

Self-Portrait: Between Normality and Psychosis

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Abstract: The article entitled "Self-Portrait: Between Normality and Psychosis"¹ makes a comparison between specific international artists' self-portraits (such as: Vincent van Gogh's, Syd Barret's, Maria Lassning's etc.) and national artists' self-portraits (such as: Ion Țuculescu's, Aniela Firon's etc.) with a proper education in the field of fine arts and specific patients' self-portraits (diagnosed with schizophrenia and other mental disorders) with no artistic education, in order to highlight the therapeutic role of self-portrait in both cases. Regarding the first case there has been made a comparison between an interesting self-portrait belonging to the Romanian artist Ion Țuculescu called Self-portrait on yellow background and a medieval two handle cooking pot found in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen from Rotterdam which proves a natural connection of the modern period with the medieval one, as a proof that human being's origins cannot be denied, because they exist in our subconscious. Regarding the second case, there has also been made a comparison between a patient's self-portrait with Paranoid Schizophrenia and the medieval iconic character Ioana d'Arc, as the patient identifies herself with this historical figure. The main purpose consisted in presenting the way a self-portrait betrays the existence of specific moral disorders through the elements of visual language, like a mirror which reflects a painter's unseen reality.

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Generally speaking, self-portrait emerged due to a strong psychological need to express some hidden experiences which are apparently forgotten but stored in our subconsciousness. The purpose consists in presenting the development of self-portraits both in the history of universal art and in the history of Romanian art, which are analysed from a historical point of view by making some connections with the Middle Ages Period, but also from a psychological² point of view according to the structure: Id – Ego- Superego which involves the decipherment of certain symbols expressed by instincts that are denied by our consciousness, they are concealed in the unconsciousness and they are subsequently outsourced indirectly.³ Self-portrait stands for a symptomatic manifestation of our unconsciousness⁴ and brings to light the desires, regrets or traumas repressed by our consciousness, whose interpretations are difficult to convey: thus, dream and artistic creation as well, are «enigmas which need to be deciphered», because both in dream and in art there is a latent content which is expressed in a derivative way through the artistic forms the artist resorts to and because in both situations the intervention of consciousness limits free expression.⁵

The reason of self-portrayal is the desire of individualization and self-valorization of which one is more or less conscious of, having its roots in childhood since the moment the human being starts showing interest in its own physiognomy.⁶ Self-awareness since the age of 18 months⁷, as well the awareness of one's own feelings and thoughts⁸ since the age of 4 or 5 years old reveal an intense need for self-knowledge which develops later in life. It is not accidental the usage of mirror in the artistic creations of the 20th

² The concept of *personality* consists in summing up several psycho-physiological, instinctive-affective or behavioral aspects, temperamental characteristics, etc., Constantin Enăchescu, *Tratat de psihanaliză și psihoterapie*, Maria-Elena Druță (editor), *Didactică și Pedagogică* Press, R.A. - Bucharest, 1998, pp. 30-31.

³ *Ibidem.*, pp. 34-35.

⁴ Cristian Nae, *Moduri de a percepe. O introducere în teoria artei moderne și contemporane*, Oana Maria Nae (editor), Artes Press, Iași, 2013, p.86.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.87, apud Sarah Kofmann, *L'enfance de l'art. Une interpretation de l'esthetique freudienne*, Payot Press, Paris, 1970.

⁶ Matthias Wildermuth, *Entwicklungs- und Störungsmodelle B1 Module, Spezielle Störungslehre: Krankheiten des Kindesalters, Behinderung*, B2 Module, *Vorahnung-Mitahnung-Nachahnung-Verbindung, Leibnahe und geistnahe seelische Spiegelungsprozesse in der Entwicklung*, Power Point Presentation, slide no. 16, Master Studies, Art Therapy, Alanus Hochschule für Kunst und Gesellschaft University, Alfter, Bonn, 2015.

⁷ *Ibidem*, slide no. 26.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

century, relevant in this sense being Michelangelo Pistoletto's self-portrait which is part of the series entitled *Mirror Paintings* which consists in integrating the natural-size of his own image on the surface of a mirror. The main aim is to include external characters as well as other elements from the environment in his artworks, in order to deal with the hazard. According to the Lacanian concept, the ego projection in a mirror is illusory, being rather understood as a self-denial or as an utopia of self-knowledge⁹ and Pistoletto has created a connection with this idea which is about creating a fictional (self-)portrait. It is considered that self-knowledge is partly fulfilled, as a human being is defined by an endless mountain of secrets which cannot be fully decrypted.

From a psychological point of view, the imperative need for self-portraiture is explained by the desire to unconsciously compensate for the lack produced by the loss of the original state¹⁰ when the baby suffers a separation from his mother's body at birth. This nostalgia for unity, symbolized by the artistic creation (self-portrait), can also be connected to Id-Ego relationship which forms a unitary whole¹¹ in the prenatal stage, as these two instances are not developed yet. The beginning of awareness marks the beginning of a development which leads to a painful experience that is felt like a real shock; once the prenatal stage is over, the baby breaks out of his mother's body (Id) to enter the physical world and since that very moment his native stage begins (Ego) and Superego becomes a component part of it which is willingly "built" by the educational and social factors. These three instances are connected to each other during the entire life as a whole in comparison to the prenatal stage when this connection is not fully defined, there is no clear separation among these three instances.

At the end of the 18th century, when psychology began to be considered as an independent science¹², painting begun playing a major role in identifying patient's diagnosis and self-portrait was just a direct way of accessing his mind and soul. Since Hans Prinzhorn's *Mental Illnesses* was published in Berlin in 1922, the interest for psychiatric patients' art creations increased and art scientists and artists such as: Max Ernst, Jean Dubuffet etc. investigated this problem and used their drawings¹³ as a source of inspiration for their artworks. The major difficulty for psychiatrists and art critics

⁹ Cristian Nae, *op.cit.*, pp.102-120.

¹⁰ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Psihanaliza artei și a creativității*, Marius Chivu, Silviu Dragomir, Vasile Dem.

Zamfirescu (editors), translation from French to Romanian by Georgeta Mitrea, *Trei* Press, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 86-90.

¹¹ K.-U. Adam, *I Allgemeine theoretische Grundlagen*, Springer Press, Berlin, 2006, <http://www.krammerbuch.at/bookData/pdfs/adam_lesepr.pdf> (29.05.2016, 17:34).

¹² Constantin Enăchescu, *Tratat de psihopatologie*, Tehnică Press, Bucharest, 2000, p. 17.

¹³ Cristian Nae, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

consists in the impossibility of defining a certain boundary between normality and pathology despite the existence of certain defining characteristics which distinguish a patient's artwork characterized by chaos from a healthy person's characterized by harmony¹⁴. Mental health is objectively defined by the adaptability to various situations which provide flexibility in response to daily challenges¹⁵, while psychological illness betrays a high degree of deviation from norms, as well as a degradation of functional structures, a cognitive and a behavioral imbalance¹⁶. Sigmund Freud's statement that perfect normality is an utopia („Normalitatea este o ficțiune ideală; fiecare Eu este psihotic, într-un anumit moment, într-o măsură mai mare sau mai mică.”¹⁷) has further amplified the uncertainty regarding the existence of a clear demarcation between these two concepts by creating a general confusion.

It is obvious that self-portrait emerged from an inner strong need for expression during an existential crisis¹⁸ which betrays a desperate attempt to find a solution in order to solve a conflict with oneself. Several international artists such as: Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, as well as Romanian artists such as: Ion Andreescu, and Ștefan Luchian etc. have been particularly concerned about the analysis of their inner world; the Dutch painter Philip Akkerman's statement emphasizes the interest in self-knowledge through his serial self-portraits: "People can deal with that aspect [= the spark of Creation, that great unknown] in three ways. By reflecting on it - that's philosophy; through mystical experiences, revelations - that's religion and ultimately art. Everyone worries about the unknown. [...] I give shape to that worry by continually painting that self-portrait; that is my basso continuo. I'll never figure out that riddle, and so I'll always be painting self-portraits. The day that I solve the riddle, I'll stop painting." Thus, self-portrait becomes synonymous with the concepts of *unknown* and *mystery*, whose meaning become decipherable throughout life.

Some biographical details show that that personality traits of artists such as: Odilon Redon, Edvard Munch, James Ensor, Salvador Dali, William Blake etc. were beyond the boundaries of normality so that hallucinatory visions, traumas and manic symptoms caused by the socio-technical stress

¹⁴ Hartmut Kraft, *Grenzgänger zwischen Kunst und Psychiatrie*, D1 Module, Master Studies, Art Therapy, Alanus Hochschule für Kunst und Gesellschaft University, Alfter, Bonn, 2015.

¹⁵ Florin Tudose, Cătălina Tudose, Letiția Dobranici, *Tratat de psihopatologie și psihiatrie pentru psihologi*, Silviu Dragomir, Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu (editors), Trei Press, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 87- 90.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 90- 91.

¹⁷ „Normality is an ideal fiction, everyone is psychotic at some point, to a greater or lesser extent.” *Ibidem*, p.80

¹⁸ Juliette Hanson, *The Art of Self-Portraiture* <<http://www.juliettehanson.com/#!the-art-of-self-portraiture/cqqs>> (22.08.2016, 22:44).

due to a very high psychological level¹⁹ were transposed into their own creations. Thus, the artists' refusal of facing the objective reality resulted in creations which show a new reality without any logical references. Gino Severini's distorted futuristic self-portraits, Francis Bacon's or Paul Klee's expressionist self-portraits are a response to extrinsic aggression (war, loneliness) as well as to intrinsic aggression (hate, cruelty, etc.)²⁰, since their self-representations betray a high degree of suffering, the physical aspect being totally subordinated to the moral one.

Psychologists have established two types of biostructures: a stable biostructure which preserves real coordinates and an unstable biostructure which neglects the reality²¹.

In the first category there are included: Expressionists' self-portraits (James Ensor's, Willem de Kooning's, who was diagnosed in the '80s with Alzheimer²²; de Kooning's self-portraits betray an innovative sense of form and color, Maria Lassnig's, known for her interest in self-investigation²³, William Utermohlen's, also diagnosed with Alzheimer²⁴; his series of self-portraits reflects the exciting evolution of his disease, Syd Barrett's, the founder of Pink Floyd psychedelic rock band and painter at the same time, diagnosed with schizophrenia²⁵ because of drug abuse, Aniela Firon's which reveal the emotional problems which pushed her to suicide²⁶, Ion Țuculescu's which express some psychological tensions which are translated into the existence of a moral disorder²⁷), Impressionists' self-portraits (Claude Monet or Pierre-Auguste Renoir's self-representations are an excuse for representing

¹⁹ Mihai Dragomirescu, *Medicina și arta plastică*, Facla Press, Timișoara, 1986, pp. 185-189.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.190.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² EL Marcus, Y. Kaufman, A. Cohen-Shalev, [Creative work of painters with Alzheimer's disease], 08.2009
<<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19899261>> (11.07.2016, 19:14).

²³ *The Austrian Cultural Forum and Tate Liverpool Members, Who is Maria Lassnig*
<<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/who-is-maria-lassnig>> 13.05.2016 (22.08.2016, 23:00).

²⁴ *The Alzheimer Artist Who Painted Self Portraits Every Year Until He Forgot To Send Them In*, <<http://www.viralforest.com/alzheimer-artist/>> (11.07.2016, 19:14).

²⁵ Kris DiLorenzo, „Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd and Mental Illness” in *Trouser Newspaper*, pp. 26-32, February 1978
<<http://www.schizophrenia.com/stories/sbarrett.htm>> (11.07.2016, 19:14).

²⁶ [Nettime-ro] Erwin Kessler vs. Mihai Oroveanu, *Referitor la acuzele aduse lui Erwin Kessler de catre dl. Mihai Oroveanu*: <<https://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-ro-1301/msg00014.html>> (11.07.2016, 20:16).

²⁷ The author Magda Cârneci describes him as having „an overflowing psychism with strange obsessions, visions and exacerbated tensions (...)” which shows the existence of some paroxysmal feelings which overcome the limits of normality. Magda Cârneci, *Ion Țuculescu*, Vasile Florea (editor), Meridiane Press, Sibiu, 1984, pp. 6-7.

sensory perceptions through the investigations of light effects), Neo-impressionists' self-portraits (including Georges Seurat's and Edmond Delacroix's which express an inner peace due to their statuary self-portraits²⁸), Post-impressionists' self-portraits (we mention here: Vincent van Gogh's self-portraits which betray psychotic feelings which are under the influence of epilepsy diagnostics, respectively Hebephrenic Schizophrenia²⁹, Paul Gauguin's who announced *Les Nabis* and *Fauvism* Movements, Paul Cezanne's who announced *Cubism* Movement. Also some patients's self-portraits suffering from Paranoid Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorder belong to this category and their artworks are analyzed by the physician Constantin Enăchescu.

In the second category there are included: Surrealists' self-portraits (such as: René Magritte's or Salvador Dali's who are supposed to have suffered from Parkinson's disease³⁰, Frida Kahlo's diagnosed with depression³¹ who expressed her interest in a psychoanalytic self-interrogation beyond the limits of rationality), Cubists' self-portraits (namely: Pablo Picasso's, whose diagnosis of clinical depression³² can be noticed in some of his self-portraits), Expressionists' self-portraits (Francis Bacon's which betray the dysmorphic disorder³³ he was suffering from), performers' self-portraits (Joseph Beuys, a famous character of Fluxus group, portrayed himself by using both traditional and modern techniques, his actions revealing the trauma he suffered during the Second World War³⁴) etc.

It is obvious that self-portrait, regardless the technical means of expression, represented a way of spiritual healing, as artist Michael Buthe declared: „Ich habe lange gesucht, bis ich diese alte Scheibe fand. (...) Es ist ein Material, das viel Gelebtes und viele Energien gespeichert hat, ich könnte mich damit identifizieren. // Meine Sonne ist für mich wie alle Bilder ein

²⁸ Mihai Dragomirescu, *op.cit.*, p.147.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp.153-154.

³⁰ *Famous People with Parkinson's Disease*, <<http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/parkinsons-famous.shtml>> (11.07.2016, 19:55).

³¹ Liz Campese, *The life, Art and Mental Illness of Frida Kahlo*, 10.07.2015<<https://www.talkspace.com/blog/2015/07/the-life-art-and-mental-illness-of-frida-kahlo/>> (11.07.2016, 19:43).

³² Alicia Sparks, *Famous Writers And Artists And Mental Illness*, 14.06.2008,<<http://www.blisstree.com/2008/06/14/mental-health-well-being/famous-writers-and-artists-and-mental-illness-234/>> (11.07.2016, 20:00).

³³ Susana Martinez-Conde, Stephen L. Macknik, *Famous Paintings Can Reveal Visual Disorders. Neural pathologies have shaped great art throughout history*, 01.03.2015 <<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/famous-paintings-can-reveal-visual-disorders/>> (11.07.2016, 20:08).

³⁴ C. Ottomann, PL. Stollwerck, H. Maier, I. Gatty, T. Muehlberger, *Joseph Beuys: Trauma and catharsis. Med Humanit*, 12. 2010, <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21393290>> (11.07.2016, 22:07).

Gebrauchsgegenstand zum Sehen, zum Fühlen, zum Träumen, zum Sich-etwas-Klarmachen. // Heilungswirkung in der Kunst kann ich mir gut vorstellen. Ich kenne Medizinmänner in Nigeria - das sind Ärzte, die für mich eigentlich ganz große Künstler sind-, die Heilungsprozesse einleiten, das funktioniert wunderbar.”³⁵

The explosion of self portraiture³⁶ at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century is the symbol of the modern human's dramatic condition expressed by the emergence of solitude and anxiety³⁷. Overurbanization, mechanisation and the tormented daily life have played a very important role in this direction, as they have increased psychological stressors and therefore the risk of psychopathology³⁸ which gave birth to a psychological instability³⁹. There is evidence that tuberculosis, mental illness, alcoholism and delinquency are caused by the overcrowding and stressful life which gives to the human being a feeling of loneliness⁴⁰. The reorganization of the large industrialized centers through the collaboration of architects with physicians and sociologists was considered the best way of counteracting stress by bringing harmony from an architectural and moral point of view⁴¹. The abandonment of angular constructions in favour of circular and oval shapes would be a very important aspect, as sharp shapes symbolize aggression in comparison to oval shapes which symbolize balance and optimism which are so necessary for an inner balance.

Below there are presented the concepts of some artists' self-portraits and also of some patients with artistic skills who have used their own images for therapeutic purposes in order to overcome some moral difficult situations.

One of the artists is Vincent van Gogh whose several self-portraits reflect various states of mind which contain painter's shared fragments of his

³⁵ "I have been searching for a long time until I have understood one thing. (...) It's a material which has stored many energies I am indentifying with. // Like all pictures, my sun is for me a way to see, to feel, to dream, to see clearly. // I can imagine very well the healing effects in art. I know doctors in Nigeria - who are really great artists for me - who initiate healing processes which work wonderfully". Simone Iris Riehle, *Die Thematisierung des Ich: Das Selbstbild als Gegenstand der Selbstbeobachtung in der bildenden Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts und in der Kunsttherapie*, 20th Volume, Manfred Wagner (editor), Praesens Press, Vienna, 2012, p. 140 apud *Der andere Blick. Heilungswirkung der Kunst heute*, Walter Smerling, Evelyn Weiss (editors), Köln, 1986, p.29.

³⁶ Self-portraits started playing a major role in that period, cf. Mihai Dragomirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 138..

³⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 137-138.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, apud Paul Calseyde, „Abbotempo”, *This strange disease of modern life*, 1967, no. 1, pp. 2-6, Ralph Caplan, „Amer. J. of Psychiatry”, 1981, no. 4, pp. 413-426 and S. Vicari, "Medicine et Hygiene", 1978, no. 36, pp. 3613-3614.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

soul. The usage of complementary colors: red and green which is present in the artwork entitled *Self-portrait with the bandaged ear and pipe*⁴² betrays a double conflict: a chromatic conflict, due to the juxtaposition of strong colours, and a psychological conflict since he committed in fact a self-aggression act by cutting his right ear⁴³ after a major conflict with his artist and friend Paul Gauguin, because of the great personality differences between the two. His eyes' expression reveals a profound pain, a strong inner tension which torments his mind and soul, amplified by the nervous brushstrokes.

Egon Schiele painted several self-portraits, questioning various aspects such as: sexuality, eroticism, self-irony, doubt, pathos, allegory, etc. and it is important to mention that physical deformities, which are typical for his style, indicate suffering⁴⁴. Like other expressionists, such as Oskar Kokoschka and Max Beckmann, Egon Schiele unveiled his inner side, his own beliefs, and last but not least his vulnerability.

Frida Kahlo's self-portraits played an important role within her artistic activity, being a way of self-protection with a therapeutic role at the same time, a revelation of her physical and moral pain, of her solitude. The paralysis she suffered from since she was 6 years old, as well as the accident at the age of 18, the loss of her child and the unfortunate marriage⁴⁵ caused her a great pain, painting being the main activity which compensated all these tragedies: „Ich bin nicht gestorben, und außerdem habe ich etwas, wofür es sich zu leben lohnt: die Malerei.”⁴⁶. Extremely sensitive, Kahlo analyzed her own experiences by metamorphosing them in a Naive Surrealist artistic language which is rich in symbols.

⁴² Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)
<<http://www.anahitadesign.com/impressionist/vangogh.html>> (18.09.2016, 15:42).

⁴³ Joseph Phelan, *Tragedy and Triumph at Arles: Van Gogh and Gauguin*
<<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/feature-2001-11.html>> (18.09.2016, 15:59).

⁴⁴ Frank J. Erbguth, „Egon Schiele and Dystonia” in *Neurological Disorders in Famous Artists*, Part 3, vol. 27th Volume, J. Bogousslavsky (editor), S. Karger AG Press, Basel, Switzerland, 2010, pp. 46-60,
<<https://books.google.ro/books?id=NTmyjVWIrTYC&pg=PA46&lpg=PA46&dq=egon+schiele+self+portraits+suffering&source=bl&ots=0vxcJEOW6A&sig=rqB5gx0piPxT86LQSoM36FNsby4&hl=ro&sa=X&ved=0ahUK EwjsuPnF8dXOAhVDVBQKHeZfA10Q6AEINDAJ#v=onepage&q=egon%20schiele%20self%20portraits%20suffering&f=false>> (22.08.2016, 23:47).

⁴⁵ Frida Kahlo Fans. Complete Biography
<<http://www.fridakahlofans.com/biocomplete.html>> (22.08.2016, 23:54).

⁴⁶ „I am not dead and besides painting is the best reason I am living for”, Simone Iris Riehle, *op. cit.*, p. 181, apud Raquel Tibol, *Frida Kahlo. Ein offenes Leben*, München, 2005, p. 51.

The surrealist Austrian artist Rudolf Hausner often painted self-portraits as a therapeutic way, because they represented for him a psychological necessity, a way to overcome his traumatic events according to his own statement: „Malen ist für mich ein Mittel zur Bewältigung meines Lebens! Die Malerei ist für mich eine gnostische Disziplin⁴⁷“.

Joseph Beuys, an important artist in the second half of the 20th century, considered that self-portrait was the best way for regaining his moral balance. His traumatic experience caused by the plane crash during the Second World War, the dismissal from the Academy of Arts in Düsseldorf in 1972 and so on, determined him to find his refuge in art⁴⁸ which was considered to be a therapeutic form⁴⁹, a way to overcome his psychological crisis. Willem de Kooning, one of the most important Abstract Expressionist painters, suffered from Alzheimer's disease at the age of 70 and afterwards the artist was no longer able to work, being addicted to alcohol and drugs⁵⁰. After he met his ex-wife⁵¹ after a long breakup which lasted 21 years, he started painting again by using bright colours and harmonic graphics⁵² which were totally different from his artistic style prior to his disease. There are some self-portraits since his cognitive decline which reflect an existential fear expressed by his grotesque facial features. Anyway, the artistic creation was for the artist a silent confident, helping him to free himself from fears, depression and embarrassment.

Maria Lassnig painted various unconventional self-portraits with her eyes closed⁵³ as a continuous search for her existential condition and identity, the artist proving a strong interest for monologue, self-enthusiasm, self-observation and introspection. Self-portrayal was not for her just a simple

⁴⁷ „Painting is for me a way of surviving! Painting is for me a gnostic discipline.“ *Ibidem*, p. 176, apud Dolf Lindner, *Rudolf Hausner Catalogue*, Dortmund, 1982, p. 41.

⁴⁸ Volker Harlan, *What is Art?: Conversation with Joseph Beuys. Paperback – 16 Mar 2007* by Joseph Beuys, <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/What-Art-Conversation-Joseph-Beuys/dp/1905570074>> (22.08.2016, 00:11).

⁴⁹ Matthew Biro, *The Arts of Joseph Beuys*, 2nd Volume, 2nd Issue, Winter 1995 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0002.203/--arts-of-joseph-beuys?rgn=main;view=fulltext>> (31.05.2016, 01:35).

⁵⁰ Jerry Carroll, *Apex or decline? / The great painter Willem de Kooning has Alzheimer's disease. As a major new show opens at Sfnoma, debate continues over the quality of his late work*, 01.10.1995.

<<http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/APEX-OR-DECLINE-The-great-painter-Willem-de-3022569.php>> 01.10.1995 (23.08.2016, 00:18).

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Gilda Williams, *How Embarrassing!*, 04.07.2016, Tate Etc. issue 37: Summer 2016 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/how-embarrassing>> (23.08.2016, 00:20).

reflective process, but also a way to face her own feelings and thoughts she was not conscious of ⁵⁴.

William Utermohlen's self-portraits reveal the evolution of Alzheimer's disease⁵⁵, characterized by the gradual loss of cognitive and perceptual capacity expressed by the distortion of his physical traits. His *Self-portrait* since 1967⁵⁶ reveals fine features, big fearful sad eyes which betray sensitivity, a fragile physical and mental structure, predicting the emergence of his disease which severely affected his mental health.

His *Self-portrait with easel (yellow and green)* since 1996⁵⁷ marks the onset of his disease which can be easily noticed in the usage of strong colours which seem like a "roar", like a mute cry of a human being who is steadily heading to a new reality. The white cornea, which is highlighted very well by the yellow ochre skin becomes aggressive and bizarre and his threatening look betrays an inner suffering caused by the cruel illness. The rectangular shape of the easel becomes the symbol of his social and emotional isolation from the outer reality.

His self-portrait since 2000 entitled *Head I*⁵⁸ shows an advanced degree of disease, expressed by the distortion of his facial features which is so high that this artwork is at the boundary between figurative and abstract style. His features have become rather echoes or memories of his anatomical forms which were previously represented in such a rational manner. The lack of eyes also symbolizes the destruction of his last connection to reality, being a sign of psychological trauma.

An interesting self-portrait belongs to Syd (Roger) Barrett, the founder of the psychedelic rock band *Pink Floyd*. Less known for his artworks, he started painting more especially after he left the band in 1968⁵⁹ due to his diagnosis of schizophrenia because of drug abuse.

⁵⁴ Simone Iris Riehle, *op.cit.*, p.153, apud Christa Murken. *Maria Lassnig. Ihr Leben und ihr malerisches Werk. Ihre kunstgeschichtliche Stellung in der Malerei des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Herzogenrath, 1990, p. 308.

⁵⁵ Denise Grady, *Self-Portraits Chronicle a Descent Into Alzheimer's*, 24.10.2006 <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/24/health/24alz.html?_r=0> (22.02, 11:22).

⁵⁶ *Self-Portraits of an Artist with Alzheimers*, <<http://jeffwongdesign.com/2012/02/self-portraits-of-an-artist-with-alzheimers/>> 07.02.2012 (02.08.2016, 20:22).

⁵⁷ MIT TR Editors, *Dementia: The Self-Portraits of William Utermohlen* <<https://www.technologyreview.com/s/429486/dementia-the-self-portraits-of-william-utermohlen/>> 05.10.2012(02.08.2016, 20:22).

⁵⁸ *Self-Portraits of an artist with Alzheimers* <<http://jeffwongdesign.com/2012/02/self-portraits-of-an-artist-with-alzheimers/>> 07.02.2012 (02.08.2016, 20:22).

⁵⁹ Biography.com Editors, *Syd Barrett Biography. Guitarist, Musician (1946–2006)*, A&E Television Networks Press, 06.07.2016 <<http://www.biography.com/people/syd-barrett-20930217#later-career>> (23.08.2016,00:43).

His *self-portrait* since 1961-1962⁶⁰ is located in a dark rectangular form which seems to be a shield which protects him against the stormy atmosphere and the luminosity contrast creates a strong inner tension. This composition betrays the presence of a turbulent landscape which threatens the existence of the authorial identity that is balanced by the rectangular shape. This apocalyptic image emphasised also by the strongly defined shadows denotes an introverted person according to his own statement: "I don't think I'm easy to talk about. I've got a very irregular head. And I'm not anything that you think I am anyway." His obscure and dramatic look foresees his disappearance from the musical career in 1968 because of his pathological condition which severely affected his mind, isolating him from the others.

The famous song entitled *Wish you were here*, which is dedicated to Syd Barrett, expresses an indescribable sadness and compassion for the tragedy he suffered. The lyrics of this song highlights his complex personality, the dramatic atmosphere which predicts the unavoidable stage of his disease. The low tones of the song and the sad lyrics, which evoke an irreversible lack⁶¹, create a depressing atmosphere which carries into its depths the traces of a nostalgia and of an incurable melancholy. The metaphors, which often appear in the lyrics of this song, are designed to compare Syd's two lifestyles: before and after his pathological condition, defined through his double identity; thus he gave up to his scene name of Syd after leaving the band, recognizing only his baptismal name, *Roger*⁶².

Aniela Firon's self-portraits, whose painting style belongs to Neo-expressionism movement, betray emotional problems under whose influence she committed suicide. One can notice in her *Self-portraits* since 1984⁶³ the prevalence of an aggressive line which decomposes her face, outlining her inner wounds. Her sickening look reveals an inner emptiness and the raised hand in the background, which doesn't seem to belong to her because of its forced position, is a symbol of a mute cry which foresees an existential abyss.

⁶⁰ *Rare Photos Of Pink Floyd's Creative Genius Syd Barrett* <<http://www.nme.com/photos/unseen-and-rare-photos-of-pink-floyds-lunatic-genius-syd-barrett/209240#/photo/13>> (05.08.2016, 20:16).

⁶¹ Pierpaolo Ceccherini, *Wish you were here - Pink floyd - Lyrics - Meaning*, 28.06.2016
<<http://www.planckmachine.com/wish-you-were-here-pink-floyd-lyrics-meaning/>>
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⁶² SBA, *The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story* <<http://sydbarrett.net/the-pink-floyd-and-syd-barrett-story/>> 18.02.2003 (18.08.2016, 02:41). 18.02.2003 (18.08.2016, 02:41).

⁶³ *Arta. Feminisms. Portrete de artist, Expoziții în România, Expoziții internaționale, Eseuri, Interviuuri, Cronică de carte, Infô art*, no. 11 / 2014, Visual Arts Magazine, Union of Visual Artists from Romania (editor), Magda Cârnci (editor in chief), Bucharest, fig. no. 3, p.37.

The look of another *self-portrait*⁶⁴ since the same year expresses a state of restlessness and anxiety highlighted by the descending lines and the vibrating brushstrokes from the background which are the symbol of despair and suffering. The red bruises are similar to some blood traits and the yellow ones are the expression of a hidden suffering.

Another *Self-representation*⁶⁵ also since the same year is the very embodiment of an incurable pain expressed by her red eyes whose dramatic expression breaks any contact with the surrounding reality, revealing a serious depression.

Ion Țuculescu is one of the best examples of artists who refused to accept the communism political requirements⁶⁶. His expressionist works⁶⁷ which are a mixture between figurative and abstract, between traditional and modern style⁶⁸ reveal his inner world⁶⁹, his own thoughts, feelings and tensions, according to his confession: „Am vrut să las oamenilor o operă plină de dragoste de viață – am vrut să calc peste toate tristețile, peste toate neliniștile sufletului meu, dar n-am putut. [...] Ce aş putea spune oamenilor pentru a-i convinge că viața e frumoasă, veselă și fericită? Ca să fiu sincer, în viața de toate zilele nu mai pot trăi fericirea. Nu mai trăiesc decât în artă, în pictură și mai ales în muzică.”⁷⁰

A psychic tension is betrayed by his obsession for eyes which become a leitmotif in his artworks and can be noticed in some of his self-portraits; for example in his *Self-portrait with leaf*⁷¹ the leaves have the shape of eyes and even his left eye is covered with a leaf which makes a reference to his sensitive personality who needs protection. One can notice the presence of both green and dead leaves which express the transition from

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ Cf. Magda Cârnci, *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-1989*, 2nd Edition, Ioana Aneci (editor), *Polirom Press*, Iași, 2013, p. 30.

⁶⁷ Idem, *Ion Țuculescu*, Vasile Florea (editor), *Meridiane Press*, Sibiu, 1984, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 32-33.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁷⁰ „I wanted to I leave people an artwork full of life - I wanted to get over all sadnesses, over all anxieties of my soul, but I couldn't. [...] What can I tell people to persuade them that life is beautiful, cheerful and happy? To be honest, in my everyday life I cannot live happiness anymore. I only live in art, especially in painting and in music.” Maria Morariu, *Să calc peste toate tristețile*, *Literatura de azi* Online Magazine, Union of Visual Artists from Romania, 19.05.2016 <<http://www.literaturadeazi.ro/panoramic/sa-calc-peste-toate-tristetile>> (26.05.2016, 09:58).

⁷¹ Painting Collection. Ion Țuculescu. *Autoportret cu frunză*, <<http://www.muzeuldeartacraiova.ro/index.php/colectia/pictura/ion-tuculescu/18-autoportret-cu-frunza>>, data provided by the Art Museum, Craiova (10.05.2016, 18:56).

youth to maturity and from life to death; thus the artist invites the viewer to a moment of meditation at the ephemerality of life.

Another interesting self-portrait is *Self-portrait on yellow background* (figure no. 1) where the presence of the eye motif can be easily noticed; besides, the shape of the artist's body can be associated with a two handle cooking pot since Medieval Period (figure no. 2).

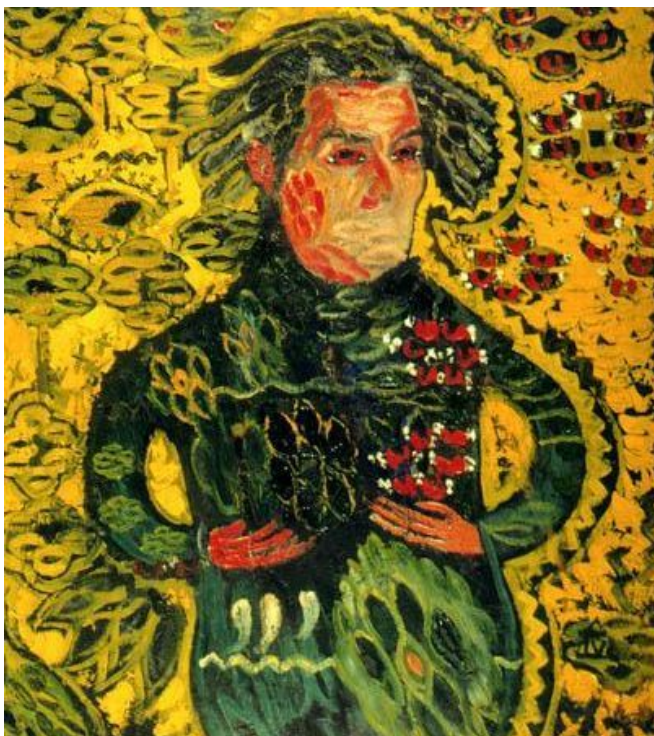


Fig.1 Ion Țuculescu, *Self-portrait on yellow background*

Cooking pot is basically a household object which passed the test of time for thousands of years. In Middle Ages it was for people more than just an indispensable object in the household, symbolizing the sense of security, as it met two basic needs – obtaining cooked food and socializing⁷² with the others. It can be concluded that Țuculescu expressed a subliminal need for regaining balance, psychic security and peace of mind fulfilled through visual language, shape and colour.

⁷² Omeka, *Cooking Pot*

<<https://medievallondon.ace.fordham.edu/collections/show/6>> (22.04.2018, 14:27).



Fig. 2 *Cooking pot*, Anonymous, 1200 – 1250

Therefore, Țuculescu's artworks generally speaking are the expression of the intellectual's great pain who is misunderstood by the others. His opposition to Classicism is distinguished by essentializing the plastic motifs which mediated the discovery of his inner truth.

Self-portrait as a form of therapy is also practised by mentally ill people who do not have any artistic education, and now the question is whether there is any difference between artists' self-portraits with mental disorders and ordinary people's self-portraits who also have mental disorders, or whether the pathological state simply annihilates the aesthetic sense which was systematically educated in the spirit of art and beauty. In the book *Selbstbilder in Psychose und Kunst. Portraitgestaltung als Spiegel psychischer Befindlichkeit* is to be found a woman's interesting self-portrait⁷³ with Paranoid Schizophrenia who is facing her own identity⁷⁴. The annihilation of eyes plays a major role, because this express a psychological disorder betrayed by her tensioned and expressive crossed hands which become a symbol of self-defense. Her open mouth is similar to a (moral)

⁷³ *Selbstbilder in Psychose und Kunst. Portraitgestaltung als Spiegel psychischer Befindlichkeit*, Flora Gräfin von Spreti, Hans Förstl, Karolina Breindl, Philipp Martius (editors), Akademischer Press, München, 2001, p. 127.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, pp.127-129.

wound which could be healed through art therapy only if some aspects of the unconsciousness are brought to light.

There are some interesting art-therapeutical activities based on self-knowledge which are organized also for children⁷⁵ whose purpose is to discover concealed sufferings, as one can notice in a self-portrait of a child who had a heart surgery⁷⁶ which is to be found in the article entitled „Das bin ich. Selbstporträt mit Zuckerkreide”. It is entitled *I'm playing even in misery* and reveals a double ego expressed both through the form of his big dark shadow which signifies disease and suffering and through the form of the bird above his head which signifies his desire to get rid of illness; it is therefore a double self-portrait. There is no emphasis on child's facial expression but on the quintessence of his soul experience. In this case self-portrait plays a therapeutic role by annihilating psychosomatic disorders through the exposure and awareness of the problem and then by activating human being's existing resources in order to reevaluate certain fears and thoughts as well as to gain moral balance⁷⁷.

In Constantin Enăchescu's album entitled *Artă și nebunie. Universul plastic al iraționalului* there is a teenager's self-portrait⁷⁸ aged 19 years old with schizoid personality disorder⁷⁹ whose family problems have been a real impediment for the natural development of his personality. His strange facial expression and also the weird characters from the background reveal a tensioned atmosphere highlighted by the teenager's wide open, scared and bizarre eyes. His cry for help, his prematurely aged and cadaverous face, his harsh facial features and also his dark red eyes irises betray a great suffering, fear, depression, weakness, constraint, isolation and mistrust in himself.

In the same album there are some self-portraits who belong to a woman aged 35 with Bipolar disorder (Manic Depression)⁸⁰. One of her self-portraits was painted during a Manic episode whose symptoms of sexual hyperactivity⁸¹ are symbolized by her weird eyes, by her chaotic hair, by the enormous flower positioned on the top of her head and also by the warm and aggressive colours of her face. Her facial expression betray a deep pain, a

⁷⁵ Constanze Kirchner, „Das bin ich. Selbstporträt mit Zuckerkreide”, *Kunst + Unterricht. Selbstbegegnung im Bild*, no. 242, 2000: 36-38.

⁷⁶ Mijam Mathar, „Selbsterleben und Krankheitserleben. Zeichnungen herzkranker Kinder”, *Kunst + Unterricht. Selbstbegegnung im Bild*, no. 246/247, 2000: 77-78.

⁷⁷ Dagmar Wohler, *Künstlerisch-therapeutische Prozess Erfahrung A3 Module*, Master Studies, Art Therapy, Alanus Hochschule für Kunst und Gesellschaft, Alfter, Bonn, 2015, Course.

⁷⁸ Constantin Enăchescu, *Artă și nebunie. Universul plastic al iraționalului*, Noi Media Print Press, Bucharest, 2006, fig. no. 49, p. 53.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 52-53

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p.68.

⁸¹ Alina Mandragiu, *Psihoza maniaco-depresivă (tulburarea bipolară)*, 09.02.2007 <<http://www.emedonline.ro/afectiuni/view.article.php/c6/71/p1>> (03.09.2016, 12:17).

lack of moral balance and the overly long hair generates a suffocating and overwhelming atmosphere. The absence of neck is the expression of an insecurity state of mind.

Another self-portrait⁸² who belong to the same patient was painted during a Manic Depression episode expressed by the combination of warm colors specific to the Manic type, with cold and dark colors specific to Melancholic Depression type. Her enormous hair is richer in this composition in comparison to the previous one where it's only suggested through some curved lines. The obsessive and nervous reiteration of the oval forms announces the occurrence of depression characterized by anxiety and apathy⁸³ which isolates her in another reality; the vivid colours are specific to the Manic type whose symptoms are opposite to Depression, namely: insomnia, irritation, disinhibition etc.⁸⁴. Her look betrays some melancholic personality traits, since her eyelashes which are absent in the previous composition, are drawn in this composition through some nervous lines which are the expression of a moral disorder.

Another Self-representation⁸⁵ which is to be found in the same album belongs to a patient with paranoid schizophrenia⁸⁶ whose symptoms consist in visual hallucinations; she paints herself as Ioana d'Arc burning in fire flames, who is also supposed to have suffered from schizophrenia⁸⁷, and the reason for choosing this iconic medieval figure is the desire to express her psychological torture she was suffering from which is nothing but a process of moral purification, of a mental metamorphosis. Her transcendence to another level is symbolized by the blue austere coat, as well as by the yellow halo which circumscribes her face; her red irises which are chromatically connected to the fire flames express her enduring suffering. The patient's face is paradoxically rigid, as she does not show any frown and the bizarre gaze and red eyes reveal a strong inner tension.

Therefore, self-portrait is a direct way of accessing one's inner universe, it plays a therapeutic role whose goal is self-confrontation by discovering some inner conflicts, fears or thoughts and solving them.

⁸² Constantin Enăchescu, *op.cit.*, fig. no. 67 a, p. 70.

⁸³ Psiho Blue, *Psihoterapie si psihologie. Depresia* <<http://www.psihoterapia.eu/psihoterapia-adultului/depresia/>> (03.09.2016, 12:48).

⁸⁴ „8 semne ale psihozei maniaco-depresive” in *BZI Newspaper*, 21.04.2011 <<http://sanatate.bzi.ro/8-semne-ale-psihozei-maniaco-depresive-3109>> (03.09.2016, 13:01).

⁸⁵ Constantin Enăchescu, *op.cit.*, fig. no. 104, p. 95.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

⁸⁷ *Ioana d'Arc, sfântă, eroină națională sau doar o schizofrenică?*, <<http://a1.ro/news/extern/ioana-d-arc-sfanta-eroina-nationala-sau-doar-o-schizofrenica-id2025.html>>, 30.05.2012 (13.07.2016, 10:19).

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Fig. 1 Ion Țuculescu (1910-1962), *Self-portrait on yellow background*, <<https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/401875966725357300/>> (25.04.2018, 08:57).

Fig. 2 *Cooking pot*, Anonymous, 1200 – 1250, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Ailan Olsen, SCA medieval cooking pots

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