

# Foreword

to: Friend, D.  
Composition: a painter's guide  
to basic problems and solutions.  
Watson-Guptill, N.Y., 1975.

It may appear unusual for a neurosurgeon to write a foreword to an art book; it is because my colleagues and I have acquired a special view of creativity and artistic sensitivity as the result of recent neurophysiological findings. These findings are, put simply, that the brain is double, in the sense that each cerebral hemisphere is capable of functioning independently and, moreover, each functions in a manner different from the other. The implications of these facts, for educators in general and for art educators in particular, are far reaching.

We have not the space here to review all the vast array of facts which have led to our conclusions. I have dealt with them elsewhere in a series of articles entitled "The Other Side of the Brain,"\* which emphasizes how little neurologic attention has hitherto been given to the right cerebral hemisphere. This historical oversight is largely because it is the left cerebral hemisphere (in most persons) which does all the reading, writing, calculating, and talking. Briefly, our conclusions can be summarized by saying that each cerebral hemisphere is specialized for a particular type of information processing that is less available to the other. The left hemisphere specializes in verbal and analytical processing, whereas the right hemisphere specializes in nonverbal and configurational processing.

Since education is effective only insofar as it affects the working of the brain, we can see that a school program narrowly restricted to verbal or analytical approaches will educate almost solely the left hemisphere, leaving half of an individual's high-level potential unschooled. Such a one-sided approach, unfortunately quite common, may even be responsible for

some of the antisocial activity of individuals who have not found other, more constructive outlets for their need to make some mark upon the world. The right hemisphere must receive equal consideration and cultivation if humans are to live as balanced, whole persons.

Many educators have intuitively recognized the need for more creative and artistic activity in the general school system. Art educators have a particularly important role to play in this attempt to equalize education. In the light of recent scientific findings, artists no longer need feel the slightest inhibition in resisting the myth that rationality is superior to sensitivity, or in pointing out that this myth leads to a half-brained educational product.

More specifically, art educators can implement their creative, aesthetic inclinations by adopting in practice an approach conforming more directly to their ideals. Of art curricula, at all school levels, the following question can be asked: How can our teaching methods best be improved for the immediate, effective encouragement of the right hemisphere?

As an individual interested in fine art and as a parent concerned about the cultural development of my own children, there are some other, more specific questions that seem pertinent. Is not the present training in the "scientific" basis of art (the theory of color, the nature of materials, the mechanics of perspective, etc.) as well as the disciplines of drawing and painting, clearly directed toward only one, the left hemisphere? Does not the learning of a panoply of technical skills tend to postpone rather than accelerate the cultivation of the right hemisphere? Would it not be better to start with the simplest medium and

the most primitive skills, not proceeding to other media and skills until the habits of aesthetic creativity are established? Should not these habits include, in particular, an intense awareness of the structural requirements for the overall unity of a work?

To those educators who have considered such questions and successfully dealt with them, even though they may not yet know how such questions are related to the brain, goes our enthusiastic endorsement. But what of the vast number of teachers and prospective teachers who would like to have specific teaching aids to assist them in the achievement of a balanced brain development?

One source is David Friend's earlier book, *The Creative Way to Paint*. In that book he avoids the pitfalls mentioned above. The painter's creative process, which requires bilateral hemispheric activity, has been simplified and organized for immediate application by art beginners, from children in late primary grades to adults on the community level.

In this book, *Composition*, David Friend tackles what is not only the most glaring weakness in student painting, but the artistic problem most obviously related to the right hemisphere. This is the establishment of an organic overall configuration in which no one of the parts is critical, or solely sufficient to convey the meaning, but all of whose parts are mutually contributory. The teaching of composition is here simplified by postponing for future specialization the problems of three-dimensional illusions. Instead, he concentrates almost exclusively on the problems of configuration as it appears in two dimensions, where artistic sensitivity can be more easily cultivated and controlled in progressive stages. By providing a smoothly progressive learning sequence, and by aiming at the highest compositional achievement with the greatest economy of means, David Friend has provided us with an invaluable assist toward the development of the other side of the brain.

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\**Bulletin of the Los Angeles Neurological Society*, vol. 34, nos. 2-4, 1969.