

## The Therapeutic Benefits of Artistic Painting to Human Health

Paul Seyi-Gbangbayau

paul.seyi-gbangbayau@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

Department of Art and Design, The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria

### Abstract

*This qualitative studio-based research focuses attention on the health benefits of painting to human health especially emotion related issues. Painting is a branch of art in which both lines and colours are used as means of artistic communication. Unknown to many people, sometimes this communication goes beyond aesthetics to the realms of feelings and emotions which can positively or negatively affect the human health. This study looks into how painting can be channeled to serve as healing tools in human health and how it has been used in medicine to heal some emotional ailments like depression, stress, mental issues, Alzheimer diseases, dementia and also children with learning disabilities and behavioral issues. Unlike other forms of art, painting has the potentials not only to appeal to our sense of sight alone, but also to trigger feelings that soothe human emotions thereby enhancing good health which on the long run promote healthy society. Aside the various benefits of creative painting on human health, the paper also examines two broad ways through which we can use art generally to benefit us viz: taking painting as a hobby, occupation or purposely as means of occupational therapy and surrounding ourselves with paintings in our homes, offices and public places. The methods used for this research include literature review and studio experiments. The author proposes continued investigation into this relatively new subject matter and equally to further arouse interest in researching the possibilities of interdisciplinary collaboration between the arts and medicine.*

**Keywords:** *Painting, Art, Human health, Therapy, Mental issues*

### Citation

Paul Seyi-Gbangbayau. (2022). The Therapeutic Benefits of Artistic Painting to Human Health. *International Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment (IJOWITED)*, 3(1), 147-154

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: May 1, 2022  
Revised: May 31, 2022  
Accepted: May 17, 2022

### Introduction

The 21st century has introduced a lot of new genres inert and several innovations in sciences, technology, medicine and other fields of human endeavors. These developments have given birth to various interdisciplinary relationships and collaborations. A good example is the interaction between art and medicine in area of occupational therapy, emotional and mental health. It has now been established those creative activities have lots of benefits for mental health. T scientists are constantly uncovering encour evidence which support the fact that engaging creat artistic activities like painting, drawing, modelin, crafts are beneficial to human mental health and being generally (Renée, 2021). According to a credited to Therapy Group of NYC, in 2015, Dr. Malchiodi an art therapist and a psychologist cited studies which confirmed that creativity reduces increases positive emotions, lessen depressive symptoms, decreases worries or anxieties and is capable of improving immune system functioning in man. Several

other studies have also ascertained that the above findings are true, hence creating time for creative activities is associated with higher activated Positive Affect (PA) during the time of such artistic actions. (Brenne, 2019). Positive Affect (PA) describes the extent to which human beings experience positive moods, happiness, feeling good, joy and hopefulness. Painting as a medium of artistic expression uses primarily colours as means of communication.

There are several types of painting which include, Life or figure painting, Still Life painting, Nature painting and Landscape or Sea scape painting. Life painting deals with painting of human beings especially when they are posed for that purpose. Figure painting is the painting of human beings generally either from a model, moving figures, pictures or from imagination. Portrait paintings either in full or half size are under figure paintings. Still life paintings on the other hand are paintings of man-made objects like car, fan, furniture, kitchen utensils, fabrics, etc. (Makanju, 2006). Nature painting is the

painting of things created by God especially, p flowers, trees, rocks, bones, birds and ani Landscape or Seascape paintings deal with land or rivers and the things on it or around it. Other forms of painting include imaginative painting which is painting done purely from a man's imagination without direct reference to life objects or figures. Abstract painting which is

deliberate distortion of natural forms or shapes in a painting, drawing or sculpture (Brenne, 2019).

Painting being an old art practice comes more naturally to artistic right-brain people, however people with left-brain known as analytical left-brainers can also stimulate their creativity too by also practicing painting. (Makanju, 2006, Beginner’s School, 2017).



**Figure 1:** Landscape (Pinterest, 2022)



**Figure 2:** Multiple figure (Ajayi, 2021)



**Figure 3:** Single figure (Taiwo, 2021)



**Figure 4:** Still Life, rubber mosaic (Adeleye 2012)



**Figure 5:** Abstract painting, mixed media (Olatunji-Aguda, 2022)

The human society has been experiencing health related issues for ages. With the fast-rising population globally that has consistently increased from 1 billion in 1800 to about 7.9 billion in 2020 and with the projection that the population will hit 9.7 billion in 2050 health related problems will also increase. (United Nations, 2019) For example Nigeria which currently rank Nigeria as the 6<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world with about 219 million population is projected to hit 440 million population by 2050 (USAID, 2020, US Census Bureau, 2021). Nigeria is

currently said to be vulnerable to various diseases such as malaria, stroke, road accidents, HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, among others that have been claiming lives over the years. (Menizibeya, 2011, Macrotrends.net, 2021) Besides direct physical ailments, emotional and mental deceases are also increasing due to so many social, economic and marital problems. Hence the need for alternate health remedy which painting provides is a welcoming idea. (Joshua, 2019). Consequently, this paper presents painting either as a profession, vocation and decoration as an

alternative means of solving global health issues especially the ones relating to emotional and mental health. In the course of this research, a lot of related literature were reviewed, studio activities on painting were observed and the effects of colours and getting engaged in painting skills on human emotions were equally studied through various related art therapy reports. Brenne, (2019), Helen, (2019), Hutter, (2020), and others examined the psychology effects of art generally on human health. However, most of them did not discuss painting directly as a therapeutic means. But, Raynes, (1981) and Mhf, (2021) wrote on the benefits of drawing and painting human emotions.

The objective of this research is to unveil the medical or health benefits of art especially painting and to motivate researchers to delve deeper into the possibilities of mutual relationship between art, medicine and human health.

Theoretical Framework that supports art therapy explored in this research is from an existential perspective which looks at creative art as a "courageous affirmation of life in face of the void or death". According to existentialism from this

**Plate1:** Painting media and their solvents

Liquid Based Paints	Solvent	Dry Approach Materials	Solvent
Water Colour	Water	Coloured pencils	Not needed
Poster Colour	Water	Wax pencils	Not needed
Gouache	Water	Chalk Pastel	Not needed
Acrylic paint	Water	Oil Pastel	Not needed
Oil Paint	Linseed oil/Turpentine	Marker	
Tempera paint	Egg yokes		

Painting Tools: Sable brushes, hard brushes, pallet, pallet knives, and container for holding brushes and for washing, painting easel, drawing board and donkey chairs. Other materials include paper, canvas and painting board.

affirmation of life comes the healing medicine of creation. Hence, the need to create emerged (Garai ,2001)

### Methodology

This practice-based study is scholarly explaining the benefits of painting or art generally to human health. It also encourages anyone who engaged in painting either as a professional practice or as a part-time, or as collector or dealer or as a lover of art who just enjoys decorating his immediate environment with paintings to see and apply the therapeutic aspect of painting. In view of the ongoing explanations, it is imperative therefore to enrich this research with at least one painting therapy activity.

Materials for painting: It should be established that the method of painting comes in two basic forms. The liquid-based approach and the dry technique. The liquid-based approach involves the use of fluids as solvent for the paint. This fluid may be water, oil or egg yokes which must be mixed with the paint to create the desired flow. While dry approach involves the use the painting or drawing medium alone.

When it comes to painting for therapeutic purpose, no hard rule is followed. The person who wants to paint may not even be an artist. The principles and elements of art may not be applied. What is of utmost importance here is interest. However, the type of brush or pencil strokes and use of colours will reveal the prevailing emotion of the artist.

**Plate 2:** Colour Psychology: Warm and Cool Colours.

RED	ORANGE	YELLOW	BLUE	GREEN	PURPLE
Danger	Happiness	Happiness	Calmness	Natural	Royalty
Aggression	Energetic	Laughter	Serenity	Cool	Wealth
Warning	Enthusiasm	Warmth	Uncaring	Growth	Sophistication
Intensity	Wealth/Prosperity	Optimism	Wisdom	Health	Wisdom
Passionate	Sophistication	Hunger	Loyalty	Money	Exotic
Excitement	Change	Frustration	Truth	Envy	Spiritual
Warmth	Stimulation	Anger	Focused	Harmony	Prosperity
Dominance		Attention-seeking	Unappetizing	Calmness	Respect
Power			Gentleness	Fertility	Mystery

Warm colours are Red, Orange and Yellow While Cool Colours include Blue, Green and Purple

### Self Portrait Bag Painting Activity

Materials: gum, scissors, drawing paper, crayon, colored pencils, markers, water colour or poster colours, brushes, drawing board on which to place the paper, tape or pins with which to hold it. However, for this exercise brown paper bag will be needed. The interested participant in this therapy exercise is required to create a self-portrait on a side of the brown paper bag. What is required here is just for the participant to think of himself and draw and paint as

freely as possible. Any of the painting materials mentioned above could be used. However, the other side of the bag can be used to express the participant's feelings or ideas apart from the portraiture by painting anything that comes to mind. For instance, one may want to represent his or her fears and dreams, or goals and aspirations. For the inside of the bag one can put items like pictures of things you like, personal items, books, or even some of the future paintings you make.



**Figure 6:** Self Portrait Bag, (www.arttherspy.com , 2021)

### Results and Discussion

From the above painting therapy exercise, it can be observed that both painting and drawing are closely knitted. Art is a broad discipline which includes painting and drawing. However, while painting the element of drawing especially lines are used. Drawing is a form of art through which thoughts and feelings are expressed through the use of lines travelling from one direction to the other depicting a portion of one's mind.

The two are intertwined with a thin line between them. Although each of them can be used is the used independently, for the purpose of art therapy, this study considers painting as more appropriate because colours are involved.

So many activities are taking place globally including Nigeria by various concerned groups to use alternate means like art to reduce and cure mental health and

emotional related illnesses. These groups comprise of Medical professionals, Artists, Musicians, Writers, Poets, Dramatists, Social Workers, Dancers, Administrators, Researchers, Clinicians, Educators,

Policymakers, Entrepreneurs and Mental Health and Wellness advocates (Mhf, 2021). Example includes Arts in Medicine, Nigeria, Global Art in Medicine Fellowship, Global Brain Health Institutes.



**Figure 7:** Some Art Therapy Groups  
 Source: AIMGroup Gastriatric, 2022

This section of the research will discuss the benefits of painting to human health. It will focus attention on the practice of art especially painting and how beautification of our immediate environment can affect our emotions and psyche. According to Pablo Picasso a renowned artist, 'art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life' (Mhf, 2021) As explained earlier, as a result of the collaboration between arts and medical sciences, today many people globally use art as a channel to deal with stress, trauma and unhappiness. Art is also used to find greater peace and meaning in people's lives. Painting, however, is not limited to being just an artistic endeavor, but also enjoys many health benefits. Painting is an effective therapeutic and calming techniques for mental and physical health. The followings are health benefits of painting to human health especially emotional and mental issues.

Painting as a creative tool utilizes the brain which is the faculty of thinking. The painter, whether professional, amateur or even curious playing children are delighted when they see people appreciating their works. This also gives them sense of pride and joy in their handy- work. The ego or self-esteem of such people is boosted hence, they happily strive to a higher level of creativity. In this way their emotion is stabilized giving way to a healthy living and healthy society. Practicing and learning creative skills especially



**Figure 8** Some Art Therapy Groups  
 Source: AIMGroup Gastriatric, 2022

painting at one's own speed encourages creative developments which are beneficial to mental health in this age of stress.

Painting Improves attention and concentration: From the moment one decides to paint, a lot of activities which needs concentration start. Such preliminary activity includes selection of what to paint, is it still life, landscape or flower, what colours to use, etc. And the moment proper painting begins, the 'artist' must concentrate on the subject been painted or improving the details in the object of painting. As the painting progresses, your attention will be on giving the work the type of finishing that satisfy your mind. (Raynes, 1981)

All these help the mind to concentrate and build essential skills in focusing. Your ability to learn to be focused on any work you are doing enhances regular success. According to a study conducted in 2008 medical students were able to observe and recall more information after participating in eight sessions that taught fine art concepts and observation techniques. (Mhf, 2021)

Painting Enhances Relaxation and Serves as Stress Relief: Painting undoubtedly is therapeutic because it helps the mind to concentrate on the object been painted alone at that particular time. As attention is centered

towards the painting, stress on the mind is reduced and this in turn relaxes the body. Hence, this relaxation reduces muscle stress, soreness, joint pain, headaches, and other related physical ailments. This effect on the body and mind is compared to meditation.

In addition, it is clinically reported that some colours in painting have direct influence on human emotions. Some colours irritate while some cool the nerves and relax human emotions. Red for example is popularly known to warn people of danger. Some other symbols of red colour include alertness, ambition, aggression, battle, beauty, brilliance, charity, charm, tension, thrill, triumph, urgency, victory, violence, vitality, war, warmth among others (Plate 2) (www.arttherapy.com, 2021). Hospital walls are painted with white and cool

colours like blue, green and grey rather than warm colours like red, orange and yellow. Colours with blue and green hues are known to psychologically soothe the nerves.

**Painting Boosts Creativity:** Paintings like other branches of Art boosts creativity especially with the use of colours and tones. Whatever the technique is, be it abstract, realism, impressionism, expressionism or modernism, painting is a means of artistic communication. Abstract art gives room for total freedom of expression in which the artists is not restricted by any traditional rules to create his piece. The joy of art lies in innovation, creation and recreation of something with one's own hand, and original thing that "reveals one's deepest expressions and motivations.



**Figure 9:** The Blue Landscape (Obaro, 2021)

**Painting promotes Non-Verbal Communication Skills:** Painting helps you to express your thoughts, ideas and feelings that you may not be able to communicate in written words or verbally. There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words and to communicate the words. Communication on a Non-Verbal platforms can serve a healthy release of emotion and mental stress.

**Painting also Facilitates Critical Thinking Skills:** The process of selection of which brush to use or paints to mix to create the exact colour for your expression makes you a decision person and as well a critical thinker. Decision-making skills promotes the performance of the mind and can ease stress.

**Painting develops the Spirit of Perseverance:** Generally, some well-developed ideas and innovations have



**Figure 10:** Mother and Child (Kreative hand Studio, 2021)

chances of being badly executed. Whenever a painting fails to turn out the way an artist pictured it in his mind, he becomes determined to solve the problems making sure the art piece becomes what he envisioned. This situation of trial and error sometimes may last for a long time. It is, definitely building a more capable and determined mind.

**It Improves Self-Confidence and Gives You Positive Mindset:** The same way you feel when your hard work brings result, completing a painting successfully makes you feel happy and gives you a great feeling that boots your self-esteem. Receiving positive comment and feedback from your colleagues will also give increase to your sense of self assurance that follows making a work of your own. When you create art, you become

used to aesthetically visualizing the world around you which makes you appreciate the beauty in and of life. You get to love the texture of a tree's bark or the fur of a dog, of various highlights and shadow displaying on bare white flat surfaces. Embracing the beauty that surrounds you enhances your positive view of the world and has possibilities to even decrease the risk of mental illness.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings/results from the prescribed painting therapy exercise and similar ones showed that artworks in form of drawings and paintings, especially the colourfully made ones, are really a viable contrivance through which the countenance, health and wellbeing of individuals can be improved. Similarly, the study unearthed the fact that art can achieve the health enhancement on many people through gazing at artworks; especially if the artwork is painting. The exposition from the study also unearthed the proposition that artworks should be more considered as a means of gifting or surprising loved ones. During the course of the research, it was also established that painting has an hallucinogenic way of making someone feel good and could evoke surprise from the recipient of such artwork (Helen, 2019) This is also applicable to an artist whose work gives him delight after it is completed

This study looked into the importance of art as regards human wellbeing especially as a curative and emotion-sustaining means. It also further established the efficiency of painting as a tool for health enhancement and for a country like Nigeria that is already potentially nearing overpopulation, there is a need to implement, as fast as possible, every effective alternatives that can help improve or enhance the health of her over 210 million citizens; and on the basis of this study, works of art, are not only a viable health enhancement apparatus; participation in the activities of art creation can also heal some diseases especially emotional and mental related ones. Several relevant literatures were reviewed, and a practical practice was suggested.

This paper therefore recommends that participation in painting activity should be encouraged not just as course of study in higher institutions or as a topic under the subject of Visual art, Fine art or Creative art as it

may be called in primary and secondary schools. Educational institutions at various level should promotes the establishment of Art in Health, Art Therapy, or Art in Medicine clubs not only for students but for adults too. It is hoped that if these actions are taken, emotional and mental health ailments which are on the increase in the country and globally can be reduced.

#### References

- Ajayi O. T. and Seyi-Gbangbayau P. (2021). Covid-19 Pandemic: The Place of Textile in Neutralizing the Spread of the Pathogenic Virus, a paper presented at the 5th Annual (1<sup>st</sup> Virtual) Research Conference. *An International Conference of the Humanities and the Sciences, University of Lagos.*
- Beginner's School, (2017). Art History: the History of Drawing. Retrieved on June 16th, 2021 from <http://www.beginnersschool.com/2015/05/04/history-of-drawing>
- Brenne, E., & Rimehaug, T. (2019). Pragmatic language impairment general and specific associations to mental health symptom dimensions in a child psychiatric sample. *Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology*, 7(1), 3-12.
- Hutter, H. R. (2020). *Drawing art'*. Retrieved on December 27, 2020 from Britannica.com, <https://www.britannica.com/art/drawing-art>
- Ihekweazu C., (2010, October 1<sup>st</sup>). Cry my beloved Nigeria. Retrieved on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from: <https://nigeriahealthwatch.com/cry-my-beloved-nigeria/>
- Joshua, O. (2019, November 7<sup>th</sup>). Nigeria budgets N2,000 for the Healthcare of each citizen in 2020. Retrieved on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/health/health-features/361373-nigeria-budgets-in2000-for-the-healthcare-of-each-citizen-in-2020.html>
- Garai, J. (2001). *A humanistic approach to art therapy*. In J. Rubin (Ed.), *Approaches to art therapy*. New York: Brunner-Routledge. 243-253.
- Makanju, A. A. (2006). Uncommon Genius–The Artist, A Catalyst for Technological Advancement in Nigeria. In *Contemporary Issues in*

*Nigerian Art. Culture and Creative Arts  
Forum Publication.*

- Menizibeya O. W. (2011). The Nigerian health care system: Need for integrating adequate medical intelligence and surveillance systems, *Journal Pharm Bioallied Sci.* 3(4): 470–478.
- Raynes, J. (1981). *Figure Drawing*. London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, Pg. 6-8
- Renée P. (2021). Quotes about the Benefits of Art & Artmaking. Retrieved from: <https://www.healing-power-of-art.org/benefits-of-art/>.
- Rinkesh, (2021). What is overpopulation? Retrieved from: <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/causes-effects-solutions-of-overpopulation.php> on June 6th, 2021
- Seyi-Gbangbayau, P. and Ajayi, O. (2019). Tie & Dye Craft as a Means of Female Gender Empowerment. A paper presented at the *1st National WITED, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro*. August 12th – 15th, 2019.
- United Nations (17<sup>th</sup> June, 2019). World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights. Retrieved on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-2019-highlights.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau Current Population (June 10, 2021). Retrieved on June 16th, 2021 from: <https://www.census.gov/popclock/print.php?component=counter> on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021
- USAID, (2020, September 20). Global Health. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/nigeria/global-health>