

## The Psychopathology of Marija Novaković's Paintings

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**Abstract** - This paper emphasizes the psychopathology of Marija Novaković. Marija Novaković suffered from psychosis since the age of 24. She has been treated for more decades in the Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče. She was an artist educated in music, but in the relapses she could not compose. Thanks to the support of the Vrapče Hospital her talent came to a full expression. Župić noticed the spontaneity, creativity and symbolism in her paintings. Her visual expression contributed to the auto- and hetero-art-therapy. The protectiveness of the Vrapče Hospital positively affected not only on her illness, but on her artistic expression and creativity. She also contributed to the *art brut*, which is evident in her opus.

**Key words:** psychosis, psychopathography, paintings, creativity, art-therapy, Marija Novaković

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### Introduction

In this paper the artistic work of Marija Novaković will be heavily quoted, but it should be noted, due to the terminological confusion, terms such as “psychopathological art”, “psychiatric art”, “the art of the mindless” do not exist, although, in Paris the International Society of Psychopathology of Expression was established. It is therefore better to talk about psychopathology and the capabilities of the early needs for the human

creativity. It is also important to accentuate that it is not possible to conclude that any of the works (by any age, myths, primitives, births, loners, prettiest, naïve, professional, amateur, dilettante) should be a work of a mentally ill individual.

To be able to make such a conclusion it is needed to have clinical, anamnestic, hetero-anamnestic, biographic, bibliographic, non/intermediate examination information about a particular author, about his work, his creation, development, life, medical treatments, general behavior, thinking and feelings. In fact, this all is not important, except for clinical research reasons.

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Neimarević wrote in the books *Umjetnici tamnoga sjaja*, in our free translation *Artists with dark splendor*. These are three books about mentally ill artists: painters, sculptors, musicians, and writers. [1]

The phase and intensity of the illness reflects on their artistic production, in its consistency and form, motoric, imaginative, sensible, general psychological, spiritual, and executive ability to transform reality and express an inner experience through artistic creation. Surrealists pretended to be insane. Salvador Dali, with his extravagance and eccentricity, once said: “The difference between me and the madman is that I am not crazy”.

### **Psychopathography of Marija Novaković**

Marija Novaković (1885, Zagreb – 1960, Zagreb), a mentally ill painter, was not particularly educated in art, but applied many fine art techniques: charcoal, pastel, pencil, feather, pen and brush. She was the daughter of a Viennese Jewess (Wilhelmine Deutsch) and of an Austrian officer (Anastasije Novaković). Marija Novaković was brought up on German language and was educated in music. She sang arias in cabarets, played a piano and improvised the happenings of silent movies at cinemas.

Her pictures were first noticed in the Vrapče Psychiatry Hospital (Zagreb, Croatia), which was not even, at that time, a typical early European asylum, but was called The Temple of Humanity. Župić stimulated Marija's expression, organized her exhibitions and wrote first booklet catalogs about her. He also wrote articles for medical journals in appropriate rubrics about her and her work. [2-6] Neimarević (Karlovac, Croatia) showed great scientific interest for her paintings and

drawings. He published three books titled *Umjetnici tamnoga sjaja*. [1] Neimarević published some other scientific papers about Marija Novaković in books and journals. [7-10]

The mentally ill artist Marija Novaković was already known in the psychiatric literature. Spitzmiller wrote her Master's Degree about the life of Marija Novaković. Župić published books, announcements, and journal preface on Marija Novaković. The authors have written an article about the peculiar personality of Župić and other topics. [11] Neimarević wrote most prominently about Marija Novaković.

Since she was treated in Vrapče, her works were exhibited in Župić's Museum (Vrapče PH). The psychiatric and art-historic literature is full of psychopathographies of the mentally ill artists, just like the works of the well-known psychiatrists Župić and Neimarević. Therefore, our paper on Marija Novaković's different paintings is a contribution to the study on the opus of Marija Novaković, our most significant mentally ill painter. Marija Novaković, as a paradigm, highly contributed to the *art brut* ('raw art') of unfortunately mentally ill artists.

Dubuffet, the world-renowned painter and theoretician, discovered and affirmed art values of (mentally) ill, lonely, marginalized, alienated, inexperienced and often illiterate people from the outside of the artistic sphere and scene. [12]

Marija Novaković had almost no fine art education. She was self-taught, but very talented, and gravitated towards expressionism, in the style of *Zeitgeist* and *Weltanschauung*. Despite creating paintings in *art brut* style, some of her paintings belong to the style of symbolic secession and surrealism. Her art expression was the result of her rich fantasy,

fiction and by some aspects of her chronic mental illness with relapses. Exhausted by impulses and pulsations from *id*, she transformed her deceitful silence into more pronounced works of art. Prosecuted by impulses from the *id*, she transferred her hallucinations into pronouncedly art paintings. Psychotic process, when in remission, is also releasing creative forces regarding artistic creativity. Her inner experience was spontaneously transformed in her paintings and artistic pictures.

The unhappy life of the painter blended with the illness, caused partly by the hereditary (four suicides in the family: uncle and two sisters and a mental illness and suicide of her father), required her longtime internment and scarce treatment in the Viennese mental hospital Steinhof (9 Aug 1909, aged 24), in the Heil um Pflegeanstalt in Berlin (22 March 1931 – 3 March 1932), in the Sv. Duh hospital in Zagreb, and in the Hospital for nervous and mental illness Vrapče (Zagreb, Croatia) about 30 years. Despite of being in the stationary hospital, she had enriched her artistic expression. Her chronic psychotic process was able to induce her imagination, which was the base of her artistic creation. She died at the age of 75 of acute disease.

## Discussion

Marija Novaković was able to express her hallucinatory and delusional experiences: illusions and out-of-order intensive feelings and thoughts, from both subconscious and conscious area of the psyche, into pieces of art. Healthy artists, both naïve and professional (both adults and children), mostly do succeed in this, unlike those under alcohol and drug abuse. The artistic quality of the work depends on the talent combined with other elements, such as education.

Medical procedures in psychiatry of that time did not hurt Marija Novaković's exceptional affective and cognitive properties. She was homeopathically treated by Župić. Despite being unsatisfied, frustrated and distrusted of the outside life, she was able to express her art creativity in the pure silence of CH Vrapče, under the leadership and understanding of Župić. It is important to stress-out that Neimarević was one of the few neuropsychiatrists who was motivated and interested in the artistic expression of all mentally ill patients and was the author of many patographs. Neimarević, a neuropsychiatrist from Karlovac, recognized the artistic value of Marija Novaković's paintings. He was a feverish collector of her work, who took notice of her work not because of her mental illness but because of the purely artistic value of her work. Additionally, the very fact of the nature of her illness (chronic psychosis) is further having a strong influence on her creative art. Her opus is characterized by a peculiarity which is also recognized by other researchers and theoreticians whose work is related to the creativity of the insane (Dubuffet, Naumburgh, Renert, Bader, Wadson, Prinzhorn, Jakab etc.). [12-17]

The mental patients have the capability to produce something special driven by their psychosis: the expressive presentation, truly introspective with pure experience taken from their inner world. Marija Novaković was recognized as a great talent and in her work the famous "the master's touch" choice can be noted: in every move of her pencil or brush, in every chosen theme, content, color, shade, and valeur.

It is not strange that such suggestive manifestations of intrinsic, persistent, hallucinatory, onychological, macabre, and, sometimes, transient experiences come from *id*. It

is exactly the psychosis that is a scapegoat: a destroyer of the dam of censorship between the conscious and unconscious, by allowing the penetration of partly irrational preoccupations, with the preserved critical mass of reflexivity, cognitive and emotional capabilities; something that enables the painter to reach artistic such great achievements.

Neimarević was a pioneer: he propagated the values of the schizophrenic-etio-pathogenic creativity. In his book *Umjetnici tamnog sjaja* he described the fates of Marija Novaković, Slava pl. Raškaj (1877 – 1906) and the others. [1]

Thanks to the enthusiastic understanding of Jukić the Gallery and the Museum of History of Psychiatry (both in Vrapče PH) were formed, as an addition to the previously existing Museum founded by Župić.

Mentally ill patients contributed to the freedom of the artistic creation, which was noted by theoreticians, making recent changes of art-theory in general.

Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate art-therapy and psycho-diagnostic activities inside and outside of the hospital environment, and to study further effects regarding preventive, remedies, adjuvants and occupational therapy.

What makes art-therapy healing for the patients? And what does the case of Marija

Novaković prove? Expressing emotions and thoughts is extremely important for mentally ill patients!

Much has been written about neurosis, psychosis and creativity, especially the artistic creativity (e.g. Jerotić, Erić, Bihalji-Merin, Pražić, Radovančević, Švarc). [18-22]

## Conclusion

We are dealing with the creativity-psychosis relationship, supported by the Marija Novaković case. Psychosis in an acute or impoverished state that hurts the creative spirit. But in remission, even if not perfect, for the gifted artists can make them create masterpieces. This creativity leads to relative healing or a temporary cure, but incomplete health (as defined by WHO), due to the devastating psychotic forces being stronger. The creativity helps to uncover and release the unconscious through art. All this is polemized through the life and work of Marija Novaković.

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## Conflict of Interest

None

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## Psihopatologija slikarstva Marije Novaković

**Sažetak** - U ovom radu stavljen je naglasak na psihopatografiju Marije Novaković. Ona je rano oboljela od jasne paranoidne shizofrenije. Dugotrajno je bila liječena u Psihijatrijskoj Bolnici Vrapče. Marija Novaković je muzički obrazovana umjetnica, no u relapsima procesa nije mogla skladati. Njezin likovni talent ipak dolazi do punog izražaja zahvaljujući podršci KP bolnice Vrapče i Župića koji je zamijetio spontanost, kreativnost i simboliku u njezinim radovima. Njezino likovno izražavanje je doprinijelo auto- i hetero-art-terapiji. Zaštićenost u bolnici Vrapče djelovalo je povoljno na njenu bolest, stvaralaštvo i kreativnost, a doprinijelo je i *art brut*-u, što se vidi proučavanjem njezinog opusa.

**Ključne riječi:** psihoza, psihopatografija, slikarstvo, kreativnost, art-terapija, Marija Novaković

