

# ART

## Painting Under LSD

*A man stands before a mirror painting his face. "Strange how everything is turning out to be larger and smaller at the same time," he says. Applying the color to his forehead, he looks in the mirror with fascination. "Now I'm seeing windows all over, windows, windows. Suddenly, my face becomes like a window picture." He quickly fills in his blank cheeks with a network of lines. "What I'm painting now are the nerves beneath my face. I feel I can see through myself, look through my head, perceive its back. It expresses my innermost self. Funny, I suddenly feel as if my chin has disappeared."*

Arnulf Rainer, the man before the mirror, is a Viennese painter working under the influence of LSD. One of 34 artists who participated in a controlled experiment to test the effects of the drug on creative activity, Rainer was alternately amazed, disturbed and delighted to find himself turning his face into a self-portrait. The sequence is one of the most dramatic moments in a film titled *The Artificial Paradises*, which will be shown on West German television next week. The guiding genie behind the tests was Dr. Richard Hartmann, a Munich psychiatrist and art dealer, working in conjunction with the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry.

To give his project the broadest scope, Hartmann chose artists with differing styles. Some were pure abstractionists, others were from the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism. Each was asked to bring a recent painting or drawing into the studio for the five-hour trip; after the 100-microgram dose began to take effect, each was asked to center his attention on the subject of the work he brought.

**Sliding Images.** Alfred Hrdlicka, an Austrian etcher whose fantasy even without drugs is pretty grotesque, began drawing a pig. "Don't you think that the eyes of a pig have a particularly devout look?" he asked. Suddenly Hrdlicka



RAINER PAINTING FACE

ka began drawing symmetrically with both hands at once, something he had never done before. "The simultaneous depiction with both hands may be new to Hrdlicka," says Hartmann. "But it is a well-known archetypal phenomenon that occurs in the art of schizophrenics."

Most of the artists found their powers of concentration affected and experienced frustration in arresting the dream images that rapidly slide in from the subconscious. "I really can't draw any more," Bernhard Jäger complained. "Everything begins to move on this picture. The ears of a wolf turn into a burning pine forest." Artist Gerhard Hoehme observed: "The paper in front of me turned into a room in which I became lost." Michael Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi watched his precise draftsmanship disintegrate into chaos.

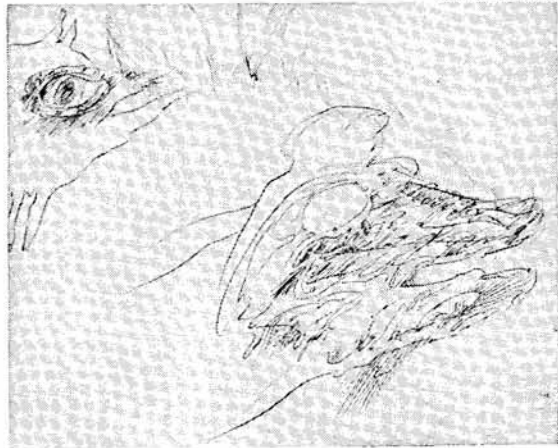
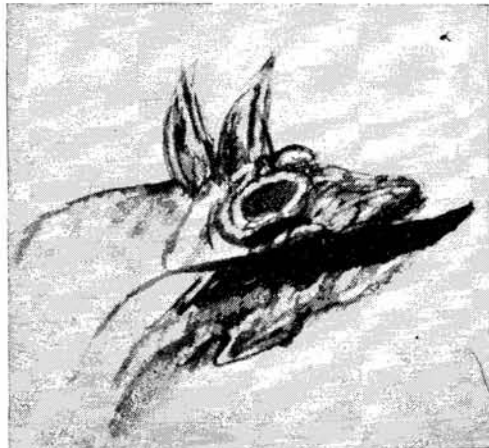
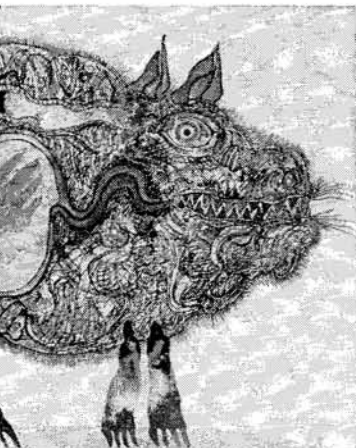
The phenomenon of color intensification under LSD is well known, and Painter Heinz Trökes experienced it intensely. "Whenever I frame the color white," he said, "the color starts to burn. My God, this white becomes the whitest white of my life. Now a bird ap-

pears in its midst. But then it begins to look like a volcano, ejecting bright colors." Perhaps significantly, the abstractionists in the experiment showed far more resistance to mind expansion. Action Painter K. H. Sonderborg displayed few discernible effects, though he reported seeing thousands of strange little animal figures that he found impossible to draw.

**Decline in Skill.** Hartmann offers no final conclusions from his experiment. Significant similarities in the art produced under the drug and that done by schizophrenics may lend support to medical scientists who think that some biochemical imbalance is responsible for schizophrenia. He still thinks that LSD may be useful in tracing archetypal patterns that emerge when inhibitions are lowered. Yet he now believes that, for the creative artist, drugs are likely to produce more negative than positive results. The works produced under the experiment bear him out.

Nearly all of them demonstrate a decline in skill and difficulty in making a cohesive composition. Several artists experienced difficulty in holding pencil or brush. One became paralyzed; another traumatically relived his experiences as a World War II flyer. Under the drug, an artist may lose all desire to create anything at all. His capacity for self-criticism is seriously damaged, and the classic reaction on seeing his work in the cold light of day is that it seemed so much better when he was making it.

Austrian Painter Ernst Fuchs finds a middle ground. He thinks that his experiments with mescaline and other drugs have opened an "aperture" in his consciousness that now enables him to experience the same kinds of perception via pure meditation. But his fellow Austrian, Friedrich Hundertwasser, found his own experience with drugs as a youth in Paris frightening, and is adamant in rejecting them. "Look at Venice," he says. "This city appears like a vision contrived under drug influence. Yet had its builders been drug eaters, they would have never managed the energy to build it. They would have merely dreamed about the city, and would have remained idle on their mud flats."



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