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Cognitive States of Potentiality in Art-making

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Abstract: Creativity is commonly thought to involve searching and selecting amongst multiple discrete idea candidates. Honing theory, which grew out of a quantum theory of concept combination, predicts that it involves actualizing the potentiality of as few as a single ill-defined idea by viewing it from different contexts. This paper reports on a study designed to test between these theories. Participants were invited to “Create a painting that expresses yourself in any style that appeals to you,” and asked “Were all of your ideas for your painting distinct and separate ideas?” Naïve judges were provided with descriptions of the two theories of creativity, sample answers, and practice responses to classify. The judges were significantly more likely to classify the artists’ responses as ‘H’, indicative of honing theory rather than ‘S’ indicative of a search/select view of creativity.