



Sensitivity to fine Arts The Stendhal syndrome

A referent of the romantic reaction to the accumulation of beauty and the exuberance of artistic enjoyment

By: Various | Source: OjoCurioso/Canal Viajes/Wikipedia

Have you ever wondered why sometimes we get so caught up, we get goosebumps or even we can escape some crybaby to a strong emotion such as, for example, contemplating a work of dramatic visual impact, walking around a large museum or walking in a beautiful city?

Because these symptoms, which are not at all unusual and are within the considered "normal", in certain people particularly sensitive can reach extremes that often affect their health state in a punctual manner, in these cases, generally, we would be in the presence of the so-called Stendhal syndrome.

What is Stendhal syndrome?

Stendhal syndrome (also called Florence syndrome or "traveler's stress") is a psychosomatic disease that causes high heart rate, vertigo, confusion, tremor, palpitations, depression and even hallucinations when the individual is exposed to works of art, especially when they are particularly beautiful or are exhibited in large numbers in one place.

Beyond its clinical incidence as a psychosomatic disease, the syndrome of Stendhal has become a benchmark of romantic reaction to the accumulation of beauty and the exuberance of artistic enjoyment.

It is thus named by the famous French author of the nineteenth century Stendhal (pseudonym of Henri-Marie Beyle), who gave a first detailed description of the phenomenon which he experienced in 1817 in its visit to the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Florence, Italy, and which he published in his book *Naples and Florence: A trip from Milan to Reggio*.

"I had reached that point of emotion in which one finds the celestial sensations given by the fine arts and the passionate feelings. Leaving Santa Croce, my heart was beating; life was exhausted in me, I was afraid to fall. "

When the French writer visited the city of Florence the beauty of the artistic

treasures he found there troubled him so that, according to himself, he suffered palpitations, dizziness, and fainting. Exaggerated? Perhaps, but although there have been many cases of people who have suffered dizziness and fainting while visiting art in Florence, especially at the Galleria Degli Uffizi from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, it was not described as a syndrome until 1979, by the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini. She observed and described more than 100 similar cases between tourists and visitors in Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance, and wrote about it.

Stendhal fell "sick" in 1817 at the exit of the Florentine Basilica Della Santa Croce. There were so many wonders that he had seen on his journey to this prodigious city, so much talent of the geniuses of universal art deployed, so much beauty not comprehended for the senses, that his senses overflowed, leaving this hypersensitive writer in the state of shock.

The syndrome of Stendhal is also known as "the disease of the museums" and is produced by the saturation of the human mind of artistic treasures, referred more to the quantity than to the quality of the same, according to the psychologists' aim. We all know that there are people who never step into a museum and when you go on a trip there is a real binge, and this can be one of the consequences.

Most of the cases that Magherini documented were produced at the exit of the Uffizi Gallery. Is there any autosuggestion in this curious disease? Perhaps, although anyone who has visited Florence will know that it is impossible to remain indifferent to such beauty and treasures.

Can we all suffer from Stendhal syndrome?

In principle any of us could experience some of the most intense symptoms of this syndrome at some point, although it is very unusual to occur and is usually associated with tourists of special sensibility who travel specifically to visit works of art of certain authors and places very admired by them and that for some reason have a great emotional meaning for them.

There have been situations where the physical disorders have appeared the same way that it happened for the French writer, but also some psychic ills of something more serious as hallucinations, depressive feelings or euphoria, disturbances in perception, attacks of anxiety, etc.
Mysterious disease or myth?

Although this syndrome is recognized by many psychologists, as most of all, it is not exempt from controversy. Faced with the multiplication of cases in recent years due to the increase of tourism and the popularization of art, especially in the hospitals of Florence, some have come to raise doubts about its existence. They allege that the knowledge and popularization of the existence of the Florence syndrome can create a kind of suggestion in the visitors of the city, which would

unconsciously lead them to feel the different symptoms.

There has also been the talk of an exaggerated disclosure of the syndrome, especially from Florence for commercial purposes, arguing that the beauty of the city is such that it can provoke extreme emotions, attracting more tourists to it.

Regardless of all of the above, it is indisputable that art in all its splendor can arouse intense emotions that can provoke us different reactions according to our sensibility and our way of appreciating the world around us and even though there is really Stendhal syndrome, this cannot be an obstacle to encourage us to visit one of the most beautiful cities in Italy and around the world.