Self-portrait with goiter: Antonio Ligabue

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Received: 4 June 2018 / Accepted: 16 June 2018 / Published online: 22 June 2018
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The Italian painter Antonio Ligabue (Zurich 1899; Gualtieri 1965) lived a life marked by troubles and depressive episodes. Because of the poverty of the adoptive family, he suffered from rickets which compromised his normal physical development. His artistic work is generally framed as “naïve”, and the best known and appreciated parts of his work are the paintings of animals. However, numerous are the self-portraits, in which the author paid attention to physiognomic details. We known from photographs that Ligabue was affected by goiter, and it is interesting to note that this physical feature is very often underlined in many of the self-portraits. The self-portrait we have reported belongs to the mature phase of the author (Fig. 1). The goiter is particularly evident, even more accentuated than other works of the same period. Ligabue was hospitalized three times in a psychiatric Clinic in San Lazzaro of Reggio Emilia between 1937 and 1948. These hospitalizations were caused by a maniac-depressive state which were marked with episodes of self-harm and aggression towards other people [1]. It is a common opinion that Ligabue is an example in which psychiatric disease contributed to the artistic genius [1, 2].

Fig. 1 Antonio Ligabue: self-portrait, 1951–1952

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval This paper does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent No informed consent.

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