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## From “Woman with Child” to “Stranger” – the Feminist Project of Nadežda Petrović

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Serbia, female painters, following modern European artistic trends became leaders in the dissemination of avant-garde ideas. Women’s art became the object of sharp critique or was ignored by the critics and completely marginalized. Feminists strove to fix the imbalance in practices of subject production, to establish institutions and models of life in which the existence of ones did not entail the suppression of all others. Despite their significant opus, certain Serbian female artists are only now the subject of monographs. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, only M. Pavlović Barili got respect, and even that was posthumous. The work of Nadežda Petrović, Zora Petrović and Kosa Bokšan was also valued later, most often with the presence of other (male) authors, which confirms that the patriarchy always values men, while the role of women was to be unnoticeable and meaningless, always outside the focus.

In this paper the focus is on the art of Nadežda Petrović, and its reception indicates not only the individual path of the artist, but the problem of female expression through painting. By establishing the value of art in the spirit of contemporary strivings, Nadežda Petrović comes up against the outcry of painter colleagues who label her art as “naive” and “primitive”, neglecting and refusing to acknowledge her artistic individuality. As an illustration of the feminist engagement of Nadežda Petrović in her artistic expression, three paintings from different phases of her career were chosen: *Woman with child, Portrait of Kosara Cvetković and Xenia*.

Nadežda Petrović radically oversteps the conventional way of looking at women from the viewpoint of men. Visual expression represses and destroys the traditional framework of seeing (in which man is the subject and woman the object), pointing to the projected viewer outside the painting and the woman’s gaze which prepares the establishing of dialogue. Creating in the time of establishment of new sociocultural relations on the ladder of male/female determinations, Nadežda Petrović did not want to run from problems, but heralds and “insists” in an open and direct way, flaunting her cosmopolitanism, desire for independence and aversion toward universal ideologies. The art of Nadežda Petrović maps the mosaic of incorporated fragmented positions of women in former as well as in contemporary society.

### Key words:

anthropology of painting, “women’s art”, feminist project, visual narratives, socio-cultural constructs, Nadežda Petrović.

By deconstructing and questioning the dominant presumption about *creativity*, as well as the meaning of the term *artist*, artists such as Nadežda Petrović directly pointed to the unspoken idea that the language of art is created by men, uncovering the relationship between language, art and ideology, thanks to them, *women's art* becomes noticed and valued, which kickstarts the process of constituting an equal art, outside the categories of “male” and “female”.