

The Art of Laszlo Gyermek, M.D.

By Stephen Jackson, M.D.

First-time visitors to the Palos Verdes home of anesthesiologist Laszlo Gyermek might easily imagine that they have entered an art gallery. Throughout the residence, walls are lined with handsomely framed works of Old Masters, Impressionists and Post-Impressionists—all produced by Laszlo Gyermek, M.D., Ph.D., who has been interested in copying art since he was a boy of 16 in his native Hungary. Artists represented in his collection of over 400 pieces are primarily the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists: Monet, Manet, Marquet, Matisse, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Van Dongen. Also represented are Italian Renaissance masters such as Botticelli, Raphael, della Francesca, Lippi, Uccello and Ghirlandaio, along with the 17th-century Vermeer and Rembrandt, among others. He amusingly states that he has what is likely one of the largest “fake” Monet collections in the Western world.

Contemporary abstract art has no attraction for him. “I don’t understand ultra-modern paintings, maybe because as a scientist, I don’t see reasons beyond the bizarre extravagance and occasional bravura.”

Gyermek refers to the majority of his paintings as “studies,” rather than copies. Sometimes the paintings are the same size as the originals, but usually the size is altered. “I don’t want to be accused of making a fake.” He sees copy-



Dr. Laszlo Gyermek with some of his re-creations of Monet’s Rouen Cathedral series of paintings.

Meredith Skrzypczak/Palos Verde Patch

ing art as a way to bridge the gap between the largely unavailable classic originals and the mass-produced printed or even “hand-painted” reproductions. There is a tradition of rich collectors commissioning high-quality copies of art because they are afraid to display their original paintings. “For such people it’s a wonderful and practical solution. For others, a near ‘perfect’ copy may also fulfill an aesthetic experience and desire.” Of note, he admires the draftsmanship—but not the ethics—of some of the famous forgers, particularly the notorious Hungarian painter Elmyr de Hory, who drifted into forgery when he was unable to sell his own artworks. When his deceit was discovered in the U.S., de Hory “had to leave

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the U.S. very quickly.” The fact remains, however, that in an ill-defined and commercial art world, huge emphasis is placed on a famous signature in determining the “value” of a given painting. “For instance, an unsigned Monet (and some do exist) has a vastly lesser economic value than a signed one.”

In research for his studies, Gyermek has visited many art museums in this country and abroad, analyzing different artists’ techniques. Having little opportunity to work from originals, he usually relies on reproductions for his models, finding that “it makes a good deal of difference what kind of reproductions you use.” With the color in books and posters often distorted, he frequently has come home to touch up and alter his study painting after having seen the original in a museum. For his study of the large-scale painting *Battaglia di San Romano* by Paolo Uccello, Gyermek had to work on a billiard table. He used egg tempera, a “wonderful material that dries quickly and can be over-painted.”

Gyermek grew up in a family of artists. His father, Laszlo II, also a physician, was an accomplished aquarellist (watercolorist) and photographer. His grandfather Laszlo I, a professional painter of religious art, designed stained-glass windows and mosaics for churches in Europe. The monumental mosaics of Mexico City’s Fine Arts Palace (Palacio de Bellas Artes) originated in his workshop. Gyermek’s great-grandfather, Janos, started in porcelain painting and became a teacher of drawing and design in Hungary. And Gyermek’s only brother, Stephen, also an expatriate, is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam and was a professor of art history at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, as well as being a highly respected artist.

Gyermek, who received his early medical training in Hungary at the Semmelweis University Faculty of Medicine in Budapest, came to the U.S. in 1957 shortly after the 1956 Hungarian uprising and became a U.S. citizen in 1962. He first worked as a research pharmacologist. Then in 1968, he started his anesthesiology training at Stanford. He later practiced anesthesiology and obtained faculty positions at Stanford, the University of California, Davis, and at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance. His research focused primarily on the pharmacology of “antagonist drugs” (e.g., anticholinergics), tricyclic antidepressants, antiserotonin agents, hypnotics and muscle relaxants, and this body of work is reflected in numerous publications, including major reviews, and his book *Pharmacology of Antimuscarinic Agents* (Handbooks in Pharmacology and Toxicology, 1997). He is still actively involved in research on the shortest-acting nondepolarizing muscle relaxants ever synthesized, exemplified by TAAC3, a derivative of the early “succinyl-tropine” molecule, which Gyermek and Nador developed in 1952. However, TAAC3 has been found to be nephrotoxic in certain animal species and has been abandoned.

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It should be noted that in 2005, Dr. Gyermek was elected to membership of the Hungarian Academy of Science. A fuller history of his scientific achievements can be found in the 2004 *Yearbook* of the Collegium Internationale Neuropsychopharmacologicum.

Retired nine years ago, the now Professor Emeritus of Anesthesiology at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center has used his newly found time “to take refuge in painting as a serious hobby and sort of second profession.” Indeed, he recently completed copying and interpreting Claude Monet’s 30 Rouen Cathedral paintings, setting the stage for two local exhibits. Despite his artistic endeavors, he still devotes some time to self-supported laboratory research at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute with the aim of possibly improving the above-mentioned TAAC3-type agents.

He and his wife, Emilia Bathory-Rausch, are about to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary in September. They lived in Portola Valley and Los Altos before moving to Rancho Palos Verdes in 1986. They have two sons, Laszlo IV, a talented chef living with his family in Colorado, and Francis, a movie industry consultant who resides with his family in California.

Gyermek’s original artworks (watercolors, oils and photographs) have received awards in physician-artist exhibits internationally (see, for example, *CSA Bulletin*, January–March 2004) and have been exhibited in several locations in California. Some of his paintings are available for purchase. Additional information about Gyermek’s works is available at www.monetpaintingsreplicas.com and www.monetsrouencathedrals.com. He can be contacted at: laslogy3@gmail.com.

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