



**Danguole Regina
Survilaite**

**No great genius was
without a mixture
of insanity.**

*Seneca (Roman
philosopher, IV BC - 65 AD)*

FAMOUS ARTISTS AND MENTAL ILLNESSES

D. R. Survilaite is the chairperson of Club & Co., the first NGO of mental patients and their friends in Lithuania. She graduated from Vilnius University in 1970 and since then has been working as a psychiatrist. Since 1984 she has been the head of the psychiatric male ward, in 1991-2002 lectured in Vilnius University and was teaching doctors in training and psychiatry residents.

Since 2006 she is the head of community psychiatry ward. In 1993 D. R. Survilaite founded the first art therapy studio in a psychiatric hospital in Lithuania. She wrote more than 70 articles on psychosocial rehabilitation, patients' rights, connections between art and psychiatry, art therapy, psychiatric diagnostic from patients' paintings, the expression of mental disorders in art, etc. She is a representative for Lithuania at ECARTe (European Consortium of Art Therapy Education). Since 1993 she is paid more her professional attention for art of mental patients and wrote many articles and papers on this subject.

D. R. Survilaite agreed to write some articles on art and psychiatry for GE Newsletter.

What is patography?

The connection between art and psychiatry had generated much interest among psychiatrists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, as well as artists, art critics and philosophers. Where is the line between genius and madness? How does madness influence art? How has the relationship between art and madness changed throughout the centuries?

These questions were raised more than 2500 years ago in ancient Greece. Plato separated clinical insanity from creative madness and said that creativity is "divine madness", specific for poets and prophets, a gift from the gods. For Aristotle, melancholy was the temperament of the creative artist, and those who became eminent in philosophy, politics, poetry or the arts, as well as many of the great Greek heroes, were of a melancholic temperament. He included Plato and Socrates among these. There could be, he suggested, a touch of mad genius in melancholia, and so melancholy was an enviable condition of the mind.

Medical professions started to show interest in creators' psychopathology in XIX century. In Italy in 1864 Cesare Lombroso published *The Man of Genius (Genio e follia)*, a book which argued

that artistic genius was a form of hereditary insanity. The term pathography was first used about 1899 by the German psychiatrist Paul Julius Möbius, who contributed with several pathographies, including Rousseau, Goethe, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. This term was popularized by famous Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910). Freud used this term to characterize his investigation of the unconscious motivations of Leonardo da Vinci's art. Other famous pathographers were German psychiatrist Karl Theodor Jaspers (1883-1969) and Ernst Kretschmer (1888-1964). According Australian psychiatrist J. A. Schioldann (2003), pathography can be defined as historical biography from a medical, psychological and psychiatric viewpoint. It analyses a single individual's biological heredity, development, personality, life history, and mental and physical pathology, within the socio-cultural context of his/her time, in order to evaluate the impact of these factors upon his/her decision-making, performance and achievements. The pathographical method is applicable to any personality, sick or sound, provided that sufficient biographical sources are available.

Eminent historical and creative individuals have been studied by researching their biographies to see what percentage of them has psychiatric illness. Colin Martindale in 1972 studied 42 English and French poets, and found significant psychiatric illness in 45 % of them. Arnold Ludwig (1992) in a study of 1004 twentieth century artists and writers, found that 74 % of them exhibited psychiatric symptoms at some stage of their lives, which compares with that 32 % for the average (cit. Kenneth Lyen, 2002).

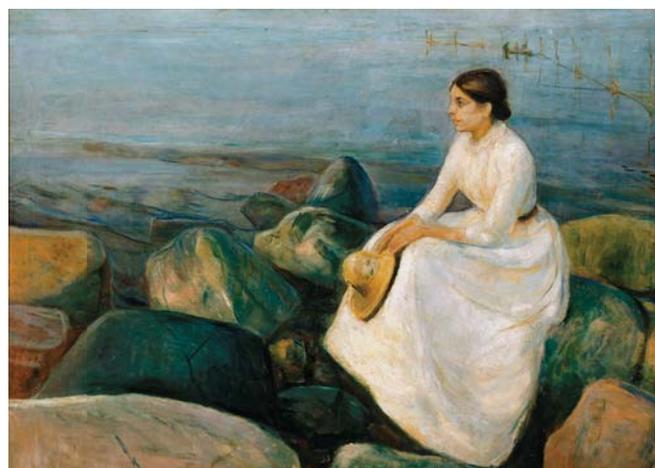
Mentally ill artist – the pearl

*A pearl born in the anguished
labor of the wound.*

Karl Theodor Jaspers

Almost every country has its' artists genius touched by

insanity. It is credibly known that these famous artists had suffered from mental diseases and had been treated in mental hospitals: Edward Munch (Norway), Carl Fredrik Hill and Ernst Josephson (Sweden), James Ensor (Belgium), Van Gogh (Netherlands), Mikhail Vrubel (Russia), Otto Dix and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (Germany), William Blake and Richard Dadd (England), Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (Poland), Camille Claudel (the only woman) (France), Derwent Lees (Australia), etc., etc., etc. It is widely written about suffered from depression artists: Michelangelo (Italy), Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro (Spain), Edgar Dega, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse (France), Marc Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Georgia O'Keeffe (all from



Edvard Munch, "Inger on the beach"



USA, the last one – woman), etc.

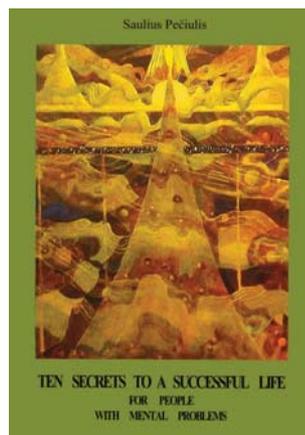
Sometimes the great artists are kindly called not mad, but visionary artists (visionary art is art that purports to transcend the physical world and portray a wider vision of awareness including spiritual or mystical themes, or is based in such experiences).

Very often mental patients used to compare themselves to these great people. For example, I have seen a list of famous people who allegedly suffered from schizophrenia on the wall in one of mental patients' occupational therapy center in Poland. Many user organizations used to publish numerous leaflets with such lists. Yet quite frequently the same famous person seems to suffer from several different mental diseases, depending on which patient organization is publicizing the information. Often this information appears in public records, so it is up to patient organizations to compile those lists. Why not. A number of internet sites provide long lists of famous persons suffering from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, epilepsy, those who committed suicide, are addicted to alcohol, drugs, and "historical persons, who are retrospectively thought to have been autistic". I suppose that very often such diagnostic labels are quite speculative, and sometimes depend on psychiatric school of the researcher.

M. K. Čiurlionis (1875–1911)

Lithuania has its artist genius who suffered from mental disease as well. He is Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis — Lithuania painter, composer, public figure, father of Lithuanian national art (music and fine arts) and one of the pioneers of abstract art movement in Europe.

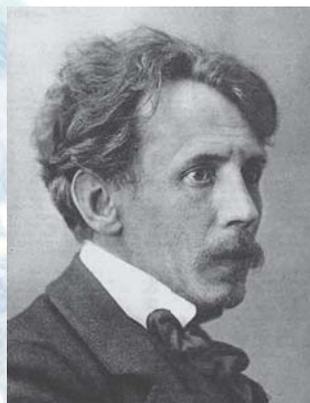
Mental patients in Lithuania used to exploit this fact for their benefit and sometimes for extenuation their often not adequate behavior. User Saulius Pečiulis, a doctor of social science, in 2002 wrote the book *Ten secrets to a successful life for people with mental problems* (also available in English) and used one of the paintings by M. K. Čiurlionis for his front book cover.



I thought it was somewhat pretentious and reproached him with remark, that: yes, Čiurlionis was a mental patient, but not every patient could be Čiurlionis.

This is the 100th death anniversary of the artists and UNESCO has announced this year the year of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis.

M. K. Čiurlionis grew up in Lithuanian town Druskininkai, at a time, when Lithuania was under Tsarist Russia's regime. In 1894–1902 he studied in Warsaw Musical Institute and Leipzig Conservatoire musical com-



Eden (1905).

position. He engaged in painting at the age of 27. In 1902 M. K. Čiurlionis began to attend drawing studio in Warsaw and 1904–1906 studied in the Warsaw School of Fine Arts.

In Warsaw he joined the ranks of the Lithuanian national movement, conducted Lithuanians choirs, took a special interest of Lithuanian folk songs, folklore. Having returned home to Lithuania, Čiurlionis collected pieces of folk art fixed in writing, then harmonized Lithuanian folk songs, drew Lithuanian crosses, took interest in folk legends and oral folklore. Čiurlionis kept relations with Warsaw and Saint Petersburg artists.

His creative work of 1902–1906 period referred to Symbolism, and is characterized by cosmogonist and historiosophic themes, allusions to music (cycles: Funeral Symphony, 1903; Creation of the World, 1905–1906, etc.)

Since 1907 M. K. Čiurlionis painted some cycles of paintings, relying on the synthesis of painting and musical expressions. As M. K. Čiurlionis was both painter and composer we can see a lot of his paintings named after the titles of compositions (Sonata of the sea, Sonata of the spring, etc.). It was widely written he was a synaesthete. Synaesthesia (in Greece syn – joined, aesthesia – sense) – neurologi-

cal rarity, in which two or more senses are connected. For example, music might be "seen" in colours and patterns, taste may be seen in shapes etc. The Russian expressionist artist Vassily Kandinski (1866–1944) was also a synaesthete, in whom musical tones elicited specific colours. He tried to capture on canvass the visual equivalent of a symphonies as well as Čiurlionis.



The Sacrifice (1909)

M. K. Čiurlionis produced his best art works between 1907 and 1909, while living in Vilnius and St. Petersburg. He left some 300 paintings, almost the same number as musical compositions. M. K. Čiurlionis' paintings were loaned to various exhibitions and mostly exhibited at joint shows. The major retrospectives abroad were held in Tokyo (Japan, 1992), at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris and Warsaw (2000), Copenhagen (2007). In last decades his paintings and drawings have been displayed at exhibitions in Japan, France, Italy, Canada,



Serenity (1904–1905)

Spain, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Great Britain, Denmark, Poland and USA.

M. K. Čiurlionis was twice treated in mental hospital and died in it in Poland. The medical case-record is missing. In Lithuanian media and professional publications the fact of his mental illness and treatment is deliberately avoided, although foreign psychiatrists have been interested in the subject of his creativity and mental conditions for a long time and has written extensively on the subject. Some authors called him a visionary artist.

The painting of M. K. Čiurlionis "Serenity" (painted in 1904–1905) was presented as the example of illusion in the Russian handbook of psychiatry (Gilarovsky, 1933). After Čiurlionis death, in 1912–1914 the Russian traveler Gregory Sedov (1877–1914) had arranged the expedition to Frank Jozeph archipelago. The painter Nikolay Pinegin (1883–1940) participated at this expedition and later wrote a book. During this expedition the travelers saw a hill Rubini looking like a hill in the painting mentioned above and named it after Čiurlionis.

It is important that Russian travelers were well educated and knew the paintings by Čiurlionis.

In Lithuania I was the first to analyze the pathography of the famous Lithuanian painter and musician based on his letters and reminiscences of contemporary people and published an article in 2008. I have hypothesized that M. K. Čiurlionis suffered from schizoaffective disorder which was represented by affective disorders (manic and depressive periods, derealization and depersonalization), as well as cognitive disturbances typical for schizophrenia, and acute psychotic symptoms, episodes of katatonia and oneiroid.

I have also noticed that in western countries the diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder is quite rare, more often persons exhibiting similar psychopathology are diagnosed as suffering from bipolar affective disorders. This also expands the limits of this disorder. Also quite



M. K. Čiurlionis by patient Rimtautas O. (2000)

often the opinions of psychiatrists importantly diverge (for example, Vincent Van Gogh was diagnosed with more than 30 disorders by 150 psychiatrists).

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