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Art and psychopathology. The drawings of Paloma

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The evolution of the criteria on artistic production of mental patients has been changing. The opinions of professional critics and artists on visual artworks performed by mental patients have also been evolving. In 1947, the French artist Dubuffet founded «la Compagnie de l'Art Brut» and stated that the most estimable, genuine and authentic Art was that created by children, the primitive and mentally ill patient.

This point of view on art created by the mentally ill has had growing circulation. The value of art works of some mentally ill patients has reached high levels from the esthetic and also commercial point of view. Works of psychotic patients who were admitted in psychiatric hospitals for years are presented for sale in large samples of the Art market. In worldwide renowned galleries, pictures of sculptures of patients together with those of recognized artists are on sale.

Public and social recognition of the works of the patients has influenced in destigmatizing their authors, those that create them. This is one of the roads that are being used in the fight against the stigma of mental illness. The consideration of the intrinsic value of the art works without considering who has created them contributes to destigmatizing the work itself and also the person who has done it.

The book written by doctors Maximino Lozano, Silvia Zabala and Agustín Madoz and that was published by Ars Médica shows the psychiatric quality of its authors. The medical, psychiatric approach is that which predominates in its pages.

It is based on a clinical history in which the evolution of a patient who expresses herself to a large degree thanks to her drawings is recorded. It is a model of what can be and should be done to understand, treat and relieve a psychia-

tric patient, to establish a medical-patient relationship, to go deeper into the knowledge with a phenomenological perception of what Paloma paints and expresses verbally. It is not only a pathography in which the most outstanding traits of the anecdotic of a life are stressed.

Dr. Maximino Lozano has accompanied and treated a patient psychiatrically, considering her evolution, using and taking as a base a resource that was necessary to be able to go deeper into the communication. The «graphic language» makes it possible to go deeper into the delusion of the patient, into the fragmentation of her world, into her deep anxiety.

In one of the comments of the clinical history, Dr. Lozano explains how the patient reacted when he called her attention to the similarity of one of her drawings to a picture of Vereschaguin, a Russian artist of the XIX century, exhibited in the Tretyakov gallery of Moscow. The patient's answer, her increased anxiety, the deterioration of her evolution, helped the author evaluate his own psychotherapeutic action and make an evaluation and critical analysis of it.

The book is written by psychiatrists (that is stated in the introduction) and it is very satisfactory to verify over its pages that solid psychopathological criteria are maintained, so that it is a book that illustrates and serves the psychiatrists. Dr. Lozano, from the time that he received the patient referred by a neurologist, continued to consider her medical, biological and psychopathological aspects, without using easy interpretations or simply picturesque ones.

His clinical-psychiatric training allows him to draw conclusions, analyzing and stimulating the artistic capacities of the patient to express herself with visual artworks in a language that has significantly enriched her communication. Using the 147 drawings of the patient therapeutically to better know the structure of her delusion has been a very estimable psychiatric task. Assessing the artistic quality of her works adds interest and merit to the book and of course to its authors.

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In the book, the characteristics of the drawings, their depth and authenticity and thus their psychological and psychopathological value are described. «She does not draw what her senses see but rather her thoughts and internal perceptions», which Jünger calls thoughts in images. It recalls the sentence of Picasso when he said «I do not paint what I see but rather what I think», thus expressing his personal liberty even in the face of the imposition of his own senses.

It mentions Heidegger who described «art as reflecting the truth» and Goya when he wrote, in reference to his etching of «The sleep of reason produces monsters» that he was seeking to perpetuate the solid testimony of the trust in his work.

The drawings and notes of the patient are reproduced in the book. Finally, the psychopathological characteristics of the drawings are described.

The comparative analysis of the works of Paloma with pictures of recognized artists and the reflections of the author on the psychopathological characteristics of these copies or «appropriations» that the patient makes of the original works is very interesting.

The references include interesting and useful titles related with art and psychiatry.

The book has 197 pages and the text is in Spanish and parallelly in English, which represents a significant added effort.