

Psychosis

A psychosis is the term for a serious mental disorder, which can be of many kinds, but of which it is generally agreed that it makes daily life difficult or impossible. There are innumerable forms to this debility, but its outstanding common theme will involve loss of touch with reality. The afflicted individual will hear sounds or conversations which exist only in his or her head. The same with visual delusions; the afflicted person can 'see' things which do not exist, or can fail to see things which are palpably right in front of him.

The neuroscience behind such a delusive condition remains obscure to this date, though the proliferation of the disease advances and palliative medicines abound. (A country like Nigeria, far from the front line of medical research, reports for a recent year 100,000 new cases of psychosis.)

One of the most mind-enlarging corollaries to the investigation of psychoses, is their relation to art. From the broadest perspective there is a kinship between some great recent painting—think Van Gogh. Seurat, Kaethe Kollwitz, Edvard Munch—and a sense world in which disordered, intrusive forms demand attention to an ever vanishing core of meaning. The implication of these fragmentary insights is not that artistic creation is a form of illness, and yet the genesis of some art clearly requires a denormalization of ordinary perception. A Georgia O'Keefe landscape of a sunset in New Mexico is, as it has to be, just a little too vermillion.