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Existential Anxiety and the Meaning of Death in Zygmunt Andrychiewicz's The Last Friend: A Psychological Interpretation Through the Lens of Irvin Yalom's Existential Theory

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a psychological analysis of existential anxiety and the concept of death in The Last Friend, a painting by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz (1861–1943), based on the existential perspective of Irvin Yalom. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach grounded in the intersection of visual arts and existential psychology. Within this framework, the artwork is considered not merely as a visual representation but as a pictorial text open to existential-psychological interpretation. The study employs a qualitative methodology based on interpretive analysis, examining the visual elements, spatial structure, relationships among subjects, and the overall emotional atmosphere of the painting. The analysis is informed by Yalom's key theoretical concepts, particularly death anxiety as one of the fundamental concerns of human existence. The findings indicate that the painting contains recognizable signs of loneliness, loss, emotional separation, and the human confrontation with mortality. Collectively, these elements allow the work to be interpreted within the framework of existential anxiety. Theoretically, this study is based on the assumption that artistic experience can reflect unconscious layers of the psyche as well as humanity's fundamental existential concerns. From this perspective, The Last Friend is viewed not only as an individual artistic creation but also as a symbolic representation of the human condition in relation to finitude and existential isolation. Such an approach makes it possible to blur the boundaries between aesthetic experience and psychological experience, allowing art to function as a means of understanding the human condition. Furthermore, the pictorial space and the relationships among the visual elements are organized in a manner that evokes a sense of suspension and existential instability. Within Yalom's framework, this state of suspension may be interpreted as a confrontation with non-being and an awareness of death. This awareness simultaneously generates anxiety and creates the possibility for philosophical reflection. Consequently, the painting not only represents the psychological state of the subject but also engages the viewer in an empathic experience of existential anxiety. In conclusion, the findings suggest that The Last Friend can be understood as a symbolic representation of the lived experience of confronting death, in which the human subject exists in a suspended state between presence and absence. This study demonstrates that works of art can serve as valuable contexts for exploring the deeper layers of the human psyche, particularly the fundamental anxieties associated with existence.

Keywords: Existential anxiety, Death anxiety, Existential psychology, Irvin yalom, Painting analysis, Zygmunt andrychiewicz.

1 | Introduction

In recent decades, the expansion of interdisciplinary approaches within the humanities has provided opportunities for a deeper integration of art and psychology. Among these disciplines, the visual arts, as one of the richest forms of expressing human experience, offer a valuable medium for representing complex concepts such as death, anxiety, loss, and loneliness. Painting, in particular, through its visual and symbolic

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language, is capable of revealing layers of human lived experience that are often difficult to articulate through verbal language alone. Consequently, the analysis of artworks within the framework of psychological theories can contribute to a deeper understanding of the hidden dimensions of the human psyche.

One of the fundamental concepts in contemporary psychology, particularly within the field of existential psychology, is death anxiety. This concept, systematically elaborated in the works of Irvin Yalom, refers to the profound and often unconscious concern that human beings experience regarding mortality and the inevitability of death. From Yalom's perspective, death anxiety is not a peripheral phenomenon but one of the most fundamental existential concerns of human existence. It permeates various levels of individual and social experience and may manifest itself in diverse forms, including artistic expression. Accordingly, works of art can be regarded as arenas in which this anxiety is expressed, reflected, and even confronted. Within contemporary art, the exploration of death and related existential themes has become a significant concern for many artists. Such themes are frequently represented through symbolic imagery, emotional atmospheres, and visual narratives that invite viewers to engage with questions concerning mortality, finitude, and the meaning of existence. In this context, artworks may function not only as aesthetic objects but also as psychological and philosophical texts that provide insight into the human condition [1]. This attention to death should be interpreted not merely as a representation of a biological reality, but as an attempt to understand the human condition in the contemporary world—a world in which experiences of disconnection, loneliness, and meaninglessness have become increasingly prominent. Within such a context, paintings that depict death or situations associated with it may be analyzed as visual texts in which multiple layers of meaning, emotion, and experience are intricately intertwined. The Last Friend by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz can be examined within this framework. Through its distinctive visual and spatial elements, the painting represents a situation in which concepts such as loss, loneliness, and confrontation with death are symbolically present. What makes this work particularly suitable for psychological analysis is not merely its subject matter, but also the manner in which its visual components are represented and organized, allowing for multiple layers of interpretation and meaning. From this perspective, The Last Friend may be regarded as a visual text in which traces of existential anxiety can be identified and explored. Despite the significance of such works, interdisciplinary studies that simultaneously employ the tools of art analysis and psychological theoretical frameworks remain relatively limited. In particular, analyses of paintings that focus on the concept of death anxiety within the framework of existential theories have received comparatively little scholarly attention. This research gap highlights the need for studies capable of integrating these two fields in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the relationship between art and the human psyche. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine existential anxiety and the concept of death in The Last Friend by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz through the theoretical lens of Irvin Yalom's existential psychology. The central research question is how the signs of death anxiety can be identified and interpreted within this painting, and how these signs relate to the lived human experience of confronting mortality. To address this question, the study employs a qualitative methodology based on interpretive analysis. By focusing on the painting's visual elements, spatial structure, relationships among subjects, and emotional atmosphere, the research offers a renewed reading of the work. The significance of this study may be considered from several perspectives. First, from a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to the development of interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of art and psychology and demonstrates the applicability of existential psychological concepts to the analysis of artistic works. Second, from a practical perspective, the findings may contribute to a better understanding of the role of art in representing and confronting fundamental human concerns, particularly death and the anxiety associated with it. Finally, from a methodological perspective, this research illustrates how the analysis of artworks can serve as a valuable tool for exploring the deeper layers of human experience. Overall, this article seeks to provide a new interpretation of The Last Friend by integrating artistic and psychological approaches, demonstrating how a work of art can become a space for the representation, experience, and interpretation of fundamental existential anxieties.

2 | Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in existential psychology, with particular emphasis on the ideas of Irvin Yalom. Within Yalom's approach, existential anxiety is regarded as one of the most fundamental human experiences, rooted in an individual's confrontation with realities such as death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness. Among these four existential concerns, death anxiety occupies a central position [2]. as awareness of mortality continuously influences human lived experience, whether directly or indirectly. According to Yalom, although individuals attempt to suppress or suspend this awareness in everyday life, death, as an inevitable reality, remains present beneath psychological and behavioral experiences and serves as a source of fundamental anxiety [2]. Within this framework, death is understood not merely as a biological event but as an existential reality that profoundly affects the meaning of life, human relationships, and an individual's perception of the self. Yalom argues that conscious confrontation with death may lead to two distinct outcomes: on the one hand, anxiety, insecurity, and psychological fragmentation; and on the other, the possibility of existential growth, the search for meaning, and the redefinition of life. Consequently, in Yalom's theory, death functions simultaneously as a source of anxiety and as a catalyst for philosophical reflection and self-awareness. From another perspective, interdisciplinary studies in art and psychology regard the artwork as an interpretable text capable of reflecting unconscious layers of the psyche, repressed emotions, and fundamental existential experiences. Within this view, the artistic image is not merely a representation of external reality but a meaningful structure that invites psychological and philosophical interpretation. Accordingly, visual elements, spatial relationships, and sensory qualities within an artwork may be understood as signs of the subject's psychological and existential condition. Therefore, the integration of Yalom's existential theory with interpretive approaches to art provides a framework through which The Last Friend may be analyzed not simply as an aesthetic object, but as a symbolic representation of existential anxiety and the human confrontation with death. Such an approach enables a deeper exploration of the psychological and existential dimensions embedded within the visual structure of the painting and highlights the potential of art to express fundamental concerns of human existence.

3 | Literature Review

The relationship between art and psychology, particularly in the analysis of visual artworks, has a relatively extensive history within interdisciplinary studies. Since the early twentieth century, with the emergence of psychoanalytic approaches, works of art have been viewed as reflections of both the individual and collective unconscious. Within this framework, thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung sought to access the hidden layers of the human psyche through the analysis of symbols, images, and artistic forms. Freud, emphasizing concepts such as repression, desire, and mourning, regarded art as an expression of internal conflicts and unresolved psychological tensions. Jung, by contrast, through his concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes, viewed artistic works as carriers of universal patterns and shared human experiences. According to Jung, artistic imagery often transcends the personal experiences of the artist and reflects symbolic structures deeply rooted in the collective human psyche. Consequently, both perspectives contributed significantly to establishing art as a legitimate subject of psychological inquiry and interpretation [3] In the field of psychological analysis of artworks, a number of studies have specifically focused on the concept of anxiety. These studies suggest that visual elements such as darkness, enclosed spaces, ambiguous faces, and unstable compositions can be interpreted as indicators of tension, anxiety, and inner psychological unrest. Furthermore, some research has examined the relationship between experiences of loss and their artistic representation, demonstrating that art can function as a means of confronting grief and reconstructing the meaning of life. Building upon this line of inquiry, phenomenological and existential approaches opened new horizons in the analysis of art. Within these perspectives, attention shifted from purely unconscious-based explanations toward lived experience, perception, and existential meaning. In particular, theories concerning existential anxiety and death assumed a significant role in the interpretation of human experience. Among the leading contributors to this field, Irvin Yalom introduced the concept of death anxiety as one of the most fundamental concerns of human existence, providing a theoretical framework that can also be

applied to the analysis of artistic works. From Yalom's perspective, awareness of death, although a source of anxiety, may simultaneously lead individuals toward a search for meaning and a redefinition of life itself.[5] However, despite this body of research, studies that specifically analyze a single painting with a focus on death anxiety within the framework of existential psychology remain limited. In particular, the direct application of Irvin Yalom's theoretical framework to the analysis of visual artworks has received relatively little scholarly attention, and most existing studies either address existential concepts in a general manner or remain within psychoanalytic frameworks. On the other hand, there are also a few systematic and interdisciplinary studies available on the works of Zygmunt Andrychiewicz, especially those that focus on a psychological analysis of his paintings through an existential lens. This indicates a significant research gap in the in-depth theoretical examination of his artistic oeuvre, a gap that can be partially addressed through a careful and structured analysis of his works. Accordingly, the present study seeks to employ Yalom's theoretical framework to analyze the painting The Last Friend and to demonstrate how signs of death anxiety can be identified and interpreted within this work. As a continuation and extension of previous research, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between art, death, and the human existential experience through a focused case study and an interpretive approach.

4 | Methodology

This study is applied in terms of its objective and is qualitative in nature, and it is conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach. The overall framework of the research is based on an interdisciplinary perspective integrating art and existential psychology, aiming to examine the artwork not merely as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as an interpretable text within the field of existential psychology. In this regard, The Last Friend by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz was selected as the case study of the research. Data collection was carried out through library-based methods and relied on written sources related to Irvin Yalom's theory, particularly the concepts of existential anxiety and death anxiety, as well as literature on the psychological analysis of art. In addition, the painting itself was examined as the primary source of data, and its visual components were carefully extracted. The method of data analysis is interpretive analysis. In this approach, the visual elements of the artwork, including spatial structure, composition, relationships among subjects, body posture of figures, direction of gaze, and the overall atmosphere of the painting, are systematically examined and interpreted. These components are then analyzed within the framework of key concepts in Yalom's theory, particularly death anxiety, existential isolation, and awareness of mortality. In the analytical process, formal and structural features of the artwork were first described, and subsequently these features were interpreted at a conceptual level in relation to existential psychological concepts. Efforts were made to avoid subjective interpretations, ensuring that inferences were grounded in visual evidence and theoretical foundations. The validity of the analysis is supported by adherence to a clear theoretical framework (Yalom's existential theory), consistency in the interpretive process, and reliance on established concepts in existential psychology. Ultimately, this method allows the artwork to be understood as a visual text that goes beyond mere visual description and can be analyzed as a representation of the human existential experience in the face of death.

5 | Existential Death Anxiety in Irvin Yalom's Theory

Irvin Yalom (born 1931) is a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, professor at Stanford University, and one of the most prominent contemporary theorists in existential psychology and psychotherapy.[6] His fame is primarily due to the development and elaboration of existential psychotherapy, an approach that focuses not merely on psychological symptoms but on the fundamental existential concerns of human beings. Yalom argues that many psychological conflicts and forms of anxiety originate from human confrontation with the inevitable realities of life. He formulates these realities in terms of four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness. From Yalom's perspective, human awareness of mortality is the primary source of existential anxiety, and a significant portion of human behaviors, choices, and psychological crises are shaped in relation to this awareness. However, he does not regard death solely as a source of fear and

suffering; rather, he believes that conscious confrontation with death can lead to authenticity, personal growth, and a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. His works, particularly Existential Psychotherapy [5] and Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death [2], are among the most important references in existential psychology and have had a profound influence on studies in psychology, philosophy, literature, and art. In Irvin Yalom's existential psychology, death anxiety is regarded as one of the most fundamental dimensions of human experience. Within the framework of existential psychotherapy, Yalom maintains that human beings constantly confront four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness. Among these, death occupies a central position because awareness of mortality constitutes the foundation of human psychological and existential experience. According to Yalom, human beings are the only creatures aware of their own death, and this awareness is considered the primary source of existential anxiety [4]. From Yalom's perspective, death is not merely a biological event or a natural end of life, but an inevitable existential truth that is constantly present either explicitly or implicitly, within the structure of the human psyche. This awareness generates a fundamental tension in the psyche: a tension between the human desire for survival and the unavoidable reality of annihilation. According to Yalom, much of human behavior, including the pursuit of success, the creation of meaning, emotional attachments, and even cultural and religious systems, can be understood as attempts to manage, deny, or contain the anxiety arising from death. Yalom distinguishes between fear of death and death anxiety. Fear of death typically refers to an external and identifiable threat, whereas death anxiety operates at a deeper level and is related to an individual's internal awareness of their own finitude. This anxiety is often unconscious and manifests indirectly in forms such as everyday anxiety, identity crises, feelings of emptiness, or fear of loneliness.[5] From Yalom's perspective, although awareness of death can be a source of anxiety and psychological suffering, it also possesses a transformative capacity. He argues that an authentic confrontation with death can lead to an "existential awakening," in which individuals, by accepting the limitations of existence, achieve a deeper understanding of life, human relationships, and the meaning of being. In this state, death is no longer merely a threat but becomes a force that affirms and gives authenticity to life. In Yalom's existential psychotherapy, the goal is not to deny death but to help individuals confront it consciously. He emphasizes that the more individuals can accept the reality of death, the less they are affected by hidden and destructive forms of anxiety. For this reason, death anxiety in Yalom's theory is not considered a mere psychological disorder but a fundamental human condition that exists at the core of all existential experience. Overall, within Yalom's theoretical framework, death anxiety is regarded as the root of many other psychological anxieties, and its analysis leads to a deeper understanding of the structure of the human psyche. From this perspective, death is not located at the periphery of life but at the center of human existential experience, and an individual's entire system of meaning is directly or indirectly shaped in relation to this reality. Based on this framework, the following chapter will analyze and interpret existential anxiety and confrontation with death in Andrychiewicz's The Last Friend.

In recent decades, the expansion of interdisciplinary approaches within the humanities has provided opportunities for a deeper integration of art and psychology. Among these disciplines, the visual arts, as one of the richest forms of expressing human experience, offer a valuable medium for representing complex concepts such as death, anxiety, loss, and loneliness. Painting, in particular, through its visual and symbolic language, is capable of revealing layers of human lived experience that are often difficult to articulate through verbal language alone. Consequently, the analysis of artworks within the framework of psychological theories can contribute to a deeper understanding of the hidden dimensions of the human psyche. One of the fundamental concepts in contemporary psychology, particularly within the field of existential psychology, is death anxiety. This concept, systematically elaborated in the works of Irvin Yalom, refers to the profound and often unconscious concern that human beings experience regarding mortality and the inevitability of death. From Yalom's perspective, death anxiety is not a peripheral phenomenon but one of the most fundamental existential concerns of human existence. It permeates various levels of individual and social experience and may manifest itself in diverse forms, including artistic expression. Accordingly, works of art can be regarded as arenas in which this anxiety is expressed, reflected, and even confronted. Within contemporary art, the exploration of death and related existential themes has become a significant concern

for many artists. Such themes are frequently represented through symbolic imagery, emotional atmospheres, and visual narratives that invite viewers to engage with questions concerning mortality, finitude, and the meaning of existence. In this context, artworks may function not only as aesthetic objects but also as psychological and philosophical texts that provide insight into the human condition.[1] This attention to death should be interpreted not merely as a representation of a biological reality, but as an attempt to understand the human condition in the contemporary world—a world in which experiences of disconnection, loneliness, and meaninglessness have become increasingly prominent. Within such a context, paintings that depict death or situations associated with it may be analyzed as visual texts in which multiple layers of meaning, emotion, and experience are intricately intertwined. The Last Friend by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz can be examined within this framework. Through its distinctive visual and spatial elements, the painting represents a situation in which concepts such as loss, loneliness, and confrontation with death are symbolically present. What makes this work particularly suitable for psychological analysis is not merely its subject matter, but also the manner in which its visual components are represented and organized, allowing for multiple layers of interpretation and meaning. From this perspective, The Last Friend may be regarded as a visual text in which traces of existential anxiety can be identified and explored. Despite the significance of such works, interdisciplinary studies that simultaneously employ the tools of art analysis and psychological theoretical frameworks remain relatively limited. In particular, analyses of paintings that focus on the concept of death anxiety within the framework of existential theories have received comparatively little scholarly attention. This research gap highlights the need for studies capable of integrating these two fields in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the relationship between art and the human psyche. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine existential anxiety and the concept of death in the last friend by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz through the theoretical lens of Irvin Yalom's existential psychology. The central research question is how the signs of death anxiety can be identified and interpreted within this painting, and how these signs relate to the lived human experience of confronting mortality. To address this question, the study employs a qualitative methodology based on interpretive analysis. By focusing on the painting's visual elements, spatial structure, relationships among subjects, and emotional atmosphere, the research offers a renewed reading of the work. The significance of this study may be considered from several perspectives. First, from a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to the development of interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of art and psychology and demonstrates the applicability of existential psychological concepts to the analysis of artistic works. Second, from a practical perspective, the findings may contribute to a better understanding of the role of art in representing and confronting fundamental human concerns, particularly death and the anxiety associated with it. Finally, from a methodological perspective, this research illustrates how the analysis of artworks can serve as a valuable tool for exploring the deeper layers of human experience. Overall, this article seeks to provide a new interpretation of the last friend by integrating artistic and psychological approaches, demonstrating how a work of art can become a space for the representation, experience, and interpretation of fundamental existential anxieties.



Fig. 1 .Artist's death. The last friend (1901).Zygmunt Andrychiewicz (Polish, 1861-1943)

6 | Introduction to the Work and Preliminary Reading within the Framework of Existential Anxiety

Zygmunt Andrychiewicz (1861–1943) was a Polish painter who worked in the fields of genre painting, portraiture, and landscape art. He is generally not classified as a pure Symbolist or Romantic artist; however, his works are positioned at the intersection of Academic Realism, late nineteenth-century Symbolism, and genre painting with psychological themes. Within this artistic context, his works can be approached as visual narratives that reflect both realistic representation and subtle symbolic and psychological dimensions. This hybrid positioning allows his paintings to be interpreted beyond formal aesthetics, opening them to existential and psychological readings. From the perspective of existential anxiety, such an artistic orientation provides a fertile ground for interpreting visual elements as carriers of deeper emotional and existential meanings. Accordingly, The Last Friend can be initially read as a work in which themes of loss, isolation, and confrontation with mortality are potentially embedded within its visual structure, inviting a preliminary existential-psychological interpretation.[7] For this reason, The Last Friend should not be understood merely as a realistic depiction of the death of an artist; rather, it is a work that employs a realist visual language to express a symbolic concept. The painting The Last Friend was created in 1901 and is currently housed in the National Museum in Warsaw. The year 1901 is highly significant in the history of art, as it coincides with the end of the nineteenth century and the emergence of intellectual and artistic movements associated with the crisis of spirituality, concerns about death, the loneliness of modern human, and existential questions in European art. Accordingly, the theme of death in this work should not be interpreted solely as the death of an individual. Instead, it can be understood as a reflection of broader concerns of the modern human condition at the threshold of the twentieth century.[8] This work can be categorized among those paintings that, rather than merely representing a narrative scene, directly depict the psycho-existential condition of the human being. At a preliminary and superficial level, the painter presents an interior space; however, at a deeper level, the visual structure of the painting is grounded in an experience of crisis, the collapse of relationships, and confrontation with death. Within the theoretical framework of Irvin Yalom, such a space can be interpreted as a manifestation of death anxiety and its consequences in lived human experience, where death

is not represented as an external event, but as a psychological presence permeating all elements of the image. One of the most important visual components of the work is the enclosed and confined interior space. This space, with its compressed walls and clearly defined boundaries, creates a strong sense of enclosure and confinement.[9] In Yalomian interpretation, this spatial structure can be understood as a reflection of the human condition in confrontation with the limits of existence, an individual confined within the closed world of his own being, unable to escape awareness of death. The enclosed space here symbolizes a condition in which the subject is confronted with the "awareness of finitude," yet no external path of escape is available; this constitutes the fundamental state of existential anxiety. The presence of the artist lying on the bed in a recumbent and near-death position is one of the most significant existential indicators in the painting. The bed is not merely a compositional element; rather, it functions as a threshold between "active life" and "imminent death." The artist's body, positioned in a state of passivity, weakness, and diminished vitality, expresses a moment in which the human subject is no longer in a position of agency and has entered a state of "ultimate confrontation" with existence. Within Irvin Yalom's theoretical framework, this condition can be interpreted as a moment of direct encounter with death anxiety, where the individual experiences awareness of finitude not through symbols, but in a lived and embodied form. In this sense, the bed becomes a site of existential transition, a boundary between being and non-being.[10] Another important element is the presence of the violinist beside the bed and his resemblance to a death-like figure. This character, positioned in close proximity to illness or death, does not function merely as a musician; rather, he operates as a symbol of the "coexistence of art and death." Within Yalom's framework, art in the face of death anxiety can function both as a source of consolation and as a reminder of life's impermanence. In this sense, the violin does not represent the sound of death, but rather reflects the human attempt to ascribe meaning to a moment dominated by the anxiety of finitude. This juxtaposition of art and death indicates a dual condition that Yalom describes as the "struggle for meaning in the face of non-being." The lamp on the table serves as a limited, localized, and non-universal source of light. Unlike omnipresent or symbolic illumination, this light reveals only part of the space, leaving other areas in shadow or semi-darkness. In an existential reading informed by Irvin Yalom's thought, this condition can be interpreted as a metaphor for the "limited human awareness of death," meaning that human beings only intermittently and partially confront the reality of their own finitude, rather than continuously or completely. Moreover, as a domestic and everyday object, the lamp indicates that the confrontation with death in this work takes place within a "completely ordinary and lived" space, rather than in a mythological or exaggerated scene. This aligns with Yalom's view that death anxiety is not an exceptional experience but a constant and often hidden dimension of everyday human life. Thus, the lamp may symbolize the "silent presence of death within ordinary life," a presence that, rather than manifesting violently, gradually activates human awareness of finitude through its restrained and subdued illumination. At the spatial level, this localized lighting does not produce a sharp contrast between light and darkness; instead, it generates a subtle perceptual unevenness, as if death does not appear as a sudden event but as a gradual and internal condition permeating the fabric of life. Scattered papers on the floor constitute another significant element of the composition.[9] These papers may signify the breakdown of mental order, the incompletion of thoughts, or a disruption in the process of meaning-making. Within Yalom's framework, this condition can be associated with the experience of meaninglessness, where the individual, in the face of death, loses the capacity to generate stable meanings and the cognitive system becomes fragmented. The dispersion of the papers across the space reflects the external manifestation of this inner psychological disarray. Alongside this, the presence of the artist's canvas within the painting constitutes one of the most significant existential indicators of the work. This unfinished canvas directly refers to the notion of the "incompleteness of the life project." In Yalom's view, awareness of death can generate an experience in which life is continually perceived as unfinished and suspended. The half-completed canvas in this work symbolizes precisely such a condition, as if life, like an artwork, is exposed to interruption before its completion. This element visually embodies the tension between the "desire for creation and continuity" and the "certainty of death." Overall, the visual structure of The Last Friend can be understood as a network of existential anxiety markers, each corresponding to one of Yalom's theoretical dimensions: the enclosed space to the limits of existence, the violinist to the attempt to create meaning in the face of death, the scattered papers to meaninglessness, and

the unfinished canvas to the incompleteness of the life project. In this reading, the work is not merely a representation of a scene, but a scene of human awareness of its own mortality, an awareness that is simultaneously a source of anxiety and a basis for deep reflection on the meaning of existence. Yalom argues that although awareness of death is a source of anxiety, an authentic confrontation with it can lead to acceptance, psychological growth, and a deeper understanding of life. In this sense, death is not merely destructive; it can become the final companion of human beings on their existential journey[2]. Andrychiewicz depicts death not as a hostile force, but as an inevitable, calm, and accompanying presence, one that remains with the human being even at the final moment, when all human relations have come to an end.

7 | Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the concepts of existential anxiety and death in The Last Friend, a painting by Zygmunt Andrychiewicz, based on Irvin Yalom's theoretical perspective. The main research question addressed how the visual elements and pictorial structure of this work can be interpreted within the framework of existential psychology, and what relationship exists between its visual organization and the fundamental concepts of Yalom's theory. Accordingly, the painting was analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach, focusing on concepts such as death anxiety, existential isolation, meaninglessness, and human confrontation with finitude. The findings indicate that The Last Friend functions beyond a simple representation of the death of an artist and instead constructs a meaning-generating structure that is open to psychological and existential interpretation. The confined and enclosed interior space, the artist's body positioned on the deathbed, the violinist figure resembling a death-like presence, the unfinished canvas, scattered papers, and the fragmented relationships among visual elements all contribute to an atmosphere of anxiety, loss, and existential suspension. Together, these elements represent a lived experience of human confrontation with the fundamental limits of existence. The analysis further revealed that death in this painting is not merely a biological event but an existential reality that is always present. The title of the work, The Last Friend, is particularly significant in this regard, as it presents death not as a hostile force but as an inevitable and constant companion on the human life journey. This interpretation aligns with Yalom's view, which considers death a source of anxiety while also suggesting that conscious confrontation with it can lead to a deeper understanding of life and a more authentic experience of existence. In addition, the visual analysis demonstrated that existential isolation is another central theme of the painting. The absence of meaningful interaction among figures, fragmented gazes, and the emphasis on the individual experience of death reflect what Yalom describes as "existential isolation"—a condition in which individuals remain fundamentally alone in the face of death and ultimate destiny, despite the presence of others. In this work, death is an entirely individual experience that cannot be eliminated or replaced by any human relationship. Moreover, the unfinished canvas and scattered papers symbolize the incompleteness of the life project and the fragility of meaning in the face of mortality. These elements highlight the fact that many human aspirations, plans, and achievements remain inherently incomplete and unstable in relation to the inevitability of death. However, from Yalom's perspective, this awareness of incompleteness and limitation can also serve as a foundation for rethinking the meaning of life and appreciating the present moment. Overall, the findings suggest that The Last Friend can be understood as a symbolic representation of one of the most fundamental existential concerns of human beings: confrontation with death. Through its visual language, the painting reveals concepts such as death anxiety, existential isolation, the instability of meaning, and the finitude of life, inviting the viewer to reflect on the human condition. From this perspective, art is not only a medium for expressing emotions and individual experiences but also a space for representing the deepest existential concerns of human beings. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Yalom's existential psychology provides a useful framework for analyzing artworks and uncovering the hidden layers of meaning embedded in visual structures. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in connecting art and psychology, showing that artworks can function as cultural and psychological documents for understanding fundamental human experiences, particularly existential anxieties. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ other existential theorists and conduct comparative studies of artworks related to death and mortality in order to further explore the relationship between art and human existential experience.

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