

You oughta be sedated...

By Jennifer Vignone

Turn on the television, and there it is...another commercial about creative types and their inability to cope. Oh, sigh...just why?



Woe is me, Vignone, 2021

According to most media, artists are depressed, angry, sad, hyper, bipolar, migraine-riddled, psycho-schizoid, and schizophrenic. They are either cleaning everything, not cleaning anything, carrying around weird little round happy faces that don't quite fit into their purses and backpacks, spending money they don't have, aloof from their families – their little children looking about them forlornly clutching a coloring book and crayons (a future creative depression candidate) – afraid of approaching the despairing parent. Their husbands or wives are weary, with a look that says maybe this relationship was a mistake ('mom and dad warned me about those mood swings and dead squirrels...').



John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1851-1852. Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

An alarming number of them appear to be female. Is this scientific fact, or an attempt to make women feel like they are a gender always on the verge of a nervous breakdown (Pedro Almodóvar know).

“Mommy, are you okay today?” a child winsomely asks in one commercial. “Yes!” says Mom enthusiastically, until her meds wear off and then she’s rifling through the hamper wondering where she left that toy gun. In another ad, a woman is apparently failing miserably at painting a frame for a mirror. She is listless, uninspired. Her creativity has left her. Depression. Not even a smiley face hidden in a closet to fall back on. She must turn to drugs. And lo and behold, it has worked! Her family no longer lives in fear of what Mommy might do and she completes the mirror frame in lovely pastel blues for her daughter’s room. Her daughter approaches her joyfully because Mommy has regained her creative soul and at least for now, some mental stability.

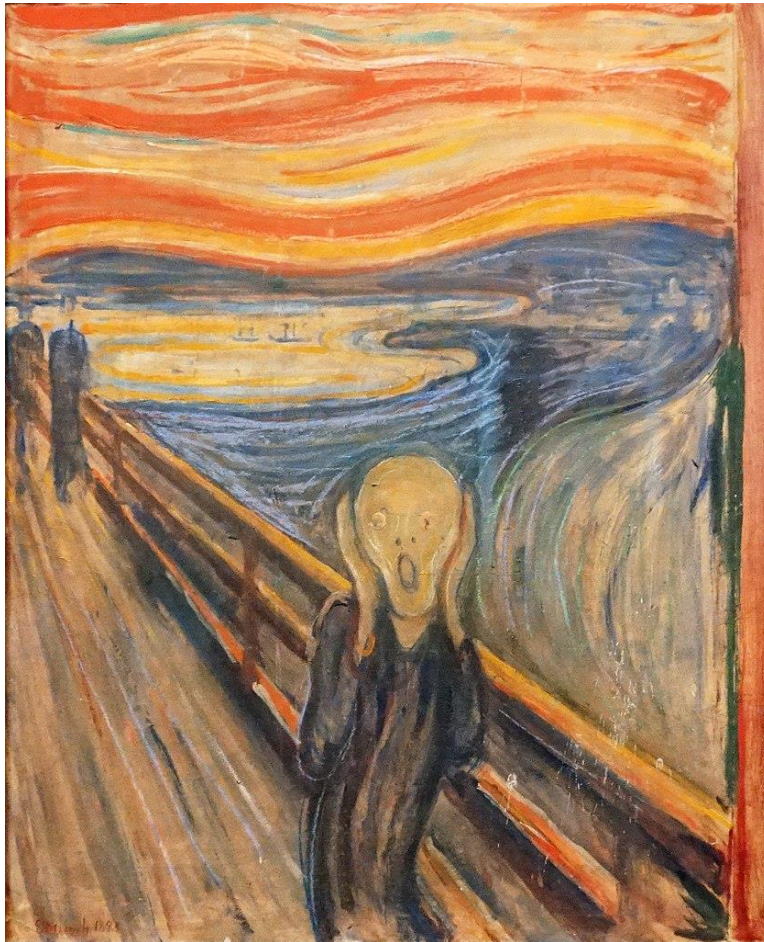
There is a part of me that resents being made to feel being a woman and an artist is a mental double whammy. I am doomed like poor Olivia de Haviland in “The Snake Pit”, a writer whose work was rejected – no happy faces for either one on us.

Why is being creative so often paired with mental disorders, illness, or being generally unbalanced...who is doing this?

One drug campaign uses artwork inspired by people who have actually painted their feelings... it’s called “Art”. Good grief. These ads feature actors – not the actual people from these “real” stories – showing works that depict their delicate mental state. If you weren’t already confused, depressed, bipolar, or delusional, you will be after attempting to untangle the mess of false

reality being thrown at you in this commercial. What is interesting is that the artwork inspired by the depression is more compelling than the adjusted, happier state, provoking the thought, "Hey, maybe a chemical imbalance or two makes me a better artist....?" And thus, more mental chaos ensues. What happened to the real people used as the basis for this advertisement? Are they someplace dark and quiet, recovering from the victimization of this commercial? One presumes that the real people these works of art are based on were too incapacitated to star in their own story.

With all of this in mind, let's take a look at some works of art throughout history as seen through the lens of anti-depression campaigns of the present. What do they say about what the work is telling us? What regimen would most benefit the subject depicted?

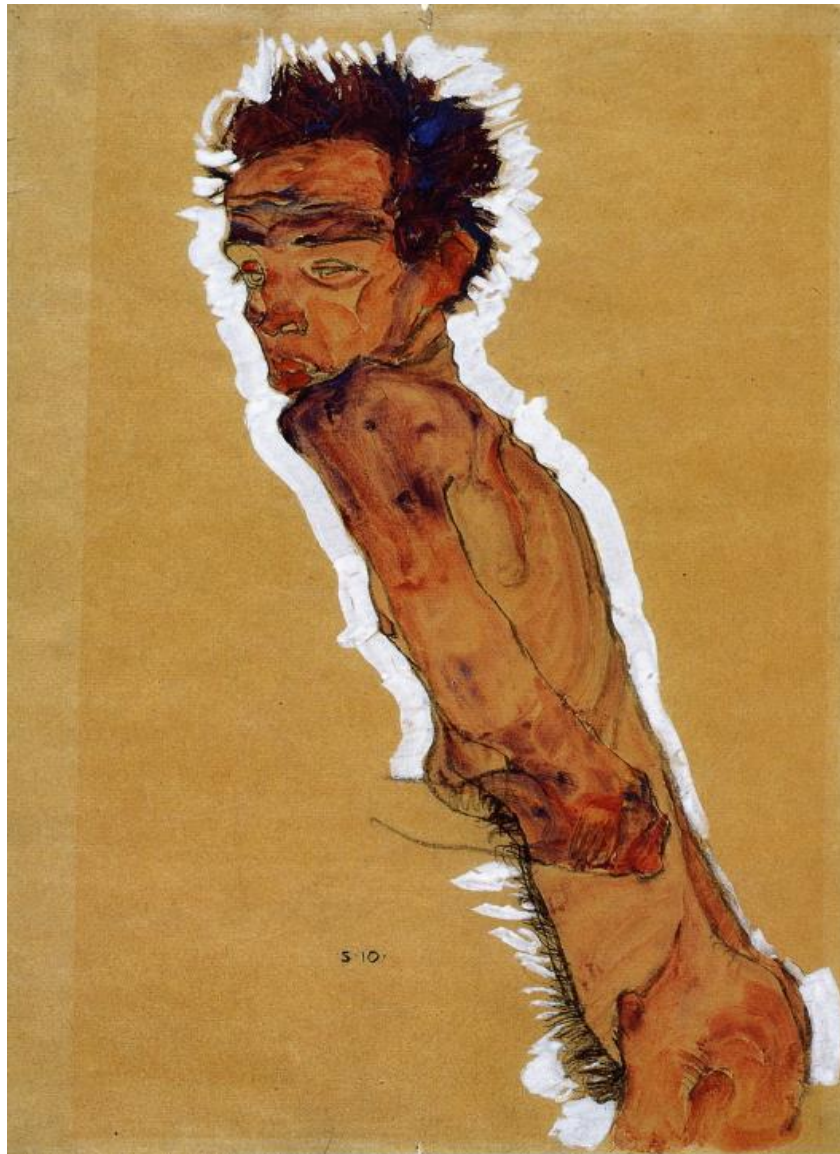


The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893. Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

The Scream

Campaign: Feeling afraid, nervous, anxious? Is someone is following you? Sleepless, disturbed, imagining yourself in a German Expressionist painting for no good reason? It could be depression.

Recommended treatment: Fluoxetine; avoid elongated, willowy people wearing top hats.

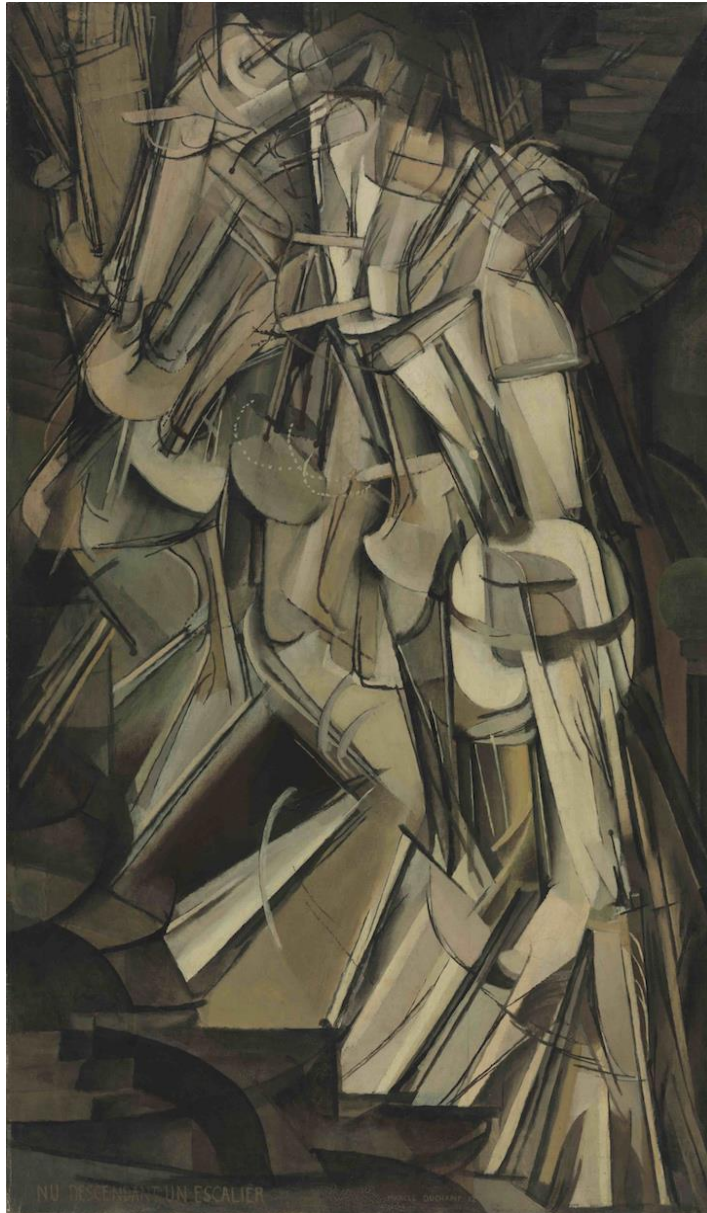


Egon Schiele, Self Portrait, male nude in profile facing left, 1910 via [Amazon](#).

Self Portrait, male nude in profile facing left

Campaign: Frazzled? Isolated, depressed. Need a sandwich? Perhaps a sweater?

Recommended: Is there anything a little medical marijuana won't fix, or at least blur for a while?



Nude Descending a Staircase, Marcel DuChamp, 1912 via [The Cleveland Museum of Art](https://www.clevelandmuseumofart.org/).

Nude Descending a Staircase

Campaign: Nothing like a little Dada to mess with your head. Feeling fractured, a migraine like shards of glass tumbling down stairs? Trying to hold it together but wondering where you can get a toilet seat covered in fur?

Recommended: Botox, so you can tell people it is for the headache, but be honest, getting rid of those frown lines is what will really cheer you up...



Mystery and Melancholy of a Street, Giorgio de Chirico, 1914 via [The Paris Review](#).

Mystery and Melancholy of a Street

Campaign: Terrified of everything from architecture to hoola hoops? I'm right there with you. I sense the ominous dread of an Easy-Bake Oven, or an ice cream truck rolling round a corner...

Recommended: Sertraline Hydrochloride, Escitalopram Oxalate; limit access to children's toys, Neoclassical architecture and circuses.



Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear, Vincent Van Gogh, 1889. Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear

Campaign: Feeling like all your best efforts have failed you? Your former banker artist friend left you because you're acting a little weird? The local brothel leaving you feeling like you aren't being heard? Maybe she needs help...wait...ouch...!

Recommended: Venlafaxine, Bupropion; keep to just plastic cutlery for a while.



Fallen Man, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, 1915 via [Facing History](#).

Fallen Man

Campaign: Just can't seem to keep up, get up, stand up? Exhausted by the very thought of existing? Is life just one long existential nightmare?

Recommended: If caffeine isn't enough, try a little Methylphenidate in your morning oats for that extra boost.



Study for a Head, 1952, Francis Bacon via [Sotheby's](#).

Study for a Head (or simply, anything by Francis Bacon)

Campaign: Wishing the world would just end?

Recommended: Uh, we could be beyond drug therapy now. Electro-shock followed by permanent housing in a mental facility.



Carcass of Beef, Chaim Soutine, 1925. Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Carcass of Beef

Campaign: Dead, dead, dead.

Recommended: Lock up the house. Check the crawl spaces. Look for any evidence of tarpaulin, shovels, lye...

Why do the depressed people in the ads never have jobs like a subway conductor, construction worker, or doctor? I guess the thought of a publicly engaged or responsible role would really freak people out. If you were getting on a train or going under the knife and are thinking “I hope Conductor Bob or Debbie the Dentist took their meds and is feeling pretty high on life today” – it could mess up the commercial (and your head).

But then again, popping those meds might help get you over it...just beware of the side effects! Be well.