



## Serbian painters in the Army Medical Corps 1914–1918

### Srpski slikari u ratnom sanitetu 1914–1918

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#### Ključne reči:

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#### Introduction

Searching documents in the history of the Serbian Army Medical Corps reveals their different fortune: while the Serbian-Turkish Wars (1876–1878), and the Serbian-Bulgarian War were described by the hand of Dr. Vladan Đorđević and published in four volumes<sup>1</sup>, a larger part of the archive which could shed more light on the Great War was destroyed either in trains at the town of Kraljevo railway station or at the torches lit at Kosovo and Metohia, during the retreat of the Serbian Army in 1915. Fortunately, there are other sources as memoirs and the medical papers of those who participated in the wars from 1912–1918, gathered and published by Dr. Vlada Stanojević<sup>2</sup>, a book written by a Polish volunteer, Prof. Dr. Ludvig Hirszfild<sup>3</sup>, and Dr. Svetislav Barjaktarović's war diary<sup>4</sup>. Recently, a group of authors has reconstructed the work of the Medical War Corps based on the survived documents and other sources<sup>5,6</sup>. Not long ago, the life and tragic death of Nadežda Petrović, a voluntary nurse in two wars, a great painter, and Serbian heroine was presented<sup>7</sup>. Nadežda's work and death from epidemic typhus fever have been widely known to the general public: an art gallery and an exhibition, a monument, and her portrait on a bank-note all keep the memory of this artist, philanthropist and patriot. However, the triumph of Serbia in the Great War had its price – sufferings of the whole people, including a complete generation of the young Serbian painters\*, Nadežda's colleagues and pupils, whose names are known mainly to the art circles. Yet, most of them were either voluntary

nurses or patients of the Army Medical Corps, or both, from 1914 to 1918. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to make them known to the medical community.

Although with a different human and artistic nature, these young men and women, as a generation, followed the same path. At first, they would attend the art school in Belgrade, lead by Kiril Kutlik, and later, by Rista and Beta Vukanović.

After having learnt the basic drawing, they would switch to Anton Ažbe's preparatory art school in Munich. Later, in the first decade of the 20th century, they would graduate from the Fine Arts Academy in that German city. A touch of French impressionism would make some of them go to Paris in order to get acquainted with this revolutionary style more closely, while others would return to Serbia and try to exercise impressionism while working as school teachers.

Most of them were in the wars 1912–1918: women as the voluntary nurses, men as the war painters or soldiers. Unfortunately, they reached the peak of their art expression in the time of war. On the other hand, places where they were sent to gain strength after a life-threatening disease, the Mediterranean islands of Corfu and Capri, were a paradise for an impressionist's eye, and set the scene for some of the capital achievements of Serbian art. As the war painters, these young men produced drawings and the small size paintings of a documentary value. Contrary to many works of the western art of that time, the scenes which they depict rarely show hopelessness and horror, and never send an anti-war message.

The post-war exhibitions of their paintings in 1919 and 1922 were followed by a tide of expressionist art embraced by yet a younger generation of painters who had little respect for impressionism. Except for a very few, the whole generation of our impressionists by style, and nurses or war painters out of the patriotic obligation, had been forgotten, and brought back from the oblivion decades later<sup>8</sup>.

\* Painters from Serbia and volunteers (V), who took part in the war but escaped from injuries or disease, are listed here: Vladimir Becić (V), Nikola Bešević (V), Bogosav Vojnović Pelikan, Vilko Gecan (V), Miloš Golubović, Oton Iveković (V), Nikola Jeremić, Živojin Lukić, Mihailo Milovanović, Stevan Milisavljević, Dragoljub Pavlović, Branko Popović, Stevan Stanković, Radomir Stevanović, Hristifor Crnilović. Ignjat Job and Todor Švrakić were imprisoned by the Austrian authorities.

The eldest in this generation, Beta Vukanović and Nadežda Petrović had voluntarily joined the Army Medical Corps as nurses much earlier – in the Balkan Wars 1912–1913, while Dragomir Glišić and Petar Ranosović became the first appointed war painters ever<sup>9, 10 †</sup>. Glišić, who was a life-long teacher of art, joined the Danube Division of our Army in 1914. In Thessaloniki, he became a war painter and photographer.

A year later, the first victims of the World War tempest fell: Danica Jovanović was accused of Serbian patriotism, and executed at Petrovaradin Fortress, while Aleksandar-Šaca Jovanović and Cvijeto Job, a volunteer, lost their lives in combat<sup>11–13</sup>.

The disease was stronger than the efforts of the Medical Corps to save Mališa Glišić's and Nadežda Petrović's life, and they both died in 1915. Mališa's studies in Munich were more a fight with poverty, contrary to his Italian period (1911–1912), marked with large, pastously painted landscapes full of light and colour, and exhibited in the Serbian Pavilion at the World Art Show in Rome. This ended in the Balkan wars, where he was a war painter, and in the Great War, which cut his life at the age of 29. The following year, Branko Jevtić, from Belgrade, was killed in a battle near Bitola, leaving only the unfinished paintings to remind us of his talent. Branko Radulović from Mostar, a volunteer in two wars, and one of the best Bosnian and Herzegovinian impressionist painters, died in Skopje. At the end of the war, the elderly Rista Vukanović and seriously wounded, young Kosta Josipović succumbed, too<sup>11–13</sup>.

#### Voluntary nurses in the Army Medical Corps

Beta Vukanović, Nadežda Petrović, Mara Lukić-Jelesić, Ana Marinković, Jelica-Jela Marković, and Natalija Cvetković were voluntary nurses in the Great War.

Beta Vukanović (Bamberg, Germany, 1872–Belgrade, 1972) had attended the art schools in Munich and Paris. Born as Babette Bachmayer, she had married Rista Vukanović, and shared the horrors of the wars from 1912–1945 with her new compatriots. Beta had influenced Serbian art in many ways: as a painter, a teacher and a founder of art societies. As early as in 1900, together with her husband, she founded a School of Fine Arts in Belgrade. The beginnings of Lada Art Society, and the Association of Artists have firmly been connected with her name. Her retrospective exhibition was held in Belgrade in 1958<sup>11–14</sup>.

Nadežda Petrović (Čačak, 1873–Valjevo, 1915) started as a pupil of Kutlik's in Belgrade. Later, she went to Munich (1902) to study under Anton Ažbe and Julius Ekster, and to paint "in a manner that would reappear some years later, in the same place, in the work of Kandinsky and

the Blaue Reiter Expressionists"<sup>13</sup>. Nadežda was ahead of her time, both in her style and in her vigorous efforts to introduce Modernism. She exhibited at the First Yugoslav Art Exhibition in 1904, next to her admired Jakopič, Grohar, Jama and Stern. The following year she founded the first Serbian artists' colony at Sićevo. Finally, she left for Paris (1910–1912), where she met the Fauves, and exhibited at the famous Autumn Salon. When the war of the Balkan allies against Turkey started, she returned to Serbia to volunteer as a nurse in the Army Medical Corps, and served from one war to another, until her untimely death from epidemic typhus fever. Her retrospective exhibition was held in the Museum of the Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1973<sup>11</sup>.

Mara Lukić-Jelesić (Novi Kneževac, 1885–Šabac, 1979) studied under Beta and Rista Vukanović and later in Munich. After volunteering as a nurse in the First World War, she was a school teacher of art<sup>11</sup>.

Ana Marinković (Belgrade, 1881–Getari, France, 1973) had studied under Nadežda Petrović and Beta Vukanović before she went to Paris and London to attend private art schools. As a voluntary nurse, she helped the diseased and wounded soldiers through Albanian mountains, all the way to Corfu. Her first exhibition was with Lada Society in 1910<sup>11, 13</sup>.

Jelica-Jela Marković (Belgrade, 1891–Belgrade, 1969) took lessons from Beta Vukanović. She volunteered as a nurse as long as the Medical Corps acted on Serbian territory. After the war, she chose another occupation, and her paintings have been kept within her family<sup>14</sup>.

Natalija Cvetković (Smederevo, 1888–Belgrade, 1928) attended the Vukanović School of Fine Arts in Belgrade, and afterwards studied in Munich and Paris. During the war, she volunteered as a nurse. She was one of Lada's founders, and exhibited at the First Yugoslav Art Show in 1904. Her retrospective exhibition was held in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1974<sup>11–13</sup>.

#### Convalescents

Infective diseases were yet another enemy of Serbian soldiers, officers, and the members of the Army Medical Corps. A vivid picture of epidemic typhus fever and the conditions in which the Corps had to act, has been brought to us by the War Diary of Dr. Svetislav Barjaktarović. No statistics can match these short notes written on the spot, even at the height of the author's disease<sup>‡</sup>. Those lucky

<sup>‡</sup>P. 67. "1915. Jan. 11. Vlaška. Mud and humidity in this village are huge. Water has destroyed most of the huts. There are many cases of trench fever, as well as of epidemic typhus fever and pox. Feb. 1. Vlaška. There are about 200 patients in this hospital, all suffering from infective diseases: *Febris exantematica*, *Febris recurrens*, *Variolla vera*. I asked to work in this hospital in order to get acquainted with epidemic typhus fever and trench fever. Number of patients with epidemic typhus fever is 32, and 70 suffer from trench fever." P. 69. "Feb. 12. Vlaška. Today, I feel fever. 37.3°C. Feb. 13. Vlaška. Today, I stayed in bed. 38°C. But, I got up in the evening, as I felt better, and my temperature dropped. Feb. 14. Vlaška. Illness is overcoming me, fever is raising, I feel worse. Feb. 15. Vlaška. I was moved to share the room with Dr. Andra, Đura, and major Gvozden Ristanović. This means that my disease is epidemic typhus fever".

<sup>†</sup>While the British Army did not encourage artists to make drawings of the battlefield scenes in the Great War fearing that the enemy could obtain information from them, our Staff had introduced the term "war painter" as early as 1912. This title appeared in the Travel permission number 86 signed by Colonel Živojin Mišić, and issued to Petar Ranosović, as well as in the Permission number 4190 issued to Dragomir Glišić according to the Order signed by Petar Bojović, Chief of Staff. Many artists who bore this title in the Great War left valuable eyewitness documents<sup>11</sup>.

enough to survive the disease were sent to recover at the hospitals along the Mediterranean coast. Veljko Stanojević (Belgrade 1892–Belgrade 1967) was an exception: he was transferred from a combat division to the Department of Topography. Stanojević had studied under Marko Murat and Ljuba Ivanović before the war, and in Paris after the war. He participated in the group exhibitions in 1922, 1927, and 1940. His retrospective exhibition was held in 1957 in Belgrade<sup>11</sup>.

Two painters were treated either in Russian or Austrian hospitals: Vasa Pomorišac (Modoš, 1893–Belgrade, 1961), a volunteer, was hospitalized in Russia after being badly wounded at Dobrudža. He put an immense effort into joining our Army in Thessaloniki, after the travel through Siberia, Mancuria, and across the Indian Ocean<sup>11</sup>.

Nikola Džanga (Belgrade, 1892–Belgrade, 1960) was dangerously wounded near Aleksandrovac in 1915, and immediately sent to captivity in Austria<sup>11</sup>.

Živorad Nastasijević (Gornji Milanovac, 1893–Belgrade, 1966), ill and with bad contusions from a battle for Kaimakchalan, was transported to the hospital in Thessaloniki, and further to Algeria, as a convalescent. He graduated from the Art School in Belgrade, and studied at the Academy in Munich. He spent a part of the war in battle forces, and later became a war painter. After the war, he studied in Paris. Nastasijević exhibited at the War Painters Show in 1919, and was one of the founders of the Zograph group<sup>11,12</sup>.

Vasa Eškićević (Irig, 1876–Novi Sad, 1933) who had studied historical painting in Sankt Petersburg under Ilya Ripin, joined our Army as a volunteer, to become a war painter. He convalesced in Rome and Paris, but there are no available documents to show the nature of his illness or injuries<sup>11</sup>.

The same holds true for Josip-Sibe Miličić (Brusje, Hvar–Bari, 1945) whose convalescence took part at Capri and in France<sup>12</sup>.

Dragoslav Vasiljević-Figa (Kragujevac, 1895–Kruševac, 1929) spent his convalescence near Biserta, where his duty was to create scenography for an army theatre. Figa's art education began in 1911, under Rista and Beta Vukanović, and ended after the war. His exhibitions were held in Priština (1920), and in Belgrade, 1975 (retrospective)<sup>11,13</sup>.  
 Miroslav Petrović (Dubravica, 1888–Belgrade, 1950) was sent to Sidi Abdalah in Tunisia to recover from malaria. There, he painted icons for a military chapel and the theatre scenography. His numerous drawings with extensive notes, including dialogues, are a living memento of the war times. Petrović had attended art schools in Belgrade and Munich before the war, and in Paris, after the war. Later, he became a high-school teacher of art. His one-man exhibition was held in 1926, and a retrospective was in 1963, in Belgrade<sup>11–13</sup>.

Paško Vučetić (Split, 1871–Belgrade, 1950) spent his convalescence at Corfu, and later in Italy, where he attended art schools in Trieste and Venice (later in Munich, Germany) at the end of the 19th century, and exhibited in Trieste in 1901. Although elder than most of the war

painters, Paško accepted their style and painted vedutes of Rome in 1916, which shine with orange buildings, blue sky and violet shades. His art also included sculpture and copying fresco paintings (as a member of the staff of the National Museum in Belgrade). Vučetić had assisted Nadežda Petrović in organizing the First Serbian Artists' Colony<sup>11–14</sup>.

Kosta Miličević (Vraka, 1877–Beograd, 1920) was recovering at Corfu twice: in 1916–1917, and in 1918. In spite of that, he was so weak that he succumbed to the Spanish fever in 1920. He studied painting under Kutlik in Belgrade, Ažbe in Munich, in private schools in Vienna, and again in Belgrade. Kosta's original technique which included short brush strokes and a thick paint, as well as his charisma, made him an admired leader of a group of young Belgrade impressionists. His almost musical treatment of two motives: St. Sava's church before the war, and the landscapes of Corfu during the war, places him, together with Nadežda Petrović and Milan Milovanović, among the three most prominent Serbian artists of that time. A retrospective exhibition of his works was held in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1973–4<sup>11–15</sup>.



**Fig. 1 – Milan Milovanović – Drawing (pencil on paper), C 1249; National Museum, Belgrade**

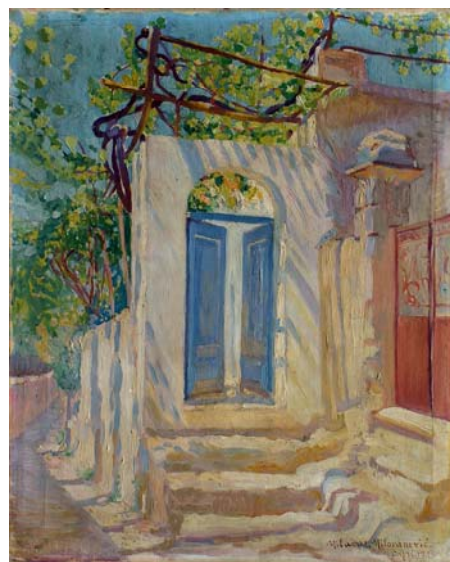
Milan Milovanović (Kruševac, 1876–Belgrade, 1946) recovered from epidemic typhus fever at Capri during 1917–1918. Young Milovanović was lucky to live in a country which had a Minister of education, a famous academician Mihailo Valtrović, who assumed that his duty was to tour even the remotest Serbian schools in a search for gifted youth. This is how Milan, a high school student from Kruševac, got a state scholarship for studies abroad, which

lasted from 1895 to 1905: first under Kutlik in Belgrade, then under Ažbe in Munich who prepared him to graduate from the Academy in Munich, study at the Colarossi Private Academy in Paris and to graduate from the famous L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in that city! He paid his country back immediately, in 1907, with a long official tour of monasteries in Serbia, Macedonia, and on the Mountain Athos in Greece, when he painted one of the earliest and purest impressionist paintings of Serbian art – „The Bridge of the Tsar Dušan in Skopje“<sup>16, 17</sup>. However, his achievement as a war painter stays within the limits of a document<sup>18</sup>. According to M. Đurić, views of the battle field, narrowed by the frame of observation post, with mixed roars of cannons and of the wounded, suited neither a sensitive artistic nature nor an impressionist painter<sup>17</sup>.



**Fig. 2 – Milan Milovanović – Drawing (pencil on paper), C 1256; National Museum, Belgrade**

*Chiaro* of Capri, where the shapes vibrate and the shades hide, was such a revelation for Milovanović, broken by illness and left with the damaged nerves and with a hearing loss, that he painted there a series of masterpieces which rank second to none in Serbian landscape art (Figure 3).



**Fig. 3 – Milan Milovanović – The Blue Door, 1917 (oil on canvas, 480 × 390 mm); National Museum, Belgrade**

After the war, he continued to paint for two more years, choosing either scenes from the epic past, or views of Dubrovnik, almost as good as those of Capri. In 1920, at the age of 45, and after only a decade of a full artistic activity, he chose to live in a creative silence, painting a routine portrait or a flower arrangement from time to time. Until his death in 1946, he was teaching at the School (later, Academy) of Fine Arts. Retrospective exhibitions were held in the National Museum in Belgrade (1960), and at Kruševac (1963, 1966)<sup>11–13, 16–18</sup>.

### Conclusion

Serbian painters had a significant role in the Army Medical Corps in the Great War. It is tempting to imagine what direction Serbian art would have taken, had Nadežda Petrović, Mališa Glišić, Kosta Miličević, and their numerous friends stayed alive, and Milan Milovanović continued to paint.

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