

Iconodiagnostics to promote care skills

Paolo Pozzilli^{1,2}

¹ Campus Bio-Medico University of Rome, Italy

² The Blizard Institute, St. Bartholomew's and the London School of Medicine, London, UK

E-mail: p.pozzilli@unicampus.it

BACKGROUND

Iconography is a discipline linked to the history of art that investigates the meaning of images.

Iconodiagnostics, at the intersection of art and medicine, is an interplay between art and science, tracing the chronology of a pathological condition through the aesthetics of disease and making a diagnosis based on a depiction.

By analyzing historical artworks, medical depictions, and even portraits of individuals from the past, iconodiagnostics can help trace the symptoms and progression of endocrine conditions that were not well understood at the time. Moreover, iconodiagnostics allows the reinterpretation of individuals' lives in light of the pathology described.

ENDOCRINE PATHOLOGIES AND ART

Pozzilli P., Vollero L. and Colao AM (2019) with a comparison among face traits in different paintings representing the same woman postulate that Simonetta Vespucci, the Venus depicted by Botticelli, suffered from a pituitary-secreting tumor progressing to pituitary apoplexy (Figure 1.).



Figure 1. Allegorical Portrait of a Woman Simonetta Vespucci (1480-1490). Sandro Botticelli.

Pozzilli P., Nicolai L. (2021) maintain to have identified a case of severe Graves' disease (untreated hyperthyroidism, atrial fibrillation and thyroid eye disease) in the bronze statue

of Cosimo I de' Medici forged by Benvenuto Cellini in between 1545 and 1547. Following the Authors' interpretation, the severe Graves' disease represented a considerable risk factor for the thromboembolic stroke which severely affected Cosimo I's last months of his life (Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Bronze statue of Cosimo I de' Medici forged by Benvenuto Cellini in between 1545 and 1547.

HORMONES AND THE BODY IN ART: BODY WEIGHT AND BEAUTY

Artists have long used the human body as a subject, striving to portray not only the exterior but also the inner workings of the body. Hormonal changes can drastically alter the physical body, affecting everything from muscle tone and fat distribution to the skin's appearance and even facial expression (Bonafini BA, Pozzilli P. 2011 and 2013) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Venus of Willendorf 30 000 a.C.; Aphrodite of Knidos. Praxiteles 350 a.C.

By observing the art of different eras, as well as the more recent existence of the media, it is obvious that there have been dramatic changes in what is considered a beautiful body. The ideal of female beauty has shifted from a symbol of fertility to one of mathematically calculated proportions (Figure 4.).



Figure 4. The three graces, Prado by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640, Germany).

Nowadays there seems to be a tendency towards the destruction of the feminine, as androgynous fashion and appearance dominate our culture. The metamorphosis of the ideal woman follows the shifting role of women in society. Her depiction by artists across

the centuries reveals this change in role and appearance that should be interpreted within the social and historical context of each era with its own theories of what constituted the ideal female body weight (Bonafini BA, Pozzilli P. 2011 and 2013).

CONCLUSION

Iconodiagnostics serves as an interdisciplinary tool that allows endocrinologists and medical historians to gain new insights into the physical and psychological impact of endocrine disorders on individuals throughout history. From the portrayal of the human form and emotional states to the exploration of hormonal influence on creativity, the connection between these two fields enriches our understanding of the human experience. Together, they offer a more holistic view of the human condition, one that encompasses both the scientific and the emotional, the physical and the symbolic.

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