

Remarkable similarities between Picasso's art and oral-facial syndromes

Krishna R. Dronamraju - President, Foundation for Genetic Research, Houston, USA, - KDronamraj@aol.com
P.O. Box 27701-0, Houston, Texas

Abstract:

From the viewpoint of a geneticist, it is apparent that several paintings by the artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) bear a remarkable resemblance to the genetic syndromes described in the medical genetic literature. The similarities are especially evident in the case of human syndromes affecting the oral-facial region. What is remarkable is that the similarity appears to be entirely coincidental. How did Picasso visualize these structures and shapes in his paintings which were portrayed in his paintings, often long before they were described in the medical literature? It is unlikely that he saw them in hospitals because they are very rare syndromes which were described, some after his death, in hospitals and medical centers located far away from the places where he lived.

For instance, the painting, Head of a Woman (1932), and others such as various forms of Bust of a Woman, bear a strong resemblance to the syndrome of rhinocephaly or its many variations. Similarly, variations of cyclopia can be seen in a Woman with Artichoke (1941) or suggestions of it in Dora Maar Sitting (1939) and other paintings of that period. Ethmocephaly with two proboscides is very much evident in several paintings, especially in the painting Dora Maar Seated (1937) and its variations as in Seated Woman (1938). These variations in Picasso's paintings bear a strong resemblance to the biological variation that occurs in nature. Such variations were called quasi-continuous variations by the great biologist at Cambridge University, William Bateson (1861-1926) who also invented the term genetics in 1906. Bateson suggested that it is by studying exceptions to normal variation that we can understand the biological process of development. It is the study of exceptions that leads to the understanding of the etiology and pathology of birth defects and other problems we come across in our lives.

Picasso appeared to have grasped this important point. His paintings provide a remarkable education in human variation seen from an artist's point of view. It is continuous variation with occasional extreme exceptions such as rhinocephaly and ethmocephaly. He was a keen and exceptional observer of human morphology and human nature. Picasso was a very great artist, which is mainly due to his keen perception of his fellow human beings.