

## Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD

Do you have an image, preferably accompanied by 100 to 200 words of explanatory text, that you think would be suitable for Psychiatry in Pictures? Submissions are very welcome and should be sent direct to Professor Robert Howard, Box 070, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF, UK.



Steve Blundell (b. 1948) *Number 15 Digital Cry* (painted between 06.00 19 March and 04.30 21 March 2001) and *Number 24 Stapled Red* (painted between 21.00 17 April and 24.00 18 April 2001) (pigments, gum Arabic and linseed oil on paper)

Steve Blundell suffered with depression during late 2000, which precipitated his early retirement from a university career. These are two of a series of 68 pictures produced between February and September 2001 during a period of severe depression. He made notes as he painted and extracts from these, together with more recent annotations to the pictures, give a very vivid account of the experiences and feelings that accompanied his painting.

*Digital Cry*: 19 March 2001 – Slept from midnight until 2.45 am uneasily. Kept awake by increasing headache – tightly twisting above right eye. But worse. Very real hallucination. There were people outside bedroom door.

Flat/house where? Room with whom? But I couldn't call out. I couldn't. 20 March 2001 – Took three paintings to Dr Jawad Sheikh [psychiatrist] his questions: tell me their story? ['No, you tell me what you feel about what you see'] and do you have an image in your head and then try to paint it? ['No I don't paint what I see, but what I think and feel as I paint. That's why I have to paint. Just to see']. 18 June 2003 – Eyes were closed, pinning face backwards, tilting it as the sliding face ran downwards into that pit. All were to be lost in the mire, the emptiness of that hollow, pitted mouth. But just as everything was slipping into it, nothing was coming this way out of it. Inwards and outwards punctuating each other, like in a cross-fire. Trapped, tortured. I can feel my jaw ache – as I can't stop the detritus get swept up and as I can't call out – I'm choking. *Stapled Red*: 15 April 2001 – Head tight. I just want somewhere quiet I can leave my head, take it and lay it down there. 18 April 2001 – Started to use red. 'Horror' remains pumped through eyes. 19 April 2001 – Paintings, first three with red eyes open. Can't ever close them. Always full, stinging. 18 June 2003 – For the first 23 paintings only black, but I wasn't up to it was I? Or I just didn't really want the bleakest, blackest black did I? It made me feel better just to paint. I was doing something, anything to focus out there away from me. Playing with black, mixing gum Arabic, more, less water, linseed oil, stains and slush; less liquid, mush, crust, congealing, creamy, clotted, cow pat-like. Remember, once the 'red' hit the paper, the feeling was bleakest then wasn't it? And the red stapled eyes saw this. It was that the staples stapled the eyes together, but also they were being stapled 'open'. Yes, that was it.

Steve Blundell continues to take antidepressant medication but works as an artist and writer. *Fractured Mirrors of Disorder*, an illustrated journey through his depression, is available directly from him: Sblundell4madder@aol.com