

Dr Zoja Bojić, an art historian, a lecturer at COFA Online, University of New South Wales, Sydney, and a Visiting Fellow and Lecturer, Art History, The Australian National University, Canberra, has written about Stanislav Rapotec and his art as follows:

The artist Stanislav (Stanislaus) Rapotec, an émigré of Slovenian background, was at the forefront of the Sydney art avant-garde of the 1960s and made a significant contribution to the international and Australian art scenes during the second half of the twentieth century. His oeuvre is characterised by the question: to which culture does it belong, to the one it most enriched or the one on whose traditions it most drew?

He was acknowledged and considered an art legend by his fellow Australian artists, and received several significant awards for his works as well as for his overall contribution to Australian art. For Stanislav Rapotec his cultural memory and its origins were central to his art. They were evident throughout his long art practice in the selection of his subject matter, as well as in the execution of his work.

His method, similarly, stemmed from his pre-Australian visual experience, which included the broader European and Middle Eastern Byzantine cultural heritage as well as expressionistic and avant-garde traditions in the art practice of the South Slavs.

As an abstract expressionist, Rapotec built his work on ideas.

These characteristics of Rapotec's creative practice, despite the artist's peers' acknowledgement of the integration of his oeuvre in the Australian art environment, have occasionally been interpreted as brooding, or even violent, and his oeuvre has thus far largely remained unexplored.

The work *Meditating on Good Friday* also proved to be a turning point in an aspect of art practice in Australia. Rapotec's win generated a debate that 'concerned the suitability or otherwise of abstract expressionist art forms in church art', as the reviewer Alan McCulloch described it. The question of whether an abstract expressionistic work could stand for a religious experience turned into a battle between conservative and avant-garde forces in Australian art. Rapotec, with his relatively recently found manner of artistic expression, thus became the pioneer, and a hero, of abstract ('semi-abstract' was also a term used in the debate, as Rapotec himself poited out), expressionism in Australia.

After his wife's tragic death in 1976, Rapotec introduced overtly abstract spiritual subject matter in

his work that can be seen as direct descendents of his *Meditating on Good Friday*.

Formally, however, Rapotec's work appears to stem from another tradition in Yugoslav art: that established by the students of the Andre Lothe school in Paris.

It can thus be established with certainty that Rapotec's initial inspiration was based on his visual and art experiences before his coming to Australia, obtained mostly in the Balkans and the Middle East prior to, during and immediately after the Second World War.

The struggle itself defines a man as a hero and Rapotec's self-identification with a hero was evident throughout his creative practice. Inherent in the notion of hero is the notion of continual struggle where there is no winner (in contrast to the Roman construct of victor). In the words of James Gleeson: "Mr Rapotec does not win his war, nor does he actually lose it. One has the impression that he is not really interested in the outcome, only in the conflict itself."

Rapotec said himself: "You must have a few good dramas behind you, a few love affairs breaking down, a few tragedies besides and another few of joyful events. You must know people, you must know the world, you must see the places, you must get the feel of history and you must build up a bit of your own philosophy."

*Dr Zoja Bojić: Stanislav Rapotec, a Barbagogenius in Australian Art, 2007*

*quotations from pages: 11, 18–20, 30, 38 and 40–43*

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