

## "Next time you have a headache, remember – pain is an illusion..."

"Na próxima vez que tiver uma dor de cabeça, lembre-se – a dor é uma ilusão..."

Marcelo Moraes Valença<sup>1</sup>, Luciana Patrícia A. Andrade-Valença<sup>1</sup>, Maria Helena Costa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Neurology and Neurosurgical Unit, Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, PE, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar in the International Institute at University of California at Los Angeles – UCLA, California, USA

Valença MM, Andrade-Valença LP, Costa MH. "Next time you have a headache, remember – pain is an illusion...". *Headache Medicine*. 2012;3(2):53-4

### INTRODUÇÃO

During the 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Headache Society in Los Angeles we visited Santa Monica, California on Sunday June 24, 2012. It was a beautiful sunny day, with a happy crowd walking along the Third Street Promenade. There were many musicians, dancers, jugglers, among other artists entertaining the crowd. On the sidewalk we met Sterling Simons, a young American who was in the company of two friends offering his drawing artistic expertise to the public. He could draw a picture of anything of somebody's choice. Our request was for him to draw whatever he could think of (or interpret as) a "headache". He asked us to return in 30 minutes. Half an hour later he showed us the drawing of a woman with migraine, which he entitled "The migraine" (Figure 1). On the reverse side of the drawing Simons wrote: "Next time you have a headache, remember - pain is an illusion..." (Figure 2). Simons reported that he had frequent headache attacks. We paid U\$15.00 for this precious work of art.

Trying to interpret the drawing, we think the artist, whether consciously or not, represented the right part of the woman's face somewhat blurred, as if a visual aura were present. In addition, the hair covering the right eye suggests the woman was suffering from some degree of photophobia. The photophobia is also suggested by the fact that both eyes are closed. It seems to represent a severe attack, since she appears to express the facial



Figure 1. Drawing: "The migraine".

A NOTE FROM THE ARTIST: Sterling Simons  
Next time you have a headache, remember –  
PAIN IS AN ILLUSION...

Figure 2. The reverse side of the drawing.

mimicry of pain, reinforced by a clenched positioning of the teeth, characteristic of a person suffering from pain. Her hair is also uncombed, indicating an intense feeling of sickness, common in migraineurs, and the characteristic restful undisturbed behavior and less concern for personal appearance during the period of suffering.

Thus, this is another example of neuroart, in which neurological disorders depicted in a drawing may transmit feelings of pain. Furthermore, the representation itself tells us more about someone's (in this case, the artist's) particular view on a specific subject which must be interpreted within the context of a general (cultural?) understanding (in some cases, misunderstanding) of a particular subject. In the end, artistic representations influence the way the subject itself is regarded, viewed, understood and interpreted.

---

Correspondence

**Marcelo M. Valença**

*Neurology and Neurosurgery Unit, Department of  
Neuropsychiatry, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco  
Cidade Universitária*

*50670-420 – Recife, PE, Brazil.*

*Phone: +55 81 99229394; +55 81 34263501;*

*Fax: +55 81 21268539*

*mmvalenca@yahoo.com.br*

Received: 6/25/2012

Accepted: 6/29/2012