

Van Gogh was perhaps a synesthete. To what extent this affected his work, we will never know. The same goes for Liszt, who famously instructed his orchestra to play 'a little bluer, if you please'. We can never know exactly what Liszt meant when he said this; synaesthesia is a neurological condition unique to each person (perhaps up to 4% of the population) who has it, but that's surely the beauty of the human mind. There have been over 80 types of synaesthesia identified so far, for example chromesthesia (seeing sounds) and grapheme-numeral synaesthesia (ascribing colours to letters and numbers). Synesthetes have an individual and inimitable view of the world, which for artists likely translates into unique inspiration with extraordinary results.

It is debatable whether having synaesthesia will make a person a better artist. It cannot really be compared or measured by a scale because of its nature, and neither can one piece of art said to be 'better' than the other; both instances are subjective and personal. However, it is a fact that 25% of artists have synaesthesia, so whilst the condition might not make a person a 'better' artist, it does statistically make a person more likely to be creative, and people with synaesthesia are 8 times more likely to have an artistic career. Synesthetes are afforded an immediately artistic and creative image of the world – the creative processes of synesthetic artists begin long before the canvas.

But perhaps the question should not be 'do synesthetes make better artists' but rather 'should it matter how or by what an artist is inspired'. Is the important part of a composition the creative process, how it's made, or the final product and the messages that this conveys? Or is the meaning conveyed during the creative process? Or even before that, in the mind of the artist before any transfer to becoming an actual artistic idea? There is probably not a right or wrong answer to any of these questions; when, how or by what the meaning of a composition is conveyed is entirely subjective and specific to the viewer. It doesn't matter so much what the artist intended as how their message is interpreted; the creative process is often overshadowed by the reception of a piece which cannot be accurately predicted or certainly provoked.

Synaesthesia

