Title
The “Autonoetic Hypothesis” on Creativity: Memory and Cognition in Picasso’s Guernica.

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4547w5kd

Journal

ISSN
1069-7977

Author
Espinel, Carlos H.

Publication Date
2003

Peer reviewed
The “Autonoetic Hypothesis” on Creativity: Memory and Cognition in Picasso’s Guernica.

Carlos H. Espinel (espinelmd@aol.com)
The Blood Pressure Center, Washington, and Georgetown University Medical Center, Dept. of Medicine
1715 North George Mason Dr., Suite 401, Arlington, VA 22205 USA

Purpose.
To study Picasso’s memories in relation to the creation of his masterpiece, Guernica.

The Hypothesis.
In a previous study, I presented The “Autonoetic Hypothesis” on Creativity showing that long-term memories, recognizable, conscious images, are critical to the genesis of abstract art, like in Pollock’s abstract paintings. (Espinel, 2002) Guernica (1937, Madrid), one of the greatest masterpieces of the 20th century, is a symbolic painting. It was inspired by rage over the bombing of the ancient town of Guernica during the Spanish civil war. (Oppler, 1988; Rubin, 1980) In the mural motifs from bull fighting and mythology symbolize the horrors of war. (Oppler, 1988)

“The Artmedicine Methods.”
I have devised “The Artmedicine Methods” that integrate neuro-cognitive concepts of how an image is seen with artistic concepts of how an image is created. (Espinel, 1995, 1996, 1998) In this study I investigate the relationship between Picasso’s memories, life events, recollections, statements, art works and the images he created in Guernica.

I pursued the investigation in 5 categories: 1. History. Information on Picasso’s memories was gathered from his own statements, his friends’ and acquaintances’, art experts’, historians’ and biographers’. 2. Art. Works of art, by Picasso and by others, and ranging from modern to Ancient Iberian art, were examined in relation to Guernica. 3. Guernica’s images. The images of the painting and its creation, its 6 sketches and 8 states of progression, were separated and studied individually. 4. Memory classification. Picasso’s memories were classified: a) graphic or verbal; b) chronologically: by day, week, month, and by year, to his childhood; and c) whether conscious (autonoetic), or not. 5. Relationships. Comparison was made between Picasso’s memories and each of Guernica’s images.

Results.
1. A precedent for all of Guernica’s images was found in Picasso’s memories. 2. Images that appeared and disappeared during the creation, except for those of the bombing of Guernica, were related to recent memories. 3. Images from the 1st sketch and finished composition were related to long-term, conscious memories. The times and events of these crucial memories were identified by Picasso himself.

Conclusions.
Picasso’s images germainal to the creation of Guernica were related to long-term memories associated with autonoetic recall. These memories had a personal emotional content. It is likely that the conscious re-experiencing of Picasso’s past events was germainal in the creation of images symbolic of horror. A form of episodic memory (Tulving, 2001) may have been crucial to the creation of Guernica. My “Autonoetic Hypothesis on Creativity,” therefore, might apply to the creation of Picasso’s Guernica.

References.