

Denys N. Wheatley

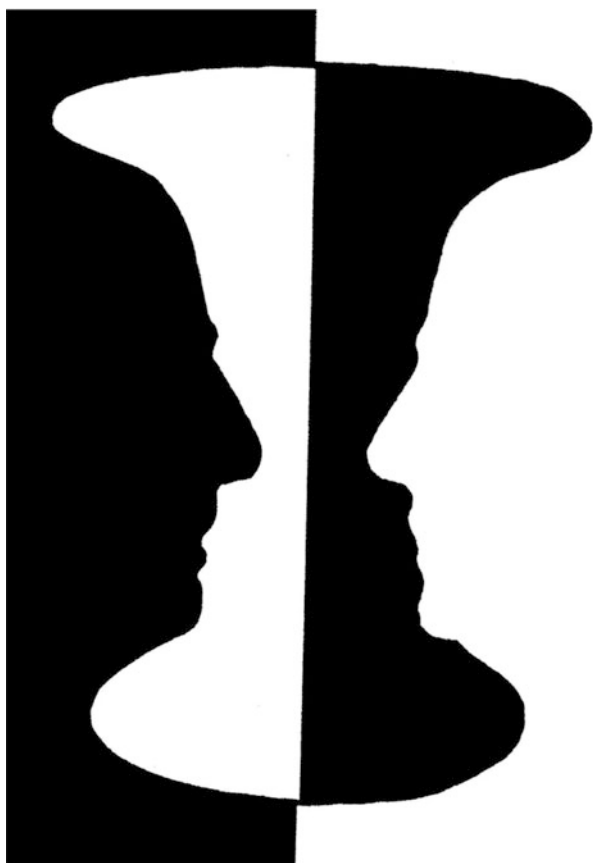
# “BipolART”

Art and Bipolar Disorder:  
A Personal Perspective



Springer

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A typical late doodle (Yoyoscan, February 2011)

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Perspective

 Springer

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# Acknowledgements

To have written this book at my time of life, I am eternally grateful to my family, who have seen me through many long periods of depression, and at other times where I have been almost unmanageably manic. They must have suffered almost as much as myself in their way, but they have held me together such that I nevertheless could pursue a rewarding career in cancer research. I particularly want to thank my former wife, Pamela, my two daughters, Nina and Sally, and my present partner, Jean Fletcher.

I have been encouraged to write this book by a number of colleagues, some of whom know that I have bipolar disorder and others that are not so aware of my condition; they include Edward Mercer, Bhanu Jena, Reginald Goldacre, Ian Clark, and Lee Tsun Hou. There have been others, who—as artists themselves—saw that my efforts were not in vane; indeed they seem to indicate that I could have been something of an artist if I had chosen this as a career. These include Jennifer Jane Bayliss, Douglas Prosser, Bert Menco, Cynthia Coda, Jacqui Robertson and Marian Reid.

The Carnegie Trust of Scotland was generous in giving me an award as an emeritus staff of Aberdeen University to start this project. It would not have progressed much further if Springer (Dordrecht) had not also encouraged me after seeing my portfolio, and taken the bold step of offering a contract for the publishing of this book. Its content lies intentionally somewhere between science and art; it is neither a scientific/medical monograph nor an art book. Today we are seeing renewed and welcome activity in the interface between science and art, and how together they impact on society. I hope that my work will add a further small step in this direction.

Some of the paintings and drawings have been on show in local exhibitions, which has resulted in quite a number being purchased. Other pictures have been given to members of my family, whom I hope one day will see these works and the ones I will later leave as a tangible legacy. However, I cannot assume that the artwork will survive the test of time!

I also wish to acknowledge many of my newer friends whom I have made at the local mental health recovery centre. Together our art efforts have provided a focus for me, and a chance to share my work and feelings with them. There has been a long history of treatment with many doctors, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists,

whom I would like to pay tribute to their patience and helpful understanding of my condition. In particular, my recent GP, Dr. Hood and clinical psychologist, David Huxtable, has not only succeeded in getting me past cyclical depression, but saw the potential in the artwork in being incorporated into art therapy in future. I now have the task of finding out much more about the role of art therapy in mental disorders, for it is very apparent that we are all going to need much more help as we get older in keeping our brains and minds functioning in a healthy and focused manner. Once again, I reiterate the hope that what I have produced in this book can provide some insight into bipolar disorder such that its content can be assimilated in some way into the kinds of therapy that might work gently and humanely in lifting people out of the awful feelings of depression, and calm down those who are manic. To be creative in life, as we can all be, lifts our spirits and should make us happier in this stressful world that we seem to have inherited today.

# Contents

<b>1 Prologue—By Way of an Introduction</b> .....	1
A Little Background .....	2
Art and Therapy .....	5
<b>2 Doodles—From the Beginning</b> .....	9
<b>3 Drawing Doodles</b> .....	19
First Example .....	20
A Second Example .....	24
Where Doodling Might Take You? .....	28
<b>4 Development of the Doodle</b> .....	31
<b>5 A Biological Journey</b> .....	41
<b>6 Reality—Drawings from Life</b> .....	55
<b>7 A Short Musical Interlude</b> .....	65
<b>8 Abstract Art—A Mind Roaming Free</b> .....	71
<b>9 Humour—A Means of Relief</b> .....	85
<b>10 Goaded by Geometry</b> .....	91
<b>11 Epilogue: Art, Creativity and Bipolar Disorder</b> .....	105
The Person(ality) Behind the Art .....	105
Mental Stability in the General Public .....	106
Art, Creativity and Its Place in Bipolar Disorder .....	108
The Influence of Others .....	110
Science—Its Relation to Art and Creativity .....	111
Imagination .....	112
Anger and Bipolar Disorder .....	114
Doodling—A Natural Approach to Art Therapy .....	115

Features of Depression . . . . . 115  
In Touch with Infinity, Unity, God . . . . . 117  
And the Future? . . . . . 120  
**References** . . . . . 123  
**Index** . . . . . 125

# List of Figures

<b>1 Prologue—By Way of an Introduction</b> .....	1
Masks .....	7
<b>2 Doodles—From the Beginning</b> .....	9
Writer’s world .....	10
Clawed table .....	11
Glassy eardrop .....	11
Vase/skirt .....	11
Draped urn .....	11
Follow the flow .....	12
Full Swivel .....	12
Frent .....	12
Clot .....	12
Factory fancy .....	13
Exegesis .....	13
Beach forms .....	13
Beach scene .....	14
Old esplanade .....	14
Bangkok .....	15
Ice-man .....	15
Heady .....	16
Pisces .....	17
Core yin-yang .....	17
<b>3 Drawing Doodles</b> .....	19
Doodle/developing senses .....	19
Doodle 1 steps 1-4 .....	21
Doodle 1 steps 5-6 .....	22
Doodle 1 steps 7-8 .....	23
Doodle 2 steps 1-2 .....	25
Doodle 2 steps 3-6 .....	26
Doodle 2 steps 7-9 .....	27

Crab-clawed . . . . .	28
Radiant flowers . . . . .	29
<b>4 Development of the Doodle . . . . .</b>	<b>31</b>
The paths we tread . . . . .	32
Easycargot . . . . .	33
Sea scrolls . . . . .	33
Kernel . . . . .	34
Cryptic signs on bridge . . . . .	34
Pumping air . . . . .	35
Hot air balloon . . . . .	35
Planted feet . . . . .	35
An old tower . . . . .	36
Breugel's Tower of Babel . . . . .	36
Old fort . . . . .	37
Wave hill . . . . .	37
Hill of the table . . . . .	37
Chaos unresolved . . . . .	38
Untitled . . . . .	39
Leviathan . . . . .	39
<b>5 A Biological Journey . . . . .</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Varanus</i> 1 and 2 . . . . .	42
Moons and skulls . . . . .	43
Bony girdle . . . . .	44
Wounded dragon . . . . .	44
Fantasy birds . . . . .	45
About life . . . . .	46
Fully wound . . . . .	47
Doubly wound . . . . .	47
Making and forming . . . . .	47
Circulation . . . . .	48
Design for a brooch . . . . .	48
Shellflower . . . . .	49
White orchids . . . . .	50
Old tree at Longford Park . . . . .	51
New fruits . . . . .	52
Carnival of animals . . . . .	52
Seashore plant . . . . .	53
<b>6 Reality—Drawings from Life . . . . .</b>	<b>55</b>
Christmas rose . . . . .	56
The farm enface . . . . .	56
South lodge . . . . .	57
South lodge (photo) . . . . .	57
South lodge 2 . . . . .	57

Dacha . . . . .	58
Stone circle, hill and sunset . . . . .	58
Bennachie thrice subtended . . . . .	59
Orange sea, tempest – Madeira . . . . .	60
Palm tree – Madiera . . . . .	60
St Laurence point – Madeira . . . . .	60
Holy Island – Lindisfarne . . . . .	61
Macchu Picchu village . . . . .	62
Una . . . . .	63
Daniella . . . . .	63
Mike – Biker . . . . .	63
Douglas . . . . .	63
(van Gogh – 2 pictures for comparison) . . . . .	64
<b>7 A Short Musical Interlude . . . . .</b>	<b>65</b>
King Juggler . . . . .	66
Bagpipe tune . . . . .	66
Organ stops . . . . .	67
Harp of triumph . . . . .	67
Sporting the sporon (drum major) . . . . .	67
Organ console . . . . .	68
Foot harp . . . . .	68
Triple concerto 1 . . . . .	68
Triple concerto 2 . . . . .	69
Quartet . . . . .	69
<b>8 Abstract Art—A Mind Roaming Free . . . . .</b>	<b>71</b>
Doodle (birth of spheres) . . . . .	71
Birth of spheres . . . . .	72
Emergent life . . . . .	72
Sea of spheres . . . . .	73
Ascending from the depths . . . . .	73
Red centre . . . . .	74
Two spheres . . . . .	75
Blue staircase . . . . .	76
The four winds of colour . . . . .	77
Triome 1 . . . . .	78
Triome 2 . . . . .	79
Léger-like . . . . .	80
Miami beach scene . . . . .	80
Cave in the desert . . . . .	81
The elements . . . . .	82
Design for a mural . . . . .	82
Falling into depression . . . . .	83

<b>9 Humour—A Means of Relief</b> .....	85
Centriole .....	85
Baha’i .....	85
Ants .....	86
Obese mice .....	86
Homage to Mendel (Pea; <i>Pisum sativum</i> ) .....	87
Pints of beer .....	87
Elephant toes .....	87
HGV wheels .....	88
Traffic lights .....	88
Gas burner .....	88
Newton’s cradle .....	88
Cherries .....	89
Tomatoes on the vine .....	89
Aboriginal .....	89
<b>10 Goaded by Geometry</b> .....	91
Flypast .....	91
Shades .....	92
Corner cones .....	93
Beach building .....	94
Fixed to a Hill/Fixed to a wall .....	94
Starkvistas .....	95
Blocks .....	95
Panes .....	95
Plant .....	96
Santa Fe .....	96
Pump .....	97
Putting a slant on it .....	97
Suspended form .....	97
Four by four by four .....	98
Multifaceted .....	99
Spherangle doodle .....	100
Spherangle .....	100
Light of the spheres .....	100
Under construction .....	101
Strident .....	101
Mondrian in steel .....	102
Neo-Mondrian homage .....	102
Space-time boogie woogie .....	103
6-Fold symmetry .....	103
1-2-3-4-5 .....	104

# Chapter 1

## Prologue—By Way of an Introduction

*No excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness.*

Aristotle

It was not my original intention to say much up-front about what follows in the chapters of this book that are filled with artwork. The content should hopefully speak for itself, with a few short interjections helping to set the scene, or providing an apt quotation. The idea had been to let you wander through the “gallery” (the chapters of this book) first, and then for me to make some remarks about artwork and its therapeutic value in bipolar disorder, as well as a little about myself, in the Epilogue.

But the gallery needs some introduction, even if something about the person (personality) behind them is left until later. The artwork is an eclectic mixture of two-dimensional art produced over the last 12–13 years, although this is not the only phase during my life that manic-depression (bipolar disorder) has loomed large. The original idea of setting these works out in chronological order had to be abandoned since it proved better to collect them into groups, as can be seen from the chapter headings in the Contents, but deciding which picture went where was often difficult. Nevertheless I hope their presentation in this way works well.

There are simple pencil doodles in Chapter 2. Drawing them depends on who you are, and how you set about it is a personal matter. But in Chapter 3, I give a brief glimpse of how I build up some of the more abstract of them, and from there they could become very elaborate, as in Chapter 4. There is no doubt that doodles are almost always abstract, although many will contain images that are recognisable. Doodles in the last few years have, on average, become larger, as well as being more elaborate and stylised than before, a kind of new genre.

Some doodles have led to major paintings, although others were done without first drawing a doodle. A common motif can be seen in the many of the life-forms depicted in the early doodles, and therefore I have selected those which emphasis this aspect in Chapter 5 in a “biological journey”. This is not surprising because of my biomedical training and background. The trend towards paintings rather than pencil doodles took off quite early, and many of them remain relatively true to life and nature; Chapter 6 is on “reality”. A variety of different media have been used,