

ART AND THE HUMAN BRAIN

by Daniel Richards

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How often do you walk into an art gallery thinking about how much you love the art? Or are you more likely to consider where the piece will hang, whether it's too large, if it matches your décor or how it was created? Doesn't all that sound kind of analytical? When I meet someone preoccupied with these thoughts I light-heartedly say, "I would just love to marry you but I am not sure if you will match my decor." It always gets a good laugh. So why do so many people place such high priorities on the analytical aspect of art when it actually has little to do with its intent. After all, to most artists a work of art deals with pure matters of the heart and their emotions. To understand this we need to look at the human brain's dominant left analytical hemisphere and its processing functions, something most of us know very little about.

The human brain is a complex machine and I am no expert by any means, but I do know that when it comes to feeling art we need to use the correct hemisphere. The human brain is broken down into primarily left and right hemisphere functions, each with specific processes. When these come together in the corpus coliseum — a nerve centre connecting both hemispheres — we perceive ourselves as one person. A very brilliant American by the name of Roger Sperry won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1981 for his discoveries concerning the functional specialization of the cerebral hemispheres. He basically figured out how our brain processes information. Interestingly enough, at the time I never knew I would use this knowledge to create my art and later help people select it, but that's another article altogether.

People I meet in my gallery seem to be either left analytically dominant,

right holistically intuitive or a balance of both. This is a product I suppose of evolution, genetics, education and upbringing. I find it interesting that I have never really sold a work of art to a completely left analytically dominant individual. You see, these individuals view art primarily as an object of interest rather than one of beauty. To them it needs to be understood through analysis or as a component of their décor rather than just loved for what it is and how it makes them feel. On the other hand, the lovers and buyers of art are primarily right holistically intuitive and love art for the pure reason of enjoyment.

I give credit to our education system for perpetuating the analytical interpretation of art as much of the system is primarily focused on reading, writing, arithmetic and the rational sciences, all of which exercise the left analytical hemisphere functions. Understanding art is not so much about being educated in the arts but rather more about which hemisphere is dominant when standing in front of it. Sperry found that the left analytical brain was the happy brain while the right holistic was the more profound. Fine art is often perceived as a serious subject that touches our deepest emotions; often, a right hemisphere dominant individual is more in tune with art because he or she is more in tune with matters of the heart. These individuals tend to feel more emotions in the face of creativity. They quite often don't know much about the piece of interest nor do they really care. They just love it and don't know why.

The left analytical brain is dominant in most people and, when compared to right hemisphere dominance, comes less equipped to process emotional



Three Flowers, Mixed Media on Canva. Original screening by Daniel Richards.

matters of the heart efficiently. Knowing this is the first step to truly understanding art and why you're not drooling all over it with passion.

In closing, I want to remind you that everything outside of how you feel for art will change over time but your love never will. Take a look at your training in life and if you think you are predominantly analytical and find it hard to understand emotion in the face of such things then it's time to learn about your brain. Query split brain functions over the internet and then move onto the four personality types. Tie all this together and you will be surprised at how fast you will understand who you really are and perhaps why you do not always connect with art. You most likely are in the wrong brain at the wrong time. With a greater understanding of brain functionality, and a little time, it is possible to change your responses and develop a richer experience with art. ■