

Quit Art Now



Dr M.C. Matheus, founder of the Grendel Green Institute, speaks with Samantha Renick about the programme of this unorthodox institution.

Can you briefly describe the Grendel Green Institutes philosophy?

The core premise of our institute is that art-making is a behavioural disorder. An irrational impulse stemming from a trauma or imbalance. Conventional psychology perceives art as a practice that aids emotional regulation, a coping mechanism or an outlet, usually for the maladjusted. While some studies have shown remedial benefits for 'Sunday Painters' (a classification denoting hobbyists), there is a plethora of clinical data demonstrating the negative impacts on full time practitioners. Art as a core belief, in most cases, leads to a life of poverty, subservience, social-isolation and alcohol and drug abuse. These adversities far outweigh the temporary elevation of any personal insecurities. The trope of the tortured artist is what awaits all except a handful of the most privilege participants. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we, at the institute, view art as a disease of the mind.

Some people find the novelty of this position offensive. Nobody is foolish enough to question this profession as they would any other. In contemporary thought 'artist', as an abstract notion, is viewed with a unique reverence. They are our visionaries, our social conscience, the last true mystics. Such a cruel deceit. The majority of artists will make countless sacrifices driven by this delusion, but they will die in obscurity and their 'great' works will be buried and forgotten with them. Only a small fraction will avoid this fate, fortuitously being picked up by a gatekeeper of the cultural ruling class. However, these wretched souls seek nothing more than the commodification of desire itself. Harvesting what they will and selling it on at perversely inflated prices to aspirational elites looking to elevate their social status. These artists are completely dependent as the sector is quarantined by monumental public indifference. The medium is corrupted beyond salvation, it has the stench of death to it.

There are genuine actors; artists, gallerists, curators and writers doing great work. Why do you hold such a wholly negative view of art?

Let me put it this way; if a man is lying in a bath containing 65% sulfuric acid, 20% vinegar and 15% water, and he turned to you with blistering flesh and started espousing the remedial virtues of bathing in water; it would be cause for concern no? To me this is what you are suggesting. The canary in this coal mine died some time ago. All that survives down there is a heaving circle-jerk of non-carbon-based lifeforms with translucent skin and darting mirrored eyes. Have you ever been to an art fair?

That said, the Grendel Green Institute does not seek to engage in political or cultural debates. I'm only presenting these ideas to illustrate the degree of trauma many of our patients suffer. Art is a grand delusion that permeates all aspects of one's self-image. When this narrative collapses an existential crisis ensues. In this landscape we act as crisis managers, navigating clients through a hostile terrain of intrapsychic conflicts, seeking to correct this maladaptive behaviour through a series of therapeutic interventions.



The Grendel Green Institute - Montreux, Switzerland

How do you treat your patients?

Our programme is broken into two stages that are delivered over the course of a 2-month residency at the Grendel Green Institute. The first is psychoanalytical in nature. The patient provides us with raw materials; images of their work, description of their methodology and an outline of their individual histories. Trained clinicians analyse this data and construct a personalized psychological model of the patient. From this model a treatment strategy is formulated. This is the second therapeutic stage. Treatments can vary from mindfulness meditation and hypnosis to more aggressive cognitive behavioural therapy techniques. We utilize whatever approach is necessary to achieve a result. This course is run in conjunction with scheduled activities amongst patients. These are designed to enhance social interaction and to expose and address interpersonal relationship issues. There are also elective activities such as yoga, canoeing and meditation

deployed to elevate some of the inevitable stress and trauma dredged up in therapy.

You have some prominent detractors. Steven Fry has spoken out against the institute. What do you say to the critics' concerns that if life would be devoid of art our culture will be poorer for it?

Steven Fry is a charming luddite, a darling of enlightenment thought. It's important not to get swept up in romantic notions. We must see things for what they truly are.

In some countries they beat dogs because it is their belief that the adrenalin tenderises the meat. This is so obviously repugnant. Well, I ask these critics – is it any different to knowingly allow tortured souls to wander blindly and untreated because some of their pictures amuse you? Most assuredly not. If I could go back in time to the aid of Goya, Van Gogh, or O'Keeffe, I would, without a second thought. The museums may lay empty, but men and women with full hearts would walk the streets.

Plato himself proposed banning poetry - in the west this dispute has been with us since our civilization's inception.

Any final words?

Quit art now. It abuses you in countless ways and its influence in the world is increasingly impotent. Do something more vital. If you need assistance with this transition we are here to help.



Samantha Renick
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