



BipolART: Art and Bipolar Disorder: A Personal Perspective

Denys N. Wheatley

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Written with disarming honesty by a long-term sufferer of bipolar disorder, with more than half a century's experience of intervention and treatment, this highly personal volume traces the effectiveness of a therapy modality for mental illness that has gained much ground in the past two decades: art. The author began to use art, and in particular doodling, from 1998 as a way of externalizing his feelings. Its expressiveness, accessibility and energy-efficiency was ideally suited to the catatonia he experienced during the bouts of depression that are a feature of bipolar disorder, while as the low moods lifted and his energy surged, he completed more ambitious and elaborate works. As well as being highly eclectic, Wheatley's assembled oeuvre has afforded him both insights and therapeutic intervention into his condition, once deemed highly debilitating and taboo, but much more socially accepted now that well known sufferers such as Stephen Fry have recounted their experiences of the condition. After an opening account of how the images were generated, the volume reproduces a 'gallery' of selected work, and then offers an extended epilogue analyzing the art's connections with the disorder as well as the author's assessment of how each attempt at visual self-expression was, for him, a therapeutic intervention. Wheatley, a cell biologist who has enjoyed a full career in cancer research, has had no formal training in art, yet his haunting pictures, many of them resembling life forms, are brought to life by his perceptive, self-aware commentary. This book will be of interest to psychologists and psychiatrists among the wider medical profession as well as people suffering from any form of bipolar disorder whatever the severity.

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