

# David Hoyle Souvenirs of Copenhagen

Thursday 13th June to  
Saturday 6th July

Gallery open 2 - 6pm, Thurs to Sat  
Queens Park Railway Club  
Queens Park Railway Station

492 Victoria Road  
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Albrecht Dürer - *Melancholia I*, 1514

The exhibition *Souvenirs of Copenhagen* by David Hoyle is made up of a collection of paintings which were created during the artists residency in Copenhagen 2013. When asked by the hosts, Warehouse 9, what he would like to accomplish during the residency Hoyle replied, “complete enlightenment”. Although on the surface this might appear to be a flippant remark, it was one made by an artist who describes his creative process as cathartic and with specific relation to this body of work as, “an exorcism”. Hoyle also states that for him, his work is, “occupational therapy”. With these statements come a series of problems when attempting to engage with therapy as an art object or collection of art works. The reason for this is the different cultural status given to objects made by ‘professional artists’ and those made by ‘outsiders’. Here Hoyle presents the dilemma of an established artist presenting his work as that of the outsider.

Around 330 BC it is thought that Greek philosopher Aristotle developed Hippocratic theories of the Four Humors (considered to be fluids present in the human body which caused medical problems when imbalanced) into a form of early psychology, which described the cause of four main personality types or temperaments - Choleric, Melancholic, Sanguine and Phlegmatic. The Melancholic temperament was thought to be caused by an excessive presence of black and/or yellow bile in the body of the sufferer. Melancholia is today thought of as a medical conditions such as depression or bi-polar disorder, though contemporary medicine tends to lean towards the cause being an imbalance of an individual's biochemistry as opposed to the ancient theory of bile.

This understanding of medicine and psychology has had a huge effect on Western culture, for example in 1514 Albrecht Dürer created the engraving *Melancholia* which illustrates the depressive temperament which at the time was thought to accompany those of a particularly artistic or intellectual persuasion. At this point in time Dürer's peer Leonardo da Vinci had developed a reputation in Italy as the quintessential melancholic artist who would leave great works incomplete due to a temperament that was believed to accompany genius. It would seem that this was accepted as part of his character and there does not appear to be any



serious evidence to suggest that this society wished to alter, fix or cure da Vinci of his temperament.

In the early part of the 20th Century, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud offered an alternative portrait of da Vinci's temperament in a book titled, *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of His Childhood* (1910).

*"In his psychoanalytic study of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud (1910) concluded that da Vinci's artistic talent and creativity were, in part, a product of "his extraordinary capacity for sublimating the primitive instincts: (p136). Freud wrote about the regressive shift which occurred in da Vinci's psychic equilibrium in his fifties, that yielded access to "deeper layers" of his mind and acted "to benefit his art" (p134). In other words, Freud implied that da Vinci's sublimation of his erotic impulses acted in the service of his artistic talent"†*

For the purposes of this discussion the key point is to note a shift in cultural understanding of Melancholia that occurred broadly in the 20th Century. During this period a 'temperament' became a 'disorder'. The implication being that it could/should be treated, fixed, altered or cured and with the idea of treatment came the stigma of mental illness. Although Freud himself supported the creative benefits of such a condition, as the 20th Century progressed the perception of Melancholia now articulated as mental illness acted to separate the more difficult characteristics of an individual's temperament from the more pleasurable ones. This, it could be argued, cast melancholia in the role of a disease that must be eradicated and the carriers of that disease must be either cured or quarantined in hospital wards. During the mid 20th Century there was however still a level of grace afforded to artists which would allow them to behave in ways that would have led to any other member of the public to end up receiving medical treatment. For example Bas Jan Ader's film work *I'm too sad to tell you* (1971) shows Ader crying. No explanation is offered other than that he feels sad. This activity was and is accepted as a valid work of art. Had an American or British housewife filmed herself crying without explanation hospitalisation or a prescription for Valium would no doubt have ensued. Here we can see a clear demarcation point between how the activities of a 'professional artist' and that of an outsider are interpreted. There is a set of propositions that we must accept if we are to engage with this idea. Firstly that being an artist is now considered to be some sort of profession and secondly that if such a professional is making art about crying that this is completely contrived; a fiction and certainly not the product of mental illness. Bas Jan Ader was the quintessential melancholic artist of the 20th Century and though his intentions cannot be confirmed his mysterious disappearance could be interpreted as suicide or at least as the actions of a person with little regard for their own safety. The final proposition is that a non-professional with mental health issues cannot produce an artwork, merely an artifact of therapy or illness.

During the later part of the 20th Century and the early 21st Century mainstream culture and media began to engage with psychiatric/psychoanalytic language and theories to such a degree that medical terminology such as *psycho*, *narcissist*, *depressive* and *schizophrenic* became part of common parlance and with that, new non-medical meanings and implications were attached to these terms. In general these words became used as insults implying madness and danger. As the activity of making art became more commodified the temperament of melancholia became more stigmatised. For example in the mid to late 20th Century therapy sessions which would conventionally be conducted in a confidential medical environment were now being broadcast on television as a form of entertainment in TV talk shows such as Oprah. In the 21st Century this form of entertainment became intensified with reality TV shows such as Big Brother, where psychologists would broadcast their analysis of contestants behavior in weekly episodes, or shows such as Celebrity Rehab with Dr Drew which created a story line made up of the participants rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol for the public to view.

If we return to Hoyle's initial statement that his work is occupational therapy, taking into account the shifting status of the artist and of Melancholia within Western culture, this body of work begins to appear to be an intentional politicisation of mental health issues within the art world. *Souvenirs of Cope n hagen* could be seen as a development of Hoyle's previous explorations of the relationship between Art and mental health for example, the performance *Melancholic Youth* as part of a series titled *Dave's Drop-in Centre* (2009) or video work *On the couch with David Hoyle* (2011) shot by filmmaker Nathan Evans. Here Hoyle engages members of the public in a form of analysis and self-reflection while sitting on Sigmund Freud's couch. This is not the furniture of Freud's clinic however but that of his home, again Hoyle makes no demarcation between professional and non-professional. For over 30 years Hoyle has challenged the Status Quo wherever he has found it including that of sub cultures as much as of mainstream society. His message with this body of work is firstly to challenge stigma attached to mental health and also to propose that art has healing properties for everyone, including professionals, and that everyone needs to be healed. His work explores pain yet remains optimistic and perhaps we should listen to him as he may become the quintessential melancholic artist of the 21st Century.

† *Disordered Thinking and the Rorschach. Theory Research and Differential Diagnosis. James H. Kleiger (1999) The Analytic Press, Inc.*