

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*

'Animals portrayed as princes': the ballpoint-pen drawings of Jaime Fernandes

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Chaos is merely order waiting to be deciphered.

José Saramago, 2002

Kandinsky once argued that the objective was a projection of something internal. Asserting that 'art stands above nature', he also asserts that it emerges from internal necessity.

George Boas, 1966

An artwork comes neither from health nor sickness, but from its creator's formative skill, which is rooted in the whole personality, regardless of sickness or health.

Hans Prinzhorn, 1922

The past of mental institutions is made up of their patients' life stories. During their internment, some patients revealed themselves to be artists. Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930) and Martin Ramirez (1865–1963) are examples of this creative drive that occurred during their confinement in psychiatric hospitals. Their individual biographies are dissimilar and the only common feature they share is that they were both self-taught artists.

Owing to the fact that neither had any academic training, their drawings and paintings strike us as having unusual qualities because of the way they organise and create tensions among the shapes by using lines and colours giving form to the images. Some of the techniques used spontaneously rely on ornamentation and *horror vacui*, involving distortion and the compression of forms. The meanings of their symbols are all too often idiosyncratic. The discovery of such artists' work by *connoisseurs* coming from very different fields led to the establishment of converging aesthetic categories – the art of insane, psychotic art, asylum art, art brut (Kris, 1936; Volmat, 1956; Thèvoz, 1975; Arnheim, 1977; Bowler, 1997; Tansella, 2007).

Some of these artists only revealed their talent when they were already old, as in the case of the Portuguese artist Jaime Fernandes (1899–1969), who was a small crop farmer coming from a village situated deep inside Portugal and which for many years was the site of underground mining for tungsten and tin. When he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, Fernandes was interned for more than three decades (from 1938 to 1969) in the Miguel Bombarda Hospital (1848–2011), the first mental asylum in Portugal located in Lisbon. The first anything known about his life was when the film *Jaime* (1974), directed by António Reis (1927–1991), was made. Without resorting to a linear storyline, the filmmaker presented the subject of his

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Fig.1. Photograph of the artist (1969) and signature both originally published in 'Jornal do Fundão' (January, 1974).

biography by means of juxtaposing the free natural landscapes of the village where Fernandes had been born with the cloistered psychiatric environment and by showing some of his drawings.

From what we are able to gather, Fernandes started drawing quite unexpectedly 4 years before his death.

References were made in his clinical records to the drawings and to the letters he wrote his wife where his handwriting was visually pleasing but devoid of any sense. He worked hard and quickly using any sort of material that came to hand: ballpoint pens and all kinds of paper. None of his known drawings, which have been reproduced in catalogues and belong to private collections are dated or signed; neither are there any notes about them written by others. Fernandes offered his work to the hospital doctors and nurses, and to friends who visited him when he wished to thank them for having brought him gifts of fruit, tobacco, matches, biro pens and paper. There is a tendency in his drawings to conform to a formal order with a propensity for adding faces to his figures, falling back on the subject of 'representing' animals and human figures, some of the latter taking the shape of animals. Similar to children's drawings, Fernandes' drawings are instinctively rational and direct. When taken objectively, the images portray a seemingly ingenuous knowledge of reality where the 'errors in his techniques' help to foster their original artistic quality, although it is in the work involved in the elaborate texture of the drawing that Fernandes shows us his singularity as an 'accidental artist'. His drawings, to use his own words 'animals portrayed as princes', appear to be hieroglyphics, pure artistic signs that generate content, lines, colours and textures without calling upon and imitating any model that might have acted as an example, apart from what he fetched up from his own authorial memory. In being consciously depicted, his figures observe us and question us.



Fig.2. Jaime Fernandes drawing, Untitled, Undated, Ballpoint pen on paper, 25 × 32.6 cm. Collection Dr Fernando Medina (Lisbon, Portugal).

Jaime Fernandes achieving recognition: Exhibitions and collections.

Two exhibitions achieving international acclaim were organised about Jaime Fernandes. The first was held in 1980 by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation exhibiting 74 drawings and publishing an exhibition catalogue. A year later, 51 of the drawings which had been on display at the Gulbenkian Foundation were included in 16th Sao Paulo Biennial called *Arte Incomum* (Bocchini, 1982). In the 20th Fascicle of the *Lausanne Collection d'Art Brut* (Lausanne, Switzerland), Michel Thévoz (1997) wrote an entry about Jaime Fernandes' work. A catalogue *Outsiders: An Exhibition of Art Brut* was published by the art dealer Gérard A. Schreiner (1998) who owned most of Jaime Fernandes' drawings in the 1980s. It included 29 of Jaime Fernandes' drawings together with the work of 16 other well-known outsider artists. Fernandes was also included in the following collections: *Gulbenkian Modern Art Centre* (Lisbon, Portugal), *Collection de L'Art Brut* (Lausanne, Switzerland), the *Outside Art Collection* by Philippe Etemod and Jean-David Mermod (Lausanne, Switzerland), Hannah Rieger (Vienna, Austria), *The Art Brut abcd Collection* by Bruno Decharme (Montreuil, France), the *Frédéric Ledure Collection* (Paris, France) and the Karin and Gerhard Dammann Collection (Tägerwilten, Switzerland).

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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