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The British Journal of Psychiatry



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Das-Munshi et al

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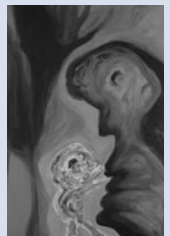
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Cover picture

Untitled (date unknown), Mary Barnes

Mary Edith Barnes (1923–2001) is an English artist and the best-known resident of Kingsley Hall, a radical therapeutic community established by R D Laing in Bow, East London in 1965. Barnes worked as a nurse before she experienced a psychotic breakdown in her 40s and sought counsel from Laing. She was the first to move into Kingsley Hall where she was encouraged by Laing to regress to infancy and to *live through* her illness and trauma. Barnes initially spent time curled in a foetal position in a shroud-like box on the floor. Her creativity was ignited when Dr Joseph Berke a young, American psychotherapist arrived at Kingsley Hall to work with Laing. He developed an intense therapeutic relationship with Barnes, using unconventional methods such as him feeding and bathing Barnes as if she were an infant. Barnes began to mark the walls of Kingsley Hall using her excrement, applied with her fingers. This led to conflict with the other residents who wanted her evicted. Berke offered her art materials and encouraged her to scribble. There began a flourishing artistic practice that resulted in many hundreds of works, and that she continued into her later life, spent in Scotland. Despite no formal artistic training, Barnes developed an expressionist style, characterised by heavy, layered application of oil paints, often using her fingers as seen in this example. Her inspiration included depictions of her psychosis, a dark, fractured form she named IT, relational themes as seen in the featured work, and after her recovery - the Scottish landscape and her deep Catholic faith. Barnes's artwork and her archive have been acquired by the Wellcome Collection. Find out more about Barnes <http://www.mary-barnes.co.uk> and a series of celebrations in the anniversary year of her birth: <https://falklandestate.co.uk/rebirth-a-celebration-of-the-life-and-work-of-mary-barnes/>



Professor Victoria Tischler

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Surrey

v.tischler@surrey.ac.uk

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