

Georg Schmidt, Hans Steck, and Alfred Bader: 'Though this be Madness: A Study in Psychotic Art', Thames and Hudson, 1961

"It is not the purpose of this book to prove anything, but to afford an insight into the wonders hidden in the depths of the human soul. The remarkable gifts displayed here by three psychotic patients open up to us a realm of weird poetry - a realm which the poet and the scientist, the art historian and the physician each strives in his own way to make accessible. Disease itself then fades into insignificance before man't astonishing creative energy. To hear witness to the primeval spirit of humanity is the sole aim of this pictorial album."

See: Plates 13-15 Drawings of monsters made by a psychotic patient, in Marjorie M. Halpin, Michael M. Ames (eds): 'Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence', UBC Press, 1980.

Psychotic Art (p. 1060)

Though This Be Madness. A Study In Psychotic Art by Georg Schmidt, Hans Steck, Alfred Bader
Review by: E. A. Bennet, The British Medical Journal Vol. 1, No. 5284 (Apr. 14, 1962), p. 1060
(1 page)

normal processes are disturbed the result, expressed in symptoms, depends upon the mental quality of the person affected. There are no established rules to guide us in understanding the art productions of psychotics, psychoneurotics, or healthy persons. Such paintings of course may be discussed objectively, from the outside. This, broadly speaking, is the plan adopted in this book, for the opinion of the artists on their work is rarely mentioned.

Pictures by three schizophrenic patients—scarcely a representative group—are discussed by the authors. Dr. Georg Schmidt answers the question: "What has the art of psychotics to do with art as such?" He reaches the conclusion that "we can hardly accept it as art in the true sense of the term." Dr. Hans Steck considers psychotic paintings as an aid to the doctor's understanding of his patient's illness. Valuable though this may be, it is a pity that only a passing reference is made to the effect of the pictures upon those who painted them. It is inferred that "this display of creative imagination enables them (the patients) to liberate themselves more completely." This obscure and unconfirmed statement is probably true. Dr. Alfred Bader introduces the paintings around which the book is written. Here we get a glimpse—no more, alas!—of art therapy: "a chronic schizophrenic became progressively more sociable and less irritable since she managed to materialize her delusions."

A problem facing the reader is the difficulty of linking the numerous unlabelled pictures with the text. M. Jean Cocteau's foreword, "Minor Masters of Madness," increases the reader's perplexity by giving the word schizophrenia a connotation unknown in psychiatry.

E. A. BENNET.