

Conferencia especial

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COVID-19 and other emergent infectious diseases in the Art

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Art has been influenced by world pandemics throughout History, especially by the Medieval plague and the 1918 Spanish influenza. Therefore, it is not unusual that COVID-19 be represented in multiple and sophisticated ways in Art. Certainly the approach to this viral disease and the graphic techniques used for its representation are different to those used before. Death is not the main idea behind COVID-19 artistic representation. There are other human worries represented instead. Fear, isolation, enforced change of daily activities and lifestyle, and mainly lack of freedom are the main ideas behind COVID-19 graphic representations. Graphic techniques switched from the traditional oil, watercolor and engravings to Pop-Art techniques using acrylic, photocompositions and even graffiti¹⁻⁴.

On the other hand, world museums remained closed boosting the need of offering their masterpieces online to people forced to remain secluded during months in their own homes, many times small apartments, along with their complete families. There were some laudable initiatives to offer free Art online promoted by the New York MOMA, the UNESCO's Museum "#share culture" program or in Spain by the Museo del Prado Instagram videos, Barcelona's MACBA "Diary of confinement" or Madrid's La Casa encendida "#MeQuedoEnCasa".

Several were the themes related to the COVID-19 pandemic favored in Art that we will briefly describe. Firstly, the home confinement.

The own house was considered a safe and pleasant place but also a prison. Several authors followed this line of thought in their works (Goikoetxea, Simoes, Mildner and even the famous graffiti artist Banksy). Windows, though, were the only link with the outside work (Burguiño, Naves, Tordjman, Bianchini, Murillo) along with internet, used not only for fun but for teleworking that received a decisive push by COVID-19 (Monreal, Yilmaz, Dekel, Crespo). The emptiness of public places and the social isolation were other ideas frequently represented in Art regarding the COVID-19 pandemic (Yurhack, Seoane, Farinha). Following the same idea was the "Pandemiarte" project from the Spanish David Bokeh. In Pandemiarte several classical Art masterworks that their human figures deleted with Photoshop illustrating the loneliness that the COVID-19 pandemic brought. The own SARS-COV-2 that its own representation in Art as a magical or awesome figure (Guanyu, Szalay, Jaen, Zanni). Protection measures including personal protective equipment (PPE) with face-shields, face masks, gowns and gloves used against COVID-19 and PCR swabs for its diagnosis had been well depicted (AOS art, Mokshini, @anindianminiaturist, Muñoz Montejano, Ocho Diz, Rus, Amann, and even by the famous El País cartoonist El Roto). Finally, it must be mentioned the hero role of the health workers including doctors and nurses in and outside hospital in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This risky and braver work of the health

workers was well depicted in the works of Pakdel, Grainca, Baksy, Lee, and even in a 2020 New Yorkers cover by Ware.

However, COVID-19 was not the only emergent disease portrayed in Art. Several arbovirus including Zika, dengue, Ebola are well depicted. Black a microbiologist and a graphic artist conceived artistic images of Zika virus. Hirsch, an artist from Israel created several truly original works on dengue, a viral disease he contracted while visiting the Dominican Republic. Seemel portrayed a threatening image of the mosquito as dengue-vector. Other artists (Mansaray, Carrett) portrayed Ebola, cause of an African pandemic breaking out between 2024-16. Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are well represented in ART⁶⁻⁸. The most recent, HIV infection, is well represented, emphasizing the risk of unprotected sex (Lida), its family spread through heterosexual sex and vertical transmission especially in low. Income African and South American countries (Wesley, Lacend). Even famous illustrator such as Keith Haring, himself a gay artist living with HIV and a son of Pop-Art. Haring created many works on HIV infection emphasizing the need of showing affect, friendship and open acceptance by the general population with those infected with this retrovirus. Haring made these works in years when there was no effective therapy and many of the HIV transmission mechanisms were unknown. Lucien Freud, the noted British painter, that had many friends among the homosexual population produced some moving masterworks on AIDS- stricken patients as well. Even monkeypox one of the most recent pandemic among men who had sex with men (MSM) has its own graphic representation (Melnik).

Other STD such as syphilis have been broadly depicted in Art emphasizing the deadly consequences of illegitimate sex linked to prostitution (Hogarth, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gorrive, Cooper, Rops) or the consequences of syphilis vertical transmission in the hapless descendence (Rembrandt, Munch)⁹.

Among other emergent infectious diseases the 1918 Spanish influenza has its own representation in artists that suffered themselves this deadly pandemic such as Much and Schiele,

Malaria (Hebert, Sartorio) and Chagas disease (Favre-Mosier) are well represented in Art as well¹⁰.

In summary, Art is a depiction of life and is the mirror in which the human population sees itself. Pandemics damage or pose a risk for human health and always disturb daily activities enhancing isolation and confinement. Therefore, pandemics are well represented in the Art history, especially the most recent such as those due to HIV and COVID-19.

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