

Abstract

Irja Bergström, "*Lonely bird – I know who that is*". Ester Henning. *Woman Artist in Mental Asylum*.

This is a study of the life and art of the Swedish artist Ester Henning (1887–1985). Ester Henning studied sculpture for two and a half years at the Tekniska Skolan for women students in Stockholm but had to give up her studies in 1913. In 1916 she had a mental breakdown and was taken to hospital for the first time. From 1919 till her death she lived in mental homes, for more than forty years at Beckomberga Hospital in Stockholm. The diagnosis was schizophrenia. During the 1920's and 1930's she was artistically inactive but from 1941 onwards, supported by friends and patrons who provided her with materials for her art, she was able to sculpture, draw, paint and embroider. The catalogue of her artistic work includes more than 1.100 works. Her art has been exhibited at three main exhibitions: in 1946 in Gothenburg, in 1963 at the Beckomberga Hospital and in 1970 at the Liljevalch Art Gallery in Stockholm. Her female nudes in terracotta and in crayons show a slight influence of the famous Swedish painter Anders Zorn (1860–1920). The 175 portraits of her fellow patients and hospital personnel are complicated from a psychological point of view. They are here interpreted as magical transformations of the artist's inner needs. Three topics discussed at length in this thesis are Ester Henning's phobia about men as shown in her art, the restitution of lost objects in her works and the body image in her art. H. Rennert's "List of Characteristics of Schizophrenic Figurativeness" has been used regarding Ester Henning's art products. Very few schizophrenic characteristics have been found. Chapter 10 is a comprehensive history of research on psychopathological art.

Key words: Ester Henning, woman artist, schizophrenia, psychopathological art, creativity, body image in art, hospitalization, restitution, split personality.