



Museum-goers often scoff that costly abstract expressionist paintings could have been made by a child; paintings by chimpanzees have been mistaken for professional art. Angelina Hawley-Dolan (Boston College) finds this intriguing. 'People do not confuse stories by children with literature by established writers. Nor do they confuse scientific reasoning by children with that of established scientists. Why, then, do people make such confusions when it comes to modern art? Either abstract art really is indistinguishable from the markings of the unskilled or these confusions are more apparent than real.'

Working with Ellen Winner (Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education),

Hawley-Dolan showed art and non-art students paired images, one by an abstract expressionist and one by a child or animal, and asked which they liked more and which they judged as better.

'Participants preferred professional paintings and judged them as better than the non-professional paintings even when we reversed the labels – e.g. "artist", "child" – on them. Art students preferred professional works more often than did non-art students, but the two groups' judgements did not differ. Participants in both groups were more likely to justify their selections of professional than of non-professional works in terms of artists' intentions. I think this shows that the world of

## Seeing the mind behind the art

Can you tell which of these pictures is the work of a child?  
If your work lends itself to a striking image, get in touch on [jon.sutton@bps.org.uk](mailto:jon.sutton@bps.org.uk)

abstract art is more accessible than people realise.'

And for those wondering, the painting on the left is by artist Hans Hoffman; on the right is the work of four-year-old Jack Pezanosky.