

objective world, it would be a simple matter of selective behavioral interaction with the objective world to insure one's salvation—definitely not in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. (Ephesians 2:8,9). Good works and teachings are good, but not, of themselves, a spiritual principle. •



Drug Taking and the Fine Arts

The nature of art, as a creative exercise of aesthetic experience, can be modified through drug taking. Many writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, and others involved in the fine arts have utilized hallucinogenic substances in the conceptualization, creation and perception of works of art or literature. Cocteau felt that while under the influence “one becomes the meeting place for the phenomena which art sends to us from the outside.”

Drug taking has been a significant factor in the lives of some artists. In the 19th century, Paul Verlaine, the celebrated French poet, created much of his work with a glass of absinthe (a thujone-containing liqueur) at his side. The prose of Théophile Gautier and Victor Hugo and the poetry of Charles Baudelaire were influenced by experimentation with hashish. The writings and theories of the “decadent” artists (Beardsley, Dowson, Symons, Wilde) were, in large measure, based upon experiences with new sensations, including drugs, and an interest in what was unique and exotic. Their work had a direct influence on other artists. The artistic work of the dadaists and surrealists can be viewed as an extension of this philosophy. Drug experiences are seminal to the works of Huxley, Bowles, Ginsberg, Michaux, Burroughs, the Beat poets and musicians, the psychedelic artists of the 1960s, rock bands and other musical groups, and a great variety of filmmakers and video artists.

The influence of drugs on artistic creativity and aesthetic experiences (e.g., the viewing of a painting) has not been satisfactorily explained in scientific or academic terms. Obviously, the perceptions and interpretations arising from a drug taking experience may be translated through some form of art into a new synthesis (or impression) of reality. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* was ostensibly the recall of an opium dream. It seems possible that meaningful artistic forms can emerge in final form while the artist is in a drug-induced state of consciousness.

Can the intensely personal statements of the drug taking artist be better understood by the

reader, viewer, or listener while under the influence of the same drug? Without the drug's effects, are significant nuances or color and form relationships lost to some

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degree? Would certain impressionist paintings assume new artistic dimensions if viewed under the influence of an hallucinogenic agent? This is not to suggest that all artistic creativity has been dependent upon drugs. On the other hand, what is the effect of perceiving a work of art, not directly influenced by drugs or drug taking, while under the influence of a particular substance? Is a new way of perceiving or understanding revealed to the viewer?

Interested readers are encouraged to explore some of the ramifications of this discussion for themselves. For example, become familiar with several paintings of a particular style (e.g., impressionist, romantic, pop art, surrealist), or music (e.g., Berlioz, Debussy, jazz). Record your feelings and perceptions in a notebook (as has been suggested previously in this newsletter). Repeat your observations while using a particular drug and record your experiences. Compare your impressions; or if you are artistically inclined, exercise your talents within some selected framework. If you have a particu-

larly vivid impression of an experience inspired by drug taking, attempt to capture it in artistic form. How would it vary with your work which is not influenced by the drug? Study the lives of various artists to determine if drug taking was influential in the development of a specific work, a whole system or way of conceptualizing. As Huxley said of his mescaline experiences and the influences they had on his perception of various works of art, it "...had shown me, more clearly than I had ever seen it before, the true nature of the challenge and the completely liberating response."

In any given context, art and drug taking can be intimately related. Various motifs have employed

drugs or the plants from which they are derived (e.g., opium poppy, mushrooms, peyote cactus, water lily). Paraphernalia used in drug taking have been designed by the artist of the community (e.g., elaborately carved and painted pipes and drinking vessels). In a positive sense, this relationship can lead to a type of ritual.

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Many drug takers have already been initiated into this world; consider those who take a chemical substance prior to attending a film or musical concert. Drug taking in this context (i.e., to perceive or create a work of art) can act as an informal social control, regulating the nature and pattern of drug use, identifying the optimal user set (form of mind) and setting for use, allowing the user to gain more control over his or her drug taking—actively structuring his or her drug experiences while minimizing the potential for problems as a result of use.

The authors would be very much interested in hearing about the perceptions and observations

of readers who have an interest in this area of inquiry, particularly those who have experienced drug-related artistic creativity.

For further information, the reader is referred to David Ebin's *The Drug Experience* (1961), R.E.L. Masters' and Jean Houston's *Psychedelic Art* (1968), and Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968).

— D.D. Vogt and M. Montagne, 1982

“You can’t hug your kid with nuclear arms.”

— Anonymous
