

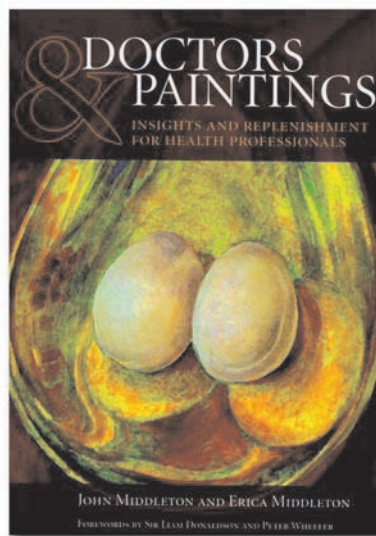
BOOK REVIEW

Paintings through the medical lens

Doctors and paintings. Insights and replenishment for health professionals. John Middleton, Erica Middleton. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2006 (x + 102 pp, \$61.75). ISBN 1 84619 052 5.

I WANTED TO LIKE this book. The idea of a husband British GP educator and wife artist/art historian coauthoring a book about the interface of painting and medicine intrigued me. The structure is also quite novel. It follows four fictional general practitioners starting up a group learning course about painting and medicine, listening in on their discussions in a play-like format. Superimposed on this are two more layers, the first being two other characters walking through an art museum, listening in on and commenting on the group of doctors. Secondly, there is a non-fictional analysis of various famous artists and their works, as well as the art-in-medicine movement. Strangely, the artist co-author includes her own works in the book for analysis, putting herself up against some of the most famous artists in history.

All of this in a book under 100 pages long! It did come across as confusing to me; on many occasions, I found myself unaware of who was talking (author or character) or whether I was reading fiction or non-fiction.



That said, both authors seem knowledgeable in their respective fields. Analysis of communication techniques, of empathy and listening, and of “patient-centredness” are well discussed and referenced. Philosophical points on the role of the doctor, of death and dying, and even faith suffuse both the fictional and non-fictional sections. Artists as diverse as traditionalists like Rembrandt and Rubens through to modern artists such as Francis Bacon and Mark Rothko are analysed both in terms of how their lives and personalities helped shape their works and in how their philosophy and its expression can influence us as doctors viewing their works. Rather than being printed in the book, the works discussed have web addresses for viewing (except for the coauthor’s work!), I suspect to reduce cost.

While interesting in parts, *Doctors and paintings* may be trying to be too many things. Nevertheless, those with a passion for painting and/or medical philosophy might find it worth a read.

James A Best
General Practitioner
Sydney, NSW