

ART AND THE BRAIN: THE VIEW FROM DEMENTIA

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Art making encompasses a range of perceptual and cognitive functions involving widely distributed brain systems. The dementias impact on these systems in different ways, raising the possibility that each dementia has a unique artistic signature. Here we use a review of the visual art of 14 artists with dementia (5 Alzheimer's disease, 7 fronto-temporal dementia and 2 Dementia with Lewy bodies) to further our understanding of the neurobiological constituents of art production and higher artist function. Artists with Alzheimer's disease had prominent changes in spatial aspects of their art and attributes of colour and contrast. These qualities were preserved in the art of fronto-temporal dementia which was characterised by perseverative themes and a shift towards realistic representation. The art of dementia with Lewy Bodies was characterised by pronounced changes in visual perceptual attributes and bizarre content linked to visual hallucinations. The impact of dementia on wider aspects of art production is discussed and a novel classificatory scheme presented to help characterise neural mechanisms of higher artistic functions in future studies.