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## **Repetition and Return in Trauma Recovery: A Structured Four-Session Art Therapy Protocol for War-Affected Populations**

Ponavljjanje i povratak u oporavku od traume: Strukturirani art terapijski protokol u četiri sesije za ratom pogođene skupine

**Prof. Dr.art.Jasmina Pacek, univ.spec.art.therap.**

This presentation outlines a clinically structured four-session art therapy protocol developed and delivered by Prof.Dr.art.Jasmina Pacek, univ.spec.art.therap., at the Department of Psychological Medicine, Regional Center for Psychotrauma, Clinical Hospital Center Osijek, Croatia. The intervention was conducted with Croatian war veterans, their spouses, children, and civilian victims of war—more than two decades after the end of the conflict.

The program was implemented with three closed groups (N=36), each consisting of 12 patients aged 21 to 67, most diagnosed with PTSD, recurrent depressive disorder, or other trauma-related conditions. Fifteen participants also received individual sessions (1–14; avg. 6) to supplement group work. Weekly 90-minute sessions followed a consistent structure that integrated art-based interventions with trauma-focused psychoeducation. Participants engaged in protocols such as self-portrait drawings, body outlines, trauma-to-safety collages, emotional mandalas, and reflective letter-writing. These activities supported emotional expression, insight into psychosomatic symptoms, and strengthened interpersonal connections. The inclusion of trauma psychoeducation helped patients better understand their psychological and physiological responses.

Participants reported finding the group setting deeply validating and emotionally safe, revealing that many viewed the therapy group as a rare source of light in otherwise dark daily lives.



The program demonstrated that even a short, well-structured art therapy intervention can foster emotional integration, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance mutual empathy across generations.

Framed within the conference theme, this case study illustrates how trauma reasserts itself cyclically in the lives of individuals and communities. The inclusion of family members facilitated recognition of transgenerational trauma and fostered relational repair across generations. Repetition emerged both as symptomatology (e.g., flashbacks, somatic pain, emotional numbing) and as a therapeutic form.

This presentation shows the development of the innovative four-session protocol as a clinically grounded, time-limited, replicable intervention for trauma-affected populations in institutional or community-based mental health settings.

### **Biography**

**Jasmina Pacek**, Dr. art.univ.spec.art.therap is a Croatian-American artist and art therapist. Dr. Pacek is a Full Professor at The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Croatia, where she teaches both applied arts and art therapy classes. As Vice-Dean for Curriculum Development, Dr. Pacek was the lead author of the first academic program for Arts Therapies in Croatia: Postgraduate Specialty Study of Arts Therapies. Today, she is a coordinator of the Art Therapy specialization program, as well as the ECArTE country representative. She was one of the founders of HART, the Croatian Association for Art Therapy, and is currently its Vice-President.

### **Recent Publications and Conference Presentations**

Pacek, J. (2025). **Narrative Textiles and the Neurodevelopmental Framework** (invited talk) and **Stitching Stories: Finding Your Safe Space** (workshop). Presented at *BIEN 2025: Air*, Panel 'Textile in Resistance', Kranj, Slovenia, May 31 – June 3, 2025.

Pacek, J. (2025). **Art Therapy in Therapeutic Work at the Psychiatric and Rehabilitation Hospital Insula on Rab Island: Institutional Preconditions and Examples of Good Practices**. Presented at the *4th Symposium on the Integrative Approach in Psychiatry with International Participation*, May 9–10, 2025, Osijek, Croatia.



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Gulbe, E., Ozola, A., Vītola, B., Akmane, E., Pacek, J., & Mārtinsone, K. (2025). **Exploring nature-based art therapy: A scoping review.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1522629.