

PAGE TWO

The science of why we like what we like



Left, the artist Patrick Tresselt's robotic installation, "5 Robots Named Paul," was used to measure how people respond to drawings created by machines. Above, psychologists like Ellen Winner are studying the aesthetic response and the creative impulse.

ART, FROM PAGE 1
logical Association. "We want to build a research base science can draw on."

For years, the journal has been filled with peer-reviewed articles with arcane titles like "An Empirical Study on the Healing Nature of Mandalas," or "The Effects of Cognitive Load on Judgments of Titled Visual Art," or "A Qualitative Case Study of the Impact of Environmental and Personal Factors on Prominent Turkish Writers."

In June, researchers at the University of London tackled the riddle of machine-made art in a paper, "Putting the Art in Artificial: Aesthetic Responses to Computer-Generated Art."

They found that while people tend to disdain paintings they know are generated artificially, they have a soft spot for those works when they see them being made by a robot with an arm.

The researchers concluded that including a humanlike robot in the art-making

process "may indeed represent the final frontier for the true acceptance" of works created by artificial intelligence.

While some studies are born of scholarly curiosity, others are aimed at discovering medical and educational applications based on how art affects the body and the brain.

The National Endowment for the Arts is helping fund research into the potential therapeutic benefits of art "in treating a disease or disorder, or in improving symptoms for a chronic disease, disorder or health condition." One specific question: "How does a dosage — frequency, duration or intensity — of creative arts therapy relate to individual or program-level outcomes?"

The N.E.A. is also working with the Defense Department on a study to determine whether having service members decorate blank plaster masks can help with diagnosing and treating post-traumatic stress disorder. Preliminary

findings suggest the masks offer clues to the psychological states of service members and veterans otherwise reluctant to report symptoms because of social stigma.

"We all want to raise the quality of evidence in this space," said Sunil Iyengar, director of the N.E.A.'s Office of Research & Analysis.

Another study by Drexel University in Philadelphia offers hope that art therapy can have physiological benefits. Researchers determined that 45 minutes spent on art projects "resulted in a statistically significant lowering of cortisol levels," a hormonal marker of stress, measured in before-and-after saliva samples from participants.

The organization whose members initiated much of this research, the Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts, is a unit of the American Psychological Association that was established in 1945. Its mem-

bership has grown consistently over the years and stands at about 500.

A second organization that promotes similar research, the International Association of Empirical Aesthetics, includes not only psychologists but also philosophers, sociologists and neuroscientists. Each group publishes a research journal and both will hold conventions in August.

Ms. Winner's team at Boston College published its study, "Essentialist Beliefs in Aesthetic Judgments of Duplicate Artworks," in the society's journal in June. The research was designed to explore why people come to devalue pieces they had once revered after finding out that the works were not actually created by the artist.

The study, conducted by Ms. Winner and two colleagues, Nathaniel Rabb and Hiram Brownell, was built around an experiment that featured identical images of the same artwork, presented side by

side. The subjects were told both works had the same market value to eliminate concerns that money might affect the aesthetic judgments. They were told both images were sanctioned by the artist, to alleviate any ethical worries. In one part of the experiment, the subjects were told that the image on the left had been made by the artist, but the image on the right by the artist's assistant.

Which did they prefer? The viewers strongly favored the image said to have been made by the artist, even though its twin was in all respects identical.

Their conclusion: "While we may dislike forgeries due to their immorality and worthlessness on the market, we also prefer originals for another reason: We like to look at original works that we know were made by the artist and this is because it makes us feel like we are communing with the artist's mind, soul, heart and essence."

Naturally, this idea of stuffing art into

a test tube has its skeptics. In a 2017 article in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Alexis D. J. Makin, a psychologist at the University of Liverpool, England, cast doubt on the efficacy of studying responses to art in a clinical setting.

"It is virtually impossible to evoke intense emotions like aesthetic rapture in the lab on repeated trials with well-controlled stimuli because aesthetic emotions are too fleeting and idiosyncratic," he wrote. "We are like scientists who would love to measure a very rare whirlpool in a chaotic system, but cannot reliably recreate it in an artificial fluid tank."

Ms. Winner, whose book "How Art Works: A Psychological Exploration" will be published this summer, said she had heard that criticism before and discounted it. "If psychology is the study of human behavior," she asked, "how can we leave out something as fundamentally human as the arts?"

Hollywood heartthrob whose star rose again in the 1980s

TAB HUNTER
1931-2018

BY ALJEAN HARMETZ

Tab Hunter, the tall, blond, blue-eyed movie star who as a teenage idol in the 1950s was one of the last products of the Hollywood studio system — and who made an unlikely comeback in a very un-Hollywood film when he was almost 50 — died on Sunday in Santa Barbara, Calif. He was 86.

His death was confirmed by his spouse, Allan Glaser, who said the cause was cardiac arrest after a blood clot moved from Mr. Hunter's leg to his lung. Arthur Gelien was 17 when the agent Henry Willson gave him a new name and added him to a roster of clients that included Rock Hudson, Robert Wagner and Rory Calhoun. "Acting skill," Mr. Hunter said in his 2005 autobiography, "Tab Hunter Confidential" (written with Eddie Muller), "was secondary to chiseled features and a fine physique."

He might not have had the skill, at least not yet, but he had the look; he was the epitome of the sunny all-American boy enshrined in decades of Hollywood films. His first audition for "Island of Desire" (1952) consisted of taking off his shirt. The screen test came later. On the basis of that movie, in which he played a brash Marine corporal marooned with Linda Darnell on a South Seas island, the readers of Photoplay magazine voted him the year's No. 1 new male star.

His breakthrough movie was "Battle Cry" (1955), in which he played another Marine, at the beginning of World War II, who has a girlfriend back home and a steamy love affair with a married U.S.O. volunteer (Dorothy Malone) in San Diego. Its success led to a seven-year contract with Warner Bros.

In February 1956, Mr. Hunter received a reported 62,000 Valentines. He was the dream date of teenage girls on several continents. And he had a secret.

It was not until 50 years after "Battle Cry," when he wrote his autobiography, that he publicly discussed his homosexuality; his love affair with the actor Anthony Perkins; the rage and wrath of his parish priest when, as a 14-year-old boy, he haltingly confessed what had happened in the dark of a movie theater; and years of being "painfully isolated, stranded between the casual homophobia of most 'normal' people and the flagrantly gay Hollywood subculture — where I was even less comfortable and



Natalie Wood and Tab Hunter in "The Burning Hills," one of two movies they made together in 1956. Warner Bros. tried to create the illusion that they were a couple.

less accepted." He was most comfortable on horseback, a lifelong passion. He had been discovered while shoveling manure at a riding academy in return for being allowed to ride.

During his heady Warner Bros. years, he bought horses — and cars — that he could not afford. He had never had money before; now it spilled through his fingers.

His fame grew when he starred with Natalie Wood in two 1956 movies: "The

His first audition for the 1952 film "Island of Desire" consisted of taking off his shirt. The screen test would come later.

Burning Hills," a western, and "The Girl He Left Behind," in which he played an arrogant rich boy turned into a man by the Army. (The studio arranged to create the illusion of a romance by having the two stars seen together in public.) When Warner Bros. made the movie version of the hit Broadway musical "Damn Yankees," about a middle-aged fan who is turned into a young baseball superstar by the Devil, in 1958, Mr. Hunter played the superstar.

His reviews were sometimes terrible. In his memoir, he quoted one: "Since Mr. Hunter discloses not one redeeming feature as an actor, the picture misses fire

whenever he's around." Determined to turn himself into a real actor, Mr. Hunter sought out live television. He played a murderer on "Playhouse 90" and Jimmy Piersall, the major league baseball player who came back from a nervous breakdown, in a well-reviewed adaptation of the book "Fear Strikes Out" on the series "Climax." But Warner Bros. refused to buy the movie rights to "Fear Strikes Out" for its teenage idol, and the film was made by Paramount, with Mr. Hunter's sometime companion Anthony Perkins.

Frustrated, Mr. Hunter bought himself out of his Warner Bros. contract in 1959. The studio already had another actor under contract and ready to take his place: Troy Donahue, who was as tall and blond as Mr. Hunter but five years younger. (In his autobiography, Mr. Hunter said he had heard that when people mistook Mr. Donahue for him, Mr. Donahue would sometimes correct them by explaining, "I'm the straight one.")

Leaving Warner Bros. proved to be a mistake. "I was a product of Hollywood," Mr. Hunter said in 1981. "And one morning, I woke up and couldn't get arrested."

He never stopped working, but he would not return to the spotlight until the maverick filmmaker John Waters cast him in his quirky "Polyester" (1981) and made him hip for a new generation.



Mr. Hunter and Divine in the John Waters film "Polyester" (1981), an unexpected success that revived Mr. Hunter's career. The two later starred in "Lust in the Dust."

Arthur Andrew Kelm was born in Manhattan on July 11, 1931, to a forbidding German immigrant mother and a father who welcomed his birth by tossing a nickel candy bar on his wife's hospital bed and leaving her to carry the baby home to their tenement in a borrowed blanket. By the time Arthur was 3, Charles Kelm had departed, leaving Arthur only the memory of begging his father to stop beating his mother.

Gertrude Kelm reclaimed her maiden name, Gelien, and moved with her two sons first to San Francisco, where she was gone for weeks at a time as a stewardess on cruise ships, and then to Southern California, where she held various jobs. "The constant in my early life was my brother," Mr. Hunter wrote. Schools and cities blurred, but his brother, Walter, 11 months older, who would die in Vietnam leaving behind seven children, was always there.

At 15, Mr. Hunter lied about his age and joined the Coast Guard. Whenever he got leave, he hitchhiked from Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley to ride. Discharged a year later when the Coast Guard discovered he was underage, he finished high school at the urging of the actor Dick Clayton, who had met him when he was 12 and working at a stable and told him, "If you ever want to get into pictures, talk to me."

Unable to afford horses, he found a less expensive passion, figure skating —

which led to a romance with Ronnie Robertson, who would win a silver medal at the 1956 Winter Olympics.

Although, as Mr. Hunter wrote, "I didn't long for an acting career, not in the way I longed to be on the ice or at the stables," Mr. Clayton brokered an introduction to Mr. Willson, who had cornered the market in wholesome all-American boys. Mr. Willson gave him his name and his start, but Mr. Hunter became a client of Mr. Clayton, who had given up acting to become an agent, just before "Battle Cry" made him a star.

At around the same time, the scandal magazine Confidential revealed that Mr. Hunter had been among several people arrested five years earlier at a gay house party. (The magazine called it a "queer romp" attended by "a load of shrill nances.") The charge, being "idle, lewd or dissolute," was later reduced to disturbing the peace, and he received a suspended sentence and a \$50 fine. But in those button-down days, such a revelation could have ruined his career.

Warner Bros. chose to ignore it, and eventually the public did too. "Remember this: Today's headlines — tomorrow's toilet paper," Mr. Hunter recalled the studio's Jack Warner telling him a few months later when Mr. Hunter was named the most promising new male personality of 1955 in an audience poll conducted by the Council of Motion Picture Organizations. (Among those he

beat for that honor were Harry Belafonte and Jack Lemmon.)

His image untarnished, Mr. Hunter remained in the public eye. Though by his own admission he was not much of a singer, his recording of "Young Love" rose to No. 1 on Billboard's pop chart in 1957 and stayed there for five weeks. In the 1960-61 television season he starred in an NBC sitcom, "The Tab Hunter Show."

But not long after that, Mr. Hunter — over 30, no longer under contract and no longer in demand — was considered a has-been.

But mostly there was dinner theater and summer stock, where faded movie stars were always welcome. He toured for years, from Ogunquit, Me., to Charlotte, N.C., and from Warwick, R.I., to Salt Lake City. The touring ended when Mr. Waters asked Mr. Hunter to play the suave, seductive Todd Tomorrow and cavort with the drag performer Divine, as a suburban housewife named Francine Fishpaw, in "Polyester."

Mr. Waters, best known at the time for challenging the notion of good taste in underground films like "Pink Flamingos," said he wanted Mr. Hunter for the part because "to me, he has always been the ultimate movie star." His script, which sent up Hollywood clichés, made Mr. Hunter laugh, and he took the part despite warnings that it would kill his career.

It did not. "Polyester," released in 1981, was an unexpected success, with critics as well as at the box office. It was both Mr. Waters's first mainstream hit and Mr. Hunter's ticket out of dinner theater.

Four years later, when Mr. Hunter reunited with Divine for the comedy western "Lust in the Dust," he was not just the co-star but one of the producers. "Lust in the Dust" was also a hit, and Mr. Hunter and Divine planned to make more movies together. Those plans ended when Divine died suddenly in 1988.

That same year, Mr. Hunter's comeback ended — by choice. After that, except for playing a small part in the 1992 movie "Dark Horse," a family drama based on a story he wrote, he did no more acting and spent his last years living in Montecito, Calif., near Santa Barbara, with his dogs, his horses and Mr. Glaser, his business and personal partner since 1983. They married shortly after same-sex marriage became legal in California, Mr. Glaser said. He leaves no other immediate survivors.