

Contemporary Outsider Art

This Section of *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* appears in each issue of the Journal and is dedicated to all forms of creative production born of an intimate and individual urge, often secretive, unbound from the conventional art system rules. Through short descriptions of the Outsider art work of prominent artists and new protagonists often hosted in community mental health services, this Section intends to investigate the latest developments of the contemporary art scene, where the distances between the edge and the centre are becoming more and more vague. Carole Tansella, *Section Editor*

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Unmapped realms: representation of inner mythologies in the creative work of artists with autism

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Humans need myths, not only to identify themselves with their local group, but also with humanity at large (Campbell and Moyers, 2001). Jung formulated the idea of the phylogenetic layer in the psyche of a man, which consists of archetypes whose contents, mainly images, fill this 'collective a priori beneath the personal psyche' (Paraschivescu, 2011). It is known that the origin of a myth can be only explained by understanding them as collections of constant experiences of humanity (Jung, 1966). Therefore, as humans, individuals with autism could relate to similar myths, or create their own, to share their inner world, allowing them to relate with each other's individual experiences (Sharmacharja, 2016). Is it possible that there is a collective unconscious among people with intellectual disability, in this case, autism?

The collective unconscious may consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, thus the myths of all nations are their real exponents (Jung, 2015). The *primordial image* presents an archaic character that strikes concerning mythological motifs, also known as an archetype (Jung, 2015). Every artistic representation has its part of the essence and ideology of an artist by itself, and a certain type of archetypal representations (Sharmacharja, 2016). Similar concepts, such as *perennial philosophy*, also suggest the existence of a universal set of truths and values common to all peoples and cultures (Almendro, 2007), including those with difficulties or disabilities. This paper looks over the work of four artists with autism to understand their inner worlds and mythologies.

The artists considered in this paper are individuals who tend to represent existent myths, thematics and characters as well as artists that are inclined to create their mythologies. The selected artwork varies from groups or individual activities provided by an artist, art activities, non-artist led and self-initiated art activities.

The Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS) was used to analyse drawing elements, as it is considered reliable in the field (Gantt and Tabone, 1998). Some other aesthetic elements were observed in the artwork made by individuals with autism, from researchers such as Colin Rhodes, Graciela García and Roger Cardinal. Drawings from George Weidener, Gregory Blackstock, Sinichi Sawada and Fatima Calderon were analysed. The drawings were obtained from the public collection ABCD Art Brut and from the data collection realised at the Day Center of La Puebla de Cazalla, Spain. Ethical approval has been obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee before this analysis.

Artwork made by people with autism is constantly fascinating because of their particular intimate content and the devotion to their work. One can identify a psychic confinement characteristic of the autistic condition (Cardinal, 2009). Back in the days, 'autism' was a symptom of schizophrenia, it was an inclination to divorce oneself from reality (Bleuler, 1950). Nowadays, the autism condition is still considered a disadvantage, although it is no longer a psychotic condition. However, this rich neurodiversity could be the origin of the production of these inner worlds and mythologies.

The productions made by people with autism have been ignored and marginalised, similarly to the art by other neurodiverse populations. Most of the time, when they are recognised, their condition tends to be eclipsed or simply analysed from the diagnosis perspective. The perception of their art has constantly included assumptions about autism, which generates a limitation to its analysis, and misleads the spectators about the experiences of individuals with autism (Barber-Stetson, 2017). A better approach to this would be to celebrate their art, appreciating neurodiversity.

The mental path of individuals with autism can be interpreted using a scale. According to the DSM-5, the autistic spectrum disorder can be defined as restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This characteristic can be observed in different parts of the life of people with autism, including the art they produce.

Individuals under autistic spectrum disorder tend to have an excessive adherence to their routines and may also have a restricted pattern of behaviour that manifests a resistance to change (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Their artwork reflects this by sticking to the same topics and techniques. Moreover, these repetitive routines and behaviours may

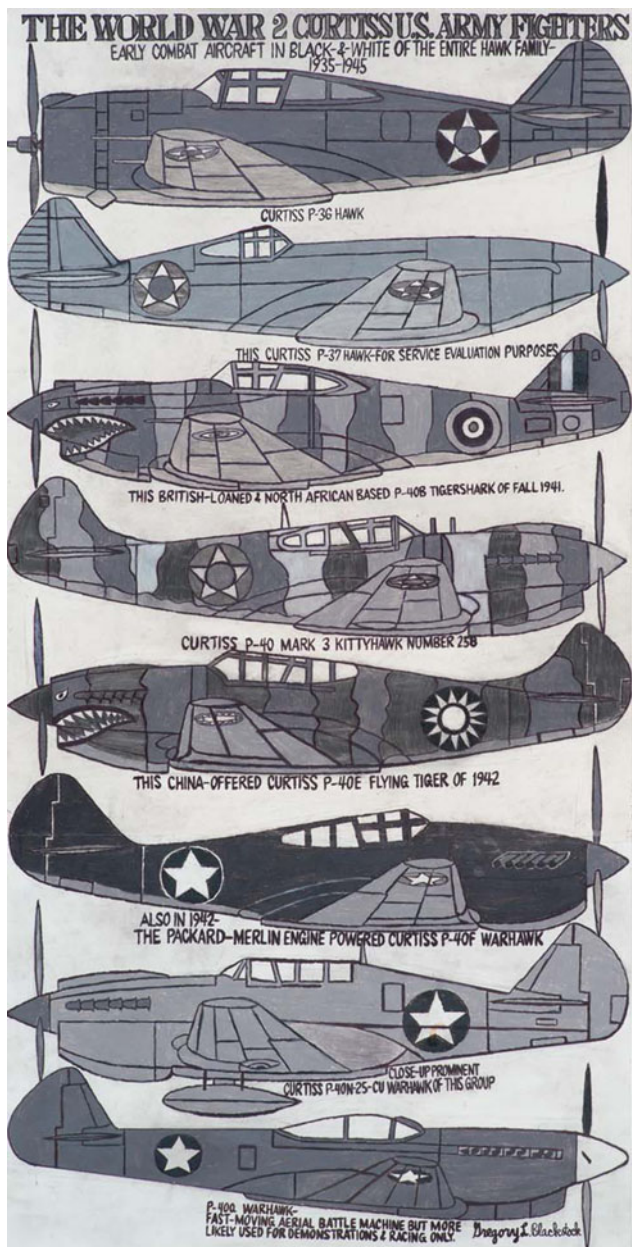


Fig. 2. The World War II cortissus army fighters, Gregory Blackstock from ABCD Art Brut Collection.

complete- common the earth's huge tropical far -&- Middle East birds spectaculars, only found in Africa -& - Asia' are common to read on his artwork.

His work is an example of how individuals with autism have a tendency to classify things and repeat patterns, even in their artwork. The repetition could be observed on the subjects he depicts, but also his compositions, the use of colour, and the elements of his drawings. It could suggest that artwork made by this population can ease the development of their particular signature.

Fatima Calderon started drawing when she was around 15 years old. Her artwork is self-initiated, and for years she has been supported by artists and facilitators in the day centre that she has been attending for several years in La Puebla de Cazalla, Sevilla, Spain.

All her characters have 'Marco' as their first name; she describes them all with a cobalt blue and black appearance. The way she represents the structure of her creations is crucial for

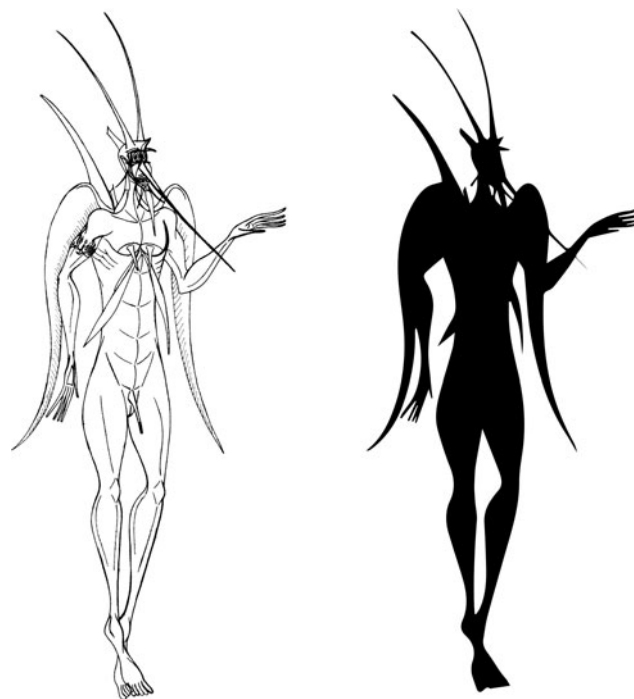


Fig. 3. Marco Polo Hernamz (MariuMZMarckus).



Fig. 4. Sinichi Sawada sculptures from ABCD Art Brut Collection.

understanding the complexity of the aesthetics of her drawings. She tends to fill the whole body with black colour, which makes it difficult to appreciate the complex anatomy of the character apparent before she takes this step (see above figure). Additionally, the characters represented by Fatima not only show an aesthetic approach, but also have a particular story behind them, like 'Marco Polo Hernamz (MariuMZMarckus)':

'His pseudonym is very long and his name is MariuMZMarckus. He is Marck's older brother and they live in the city of Granada, mainly in the Generalife palace next to the Alambra, he works crafts related to the Muslim and Islamic world. MariuMZMarkus also goes with his brother Marck to the nudist beach of La Herradura to enjoy a few days of rest and they have a great time, they love each other'.

The characters created by Fatima are related, and are classified by different first and last names. Her creations remind of mythological stories and characters because of how she describes them and how they relate with others. There is a misconception associated with autism, generally perceived as characterised by rigid

thinking and restricted interests. This can lead to the idea that people with autism normally are attached to what is in their environment and lack creativity. Fatima's work refutes this, offering a prominent example of these inner mythologies with her vast creativity.

Sinichi Sawada's work is a never-ending cycle full of constant repetitions. Mantras and tribal percussion enable individuals to meditate or reach the trance state (García, 2012). For Jung, repetition was an association with a primitive pattern through which we come into contact with the collective unconscious (Jung, 1966). Repetition is a recurrent element observed on artwork from outsider artists, permeating through the materials they use, the elements, thematics and compositions in their work.

He was born in 1987 in Shiga, Japan; Sawada is diagnosed with autism and rarely speaks. He creates fantastical clay beings such as daemons, reptilian beasts and ocean creatures (Sharmacharja, 2016). Repetition is observed in his work in the creation of very similar creatures, using his technique of filling all of them with spikes. The shapes of the creatures and compositions have a particular signature.

The work of Sawada is an example of people creating from the inner creative impulse and his own mythologies, which don't have a direct style or thematic relation with Japanese culture. His artwork resembles the roots of the meaning of the magical relation between man and clay, where it is known that clay was used to insufflate life (Amiran, 1962). Despite his congenital handicap and his speaking difficulties, his work is loaded with energy and can communicate his inner world completely. His mythology is not only part of his thoughts, but also he metaphorically insufflated life into them through clay. This is reminiscent of the way ancient cultures used to give form to their beliefs (Kakar, 1982).

The artists explored in this paper have shown their inner world through art; there are plenty of other cases where people with autism share their creativity by plastering it with different techniques. These archetypal practices could be linked to therapeutic purposes, but could also have deeper connections with routes of ancient ways of thinking, by channelling the inner impulses of creative manifestations (Jung, 2015).

Art has the particularity of making us perceive social conditions, through the eyes of a particular individual's experience (Potash *et al.*, 2018). This generates a relation with the motivations and instincts that have moved humanity and have taken different forms in different nations. If humans recourse to myths and stories to understand each other and their reality, it could be possible that people with autism, for whom it's difficult to connect with the outside world, could more frequently make use of such creative resources.

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