

PSYCHIC ART

by Valerie Hope

Is psychic art evidence for survival? A study assessed portraits produced by various psychic artists.

A criticism often levelled at platform mediums is that the messages they convey are so vague that they could be intended for a large proportion of the audience. While there are cases in the literature of messages that clearly relate to events known only to the deceased, but subsequently shown to be true, most messages are largely devoid of evidential facts, places, dates and full names. Many sitters in their eagerness to accept messages unguardedly blurt out personal details, although the mediums themselves most often ask for simple 'yes' and 'no' answers. Mediums are also often accused of picking up on involuntary clues such as body language that encourage them to embroider on a particular message.

Possible Improvements

It seems that some other piece of external evidence is required for the message to be accepted as evidential. A description of the deceased would be of great help in confirming her identity, but recognition of the communicator depends not only on the descriptive skills of the medium, but also on her psychic ability. An impression of a little grey-haired old woman would not get us very far, as there are doubtless many such people in spirit.

What seems to be needed is a more accurate picture of the communicator. There are a number of psychic artists working in the United Kingdom today, some providing a postal service. On stage such artists often work in tandem with another platform medium who concentrates on delivering the verbal message while the artist draws the communicator in full view of the audience. One well-known and successful psychic artist is Coral Polge. In the mid-1980s, at a demonstration at the Belgrave Square headquarters of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (SAGB) in London, I saw her produce excellent portraits of a good half dozen communicators, accepted by the intended recipients. Ms Polge also supplemented the verbal messages passed on through her colleague on stage that day.

The Drawbacks

Just as other physical and mental mediums lay themselves open to accusations of fraud and cheating each time they attempt to convey messages from the next world, the same could be said of psychic artists. While some have obviously had drawing lessons or possess a natural talent, others seem to be struggling to capture the likeness. Would it be possible for a psychic artist to pick out family traits visible in the face of the message's recipient and then build on these to produce a plausible picture of the communicator? If a mother and daughter sitting together resemble one another, there is a fair chance that a late grandmother would have looked something the same. The first few strokes applied to the sheet of paper while the accompanying platform medium is establishing sex and age could be vague, forming a basis for a suitable face when the identity has been established. The family bone structure, coloration and so on could be manipulated to give a picture of a deceased relative. After all, the recipients are not expecting a Leonardo da Vinci in the five to ten minutes allocated per portrait.

However, it must be borne in mind that not all communicators at public demonstrations or private sittings will be blood relatives. Friends and unknown 'drop-in' communicators could also put in an appearance. Even if the psychic feels that the 'vibrations' are good that day and messages are coming through clearly and easily, there is nothing to guarantee that the communicator will be known to the sitter.

The Experiment

In order to rule out any possibility of family traits being used, consciously or unconsciously, to form the basis of a portrait of a deceased relative, I decided to contact a number of psychic artists for postal readings. The fees varied, as did the services provided. Some wanted a sample of my handwriting, others did not. Some provided just a portrait, others also gave a written reading. I narrowed the field to three artists and contacted them at the same time. The responses came back over a number of weeks. The [edited] texts of the communications are provided below, with details of the artists removed so that they cannot be identified. An analysis of the services offered is given in the table.

The bulk of the messages consisted of general 'philosophy', and this has been omitted here. There was little information about the persons depicted in the psychic portraits, who were claimed to be 'guides' or 'helpers', and no evidential personal information.

Psychic Artist No. 1

Here is the psychic portrait of a fine soul who is linked with you spiritually. 'Zubin Schroder' is a healing channel and will work with you for the upliftment of the suffering souls who will be sent to you. Let this be of great comfort to you, for nothing is taken away but that something of far greater value is given to you. [... *personal information omitted...*] Please look at your picture in a very soft light.

Psychic Artist No. 2

In enclosing this portrait I wish to say that the lady in the picture has a very lovely feeling of belonging with you. She represents the 'mother' figure and I strongly feel she has not been long in the Spirit World. I feel that her departure was the cause of some sorrow.

Psychic Artist No. 3

Enclosed are two portraits which 'came' very easily, after meditation and holding your letter. The first is a young man who wishes to make himself known. He comes in the blue ray which signifies a deeply religious nature, and a boy with artistic talents who passed some years ago. Can you place him? The other picture is of an Indian girl, who must be one of your helpers in spirit. She brings much love, gentleness and sympathy and vibrates a feeling of peace.

Assessment

The portraits were commissioned at the same time in order to ensure that the 'conditions' around me would be the same for each artist. However, the dates the artists actually produced the portraits could not be coordinated. The date for sending the commissions was chosen at random and was of no personal significance. It was not a period of any great upheavals in my life, and nothing momentous was picked up by the psychics. No elements of the messages were evidential. Not one statement gave me cause to believe that the artist had been in contact with anyone known to me. The production of so many portraits of spirit guides and unidentified communicators would have made a sceptic think there must be a lot of unacknowledged activity on my behalf somewhere in the Spirit World. Indeed, portraits produced for me in 1986 by a another psychic artist depicted a further two unrecognised communicators and a Japanese guide claimed to have been a Zen Buddhist monk in this life.

Conclusions

The results were disappointing. If I had not already seen examples of very convincing portraits produced in the presence of the sitter, the evidence I received in 1992 would have led me to believe that psychic art had nothing of value to contribute to survival research.

To sum up, it seems that psychic art may help to provide evidence of survival, but is by no means always evidential. The portraits commissioned by post had a 100% failure rate, but the small number of artists commissioned means that this is not statistically significant. A full-scale study would require a great many more artists and would therefore be expensive. Portraits produced in the presence of the sitter seem to stand a far better chance of being recognized, but this resemblance could be explained by factors other than psychic ability.

Comment	Artist No.1	Artist No. 2	Artist No.3
Sex of artist	♀	♀	♀
Apparent artistic training	Yes	No	Yes
Reading included	Yes	No	Yes
No. of portraits	1	1	2
Guide	Yes	-	Yes
Friend/relative	-	'mother figure'	'boy'
Named communicators	Yes	No	No

In order to preserve the anonymity of the psychics commissioned, who may be identifiable through their artistic style, the decision was taken not to reproduce the portraits. The original study was not carried out to prove or disprove survival, but merely for personal research.