



EUROPEAN CONSORTIUM OF ARTS THERAPIES EDUCATION

ECArTE

18TH EUROPEAN ARTS THERAPIES CONFERENCE

8-11 SEPTEMBER 2026

PULA, CROATIA

Coming Back Home - Embodiment of Safety

Povratak kući – utjelovljenje sigurnosti

Mia Janković Shentser

Change, as the only constant, profoundly shapes our individual and collective experiences. Societies in transition face shifts in values, crises in the institutions of family and marriage, and crises of identity. Directly or indirectly influenced by global politics and economy, everyman is faced with destabilisation and uncertainty.

On a neurophysiological level, destabilisation is read by the autonomic nervous system (ANS), activating the alert mode. At the edge of the window of tolerance, climbing dangerously the sinusoid counting movement from regulation to disregulation, the sense of safety is rippled, and the physiology of unsafe sets on.

Safety in physiology is manifested by calm, even breath, relaxed muscles and posture, openness to communication. In polyvagal terms, this is the social engagement system, which is supported by the ventral vagal parasympathetic branch. The moment our safety is compromised, the sympathetic system mobilises for fight or flight. Only after this response is unavailable does the parasympathetic system again take over, this time as a shut-down, supported by the dorsal vagal branch.

Recovery of safety follows the same path in reverse: from the preservational dorsal state, via the sympathetic, to the ventral vagal state. As if following a known path back home, we are moving through somatic states, re-establishing felt sense of safety and connection.

Being safe doesn't mean we feel safe.



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The workshop invites participants to explore and identify own vagal states and corresponding physiological sensations. Through mindful body awareness and creative expression, participants will deepen their understanding of their autonomic responses and discover adequate ways to regulate and embody safety.

Using paper and oil pastels, participants will visually represent their vagal states and transitions between them. The process aims to bridge neurophysiological awareness, somatic imagery and visual expression fostering awareness of individual dynamic processes of stress, resilience, and restoration, with emphasis on the ability to control what is in our power – own stress response.

Biography

Mia Janković Shentser, Assist. Prof. univ. spec. art. therap., is an artist, art therapist, supervisor, and lecturer on the Art Therapy Post-Master's Programme at the Academy of Art and Culture of the University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek, Croatia.

She is one of the founders and a president of the Croatian Art Therapy Association; member of the European Federation of Art Therapy and American Art Therapy Association.

She is the editor-in-chief of the art therapy journal, *Transfer*; editor of the Creative Therapy rubric in Art and Science Journal, *Artos*, and scientific journal *Nove teme*. She has presented at conferences and universities in the USA, Croatia, Latvia, Slovenia, and Israel.



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Recent Publications

Janković Shentser, M. **Croatian Traditional Techniques as Art Therapy Protocols: Drywall as Expression of Therapeutic Themes of Boundaries, Protection, Defence and Privacy.** *Transfer*. 52-76.

Janković Shentser, M. **Sensorimotor Art Therapy: Clay Neurologic connections and therapeutic effects.** *Socijalne teme*. 41-54.

Janković Shentser, M. (2023). **Openings in art therapy or “I don't know how to draw”.** *EFAT Conference, 2023. Growing together, Riga*. The paper is accepted for publishing in this year's issue of *Nove teme*, science and art journal.