

# Migraine and Art: Painting

## Joost Haan

- What is art?
- Painting and migraine
  - Some examples
- Can painting help us to better understand migraine?



# What is art?



Marcel Duchamp



Joseph Beuys



Piero Manzoni

# What is art?

- Art is what you and I call art
- Art is what the artist calls art
- (You are all art, but some are more art than others)

Art is an expression of ...

?

# What is art?

- Art is what you and I call art
- Art is what the artist calls art
- (You are all art, but some are more art than others)

Art is an expression of ...

- Knowledge
- Skill
- Emotion
- The senses
- Inspiration
- .....

?

# What is art?

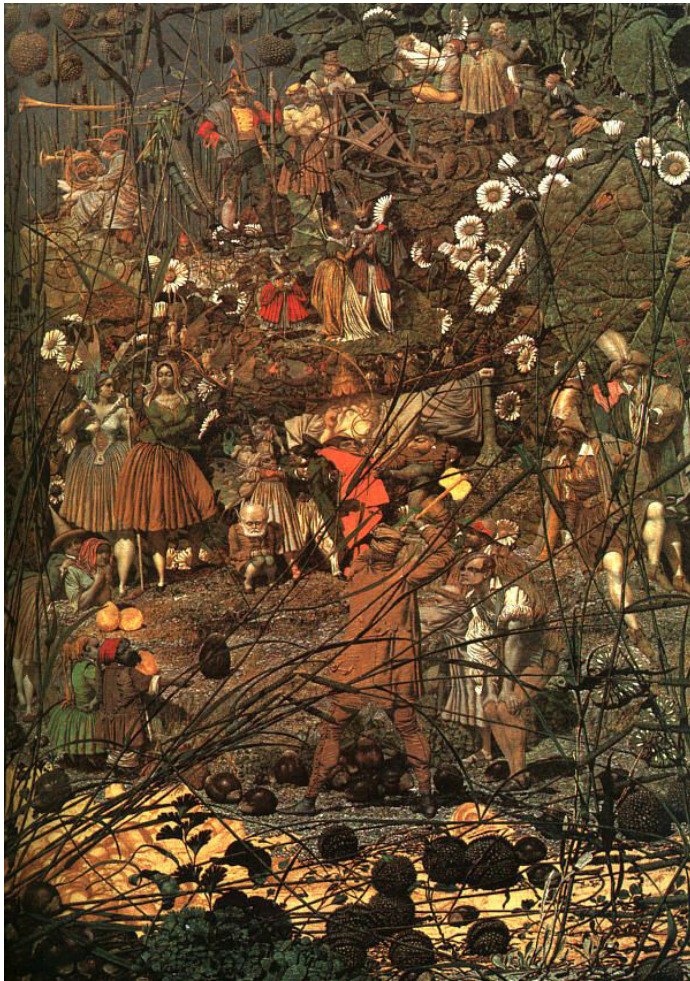
- Art is what you and I call art
- Art is what the artist calls art
- (You are all art, but some are more art than others)

Art is an expression of ...

Disease

?

# Art as an expression of disease?

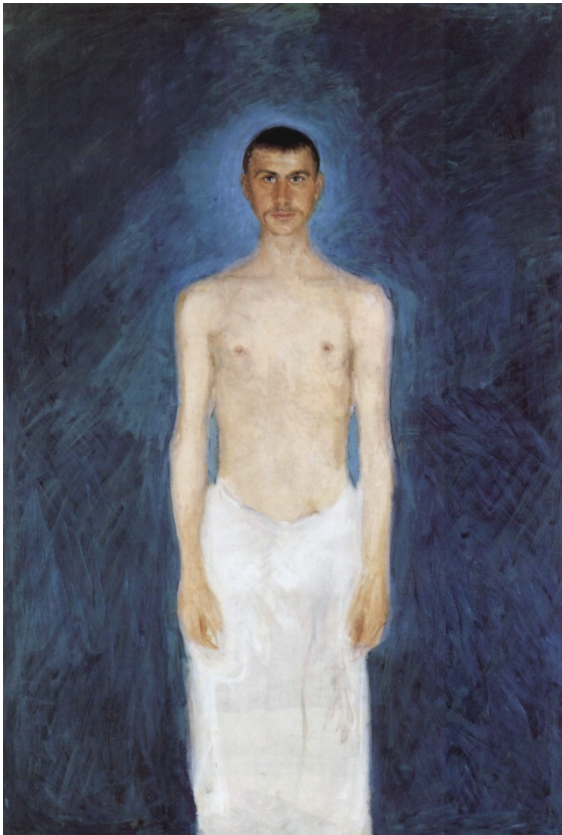


1817-1886

Capgras syndrome



# Art as an expression of disease?



Richard Gerstl  
1883-1908

Depression

# Art as an expression of disease?



Charley Toorop  
1891-1955

Stroke



# Art as an expression of disease?

Is it useful to search for disease in art?

Is it useful to search for migraine in painting?

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Can art (sometimes) help us to better understand disease?

Can painting help us to better understand migraine?

# Did Pablo Picasso suffer from migraine?



- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

# Migraine aura, illusory vertical splitting, and Picasso

© Blackwell Science Ltd *Cephalalgia*, 2000, **20**, 686

In conclusion, we agree with Podoll and Robinson (page 228) that 'the small number of communications about illusory splitting does not reflect its true prevalence in migraine'. Besides, we think that illusory splitting as a part of bizarre visual migraine auras might have inspired Picasso to paint female faces with the characteristic vertical splitting and shift of the eyes



MD Ferrari

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© Blackwell Science Ltd *Cephalalgia*, 2000, **20**, 686

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MD Ferrari & J Haan

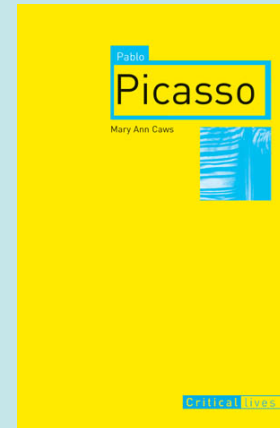
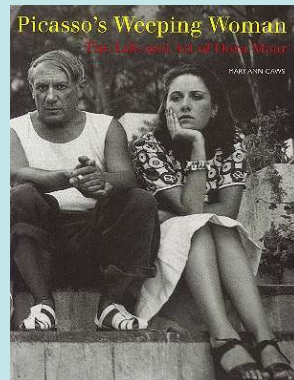


# Picasso and Migraine

- BBC News: Monday, 4 September, 2000, 14:08 GMT 15:08 UK
- A leading Dutch neurologist is suggesting that the Spanish painter, Pablo Picasso, painted the way he did because he suffered from bizarre visual migraines.
- The Dutch neurologist, Michel Ferrari, who is presenting a paper at an international conference, conducted research in which migraine sufferers drew pictures of what they saw during an attack.
- Doctor Ferrari says these were extremely similar to Picasso's paintings from the late 1930s period.
- Google 2009: 'Picasso and migraine' >53.000 hits

# Picasso and Migraine

- No mention of migraine in:
  - Biographies
  - Memoirs of contemporaries
  - Letters of Picasso (eg. To Guillaume Apollinaire)







**Dora Maar,**  
alias **Henriette Theodora Markovitch**

She is presented both profile and full face.

Then, one eye is shown looking inward, toward herself.

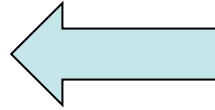
The eyelashes of this eye are painted to emphasize this inward direction, yet the pupil looks straight out.

The other eye, which Picasso has surprisingly painted red, looks out at the world and us; while the red shows intensity, the curves and symmetry of this eye give it serenity.

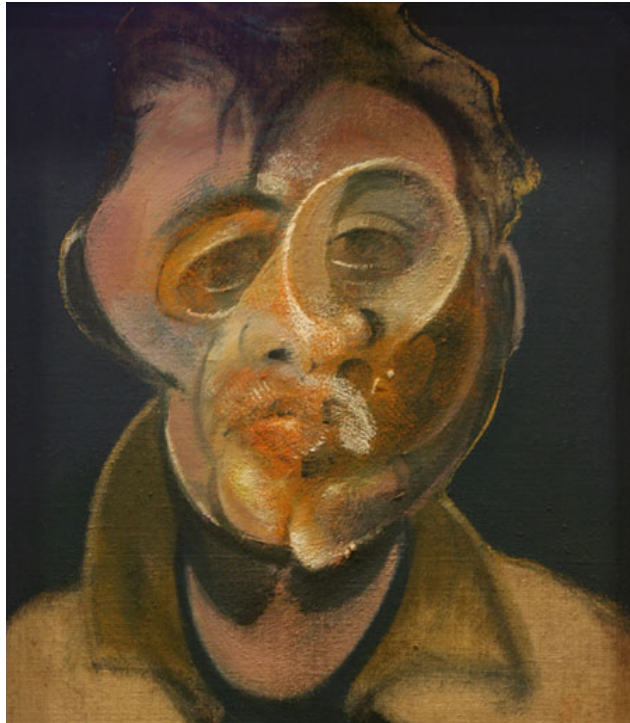




Juan Gris



Portrait of Picasso

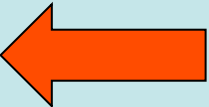


Francis Bacon



Georges Braque

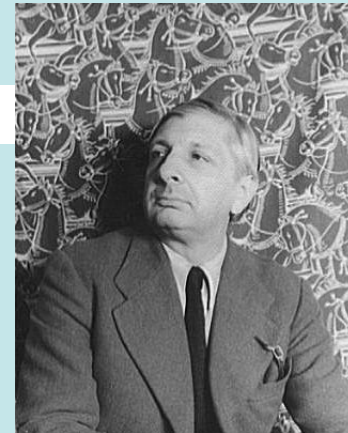
Did Pablo Picasso suffer from migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No 
- 3) Don't know



Did Giorgio de Chirico suffer from  
migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know



# Giorgio de Chirico

- Italian painter 1888-1978
- Metaphysical art
- Attacks of headache
- Attacks of vomiting
- Scotoma?
- Relieved by sleep
- Migraine?

Fuller and Gale, BMJ 1988

## Die andere Moderne

Die Geburt der metaphysischen Malerei  
aus dem Geist der Migräne

Podoll, Robinson, Nicola 2002



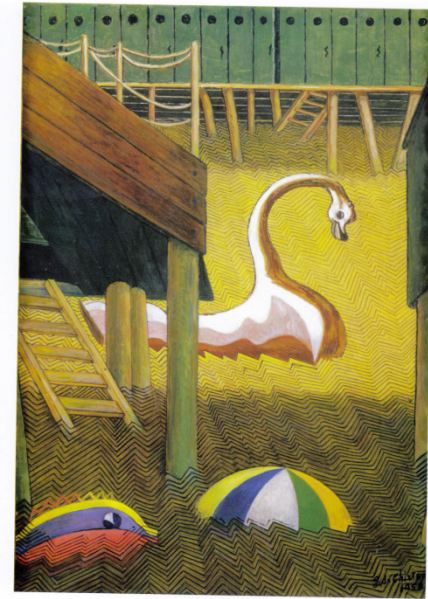
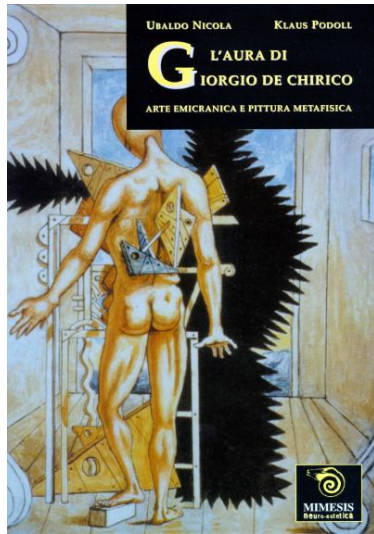


FIG 1—Giorgio de Chirico, lithograph from "Mythologie," 1933

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# The Metaphysical Art of Giorgio de Chirico

## Migraine or Epilepsy?

Olaf Blanke Theodor Landis

Department of Neurology, Geneva University Hospital, Geneva, Switzerland

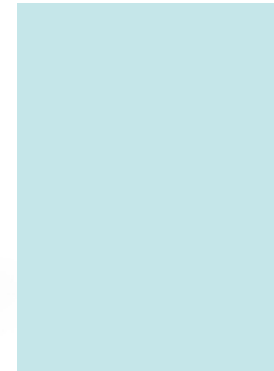
- Only two episodes of recorded headache
- Abdominal malaise of sudden onset and short duration
- Complex visual and gustatory hallucinations

Carlo Lisotto: No mention of migraine in the autobiography of de Chirico, only two episodes of TTH

Personal communication

Did Giorgio de Chirico suffer from  
migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know



# Did Hildegard von Bingen suffer from migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know



# Hildegard von Bingen

- German abbess and mystic (1098-1179)
- Descriptions of her visions in:
  - Scivias
  - Liber divinorum operum simplicis hominis
- Drawings of her visions
- Composer of church music

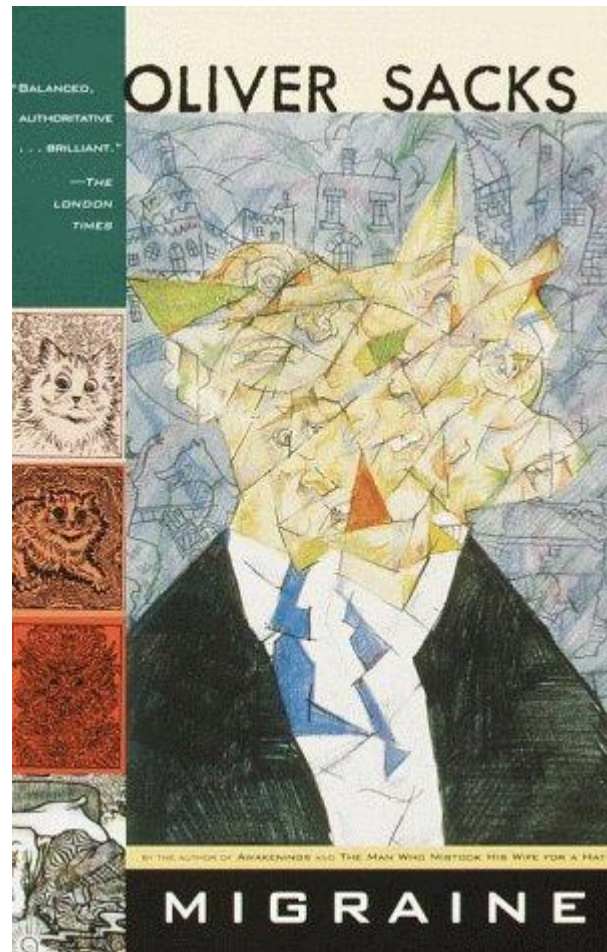




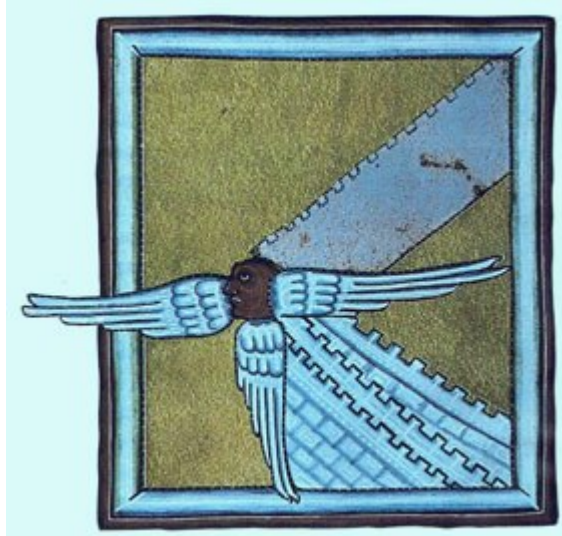
Did Hildegard von Bingen suffer from migraine?



‘Yes’, says







D



# The Visions of Hildegard of Bingen

Charles Singer

1917

*London, England*

I saw a great star most splendid and beautiful, and with it an exceeding multitude of falling sparks which with the star followed southward. And they examined Him upon His throne almost as something hostile, and turning from Him they sought rather the north. And suddenly they were all annihilated, being turned into black coals ... and cast into the abyss that I could see them no more (*Scivias*, lib. iii, vis I; Migne, col. 565) (Frontispiece).

: migraine?

This outline of the visions Hildegard herself variously interpreted. We give examples from the more typical of these visions, in which the medical reader or the sufferer from migraine will, we think, easily recognize the symptoms of “scintillating scotoma.” Some of the illuminations, here reproduced in their original colours, will confirm this interpretation.

Podoll and Robinson, 2002

Recurring painful disease  
Episodes of complete amaurosis  
Bilateral pareses of the legs  
Speech difficulties

## OCCASIONAL PAPER

# Exploring the visual hallucinations of migraine aura: the tacit contribution of illustration

G. D. Schott

National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square, London, UK

..... Hildegard's 'fortification figures' resemble the castellated tops of battlements, which are depicted together with human figures. To the present writer, neither Hildegard's illustrations, nor her descriptions, are at all suggestive of migraine aura, and others too have been sceptical (Levene, 1975–6; Plant, 1986; Rose, 2004). Here illustration has been instrumental in discriminating fact from fiction.

Did Hildegard von Bingen suffer from migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know

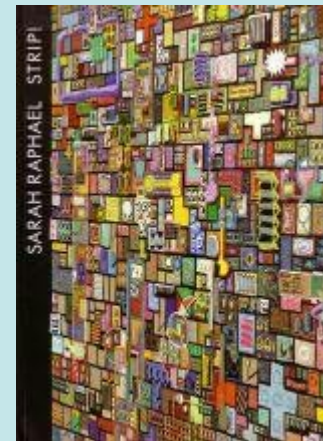


Did Sarah Raphael suffer from migraine?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Don't know

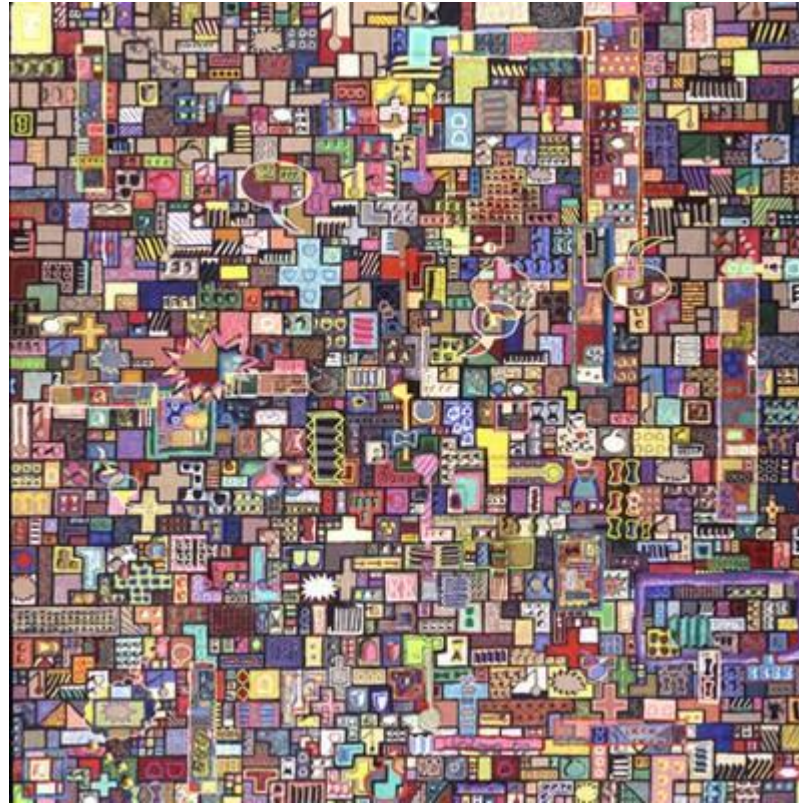
# Sarah Raphael (1960-2001)

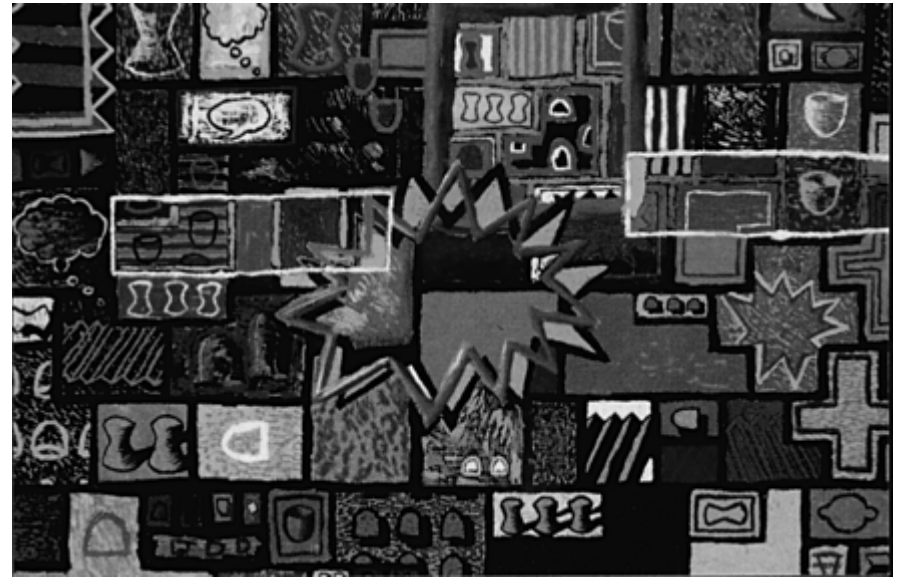
- Suffered from migraine with aura from the age of 15 or 16
- Inspiration for her art





Aura -->







# Is it useful to search for disease in art?



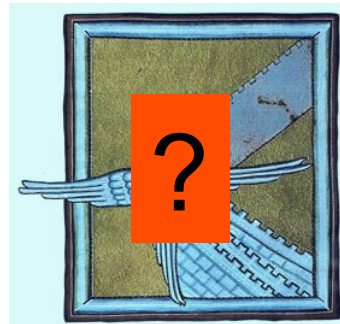
Migraine



De Chirico



Picasso



Hildegard



Raphael

# Can art (sometimes) help us to better understand disease?

## Can painting help us to better understand migraine?

The visual aura of migraine is a subjective phenomenon...

...what the migraineur experiences is necessarily inaccessible to others.

Illustration, particularly when made during the attack, provides an unusual, little used but powerful tool which uniquely allows the sufferer's subjective visual experiences to inform objective analysis. In turn, this analysis leads to insights into some of the cerebral disturbances which subserve migraine aura.

[doi:10.1093/brain/awl348](https://doi.org/10.1093/brain/awl348)

*Brain* (2007), **130**, 1690–1703

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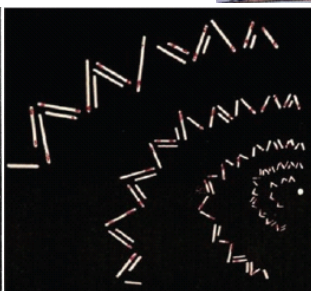
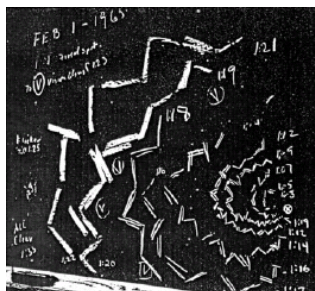
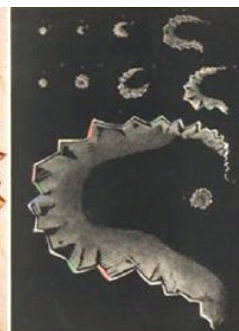
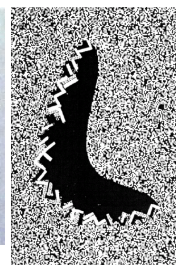
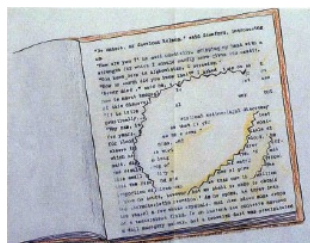
G. D. Schott

National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square, London, UK

Die Kenntnisse dieser Thesen war für n  
gangspunkt zum Bau von neuen Instrumenten. E  
beschwerlicher Werkzeuge über durchgemessene we  
Ziel erreicht wurde. Dass dies gelang, danke ich  
den freundlichen Ratschlägen des bekannten. Es  
dem Gebiete der Photochemie, Hofrath Dr. J. M. J  
der graphischen Lehrsatz in Wien. Es hat mir e  
nugthuums Bewußt, als ich später aus seinem M  
fälligen Gebiete über den fertigen Apparat vernahm  
Ich kann nicht umhin, auch der Firma Siegl  
und besonders dem Orgau derselben, Herrn E. Stro  
unermüdeten, meinen zahlreichen Wünschen ents  
besten Dienste zu sprechen.

Der neue Apparat, der den Namen Haemoph  
führen soll, besteht aus der Hauptsache aus einem  
sehen Keil\* und einer Kammer, die zur Aufnahme d

On March 1st, 1890, a young man, aged 25, was  
admitted to the Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery,  
Queen Square, London, with a complaint of  
migraine. He had been suffering from this complaint  
for some years, and had been treated by various  
methods without success. He had also been  
suffering from other symptoms, such as  
headache, dizziness, and weakness. He had  
been advised to take rest, but this had not  
helped. He had also been advised to take  
medication, but this had not helped either.  
He had now come to the Hospital for  
Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square,  
London, for a further examination.



# Can painting help us to better understand migraine?

- **Migraine Art**

- Wilkinson and Robinson (Cephalalgia 1985;5:151-7)
- Analysis of drawings and paintings entered for a migraine art competition.
- ‘...draw your own impression of visual disturbance or depict the effect of migraine in your life’

- N = 207

- Spectral appearances\* 70%
- Fortification spectra 48%
- Visual loss 16%
- Pain 39%
- Metamorphopsia 16%
- Hemianopic loss 30%



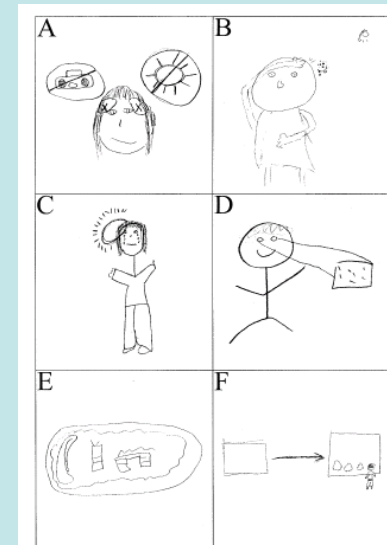
Uniformity of the similar representations

\*stars, flashes.



# Can art help us to better understand migraine?

- The usefulness of children's drawings in the diagnosis of headache
  - Stafstrom et al., Pediatrics 2002;109:460-72.
  - 'Draw a picture to show how your headache feels'
- N = 226 (4-19 yrs)
  - Analyzed blind to clinical diagnosis
  - Migraine or non-migraine headache?
  - Drawings had PPV\* for migraine of 87%
    - Focal neurological signs 100%
    - Visual symptoms 95%
    - Sad expression 49%



PPV = positive predictive value

# Can art help us to better understand migraine?



- By drawing, migraineurs can show us what they see and what they feel