

VERA FISCHER. PREŽIVJELA



Potresniji od nacističkih logora i njihovih suvremenih verzija samo su arhivi žrtava. U njima leže kolone identifikacijskih listova. Uz crno-bijelu fotografiju navedeni su samo datum i mjesto rođenja, zanimanje, a pri dnu presuda – preživio: da/ne. Raznolika lica snimljena u nekim sretnijim vremenima lišena su ostalih osobina. U logoru, svjedoči Primo Levi, zvali su ih *Die Stücke* – komadi.

Među djelima Vere Fischer bila je slika crnokose žene, modiljanijevski izduljene, izbrisanog oka. Iza njezina, lutki sličnoga lika iz tame se pomalja avetinjski hermafrodit. Naslućuje se da je riječ o autoportretu. Vera se našla među preživjelima, ali je ostala s otvorenom ranom.¹

Rođena je u Zagrebu 1925., u skromnoj židovskoj obitelji. Fischerovima je dodijeljen stan u zgradi namijenjenoj zaposlenicima Paromlina, nedavno razorenog simbola srednjoeuropskoga industrijskog poleta između dva velika rata. „To su one kuće iz kojih sada istjeruju Cigane, dakle, manje otmjeno“, stoji u lakonskoj ispovijedi začinjenoj gorkim humorom. „Vesela pesimistkinja“ zarađivala je kao „tipkačica, zubarski asistent, necanjem mrežica za tržnicu, uređivanjem zidnih novina, uvećanjem fotografija pomoću kvadratića, vođenjem tiskare, novinarstvom, za blagajnom u tiskari, kao telefonistkinja, pomoćna referentkinja za gorivo i mazivo, statističarka, laborantkinja“, a nakon studija kiparstva na Akademiji likovnih umjetnosti postala je „projektanticom velesajmovskih štandova, dizajnericom u tvornici porculana, profesoricom likovnog odgoja na šest osnovnih škola“.²

Egzistencijalno lutanje u mladenačkim godinama nagovijestilo je nestalnu narav umjetničkog rukopisa. U svijetu likovnosti razmjerno je malo autora koji su spremni u potpunosti izmijeniti svoj stil. Za takav suicid valja biti lišen karakterne samoobmane, biti dovoljno žilav i lud. Bez potrebe da se ukorijeni, Fischerova se svakog desetljeća preobražavala, pa su dionice opusa, koji je bujao od 1950-tih do kraja 1980-ih godina, dojmljiv dokaz jugoslavenske zastupljenosti na poligonu velikih umjetničkih pokreta.

¹ Da je riječ o autoportretu, mišljenje je psihoanalitičara dr. Gorana Babića, koji je dao zanimljivo tumačenje brojnih sastavnica opusa preminule umjetnice.

² Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014., str. 17-18.

Vera Fischer bila je dio pametne deziluzionirane mladosti koja je, posvjedočivši ratnoj klaonici, prihvatila egzistencijalizam kao jedinu moguću religiju obezboženog svijeta. U vrijeme kada Giacometti, Fautrier, Richierova, Dubuffet i Wols materijaliziraju kolektivno iskustvo otuđenja, straha i nasilja, Vera Fischer izrađuje žičane skelete ljudi i životinja koje odijeva ranjavim mesom gline, bitumena ili cementa. Egzistencijalistička pobuna protiv nužnosti „samoodređenja“ i grandioznog cilja te žudnja tek za djelatnim bivanjem Fischerovoj je namijenila sudbinu vagabunda i oslobodila je dosadnih paragrafa u tvrdo ukoričenim abecedarijima hrvatske likovnosti. Tih poznih 1950-ih umjetnica istodobno otkriva apstraktnu skulpturu zaglađenih površina i počinje graditi osebujan nadrealistički mikrokozmos. Nadrealistički asamblaž *Oko na limu* nosi ključni motiv Verine ikonografije. Na njemu stakleno oko, prestravljeno i/ili demonizirano, kao da viri kroz ključanicu. Na slikama djevojaka koje će nastati nakon toga, njegova je zastrašujuća prisutnost u odsustvu.

Od 1960-ih godina Vera Fischer se opsesivno posvetila slikanju djevojačkih likova, prijateljica koje su nestale u tvornicama smrti.

U ciklusu *Djevojke*, izloženome 1965., motivi žrtava holokausta povezani su s prizorom seksualnih robinja. Vera im ostavlja samo tragove očiju. To su bića kojima je oduzeta ljudskost, bića svedena na tijelo, objekti. „Nije riječ samo o smrti već o mnoštvu manijačkih pojedinosti, koji treba da pokažu i potvrde da su Židovi, Cigani i Slaveni stoka, stelja, smeće... broj matrikule u zamjenu za ime... bezdušno iskorištavanje leševa, s kojima se postupalo kao s bilo kojom bezličnom sirovinom, od koje se dobiva zubno zlato; vlasi kao tekstilni materijal; pepeo kao gnojivo...“³ Nakon okupacije Zagreba samohrana Latica Fischer pobjegla je s kćeri u Split. Godine 1942. sedamnaestogodišnja Vera ipak je odvedena u fašistički logor Kupari, a sljedeće godine u Kapor na Rabu. Nakon kapitulacije Italije pridružila se partizanima, a kraj rata dočekala je u Glini. Ime tog mjesta je upisano u naslov nevelikog djela koje kao da sažima oganj hrvatskog inferna. *Pogled s glinskog groblja - travanj 1945.* prati upravo taktilno svjedočenje: „Mogla se oćutjeti struja toploga vlažnoga zraka. Nitko nije znao odakle se pojavila ni zašto nas grije. Nije bilo ni dima ni vatre, ni ikakva svjetla, ni mirisa ni zvuka. Uzduh se kretao bez šuma, a toplina je obavijala. Htjeli smo izići. Pružali smo ruke tražeći smjer. Doticali se vršcima prstiju. Prsti su bili osjetljivi i znojni. Vjerojatno nas je ovdje mnogo. Doticali su strano tijelo. Trzali se, šake grčile. Mlačna tjelesa bez reakcije. To je trajalo.“⁴

Slika, nastala 1958., iznimno je djelo hrvatskoga slikarstva iz vremena klimaksa Rothkova apstraktnog ekspresionizma. Vera Fischer ponešto pastoznijim tragovima gradira tonove crvene, otjelovljujući ljudsku dramu - bojom.

Crvena, za oba umjetnika boja vatre i krvi, dominirat će Verinim novim medijem - kolažem. Od 1968. počinje montirati novinske isječke i vlastite minijature. Prateći kritičku liniju pop arta, stvara nekoliko „fresaka“ „slatkog života“ narcističkog društva (*Vita cane*), onkraj kojih stoje nadrealistički kolaži koji asocijativnom metodom povezivanja nepovezivoga sondiraju zonu nesvjesnoga (*Crveno*).⁵

³ Levi, P. *Zar je to čovjek*, Znanje, Zagreb, 1993., str. 227.

⁴ Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014., str. 40.

⁵ Isto, bilješka br.1.

Uporedo s navedenim ostvarenjima, od 1960. rastao je Verin paralelni likovni svijet čistih oblika. Calderovski istanjene plohe organskih kontura i žičane mreže nalik na crteže u prostoru, lišeni simboličkih konotacija, djelovali su poput niša za kiparsku meditaciju. Umjetničina kustosica i biografkinja Branka Hlevnjak, međutim, u jednome od takvih radova - *Sedam cvjetova*, otkriva simultanost melankolije i nadrealističkog humora. Zahvaljujući socijalističkome metalurškom Talu - Željezari Sisak, i produkcijskim uvjetima što ih je ona pružala brojnim kiparima, Vera Fischer je ostvarila nekoliko blistavih javnih spomenika. Uništenjem industrije poharan je i Sisak, a Verina je *Simetrija* prodana kao staro željezo.⁶

U slikarskom vrtu zrele Vere 1970-ih se godina rascvao eros. Uz bujnu floru koja budi asocijaciju na satrozavjetni Eden nastajali su romantizirani motivi putenih ženskih tijela koje umjetnica stvara sve do kraja 1980-ih godina. Stilizirane dojke, bradavice i vulve projekcija su vlastitog libida, ali i moguća otjelovljenja žudnje prema izgubljenome majčinskom okrilju.

Godine 1989. Vera Fischer doživljava životnu preobrazbu. Višegodišnji intimni partner umjetnik Ivan Lesjak naprasno je napušta, a ona usniva Isusa s Davidovom zvijezdom na mjestu srca. Od tog trenutka prodaje gotovo sav svoj opus ne bi li proizvela tisuće križića sa židovskim simbolom koje dijeli tijekom svojih misionarskih pohoda. Iznova je u sebi oživjela aktivistički duh kojim je nekoć radnicima Gradske čistoće dodjeljivala ulogu kustosa, a njujorške *oridinale* - beskućnike preobražavala u heroje ulice. Za razliku od židovskog brata Levija, čije je cijelo biće jecalo za Bogom kojega je morao poreći, Vera je pronašla svoj smisao.

Godine putovanja dovele su je i do pape Ivana Pavla II. Lijepo bi bilo vjerovati da ga je upravo susret s Verom nadahnua da se nekoliko godina kasnije u ime Crkve ispriča zbog zločina nad „hereticima“, ženama, manjinama i Židovima, koje je razriješio „prokletstva“.

Na kraju svojega svjedočanstva iz aušvickog *Lagera* Imre Kertész je zapisao: „Nema te besmislice koja se ne bi mogla doživjeti posve prirodnom, a na mojemu me putu, znam već i to, poput nezaobilazne stupice vreba sreća.“⁷ Ranjena djevojka zavrtjela je *Djevojačko kolo* i ispjevala:

„SREĆA.
ZRAK JE MLAK I MEK.
BEZ UMORA, GLADI, BRIGA I BOLOVA,
I S PRAZONOM GLAVOM
U MLAKOM I MEKOM ZRAKU.“⁸

⁶ Skulptura je ipak spašena zahvaljujući zalaganju djelatnice Narodne knjižnice i čitaonice u Sisku Branke Sešo.

⁷ Kertész, I. *Čovjek bez sudbine*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2003., str. 265.

⁸ Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014., str. 104.

More distressing even than the Nazi camps and their modern-day alternatives are the archives records of the victims filling column after column with personal identification details. Next to the black and white photographs stand only the date and place of birth, occupation and, at the bottom, the status, survived: yes / no. The faces are of people photographed in some happier times. In the camps, writes Primo Levi, they were known only as *Die Stücke*, items.

Among Vera Fischer's works was a picture of a black haired woman, with one eye erased and a body resembling Modigliani's elongated figures. Behind the doll-like figure emerges from the darkness a ghost of a hermaphrodite. One suspects it is a self-portrait. Vera survived, but the wound remained open.¹

The artist was born in Zagreb, in 1925, to a Jewish family of modest means. The Fischers were allotted an apartment in a building that housed the employees of the plant Paromlin, a symbol of mid-European industrial fervour that has recently been pulled down. "It's the houses from which the Gypsies are being driven out now, well, they were not very elegant," says the artist in her brief account, spiked with bitter humour. The "merry pessimist", as she was nicknamed, earned a living as a "typist and a dental assistant, but she was no stranger to jobs such as hand making net bags, editing wall newspapers, enlarging photographs using squares, running a printing outfit, writing for papers, working at a till and as a phone operator, doing office work for a fuel and lubricants firm and as a statistics clerk, lab assistant, etc. After completing the study of sculpture at the Arts Academy, she worked as a "designer of fair stands and china patterns, and taught art at six primary schools."²

Existentialist exploits of youth announced the restlessness and the ever-changing character of the work to come. In art, it is not too common for an artist to abandon completely a developed style and start something entirely different. For this sort of artistic suicide one needs to be impervious to self-delusion, tough and mad to some extent, and free of the need to be held down by any permanent roots. Fischer's

¹ Psychoanalyst Dr. Goran Babić is of the opinion that the work is a self-portrait. He offered an interesting interpretation of the various segments of the late artist's work.

² Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014, pp.17-18

art underwent transformation with each new decade. The wealth and buoyancy of the output from the 1950s to the late 1980s is an impressive testimony of Yugoslavia's participation in and contribution to the major international art movements.

Vera Fischer belonged among the clever but disillusioned youth who, having witnessed the slaughterhouse of war, embraced existentialism as the only possible religion in the growingly godless world. At the time when Giacometti, Fautrier, Richier, Dubuffet and Wols made material the collective experience of alienation, fear and violence, Vera Fischer constructed wire skeletons of people and animals and clothed them in clay, bitumen and cement to suggest the vulnerability of flesh. A form of existentialist rebellion against "self-determination" and lofty goals, and a passion for an active existence meant she was prepared for the fate of a vagabond, thus denying herself the prospect of ending up in boring hard-cover glossaries of Croatian art.

In late 1950s, Fischer discovered abstract sculpture of smooth surfaces and at the same time she began building her characteristic surreal micro cosmos. The surrealist assemblage *Eye on Sheet Metal* contains the key motif in the artist's iconography. The terrified glass eye is a demon lurking, as if through a keyhole. In the later depictions of girls, the horror of the eye is in its absence rather than in its presence.

From 1960s, Fischer was obsessively painting figures of girls, her friends who lost their lives in the death factories.

In the *Girls* series, exhibited in 1965, the motifs of the holocaust victims are intertwined with the notion of sexual slaves. Fischer paints them with only barely discernible eyes. These figures are no longer human; they are reduced to the body, to an object. "It's not only about death but about a multitude of maniacal details which were supposed to be proof that Jews, Gypsies and Slavs are cattle, straw litter, trash... a matriculation number instead of a name.... cruel exploitation of corpses which were handled as characterless material to be used as mere raw material: gold for teeth, hair for textiles, ashes for making fertilizer..."³

³ Levi, P. *Zar je to čovjek*, Znanje, Zagreb, 1993. p. 227

After the occupation of Zagreb, Latica Fischer, a single mother, escaped with her daughter to Split. In 1942, Vera, then a seventeen-year-old girl, was nevertheless transported to the concentration camp in Kupari and, in the following year, to Kapor on the island of Rab. After the capitulation of Italy, she joined the partisans and was to see the end of the war in Glina. Glina is in the title of a smallish work that seems to vividly portray the fires of the Croatian inferno. *View from Glina Cemetery - April 1945* is augmented by an almost tactile testimony: "One could feel the current of warm humid air. No one knew where it came from or why it was warming us. There was no smoke or fire, no light, no smell and no sound. The air moved without a sound, and the warmth was like a shroud. We wanted to get out. We stretched out our arms trying to find direction. Our fingers touched. They were sensitive and sweaty. There must have been a lot of us there. Our fingers touched strange bodies. We shook and our fists clenched. Lukewarm bodies without response. It went on and on."⁴ The painting from 1958 is an exceptional work in Croatian art, coinciding with the peak of Rothko's version of Abstract Expressionism. Using impasto to gradate the tones of red, she portrays human drama with - colour.

Red, the colour of fire and blood, was to dominate in Fischer's new medium - collage. In 1968 she began mounting newspaper clippings onto her own miniature works. In line with the critical thinking of pop art she made several "frescoes" depicting the libertine life of a narcissistic society (*Vita cane*). These works are in clear juxtaposition to her surreal collages filled with associations between things that are normally not associated but probe into the zone of the unconscious. (*Red*).⁵

In addition to the works described so far, from 1960 a parallel pictorial world of pure form began to take root in the artist's imagery. Thin, Calder-like surfaces, limited contours and wire mesh take on the character of drawings in space, escaping any symbolic connotations. They are niches for sculptural meditation. Branka Hlevnjak, the artist's curator and biographer, observes that in the work entitled *Seven Flowers* melancholy and surrealist humour exist side by side. Working, like numerous other sculptors, on the premises of the Socialist metal industry in Sisak, Vera Fischer was given the opportunity to sculpt several amazing public monuments. When the industry collapsed and Sisak, once a prosperous town, encountered general devastation, Fischer's work *Symmetry* was sold as scrap metal.⁶

⁴ Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014, p. 40.

⁵ As interpreted by Dr. Babić

⁶ The sculpture was saved thanks to the efforts of Branka Sešo from the Library and Reading Room in Sisak.

Starting in the 1970s, erotic content pervaded the work of the mature artist. Lush vegetation is evocative of the Garden of Eden, and the romanticized motifs showing sensual female bodies persist as subject matter into the late 1980s. Stylised breasts, nipples and vulvae are not only projections of the artist's own libido but also expressions of the longing for the lost sheltering lap of her mother.

A major break in Fischer's life took place in 1989 when her life partner Ivan Lesjak, also an artist, suddenly abandoned the union. The event brought on a dream of Jesus with the Star of David for a heart. She began selling all her works in order to make thousands of crosses with Jewish symbols that she gave away to people on her missionary trips. Once again, her activism came alive, reminiscent of past projects in which the role of the curator was assigned to the workers of the city's Garbage Collection Department and, on another occasion, to New York's hoboes as street heroes. Unlike her Jewish brother, Levi, whose entire being cried for God whom he denied in the end, Fischer did find meaning in her life.

Years of travel brought her to the Pope, John Paul II. One would like to think that the meeting with the artist may have inspired him to apologise on behalf of the Church for the crimes against "heretics", women, minorities and Jews, thus absolving them of "damnation."

At the end of his testimony from the camp at Auschwitz, Imre Kertész writes: "There is no irrationality that could not be viewed as quite natural, and on my path, I know already, that like an unavoidable trap, happiness is stalking me."⁷ A wounded girl puts into motion *Girls Dancing* singing:

HAPPINESS.
THE AIR IS BALMY AND SOFT.
NO FATIGUE, NO HUNGER, CARE OR PAIN,
THE HEAD IS EMPTY
IN THE BALMY, SOFT AIR.⁸

⁷ Kertész, I. *Čovjek bez sudbine*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2003, p. 265.

⁸ Hlevnjak, B. *Vera Fischer. Od pop arta do misionarstva*, Design Art, Zagreb, 2014, p. 104.



Ptica Bird
 1958.
 metalna konstrukcija, cement
 iron construction, cement
 38x40x30 cm



Oko na limu Eye on Sheet Metal
 1960.
 staklo, lim glass, sheet metal
 77,5x78,3
 MMSU, Rijeka



Pogled s glinskog groblja - travanj 1958.

View from Glina Cemetary - April 1945

1958.

ulje na platnu oil on canvas

50x60 cm



Bez naziva No title
oko around 1960.
obojani lim painted metal
80 x 50 x 40cm



Oblici Shapes
1960.
obojani željezni lim painted metal
88 x 62 x 44 cm
MSU 6221



Sedam cvjetova Seven Flowers

1978.

obojano željezo painted iron

69x13x19; 2 x (46xØ15); 69xØ21,5;

46x8,5x12,5; 68,5xØ24; 69x24,5x10 cm

MSU



Igra sa žičanom mrežom Play with Wire Net

1981.

žičana mreža wire net

40 x 61 x 16 cm

Gliptoteka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti

Glyptotheque of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts



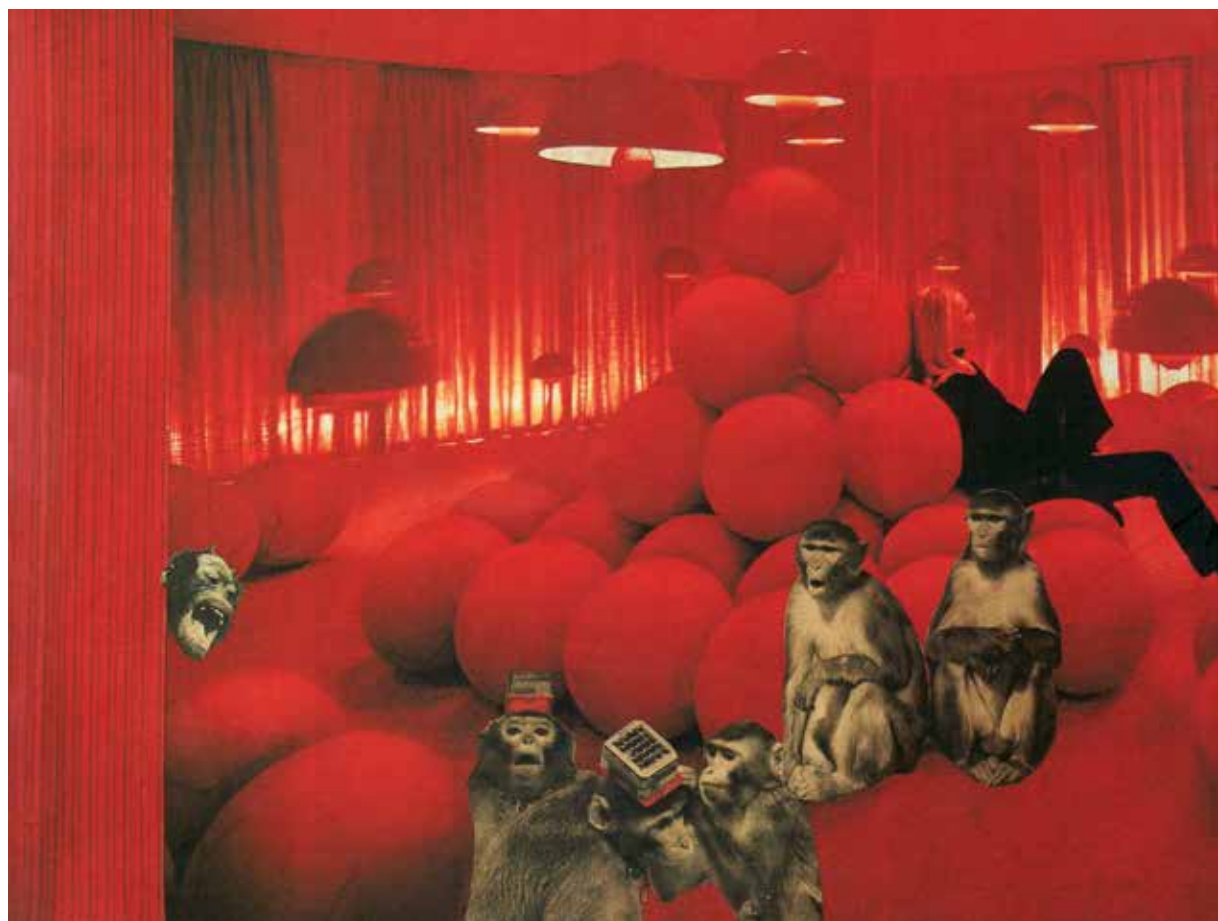
Bez naziva No title
 (?)
 ulje na platnu oil on canvas
 67 x 67 cm



U krug In a Circle
 (?)
 ulje na platnu oil on canvas
 64 x 64 cm



Vita cane
 1968.–1972.
 kolaž collage
 66,5 x 66,3 cm
 MSU, Zagreb



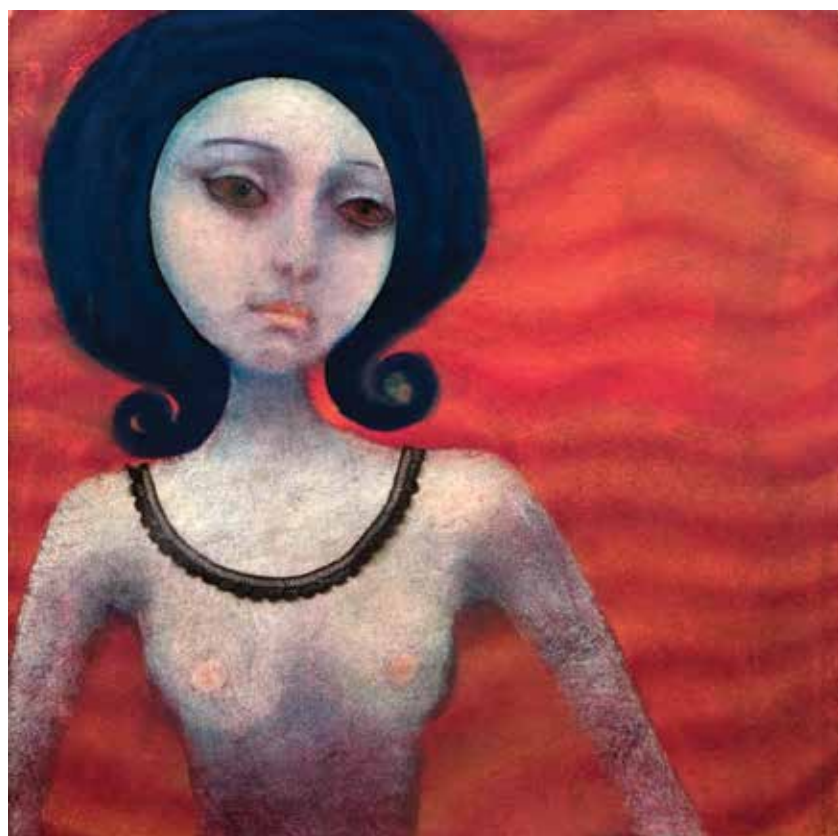
Crveno Red
 1975.
 kolaž collage
 34 x 48,5 cm
 MSU, Zagreb



Natalie
1965.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
49 x 48 cm



Lolita
1965.
ulje na lesonitu oil on panel
28 x 28cm



Striptiz Striptease

1964.

ulje i čipka na lesonitu oil and lace on panel

42 x 42 cm



Želja Desire

1965.

ulje na lesonitu oil on panel

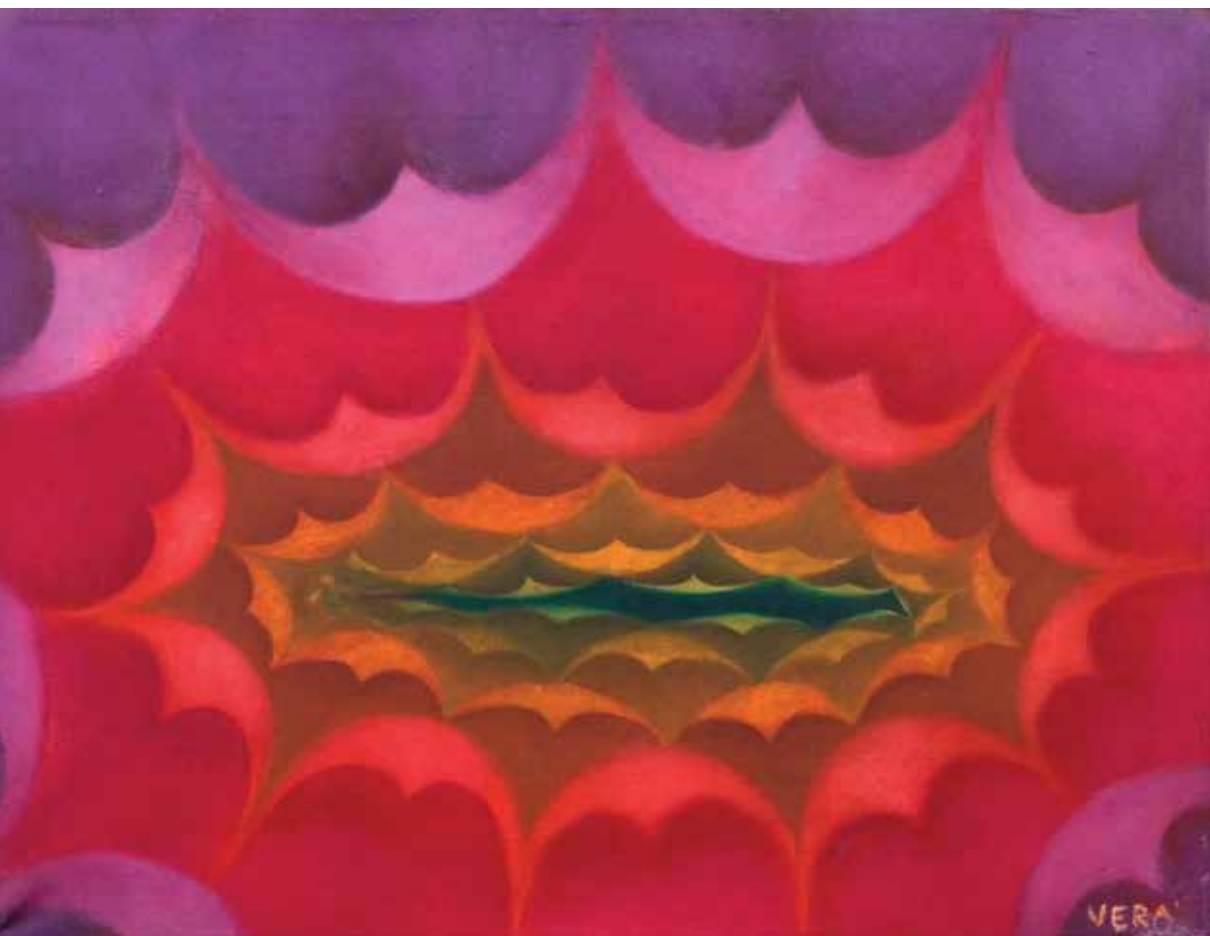
28 x 28 cm



Cvijet 32 Flower 32
1973.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
52 x 62cm



Cvijet 25 Flower 25
1973.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
40 x 60 cm



Trulo II Rotten II
 1973.
 ulje na platnu oil on canvas
 46 x 61 cm



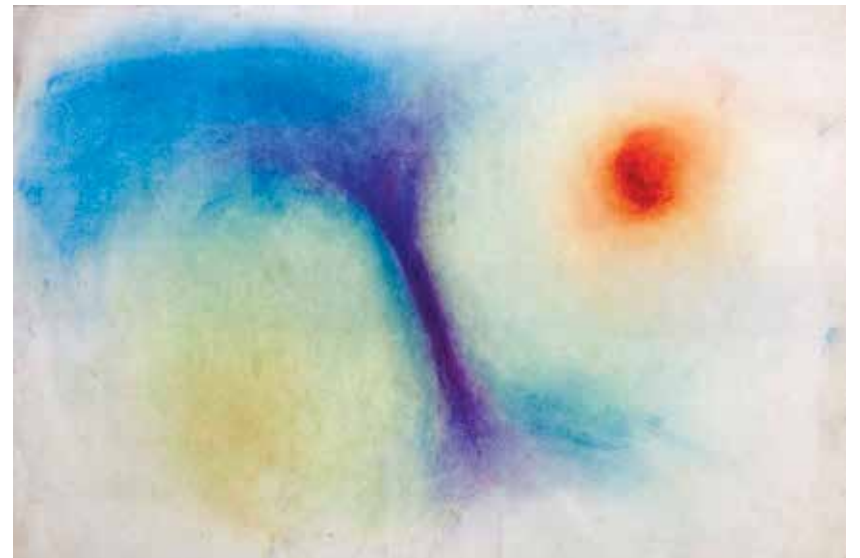
Zeleno protiv crvenog Green versus Red
 1976.
 ulje na platnu oil on canvas
 80 x 90 cm



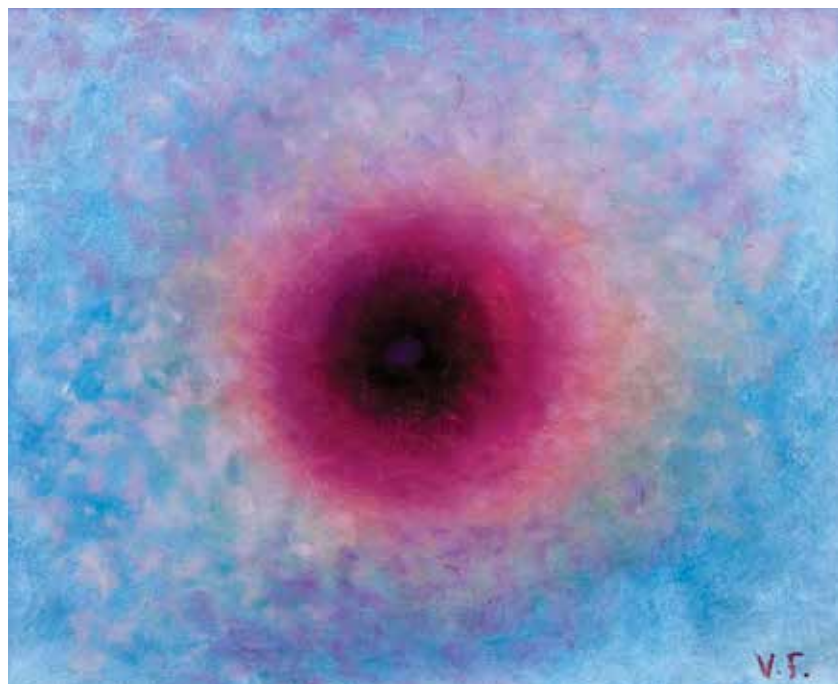
Djevojačko kolo Girls Dancing
oko around 1975.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm



Bez naziva No title
oko around 1975.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
32 x 27 cm



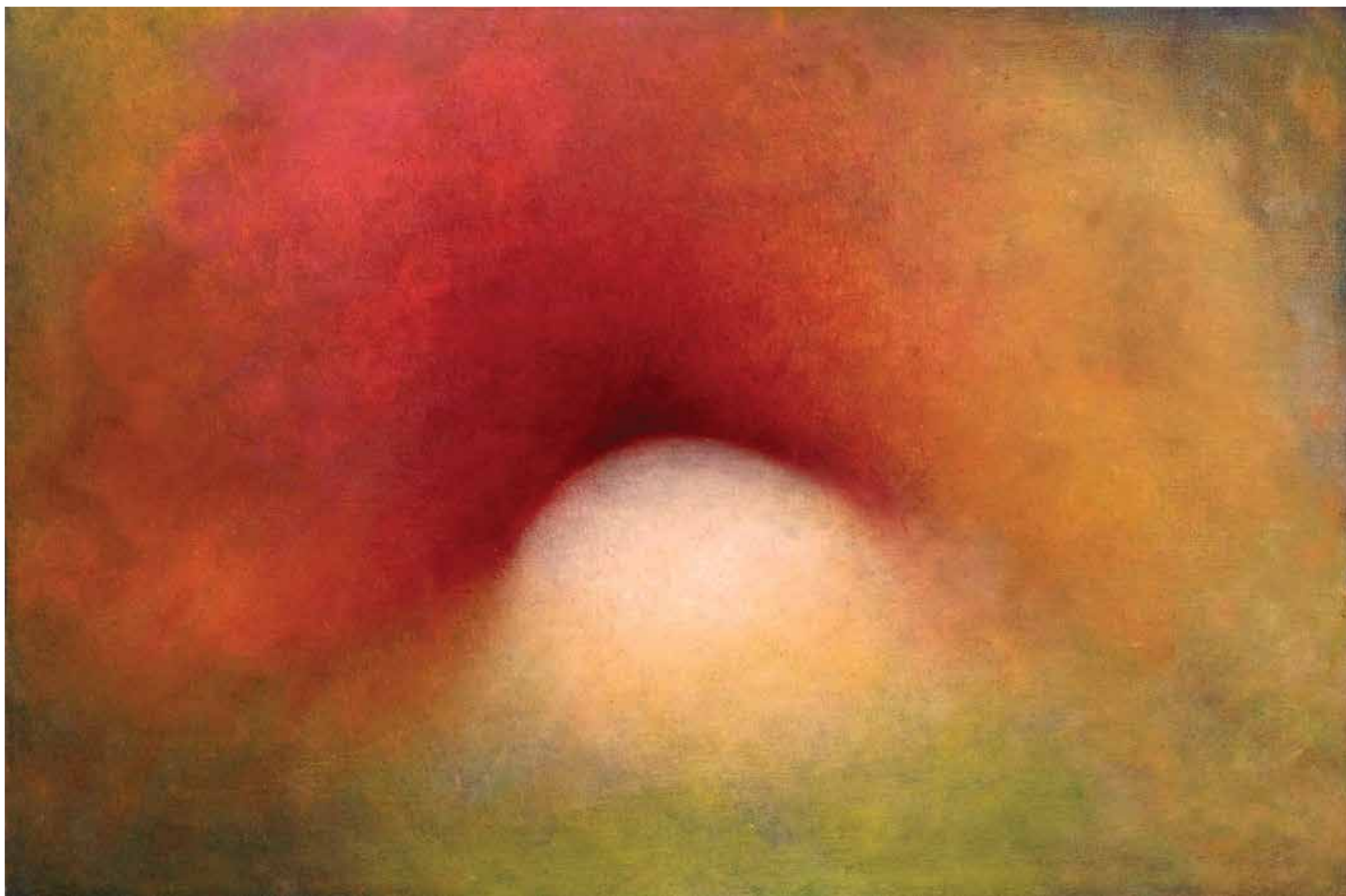
Bez naziva No title
oko around 1975.
pastel na papiru pastel on paper
60 x 60 cm



Bez naziva No title
oko around 1975.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
30 x 40 cm



Linija Line
oko around 1975.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
41 x 33 cm



Bez naziva No title
oko around 1975.
ulje na platnu oil on canvas
40 x 60 cm

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