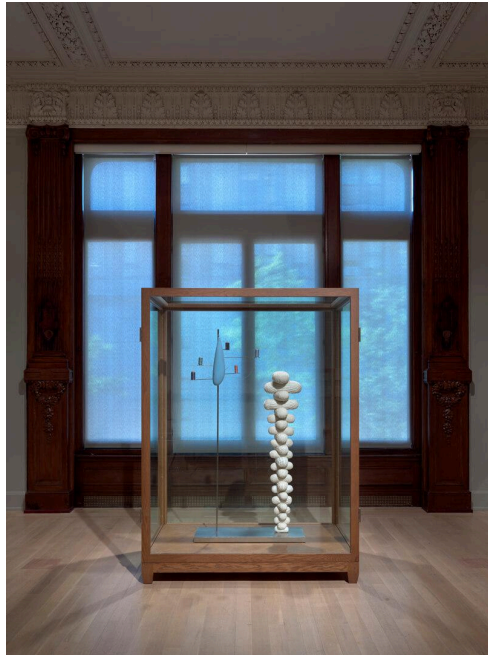


Fig 9. Louise Bourgeois, *Conscious and Unconscious*, 2008, Fabric, rubber, thread, and stainless steel⁴⁵

This sculpture, *Conscious and Unconscious*, was made as a part of a series of four large scale vitrines which Bourgeois created within the last five years of her life in the early 2000's. This work speaks to the argument that without the groundwork of Freudian psychoanalysis, abstract and emotionally charged works of art would have no lens for being understood in society. One can observe, on the left side, a set of five thread spools centered around a blue hanging teardrop. This side of the sculpture represents the unconscious function of the brain, or the primary process, as Freud named it. The threads, which represent timelessness and continuity unique to subconscious thought, are a symbolic representation of the automatic and interconnected contents of the unconscious. The floating nature of the spools centered around a teardrop speak to the random and out of context nature of the unconscious mind. In contrast to this, is a very intentionally stacked set of geometric shapes made with fabric intended to represent rational order and the goal-oriented behaviors of the conscious brain, also known as the

⁴⁵ "Louise Bourgeois - Freud's Daughter." *Hauser & Wirth*, www.hauserwirth.com/viewing-room/25849-louise-bourgeois-freuds-daughter/. Accessed 16 May 2024.

secondary process. This specific sculpture of Bourgeois's is a powerful representation of the duality of the inner workings of the human mind. When you step back to observe the two pieces of this sculpture side by side, one can appreciate a sense of balance and harmony within these two processes, one which could not exist without the other. The way Bourgeois presents it, the two sides of the brain exist almost as foils of one another, opposite processes within the same being. This sculpture, by Bourgeois, is a direct response to the findings which Freud made at the beginning of the 1900's on the unconscious versus conscious functionings of the mind. Throughout the course of Bourgeois's life, this was the common understanding which society had surrounding the functionings of the mind - two distinctly different processes. Bourgeois is a contemporary example of the evolution which took place within the art world regarding the representation of mental illness, distress, and human consciousness. Bourgeois's work developed alongside psychoanalysis at times as a visual understanding of the framework laid out for us by Freud. Inherent to much artwork of the modern day, is a correlation or connection to this process which relies on the unconscious mind's creative nature to process and cope with internal fears, impulses, and a need to express oneself. Bourgeois's body of work is a powerful example of the progress and success that the unconscious driven creative process has made in the context of contemporary fine art.

VIII. Modern Science and the Unconscious Creative Process

It goes without saying that without the foundation and framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, it would not be possible to grasp and appreciate the works and artists which represented the movements that this paper has discussed. Supplementing the understanding of psychoanalysis, was Prinzhorn's more concrete observations of the unconscious mind's role within the creative process specifically within the context of mental distress. This paved the way for society to embrace and take seriously more abstract and subjective works of art. Without these groundbreaking works contextualizing a world entering an era of industrialization and World War, it would likely be the case that traditional notions of art would have continued to dominate creative sects of society. The common thread which has carried on throughout these major movements in fine art is the dedication to representing a spectrum of human emotion while depending on the unconscious mind to navigate what that looks like aesthetically. This alongside a staunch rejection towards rationality, as a reaction to the first world war, were the driving elements within Surrealism, Dadaism, and the Prinzhorn Collection. In order to understand where this has taken us in the present day, we have to rely on modern technology's findings on the creative process and the role which the unconscious mind takes within creativity. While Freud provided us with a basic understanding that there are two modes of functioning in the brain which separate conscious versus unconscious processes, modern science has evolved to understand things are more complex than this.

To appreciate the concepts which Freud was trying to grapple with at the beginning of the century we have to look at the work of Elkhonon Goldberg and his book titled, "*Creativity*". Goldberg is a cognitive neuroscientist who is incredibly well known for his writing and academic contributions to the field of neuropsychology. The most relevant finding to this paper from Goldberg's book on the creative mind is the discovery of the salience network within the brain.⁴⁶ In order to understand the role of the salience network within the creative process we have to dissect the functionings of the brain that modern

⁴⁶ Goldberg, Elkhonon. *Creativity: The Human Brain in the Age of Innovation*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

science has informed us of. While Freud provided us with a framework to understand the definitive difference between the primary and secondary functionings of the brain, the modern understanding of this concept has evolved. What modern science has proven, is the understanding that the two modes Freud was referring to, are actually two distinct networks of functioning in the brain, and the process of creativity actually exists in the dialogue between the two.

The modern equivalent of the unconscious mind, or the primary process as Freud called it, is now well established as the default mode network. The default mode network is what we know to be a more unconscious side of the brain which allows wandering thought and is more free-flowing than our conscious thoughts and behaviors.⁴⁷ The default mode is active when behavior is not being goal directed or is free of any given task. Modern technology shows that activity in the default mode network is actually what allows us to generate creative thoughts and ideas, but it is the salience network which translates this content to the conscious side of the brain.⁴⁸ The more conscious side of the brain is known as the central executive network, which Freud named the secondary process. The central executive network is active during more task and goal oriented behaviors, and engages in analytical and structured thinking. We rely on the central executive network to problem solve while the default mode is active during more idle states.⁴⁹ According to Goldberg, the modern findings on the creative process actually stem from a toggling and interaction between these two distinct networks. This toggling phase is known as the salience network, which functions as a filter and translator for the ideas and novel concepts which the default mode generates in idleness. The salience network plays a key role in translating the novel and creative thoughts from the default mode network in a way that the central executive network can understand.

⁴⁷ Goldberg, Elkhonon. *Creativity: The Human Brain in the Age of Innovation*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁴⁸ Goldberg, Elkhonon. *Creativity: The Human Brain in the Age of Innovation*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁴⁹ Goldberg, Elkhonon. *Creativity: The Human Brain in the Age of Innovation*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

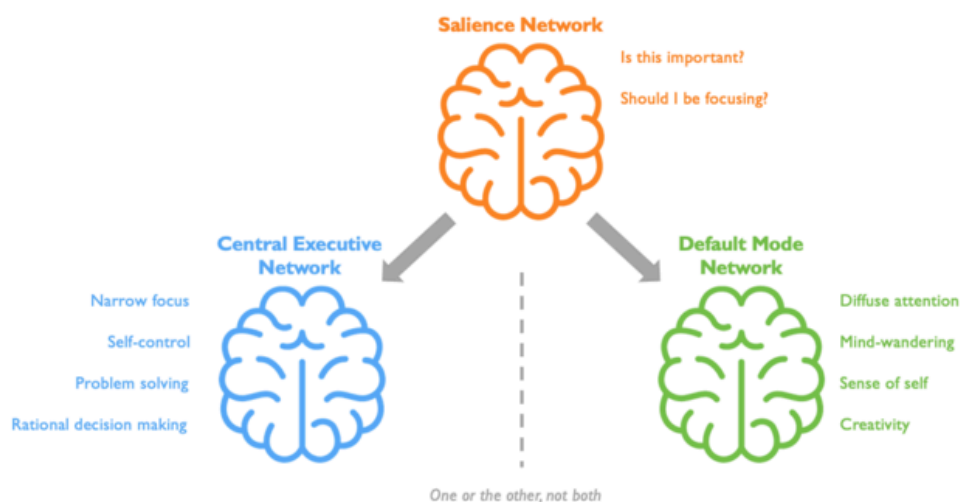


Fig 10. The Salience Network Source: MichaelAshcroft.org ⁵⁰

Through the basic understanding of the interaction between these two systems of the human brain, we begin to understand the process which these genres of art and groups of artists intentionally try to access and leverage. Knowing that a certain amount of time in an idle state is required to generate creative thoughts gives us insights on the types of mind states which are more inherently creative due to the task at hand or the absence thereof. The clarity which Goldberg's findings bring us about the unconscious creative process shows us that creativity is unique in that it engages not just one side of the brain but both. Ontop of this groundbreaking realization we actually can now understand that the interaction between both sides of the brain actually generate a unique language of creativity, almost reminiscent of an entirely unique network of its own, known as the salience network. The brain is more nuanced than just being split between two modes and the salience network is the translator of the more creative and nuanced behaviors of the human mind. Freud's understanding was not entirely inaccurate, but it was certainly limited in a sense that it left out a crucial mode of functioning that the mind has the capacity for within the activity of the salience network.

⁵⁰ "Mind-Wandering and the Dark Side of Productivity." *Mind-Wandering and the Dark Side of Productivity*, www.michaelashcroft.org/blog/mind-wandering-and-the-dark-side-of-productivity. Accessed 16 May 2024.

IX. Conclusion

The reality of the creative process as we understand it today lies in the inbetween of the conscious and unconscious functionings of the brain. The modern findings show that what is required for creativity to take place is a certain amount of time spent in the default mode network, as this is where novel ideas and inspiration take place. The act of creativity actually shows a switching between the default and central executive network, which is influenced by stimulus input.⁵¹ The unconscious functionings of the mind are still incredibly important in generating unique and creative thoughts but it is the salience network which makes the choices regarding which of these novel ideas get communicated and translated to more conscious awareness, or the central executive network. The salience network acts as almost a filter, similar to what Freud thought was the ego, to the ideas that the less conscious mind generates. To Goldberg, the salience network decides which of the contents generated by the default mode network should be communicated to the central executive network by picking the most valuable ideas and thoughts. The central executive network then acts on the novel thoughts and contents processed by the salience network to refine and further develop the ideas for creative expression. What this tells us about the creative process is that idle and taskless time, unconscious thought, allows the default mode to generate creative ideas that can then be enacted in a more conscious state of awareness within the central executive network.

In other words, time spent occupying more unconscious or idle states of the brain is crucial to inspiring creativity. What exists during the moment at which the creative process happens is a conversation and toggling between these two modes of the brain where the brain enters into a third mode of functioning, known as the salience network. The major fine art movements of Surrealism and Dadaism, and the works within the Prinzhorn collection, create a tangible understanding for this very process. The Prinzhorn is a representation of the impact that creativity has on dealing with unconscious distress and

⁵¹ Goldberg, Elkhonon. *Creativity: The Human Brain in the Age of Innovation*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

mental illness. Surrealism and Dadaism both intentionally leverage how to occupy more time in the default mode network to inspire their creative process as a means of reaching a certain set of aesthetics to represent the unconscious contents of the mind. Contemporary art today inherently welcomes the association to psychology and psychoanalysis as we now understand that much of the aesthetics we know and love within the fine art of modern times are actually rooted historically in this very relationship. Without the understanding of psychoanalysis and the potential nuance of human emotion, abstract artwork representative of emotionally charged experiences may not have a welcomed place in culture and society. Through the observation of the works of art made within these movements we understand a unique version of reality which was intentionally distorted as an emotional reaction to the historical contexts which these artists lived throughout. Without the groundwork laid out by Freud and Prinzhorn there would be no understanding or basis for the acceptance of subjective and abstracted art on a larger scale. We can observe an incredibly powerful intersection between psychology and art that set the stage for a new understanding of creativity which embraced emotionality and a broad range of subjective human experiences and still persists in contemporary art today.

As we take a look back at the findings made throughout the 19th and 20th centuries on the creative process we are able to observe an evolution of knowledge of the human mind granted by the observation of creativity. Through appreciating the work of individuals that Prinzhorn proved to be creatively gifted despite living in being removed from society, we can acknowledge that creativity is an incredibly cathartic means of self expression in the contexts of emotional distress.⁵² Ontop of the therepeutic values observed by Prinzhorn, we understand that creativity is a specific type of intelligence and means of expression either inherently present to an individual's skill set, or not. In the instance of the Prinzhorn collection, creative expression was used as a means of problem solving in distressing situations

⁵² Horner, Althea J. "The Unconscious and the Creative Process." *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2006, pp. 461–469, <https://doi.org/10.1521/jaap.2006.34.3.461>.

and to relieve personal suffering within institutionalized settings. August Natterer depended on the ability to create as a tool to process and rid himself of the repetitive hallucinations that he would experience grappling with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. There is a unique sense of flexibility which we now attribute to creative individuals who are able to take risks without the fear of failure in their creative process.⁵³ The artists who make up the Prinzhorn Collection are incredible examples of creative risk taking as they were expressing themselves without an audience but purely as a means of coping with their circumstances. This created an incredibly raw and unfiltered collection of art and gave a powerful voice to those suffering from mental illness. We cannot ignore the systematic attempts made throughout history by political powers and societal oppositions to remove these artworks along with many others from ever being acknowledged by society in the first place. It is not without the basic understanding of the human mind which Freud provided society with at such a crucial point in history, that we would be able to accept and appreciate the works and movements discussed within this paper.

Without the basic knowledge which Freud and Prinzhorn provided society with, the practices that span across these major movements of art would have no context to exist in. In the case of Expressionism, Freud and Prinzhorn provide an understanding for works of art and human emotion which is more unfiltered and less idealized. Expressionism was the first welcomed moment of abstraction following the publication of psychoanalysis. In the context of the Surrealist Movement, free association and the concept of automatic and free flowing thought was given a creative platform which drove the aesthetics of a genre that was seen as a representation of the more repressed sides of human nature, maintaining a dream-like elegance. The Dadaists leveraged an antirational creative practice within fine art that was guided by intuition and created space for the audience to project their own subjective experiences to the artworks they were viewing. Dadaism welcomed the absurd and the nonreal in ways that society had originally

⁵³ Horner, Althea J. "The Unconscious and the Creative Process." *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2006, pp. 461–469, <https://doi.org/10.1521/jaap.2006.34.3.461>.

rejected due to their lacking roots in tradition. The continuity of these movements is observed through modern artists within the early 2000's like Louise Bourgeois, whose life spanned across almost every single one of these fine art genres in history. What we learn from the observation of Bourgeois's work, and throughout the entirety of this paper, is that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the study of the human creative process, psychology, and art. Art inherently occupies the space and tension inbetween the rational, and emotional mind - or the primary and secondary processes. We can look at art as a secondary representation of the very essence that is the salience network – art is a translator for emotionally inspired ideas and creativity. What exists inbetween our conscious and unconscious parts of the brain is a desire for play, an urge to express, and a cathartic need to create. This is demonstrated by the works within every genre mentioned by this paper spanning from the Prinzhorn Collection to contemporary artwork today. While we know this space inbetween more formally now as the salience network, the unconscious mind's importance in the creative process would not be appreciated or welcome without the basic understanding provided by the themes within works of Freud, Prinzhorn, and on a modern level Goldberg.

The intersection of art and psychology which we observed throughout this paper is one which is now largely embraced and somewhat implicit to the world of art. While the artists used as case studies throughout the paper are unique examples of the history of the unconscious mind's evolution throughout the creative process, what we have now come to understand, despite attempts to remove these aesthetics from society, is a universal knowledge that the subconscious mind is innate to creative expression. While the role of the subconscious varies from work to work or from artist to artist, we know based on the information provided by Elkhonon Goldberg's, *Creativity*, that time spent occupying the unconscious side of the brain is crucial to generating creative and novel ideas. With further understanding of the tendencies of the unconscious mind, we know artists are gifted with the skill of being able to intentionally leverage these functionings of the brain, or not, based on the intentions they have for their work. Freudian psychoanalysis has paved a path of understanding which society has applied to the world of fine art and as

a result, led to the embracing of a wider spectrum of practices and genres of work. Without a modern understanding of the unconscious mind and its role in creativity, we would not appreciate nor acknowledge some of the most psychologically nuanced practices of fine art seen through the genres of the Expressionism, the Prinzhorn Collection, Surrealism, Dadaism, and much of contemporary fine art today.

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