

Department of Psychiatry, Oxford University
1st April 2025
Transcript

Hello, and thank you for staying and taking the time to listen to me and for your support. I have received encouraging cards, faxes, and emails. Being an artist is no different from any other job - encouragement is welcome.

I understand that Psychiatry used to be the Cinderella of the medical world, and it is good news that this is no longer the case. It is great that your big, brilliant, beautiful brains are being put to work in this field. It's an exciting time to study the brain with fMRIs unlocking new facts, and it is, obviously, timely.

I sense how hard you all work and understand that your brains must be increasingly adept at managing and memorising empirical data. This will help you to make good progress and drive change. This is important work, really.

But I hope my art will fire up another part of your brain—a part that is often messy and can't be trammelled into data points or spreadsheets. It is the part that feels empathy. I looked up the definition of empathy to confirm that I understood it correctly— it is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

As any psychotherapist or psychiatrist knows, feelings are not necessarily facts, BUT they are very real to the person experiencing them. If my art prompts you to imagine the whole person, put yourself in their shoes, and imagine how they may be feeling, I will feel my art has done its job. If your patient is an elderly gentleman, maybe imagine what your grandfather would feel like in this situation. Or a young girl who you love, how would she be feeling?

Each patient will be experiencing ordered thoughts and feelings alongside their disordered ones, and I believe that addressing this part of their experience is important.

The Buddhists have a way of describing pain on two levels. The first, in the case of mental health, is the crippling confusion of a disordered and unrecognisable brain. The second is an ever-present narrative pain that is driven by feelings. It is this narrative pain that I hope my art recognises.

For example, a young girl, when well, might enjoy winning an academic challenge and have proud parents on board—her second level of pain may crush her with thoughts of letting down her father. The step change in her abilities may prompt shame, separate from the diagnoses. I try to highlight this type of distress through my art. Each sculpture focuses on an ordered and very valid feeling.

It has been a privilege to have my art on display here for so many weeks, and I hope some of its messages have sunk in.

I can answer any questions when I walk around, but I sign off with a question. Did I really receive any faxes? You will need to check today's date to find out.