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THE GEOMETRIC SYSTEM OF THE NAVE VAULT OF THE CHURCH ON THE HILL OF SIGHIŞOARA

Eszter JOBBIK[*] and János KRÄHLING[**]

ABSTRACT. The Geometric System of the Nave Vault of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara. The literature on the methods of late Gothic net vault constructions mainly accentuates ideas, which presume that the initial conditions of the design are orderly. However, in the case of buildings of multiple building periods, this is rarely the case. In the present article, we present the point cloud-based geometric analysis of the net vault system of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara. Our results highlight that contrary to the generally accepted theories, the construction of a net vault is not necessarily initiated with the plan of the rib system, and that the underlying principle organising the whole system's geometry is not always the plan pattern. Our case study also exemplifies how the Gothic principles of unity and division still blend with the ideas of separation and addition, even in a late Gothic hall church with direct connections to the guild of Landshut.

Keywords: masonry ribbed net vault; late Gothic vault construction; geometric analysis; Church on the Hill of Sighişoara; Gothic construction principles

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[*] **Eszter JOBBIK** (eszter.jobbik@gmail.com) is a PhD student at the Pál Csonka Doctoral School, at the Department of History of Architecture and Monument Preservation, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary; architectural engineer (2018) and architect (2020). Main fields of interest: late Gothic vaults' construction and building methods.

[**] **János KRÄHLING PhD** (krahling.janos@epk.bme.hu) is the Head of Department of the Department of History of Architecture and Monument Preservation, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary; architect (1988), CSc (1994), PhD (1994), Dr. habil (2017). Main fields of specialisation: building archaeology, history and theory of architecture of the Early Modern period.

1. Introduction

The technical literature on the topic of late Gothic net vault construction generally accentuates the same widespread ideas, such as the primacy of the plan of the net vaults' rib pattern in the construction process, or the "Prinzipalbogen" principle. However, such ideas work ideally only in cases when the initial conditions, like the borderline of the examined vaults' plan, are regular.

The subject of the present article, the three-aisle nave vault system of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara is an excellent example of the fact, that numerous vaults, especially those of buildings of multiple building periods, have no such baseline circumstances (Fig. 1). The major theories do not give explanations on how these factors modify the orderly theories. However, by getting to know the exact geometry of a net vault system, the geometric deviances can be analysed and the regularities in the geometry identified.

In the present article, our aim is to conduct such an analysis, based on the method we developed during our previous works, and to describe the underlying ideas uniting the seemingly chaotic vault system.

Fig. 1. The three different net vaults of the nave. (right: northern aisle, middle: main nave, left: southern aisle). Photos by Krisztina Fehér PhD

1.1. Literature framework

The technical literature of the geometry of late Gothic net vaults is hallmarked by several deeply rooted ideas that were mainly spread by the 19th century's influential works on the topic of Medieval vaults.

The first important ascertainment is that these theories without exception accentuate the primacy of the construction of the vault's plan, even though the next steps may differ. Sources representing this idea appear from the 16th century (e. g. Hontañon's drawing[1] and the Manuscript Ms. 12686 of the National Library of Spain[2]), followed by the works of Ranisch,[3] Hoffstadt,[4] Warth,[5] or Ungewitter.[6] Examples of the exact methods can be the construction based on a quadrate-net's crossing points (e. g. Schulze's method),[7] or an original square's further division with inscribable rotated quadrats (e. g. Hoffstadt's XIV. A. board).[8] The theory's practical aspect is that according to recent research, the real-size construction of the rib pattern on the building site could have served as the initial step of the building process.[9] To conclude, we want to accentuate that the presentations of these theories always assume a regular plan, thus the irregularities, which often characterise the buildings of multiple building periods are not taken into account.

The next necessary step based on the technical literature is to ascertain the vertical dimensions of the vaults. In this regard, the sources show a more diverse picture. The main theories use hemi-cylindric (basically barrel vault-like) – or, in the case of stellar vaults, hemispheric – surfaces to describe the spatial

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[1] Santiago Huerta, "Technical Challenges in the Construction of Gothic Vaults: The Gothic Theory of Structural Design," in *Bautechnik des Historismus. Von den Theorien über gotische Konstruktionen bis zu den Baustellen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Uta Hassler and Christoph Rauhut (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2012).

[2] Ricardo Garcia Baño, and Macarena Salcedo Glera, "Geometry and Construction of the Eight-Loop Ribbed Vault," *Nexus Network Journal* 22, no. 4 (2020).

[3] Bartel Ranisch, *Beschreibung aller Kirchengebäude der Stadt Dantzig…* (Dantzig: Raths und Gymnasii Buchdruckern, 1695).

[4] Friedrich Hoffstadt, *Gothisches ABC-Buch: Vorlegeblätter zum gothischen A-B-C-Buche…* (Frankfurt a. M.: Siegmund Schmerber, 1840).

[5] Otto Warth, *Die Konstruktionen in Stein* (Leipzig: J. M. Gebhardt, 1896).

[6] Georg Gottlob Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch der gotischen Konstruktionen. Neue bearbeitet von K. Mohrmann* (Leipzig: Chr. Herm. Tauchnitz, 1901).

[7] Werner Müller, "Die Zeichnungsvorlagen für Friedrich Hoffstadts 'Gotisches A.B.C.-Buch' und der Nachlass des Nürnberger Ratsbaumeisters Wolf Jacob Stromer (1561-1614)," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 28, no. 1 (1975): 45.

[8] Müller, "Die Zeichnungsvorlagen," 52.

[9] David Wendland, and Frédéric Degenève, "How to Order Fitting Components for Looping Ribs: Design Procedures for the Stone Members of Complex Late Gothic Vaults," in *Building Histories: The Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Construction History Society*, ed. James W.P. Campbell et al. (Cambridge: Queens' College, 2017), 164.

positions of the ribs' junction points,[10] even though practical considerations, such as economical aspects and the required workload, suggest that these descriptions are rather the abstract, simplifying ideas behind a linear temporary supporting structure. This more practical aspect of the idea is presented on Hontañon's drawing, where the keystones are elevated to the required height (determined by a hemisphere) individually, thus presenting the structure behind the idea.

The general geometry of the net vaults and the geometry of their individual ribs are nearly always examined simultaneously in the sources of the topic. The majority of the researchers rely on the "Prinzipalbogen" theory, meaning that each rib in a given net (or stellar) vault has the same curvature (thus accelerating the building process).[11] The idea appears in the technical literature from the 16th century on (e.g. the manuscript of Jacob von Andernach[12], and in the works of Ranisch,[13] Hoffstadt,[14] Meckel,[15] Müller,[16] Tomlow[17]), and although some researchers gave voice to doubts (e. g. Lassaulx in 1835),[18] it remained the leading theory even until today, and in certain cases, the most recent studies also approved it.[19] The method to determine the value of the rib curvature's radius varies in the above-cited sources, some claim that it equals

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[10] Ranisch, *Beschreibung*; Warth, *Die Konstruktionen*; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch.*

[11] Jürgen Renn, Wilhelm Osthues, and Hermann Schlimme, *Wissensgeschichte der Architektur 3. Vom Mittelalter bis zur frühe Neuzeit* (Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2014), 71; R. Maira Vidal, "The Evolution of the Knowledge of Geometry in Early Gothic Construction: the Development of the Sexpartite Vault in Europe," *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1007.

[12] Werner Müller, "Einflüsse der österreichischen und der böhmisch-sächsischen Spätgotik in den Gewölbemustern des Jacob Facht von Andernach," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 27, no. 1 (1974): 65–66.

[13] Ranisch, *Beschreibung.*

[14] Hoffstadt, *Gothisches.*

[15] Carl Anton Meckel, "Figurierte Gewölbe der deutschen Spätgotik," *Architectura: Jahrbuch für Geschichte der Baukunst* 1 (1933).

[16] Werner Müller, *Grundlagen gotischer Bautechnik. Ars sine scientia nihil* (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1990).

[17] Jos Tomlow, "Versuch einer (zeichnerischen) Rekonstruktion des Gewölbes im spätgotischen Kreuzgang des Klosters Hirsau," in *Hirsau St. Peter und Paul 1091–1991*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (Stuttgart: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart, 1991).

[18] David Wendland, "Johann Claudius von Lassaulx' Gewölbe >aus freier Hand< – Die Wiedererfindung der gotischen Architektur und die Entwicklung der technischen Literatur," in *Bautechnik des Historismus. Von den Theorien über gotische Konstruktionen bis zu den Baustellen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Uta Hassler, and Christoph Rauhut (München: Hirmer, 2012), 106.

[19] Clemens Voigts, "Bauforschung an figurierten Gewölben der Spätgotik: Das Beispiel der Georgskirche in Augsburg," *Architectura – Die Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst / Journal of the History of Architecture* 45 (2015): 56–57; Jobbik, Eszter and János Krähling, "A Self-contained Stellar Vault Construction Method. The Vault of the Matthias Oratorio in the Inner City Parish Church of Budapest," *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture*, Online first publication (2023).

half of the diagonal described by the given rib's plan,[20] while others refer to the "principle of the longest route", meaning that the radius of the curvature is the longest continuous rib-route from the impost to the crown point on the plan (16th-century sketchbook from Dresden[21] and the works of Hoffstadt 1840[22], Ungewitter[23] and Meckel[24]). According to some researchers (e. g. Müller),[25] using ribs with uniform curvature only served the purpose of three-dimensional positioning of the ribs' junction points.

As for the webbing of the net vaults, according to the commonly accepted theory, it was built posterior to the rib system, using it as centring (as described by Saunders in 1814 and specified later by Willis in 1842,[26] either with formwork,[27] resulting in a nearly flat web-surface,[28] or without it as the individual courses form self-supporting arches during the building process.[29] Even in the case of masonry ribbed vaults, this building technique was described by certain researchers.[30] However, several works claim that in the case of ceramic ribs, the webbing is in fact a barrel vault built anterior to the rib system, the latter serving only decorative purposes.[31]

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[20] Ranisch, *Beschreibung*; Elena Pliego, "Georg Gottlob Ungewitters Lehrbuch der gotischen Constructionen," in *Bautechnik des Historismus. Von den Theorien über gotische Konstruktionen bis zu den Baustellen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Uta Hassler, and Christoph Rauhut (München: Hirmer, 2012), 407.

[21] François Bucher, "Medieval Architectural Design Methods, 800–1560," *Gesta* 11, no. 2 (1972): 47.

[22] Hoffstadt, *Gothisches*, XIV.A/5.

[23] Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch.*

[24] Meckel, "Figurierte".

[25] Olaf Huth, *Entwurfs- und Konstruktionsprinzipien des spätgotischen Netzgewölbes der Kirche St. Peter und Paul in der Lutherstadt Eisleben* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2020), 27.

[26] David Wendland, "Traditional Vault Construction without Formwork: Masonry Pattern and Vault Shape in the Historical Technical Literature and in Experimental Studies," *International Journal of Architectural Heritage: Conservation, Analysis, and Restoration* 1, no. 4 (2007): 342.

[27] Clemens Voigts, "Vaults, Centring, and Formwork of the Late Gothic Period in Southern Germany," in *History of Construction Cultures,* vol. 2, ed. João Mascarenhas-Mateus, and Ana Paula Pires (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2021), 78.

[28] Wendland, "Traditional," 342.

[29] Voigts, "Vaults," 79.

[30] Szőke Balázs, "A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum Délkelet-Erdély késő gótikus építészetében," in *Tanulmányok a székelység középkori és fejedelemség kori történetéből*, ed. Sófalvi András, and Visy Zsolt (Énlaka: Pro Énlaka Alapítvány and Haáz Rezső Múzeum, 2012), 207–208; Szőke Balázs, "Téglabordás boltozatok Dél-Erdélyben," in *Colligite fragmenta! Örökségvédelem Erdélyben,* ed. N. Kis Tímea (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2009), 72–73.

[31] Victor Roth, *Geschichte der deutschen Baukunst in Siebenbürgen* (Strassburg: Heitz&Mündel, 1905), 36; Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen* (Hermannstadt: Monumenta Verlag Hermannstadt and Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde e.V. Heidelberg, 1999); Harsányi István, "A szeged-alsóvárosi ferences templom gótikus szentélye csillagboltozatának helyreállítása," *Műemlékvédelem* 45, no. 5 (2001): 302.

1.2. The history of the vault system

The Church on the Hill of Sighişoara is a result of numerous building periods. The subject of the present article, the net vault system of its nave was built during the great Gothic rebuilding of the church's western part in the 15th century, from 1429 to 1525,[32] which became necessary due to damages caused by the anomalies in the load-bearing capacity of the hill's ground.[33] During these works, the asymmetric, irregular wall contours of the Romanesque period were not changed. Thus, the deviance in the angle of the western tower's walls to those of the nave and the tower's east-west axis, which is shifted compared to that of the nave,[34] must be considered as given circumstances regarding the construction of the nave vault. The inner space was altered by building only three pairs of columns instead of the four Romanesque ones and creating a hall church instead of a basilica.[35]

After an earthquake in 1838, reconstruction works were needed.[36] The vault of the choir was destroyed and later rebuilt out of wood.[37] However, based on the written sources, it is unclear whether parts of the nave's vault system were concerned. Several sources mention the damage to the aisles' or the main nave's vaults[38] as well, although the extent of the damage is not detailed.

Based on our geometric research, the overall geometry of the rib system is highly consequent, even though it seems chaotic at the first glance (details below), thus we claim that the nave's vault system could not have been largely concerned by the earthquake, since neither of the sources refer to a significant rebuilding phase. However, some tumbled ribs are plausible, but in ribbed

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[32] Roth, *Geschichte*, 66.

[33] George Oprescu, *Die Wehrkirchen in Siebenbürgen* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag Dresden, 1961), 55; Daniela Marcu Istrate, "Voraussetzungen und Vorbedingungen für den Bau der Bergkirche in Schäßburg," *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 41 (2018): 10; Daniela Marcu Istrate, "Entstehung und Entwicklung der siebenbürgischen Stadtkirchen im 12-15. Jahrhundert," in *Sachgeschichte(n). Beiträge zu einer interdisziplinär verstandenen Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit. Festschrift für Barbara Scholkmann zu ihrem 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Dorothee Ade et al. (Tübingen: Tübingen Library Publishing, 2021), 456–457.

[34] Marcu Istrate, "Voraussetzungen," 13; Marcu Istrate, "Entstehung," 457.

[35] Marcu Istrate, "Voraussetzungen," 14.

[36] Friedrich Müller, "Die Schässburger Bergkirche in Siebenbürgen," *Mittheilungen der K. K. Central-Commission* 1 (1856): 172.

[37] Christoph Machat, *Die Bergkirche zu Schässburg und die mittelalterliche Baukunst in Siebenbürgen* (München: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1977), 62; Christoph Machat, ed., *Denkmaltopographie Siebenbürgen. Stadt Schäßburg*, 4.1 (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag GmbH, 2002), 97; Marcu Istrate, "Voraussetzungen," 5.

[38] Roth, *Geschichte*, 67.

vaults, in such cases, the realignment of the inner forces[39] can result in another equilibrium state,[40] and the system can remain stable, as numerous examples show, thus we claim that the nave vault likely kept its late Gothic form.

2. Methodology

As we stated above, our geometric analysis is based on the laser-scanned point cloud of the church. The point cloud-based analysis of different vaults and vault systems has already appeared in the technical literature, however, the systematic, reproducible approach we use in our research projects was developed by us. Huth[41] used a scan-generated point cloud for measuring rib curvatures and keystone heights, Bianchini[42] examined the exact geometry of domes by scanning, Vidal[43] also measured the exact geometry in his research about rib deformations, while Fuentes and Huerta[44] and Gonzalo and Talaverano[45] worked with vault geometries based on laser total station and laser distance meters.

As the first step of our research, we use Leica BLK 360 space scanner and Leica Cyclone Register 360 software to create the point cloud of the building (Fig. 2). The further steps are carried out in AutoCAD software. During our geometric analysis, we lay great emphasis on differentiating the geometry connected to the previous building periods, thus meaning a given circumstance during the construction of the examined vaults and the geometry of the parts constructed in the analysed building period. Therefore, the first step of our analysis is to find the period borders, on the one hand, based on written sources, and in the absence of those, based on the building geometry itself.

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[39] Gábor Lengyel, and Katalin Bagi, "Numerical Analysis of the Mechanical Role of the Ribs in Groin Vaults," *Computers and Structures* 158 (2015): 58.

[40] Jacques Heyman, *The Stone Skeleton. Structural Engineering of Masonry Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20–22; Huerta, "Technical," 183.

[41] Huth, *Entwurfs.*

[42] Carlo Bianchini, "A Methodological Approach for the Study of Domes," *Nexus Network Journal* 22, no. 4 (2020).

[43] Vidal, "The evolution".

[44] Paula Fuentes, and Santiago Huerta, "Geometry, Construction and Structural Analysis of the Crossed-arched Vault of the Chapel of Villaviciosa, in the Mosque of Cordóba," *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 10, no. 5 (2017).

[45] J. C. Palacios Gonzalo, and R. Martín Talaverano, "Technological Development in Spanish Gothic Vaults Design," *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 7, no. 2 (2013).
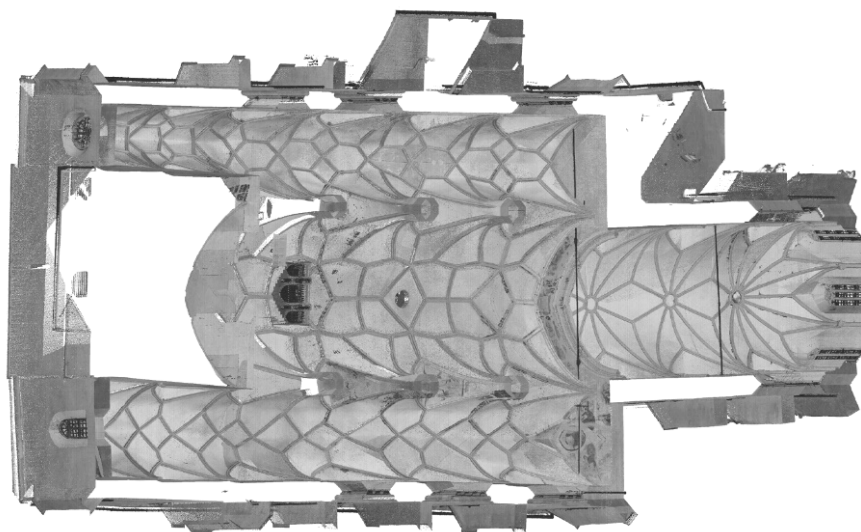
Fig. 2. The picture of the vault's point cloud. The authors' work

Since the vault presented in this article has masonry ribs, we start our analysis by examining the connection of the ribs to the webbing. For this, the point cloud gets cut by horizontal planes thus creating the "mapping" of the system. If the lines describing the webbing are parallel to the walls and do not correspond to the position of the ribs, the main structure is proved to be a barrel vault, whereas if the lines are not straight and reflect the rib system's geometry, the ribs were built posterior to the webbing and served as its formwork. This geometric description of the structures' connection is a simple one, however, its examination only became possible due to the laser scanning technologies.

Then, we analyse the plan of the net vault, while looking for regularities suggesting an underlying construction idea of this view of the rib system – which, contrary to the widespread ideas of the technical literature, was not used in each case.[46] The next step is the analysis of the rib junction points spatial position, by examining the interdependence of their projected pictures to the longitudinal and cross-sections. The subject of our further analysis is the geometry

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[46] As proved in Eszter Jobbik, and János Krähling, "Late Mediaeval Net Vault Construction Method Rediscovered by Geometric Analysis. A Case Study of the Fortified Church of Băgaciu (Bogeschdorf)," *Brukenthal. Acta Musei* 17, no. 2 (2022).

of the individual ribs of the given rib system, thus the numeric values of the ribs' radius of the curvature, chord length and arch length. By finding the regular features in the rib system's geometry, the original ideas behind the construction of the structure can be presumed.

3. Results

As we detailed above, it is crucial to differentiate the given circumstances and the conscious decisions regarding the net vault's construction. Based on the church's building history (see above), we know, that the position of the walls of the former building period determined the Gothic wall contours as well, thus the "contour line" of the vault system must be interpreted as a condition to which the design of the vault must have been adjusted. Although the number of the nave's pillars was reduced during the Gothic building period, the excavation showed that the disposition of the Romanesque pillars influenced the position of the Gothic ones.[47]

3.1. The connection of the webbing to the rib system

As we described in the Methodology chapter, the connection of the webbing to the rib system was carried out by creating the "mapping" of the net vault (Fig. 3). The level lines clearly indicate that, with the exception of the webs adjoining the crown line, the webs were built on the ribs. However, right next to the crown line, the webs show more barrel vault-like features – although they are still not straight. Based on our previous research, changing the masonry technique where the surface tangential to the webbing gets close to horizontal is not an unprecedented solution (e.g. the stone ribbed apse vault of Andocs).[48] Thus, we found that the nave vault of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara is not a barrel vault with decorative ribs installed on it, but a real net vault with the webbing built on the rib system as a formwork.

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[47] Marcu Istrate, "Voraussetzungen," 8.
[48] Eszter Jobbik, and János Krähling, "Remodelling a Medieval Net Vault Construction. Case Study: the Apsis Vault in the Catholic Church of Andocs," *Építés-Építészettudomány* 50, no. 3–4 (2022).
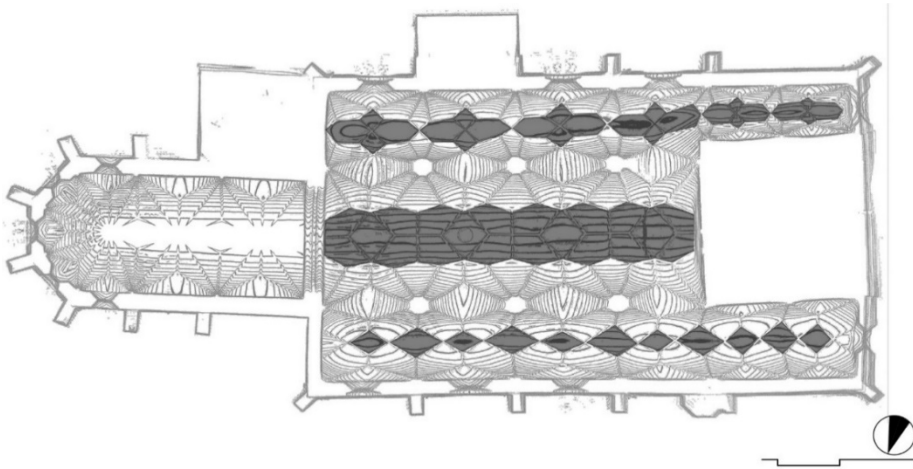
Fig. 3. The mapping of the vault. The grey marks the barrel vault-like parts close to the crown line. The authors' work

3.2. Plan analysis

For the analysis of the vault systems' plan, we were looking for recognisable regular lines and circles (representing the even distances from a given surface or point) on which the correspondent junction point's pictures fall (Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7). Regarding these figures, it is clear even at first glance that the two aisles' rib plans are not regular enough to consider them constructed, since even in the easternmost bays, a number of junction points deviate from the lines which could be presumed as the basis of their positions. However, the middle nave's rib pattern could be accepted as actually constructed on the plan view. Nonetheless, the latter theory must be rejected due to the main nave's westernmost bay, where the main lines describe the position of some of the junctions, but the position of several other junction points can not be constructed based on the same principles as the three western bays. Considering this latter finding as well as the more irregular plan geometry of the aisles, which originated from the same building period as the main nave, we concluded, that the plans of the rib systems were likely not the base of the whole system's construction. (We presume that the more regular features of the main nave are due to the fact that its net vault is supported by the columns of the nave, which are from the Gothic building period, and although they are not distributed entirely evenly, they eliminate some of the irregularities of the walls. Also, in the case of the middle nave, the problem to solve the more irregularly shaped spaces' vaults next to the tower did not occur, thus we assume that the construction of

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the simpler situation was adjusted to that of the more difficult one, and not the other way around.). However, the longitudinal lines, on which the junction points of the same function in the system fall, can be consistently found throughout all three naves (Fig. 8). (Even though other lines and circles could be also studied as the base of the aisle's construction, we claim that if our basic examinations did not highlight a regular construction idea, it is very likely that others would not lead to a different conclusion either.)
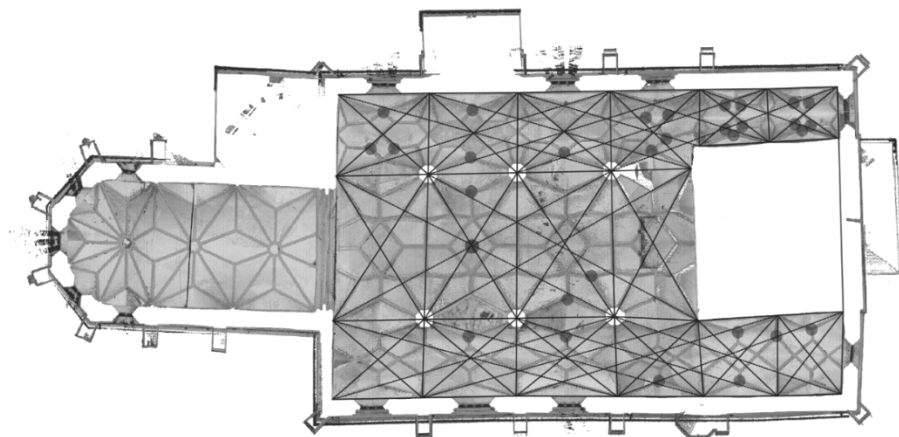
Fig. 4. The examination of the vault system's plan. Analysing the lines between the imposts. The dots mark the junctions which do not lay on the line closest to its position. The authors' work
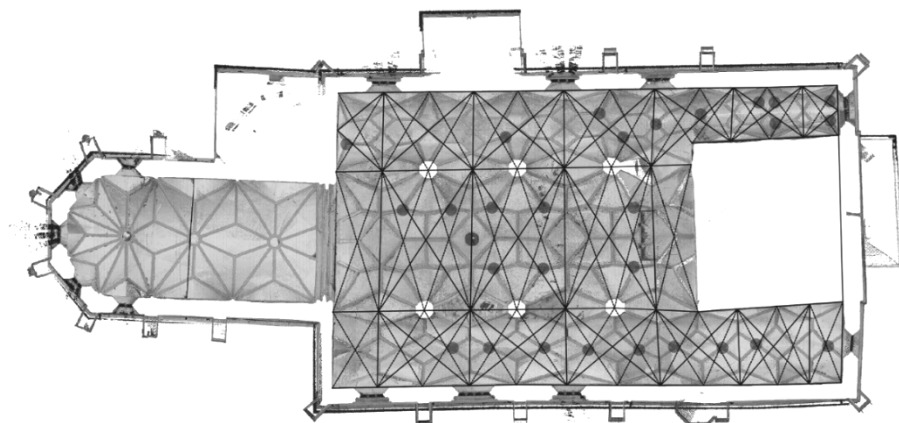
Fig. 5. The examination of the vault system's plan. Analysing the lines between the midpoints of the bays' sides. The dots mark the junctions which do not lay on the line closest to its position. The authors' work
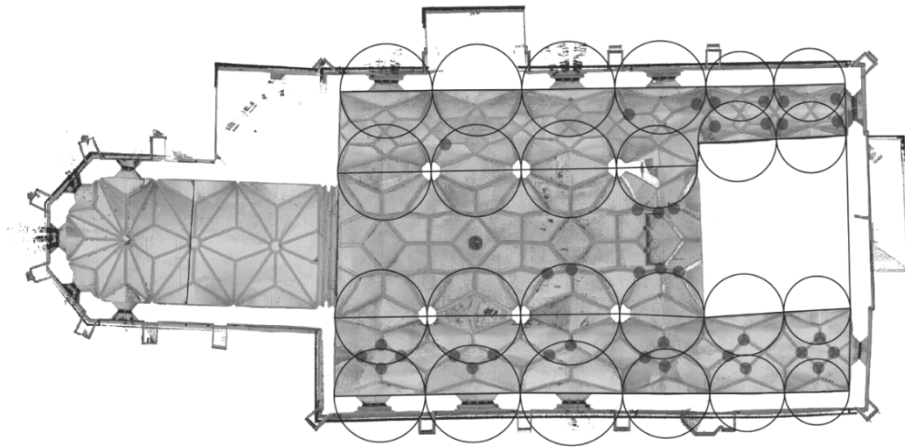
Fig. 6. The examination of the vault system's plan. Analysing the Thales' circles drawn on the bays' sides. The dots mark the junctions which do not lay on the line closest to its position. The authors' work
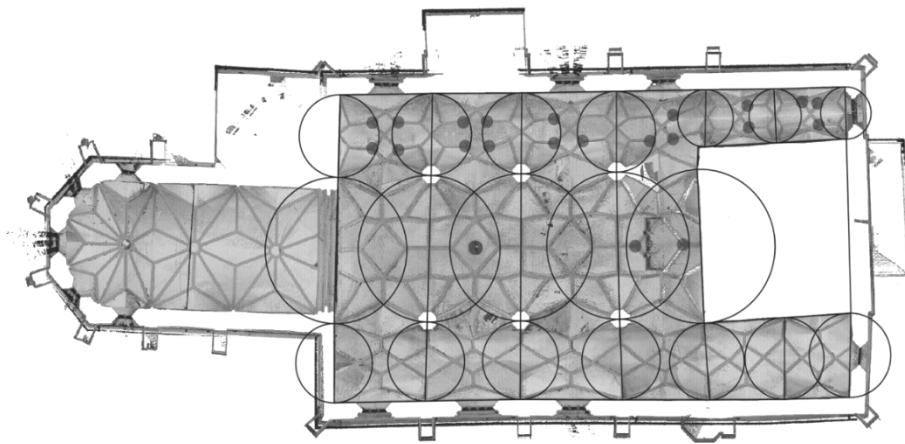
Fig. 7. The examination of the vault system's plan. Analysing the Thales' circles drawn on the lines dividing the bays from each other. The dots mark the junctions which do not lay on the line closest to its position. The authors' work
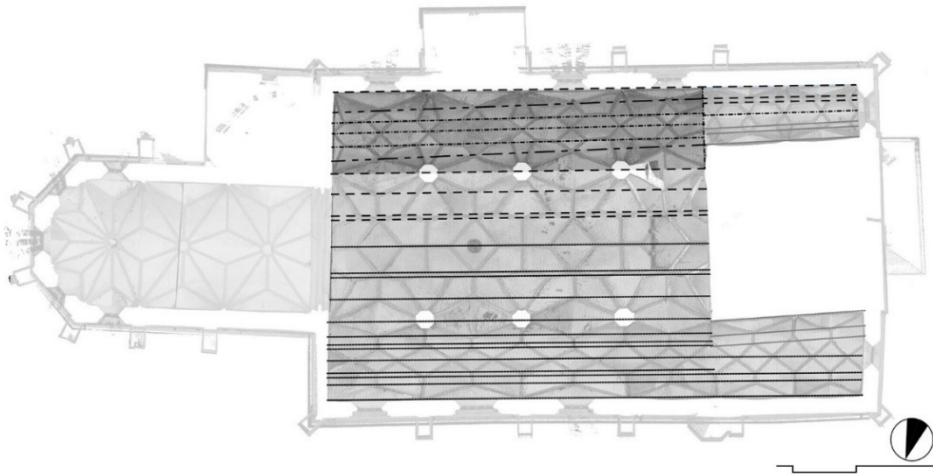
Fig. 8. The examination of the vault system's plan. The longitudinal lines determining the junction points' position on the plan view. The authors' work

In the case of the northern aisle, the lines representing the plan's regular feature are parallel to the northern nave wall, with the exception of the southern side of the westernmost two bays of the vault, where the direction of the tower's northern wall determines them. The longitudinal lines of the main nave also follow the direction of the northern wall on the northern side of the wall, as well as the main axis, while on the southern side of the vault, the lines are parallel to the southern wall.

However, in the case of the southern aisle, the lines are not parallel to the southern wall, as it would ensue from the ascertainments described so far. Here, the plan of the vault can be clearly divided into an eastern and western part, the latter being significantly narrower than the former due to the asymmetry of the western tower's placement. The axes of the two parts are not coinciding, although the construction idea is the same behind both: they connect the middle points of the short sides of their borderlines. In the case of the western part of the southern aisle, the same basic logic applies as in the case of the western part of the northern aisle: the lines of the northern side are parallel to the tower's southern wall, while those of the southern side are parallel to the southern wall of the nave. In the case of the eastern part, two different logic applies. On the one hand, the southernmost line connects the endpoint of the correspondent line of the western part and a point constructed on the cross-section of the vault projected to the eastern short wall (detailed

below). The northernmost line is parallel to the southernmost one, and one of its endpoints is the southeastern corner of the tower. On the other hand, the lines closer to the crown line are parallel to the axis of this part of the vault.[49]

3.3. The analysis of the longitudinal sections

The analysis of the longitudinal sections showed, in the case of all three naves, that the corresponding junction points fall – approximately – to the same line, as well as that these lines are parallel to each other throughout the whole net vault system (Fig. 9ab, 10ab, 11ab).

Fig. 9a. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the northern aisle looking to the north. The authors' work
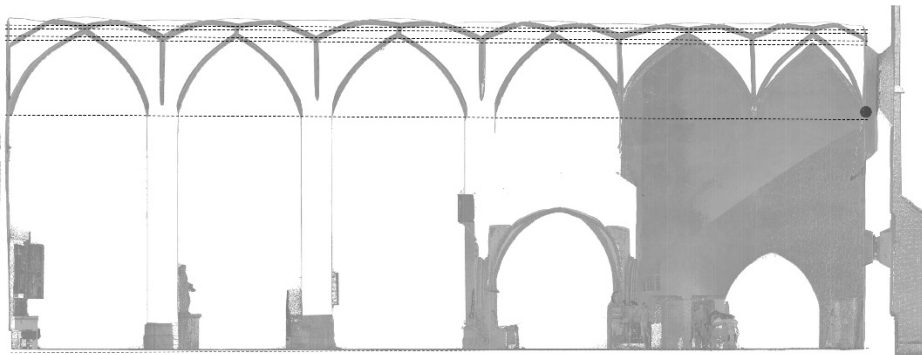
Fig. 9b. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the northern aisle looking to the south. The authors' work

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[49] The positions of the junction points, which do not fall to the lines on which the majority of the points of the same function fall, is to be explained at the last paragraph of chapter 3.5.
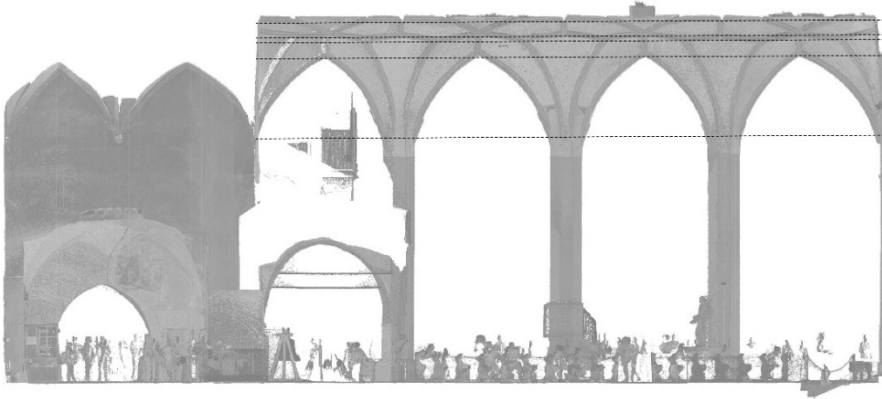
Fig. 10a. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the main nave looking to the north. The authors' work
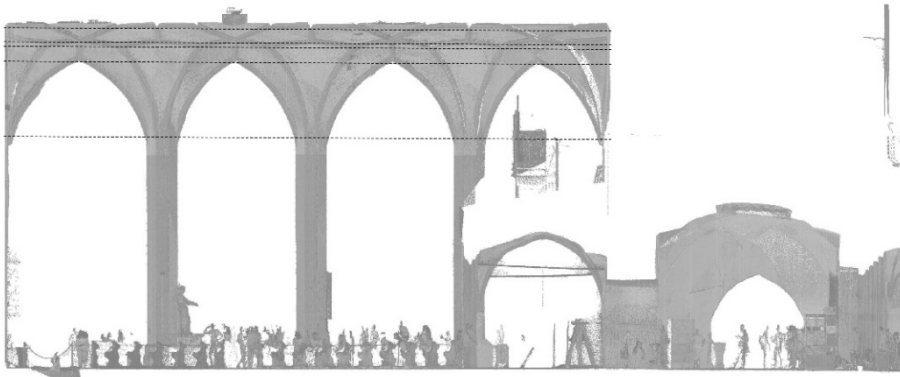
Fig. 10b. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the main nave looking to the south. The authors' work
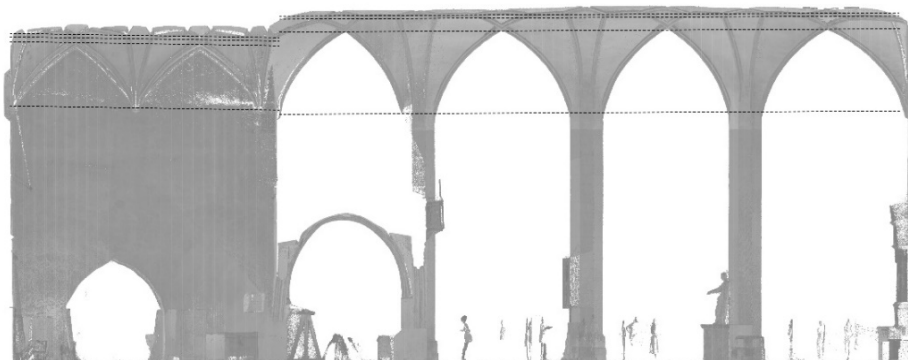
Fig. 11a. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the southern aisle looking to the north. The authors' work

Fig. 11b. The examination of the vault system's longitudinal sections. The longitudinal sections of the southern aisle looking to the south. The authors' work

3.4. The analysis of the cross-sections

The analysis of the cross-sections was carried out by analysing the position of the points where the lines found on the longitudinal sections intersect the eastern short wall of the nave. Since the analysis of the plan and longitudinal sections suggested its necessity, we accomplished the same examination with the western short wall of the southern aisle as well. (It is to be noted that in the case of the southern aisle, the height of the net vault also changed significantly at the borderline between the two parts differentiated on the plan view, whereas in the case of the northern aisle, only a slight direction change of the lines was needed to adjust to the given geometry, thus in the latter case this analysis was found pointless.)

Regarding the eastern short wall, we were able to reconstruct a quadrate net as the base for the construction of the vault. The net of the two aisles has a 4:3, while the main nave has a 6:4 width-to-height ratio. Even though the quadrates of the aisles are smaller than those of the main nave, their dimensions are geometrically cohering since the side of the smaller quadrates is three-fourths of that of the bigger ones (Fig. 12).
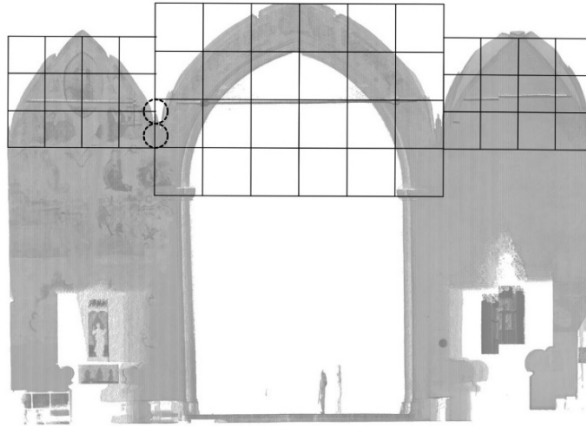
Fig. 12. The underlying quadrate nets describing the three naves' geometry.
The authors' work

We found that the lines found on the plan and the longitudinal sections of the vault system are also organised by these quadrate nets. In the case of the two aisles, the determined heights are coinciding, even though the plan patterns of the two vaults differ significantly, and they can be deduced based on the eight of the quadrate's side lengths, whereas in the case of the main nave the sixth of the quadrate's side length leads to the vertical positions of the junction points. As for the distances of the lines of the plan, the same ratios gave the solution (Fig. 13).
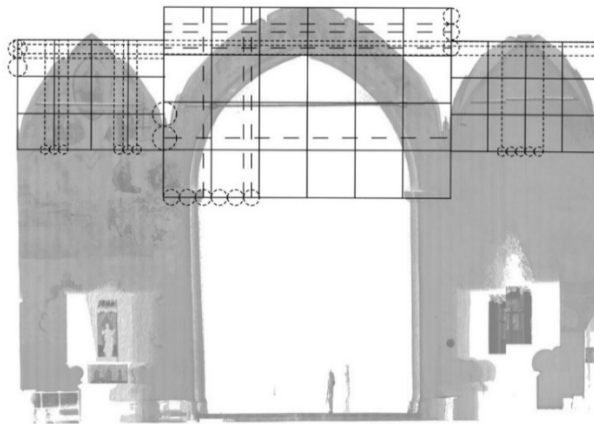
Fig. 13. The underlying quadrate nets describing the three naves' geometry
with the ratios describing the different junction types' height values
(on the eastern short walls). The authors' work

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As for the western short wall of the southern aisle, a square can be drawn as the base of the construction, the side of which is equal to two and a half units of the quadrate net of the aisle's western side. The heights of the lines found on the longitudinal section can be deduced from the eight of the side of the eastern short wall's quadrate, like in the case of the eastern part of this aisle (Fig. 14).
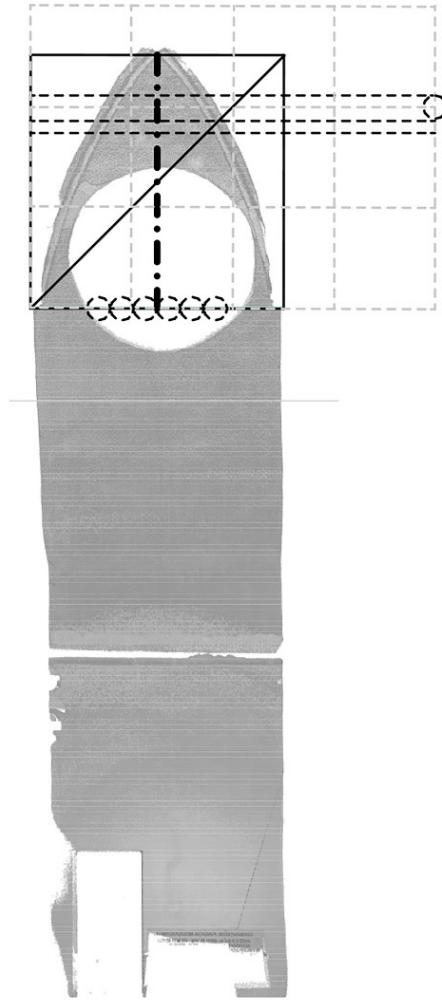
Fig. 14. The underlying quadrate nets describing the southern nave's geometry with the ratios describing the different junction types' height values (on the western short wall). The authors' work

3.5. The analysis of the individual ribs

It is to be accentuated that the number of regular features found during the analysis of the rib system's global geometry so far is not enough to unequivocally construct the spatial position of a given junction point, thus some additional data is needed. We found this data in the characteristics of the individual ribs. We measured the radius of the curvature and the chord length of each rib in the system. (Table 1. and Table 2. The legend for Table 1. appears on Fig. 15).
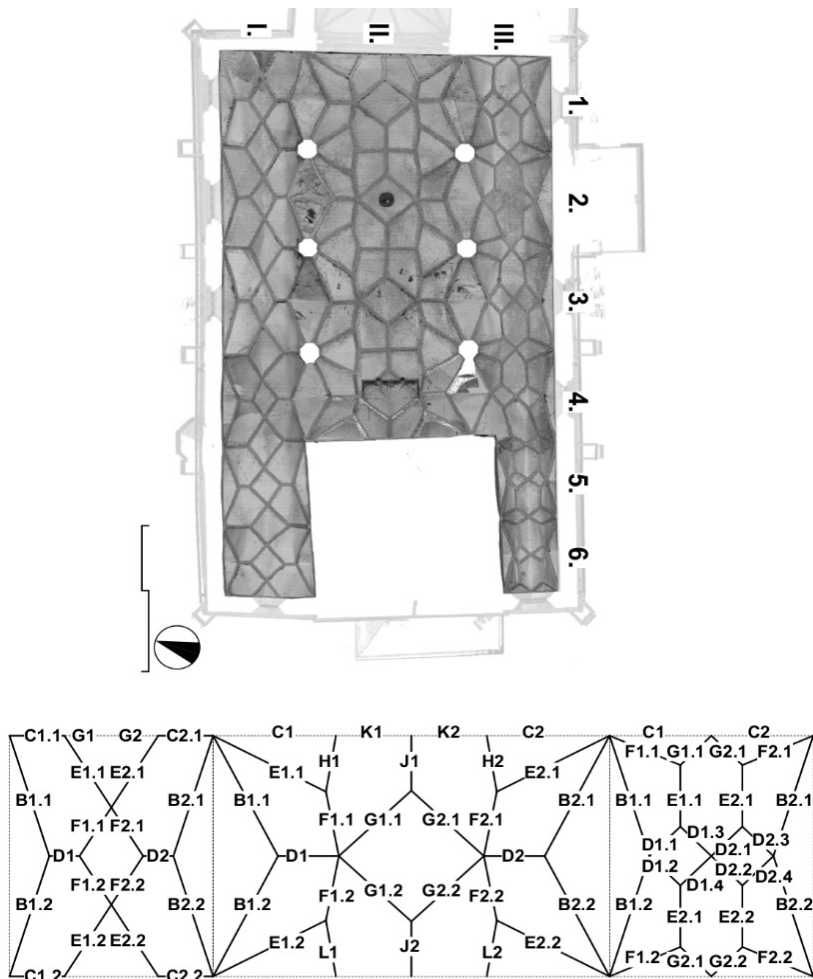
Fig. 15. Legend for the individual ribs' alphanumeric signs. The authors' work

As for the above-detailed "Prinzipalbogen" principle, we concluded that the values of the radius of the curvature show a significant deviation, thus can not be accepted as uniform. Consequently, the principle does not apply to the nave vault system of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara.[50]

However, regarding the chord length values of the ribs, we found them highly consequent with the ribs' position in the system, even though the ribs' lengths projected to the plan may differ significantly. Thus, we claim that the chord length of the ribs is the data which completes the construction of the rib system of the net vaults (Fig. 16). (It is to be noted that in the cases where the values are not consistent, the exceptions are always those ribs which constitute the vaults' connections to the imposts. Since the sizes of the bays are not coincidental – not even the easternmost ones, where the tower does not disturb the system – these border positions provide sufficient explanation for the anomalies.)
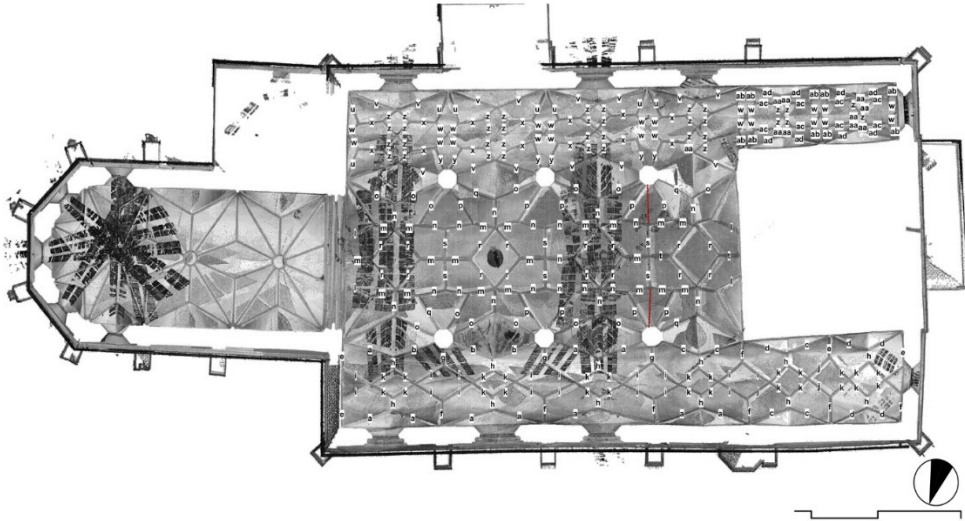
Fig. 16. The distribution of the chord length types signed on the plan. The authors' work

It must be mentioned, that while the majority of the junction points' plan pictures actually fall on the lines described in this chapter, there are certain exceptions. Most of the exceptions are only slightly displaced, which can be accepted as a result of the movement of the temporary supporting structure during the building works, or the builders' effort to fit the prefabricated rib

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[50] It is to be noted that even though measuring the curvature of a rib is not an easy task, as Vidal (Vidal, "The Evolution," 1009) proved by experiential method, regardless of the deterioration, the curvature of the ribs can be found with a high probability.

elements in the designated spaces between the junction points. However, in the case of the southern aisle, some junctions' deviation from the lines on which the others of the same function fall, is significant (e.g. the junction highlighted on Fig. 17). Deviant as these junctions' positions may seem, their chord lengths still blend in seamlessly with the other values of the correspondent groups. Thus, we presume that their positions are mainly due to the same prefabrication issue we already mentioned: the quite irregular initial geometry is the reason why in certain points the same values, which fit perfectly in other places, can not be placed between the points which were constructed previously.
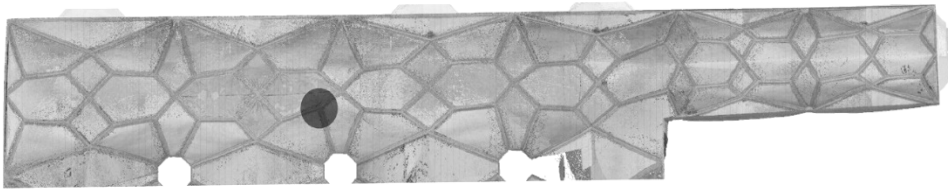
Fig. 17. An example of a highly deviantly placed junction point. The authors' work

4. Discussion

In the previous chapter, we detailed the geometric features of the net vault system of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara and highlighted the regularities in the system, which led to our conclusion about the methods used to construct the vaults' spatial geometry.

We found that the principle behind the seemingly chaotic vault system is the strictly constructed views of the vaults projected to the short walls, in which the regularities of the longitudinal sections and the plans are interweaving. This construction works with the divisions of quadrate nets based on simple ratios. Moreover, the cross sections' construction also establishes a close relation between the three naves' net vaults, however different their rib pattern may seem. It is worth accentuating that in this guiding principle the underlying idea of division, which is claimed to be the basic Gothic geometric method, is combined with addition, which is generally held as the main Romanesque geometric characteristic. The latter appears in the idea that even though geometric ratio provides a certain degree of connection between the vaults of the aisles and that of the main nave, they are not deduced from the same quadrate net, thus keeping the three parts of the same united hall church space still slightly separated. We think that this

latter intention can be parallel to the idea that the three different net vaults of the three naves have different rib patterns, expressing their separation, yet the patterns can be associated with each other, with simple mirroring and the addition of some transversal and longitudinal ribs, as presented on Fig. 18.
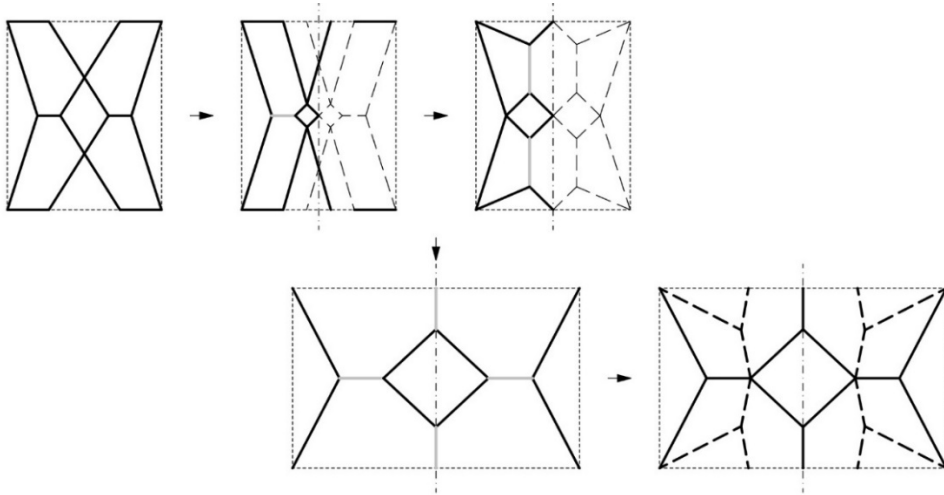
Fig. 18. The geometric connection of the three different plan types. The authors' work

We presume, that the reason to use the cross-section view as the guiding principle instead of the plan view, is the fact we highlighted in the Literature framework chapter, namely that the construction methods based on the plan view suggest a plan of regular borderlines. In this case, however, the given space borders were highly irregular, thus using the plan as the starting point of the vault system's construction would have accentuated these irregularities even more, while the idea actually applied helps to mask the inequalities as best as it seemed possible to the master builder of the Gothic times. Besides the aesthetic considerations, the applied solution could lead to practical benefits as well. The lines in the three-dimensional space (which were described in our analysis with their plan and side views) were supposedly not only theoretical construction lines but also the temporary supporting structure during the building works of the vault system (e. g. main beams supporting the individual rib's centrings). Applying the hereby reconstructed method, these lines were straight, whereas starting the construction from the plan view, they would have been fractioned. This would have resulted in ribs being of different chord lengths, even among the ribs of the same function of the system. Although this would not result in an unsurmountable difficulty, the prefabrication of the rib elements of different lengths would have required significantly more geometric construction work.

Thus, the systematic approach in the seemingly chaotic vaulting system is very much present, in a form which seemed the most practical and sensible to the master and the strict geometric principles actually helped to overcome the difficulties of the construction caused by the highly irregular boundary conditions remaining from the previous building periods.

5. Conclusion

The direct result of our analysis carried out on the net nave vaults of the Church on the Hill of Sighişoara is the description of the geometric regularities in the vault system, and based on those, the deduction of the construction ideas used to create the three-nave system.

We identified the regular geometric features in the seemingly geometric system, such as the straight lines on which the junction points of the ribs fall and the chord length groups characterising the ribs of the same function in the system.

We also found the strict quadrate net construction of the cross-sections based on simple ratios and the combination of the principles of division and addition, which proved to be the underlying idea of the whole net vault system's geometry, which ensures the theoretic and technological relation (and separation) of the three net vaults of significantly different rib patterns.

Apart from the direct results, we think that our most important finding is that even in the case of this prominent town church with a direct architectural connection to the guild of Landshut, well-known for its late Gothic masonry architecture,[51] the main construction principle (the starting point of the construction) proved to be contradictory to the generally accepted ideas of the technical literature due to the constraint of the former building periods' remains. The other question of great importance discussed in the present article is that the main geometric principle predominating the late Gothic net vaults cannot necessarily be found in the pattern of the rib system's plan. According to our hypothesis, these results open up new questions to be examined for future research about the late Gothic monuments of Europe.

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[51] Hermann Fabini, and Alida Fabini, *Kirchenburgen in Siebenbürgen* (Leipzig: Koehler&Amelang, 1985), 83; Szőke, "A Wechselberger-Harperger," 204.

6. Acknowledgements

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Table 1. The individual rib data of the vault system. *The Sign of the rib* column refers to Fig. 15 and the *Chord length type* column refers to Fig. 16.

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
I.1.-A1.1	3.83	4.71	wall arch
I.1.-A1.2	4.02	5.10	wall arch
I.2.-A1.1	3.95	4.73	wall arch
I.2.-A1.2	3.95	4.69	wall arch
I.3.-A1.1	4.10	4.68	wall arch
I.3.-A1.2	4.00	4.58	wall arch
I.4.-A1.1	3.98	4.47	wall arch
I.4.-A1.2	4.03	5.23	wall arch
I.5.-A1.1	3.45	4.74	wall arch
I.5.-A1.2	3.50	7.42	wall arch
I.5.-A2.1	3.95	breakage in the arch	wall arch
I.5.-A2.2	3.65	6.36	wall arch
I.6.-A1.1	3.21	4.52	wall arch
I.6.-A1.2	3.10	4.18	wall arch
I.6.-A2.1	3.23	5.97	wall arch
I.6.-A2.2	3.10	11.13	wall arch
I.1.-B1.1	4.18	4.86	a
I.1.-B1.2	4.20	4.80	a
I.1.-B2.1	4.29	4.44	a
I.1.-B2.2	4.07	4.70	b
I.2.-B1.1	4.33	4.52	a
I.2.-B1.2	4.23	4.57	a
I.2.-B2.1	3.90	4.68	b
I.2.-B2.2	4.08	4.86	b
I.3.-B1.1	4.42	4.65	a
I.3.-B1.2	4.59	4.65	-
I.3.-B2.1	4.16	4.92	a
I.3.-B2.2	4.22	4.73	a
I.4.-B1.1	4.16	4.66	a
I.4.-B1.2	4.35	4.84	a
I.4.-B2.1	3.68	4.78	c
I.4.-B2.2	3.79	4.93	c
I.5.-B1.1	3.84	4.68	c
I.5.-B1.2	3.84	4.51	c
I.5.-B2.1	3.41	4.51	d
I.5.-B2.2	3.81	4.83	c
I.6.-B1.1	3.57	4.24	d
I.6.-B1.2	3.45	4.56	d

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
I.6.-B2.1	3.58	4.27	d
I.6.-B2.2	3.52	4.54	d
I.1.-C1.1	2.80	7.50	e
I.1.-C1.2	3.16	4.54	e
I.1.-C2.1	2.84	7.32	f
I.1.-C2.2	2.59	4.40	e
I.2.-C2.1	3.23	4.16	f
I.2.-C2.2	2.35	4.35	g
I.3.-C2.1	3.23	4.07	f
I.3.-C2.2	2.34	4.45	g
I.4.-C2.1	3.26	4.10	f
I.4.-C2.2	3.28	6.81	f
I.5.-C2.1	3.10	6.91	f
I.5.-C2.2	2.90	6.60	e
I.6.-C2.1	3.24	4.67	f
I.6.-C2.2	2.92	4.47	e
I.1.-D1	0.73	non measurable	h
I.1.-D2	0.73	non measurable	h
I.2.-D1	0.76	non measurable	h
I.2.-D2	0.79	non measurable	h
I.3.-D1	0.73	non measurable	h
I.3.-D2	0.76	non measurable	h
I.4.-D1	0.75	non measurable	h
I.4.-D2	0.79	non measurable	h
I.5.-D1	0.77	non measurable	h
I.5.-D2	0.79	non measurable	h
I.6.-D1	0.72	non measurable	h
I.6.-D2	0.72	non measurable	h
I.1.-E1.1	2.17	6.57	i
I.1.-E1.2	2.01	7.08	i
I.1.-E2.1	2.19	non measurable	i
I.1.E2.2	2.08	6.60	i
I.2.-E1.1	2.13	9.46	i
I.2.-E1.2	2.02	8.19	i
I.2.-E2.1	2.04	7.05	i
I.2.-E2.2	2.07	11.44	i
I.3.-E1.1	2.13	9.15	i
I.3.-E1.2	2.08	8.67	i
I.3.-E2.1	2.29	10.49	i
I.3.-E2.2	2.21	10.10	i

THE GEOMETRIC SYSTEM OF THE NAVE VAULT OF THE CHURCH ON THE HILL OF SIGHIŞOARA

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
I.4.-E1.1	1.80	6.08	i
I.4.-E1.2	2.02	11.93	i
I.4.-E2.1	2.05	non measurable	i
I.4.-E2.2	1.83	non measurable	i
I.5.-E1.1	1.73	8.69	j
I.5.-E1.2	1.69	9.00	i
I.5.-E2.1	2.02	non measurable	j
I.5.-E2.2	1.77	non measurable	j
I.6.-E1.1	1.53	7.62	k
I.6.-E1.2	1.47	non measurable	k
I.6.-E2.1	1.73	non measurable	k
I.6.-E2.2	1.50	non measurable	m
I.1.-F1.1	1.47	6.87	k
I.1.-F1.2	1.58	6.79	k
I.1.-F2.1	1.61	6.51	k
I.1.-F2.2	1.50	7.60	k
I.2.-F1.1	1.42	6.96	k
I.2.-F1.2	1.59	6.98	k
I.2.-F2.1	1.42	7.63	k
I.2.-F2.2	1.45	8.39	k
I.3.-F1.1	1.55	8.35	k
I.3.-F1.2	1.54	9.49	k
I.3.-F2.1	1.54	6.93	k
I.3.-F2.2	1.62	7.17	k
I.4.-F1.1	1.43	6.29	k
I.4.-F1.2	1.29	6.72	k
I.4.-F2.1	1.49	non measurable	k
I.4.-F2.2	1.44	non measurable	k
I.5.-F1.1	1.49	7.36	k
I.5.-F1.2	1.54	non measurable	k
I.5.-F2.1	1.43	non measurable	k
I.5.-F2.2	1.50	non measurable	k
I.6.-F1.1	1.46	8.95	k
I.6.-F1.2	1.42	9.32	k
I.6.-F2.1	1.59	non measurable	k
I.6.-F2.2	1.40	6.80	k
I.1.-G1	1.30	7.50	e
I.1.-G2	1.43	7.32	e
I.6.-G1	0.90	4.67	l
I.6.-G2	0.95	4.47	l

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Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
II.1.-B1.1	4,64	4,7	-
II.1.-B1.2	4,41	5,5	o
II.1.-B2.1	4,43	4,45	o
II.1.-B2.2	4,42	4,68	o
II.2.-B1.1	4,35	4,86	o
II.2.-B1.2	4,34	4,68	o
II.2.-B2.1	4,1	4,6	q
II.2.-B2.2	4,28	4,68	o
II.3.-B1.1	4,34	4,95	o
II.3.-B1.2	4,37	4,94	o
II.3.-B2.1	4,38	4,76	o
II.3.-B2.2	4,32	4,75	o
II.4.-B1.1	4,12	4,6	q
II.4.-B1.2	4,54	4,92	-
II.4.-B2.1	4,05	4,63	q
II.4.-B2.2	4,315	4,52	o
II.1.-C1.1	5,18	6,48	wall arch
II.1.-C2.1	5,25	6,8	wall arch
II.4.-C1.1	5,51	7,78	wall arch
II.4.-C2.1	5,35	7,45	wall arch
II.1.-D1	1,65	non-measurable	n
II.1.-D2	1,66	non-measurable	n
II.2.-D1	1,65	non-measurable	n
II.2.-D2	1,77	non-measurable	n
II.3.-D1	1,73	non-measurable	n
II.3.-D2	1,78	12,11	n
II.4.-D1	1,74	non-measurable	n
II.4.-D2	1,7	non-measurable	n
II.1.-E1.1	4,82	5,05	-
II.1.-E1.2	4,105	4,76	q
II.1.-E2.1	4,89	5,13	-
II.1.-E2.2	4,48	4,24	o
II.2.-E1.1	4,43	4,155	o
II.2.-E1.2	4,33	4,08	p
II.2.-E2.1	4,23	5,5	p
II.2.-E2.2	4,22	4,08	p
II.3.-E1.1	4,34	4,88	p
II.3.-E1.2	4,16	4,9	p
II.3.-E2.1	4,31	4,53	p
II.3.-E2.2	4,19	4,51	p

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
II.4.-E1.1	4,2	5,6	p
II.4.-E1.2	5,26	7,16	-
II.4.-E2.1	4,215	4,82	p
II.4.-E2.2	4,95	5,6	-
II.1.-F1.1	1,5	non-measurable	m
II.1.-F1.2	1,41	non-measurable	m
II.1.-F2.1	1,27	non-measurable	m
II.1.-F2.2	1,46	non-measurable	m
II.2.-F1.1	1,5	non-measurable	m
II.2.-F1.2	1,43	non-measurable	m
II.2.-F2.1	1,36	non-measurable	m
II.2.-F2.2	1,38	non-measurable	m
II.3.-F1.1	1,62	non-measurable	n
II.3.-F1.2	1,64	non-measurable	n
II.3.-F2.1	1,46	non-measurable	m
II.3.-F2.2	1,47	non-measurable	m
II.4.-F1.1	1,375	non-measurable	m
II.4.-F1.2	1,14	non-measurable	-
II.4.-F2.1	1,35	non-measurable	m
II.4.-F2.2	1,08	non-measurable	-
II.1.-G1.1	2,28	non-measurable	r
II.1.-G1.2	2,34	8,37	r
II.1.-G2.1	2,29	8,76	r
II.1.-G2.2	2,23	non-measurable	r
II.2.-G1.1	2,22	non-measurable	r
II.2.-G1.2	2,38	non-measurable	r
II.2.-G2.1	2,36	non-measurable	r
II.2.-G2.2	2,25	non-measurable	r
II.3.-G1.1	2,28	non-measurable	r
II.3.-G1.2	2,26	non-measurable	r
II.3.-G2.1	2,36	non-measurable	r
II.3.-G2.2	2,23	non-measurable	r
II.4.-G1.1	2,41	non-measurable	r
II.4.-G1.2	2,265	non-measurable	r
II.4.-G2.1	2,32	non-measurable	r
II.4.-G2.2	2,31	non-measurable	r
II.1.-H1	1,89	non-measurable	l
II.1.-H2	1,85	non-measurable	l
II.4.-H1	1,795	non-measurable	l
II.4.-H2	1,91	non-measurable	l

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
II.1.-J1	1,52	non-measurable	m
II.1.-J2	1,51	non-measurable	m
II.2.-J1	1,47	non-measurable	m
II.2.-J2	1,48	non-measurable	m
II.3.-J1	1,66	non-measurable	n
II.3.-J2	1,49	non-measurable	m
II.4.-J1	1,26	non-measurable	-
II.4.-J2	1,29	non-measurable	-
II.1.-L1	1,61	non-measurable	n
II.1.-L2	1,61	non-measurable	n
II.2.-L1.1	1,6	non-measurable	n
II.2.-L1.2	1,64	non-measurable	n
II.2.-L2.1	1,655	non-measurable	n
II.2.-L2.2	1,76	non-measurable	n
II.3.-L1.1	1,72	non-measurable	n
II.3.-L1.2	1,43	non-measurable	m
II.3.-L2.1	1,78	non-measurable	n
II.3.-L2.2	1,64	non-measurable	n
II.4.-L1	1,44	non-measurable	m
II.4.-L2	1,43	non-measurable	m
II.1.-M1	1,83	0,105	s
II.1.-M2	1,78	0,07	s
II.2.-M1	1,7	0,11	s
II.2.-M2	1,8	0,87	s
II.3.-M1	1,74	0,05	s
II.3.-M2	1,78	0,08	s
III.1.-A2.1	3,775	4,54	wall arch
III.1.-A2.2	3,89	4,4	wall arch
III.2.-A2.1	3,89	4,76	wall arch
III.2.-A2.2	3,78	4,34	wall arch
III.3.-A2.1	4,07	4,89	wall arch
III.3.-A2.2	3,98	4,6	wall arch
III.4.-A2.1	3,94	4,49	wall arch
III.4.-A2.2	3,88	4,67	wall arch
III.5.-A1.1	2,92	7,31	wall arch
III.5.-A1.2	2,99	8,68	wall arch
III.6.-A1.1	2,97	8,44	wall arch
III.6.-A1.2	3,15	7,77	wall arch
III.6.-A2.1	2,97	7,06	wall arch
III.6.-A2.2	3,13	4,44	wall arch

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
III.1.-B1.1	5,14	4,42	-
III.1.-B1.2	4,17	4,7	v
III.1.-B2.1	4,24	4,83	v
III.1.-B2.2	4,41	4,94	v
III.2.-B1.1	4,15	4,86	v
III.2.-B1.2	4,16	4,77	v
III.2.-B2.1	4,24	4,37	v
III.2.-B2.2	4,32	4,57	v
III.3.-B1.1	4,25	4,54	v
III.3.-B1.2	4,2	4,83	v
III.3.-B2.1	4,4	4,7	v
III.3.-B2.2	4,13	4,62	v
III.4.-B1.1	3,81	4,86	-
III.4.-B1.2	4,105	5,02	v
III.4.-B2.1	4,24	4,53	v
III.4.-B2.2	4,15	4,63	v
III.5.-B1.1	3,17	4,64	ad
III.5.-B1.2	3,19	4,72	ad
III.5.-B2.1	3,33	4,33	ad
III.5.-B2.2	3,2	4,26	ad
III.6.-B1.1	3,23	4,41	ad
III.6.-B1.2	3,32	4,65	ad
III.6.-B2.1	3,22	4,515	ad
III.6.-B2.2	3,4	4,325	ad
III.1.-C1.1	4,17	6,28	wall arch
III.1.-C1.2	3,82	7,06	wall arch
III.1.-D1.1	1,15	6,04	z
III.1.-D1.2	1,11	4,02	z
III.1.-D1.3	1,15	5,175	z
III.1.-D1.4	1,2	4,05	z
III.1.-D2.1	1,1	5,34	z
III.1.-D2.2	1,03	4,59	z
III.1.-D2.3	1,16	7,08	z
III.1.-D2.4	1,085	10,165	z
III.2.-D1.1	1,1	5,59	z
III.2.-D1.2	1,2	4,88	z
III.2.-D1.3	1,105	4,25	z
III.2.-D1.4	1,13	6,23	z
III.2.-D2.1	1,14	5,37	z
III.2.-D2.2	1,12	14,88	z

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
III.2.-D2.3	1,16	6,265	z
III.2.-D2.4	1,02	4,24	z
III.3.-D1.1	1,22	5,17	z
III.3.-D1.2	1,22	8	z
III.3.-D1.3	1,27	8,12	z
III.3.-D1.4	1,13	6,29	z
III.3.-D2.1	1,44	8,07	z
III.3.-D2.2	1,09	8,5	z
III.3.-D2.3	1,16	5,78	z
III.3.-D2.4	1,13	6,75	z
III.4.-D1.1	0,87	6,06	aa
III.4.-D1.2	1,23	5,855	z
III.4.-D1.3	1,165	7,45	z
III.4.-D1.4	1,03	5,01	z
III.4.-D2.1	1,185	5,22	z
III.4.-D2.2	1,21	5,22	z
III.4.-D2.3	0,93	7,7	z
III.4.-D2.4	1,125	6,255	z
III.5.-D1.1	0,73	non measurable	aa
III.5.-D1.2	0,795	non measurable	aa
III.5.-D1.3	1,015	-	z
III.5.-D1.4	0,94	-	z
III.5.-D2.1	0,78	-	aa
III.5.-D2.2	0,7	-	aa
III.5.-D2.3	0,97	-	z
III.5.-D2.4	0,925	-	z
III.6.-D1.1	0,76	-	aa
III.6.-D1.2	0,64	-	aa
III.6.-D1.3	0,88	-	aa
III.6.-D1.4	0,97	-	z
III.6.-D2.1	0,53	-	-
III.6.-D2.2	0,66	-	aa
III.6.-D2.3	1,06	-	z
III.6.-D2.4	0,88	-	aa
III.1.-E1.1	1,54	8,84	x
III.1.-E1.2	1,52	5,51	x
III.1.-E2.1	1,45	5,185	x
III.1.-E2.2	1,56	9,59	x
III.2.-E1.1	1,31	7,12	x
III.2.-E1.2	1,43	8,82	x

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
III.2.-E2.1	1,44	6,89	x
III.2.-E2.2	1,49	6,81	x
III.3.-E1.1	1,41	6,575	x
III.3.-E1.2	1,49	6,77	x
III.3.-E2.1	1,39	10,05	x
III.3.-E2.2	1,58	8,045	x
III.4.-E1.1	1,34	7,54	x
III.4.-E1.2	1,98	6,5	the connection between the eastern and western system
III.4.-E2.1	1,49	8,58	x
III.4.-E2.2	1,76	8,65	the connection between the eastern and western system
III.5.-E1.1	1,19	5,74	ac
III.5.-E1.2	1,18	11,55	ac
III.5.-E2.1	1,07	6,4	ac
III.5.-E2.2	1,21	12,86	ac
III.6.-E1.1	1,3	5,94	ac
III..-E1.2	1,275	8,88	ac
III.6.-E2.1	1,34	8,16	ac
III.6.-E2.2	1,27	6,38	ac
III.1.-F1.1	3,96	3,67/4,075	u
III.1.-F1.2	3,31	5,03	y
III.1.-F2.1	3,78	5,62	u
III.1.-F2.2	4,09	4,86	u
III.2.-F1.1	3,16	4,86	y
III.2.-F1.2	3,29	4,62	y
III.2.-F2.1	4,03	4,9	u
III.2.-F2.2	4,08	4,72	u
III.3.-F1.1	3,53	5,4	y
III.3.-F1.2	3,43	4,84	y
III.3.-F2.1	4,11	5,5	u
III.3.-F2.2	3,84	4,71	u
III.4.-F1.1	3,37	5,03	y
III.4.-F1.2	2,63	7,32	ab
III.4.-F2.1	3,84	5,79	u
III.4.-F2.2	2,87	11,25	ab
III.5.-F1.1	2,58	8,58	ab
III.5.-F1.2	2,74	7,635	ab

Sign of the rib	Chord length [m]	Radius of the curvature [m]	Chord length type
III.5.-F2.1	2,83	8,18	ab
III.5.-F2.2	2,69	6,26	ab
III.6.-F1.1	2,61	7,54	ab
III.6.-F1.2	2,72	7,36	ab
III.6.-F2.1	2,685	8,26	ab
III.6.-F2.2	2,7	8,27	ab
III.1.-G1.1	1,13	4	w
III.1.-G1.2	0,99	6,17	w
III.1.-G2.1	0,95	5,4	w
III.1.-G2.2	1	6,15	w
III.2.-G1.1	1,15	8	w
III.2.-G1.2	0,945	4,28	w
III.2.-G2.1	0,97	7,67	w
III.2.-G2.2	1,03	4,79	w
III.3.-G1.1	1	5,24	w
III.3.-G1.2	0,97	5,95	w
III.3.-G2.1	1,11	7,55	w
III.3.-G2.2	0,995	8,96	w
III.4.-G1.1	1,2	7,42	w
III.4.-G1.2	1,16	5,75	w
III.4.-G2.1	1,035	9,89	w
III.4.-G2.2	1,07	5,08	w
III.5.-G1.1	1,11	6,78	w
III.5.-G1.2	1,06	6,24	w
III.5.-G2.1	1,14	non measurable	w
III.5.-G2.2	1,09	5,9	w
III.6.-G1.1	1	4,4	w
III.6.-G1.2	1,04	4,48	w
III.6.-G2.1	1	7,8	w
III.6.-G2.2	1,04	-	w

Table 2. The average and dispersion values of the different rib type groups.

Sign of the rib type	Type average	Type dispersion
a	4,25	0,09
b	4,02	0,10
c	3,79	0,07
d	3,51	0,07
e	2,87	0,06
f	3,21	0,06
g	2,35	0,00
h	0,75	0,03
i	2,07	0,12
j	1,73	0,03
k	1,49	0,08
l	1,86	0,05
m	1,44	0,06
n	1,68	0,06
o	4,37	0,06
p	4,24	0,07
q	4,09	0,03
r	2,30	0,06
s	1,77	0,05
t	1,28	0,02
u	3,97	0,13
v	4,23	0,10
w	1,05	0,07
x	1,46	0,08
y	3,35	0,13
z	1,12	0,10
aa	0,77	0,09
ab	2,71	0,09
ac	1,23	0,09
ad	3,26	0,08

"DE PILOSO FONTE SUM": ON DISHONORABLE BACKGROUNDS, LAWSUITS, GUILDS, AND ARTISANS IN EARLY RENAISSANCE CLUJ

Ciprian FIREA[*]

ABSTRACT. "De piloso fonte sum": On Dishonorable Backgrounds, Lawsuits, Guilds, and Artisans in Early Renaissance Cluj. This study, based on an exceptional source (a judicial record of 1549, published here for the first time) aims at the restitution of the biography and the distinctive character and personality of an early Renaissance painter from Transylvania, Gregorius Pictor, while making recurrent references to the artistic milieu of the sixteenth century Cluj – the town where he was mainly active. The study reveals, undoubtedly, one of the most comprehensive painters' biographies of Transylvania in early modern times.

Keywords: *painter; painters' guild; biography of artists; Renaissance; Cluj; Transylvania.*

When he died, in late December 1548 or maybe in early January 1549, the painter Gregorius – Gergely, as most of his acquaintances probably called him – was about 80 years old. One can infer his age knowing that he had recollections from the time of the victorious battle of the Transylvanians against the Ottomans at Câmpul Pâinii / Kenyérmező (*tempore conflictus in Campo Kynyr*) on the 13th of October 1479. Distance and coldness had been installed for many years between him and his wife Catherina – whom, in their younger years, he probably nicknamed Kata. Reliable sources suggest that marital tension had set

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* **Ciprian FIREA PhD** (cfirea@yahoo.com) is researcher at the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. He is interested in medieval and early modern art and architecture; art and liturgy; patronage; heraldry; *memoria*; altarpieces; scientific investigation of artworks; digital art history.

in after the death of their children. Margareta, wife of Blasius Textor, a witness in the matter to be discussed in the following lines, informed that the couple's children had already died long time ago. She knew the story from her first husband (at that time deceased), who had been in the service of the painter (probably his apprentice or journeyman). In any case, from that moment on Gregorius lived in turmoil with his wife, whom he held responsible for the children's death: *quasi ipsa in culpa esset mortis puerorum*. The lack of any direct heirs *in articulo mortis*, at the painter's deathbed and in the funerary cortege seems to have fueled the ambitions of some alleged relatives allured by the inheritance. Like birds of prey, they sniffed death and its potential benefits to the heirs, therefore they attacked the widow in a lawsuit. Their greed resulted in a long trial, including appeals and, thus, in preserved written records, which can only please nowadays historians. Had it not been for the lawsuit initiated by those who hoped to get their hands on the earthly goods left behind by a sixteenth century painter from Cluj, one might never have known today that this artisan ever existed. Without the trial records luckily preserved in the archives,[1] Gregorius Pictor would have never existed for us at all.[2] Given the scarce source materials concerning Transylvanian painters, Gregorius' case is privileged among his fellow artists. Because of this source, his biography is one of the most comprehensive painters' biographies before the modern times.[3] However, this rich information does not refer at all to his oeuvre and commissions (totally obliterated by the source focused upon in this study), but rather to various details of everyday life, to his distinct personality and abundant biographical facts. Besides, the document reveals interesting information concerning the artistic environment in the town of Cluj during the early Renaissance period, previously almost completely ignored in existent literature. Such information has been briefly disclosed in a previous contribution,[4] but here the scope is larger, since the analysis focuses on the thorough examination of the primary source.

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[1] See, below for details concerning the source.

[2] This is a paraphrase after Truus van Buren, discussing the letters of Katarina Lemmel as singular sources on her art patronage: "without those letters Katerina would not have existed for us at all"; see Truus van Bueren, "Care for the Here and the Hereafter: A Multitude of Possibilities," in *Care for the Here and the Hereafter. Memoria, Art and Ritual in the Middle Ages*, ed. Truus van Bueren (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 22.

[3] For comparison, see other Transylvanian painters' biographies in Ciprian Firea, and Saveta Pop, *Pictorii Transilvaniei medievale (cca. 1300-1600). Un Dicționar* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2021).

[4] Ciprian Firea, "O breaslă a pictorilor la Cluj în secolul al XVI-lea? Mărturii documentare inedite," in *Cluj - Kolozsvár - Klausenburg - 700. Studii de istorie urbană*, ed. Mária Lupescu Makó et al. (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2018), 345–350.

This study has a two-folded goal: on the one hand, it introduces to the larger public a significant documentary source, edited now for the first time.[5] On the other hand, based mainly on this illuminating source, the study aims at the restitution of the biography and individuality of an early Renaissance Transylvanian painter, making recurrent references to the artistic milieu of sixteenth century Cluj – the town where he was mainly active. As already suggested, this source sheds light on details of daily life, gestures, and dialogues, revealing the lives of our ancestors that thus seem closer to our own than we might suppose otherwise. It evokes social paradigms and conventions, various details of the organization of trades, but also the gossip and scandals in the neighborhood. This contribution exploits but a part of the generous documentary source. Certainly, it can be further explored in many different ways.

The quite large document (it consists of 167 lines), survived in one piece in its original form and is currently preserved in Sibiu Branch of the Romanian National Archives (Fig. 1). It belongs to the collection of medieval documents, series U IV, no 571, and is available online at arhivamedievala.ro (SIIAN: SB-F-00001-1-U4-571). The document was issued by the municipality of Cluj, on the 31st of May 1549.[6] It was written (fortunately, in legible Renaissance practical writing) by a scribe who was responsible for a number of documents emitted by the town, from the 1520s to the 1550s.[7] The document was addressed to the burgomaster and the members of the town council of Sibiu,[8] as the superior (appeal) court of a cause judged in Cluj in the first instance. As already mentioned, the cause was initiated by some individuals allegedly entitled to inherit a part of the estate of the deceased Gregorius Pictor. Ladislaus Azthalos (Joyner) and his sister Helena from Turda, son and daughter of late Elias Azthalos and Catharina, claimed that, as Gregorius Pictor was the brother of their deceased mother Catharina, and since he had died without direct heirs, they had the right to inherit a part (*dualitas*, which means 2/3 of the paternal inheritance)[9] of the possessions of the deceased, on the grounds of the laws of the town of Cluj (*secundum iura huius civitatis*). The other part (1/3) of the inheritance would remain with the painter's widow. The latter, also named Catharina, declared that she had no

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5   I warmly thank my colleague Andreea Mârza for kindly revising my initial transcription of the original Latin.

6   *Feria sexta proxima post festum Ascensionis Domini, anno eiusdem 1549*.

7   See, for example, the collection of documents (cartulary) detailing the boundaries of the town Cluj, a copy from 1555 of previous royal charters and privileges (accessible online on the web page of the National Hungarian Archives, https://archives.hungaricana.hu; DF 281236). This cartulary seems to be copied by the same scribe, probably a notary of the town.

8   *Prudentibus et circumspectis magistro civium, iudicibus ac iuratis civibus civitatis Cibiniensis etc., dominis et amicis nobis honorandis.*

9   I would like to thank Mária Pakucs for clearing out for me this juridical detail.

knowledge about the affinity between the claimants (or their deceased mother) and her late husband, but if they wanted to obtain the demanded property, they would have to prove their degree of kinship: *in qua linea consanguinitatis sunt ipsi actores fratres domini sui, vel mater ipsorum actorum qua in linea consanguinitatis fuerit consanguinea domini sui, probent ergo actores*. In the end, the claimants did not succeed in demonstrating their consanguinity with Gregorius, therefore the court of Cluj rejected their cause. The claimants then appealed to the superior court, which compelled the municipal authorities from Cluj to record the entire dossier and the respective testimonies and to send them to Sibiu.

Consequently, most of the document's content consists of recorded statements from different witnesses concerning their knowledge of the alleged kinship between the claimants and the deceased painter. About 25 different witnesses were inquired, the majority of whom were residents of Cluj (16), but also from Turda (7) and Teiuş (1). Besides being declarations on truth or proofs, these statements additionally provide "slices" of the painter's life, whose biography can thus be reconstructed, as well as a vivid restitution of his distinctive character and personality. The following lines aim to outline this biography, using information from different witness testimonies and arranging it in a more coherent and chronological order. The numbers in the brackets correspond to the specific line(s) in the document where the information is collected from.

Gregorius was born in the market town of Teiuş, most depositions concorded on this based on painter's own statements. His oldest recollections were from the time of the battle *in Campo Kynyr* [77], thus from the year 1479. Let us note this milestone in the history of medieval Transylvania. Gregorius was probably born around 1470–1475. No witness offers information about who his parents were, but we have hints concerning his early education: as a child, Gregorius was instructed by a priest (*cum puer fuisset apud quendam sacerdotem in oppido Thywys educatus extitisset* [132–133]). In this early schooling days, he was in contact with a little girl named Catharina, who was later considered (by the claimants and a part of the witnesses) to be the painter's sister (*audivit ab ore Gregorii Pictoris hoc quod hoc dixit quod ipse cum uxore Elie Azthalos frater uterinus est* [87–88]), or his cousin (*ita audivi ab ipsis quod mater defuncte iamdicte domine Chatarine cum patre Gregorii Pictoris fuissent ambo uterini* [41–42]). On the contrary, the supporters of the defendant explained during the trial that, in fact, Catharina was the daughter of a woman hosted by the priest/teacher in Teiuş, whom the latter called "his sister" (a spinster with child? a disguised mistress of the priest?) and, therefore, the children grew up together, sharing everything and calling each other "brother" and "sister" (*in oppido Thywys … ubi quoque matre istius uxoris Helie, que eciam tunc puella parva fuisset, habitasset, quam matrem dictus sacerdos sororem appellitasset. Ibi itaque pariter ut pueri viventes quicquid*

ut eique porrectum et datum fuisset inter se dividissent et perunde ut ipse Gregorius dictam puellam sororem appelasset, ita eadem se fratrem vocasset. [133–135]). Casually, they continued to call each other like this even in their mature years, wherefrom the confusion of the claimants.

At a young age, Gregorius left Teiuş or even the country for more or less 25 years: *postmodum, ipse Gregorius ex hoc regno ad exteras naciones perductus fuisset, ubi plus minus annis viginti quinque permanssisset* [136–137]. Let us dwell upon the syntagm *ex hoc regno ad exteras nationes*. Did Gregorius leave the Hungarian kingdom? There is no information whether the move was at his parents' will, or whether he just left to find his own way (supposedly, at about 15 years of age), first as an apprentice and afterwards as a journeyman. It is certain though that during this time (approximatively 25 years) he fulfilled his craftmanship as a painter. Unfortunately, one does not know where exactly this happened. Establishing the precise environment where an artist learned his craft is always useful for assessing his style.[10] Nevertheless, at a certain moment, Gregorius decided to come back to his motherland, and he established himself in the town of Cluj, working as a master painter (ca. 1505–1510?). Apparently, he always kept in mind the little girl he had once left behind in Teiuş, since he brought her a gift upon his return: a rosary. At that moment, however, Catharina was already married, with children (probably, Ladislaus and Helena, the future claimants): *et cum redire voluisset, adhuc memor dicte puelle eidem unum rosarium adduxisset. Cum autem rediisset, iam uxor dicti Helie mensatoris fuisset habens liberos* [136–137]. How exactly did Gregorius manage to find his female-friend after so many years, not in Teiuş, not even in Cluj, but in Turda, remains unanswered. Among the witnesses called for during the trial, *honesta domina Margaretha, consors Blasy Textoris* offered a long deposition [118–138] with many details concerning the life of Gregorius.

Since the first Catharina was unavailable, Gregorius Pictor married another woman called Catharina, this time from Cluj. The marriage probably provided him with the opportunity to become a citizen. He was already a man in his late thirties by then, maybe even in his early forties. We do not know any details about Catharina's family, but some of the witnesses seem to have been her kindred. The very first person to protest against the claimants from Turda was a *sororius* (probably a brother-in-law, i.e. the husband of a sister), named Blasius Kereki [24]. It is highly plausible that he was the closest male relative of Catharina, and therefore he played a role of a tutor in the legal process that followed.

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[10] I use the masculine as long as there is very sparse evidence (in fact, there is no evidence at all until now) concerning female painters in medieval Hungary and Transylvania.

Alongside a wife, Gregorius also acquired a house (probably equipped with a workshop) and the citizenship of Cluj around the year 1510. It is known from a deposition that this house was situated on the Bridge Street / *Platea Pontis* / Híd Utca (*Hydwcza*) [47], the street that led towards north from the *Theatrum* (main square) to the gate tower in front of the bridge over Someș river. Recently, archaeologists have discovered the foundations of this gate tower in the middle of the nowadays Regele Ferdinand Street. The location of the painter's house is highly significant. During the same period (the first two decades of the sixteenth century) another painter from Cluj had his residence on the same street. This is proven by the remains of the edifice, namely a splendid Renaissance door-frame (Fig. 2) disclosing the name of the owner, *Bernardus Piktor* (sic!) and the dating mentioned in a Latin inscription, which alludes to very contemporary events: *Tempore Secte Crvciate Domino Iohanne Zapolia Vaivode Trivmphanti Favste*, meaning the revolt of the "crusaders" led by Gheorghe Doja, crushed in 1514 by the voivode John Zapolya[11]. This street seems to have been preferred by artists (painters) of Hungarian origin. We can assume that *Piktor* was a special spelling choice of the painter Bernardus /Bernát, while Gregorius /Gergely himself was a Hungarian language speaker (as will be shown further on).

Master Gregorius started his trade in Cluj, where he even had some apprentices, but in fact his business was not fully authorized by the guilt. There was something missing, and this particular deficiency was central to the inquiry discussed. The painters' guild of Cluj (it should be acknowledged that this is the earliest undisputable evidence concerning the existence – only supposed previously, but never documentary attested – of such a guild active in late medieval and early-modern Cluj:[12] *contubernium ceterorum magistrorum pictorum* [99]; *ceha magistrorum pictorum* [108]; *ex parte czehe* [125]), was vainly asking Gregorius

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[11] On Bernardus Piktor /Pictor see, Jolán Balogh, *Az erdélyi renaissance (1460–1541)*, (Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Tudományos Intézet, 1943), 62, 85, 174, 257, 359, 378; Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române* (București: Editura Academiei, 1959) 619; Gheorghe Sebestyén, and Victor Sebestyén, *Arhitectura Renașterii în Transilvania* (București: Editura Academiei, 1963), 87; Jolán Balogh, *Kolozsvári kőfaragó műhelyek. XVI. század* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia), 26, 43, 45, 159, 184, 389; Melinda Mihály, "Monumente renascentiste, baroce și neoclasice din patrimoniul Muzeului Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei" (PhD diss., Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 2013) 62, 68, 207–208; Ciprian Firea, *Polipticele medievale din Transilvania: artă, liturghie, patronaj* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2016) 325; András Kovács, "Arhitectura și sculptura Renașterii," in *Arta din România. Din preistorie în contemporaneitate*, ed. Răzvan Theodorescu, and Marius Porumb (București, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Academiei Române, Ed. Mega, 2018), 518; Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 34.

[12] While for Sibiu, Brașov, and Bistrița there are preserved written regulations of the guilds, approved by the municipalities or councils. See, Ciprian Firea, and Adinel Dincă, "Breslele artistice din Transilvania medievală și regulamentele lor. Un statut nou descoperit de la Bistrița," *Ars Transsilvaniae* 25–26 (2015–2016): 173–184.

Pictor to present a certificate of "honorable birth". This was a common request of guilds all over Europe, Transylvania included, that the artisan to become master had to prove by a written document that he was born in an honorable, Christian family. Such a demand would exclude from the trade those with "genealogical issues" or "inappropriate" religious or confessional affiliations. This particular prerequisite of the craft was not fulfilled by Gregorius, unable to present a certificate (*littere genealogie*) to his defense*.* The masters of the guild repeatedly asked for it (*dicti magistri sepius ipsum super adducentis litteris genealogie sue solicitassent* [99]), but to no avail. They even warned that the apprentices of the irregular master might face problems in order to be recognized by the guild: *sepius magistri pictores sibi exprobrassent quasi minus esset contubernio idoneus ex quo apud talem magistrum artem suam perdidicisset, qui litteras sue genealogie iuxta contubernii consuetudinem non haberet* [104–106]. The certificate is invoked several times throughout the whole inquiry, since its mere existence would have solved the entire case. However, its absence is nonetheless eloquent. It was most probably intended to conceal certain details of the painter's ascendance. On the other hand, precisely this absence triggered the entire investigation meant to reveal his origins.

The painters of Cluj, Gregorius' fellows, certainly played an essential part in the judicial inquiry, as they were highly interested knowing his genealogy. Consequently, the document under scrutiny attests to the presence of (at least) three other masters (besides Gregorius himself and the above-mentioned Bernardus) who were active in the town of Cluj during the first half of the sixteenth century. For comparison, throughout the entire fifteenth century only one painter's name is known from documentary sources, a certain Lucas Pictor, inhabitant of the suburbs of Cluj.[13] The celebrated Thomas Pictor (Thomas de Coloswar) was from Cluj only by origin, while conducting his activity far away, *in medio regni* at Buda or even further West.[14] Another Thomas, who painted in the 1480s an altarpiece for the Dominican convent in Cluj was much probably an inhabitant of Bistrița.[15] Therefore, the judicial inquiry under scrutiny appears to be the most generous documentary source concerning painters and the artistic life of late medieval Cluj.

The first master to be interviewed was a certain Anthonius Pictor, probably the most established member of the craft at that moment. He can be traced in local sources between 1530–1556.[16] His deposition was rather neutral, mentioning only that Gregorius was repeatedly asked for his *littere genealogie*,

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[13] Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 131.
[14] Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 257–259 (with the essential bibliography).
[15] Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 255–257.
[16] Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 21–22.

in order to authorize his trade in accordance with the rules of the craft (*sua negotia iuxta consuetudinem contubernii clara, testataque reddere posset* [100]). Yet, he was not able to do this, invoking that all his kindred were already deceased (*universos consanguineos suos, agnatos et affines iam olim vita functos esse* [101–102]). The second painter, Johannes Pictor,[17] declared that he had learned his craft as an apprentice with Gregorius Pictor (*artem suam pictoriam … apud dictum magistrum Gregorium complevisset* [103–104]) and that he was warned by the other masters that his apprenticeship might not be recognized within the guild. Therefore, Johannes pressed his master again and again to present his *littere genealogie.* Gregorius answered that he was born in Teiuş, but all his relatives were already dead (*in oppido Thywys quidem natus sum, sed omnes propinqui mei … et affines iam olim mortui sunt* [107–108]), which was understandable since he was already quite old when his fellows were asking for that cursed piece of paper (*fratres, iam senes sumus, nec possumus tales litteras adducere* [110–111]). A second painter named Johannes (*alter Joannes Pictor*), and the third member of the guild to give a testimony, offered one of the most insightful and vivid perspectives on Gregorius' personality. He seems to have been quite a joker, a detail that can be inferred from his answers to several other witnesses in the trial over time. The second Johannes Pictor (probably the younger one) related that, when the officials of the guild asked Gregorius over and over again: "where are you from?" (*unde ergo es tu?*), the playful painter replied laughing: "I am from the hairy fountain (or spring)" (*de piloso fonte sum* [112]), an allusive, though rather transparent reference to his maternal origin. To be even clearer, the witness reproduced the expression in Hungarian language, his and undoubtedly also Gregorius's maternal tongue: *in sermone ungarico, "zewrkuthy wagyok"* [111–112]. Reportedly, he gave similar witty replies to other witnesses as well: "Where are you coming from?"; "Not from the wood, neither from some stone". (*Unde ergo provenisti? Ex silva ne, an lapide aliquo* [124]). Or, when overwhelmed by recurrent inquiries concerning his origins, Gregorius provided the most irreverent answers, that would have certainly excluded him from the trade: "I do not know, I might be the son of a priest (!) or of some Wallachians, thus I cannot find any kindred or relatives" (*Nescio an alicuius sacerdotis, vel valachi sum filius, ex quo nullos affines et consanguineos reperere possum* [127–128]). In sixteenth century Cluj, such origins would have been considered by the social establishment as "unhealthy background", if one is allowed to refer to Transylvanian Renaissance realities using the terminology preferred later on by Romanian communist authorities. Both extractions (from a priest father, or from an Orthodox Wallachian/Romanian) would have been considered highly inappropriate by the painters' guild. But, nevertheless, it

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[17] Firea and Pop, *Pictorii*, 99–100.

could have been partially or even totally true. Perhaps the real reason behind Gregorius's long absence from his native land was also determined by the intention to conceal his real origins. Let us remember that he spent his childhood in the proximity of a *sacerdos*. Moreover, one should notice that the only testimony from his native Teiuș was given by a woman named Angalith (sic!), the widow of a certain Philippus Olah, most probably a Romanian. After he returned and established himself in Cluj, Gregorius was never keen to re-discover or "proclaim" these origins. In spite of recurrent harassment from the officials of the guild, he continued to run his business, even though he was not meeting the conditions of the guild. Thus, in sixteenth century Cluj (as nowadays) there was still some room for maneuver between established norms and real life.

The business went on, but there is no evidence at all as to how successfully. Unfortunately, there is no hint whatsoever concerning Gregorius' commissioners, commissions or artworks executed by him. Considering the period of his training roughly between 1485–1490 and 1500–1505, he must have been trained in a Late Gothic manner, with some Renaissance influxes (depending on how acquainted the artistic center and his master were to the new trends developing around the year 1500). The repertory of paintings dated to the first half of the sixteenth century and preserved in Cluj (and surrounding area) is very limited. The rather mediocre painted altarpieces from Vlaha (Fig. 3),[18] Călățele (Fig. 4),[19] or Ciuleni[20] might be evocative for the style presumably practiced by Gregorius Pictor himself. There is even a fair possibility that one of these works could be attributed to him.

The fortune of our painter was changeable. There were moments in his life when he manifested a rather extravagant lifestyle. One of the witnesses was a cupbearer and a "guitar man" – meaning a musician playing a cord instrument – who had been more than once welcome to the painter's house (*Calixtus Citharedus ... quod cum olim fuisset vinorum pocillator et citharedus apud ipsum magistrum Gregorium Pictorem persepe laute receptus extitisset* [112–114]). This implies that Gregorius was a bon viveur and he sometimes organized drinking parties with music at his house. This probably happened a long time ago (*olim*) (ca. 1515–1530), when the host was still in his full powers and also when the business went well (the commission for painting was still functioning). Later on, especially after the Reformation started to manifest its effects, the command for art collapsed and things went bad for painters. One of the declarants, Lucas Coriarius (Tanner), stated that in the past (but probably closer to the moment of the testimony,

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[18] Emese Sarkadi Nagy, *Local Workshops – Foreign Connections. Late Medieval Altarpieces from Transylvania* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2012), 120–121; Firea, *Polipticele medievale*, 315–316.

[19] Sarkadi Nagy, *Workshops*, 148; Firea, *Polipticele medievale*, 159–161.

[20] Marius Porumb, "Muzeul Mitropoliei Clujului," *Ars Transsilvaniae* 22 (2012): 13.

ca. 1530–1540)[21] Gregorius Pictor was very poor and often borrowed money from him: *sepedictus quondam Gregorius Pictor egestate forte compulsus sepius ad se rogatum pecuniam accessisset* [93–94]. Having enough of lending money to him, Lucas (presumably a neighbor) asked Gregorius if he did not have some relatives that could help him out in this matter: *Mi magister Gregori, sepe venis ad me et rogas pecuniam mutuo. Nonne sunt tibi aliqui consanguinei vel affines qui in istis tuis necessitatibus tibi possent subvenire?* [95–96]. The answer coming from a man in financial need was rather humorous: "Such are my kinsmen and relatives as you, and as the rest of the good men who help me from time to time with some small money" (*tales sunt mei consanguinei et affines ut tu, et reliqui boni viri qui me subinde sua stipe adiuvant* [97]). Pushed by poverty and by the burden of a large household, Gregorius intended to exchange his house, perhaps for a smaller one, thus gaining some extra money. The last testimony attesting him alive, around the Christmas of 1548, concerned this particular matter. A certain Johannes Cleyn (probably a German from Cluj), recently elected as a Centumvir,[22] had heard of Gregorius's intention: *audivi quod per concambium permutare vis domum tuam, ergo si permutare vis, tunc michi dabis* [140].

Since a letter addressed by the council of Turda to the municipality of Cluj on January 19, 1549[23] already contained the claimants' testimonies in the lawsuit concerning Gregorius's heritage [28–57], most probably he could not accomplish his plan to move house. The painter died around the New Year's Eve, and the old house remained (together with the lawsuit to come) to his widow, Catharina. At that moment, she had probably had enough with her late husband, as they had been living a miserable life together. The death of their children profoundly affected the couple, as suggested by different testimonies. The abovementioned Calixtus, *pocillator et citharedus*, had noticed and also addressed Gregorius in the matter of his rudeness towards his unique and legitimate wife: *magister Gregorius duriter uxorem suam tractasset… Quid tam inequaliter, duriterque tractas uxorem tuam? Hec unica tibi est, nec aliquos habetis liberos, sanus esset ut liberaliter istam unicam vita … tractares* [114–116]. The children died (probably sometime between ca. 1510 and 1515) of unknown causes, but the painter blamed his wife for this tragedy and treated her badly: *pueri ipsius Gregory Pictoris mortui fuissent ac propterea tandem inquiete vixisset cum uxore sua, quasi ipsa in culpa esset mortis puerorum* [120–121]. When the crisis was going on, one apprentice could no longer stand the tension between the husband and his wife and left the

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[21] …*precedentibus temporibus*, but not *olim*, once upon a time.
[22] The elections were held usually at Christmas each year. On the organization of the town of Cluj in sixteenth century, see also the recent work of Ágnes Flóra, *The Matter of Honour. The Leading Urban Elite in Sixteenth Century Transylvania* (Brepols: Tournhout, 2019).
[23] *Datum Thorde, sabbato post Marcelli, anno Domini 1549*.

painter's workshop (*ob hanc inquietam vitam ... noluisset apud magistrum Gregorium permanere, sed reliquisset eum* [121–122]). He also changed his craft to turner (*torneator*).

When Catharina was finally freed of her conjugal yoke, she must have discovered with great displeasure that her late husband bequeathed her more troubles: litigation with people claiming his legacy, courts, trials and public exposure of her private life. Fortunately, Catharina's torment ended on June 18, 1549, when the appeal court from Sibiu added the final verdict on the verso of the same document cited in the previous lines*: sentenciam dominorum civium Coloswariensium in vigore conservaverunt ex eo quod actores nullis testimoniis et probationibus evidente sese consaguineos esse et quali linea forent, consanguinei forent. Ideo attractam, liberam et absolutam pronunciarunt...* .

To conclude, the explored documentary source offers an exceptionally generous amount of data concerning the biography (and also the particular character or personality) of an artist living in a Transylvanian town in the early Renaissance. While other European regions benefit from much larger documentary evidence, the discussed source is unusually rich in information for this part of the world. Based on the evidence provided by the records of a lawsuit, the historian can reconstruct one of the most detailed biographies of a local early modern artist (painter), as well as his working environment (the social network, the trade, the neighborhood, the town, etc.). Undoubtedly, this documentary source (transcribed in the annex) will prove useful for further inquiries as well.

Annex

31.V.1549. Cluj

Address (on *verso*): *Prudentibus et circumspectis magistro civium, iudicibus ac iuratis civibus civitatis Cibiniensis etc., dominis et amicis nobis honorandis*

Prudentes et circumspecti domini, amicique nobis honorandi, salutem et amicitie nostre commendacione. Vestre noverint dominaciones 1/ quod tempore preterito in sede nostra iudiciaria mota est quedam causa inter circumspectos Ladislaum Azthalos de Thorda 2/ filium circumspecti quondam Elye Azthalos et domine Chaterine, consortis sue, olim in oppido Thorda commorantes, atque 3/ honestam dominam Helenam, filiam predicti Elye Azthalos, nunc consortem circumspecti Francisci Litterati, in oppido Thorda predicto 4/ commorantes, ut auctores ab una, atque honestam dominam Chaterinam, relictam circumspecti quondam Gregorii pictoris, olim 5/ concivis nostri, ut in causam attractam partibus ab alia. Actores igitur, contra attractam proposuerunt in hunc modum 6/ quod quondam Gregorius pictor, olim concivis huius civitatis, maritus predicte domine Chaterine attracte, fuit frater honeste 7/ quondam domine Catherine, consortis providi quondam Elye Azthalos, matris scilicet ipsorum in Thorda commorantium. Ipse ergo Gregorius 8/ Pictor ex vivis decessit, nullumque heredem post se reliquit. Ideo ipsi actores, secundum iura huius civitatis, omnium 9/ bonorum suorum dualitatem optarent eis dari, quia illa bona in ipsos tamquam fratres devoluta sunt. Et pro maiori 10/ testimonio, post mortem Gregorii Pictoris, ipsos huc vocari fecit circumspectus Petrus Theremy, concivis noster, nunciavitque eis, 11/ tamquam fratribus, ut veniant huc ad revidenda bona quondam Gregorii Pictoris. Res tandem seorsum in domo quondam Gregorii 12/ Pictoris reposuerunt cuius clavem ipsis dederunt, quam et nunc apud se habent ex rebus quibus ipsius Gregorii Pictoris aliquam 13/ partem ad manus ipsorum dederunt. Ideo ipsi, tamquam fratres, dualitatem omnium bonorum predicti Gregorii Pictoris 14/ secundum iura huius civitatis ad manus ipsorum dari optant. Contra quorum proposita attracta respondit in 15/ hunc modum quod ipsa hoc nescit, quod si actores isti, vel mater ipsorum, fratres domini sui fuerunt, et si pro ipsis miserunt 16/ ut huc veniant ad videnda bona, hoc etiam ipsa nescit quis vocari fecit ipsos, quia non voluntate sua venerunt huc, sed 17/ solummodo actores ipsi sese fratres domini sui duxerunt et hac condicione res et bona domini domini sui secessum poni fecerunt, clavemque 18/ illius acceperunt ipsi tammodo tale testimonium non prohibuerunt de hoc quod quondam dominus suus frater ipsorum vel matris ipsorum fuisset, 19/ sed sub hoc tempus aliqua eciam ex rebus quondam domini sui ipsi actores ad manus ipsorum acceperunt, quas attracta 20/ ab eis reddi et restitui optat. Si ius dat infra decisionem litis tam diu quousque probare poterint actores id quod 21/ in qua linea consanguinitatis sunt ipsi actores fratres

domini sui, vel mater ipsorum actorum qua in linea consanguinitatis 22/ fuerit consanguinea domini sui, probent ergo actores illud, quia ipsa nescit, et neque intelligit. Inter hec verba quidam 23/ sororius attracte nomine Blasius Kerekes dixit actoribus: non intelligimus inquit, unde, et qualis fratres essetis vos 24/ qui ad hoc respondissent, quare hunc nos huc vocari fecistis denegate tunc nos quod non summus fratres. Tunc ad hoc attracta 25/ hoc non respondit, ego non denego. Ad hoc verbum ipsi actores coram domino iudice nostro et suo assessore protestacionem fecerunt. 26/ Hiis ergo auditis, dominus iudex noster, cum suo assessore, causam parcium ambarum ad probabilia admisit documenta. 27/ Actores ergo in testimonium ipsorum produxerunt unas litteras que erant sub hoc tenore: Prudentibus ac circumspectis dominis, 28/ iudicis, iuratisque civibus civitatis Coloswariensis, amicis et vicinis nobis semer honorandis. Iudex, iuratique cives 29/ civitatis Thordensis, prudentes ac circumspecti domini, amici et vicini nobis semper honorandi, salutem et nostram sinceram commendacionem. 30/ Quia providi Ladislaus Azthalos et domina Elena cum suo marito Francisco Litterato, filii relicte iam pie memorie domine Chatarine, 31/ consortis quondam Elie Azthalos, cives et commansores nostri petierunt nos, ut testes, pro tuicione cause sue coram vobis mota 32/ ex concivibus nostris productos, more alio solito, communi lege requirente, admitteremus eorumque fassiones sub sigillo 33/ civitatis nostre minore ad vetras dominaciones rescriberemus, quorum quidem postulatis admisses. Nos testes infrascriptos fateri 34/ et examinari fecimus qui deposito prius singulorum firmissimo iuramento fassi sunt modo prout sequitur. Chatarina consors 35/ Fabiani Dobos fassa est se de linea consanguinitatis inter Gregorium pictorem et relictam quondam Elie Azthalos nihil 36/ novisse, sed tempore mortis dicti Gregorii, presente se, Petrus Theremy et consors Gregorii demortui orassent ipsam ut 37/ mortem Gregorii annunciaret consanguineis eius, uti transcenderent, viderent porro quid boni frater ipsorum haberet quid 38/ vero non ne plus minus tandem affirmaverent ipsum habuisse etc. Paulus Ember fassus est quod cum Franciscum Litteratum ipse 39/ transportaverit, fuerintque in domo Gregorii defuncti hospitati, uxor eiusdem quesivisset testem quo non modo sentiret ipsos 40/ viro ac marito suo fratres fuisse carnales qui testis sic respondeat: Ego, inquit, ita audivi ab ipsis quod mater defuncte 41/ iamdicte domine Chatarine cum patre Gregorii Pictoris fuissent ambo uterini. Ad que, dicta uxor Gregorii respondit: sic 42/ et ipsa inquit ita audivi a meo misero marito et absque lite concordarem cum ipsis, verum tamen ipse Ladislaus et Elena 43/ materna eius, simili preminunt iracundia cum marito meo. Sebastianus Lutifigulus audisse se ab ore 44/ relicte Elie Azthalos asserit quod sepissime dixerit ipsam, unicum fratrem, Gregorium videlicet Pictorem, habere se in Coloswar. 45/ Elyzabeth consors Michaelis Pwskas fassa quod cum semel fuisset cum ipsa relicta Elie Azthalos Coloswarini dixerit 46/ ipsa relicta: Veniamus, inquit, ad Hydwcza visitature unicum ibi fratrem meum, qui si mori contingeret, eius bona 47/ universa de iure ad me devolverentur. Elena, consors Mathie Azthalos, fassa est se scire quod semel dicta relicta 48/ Elie Azthalos omnes res suas ad Gregorium Pictorem comportaverit que dixit preter hunc

unicum fratrem non habeo. 49/ Barbara Zytha relicta fassa est quod cum semel fuisset in Coloswar, memoratus Gregorius obviavit eam interrogans 50/ ut valet, inquit, consanguinea mea nosti eam ipsa testis quam ille Chatarinam Elie Azthalos novi bene valet, 51/ ille iterum illa michi propinquior consanguinea non est. Agatha, consors Petri Zenyessy, fassa est se ex ore relicte Elie 52/ Azthalos audivisse se non habere propinquiorem consanguineum ipso Gregorio Pictore. Chatarina, relicta Elie Zytha, cum 53/ fassionibus precedentium duarum testium, sua rite concordat fassione per omnem modum. Hec sunt fassiones testium quas 54/ nos vestris dominacionibus fide nostra mediante rescripsimus, rogamusque easdem velint hiis nostris miseris fratribus iwris compendium 55/ sine aliqua longa exequitione iuris administrari facere. Quod vestris dominacionibus maioribus gratificari studebimus valere easdem 56/ felices esse optamus. Datum Thorde, sabbato post Marcelli, anno Domini 1549.[24] Item actores produxerunt 57/ aliasquoque litteras que erant sub hoc tenore: Prudenti et circumspecto iudici Stephano Barath etc., domino nobis colenti et 58/ Observandissimo, servicium et amiciciam cum omni honore. Honorabiles et circumspecti domini iudices et iurati, 59/ venit coram nos his Ladislaus Azthalos et quesevit probacionem et fassionem. Et relicta Phillippi Olah, nomine Angalyth 60/ iurata et fassa est coram nos iudice Benedicto Barany et coram suis iuratis talem fassionem ex quo ex ore audivit 61/ hec Angalit, coniux Philippi Olah, ut coniux Elie Azthalos et Pictor Gregorius unus fuit et fuerunt de Thewys 62/ nati. Datum in Thewys feria quinta ante Reminiscere 1549.[25] Item produxerunt actores et aliasquoque litteras que 63/ erant sub hoc tenore: Prudenti et circumspecto iudici Stephano Barath[26] iudici Coloswariensis cum suis iuratis, domino 64/ collendissimo et observandissimo. Benedictus Barany, iudex oppidi Thewys, salutem et amiciciam cum omni honore. 65/ Prudentes et circumspecti iudices et iurati significamus tenore presencium nos iudices, Benedictus Barany, et iurati 66/ ex quo relicta Philippi Olah, nomine Angalit, iurata fassa est coram nos ut hec relicta Philippi Olah Angalit ex 67/ proprio ore audivit relicte Helie Azthalos ut unus esset cum Pictore Gregorio, relicta Elie Azthalos hec fassa est 68/ cum iuramento. Valere vestram amiciciam optamus, Deus conservet multo. Anno 1549. Datum in Thewys, feria quinta 69/ post Reminiscere.[27] Quid omiserat rector vicium ipsius scriptoris erut. Item actores produxerunt et aliorumquoque testes nostros 70/ concives[28] qui iuramento ipsorum deposito fassi sunt modo infrascripto. Item Michael Aurifaber fassus est quod scit 71/ hoc que uxor Elie Azthalos hospitata est apud Gregorium Pictorem et audivit

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[24] 19 January 1549.

[25] 14 March 1549.

[26] István Baráth = Steffen Münich (/Monk) was the member of an important family of Cluj. He was appointed several times as *iudex regius* in the middle of sixteenth century. (I thank Zsolt Kovács for this information).

[27] 21 March 1549.

[28] Superscript: "et alios eciam".

ab ipso Gregorio Pictore quod dixit hoc 72/ quod ipsa est sibi cognata,[29] *sed nescit ipse testis per quem modum. Item honesta domina Anna, relicta circumspecti 73/ quondam Gasparis Alperth, fassa est eodem modo ut supradictus Michael Aurifaber. Item providus Laurencius Alperth, 74/ filius predicti Gasparis Alperth, fassus est eodem modo sicut mater sua predicta. Item circumspectus Thomas Bachy 75/ fassus est quod tempore preterito requirebant unam cuppam super Gregorium Pictorem et dicebat ipse Gregorius Pictor quod indigne 76/ requierunt super eum. Et dixisset ipse Gregorius testi quod ipse adhuc tempore conflictus in Campo Kynyr*[30] *habuisset unam 77/ consanguineam in Thywys. Item circumspectus Andreas Renold fassus est quod tempore preterito venit ad eum Gregorius 78/ Pictor et dixit ei veni, inquit, ad me quia nunc venerunt aliqui fratres qui requierunt aliquid super me, ipsum ergo 79/ pro testimonio vocasset. Et ipse testis illuc ivisset ubi et alii etiam erant et dixissent Gregorio Pictori aliqui 80/ vade, inquit, ad Thordam et certifica tuum negotium quia mulier valde infirmatur qui respondisset: Ego non vadam. 81/ Item providus Thomas Litteratus de Thorda fassus est quod tercio anno ab hiuc, dum hic habitaret in scola litteraria, 82/ una dierum exiens invenisset eum Gregorius Pictor et ad se vocasset quem interrogasset unde esset, ille se 83/ respondisset esse de Thorda, et eum testis interrogaret ipsum quod quaeras ipse hoc interrogeret, respondisset 84/ Gregorius Pictor: Ideo, inquit, quia ibi ego fratrem habeo. Noscis ne inquit uxorem Elie Azthalos, testis 85/ respondisset se illam bene noscere et dixisset ipse illa, inquit, michi cognata et frater*[31] *est. Rogo ergo te 86/ ut dum Thordam transuri gravetis, michi potefac aliqua enim sibi nunciabo. Item providus Paulus 87/ Nagh in possessione Colosmonosthra residens fassus est quod ipse audivit ab ore Gregorii Pictoris hoc quod hoc 88/ dixit quod ipse cum uxore Elie Azthalos frater uterinus est. Huic autem testi attracta contradixit hac ratione quod 89/ nequam ipsimet actores dicunt tam propinquam consanguinitatem sicut is testis fatetis fassioni. Tamen eius dominus 90/ iudex noster cum suo assessore iuridice locum dedit nosquoque iurati cives locum dedimus. Attractaquoque produxit 91/ testes suos, concives nostros, qui singuli iuramento ipsorum deposito fassi sunt. Primus itaque testis circumspectus Lucas 92/ Coriarius fassus est in hunc modum quod cum precedentibus temporibus sepedictus quondam Gregorius Pictor egestate forte compulsus 93/ sepius ad se rogatum pecuniam accessisset. Eidem nonnumquam denarios triginta, aliquid eciam plus. Minusque dedisset mutuo 94/ ubi aliquocies ipsum interrogasset et secum colloquutus fuisset in hec verba: Mi magister Gregori, sepe venis ad me 95/ et rogas pecuniam mutuo. Nonne sunt tibi aliqui consanguinei vel affines qui in istis tuis necessitatibus tibi possent 96/ subvenire? Respondisset: Tales sunt mei consanguinei et affines ut tu, et reliqui boni viri qui me subinde sua stipe 97/ adiuvant. Secundus testis: Circumspectus Anthonius Pictor fassus est in*

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[29] Strikethrough "~~consanguinea~~".
[30] The Battle of Câmpul Pâinii (Kenyérmező), 13 October 1479.
[31] Strikethrough "~~consanguinea~~".

hunc modum quod dum ipse Magister Gregorius 98/ ad contubernium ceterorum magistrorum pictorum accedere debeat dicti magistri sepius ipsum super adducentis litteris genealogie sue 99/ solicitassent, quibus sua negotia iuxta consuetudinem contubernii clara, testataque reddere posset, sed nunquam potuissent efficere 100/ ut tales litteras adduxisset, cumque acriter in hoc ipsum urgerent dixisset: universos consanguineos suos, agnatos et affines 101/ iam olim vita functos esse, postremo aliquocies hysce hortatibus pulsus, ita semel ipsum explicuisset quod cum tempore posset 102/ tales adducere litteras. Tertius testis circumspectus Joannes Pictor fassus est in hunc modum quod ex quo artem suam 103/ pictoriam iuxta annos sue erudicionis apud dictum magistrum Gregorium complevisset. Sepius magistri pictores sibi 104/ exprobrassent quasi minus esset contubernio idoneus ex quo apud talem magistrum artem suam perdidicisset, qui litteras sue 105/ genealogie iuxta contubernii consuetudinem non haberet. Hoc parte compulsus fuisset eundem magistrum Gregorium sepissime adire 106/ et admonere quo huic negocio mature consuleret, litterasque sue genealogie adduceret. Qui respondisset: in oppido Thywys 107/ quidem natus sum, sed omnes propinqui mei, inquit, et affines iam olim mortui sunt. Quartus testis circumspectus 108/ alter Joannes Pictor fassus est in hunc modum quod aliquocies in cehe magistrorum pictorum ipsum magistrum Gregorium 109/ super adducentibus litteris sue genealogie et sui ipsius notificacione solicitassent, molestassentque. Ipse vero dixisset: Fratres, iam 110/ senes sumus, nec possumus tales litteras adducere, ac cum similis verbis sepe ipsum ursissent dicentes: Unde ergo 111/ es tu? Ridendo respondisset: <u>de piloso fonte sum</u>*, in sermone ungarico, "zewrkuthy wagyok". Quintus testis 112/ providus Calixtus Citharedus fassus est in hunc modum quod cum olim fuisset vinorum pocillator et citharedus, apud ipsum 113/ magistrum Gregorium Pictorem persepe laute receptus extitisset ubi cum vidisset qualiter idem magister Gregorius duriter 114/ uxorem suam tractasset, illi dixisset: Quid tam inequaliter, duriterque tractas uxorem tuam? Hec unica tibi est, nec aliquos habetis 115/ liberos, sanus esset ut liberaliter istam unicam vita comite tractares. Quoniam statim post mortem tuam aliqui affines 116/ consanguineique tui alicunde consurgentes venient et preter meritum omnia bona tua occupantes distrahent, ubi dictus 117/ magister Gregorius dixisset: Nulli michi, inquit, sunt consanguinei, neque affines, nisi hec unica uxor mea. Sextus 118/ testis honesta domina Margaretha, consors Blasy Textoris, fassa est quod prior maritus suus olim apud dictum 119/ Gregorium Pictorem in serviciis existens, pueri ipsius Gregory Pictoris mortui fuissent ac propterea tandem inquiete vixisset 120/ cum uxore sua, quasi ipsa in culpa esset mortis puerorum. Ob hanc inquietam vitam maritus fateri noluisset apud 121/ magistrum Gregorium permanere, sed reliquisset eum. Cui eciam prius sepius dixisset: Quid tumultuaris propter mortem puerorum 122/ cum uxore tua, nonne habes affines adhuc et consanguineos? Qui illi respondisset: Nullos habeo. Cui rursus dixisset: 123/ Unde ergo provenisti? Ex silva ne, an lapide aliquo. Et dum apud torneatorem maritum scilicet istius fatens pro fabro fiens 124/ globulis, vexilis apponens egisset, dictus maritus suus illi magistro Gregorio*

expossuisset qualiter ex parte czehe plurimas ₁₂₅/ fatigas haberet, respondisset magister Gregorius: ibidem michi quoque contigit cum nullas litteras genealogie mee adducere ₁₂₆/ possum et subdidisset dicens: Nescio an alicuius sacerdotis, vel valachi sum filius, ex quo nullos affines et consanguineos ₁₂₇/ reperere possum. Item Thorde apud Eliam mensatorem simul hospicio excepti vidisset ipsa fatens. Qualiter magister ₁₂₈/ Gregorius cum uxore dicti hospitis per humaniter iocaretur unde prenota interrogasset dictam uxorem dicti ₁₂₉/ hospitis an ipsa esset affinis vel consanguinea dicti Gregory, que respondisset: Ita sum illi consanguinea ut tu. ₁₃₀/ Ac postmodum exinde dictus magister Gregorius sumpta occasione declaravisset qualiter se habeat negocium ₁₃₁/ mutuo cognicionis inter se et uxorem supradicti Helie mensatoris, dicens quod cum puer fuisset apud quendam sacerdotem ₁₃₂/ in oppido Thywys educatus extitisset, ubi quoque matre istius uxoris Helie, que eciam tunc puella parva fuisset, habitasset ₁₃₃/ quam matrem, dictus sacerdos sororem appellitasset. Ibi itaque pariter ut pueri viventes quicquid ut eique porrectum et datum ₁₃₄/ fuisset inter se dividissent et perunde ut ipse Gregorius dictam puellam sororem appelasset, ita eadem se fratrem vocasset. ₁₃₅/ Postmodum, ipse Gregorius ex hoc regno ad exteras naciones perductus fuisset, ubi plus minus annis viginti quinque ₁₃₆/ permanssisset et cum redire voluisset, adhuc memor dicte puelle eidem unum rosarium adduxisset. Cum autem rediisset, ₁₃₇/ iam uxor dicti Helie mensatoris fuisset habens liberos. Septimus testis circumspectus Joannes Cleyn fassus ₁₃₈/ est in hunc modum quod in preterita Nativitate Domini[32] *fuit inter dominos centum electos communitatis nostre et dixit Gregorio Pictori: ₁₃₉/ Sororie audivi quod per concambium permutare vis domum tuam, ergo si permutare vis, tunc michi dabis, tamen sorory summus. ₁₄₀/ Tunc dixit ei: quis dixit tibi? Respondit testis, dictum est michi, sed si hoc facere volueris, nunc fac hoc, quia ecce ₁₄₁/ Thorde eciam cognatos habes, et fortasses postea te illi in hoc tuo proposito impedirent quod facere tandem non poteris. Qui ₁₄₂/ Gregorius Pictor ad hoc hec respondisset: cuiusmodi cognatos habeo, dicunt quidem ipsi, sed ego nescio illos unde ₁₄₃/ essent michi cognati. Hys igitur intellectis, dominus iudex noster cum suo assessore inter partes predictas ₁₄₄/ talem tulit sentenciam: Quod ipsa in causam attracta terciam*[33] *et iuramentum suum deponat super hoc, quod ipsa ₁₄₅/ non audivit a suo domino quondam Gregorio Pictore quod uxor Elye Azthalos, mater actorum, et actores sibi ₁₄₆/ consanguinei et fratres fuissent. Si iuramentum suum super hoc deposuerit, extunc ab acquisitione et impetitione ₁₄₇/ actorum libera et absoluta maneat. Si autem iuramentum suum modo premisso non deposuerit, extunc teneatur ipsis ₁₄₈/ actoribus dualitatem universorum et singulorum bonorum domini sui pure extradare et manibus ipsorum assignare. De qua ₁₄₉/ quidem sentencia domini iudicis nostri actores contenti non sunt, attracta eciam non est contenta, sed ambe partes hanc ₁₅₀/ causam per viam*

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[32] 25 December 1548.

[33] Correct: *tercium*.

appellacionis in conspectum nostrum iuratorum civium prononciaverunt. Nos igitur iurati cives ₁₅₁/ denuo auditis ambarum partium propositionibus, allegationibus, responsis et probabilibus documentis in hac causa ₁₅₂/ talem tulimus sentenciam: Quod ex quo actores probare non potuerunt hoc quod in linea consanguinitatis fuit mater ₁₅₃/ ipsorum et ipsi consanguinei predicto quondam Gregorio Pictori marito attracte, ideo ipsam attractam nullum iuramentum ₁₅₄/ deponat, sed ab acquisicione actorum ipsorum libera et absoluta maneat. De qua nostra sentencia attracta contenta ₁₅₅/ est, actores vero non sunt contenti, sed causam cum tota serie adiudicacionis nostre in conspectum vestrarum ₁₅₆/ dominacionum pronotaverunt et appellaverunt quam illuc transmisimus. Deinde noverint dominaciones vestre quod post ₁₅₇/ edictam et pronunciatam nostram sentenciam, actores adduxerunt nobis unas litteras preceptorias reverendissimi domini thesaurary ₁₅₈/ et locumtenentis etc. domini nostri graciosi super hoc ut fassionem circumspecti Anthony Litterati, concivis nostri, audiremus et ₁₅₉/ super fassione ipsius litteras nostras eisdem actoribus dare debeamus, iuris ipsorum ad cautelam. Dum igitur ipse ₁₆₀/ Anthonius Litteratus fassionem facere vellet. Attracta fassione sue contradixit asserentem quod ipse fateri non potest in causa actorum ₁₆₁/ Quia antea ipse procurabat in causa actorum, iudicium antea ipsum amovit de hoc, ut scilicet ipse in causa ₁₆₂/ actorum contra attractam procurare non potest secundum consuetudinem et iura civitatis nostre. Ideo istud nos iudicialiter ₁₆₃/ revidimus et iuridice nobis visum est, quod propter premissas causas ipse Anthonius Litteratus in causa actorum fassionem ₁₆₄/ facere non potest. Super hoc eciam actores non sunt contenti, sed ad vestras dominaciones appellaverint. Vestras dominaciones Deus ₁₆₅/ altissimus conservet sanas, et felices ad vota. Datum in civitate Coloswar, feria sexta proxima post festum ₁₆₆/ Ascensionis Domini, anno eiusdem 1549[34] ₁₆₇/.

Sentence of the appeal court of Sibiu (on *verso*):

1549 feria tertia ante Corporis Christi[35] / In eam causa in premissibus litteris expressata domini / consulatus Cibiniensis iudiciarie deliberantes / sentenciam dominorum civium Coloswariensium in vigore / conservaverunt ex eo quod actores nullis / testimoniis et probationibus evidente sese / consaguineos esse et quali linea forent, / consanguinei forent. Ideo attractam, liberam / et absolutam pronunciarunt et ex parte / Anthony Litterati fassionis in vigore / retinuerunt. Actores citius /appellaverunt.

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[34] 31 May 1549.
[35] 18 June 1549.

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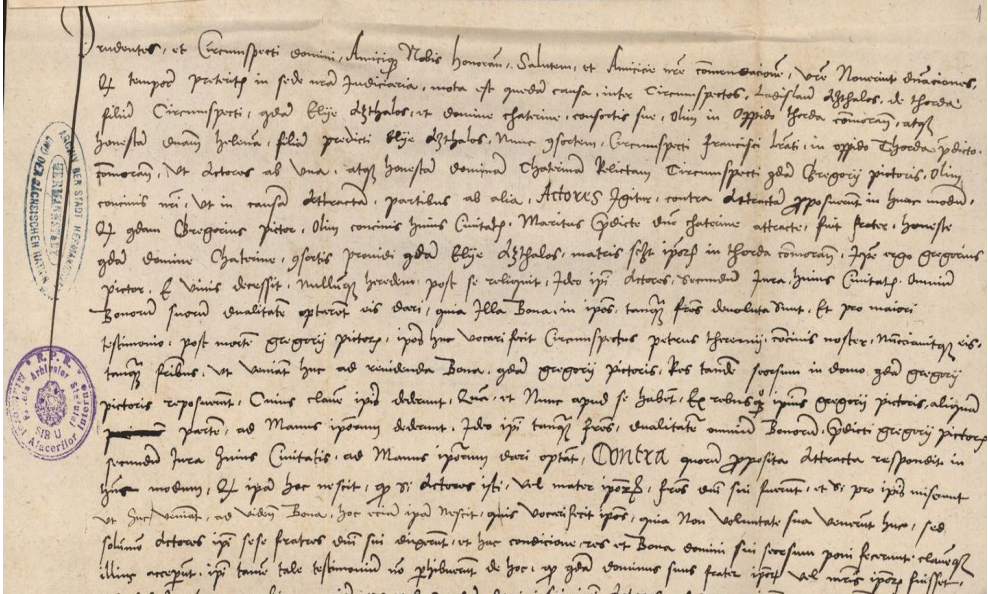
Fig. 1. The document from arhivamedievala.ro (SIIAN: SB-F-00001-1-U4-571). Detail. (photo: arhivamedievala.ro)

Fig. 2. Door frame of the house of Bernardus Pictor, once in *Platea Pontis* / Híd Utca (now in the National Museum of History of Transylvania, inventory no. F 2749, VI. 1680) (photo: Museum)

Fig. 3. The altarpiece of Vlaha, Cluj County (now in Batthyaneum, Alba Iulia, inv. no. 452)
(photo: C. Firea)

Fig. 4. The smaller altarpiece from Călățele, Cluj County (now in the Museum of the Orthodox Metropolis in Cluj). Detail (photo: C. Firea)

IS "CONSERVATION IN RUIN" ALWAYS THE BEST SOLUTION? THE CASE OF THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH IN GÂRBOVA

Ioana RUS-CACOVEAN[*]

ABSTRACT. Is "Conservation in Ruin" Always the Best Solution? The Case of the Romanesque Church in Gârbova. As the leading institution in charge of built heritage protection in Romania after 1952, the Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM) took essential steps in funding, designing, and conducting various conservation works on sites endangered by earthquakes, looting, improper use, or defective historic restorations. Partially demolished by the local community in the previous centuries and seriously affected by neglect, the Romanesque Lutheran church in Gârbova, Alba County, was in the 1960s on the verge of collapse. After a thorough cause analysis, the DHM managed to prevent disaster by undertaking a rescue intervention in line with the international trends of the time. Thus, the site became one of the first DHM projects to design the preservation of a church in a state of ruin rather than its complete reconstruction.

Part of our more extensive research on Transylvanian heritage conservation during the Communist regime of the 20th century and based on previously unpublished information found in the archives of the National Heritage Institute, our study aims at showing that despite DHM's best intentions, the church lost the chance to be more than a romantic ruin to these days. By rigidly applying the international restoration principles, the Directorate disregarded the parishioners' will, even though this was one of the very few examples where the owner was still interested in the monument and even suggested its adaptive reuse as a funerary chapel due to its location in the village graveyard.

Keywords: Gârbova, Romanesque church, conservation, ruin, 1960s.

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[*] **Ioana RUS-CACOVEAN PhD** (ioana.rus@uad.ro) is a lecturer at the University of Decorative Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca, Department of Theoretical Disciplines. The author's main research interests are art history and heritage conservation during the Communist regime.

Introduction

Built around 1280 in Romanesque style, the church in Gârbova,[1] Alba County, was a basilica with a nave, two side aisles, a semi-circular apse, and a belfry. The church had a western gallery subdivided into three small bays with cross vaults and semi-circular arches and a slender tower rising only above the middle one. Below the gallery, the two pillars and three cross vaults formed a sort of narthex distinct from the central nave. There was no trace of a staircase leading to the gallery, meaning access was only through a wooden ladder. The side aisles also bear traces of cross vaults, while the central nave, separated from the collaterals by pillars, had a wooden ceiling.

The church received a new polygonal chancel in the 15th century, now in ruins, but which preserves the trefoiled door towards the sacristy and the traces of a Gothic tabernacle. The walls of the nave still have some of the semi-circular Romanesque windows, while the belfry has twinned windows and colonettes with cubic capitals on all four sides.[2]

On Christmas Eve 1870, the roofs of the church and tower burnt down because of the traditional custom of spinning fires.[3] As a consequence, in 1872, the community dismantled their remains along with the two side aisles, and in 1876 the fortification wall, which they replaced by a low circular precinct to surround the church and its graveyard.

Probably after this event, the church was left in ruins, as the inhabitants continued to use only the closer one in the village.

Thus, by the middle of the 20th century, the Romanesque church was in a poor conservation state, as mentioned by the Lutheran Consistory in a letter sent to the Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM)[4] on July 29, 1958. According

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[1] *Urwegen* in German and *Szászorbó* in Hungarian.

[2] Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române* (București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1959), 65–66; George Oprescu, *Bisericile cetăți ale sașilor din Ardeal* (București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1956), 24–25.

[3] In Romanian *opaițe*, a traditional Transylvanian custom of lighting and spinning fires to mark the beginning of Advent or Lent, but also on Christmas and New Year's Eve, https://dexonline.ro/definitie/opaita/definitii, accessed on June 21, 2023.

[4] In Romanian, *Direcția Monumentelor Istorice*. It is the generic name of the main institution in Romania that was responsible for the research and design of monument conservation, approval of projects, inventorying, restoring monuments, and conducting their own monument restoration sites between 1952 and 1989, constantly changing its official name: The General Directorate of Historical Monuments - DHM (1952–1959), The Directorate of Historical Monuments and the Directorate of Historical and Artistic Monuments - DHAM (1959–1974), The Directorate of National Cultural Heritage - DNCH (1974–1977), The Economic Directorate and of National Cultural Heritage - EDNCH (1978–1989), according to ***, "Istoricul INP", *Institutul Național al Patrimoniului*, https://patrimoniu.ro/ro/articles/istoric, accessed on June 21, 2023.

to this, almost all the roof tiles had been looted, the stones were constantly being removed from the walls for reuse in other buildings, and the vestry was often broken into to steal the materials stored inside.[5]

Besides being unused, another reason for its poor protection is the fact that, at that time, the church in Gârbova was not listed as a historical monument and, due to its remote position, was still relatively unknown to the DHM Bucharest based specialists. The only works mentioning it had been written at the beginning of the 20th century by German and Hungarian historians,[6] while the ones in Romanian[7] were to be published only a few years after these events.

It is fair to say that the situation hasn't changed much, as this small village is still overlooked by those travelling to or researching the more famous medieval Transylvanian churches, despite its charming appearance and very interesting past.

The recent history of the church is particularly intriguing, especially in connection to heritage conservation in Romania, considering that in the 1960s, the DHM undertook here a rescue intervention in line with the international trends of the time, the site becoming one of their first projects to design the preservation of a church in a state of ruin rather than its complete reconstruction. The case is worth discussing since it also tackles the topic of monument preservation through either continuous use or adaptive reuse, and the need for collaboration between the restorers and the beneficiaries of the buildings they deal with, to ensure their survival on the long term.

Hence, based on previously unpublished information found in the archives of the National Heritage Institute, our study aims at showing how the DHM managed to prevent disaster and save from complete collapse a church that was on the verge of crumbling to pieces. But also, that despite its best intentions, by rigidly applying the international restoration principles, the Directorate disregarded the parishioners' will and thus the church lost the chance to be more than a romantic ruin to this day.

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[5] *Letter* from the Lutheran Consistory to the DHM, July 29, 1958, The Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM) Fund, File no. 5077, referring to the Ruin of the Romanesque Church in Gârbova, Alba County, *Corespondenţă [Correspondence]*, 1956–1973, Archives of the National Heritage Institute, Bucureşti (Hereinafter, DHM Fund).

[6] Friedrich Müller, *Die kirchliche Baukunst des romanischen Styles in Siebenbürgen* (Wien: Kaiserlich-Königlichen Hof- und Staastdruckerei, 1859), 184–185; Victor Roth, Geschichte der deutschen *Baukunst in Siebenbürgen* (Strassburg: Heitz&Mündel, 1905), 14–15; Idem, *Die kirchlichen Baudenkmaler des Unterwaldes* (Hermannstadt: 1922), 295; Halaváts Gyula, "Úti jegyzetek Kelnek, Vingárd, Szászorbó környékéről", *Archeológiai Értesítő*, no. XXVII (1907): 215–216; Szabó László, *Árpádkori magyar építőművészet* (Budapest: 1913), 329; Walter Horwath, "Der Emporenbau der romanischen und frühgotischen Kirchen in Siebenbürgen", in *Siebenbürgische Vierteljahrschrift*, no. 58 (1935): 70–71; Gerevich Tibor, *Magyarország románkori emlékei* (Budapest: Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, 1938), 31.

[7] Vătăşianu, *Istoria artei feudale*, 65–66; Oprescu, *Bisericile cetăţi*, 24–25.

A very picturesque but unprotected ruin in the 50s and early 60s

In the early 1960s, the Lutheran Consistory wrote several reports on the church's severe state, urging the DHM and its representatives in Sebeş[8] to take urgent action. The DHM delegates, engineer Ivănescu, architect Bilciurescu, and Ivanovici, after a visit on-site, on May 23, 1961, also noticed that the walls were cracked and the tower was unstable, threatening to collapse since it was dangerously leaning ever more out of its vertical position.[9]

Still, in these years, the DHM only surveyed the façades and layout of the church[10] since they had no authority to intervene in a building that was not protected as a historical monument.

The thing is that in Romania, listing valuable architectural sites had always been very slow, complicated, and hampered by several factors ever since its beginning. For one thing, the listing campaigns had been treated differently in the historical provinces since in the 19th century they were governed by different authorities,[11] while after the Great Union of 1918, the interwar Monuments' Commission, now under the sole authority of Bucharest, was clearly overwhelmed by the enormous task, always leaving things unfinished. It was only in the 1950s that the first national list was finally compiled and published, accompanied by a law that put under its protection a great number of architectural and archaeological values and allowed the opening of numerous emergency consolidation sites in the following decade. The listing process was nevertheless complicated and seen as a work in progress that would be finished at a later stage since there were numerous incomplete files put aside to be verified and corrected in the following years. Thus, thousands of monuments were left unprotected for the time being and outside DHM's jurisdiction.[12]

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[8] The Lutheran Church in Sebeş, a building erected by the overlapping of Romanesque and Gothic styles over time, underwent a general restoration in the years 1960–1964, as part of a larger project, entitled *The Feudal Complex in Sebeş*, which extended until the late 1960s. See Mariana Angelescu, Gustav Gründisch, A. Klein, et al., "Restaurarea unui monument de arhitectură din epocile romanică și gotică în cadrul ansamblului de monumente feudale de la Sebeş-Alba", in ***, *Monumente istorice. Studii și lucrări de restaurare* (București, 1960), 90–119.

[9] Undated *Report* sent by the DHM delegates to Nicolae Bădescu, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[10] *Releveu* [Survey], 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5078.

[11] Gaining their independence in the 19th century, Moldavia and Walachia united to form the Romanian Kingdom, but Transylvania was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and under the governance of Budapest. It was only after the end of World War I, that Transylvania became part of Romania and passed under the authority of Bucharest.

[12] Oliver Velescu, "Inventarierea monumentelor istorice din România. Retrospectivă istorică", *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, no. 1–2 (2012): 83–147; Idem, "Evidența monumentelor istorice în țara noastră", in ***, *Sesiunea Științifică a Direcției Monumentelor Istorice, ianuarie 1963*, 61–69 (București, 1963).

This is what must have happened to the Romanesque church in Gârbova also, even though on September 23, 1954, the region's referent,[13] architect Richard Lieblich, had visited the site and proposed its listing in the first category due to its importance,[14] since on April 4, 1960, the Consistory asked the DHM why Gârbova was still not listed.[15]

And so, instead of already designing a project for a much-needed consolidation, the DHM had first to assess the church's value and situation. On April 22, 1960, architect Eugenia Greceanu, the new region's referent, made a trip to investigate the monument, writing in her reports the chronology of the damage it had suffered, from the fire of 1870 to the dismantling of the side aisles in 1872, that it had been left out by mistake, and proposed its urgent classification.[16] Well aware that the listing would take too long, which was not in favour of the rapidly decaying church, the DHM specialists sent a request to Nicolae Bădescu, President of the State Committee for Construction, Architecture, and Systematisation, asking for special permission to carry out urgent interventions to support the belfry from the emergency fund of the institution, considering the unlisted building's high value.[17] But this was not possible, and it would have to wait to be listed.

The fact that the Consistory was very interested in the building's fate and was willing to make efforts for its survival is proved by its own numerous reports, in which it presents the historiography of the monument, identifying its various mentions in art history studies, with the purpose of bringing a solid argument to justify DHM's care for the church.[18]

Finally, the Historical Monuments Commission remedied this omission, and on July 25, 1961, approved the proposal for the church's listing,[19] while on April 3, 1962, they drew the Obligation and Conditions of Use, an Inventory, a Minutes of the Monument, and a record of the protection area, represented by the enclosed graveyard.[20]

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[13] Ever since its founding, the DHM appointed some of its employees as regional delegates, who had the task to visit the various endangered sites, as well as to present and refer to the conservation proposals for these during the approval meetings, n.a.

[14] Richard Lieblich, *Report*, September 23, 1954, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[15] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, April 4, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077. The reply came on May 30, 1960, that the proposals for classification were still unfinished and were to be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval at the end of the year, after which the church of Gârbova would be included for sure.

[16] Eugenia Greceanu, *Report*, April 22, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[17] Undated *Report* sent by the DHM delegates to Nicolae Bădescu, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[18] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, June 3, 1961, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[19] *Letter* from the Historical Monuments Commission to the Consistory, 1961, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[20] *Listing file*, April 3, 1962, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

The first conservation proposals

Still, this didn't mean that they went straight to design the emergency consolidation works, the years 1962 and 1963 registering in the DHM archives only more reports from the Consistory, which as late as September 12, 1963, approached the DHM again, reminding them of the ever-present instability of the tower.[21] They even tried to take advantage of the fact that the DHM was at that time involved in other conservation works in three settlements nearby, Câlnic,[22] Sebeş and Cricău,[23] asking if they could use the remaining materials.

But that was not that simple, and thus, they had to wait their turn.

It was only in October 1963 that the DHM's delegates Balş, Mănciulescu and, Bordenache made a new visit to Gârbova, acknowledging the imminent danger of collapse and the fact that the interventions had become mandatory since the deterioration of the church had worsened.[24]

The 1964 temporary consolidation

Finally, on December 19, 1963, the DHM drew up Project 41A for the support of the church's leaning tower, with Eugen Chefneux as the chief architect and Theodor Barbu as the structural engineer,[25] planning to complete the emergency consolidation in 1964. The strengthening design proposed the implementation of two wooden buttresses to support the walls, as well as to become the future

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[21] *Report* from the Consistory to the DHM, September 12, 1963, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[22] The fortress in Câlnic was built during the 13th–17th centuries, but partially ruined in the 20th century because of poor maintenance, imperfections in the foundations, earthquakes, and flooding. Under these circumstances, in the 1960s the DHM launched an extensive research and restoration campaign. See Ştefan Balş, "Restaurarea cetăţii ţărăneşti din Câlnic", in ***, *Monumente istorice: studii şi lucrări de restaurare* (Bucureşti, 1965), 38–52; Ioana Rus, "Cetatea din Câlnic. Un monument restaurat în anii 1960-1964", *Ars Transilvaniae*, no. XXI (2011): 105–134.

[23] The Romanesque Calvinist church in Cricău had been seriously endangered ever since the 19th century, with severe cracks in the central nave's walls. Here, the DHM undertook in 1961 and 1964–1967 a complex restoration work, which involved lowering the ground around the church to the original level, marking the missing aisles, and the consolidation of the tower with a reinforced concrete belt and metal tie rods. See ***, "Cronică - Principalele lucrări de restaurare a monumentelor istorice din Republica Socialistă România (1959-1969)", *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, 39, no. 1 (1970): 73–78; Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona, *Arhitectură. Urbanism. Restaurare* (Bucureşti: Editura Tehnică, 1996), 62–63, 339–340, 346.

[24] *Internal note* from the DHM's Implementation Group to the Study Group, November 2, 1963, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[25] *Project 41/1963-1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5080.

scaffolding necessary for masonry research and the tower's consolidation. The intervention would insert reinforced concrete belts and anchor the loose stone blocks that threatened to fall.[26] So, in 1964, a provisional consolidation work took place with a temporary wooden scaffolding. On this occasion, in the central nave 35 cm below the ground level, they uncovered the original brick pavement and found traces of the initial steep slope of the roofing on the tower wall. They also studied the former side aisles' remains which were 20–30 cm high and cut by the tombs, while the walls of the central nave they completed up to cornice level.[27] They carried no archaeological research, seen as unnecessary for the time being, but only studied the structural elements of the preserved walls.[28]

On December 12, 1964, the reception of this temporary emergency intervention took place[29] in the presence of Lajos Bágyuj.[30]

Further consolidation proposals

Finally, the DHM drew up Project 41A for further consolidation works, with Chefneux as chief architect. The file included photographs, a description, a history of the church and the works carried out until then.[31] For this phase, the project included provisions for complete archaeological investigations.[32] But now the real problems arose since the design proposed two variants, which launched a heated debate on the final appearance of the church and the number of works to be done.

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[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Letter* from the DHM to the DHM's Transylvania Site, November 23, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[30] Lajos Bágyuj, a constructor with studies in Budapest, an autodidact in the field of restoration, was involved in interventions on several Transylvanian monuments after 1948, becoming chief of the DHM's Transylvania Site. Among the ensembles where he worked are the Saint Michael's church in Cluj, the Calvinist church in Kogălniceanu Street in Cluj, the Franciscan church in Cluj, the Calvinist church in Nima, the Catholic church in Floreşti, the Calvinist church in Cricău, the Saint Michael's cathedral in Alba Iulia, the Castle in Hunedoara. See Sas Péter, "Bágyuj Lajos műemlékfelújításai", *Művelődés közművelődési folyóirat* LIX (2006), http://www.muvelodes.ro/index.php/Cikk?id=261, accessed on June 21, 2023; Balogh Edgár (ed.)*, Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés I. (A–F)*, (Bucureşti, 1981), http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03628/html/b.htm#B%C3%A1gyujLajos, accessed on June 21, 2023; Ioana Rus-Cacovean, "Dezbateri principiale cu ocazia restaurării Bisericii Reformate de pe Strada Kogălniceanu din Cluj în anii 1957-1962", in *Istoria ca interogaţie. Mariei Crăciun, la o aniversare* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2020), 587–611.

[31] *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

[32] *Ibid.*

The first option included all the necessary consolidation works, with the construction of reinforced concrete canopies, a protective layer of boulders over the ruined walls, fixed window frames, an open roof structure covered with scale tiles, and a roof above the tower. This variant also included extensive archaeological research and marking the foundations of the side aisles, the complete uncovering of the brick floor in the nave, and walling in the arches on its northern side.

Engineer Th. Barbu proposed reinforced concrete belts to strengthen the tower and a reinforced concrete beam to tie it to the nave's walls. He also suggested dismantling and rebuilding the southeast pilaster after installing the beam, underpinning the walls, and placing reinforced concrete belts under the windows and the nave's roof structure. Finally, he pointed out the need to dismantle and rebuild the two pilasters on the south side.[33]

The second option provided some archaeological research, but most of all, fewer interventions related to the strict consolidation works that had to protect the walls and to preserve the monument in a state of ruin, with reinforced concrete canopies at the nave and tower, but without re-roofing.[34]

The designer team recommended the first variant, understanding that proper protection and reinforcement could not be ensured without the roof covering, and also taking into consideration the functional needs of the edifice.[35] This option was also in tune with the Consistory's intentions, which on September 10, 1964, had already approached the DHM, saying that they were pleased about the consolidation works that had begun during the summer, but it also requested the covering of the tower and the nave, according to the request of the village, to use the church as a funerary chapel.[36]

Nevertheless, other DHM specialists thought differently, Eugenia Greceanu suggesting as early as April 22, 1960, a simpler solution. She believed that instead of a reconstruction of the church's missing parts, it would be preferable to design a project that included the research, consolidation, and protection of the monument only in a state of ruin[37] since its very picturesque appearance made it similar to the former monastery in Cârța.[38]

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[33] *Ibid.*; Th. Barbu, *Report*, June 2, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[34] *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, September 10, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[37] Eugenia Greceanu, *Report*, April 22, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[38] The Cistercian Monastery in Cârța, built in the 13th century, was the first Transylvanian Gothic ensemble but gradually fell into decay. In the interwar period and between 1961 and 1962, it went through a series of interventions, becoming the first Romanian site preserved in a state of ruin. See "Cronică", 77.

Conservation in ruin was not the DHM's usual approach, but the Romanian specialists, probably aware of the cases in UK, Greece, or Italy, sought to introduce in our country as well, this cutting-edge method as a substitute for the more brutal traditional restorations and reconstructions. Still, because of the always urgent interventions in Romania, they lacked the time for extensive research, and certainly the freedom to travel abroad to visit the international sites.

On June 4, 1965, took place a DHM meeting which analysed the two variants and issued the final approval for Gârbova.[39]

Greceanu had the task to present the two options, noting that rebuilding the covering with an open roof structure had the advantage of restoring the volume of the building and protecting the vaulted bays framing the west tower and the brick floor in the nave. However, she thought that walling in the arches or their fitting with windows or doors distorted the authenticity of the ruin. She also believed that neither aesthetic nor scientific grounds justified the designed flat form of the nave's roof.[40] If this first option was to be approved, Greceanu suggested keeping the arches open to the sides since the purpose of the intervention was not to restore the church as a place for worship, but to preserve the ruin in all its authenticity while protecting it with a covering. But in this case, the roof ridge should be up to the line of the west tympanum. On the question of the tower roof and balcony, she proposed to rebuild it according to one preserved drawing, but some members of the committee considered it a *'doubtful source'*.[41]

Concerning the second option, Greceanu believed it had a more scientific character, preserving the romantic aspect of the construction. She pointed out, however, that the proposal should carefully study the insulation of the vaults in the three western bays and the drainage of rainwater inside the church, as well as provide solutions to protect the uncovered brick paving.[42]

Regarding the archaeological research, on January 31, 1962, the Consistory had asked the DHM to consider delegating Radu Heitel to Gârbova, "*who in recent years had specialised in excavations on the early medieval period in Transylvania*", to carry out investigations to clarify the chronology of the church.[43] Also, on September 14, 1964, the DHM had replied to the Consistory that they would study the archaeological excavations and the covering of the tower and the nave as part of a future restoration project.[44] But despite this previous discussion, during the approval meeting of June 4, 1965, Greceanu was also a bit maliciously

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[39] *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, June 4, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, January 31, 1962, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[44] *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, September 14, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

ironic, believing that archaeological research needed more careful attention, but reminded the commission that "*the DHM does not compete with the Institute of Archaeology for extensive excavations*".[45]

So, based on Greceanu's report on the design, the commission gave a favourable opinion for the second variant,[46] provided that the brick floor was re-covered with earth. Consequently, on July 12, 1965, the DHM requested the Department for Systematization, Architecture and Construction Design (DSAPC) the building permit.[47]

In the spring of 1965, Bágyuj informed the DHM that 30000 lei had been provided for Gârbova for the second quarter of that year, but he had not yet received the design and thus could not order the supply materials. He urged the DHM to hand over the design for Gârbova, since at the church in the nearby Cricău, work always paused as they did not receive the project details on time either, and they thus had to open another worksite to make rational use of the permanent skilled workers.[48]

The project was finally implemented only in 1966: in some parts the walls were consolidated and received reinforced concrete belts, the cracks were filled, while in others the masonry was demolished, rebuilt, and grouted. The works included the minimum archaeological research, a tiled roof over the sacristy, the rebuilding of the tower's windows, uncovering up to the walking level of the side walls, paving with stone slabs, sewerage, and wall canopies.[49]

The strict consolidation works ended in 1966, but the second stage of this intervention was left unfinished, with the intention to allocate funds in 1967.[50]

A disappointed beneficiary

But the following debate shows that the Consistory was unhappy with this solution, which led to a heated debate and several problems which affected the final stage of the works.

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[45] *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, June 4, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[46] *Internal note* from the DHM to the Design Group, June 9, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077 – *Favourable opinion for the restoration project of the Romanesque church in Gârbova*, June 30, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[47] *Letter* from the DHM to the DSAPC Hunedoara, July 12, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[48] *Letter* from Lajos Bágyuj to the DHM, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[49] Oteleşteanu, *Report*, March 8, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[50] *Ibid.*

On August 24, 1965, the Parish had addressed the DHM through a letter, asking them to reconsider the approved solution and not to stop the works only with the consolidation. They were dissatisfied that they had found out from the Cricău site workers and from the *Neuer Weg* newspaper of August 20, 1965, but not from the DHM, that contrary to their expectations, the project was not for a restoration but only a consolidation of the church in a state of ruin.[51]

"*We, owners, custodians, and beneficiaries of the monument, have never been invited to participate in any discussion with the DHM, which we consider necessary so that something that has aroused so much enthusiasm in our community does not result only in disappointment and dissatisfaction.*"[52] Underlying that DHM's concern came in response to an old intention of theirs, thwarted only by the uncertain financial situation in the past, the Parish offered to help with construction material they had recovered from an old barn. To make things clear, they also stated that they did not want the reconstruction of the side aisles either and that a roof to cover the central nave would be more than enough for them, ending with a plea: "*We urge you not to override our sincere interest in this restoration!*"[53] Two other similar requests came on April 19 and October 27, 1966, the Consistory asking the DHM again to consider covering the nave with a roof since they only wished to use it as a funerary chapel.[54]

The Parish also stated that they looked forward to the promised archaeological research, perhaps carried out in parallel with the fortress and the village church, which would transform Gârbova into an even more sought-after attraction than it was then.[55] Unfortunately, they received a negative reply again, which stated that research would be restricted only on the church, necessary to mark its stages of construction, not at the other monuments in the area.[56]

Moreover, on June 6, 1966, the DHM stubbornly answered the Consistory that they had designed the proposal on the scientific principle of preserving the ruin in its present state without being distorted by other additions. As a result, they could not place a roof above the nave, and the brick floor would be covered again with earth.[57]

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[51] *Letter* from the Lutheran Parish in Gârbova to the DHM, August 24, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Letters* from the Lutheran Parish in Gârbova to the DHM, April 19 and October 27, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[55] *Letter* from the Lutheran Presbytery to the DHM, September 2, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[56] Oteleşteanu, *Report*, October 15, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077 – *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, October 22, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

[57] *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, June 6, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

This correspondence is valuable for understanding the situation, showing that the DHM had never presented their intentions to the beneficiary and obviously made here a complete mistake by not keeping in touch and making scientific decisions without consulting them. But since they were merely at the beginning of their activity, always acting in a rush because of the severe state of the monuments they had to restore, the DHM had not yet fully understood that working with the beneficiaries can be crucial. If they saw that the church was in ruins, they applied the scientific recipe, failing to realise that using it, even partially, would save the church, as the local community was still quite large. They would see only later, in the 1970s, that most of the time an interested owner meant the survival of the monument, but by then it would be too late for many other ensembles.

A change of mind

After all these requests, the DHM specialists finally reacted, chief architect Chefneux himself writing a report on April 26, 1966. He asked the reconsidering of the approval, saying that there was no reason for restoration without the roof, him, and the engineer themselves having actually proposed this variant since, in fact, they believed that the very absence of the roofing had caused the monument's deterioration, and also thought this was the best solution to protect the brick floor. In addition, he showed that there was very little difference in cost between the two options because in the second variant too, the walls needed to be covered and the rainwater drained. He also arose the question of functional necessity, showing that the only remaining argument for the first option was that of the more romantic appearance of the church in a state of ruin.[58]

On November 15, 1966, probably after Greceanu focused more on other projects and Oteleşteanu became the new referent for central Transylvania, he presented a report in which he proposed the solution's revision, suggesting covering the nave and mentioning that the conditions of ruin had been, in fact, given mainly for the side aisles, that were not to be rebuilt or the arches closed.[59]

And so, during the approval meeting of January 4, 1967, the Consistory's request to rebuild the roof for the use of the ruin in burial ceremonies was finally reconsidered.[60] They approved covering the nave, on the condition to investigate the traces of the original roofing, along with a suitable one for the tower.[61]

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[58] Eugen Chefneux, *Report*, April 26, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[59] Oteleşteanu, *Report*, November 15, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[60] *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, January 4, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[61] *Ibid.*

Since the second stage of the consolidation had been left unfinished due to insufficient funding, the DHM sent on March 9, 1967, an internal note to Chefneux, requesting him to complete the previous project from 1965 according to these new provisions.[62]

On March 14, 1967, DHM also informed the Consistory that their request for a roof for the nave had been finally approved, asking also to communicate what materials the Parish had available and what workforce it could provide, according to their address of April 23, 1966, which stated that "*the community of Gârbova is ready to contribute to the implementation of these works with materials, and voluntary work.*"[63]

On March 16, 1967, the Consistory expressed its gratitude for the works carried out so far, and their expectations to see the intervention completed.[64]

Unfinished works

But the only works made that year were those related to archaeology research. On January 7, 1968, Radu Heitel and Alexandru Bogdan handed over a Preliminary Archaeological Survey, carried out between October 25 and November 2, 1967, with the question of whether the investigations would continue in 1968. The answer was no.[65]

And nothing else followed later either, the archives registering only on June 27, 1973, a letter from the Consistory which informed the reorganised Directorate of Historical and Artistic Monuments (DHAM) that on May 31, the tower had been struck by lightning, knocking down the upper row of stones. Weathering damage to the rebuilt vault of the gallery was also present, jeopardising the effects of the consolidation work carried out by the DHM but interrupted before completion.[66]

No written justification for the interruption appears either, only another internal note sent to the design group on July 19, 1973, which urged Oteleşteanu to draw the project theme with the roofing.[67] On October 8, 1973, a new internal note recommended that that year's design plan included the addition to the original documentation of 1965, the roofing in the first variant, approved during the meeting in 1967.

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[62] *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, March 14, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[63] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, April 23, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[64] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, March 16, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[65] *Project 41/1963-1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5080.
[66] *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHAM, June 27, 1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.
[67] *Internal note* from the DHAM to the Design group, July 19, 1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

But these were never implemented. Since we see no other reason for this than the insufficient workforce at the DHAM, the lack of funding, and the institutional reorganisation that had the same effect in another case we have studied,[68] we hold this situation responsible for the interruption of works in Gârbova also. The church was left unfinished, not only without a roof, but without the final emergency consolidation that might have put the monument under at least temporary protection.

In the end, the only works took place in 1964–1966, followed by some preliminary archaeological research in 1967, and then they stopped for good. Most of the Saxon inhabitants left Romania after 1973, and so disappeared the interested beneficiary also. Since then, only the surrounding graveyard remained in use, while the tower of the church received a tiled roof as late as the 1990s.

Conclusion

The fact that today's image of the church is undeniably dreamlike and picturesque is certainly due to the DHM's efforts which managed to prevent disaster and save it from complete collapse. So, conservation in ruin appears as a proper solution for a building that has lost too many of its original elements to ensure its initial function, but the remaining ones are preserved in all their authenticity.

Nevertheless, in the case of Gârbova, we cannot help regretting that the intervention failed to give a sense of accomplishment to the well-intended community, which was left only with a deserted, unusable ruin. Willing to achieve a result similar to Cârța, the DHM disregarded that the former Cistercian monastery was still in place because its standing choir had been reused as a Lutheran church. I believe that this intervention did not necessarily suit Gârbova, the conservation in ruin being rigidly forced onto an owner who was still interested in using the former church, and who would have provided the monument's continuous maintenance, mandatory for preserving it in a proper conservation state.

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[68] Ioana Rus-Cacovean, "<A Disaster for the History of Transylvanian Architecture, a Disgrace for the Local Bodies that Take Care of it and a Load on the Conscience of Architects and People of Culture from This Country>. The Fate of the Bánffy Castle in Bonțida During the Communist Regime in Romania", *Revista Brukenthal. Acta Musei* (2021): 813–831.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Inside the church's main nave, view from the east, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 2. View from the southeast, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 3. Inside the church's nave, view from the west, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 4. View from the north, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 5. The stone frame of the Gothic tabernacle on the main nave's northern wall, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 6. The church in the early 1960s. (Photo in *Proiect 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079).
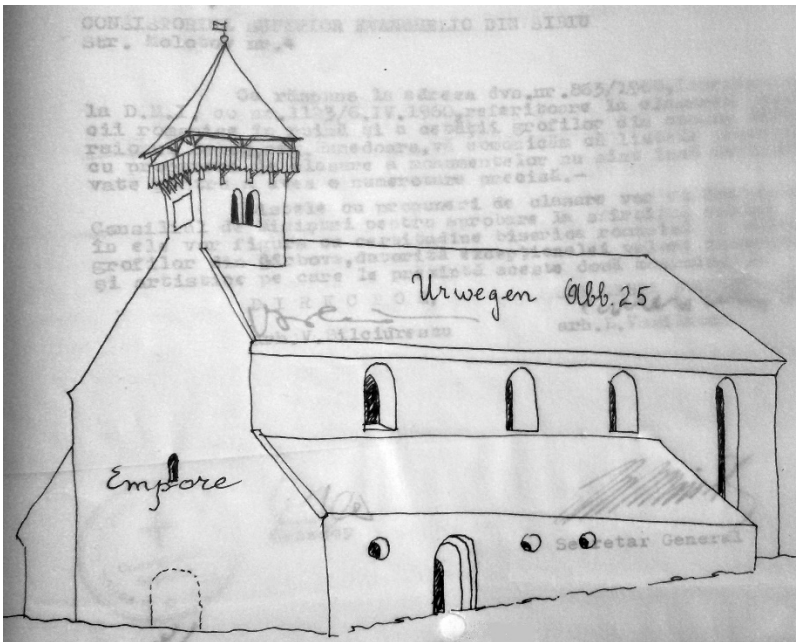
Fig. 7. The 'doubtful source'. (Reproduction of an early 20th century drawing in *Corespondență* [*Correspondence*], 1956-1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077).
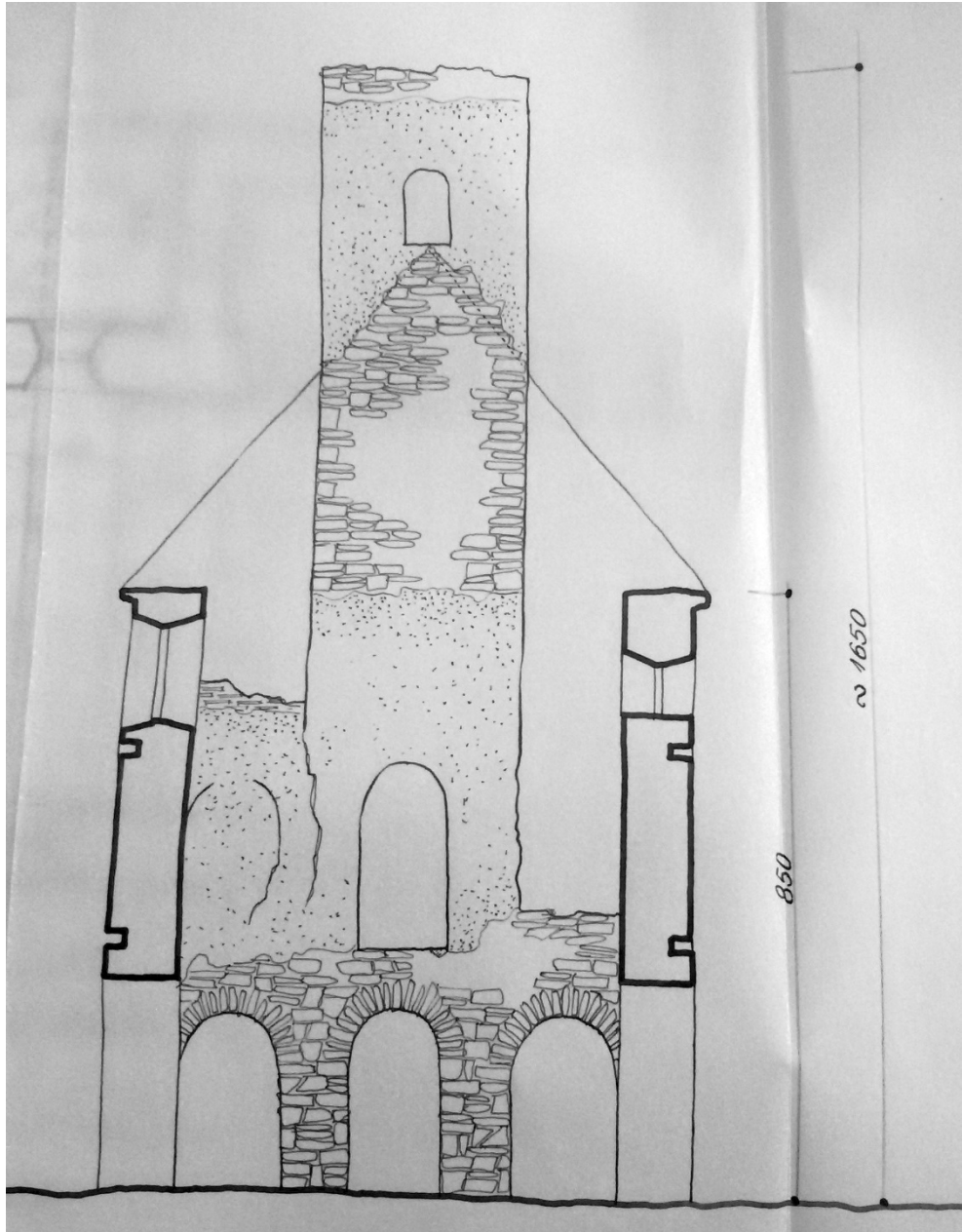
Fig. 8. Cross-section of the church in the early 1960s. (Blueprint in *Releveu* [Survey], 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5078).
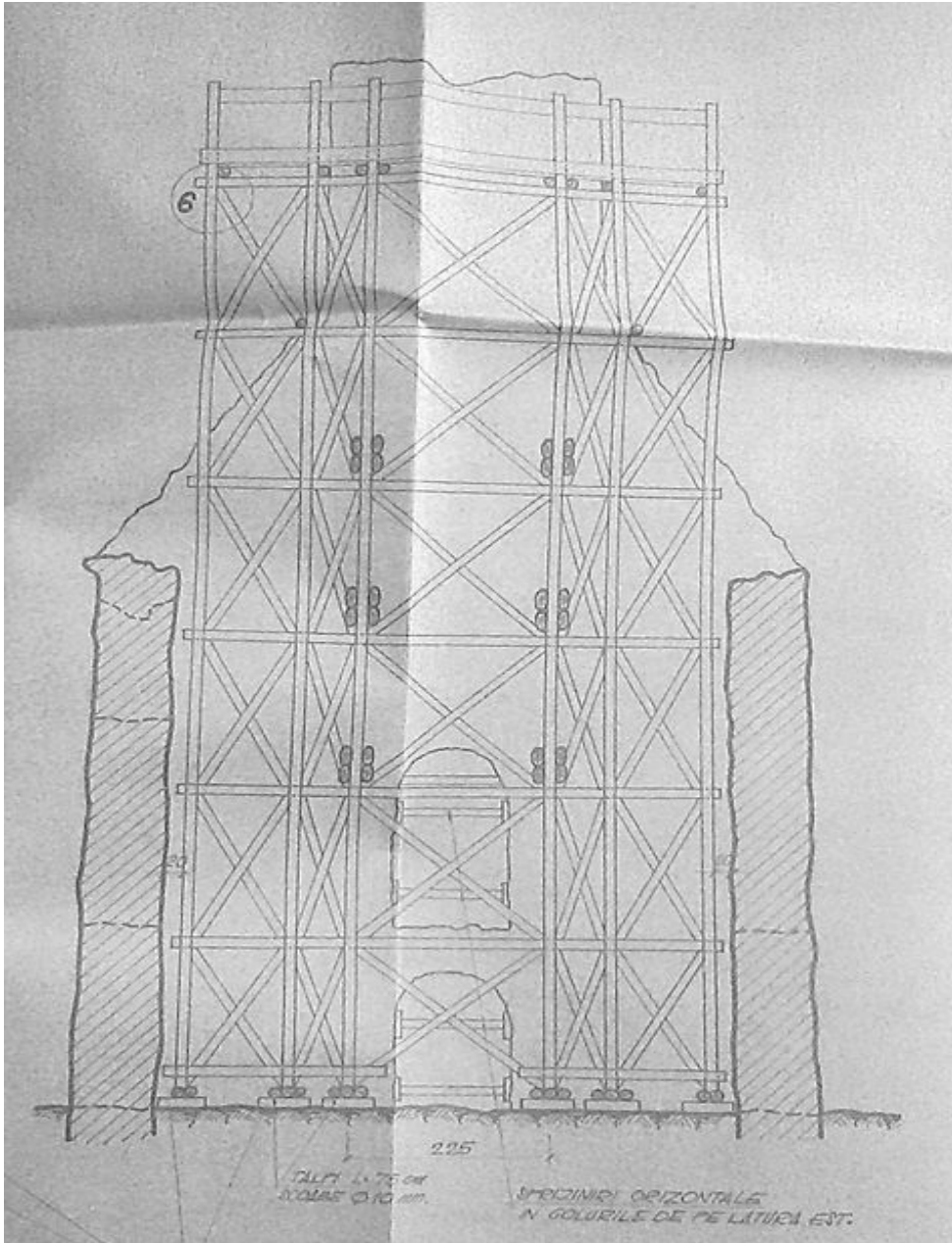
Fig. 9. Cross-section of the church with the temporary consolidation of the tower. (Blueprint in *Proiect 41/1963-1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5080).

Fig. 10. Details of the consolidation with concrete beams, view from the south, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

Fig. 11. Gârbova, the Romanesque church, bird's eye view, 2017.
(Photo: Raimond Spekking & Elke Wetzig, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/
commons/6/6b/Mountain_church_Garbova%2C_Romania-0276.jpg, 25.06.2023).

THE IMAGE OF MIHAI VITEAZUL IN 19TH-CENTURY ROMANIAN PAINTING

Sergiu-Marius MAN*

ABSTRACT. The Image of Mihai Viteazul in 19th-century Romanian Painting. The Romanian artistic movement of the 19th-century assisted the political endeavor of national legitimization by establishing the Romanian identity, in its various forms, through art.

By adapting the example of their neoclassical and romantic counterparts they depicted various patriotic symbols on their canvases in order to appeal both to the population, from a visual standpoint, and their inherent political cause: obtaining independence and unifying the historical Romanian provinces. Such unity was first achieved by the historical figure of Mihai Viteazul, a Wallachian prince of the late 16th century. As a consequence, his figure became one of the main motifs illustrated in the art of the time, being closely tied to the concept of Romanian historic identity. The artists underwent a process of research in order to represent and bring forward a faithful image of the ruler, and some of his greatest achievements. Both historical and literary sources were approached, resulting in a diverse body of paintings, which will be discussed in the present article. The research aims to establish the sources on which the various artworks were based, the accuracy of the represented message with respect to the historical background of the ruler as well as the various stylistic approaches of the artists in question.

Keywords: painting, portraiture, Romanian artist, Mihai Viteazul, 19th century.

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* **Sergiu-Marius MAN** (sergiu.man@ubbcluj.ro) is a PhD student at the Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University, School for Population Studies and the History of Minorities, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. His field of interest is 19th-century Romanian political art and its relation to European cultural and political movements.

Introduction and method

The concept of Romanian historical painting revolves around the artistic movement that emerged in the mid-19th century and gained momentum following the events of 1848 in the Romanian Principalities. The artful evocation and glorification of prominent historical figures, specifically the rulers and voivodes of the Medieval Era, is what it relies on. The process of artistic emancipation coincided with the reception of Western currents of Neoclassicism and Romanticism through the works of the first generation of "revolutionary" artists: Constantin-Daniel Rosenthal, Barbu Iscovescu, and Ion Negulici. Their aesthetic direction was inherited and continued by contemporaries such as Constantin Lecca, Mişu Popp, and Mihai Lapaty as well as their younger successors Gheorghe Tattarescu, Theodor Aman, and Nicolae Grigorescu. Their political art is meant to fulfill a specific requirement which is the consolidation of a Romanian national identity and consciousness, built upon a shared historical background and evolution.

The generation of the 1848 Revolution identifies the people as the centripetal force necessary for the entire process of national legitimization.[1] To validate its status, a nation needs a consciousness[2] grounded in a common historical tradition.[3] That history undergoes profound transformations influenced by the selective collective imagination.[4] The cohesion of the national construct is further fueled by the various easily identifiable symbols and signs, such as the flag and other heraldic insignia.[5] The symbols themselves can decode a significant amount of information, the meaning and significance of which are exclusively attributed to those who associate with them. They express both emotions and reasons.[6] One such symbol, found in the 19th century political painting, in Delacroix, and later in Rosenthal's work, is the figure of the "mother nation," perceived as voluptuous, honorable, and fertile.[7]

Observing the recurrence of the figure of Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), Romanian painting of the second half of the 19th century represents the mythological synthesis necessary for composing and solidifying a common historical pantheon. It is quite obvious why his personality has been chosen to

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[1] Simona Nicoară, *Naţiunea modernă. Mituri, simboluri, ideologii* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2002), 137.

[2] Hagen Schulze, *Stat şi naţiune în istoria europeană* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2003), 100.

[3] Eric Hobsbawm, *Naţiuni şi naţionalism din 1780 până în prezent. Program, mit, realitate* (Chişinău: Arc, 1997), 40.

[4] Simona Nicoară, *Mitologiile revoluţiei paşoptiste româneşti. Istorie şi imaginari* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1999), 19.

[5] Schulze, *Stat şi naţiune*, 100.

[6] Nicoară, *Mitologiile revoluţiei*, 63.

[7] Nicoară, *Naţiunea modernă*, 145.

represent the idea of Romanian bravery and unity, as during his reign the three Principalities were united under the leadership of a single ruler, and his tragic end canonizes him in the collective psyche as a national hero and martyr for the Romanian cause. Moreover, his figure can fulfill the paternal role of the nation in a similar manner as Maria Rosetti's figure in Rosenthal's "Revolutionary Romania". The present research seeks to verify the accuracy of artistic representations in relation to historical precision, using arguments and sources related to clothing, military strategy, style, and composition. The research aims to establish the intake of Romanian artists who were active during the 1848 Revolution and have undergone art studies in the West. As such, the upper limit of the research will be Nicolae Grigorescu's work.

From a theoretical standpoint, the primary sources around which the current research effort is centered can be classified as vestiges or indirect sources.[8] These sources are represented by the individual artistic legacy of each previously mentioned author, in other words, their paintings and artworks. Additionally, lithographs, drawings, and literary work will be addressed, to further establish the sources that served as inspiration. The present approach aims to combine a set of research methods found in both historical research and the analytical precepts of art history.

Unwritten or indirect sources[9] must undergo an examination process that culminates in the identification and translation of their intrinsic significance.[10] Artwork in general possesses the ability to concentrate the narrative of the moment they were created, preserving the cultural energies of the era in which they were created.[11] Other means of research may refer to Freudian psychoanalysis, from which art history has benefited. Identifying psychopathological traits in the individual's biography[12] and their perceived influence facilitates the deciphering of messages found in an artist's work, as well as the motivation behind compositional or stylistic choices,[13] whose origin can be found in personal individual experiences. For instance, the existing friendship between Nicolae Bălcescu, Theodor Aman, and Gheorghe Tattarescu resulted in laborious research and a series of portraits dedicated to Mihai Viteazul.

Finally, the form, or lack thereof, represents the substratum of the artwork to which the viewer and critic can relate objectively. In the opinion of Virgil Vătășianu, form in the field of visual arts is the same as the written word

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[8] Jerzy Topolski, *Metodologia istoriei* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987), 270–271.

[9] Jerzy Topolski, *Methodology of History* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977), 392.

[10] Topolski, *Methodology,* 293.

[11] Peter Claus and John Marriot, *History. An introduction of theory, method and practice* (London: Routledge, 2017), 262

[12] Jae Emerling, *Theory for Art History* (London: Routledge, 2019), 22.

[13] Emerling, *Theory,* 24.

for literature.[14] The form can vary from a general concept, such as the "human form," identifiable figures within the context of the painting, from a bare silhouette to a portrait, or forms that constitute themselves to represent clothing, weaponry, or facial features in certain cases. Thus, the research commences with Constantin Lecca's diverse patriotic feats.

Analysis

Between 1827 and 1833, Constantin Lecca was part of the editorial team behind the *Biblioteca românească* journal located in Buda, the western side of Budapest as we know it today. The editor, Zaharia Carcalechi worked alongside a group of young individuals, including Ioan Maiorescu, the father of Titu Maiorescu.[15] Lecca's main achievement was a series of historical articles published and adorned with lithographs. These early works mark his first historical-themed portraits, reflecting his interest in the figures of Ştefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, Dragoş Vodă, and Radu Negru,[16] which are recurring themes in his work. Up to this point, Constantin Lecca had been strictly self-taught, as he did not have access to the necessary resources to travel to the West.

Upon arriving in Wallachia, he settled in Craiova in 1833.[17] His initial income came from local sponsors until he became an art teacher at Central School in Craiova.[18] The years spent in Carcalechi's editorial office allowed him to understand the infrastructure necessary to run a printing house. As such in 1837, he opened the first printing house in Craiova.[19] Through both printing houses, the artist managed to reproduce a series of portraits of medieval historical figures, that were made available to the general public.[20] Two such examples are the lithographs dedicated to the ruler Mihai Viteazul (Fig. 1) and Dragoş Vodă Ioan. These early attempts, as noted by Vasile Florea, were "imaginary effigies"[21] of his creation, whereas Paul Rezeanu stated that they were nothing more than mere fantasies that suffered from an obvious lack of research.[22] At first glance, the viewer can easily discern the simplicity of the figures, exaggerated or even

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[14] Virgil Vătăşianu, *Metodica cercetării în istoria artei* (Cluj-Napoca: Clusium, 1996), 77.

[15] Paul Rezeanu, *Constantin Lecca* (Bucureşti: Arcade, 2005), 8–9.

[16] Vasile Florea, *Arta românească. De la origini până în prezent* (Bucureşti: Litera, 2017), 353.

[17] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 10.

[18] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 10–11.

[19] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 14.

[20] Florea, *Arta românească,* 354.

[21] Florea, *Arta românească,* 354.

[22] Rezeanu*, Lecca*, 21.

erroneous bodily proportions in places. For example, the foot sole of Mihai Viteazul is much narrower in relation to the calf and thigh, and there is an idealization of physiognomic features, denoting a lack of character. However, there is an obvious logical error in their judgment. The artist had at the very least conducted minimal research that has conducted him to one of the main motifs which will be brought up throughout the present study, that is Mihai Viteazul's cap.

Constantin Lecca's eventual refinement and proper artistic training occurred during a trip to Rome between 1844 and 1845. The existence of this trip has been the subject of debate, recently put to rest through Paul Rezeanu's research. Constantin Lecca submitted a request to the National Schools Authority, dated April 21, 1844,[23] seeking a replacement teacher during his absence. This episode is absent from earlier monographs dedicated to the life and activity of the painter. Moreover, a letter reproduced in Jacques Wertheimer-Ghika's work, between Gheorghe Tattarescu and Petrache Poenaru, confirms that Lecca had left Italy summer of 1845.[24] In the immediate aftermath, there is an increase in the number of works elaborated on historical themes. Notably, the portrayal of the historical figure of Mihai Viteazul coincides with a similar literary trend that seeks to highlight both his deeds and life. A few examples include Ion Heliade Rădulescu's poem *Mihaida* as well as biographies by Florian Aaron[25] and Dimitrie Bolintineanu,[26] which played an educational role to the general population.

Remus Niculescu's research provides additional information on some of these later paintings.[27] He proposes an interesting theory, attributing the work *Mihai Viteazul chemând pe fruntaşii ţării împotriva asupririi otomane* (*Michael the Brave Calling the Leaders of the Country to Resist Ottoman Oppression*) to Constantin Lecca, even though the work is neither signed nor dated as most of his artworks tend to be. The main argument in support of this theory is provided by page 22 of the mentioned sketch notebook, which represents an anatomical study of a man's head, a sketch reused to depict the figure of the ruler. The transition from the pencil sketch to oil paint alters the initial appearance of the work, causing the sketch to lose its original resemblance. Even so, Lecca's work could have inspired some of his students to pursue a similar path, as he taught until 1859.[28]

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[23] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 29–30.

[24] Jacques Wertheimer-Ghika, *Gheorghe Tattarescu şi Revoluţia de la 1848* (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1971), 28–29.

[25] Florian Aaron, *Mihaiĕ II Bravulĕ: biografia şi caracteristica lui. Trase din istoria Ţării Româneşti*, (Bucureşti: Tipografia Colegiului Naţional, 1858).

[26] Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Viaţa lui Mihai Viteazul făcută pe înţelegerea poporului* (Bucureşti: Librăria Socescu, 1870).

[27] Remus Niculescu, "Constantin Lecca în Italia. După un jurnal de călătorie inedit," *Studii şi cercetări de Istoria Artei* 49 (2015): 99.

[28] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 10.

The physiognomy of the subject does not resemble the previous version, lithographed, of Mihai Viteazul, noting the absence of the cap or "calpac" that is part of almost every version of his portrait, regardless of the work's author, date, or technique. On the other hand, it is to be noted that the clothing, composed of a short tunic covered by a mantle, both elements having parallel straps or closure systems, does coincide with various representations that will be brought up in the present research.

Nevertheless, Remus Niculescu points out the fact that in subsequent works the artist will change the facial features of his subject.[29] The statement at hand lacks a certain nuance. There is a discrepancy between it and another piece of information. In a later version of Mihai Viteazul's Triumphal Entry into Alba Iulia, "the ruler's face is based on a contemporary portrait of him, engraved by Dominicus Custos, disseminated not only in its original form but also through several adaptions."[30] This proves that Lecca had accessed the aforementioned source and there is no logical reasoning for which he would deviate from it. Dominicus Custos's engraving,[31] dated Prague 1601, presents an archetype executed with surprising attention to detail. The most faithfully rendered features are the facial hair, particularly the shape of the mustache, alongside the beard, and the arches of the cheekbones that are shaded in a manner reflecting the strong light and contrast found in the engraving. The cap, in turn, covers a significant portion of the subject's forehead, albeit in a simplified manner. The shape of the eyes and eyebrows is relatively dramatic and well-defined in Custos's work.

Nevertheless, the subsequent appearances of Mihai Viteazul's facial features in Constantin Lecca's work will follow the same facial structure presented, refined in some places or altered due to the different positions the subject will adopt.

There is no doubt about the authenticity of the canvas known as *The Death of Mihai Viteazul* (Fig. 2) as it is signed and dated in the lower left corner, "Lecca 1845." We can identify a defined perspective and interest in composition as well as simulated dynamism. The background, in neutral, natural shades, is complemented by the vivid, primary colors in the foreground of the scene, such as the tricolor of the fictitious flags arranged horizontally or the existing clothing. The ruler is caught in a dramatic pose as he emerges from his tent, evoking a confident stance reinforced by the threatening raised sword over the heads of General Basta's soldiers. The ruler is also the best individualized figure, given his typical physiognomy, whilst the other characters are mere variations of a

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[29] Niculescu, "Constantin Lecca," 117.
[30] Niculescu, "Constantin Lecca," 102–103.
[31] Domenicus Custos, "Mihai Viteazul", accessed August 9, 2023, http://clasate.cimec.ro/Detaliu.asp?tit=Gravura--Custos-Domenicus--Mihai-Viteazul&k=44B4FAE300B845EF90CD722139EFB9F3.

certain masculine template. The static horsemen seen behind the tent can be described in the same way. This type of landscape will remain a leitmotif in Lecca's work, as irregular relief forms and clear skies characterize the artists' late works, such as: *The Encounter between Bogdan the Blind and Radu the Great* and *Radu Negru's Dismount.*

Constantin Lecca adapts, in this case, Dionisiu Fotino's testimony regarding the end of Mihai Viteazul, which is more dramatic than the description found in General Basta's report on the ruler's death which focused on the ambush, and eventual decapitation of the Romanian lord.[32] In Fotino's vision, the unfortunate interaction did not result in the immediate assassination of the ruler but rather in a confrontation where he had the opportunity to appreciate the gravity of the situation and even retaliate by knocking down one of General Basta's soldiers, depicted at the entrance of the tent, only to be intercepted and pierced by a spear held by the soldier in the central left position.[33]

Their clothing follows an existing pattern, innovated solely by the inclusion of vivid, historically inspired colors. For example, the red-colored cloth present is a legacy from the reign of Ştefan cel Mare[34] (Stephen the Great), while trousers tailored to the shape of the leg and low boots were worn since the preceding century.[35]

This version of Mihai Viteazul is one of the most original representations, breaking away from the static portrait template that reproduces, with more or less accuracy, some contemporary sources. This portrayal appears to be an idealization of the one found in Custos's engraving, highlighting the fine line of the nose, the particularly well-individualized facial hair, and the unyielding gaze.

The chromolithograph *Mihai Viteazul's Triumphal Entry into Alba Iulia* should be briefly discussed. The particular copy represents a simple reproduction of the canvas that was lost in a fire, dated 1857.[36] Since the distinctive characteristics of the original artwork were lost, precise dating would be imprudent. The work reprises the previous lithograph, placing it amid a collective scene enriched by the inclusion of boyar figures and the country's populace, appearing enthusiastic. Subsequent interventions are minimal, except for the redesign of the cape covering the tunic in favor of a simpler design. This version includes

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[32] "Raportul generalului Basta cătră Arhiducele Mateiu despre uciderea lui Mihaiu-Vodă," in Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor,* ed. Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki, vol. 4, 266–267. Bucureşti: Stabilimentul în arte grafice Socecu & Teclu, 1882.

[33] Dionisiu Fotino, *Istoria generală a Daciei sau a Transilvaniei, Ţerei Muntenesci şi a Moldovei,* vol. 2 (Bucureşti: Imprimeria naţională a lui Iosef Romanov et Companie, 1859), 76.

[34] Alexandru Alexianu, *Mode şi veşminte din trecut,* vol. 1 (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1971), 94.

[35] Alexianu, *Mode şi veşminte,* 44–45.

[36] Rezeanu, *Lecca,* 45.

the similar position of the horse, the disproportionality of the head compared to the body, the hat, the ruler's appearance, and his clothing, which can all be found in the 1837 illustration. Essentially, the lithograph was detached from its relatively neutral landscape and placed in a grand scene at the gates of Alba Iulia, where numerous standardized and substance-lacking figures celebrate the event. The painting is overflowed with the patriotic energy of the period. In contrast to the painting depicting the ruler's end, Mihai Viteazul seems to lead the entire painting and even the viewer's imagination toward the idea of victory. Furthermore, the artist attempts to remain impartial when considering the social balance depicted in the captured crowd, featuring a well-balanced mixture of voivodes, peasants, and soldiers.

Despite his dedications, Constantin Lecca's renditions are not the most well-known. Probably the most recognizable portrait of Mihai Viteazul is Mişu Popp's which derives from and elevates Aegidius Sadeler's engraving.[37] An example of this engraving is found in the Brukenthal Museum's collection in Sibiu. At first glance, in the absence of an in-depth understanding of the specific working method of such a historical reproduction, the viewer might be led to believe that the ruler himself visited the artist's studio to be immortalized on canvas. The artist captures the aesthetic and compositional essence of Sadeler's engraving, infusing an archetype of academic portraiture into it.

The painting measures approximately 70 x 100 cm and is signed and dated on the verso, completed in the year 1881 (Fig. 3).[38] Compared to the primary source, the position of the ruler is invigorated by favoring the right shoulder, although the head's position and facial features maintain a conventional line typical of his neoclassical portraits. Another element of aesthetic innovation is the representation of the chest piece instead of period-specific clothing. The coat of arms on the chest brings together a series of elements with patriotic connotations: the ox head representing Moldavia, the eagle or vulture representing Wallachia, sitting on top of on the seven hills of Transylvania.[39] The cape framing the ruler's silhouette has likely acquired a strong yellow hue over time, originally being white.

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[37] Aegidius Sadeler "Mihai Viteazul" accessed August 10, 2023, http://clasate.cimec.ro/Detaliu.asp?tit= Gravura--Sadeler-cel-Tanar-Aegidius-DEL-SC--Michael-Waivoda-Walachiae-Transalpinae-utraque-fortuna-insignis-et-in-utraq-Eadem-virtute-aet-XLIII-in-registrul-inventar-Mihai-Viteazu&k=BC87215668114C69A8FE188A0BB86967.

[38] Elena Popescu, *Mişu Popp. Reprezentant al academismului românesc. Pictura religioasă şi laică*, (Sibiu: Muzeul Naţional Brukenthal, 2007), 279.

[39] Popescu, *Mişu Popp,* 180.

The cap represents one of the elements of continuity in the iconographic depiction of the ruler, decorated, of course, with a feather,[40] the coloring of which could suggest it comes from a crane or a pheasant. The position of the hands denotes the meticulous theatricality of the composition, with the right hand lifting the cape to hip level while the left hand supports the handle of a golden sword, leaning against a dark-colored tunic. The ambiance of the ruler's face underlines a certain tense emotion due to the frowning eyebrows. Compared to the neutral and natural expression in Custos's engraving, Sadeler's vision, transposed in oil paint, undergoes a conformist refinement that exudes an invigorating vigor and boldness. As opposed to Lecca's representations, Popp's painting captivates the viewer through bold chromatics, the general composition as well as the dramatic vibe of the subject's physical traits. All these elements outline the typical atmosphere of the Biedermeier style. The neutral background in shades of gray can enliven the elaborated skin tones in a warm color palette, another aspect confirming Popp's stylistic affiliation.[41]

In the later part of their life and career, both artists undertook an extensive process of popularizing the figures of Romanian political rulers, retaining examples from previous iconographic work, and establishing a visual pantheon of glorious medieval Romanian figures. Receptive to the political atmosphere of the era, when the revival of national history was a recurring source of inspiration in literary and visual arts, Mişu Popp's contribution to the pantheon of portraits of rulers from the Romanian Principalities is remarkable. In the collective consciousness, the vision of Mihai Viteazul is often synonymous with Popp's portrait, making it one of the most recognizable artworks we have brought up in the present research. His portrait presents a series of physical qualities associated with the epitome of a visionary and courageous leader who inspires through the power of his exemplary behavior. Virgil Vătăşianu, somewhat regretfully, states that historical-themed portraits "are – unfortunately – the most well-known works by M. Popp and are partially disseminated through reproductions."[42] The research will divert now to one of the least known depictions of the Wallachian leader.

Research dedicated to Gheorghe Tattarescu's life and artwork does not cover a particular series composed of three portraits: Mihai Viteazul (Fig. 4), Ştefan cel Mare, and Mircea cel Bătrân (the Elder), located in the Art Museum of Prahova. All of them share some common characteristics such as: being created within a common time frame, namely the year 1880, as evidenced by their

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[40] Alexianu, *Mode şi veşminte*, 235.

[41] Elena Popescu, "Repere portretistice Biedermeier în opera lui Mişu Popp," *Revista Transilvania*, no. 2–3 (2004): 156.

[42] Virgil Vătăşianu, "Opera lui Mişu Popp," *Ţara Bârsei* IV, no. 4 (1932): 310.

signatures, similar dimensions, approximately 90 x 70 cm, and a unified appearance through the color palette, style, and compositional elements, such as the ruler's name written in the background, which gives this series an iconographic aspect. Tattarescu's reproduction of Mihai Viteazul is a less virtuous adaptation of Aegidius Sadeler's engraving. However, the research will attempt to synthesize the main elements of originality and significant differences between this version and Mișu Popp's.

Unlike his earlier executions, Mihai Viteazul, in Tattarescu's vision, improperly reveals his age. The artist emphasizes skin creases, expression wrinkles, and the eyelid structure, which diminishes and inhibits the fleeting but ideal qualities of an immortalized hero. The portrayal deviates from the traditional classic pose, seemingly meant to conserve his memory in a sublime, robust state. The attire is customary yet concealed by a white cloak embroidered with golden thread, showcasing the golden decorative elements even more prominently. These would have represented silhouettes of vultures in their original form.[43] The shoulders are covered by a very subtly depicted black mantle. The chest is covered by a tunic that can be described as much better individualized in a repetitive manner in Aman's works, with a gem-encrusted clasp around the neck.[44] Whilst Tattarescu's work might not be the boldest or most recognizable portrait dedicated to the Wallachian leader, it might be the sincerest one, diverting from the conventional purpose of the classic portrait, to depict a noble and seemingly timeless figure, following in the footsteps of realism. But the artist most concerned with the most faithful representations of Mihai Viteazul's greatest feats is Theodor Aman.

In the view of art historian Vasile Florea, Theodor Aman's work represents an upper limit of the Romanian artistic movement,[45] a final bastion of academicism in its elementary form that would steer local taste in a new avant-garde direction with the emergence of Nicolae Grigorescu. According to George Oprescu, the artistic accumulations of the first half of the 19th century only anticipated the emergence of an impetuous and commendable artist, synonymous with what Theodor Aman would become and express.[46] Naturally, the perspectives of both art historians are the product of a specific enthusiasm for 20th-century art historiography. However, Aman's biography has now been reevaluated by Adrian-Silvan Ionescu in the study *Aman's Modernity,* reproducing existing information about the artistic and personal evolution of painter Theodor Aman in an exhaustive

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[43] Alexianu, *Mode și veșminte,* 234.

[44] Alexianu, *Mode și veșminte,* 235.

[45] Vasile Florea, *Theodor Aman* (București: Meridiane, 1965), 13–16.

[46] George Oprescu, *Pictura românească în secolul al XIX-lea* (București: Meridiane, 1984), 164–165.

manner, naming him the first exponent of the modern generation of Romanian artists.[47] Therefore, regardless of historiographical affiliation or epistemological convictions of the moment, Aman's figure is presented in a laudatory manner.

The domain in which Aman excels by comparison to his counterparts, who mainly approached historical themes, either through elaborate allegorical compositions or through "effigy portraits,"[48] evoking the figures of heroes often in a conservative yet inspiring manner, while simultaneously being dependent on the source on which their resemblance was based, is the integration of battle themes in his works. However, Theodor Aman's painting steps outside the conventional boundaries in order to "put history into action."[49] The genre he approached is often referred to as "Bataille composition"[50] derived from the French "bataille," meaning "battle." Encouraged by Nicolae Bălcescu, the artist undertakes a thorough documentation process so that his work can depict the reality of the Romanian medieval era with the highest degree of accuracy,[51] regardless of the level of dynamism found in the composition. Several ink sketches of a janissary and specific Turkish clothing elements are found in Adrian-Silvan Ionescu's article.[52]

Aman's studies in Paris extended for approximately 9 years,[53] during which the artist cultivated his interest in patriotic composition, as evidenced by two lithographs, one centered around the figure of Mihai Viteazul: *The Last Night of Mihai Viteazul* (Fig. 5), and *The Battle of Oltenița*, a copy of the original which came into the possession of Sultan Dolmabahçe Sarayi,[54] commemorating the Ottoman victory against Russian troops during the Crimean War. Some considerations regarding the first mentioned lithograph should start with the fact that, unlike Constantin Lecca's version, which illustrates the ambush orchestrated by General Basta, the title of the work reflects the content figuratively.

In the foreground is the figure of ruler Mihai Viteazul seated at a table in the open air, near his camp, raising a cup with a small group of scarcely individualized soldiers. In the lower right plane, the shape of a cannon can be discerned, consistent with technological developments in mercenary armies.[55] The prince's expression exudes a certain enthusiasm, making it difficult to

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[47] Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, "Modernitatea lui Aman," *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei* 45 (2011): 97–139.

[48] Gheorghe Cosma, *Pictura istorică românească* (București: Meridiane, 1986), 51.

[49] Cosma, *Pictura istorică,* 59.

[50] Cosma, *Pictura istorică,* 56.

[51] Ion Frunzetti, *Arta românească în secolul al XIX-lea* (București: Meridiane, 1991), 52–54.

[52] Ionescu, "Modernitatea," 108.

[53] Ionescu, "Modernitatea," 100.

[54] Oprescu, *Pictura,* 171–172.

[55] Petre P. Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul* (București: Corint, 2002), 61.

determine whether the artist follows the anatomical line of Sadeler or Custos, while the clothing and accessories are the conventional ones in which he has been portrayed throughout the era. The only anachronistic element with strange implications in this context is the presence of the full moon, which, while serving as an ideal source of diffused light, can also be seen as a bad omen. However, the primary source of inspiration is not historical but literary. The lithograph in question adopts Dimitrie Bolintineanu's poem: "But on a mountaintop stands Michael at the table, [...] He stands at the head of the table, between captains..."[56], delimiting the scenography behind the composition, while the verse "Like a golden globe the moon was shining"[57] explains the inclusion of the full moon in the previously described context.

Some of the main motifs of Aman's work and stylistic approach to the historical composition can be found in an opulent setting of the *Turkish Envoys Bringing Gifts to Mihai Viteazul* (Fig. 6) an oil painting part of the collection of the Craiova Art Museum. The painting likely aims to illustrate the moment of handing over the "banner of rule"[58] with honors and gifts from the Sultan. In this case, attention is drawn to the tunics embroidered with decorative threads known as "brandenburgs", "fabric of all colors,"[59] white silk stockings, and thin leather boots made out of goat or calf leather, also known as "saffian".[60] This "standard" attire, encountered in the representations of Aman's predecessors, undergoes minimal modifications in his work but is qualitatively reproduced far beyond the previous approaches. Of course, the cap is unique in appearance, reinforcing the connection between the ruler's image and its accuracy through repetition. The facial structure primarily reflects the visual template found in the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler. Additionally, the ruler is the only one wearing a cloak, whereas the garments of those present in the scene are a chromatic reinterpretation of an existing template, with minimal interventions, with or without a similar cap worn by the ruler.

This work serves as an overture to the murals *The Battle of Călugăreni* and *Mihai Viteazul's Triumphal Entry into Bucharest after the Battle of Călugăreni*, substantial compositions executed in encaustic technique,[61] which can be found in the entrance hall of his residence. Both works preserve the main content elements found in *The Expulsion of the Turks from Călugăreni*, except the fact that the focus is more vividly placed on the favorable position of the Romanian army,

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[56] Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Legende Istorice* (București: Litera 2018), 12.
[57] Bolintineanu, *Legende Istorice,* 12.
[58] Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul,* 125.
[59] Alexianu, *Mode și veșminte,* 233.
[60] Alexianu, *Mode și veșminte,* 235.
[61] Ionescu, "Modernitatea," 107.

with Mihai Viteazul also present as the central figure in both murals. It's worth noting that the flag present in one of the murals features the arrangement of colors with horizontal stripes, but unlike the version of the flag adopted during the 1848 Revolution, it does not, at first glance, contain notions of "justice, fraternity."[62]

The influence of Bălcescu's work is evident in two other paintings, currently exhibited at the "Theodor Aman" Museum in Bucharest[63]: *After the Battle of Ruse* also known as *The Kidnapping of Soldiers' Children by Mihai Viteazul's Troops* and *Mihai Viteazul Contemplating the Head of Andrei Bathory* (Fig. 7). In the case of the first painting, through a clever process of "artistic symbiosis," Aman takes a quote found in *The Romanians under Mihai Viteazul*,[64] which describes the situation in the city of Ruse following the rebellion orchestrated at the beginning of his rule.[65] A witness describes the situation as follows: "delicate Turkish women, much spoiled [...] had you seen them then, naked, barefoot, rolling in the snow."[66] The second painting depicts the favorable outcome of the Battle of Şelimbăr. On the one hand, Mihai Viteazul's entry into Alba Iulia marked the annexation of Transylvania,[67] presented in Lecca's work, but on the other hand, this process involved the killing of the former prince, Andrei Báthory, through decapitation.[68] Once again, the artist takes a sequence from Bălcescu's work, a fateful interaction between the ruler and "Lady Stanca," whose purpose was to reaffirm the ephemeral nature of human life but also to foreshadow the grim manner in which the ruler's life would end two years later.

Worth noting is the fact that the general resemblance of the Wallachian lord sees a recurrence in Aman's work, in the absence of credible historical sources. The iconographic pantheon initiated by the artist encapsulated a relatively wide variation of moments and historical figures. To conclude this journey through Romanian medieval history, another painting needs to be addressed featuring Moldavian ruler Stephen the Great as its protagonist. Stephen appears in two main guises in Aman's work. The first of these is *Stephen the Great Falling from His Horse at the Battle of Şcheia*, but due to the multitude of soldiers, horses, and dislocated objects, his position is partially concealed. The fur cap and white horse serve as a bridge between appellation and allegory. However, this theme is revisited and better represented in a later work, currently part of the collection of the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum.

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[62] Maria Dogaru, "Tricolorul şi cocardele în contextul luptei revoluţionarilor paşoptişti," *Revista de istorie* 31, no. 5 (May 1978): 861.

[63] Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, *Artă şi document. Arta documentaristă în România secolului al XIX-lea,* (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1990), 242.

[64] Nicolae Bălcescu, *Românii supt Mihai-Voievod Viteazul,* 2nd ed. (Bucureşti: Meridiane,1982).

[65] Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul,* 111–112.

[66] Bălcescu, *Românii,* 52.

[67] Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul,* 159.

[68] Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul,* 160.

Drawing inspiration from Ion Neculce's chronicle and the poetry of Dimitrie Bolintineanu, "Stephen the Great and Purice the Bailiff"[69] seeks to distill the energy resulting from the previously evoked painting. The chronicle mentions that a court official named Purice witnessed the scene and offered his support by helping the fallen ruler remount his own horse.[70] The canvas (Fig. 8) reveals a particular cliché of Aman's historical composition, namely, the Moldavian prince's physiognomy is a simple adaptation of Mihai Viteazul's physical traits, albeit less well-defined. The scene takes place on a battlefield. At the feet of the horse, Purice is crouched, looking toward the ruler. Near Stephen the Great, is a fallen white horse belonging to him, which he is forced to abandon. A vibrant scene unfolds around them, Moldavian soldiers confronting the forces of Petru Hronoda, "Hroiot". Surrounding them we can identify several weapons specific to the era, including spears and axes.[71]

The last two contributions are much more timid and take inspiration mostly from Constantin Lecca's work. Little is known about Mihail Lapaty's family and history. His work was strongly influenced by the contributions of Géricault and Delacroix, as well as his teacher Ary Scheffer,[72] at least in terms of dynamics and chromatics. However, his contribution to the current endeavor is limited to a work based on the figure of Mihai Viteazul. In 1855, the artwork was reproduced in the *Illustration* magazine[73] being an almost faithful copy of a previously realized lithograph.[74]

Finally, we can introduce Nicolae Grigorescu's modest contribution, an early work of his before the eventual artistic proliferation. The first historical composition of Nicolae Grigorescu *Mihai Viteazul at Călugăreni* (Fig. 9) shows the influence of his predecessors, especially Lecca, as Aman had not yet composed his own *Mihaida*. Even without well-established stylistic directions, his composition has the power to not necessarily surpass Lecca's vision he transposed it into a personal patina. Isolating the central figure from the rest of the work, we can observe that the position of the horse's legs is identical to that in the lithograph produced about two decades earlier. Nonetheless, there are minor anatomical aberrations, with the dimensional ratio between the horse and the rider severely diminished. There cannot be a specific characterization of the physiognomy,

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[69] Bolintineanu, *Legende Istorice,* 257.

[70] Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* (București: Litera, 2001), 16.

[71] Radu R. Rosetti, *Istoria artei militare a românilor până în veacul al XVII-lea* (București: Monitorul Oficial şi Imprimeriile Statului. Imprimeria Națională, 1947), 139.

[72] Vasile Florea, "Pictura românească în secolul al XIX-lea," in Vasile Drăguț, *Pictura românească în imagini: 1111 reproduceri* (București: Meridiane, 1970), 135.

[73] Ionescu, *Artă şi document*, 240.

[74] Dimitrie Papazoglu, *Istoria fondării orașului București. Istoria începutului orașului București. Călăuza sau conducătorul Bucureștiului* (București: Fundația Culturală "Gheorghe Marin Speteanu", 2000), 280–284.

given that Dominic Custos's engraving had not appeared in Lecca's work, except in the later editions. Except for the central position, there are no other distinctive elements to help the viewer distinguish Mihai Viteazul's identity from the amalgamation of soldiers and Turkish soldiers present. The clothing in this case suffers from a lack of documentation, having an anachronistic appearance, identifying several pieces of armor and a chest piece that were not part of the attire of mercenaries in that century.[75] Most human figures are depicted in a frontal manner, an aesthetic cliché of the iconographers of that time.[76] In the distant secondary plane, two flags can be identified, incorporating the colors of the Romanian national flag, represented horizontally. Both the chromatic order and the heraldic symbol incorporated, although difficult to decipher, are innovative and original in the given context.

Conclusions

Having all these paintings and artworks in mind we can identify a visible interest for representation and historical accuracy, especially in Theodor Aman's case. However, if we were to concentrate on the significance of all the works discussed, except for the portraits of Mihai Viteazul based on two credible historical effigies, the historical art of this period seeks to inspire and open the Romanian cultural horizon to the past. Visual representations provide meaning and significance to events often obscure or difficult to transpose into reality, as long as the audience possesses the necessary references. Thus, returning to the previously mentioned series of portraits, his stoic image, accompanied by his characteristic hat, firm gaze, and facial hair, overlaps with his identity in the Romanian collective consciousness.

Of course, the ruler of Wallachia and Moldavia represents more than that; he is a recurring symbol meant to affirm and support the idea of unity. His figure has been animated by a majority of modern Romanian artists. Furthermore, except for a few innovative attempts, his depiction is constant, emanating a multitude of patriotic feelings. His identity is guaranteed through those recognizable clothing and decorative elements, except for *The Death of Mihai Viteazul* in Lecca's work, which deviated from the established creed of Sadeler's or Custos's engravings.

In Aman's case, we observe his tendency to transcend this symbolic essence and evoke the actual virtues and victorious conquests that led to the unification of the Romanian nation for the first time in its history. Regardless of the earlier versions produced, each variant in which the ruler is depicted creates a

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[75] Alexianu, *Mode și veșminte,* 150.
[76] Valentin Ciucă, *Pe urmele lui Nicolae Grigorescu,* (București: Editura Sport-Turism, 1987), 42.

new cultural horizon. The pinnacle is undoubtedly Mișu Popp's portrait. However, the Romanian artistic movement acted independently from each other, certainly not due to a lack of artistic camaraderie. On the contrary, Lecca and Popp had a well-established friendship, while Aman and Tattarescu formalized superior artistic education in the newly formed Romanian state. Every artist has created according to their criteria, thus their individuality is showcased. Lecca, through his collective compositions, technically inferior but equally pertinent, relied on Custos's engravings, being the first artist to bring the Romanian rulers' subject matter into concrete form through his engravings. The reason why the other artists, from Aman to Popp, relied more on Sadeler's version is strictly due to aesthetic preference. Custos's version presents several anatomical similarities, yet the overall aspect of the engraving is theatrical and superficial, in comparison to the tenacity and compositional drama found in Sadeler's engraving.

His masculine, noble, heroic, and dramatic figure offers a moral and courageous example. The emergence of this pictorial genre was a necessity, filling a cultural void identified and fueled by the political changes determined by a succession of events, starting with the Revolution of 1848. In the proximity of the War of Independence, an influx of historical portraits can be observed, as the majority of battle compositions of that period focused mainly on current events and not on the past. Artists of the modern era drew inspiration sequentially from reality, history, and politics to produce art that first satisfied their personal demands and then fulfilled an educational function, paving the way and cultivating the Romanian spirit, adorned with such noble examples that serve both as legitimization and inspiration for the future generations.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Constantin Lecca, *Mihai Viteazul*, litograph. (photo Romanian Academy Library)

Fig. 2. Constantin Lecca, *The Death of Mihai Viteazul*, oil on canvas, signed and dated in the left corner in blue paint "Lecca/1845", inventory number 3566. (photo The National Museum of Art of Romania, Gallery of Modern Romanian Art)

Fig. 3. Mişu Popp, *Mihai Viteazul*, oil on canvas, signed and dated on the hilt of the sword "M. Popp/1881", inventory number 71. (photo Braşov Art Museum)

Fig. 4. Gheorghe Tattarescu, *Voivod Mihai*, oil painting, signed and dated center left in red paint "Tattarescu/1880". (photo: Art Museum of Prahova County "Ion Ionescu-Quintus")

Fig. 5. Adolphe Mouilleron after Theodor Aman, *The Last Night of Mihai Viteazul*, lithograph, inventory number 35315/527. (photo The National Museum of Art of Romania)

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THE MUSEUM AS A CATALYST OF COMMUNITY. CASE STUDY: THE EXHIBITION *IMAGINING FUTURES: URBAN COMICS FROM ARTIVISTORY COLLECTIVE* AT THE ART MUSEUM IN CLUJ-NAPOCA

Alexandra SÂRBU*, Anamaria TOMIUC**, and Alice Andreea ILIESCU***

ABSTRACT. The Museum as a Catalyst of Community. Case Study: The Exhibition *Imagining Futures: Urban Comics from ArtiViStory Collective* at the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca. The present article aims at illustrating the role of the contemporary museum as a conscious central stakeholder that strengthens the community and connects in the era of participatory culture with different types of audiences. Built in two parts, the article points out the main concepts of the new museum philosophy as explored in the expertise in

* **Alexandra SÂRBU** (as_sarbu@yahoo.com) is an art historian, curator and museum educator within the Department of Research, Exhibition Curatorship, Communication and Museum Education of the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, with almost 20 years of experience in the realm of cultural heritage and museum practices. Currently, she is a PhD student in Art History at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Main fields of specialization: history and evolution of graphic arts, exhibition curatorship, museum education and learning, museum communication, cultural mediation and well-being.

** **Anamaria TOMIUC PhD** (anamaria.tomiuc@uad.ro) is an associate professor, within the Department of Theoretical Subjects of the Faculty of Decorative Arts and Design at the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, Romania (UAD), with over 20 years of experience in the sphere of cultural and artistic activities in Cluj-Napoca. Main fields of specialization: art theory, exhibitions theory and practice, communication, cultural management and cultural mediation.

*** **Alice Andreea ILIESCU PhD** (alice.iliescu@uad.ro) is an associate professor, within the Graphic Arts Department and the Comics and Cartoons MA Program of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She graduated BA (2008), MA (2010) and PhD (2013) programs at UAD as well as the MA (2013) program of the Comics Department of EESI, Angoulême, France. Main fields of interest since 2009: sequential art, comics, animation, engraving and printing techniques, mixed media, exhibition practice and non-formal educational programs.

the field and brings on a case study that focuses on the analysis of the cultural mediation program built for an original thematic exhibition, centered around the exploration of the urban future and having as its conceptual stake to draw the viewer into a process of reflection on the different ways of perceiving the surrounding society.

Understanding social issues, remembering the past, exploring the ecosystem, acting on change and imagining futures are the invisible problems launched for debate through the creative laboratory of the members of the ArtiViStory Collective whose artworks could be explored within the exhibition. Their visual narratives, gathered in the various sections of the exhibition, have invited the viewers to respond to a series of questions that envisage the role of art in the community, the way we perceive the world around us, the stories that can be told about our past, the need for engaging young people into building inclusive communities or the way we can imagine our future.

Through a wide variety of formulas for exploiting the potential of the graphic imaginary (visual documentaries, comic strips, animations, sequential illustrations), the exhibition offers an overview of this space of creative investigation of the urban imaginary and social identity, rendering sequential art not only as a tool of representation but as a catalyst for activating the collective imagination, which can serve to coagulate the common interests of the community. At the same time, the cultural mediation program conceived for the exhibition is an important component that creates engagement and participation of young audiences in a discourse on the future of our community.

Keywords: *urban comics, participative art, museum education, cultural mediation*

The contemporary museum landscape is now tending, at a visibly accelerated pace, to enter a new phase of existence, as the 21st-century museum seeks to consciously and assertively connect to the requirements of the era of participatory culture, on whose collective intelligence it is betting, trying to fully capitalize on its creative and expressive potential, in formulas relevant to its own intentions. Everything is, in fact, part of a logic of democratization and cultural liberalization, the so-called "policy of open doors and the active involvement of the public in the life of «its» museum",[1] which, beyond the stake of broadening, diversifying and retaining the loyalty of current audiences, places a major emphasis on adequate institutional integration in the economic, cultural and social life of the territory to which the museum relates, with a notable contribution both in terms of increasing social cohesion and community resilience, and a significant impact on the personal development of those who walk into such an institution.

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[1] Massimo Negri, *La grande rivoluzione dei musei europei. Museum Proms* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2016), 101.

Within this context, the present article aims at illustrating the way in which the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca understands to act as a responsible institution in the service of the community and to create different perspectives for alignment with the desiderates of the 21st-century museum. Therefore, in the first part of the article, we will explore the key concepts of the new museum philosophy and its undertaken role within contemporary society as a catalyst of community, focusing on a series of reports and discussions within the professional expertise of the field (Alberto Garlandini, Jacqueline Eidelman, Massimo Negri, Nina Simon, Margherita Sani, Michela Rota, Anna Chiara Cimoli, Maria Chiara Ciaccheri etc.). Then, the second part of the article will focus on the case study of the cultural mediation program within the "*Imagining Futures. Urban Comics from ArtiViStory Collective"* exhibition set in the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca between March 11 and March 27, 2022. Even though this case study will render a localized example of a genuine initiative in Romania, through both the art form it envisages and the cultural mediation content it provides, we believe it could constitute a basis for further approaches that explore the relationship between the individual and the city, or the museum's role within the community.

Starting from the premise that the key concepts of the new museum philosophy are active participation, co-creation and experiential, the nowadays museum is becoming a space of innovative action and enthusiastic discoveries, of constructive dialogue between already established communicative languages and behaviors put in direct relation with emerging ones, hosting innovative experimental projects, which allow themselves, deliberately, to be contaminated with various forms of expression.

Embracing an open and consistent attitude towards interdisciplinarity, informal practices, unconventional approaches, participatory processes, collaborative approaches focused on inclusive education and social perspective, innovation, experimentation and even risk-taking, the great museums of the Western world are becoming more and more interested in a conscious effort to strengthen the museum-audience-territory connection, to give a "voice" and a generous space of expression to their own target audiences (thus recognizing them as central figures of current cultural practices).[2] They are thus requested to contribute and be actively involved in a series of thematic actions focused on the creative valorization of the museum's heritage collections or the historical-cultural environment of their own headquarters, assimilating them as a genuine resource, as an integral, vital part of their personal "journey", with all the implications of an intellectual, emotional and purely aesthetic process.

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[2] On the subject, see: Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010, URL: https://participatorymuseum.org/read/ and the most recent *Guidelines. Developing Education and Public Engagement in Museums* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, German Museums Association and German Association for Museum Education, May 2023).

These are valuable initiatives, which highlight not only the huge educational vocation and social relevance of museums[3] but also the importance of awareness of the fact that cultural heritage belongs to us and is accessible to all of us, as an indispensable resource for increasing the quality of life, individual potential and the psycho-emotional well-being of each of us.

Far from being just a simple whim or a fulgurating fashion effect, such approaches engage museums in a fruitful dialogue with multiple perspectives and sensitivities. This prompts them to decentralize their discourse and, at the same time, to diversify their cultural mediation "devices", to become truly accessible and empathetic spaces. They would render listening as an authentic and voluntary act – in other words, not just as a style exercise, but as a vital requirement, which commits you to adopting a new "tone" and diversifying communication styles –, a first-hand strategy in approaching their own audiences, understood in all their diversity and socio-economic complexity.

In the logic of this equation, the museum of the 21st century is no longer just a depository/custodian or "elitist sanctuary" of the artefacts of collective memory – a cultural heritage that, according to the new ICOM definition of the museum, adopted on August 24, 2022, is "active memory and civil commitment",[4] but opens up to embrace a plurality of voices and experiences under the umbrella of a "common house",[5] organically integrated into the community/communities it serves, raising lively debates and reflection, opening windows and building bridges of dialogue and interaction (multicultural and interdisciplinary, intercultural and intergenerational), in the desire to alleviate inequalities and overcome social barriers.

As an *agora* open to all, basically a public, dialogical and collaborative forum, which can stimulate and motivate civic participation, respectively can promote social justice, it defines itself as a fertile environment for debate, questioning and controversy, within which it becomes possible to affirm an alternative and nuanced perception of the world, that encourages critical distance,

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[3] On this topic, see: Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2016) and the international conference reports: *EU – Presidency Trio Conference: Museums and Social Responsibility – Values Revisited* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, Deutscher Museumsbund e.V., December 2020) and *NEMO 26th Annual Conference, 15–18 November 2018, Valleta, Malta: Museums out of the Box! The Crossover Impact of Museums* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, 2018).

[4] Alberto Garlandini, "Musei e patrimonio culturale per la difesa della diversità e della democrazia", *Territori della Cultura* 50 (2022): 168.

[5] Jacqueline Eidelman (coord.), *Inventer des musées pour demain. Rapport de la Mission Musées XXIe siècle* (Paris: La documentation Française, Direction de l'information légale et administrative, 2017), 25, 79.

analytical skills or dexterity in giving a concrete expression to thoughts and feelings. Against the background of this cultural and social exchange, the encounter with similarity or otherness inevitably occurs, "incarnated" in the presence of the other… a fact that calls for an empathic attunement to the essence of his or hers uniqueness and individuality, in order to be able to truly see it, fulfilling, thus, the point of an authentic encounter. Questioning the concept of the pretended normality, the museum of the present times understands to give a very particular interest to the so-called "public of the social field",[6] a fragile, vulnerable sample, characteristic of peripheral contexts, disadvantaged and distant from culture, who persist in perceiving museum environments as deeply niched spaces, in which they are almost never found as possible recipients.

In order to be able to change such a limiting belief, generating inevitable negative experiences, it becomes fundamental to rethink the role and functionality of the museum in a perspective of valorization for all[7] – the museum without barriers, the accessible museum, the museum without limits or borders, the museum viewed as a common home, the museum open to all – which guarantees universal accessibility (physical, cognitive, sensory, but also cultural, linguistic, economic or even emotional), aligned with the particular demands and needs of heterogeneous and dispersed audiences, actively supporting an attitudinal change in the way we understand to relate to concepts such as disability, equality and inclusion. A truly accessible museum embraces the social model of disability, in the perspective of which limitations and deficiencies are read as a key to the normality of the human condition: what, in reality, "takes out of the game" or "disables" a person, labelling him or her as "incapable", being nothing but the superficiality of an erroneous view that favors experiencing disability as a negative experience created by society, with all the undesirable effects of discrimination, oppression and the obstacles raised by "barriers". Accessibility is, in fact, not only of a physical nature that requires the conscious removal of architectural obstacles that prevent access but also one that touches on the problem of perception and cultural sensitivity, to which museums cannot remain impassive.[8]

In this way, as a "spokesperson" of peripheral and marginalized vulnerability, the museum also creates a series of opportunities as a true capital of compliance and resilience, the impact of which is also reflected positively on the health and psycho-emotional well-being of the public, mitigating the traumatic experience of

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6   Eidelman, *Inventer des musées*, 100–103.

7   On this issue, a very useful tool is the volume: Maria Chiara Ciaccheri and Fabio Fornasari, *Il museo per tutti. Buone pratiche di accessibilità* (Molfetta: Edizioni La Meridiana, 2022).

8   Fabrizio Serra, Franco Tartaglia and Silvio Venuti, *Operatori museali e disabilità. Come favorire una cultura dell'accoglienza* (Roma: Carocci Faber, 2018), 39–43, 71–78, 119–133.

social isolation, supporting the overcoming of relationships and/or communication difficulties, increasing personal comfort or the degree of social integration and adaptation, with significant effects on improving self-esteem and quality of life.

Consequently, today, the museum institution embodies a living "organism", one that is complex, imaginative, innovative, proactive, relational and dialogical, inclusive and collaborative, tolerant and reconciling, convivial, hospitable, safe, protective and comfortable, potentially widely accessible to all, in a continuous reinvention "in step with its time", a vector of social health, but also a vehicle of perennial values, a platform of potentialities and experiential well-being (a resource, documentation and research center, a stimulating environment for non-formal learning and socio-cultural exchange that offers tools for decoding and interpretation of the represented realities, but also a space for continuous training, complementary to formal education, respectively a place for creative production, permeable to the reflexive exercise of plural interpretations or polysemic approaches, a social-hub, a fab-lab or museum-cooperative, as well as its protean posture: the museum "*in situ*", "outside the walls" or dematerialized, "engine" for welfare and urban regeneration),[9] which aims, deliberately and consistently, relying also on the contribution of new technologies (the digital media viewed as a tool for cultural mediation and democratization),[10] to (re)define itself as a true point of reference and actor of the collectivity.

Without denying or harming any of its fundamental missions, the museum of the present times, through the wide range of experiences it puts into practice, with a strong emphasis on intangible notions such as aesthetic emotion, amazement, curiosity, inspiration, creativity, multisensoriality, exploration and interaction, inter and transdisciplinarity, diversity, freedom and fun, respect, morality, ethics, responsibility and solidarity, health and well-being, asserts more and more its role as a community catalyst and "driving force" of social transformation, an imperative that it understands to materialize, including, by encouraging the construction of a viable fabric of collaborative "strategic alliances" or partnerships, which not only credits, but also intelligently fructifies, aligning them adequately to the vision, mission and its own values, areas of competence and expertise of the cultural-creative, educational and social ecosystem of proximity

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[9] For emerging models and reference experiences, see Eidelman, *Inventer des musées*, 25–34, 35–46, 47–57, 59–71.

[10] On this matter, see: Kristina Barekyan and Lisa Peter, *Digital Learning and Education in Museums. Innovative Approaches and Insights* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, January 2023), Maria Elena Colombo, *Musei e cultura digitale. Fra narrativa, pratiche e testimonianze* (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2020), Nicolette Mandarano, *Musei e media digitali* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2019) and the chapter entitled "Musei e digital transformation", in Lucia Cataldo and Marta Paraventi, *Il museo oggi. Modelli museologici e museografici nell'era della digital transformation*, seconda edizione (Milano: Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 2023), 263–290.

(the local and territorial network formed by various public cultural institutions, educational environments, associative networks, local authorities, tourism offices, actors in the field of health and well-being etc.). Although they operate in similar or, on the contrary, completely distinct fields, all these institutional "teammates" are not competing with each other, but collaborate fruitfully, facilitating the exchange of experience and content-sharing in ingenious and attractive formats.

Far from being a static and neutral or apolitical "creature", but a visionary, versatile, adaptable and empathetic one, embodying an increasingly "liquid" and transparent, hybrid or multifunctional identity, guided, par excellence, by meaning, quality and value, the contemporary museum also distinguishes itself as a space of democracy, citizen participation and, last but not least, civic activism, where a position is taken through the balanced approach and debate of pressing topical issues such as emerging challenges, multiple crises and societal changes[11] (gender identity and equality; racism, antisemitism and xenophobia; the alarming recrudescence of (ultra)nationalist or localist positions; illegal immigration flow and human trafficking; refugee movements and the question of statelessness; the cultural hybridization generated by the phenomenon of mass migration; the European demographic setback and its extended implications; corruption and clientelism; the exacerbation of prejudices/conflicts/inequalities reflected in an increasingly accentuated division on multiple fronts, a source of deep animosities, hostility and social frictions that risk degenerating into large-scale street movements; the impact of technological changes on the labor market; the polarization of opinions and the accentuated radicalization of public discourse in the Western world; economic recession and depression caused by rising inflation and unemployment; the energy crisis; the global food insecurity; the recent escalation of Israeli-Palestinian dissensions or the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian military conflict; the geopolitical tensions and rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean; decolonization and ethical issues that directly concern cultural heritage; the pressing problem of transition towards sustainability etc.), the relationship between culture and well-being[12] (the global health crisis generated

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[11] Concerning this topic, see: H.A. McGhie, *Museums and Human Rights: human rights as a basis for public service*, UK: Curating Tomorrow, 2020 and Anna Chiara Cimoli, Federica Facchetti, Alessia Fassone et al., *Musei e migranti. Gli strumenti per l'incontro. Atti del workshop internazionale 4 giunio 2018, 26 novembre 2018, 18 febbraio 2019*, serie "Formazione e Ricerca", Modena: Museo Egizio, Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 2022.

[12] In this field, an edifying synthesis is offered by Rariţa Zbranca and Kornélia Kiss (eds.), *Culture for Health Report. Scoping review of culture, well-being, and health interventions and their evidence, impacts, challenges and policy recommendations for Europe*, November 2022, as well as Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, *Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67: What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review* (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019).

by the COVID-19 pandemic, with major impact and severe, "cascading", disruptive effects across all aspects of society; the intensely destabilizing consequences of stress and states of anxiety generated by digital hyper-connectivity and the proliferation of new social media platforms, the ever-faster pace of everyday life, financial worries and the uncertainty of tomorrow, to which is added the worrying increase in insecurity at global level; the transformative power of art/culture, its therapeutic valences and supporting capacity, a true tool for creative adaptation to challenges in society, effectively used in prevention models, but also in alternative treatment schemes for diseases typical of contemporary society, partly related to lifestyle; the correlation between cultural participation and its positive effects in terms of quality of life, improvement of self-esteem, socio-sanitary inclusion that contributes to salutogenesis and increasing the social well-being of individuals; Museum Therapy; Art Therapy; Dance Therapy; Theatre Therapy) or culture and climate change[13] (the devastating consequences of global warming and related extreme weather phenomena, reflected in the fragility of the environment, the decline of biodiversity and the extinction of species; natural calamities and humanitarian emergencies, with adverse effects on cultural heritage as well; the impact of human activity on the environment and the quality of life; the specific issues of environmental sustainability and respect for the biosphere; ecological challenges; environmental activism; cultural ecology etc.).

In other words, the museum institution, acting as an agent of innovation and social change, as a promoter of tolerance, inclusion, diversity and sustainability, appeals to responsibility and requires a critical sense, designing its cultural offer in order to support the construction of an educated and demanding society, fully aware, with a lucid and analytical spirit, refractory to manipulation, integral and vertical, and last but not least, much more fair, equitable, empathetic, durable, resilient and solidary. At the same time, as spaces of representation at the service of society, museums build and strengthen the sense of personal and collective identity, including that conferred by ethnicity, gender, race, religion or social status, and from the position of "relational connectors", they coagulate communities, fortifying in among the constituent members the feeling of belonging to a common past and culture. Last but not least, they are facilitators of social aggregation and cohesion, and through education, they contribute to

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[13] On this issue, see: Michela Rota, *Musei per la sostenibilità integrata* (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2019), Elizabeth Wilde (ed.), *Museums in the climate crisis. Survey results and recommendations for the sustainable transition of Europe* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, November 2022) and *Museums, Climate and Politics: Taking political action in the sustainable transition* (Berlin: NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, November 2023).

the intellectual growth of the entire community, becoming "awakeners" of public consciousness that can incite action and take positions. And thus, aware of contemporary social dynamics, museums turn into genuine community activators.

Against such a complex and nuanced background, the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca undertakes, in turn, to connect to the new principles and concepts of museology, integrating with the exhibition program new projects, which enhance the aspirations of the 21st-century museum at the community level. The exhibition that is the basis of this case study thus reflects the interest and welcome openness of the Cluj museum institution towards interdisciplinarity, towards diversity or towards participatory processes, but also towards community, towards experimentation, or social innovation, both through the artistic environment represented (sequential art – the comic strip), as well as by the manner of construction of the exhibition format.

<div align="center">***</div>

The comic strip begins to build a status and consolidate its position on the artistic scene after the 1940s, and in the 1960s it gains its legitimacy including the creation of the first comic strip exhibitions in galleries and museum institutions. The history of comic strips as an artistic medium is controversial, even its presence in exhibitions built in major international museums significantly contributing to its recognition as the Ninth Art, as characterized by the French critic Claude Beylie in 1964. Exhibitions such as *Bande dessinée et Figuration narrative* at the Musée des arts décoratifs de Paris from 1967, *The Comic Art Show* from 1983 at the Whitney Museum of American Art New York, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* from 1990 at MoMA New York or the 2005's *Master of American Comics* from the Hammer Museum and MOCA Los Angeles are powerful examples of the "cultural trajectory that shows us signs of the growing recognition of comics as an equal art form in the eyes of curators, critics, and academia, as well as some of the techniques used to overcome the problems that arose as this form of narrative art began to permeate the great art museums".[14] Today, comic strip artists are present in the international institutional circuit, being represented by contemporary art galleries, their artworks entering private collections and museums, enjoying a strong presence in the exhibition circuit, both in comic strip festivals and in the great international museums.

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[14] Kim Munson, "Beyond High and Low: How Comics and Museums Learned to Co-exist", *International Journal of Comic Art* 11, no. 2 (2009): 283.

The exhibition *Imagining Futures. Urban Comics from ArtiViStory Collective*, curated by Anamaria Tomiuc, Alice Iliescu and Daniel Popescu with the support of the exhibition commissioner, Alexandra Sârbu, was built inside the exhibition space of the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca, in March 2022, a labyrinthine route through the expressive environment of the comic strip and socially engaged sequential art. Unprecedented, both for the program of the Cluj museum institution and for the entire Romanian exhibition landscape, the exhibition marks the end of a research project focused on urban development *(in)VISIBLE: a novel approach to research and community engagement for OurCluj*, financed by Fondation Botnar[15] and constitutes a staging of the visual research process carried out by young artists Evelina Grigorean, Lucian Barbu, Melinda Ureczki-Lázár, Teodora Predescu, Horaţiu Coman, Bálint Erdély, Sebastian Ştefan, Zsófia Bernát, Eunicia Zidaru, Carla Oros, Mihai Udubaşa, Diana Florescu, Oliviana Fudulache, Alexandru Papa, Dariana Ilie, master's students of the Comics and Animation Study Program of the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, coordinated by PhD lecturer Alice Iliescu and grouped under the name ArtiViStory Collective. A previous article dedicated to these artists collective had been published in 2022 and includes more detailed aspects about both the development of the project and the ArtiViStory Collective research process.[16]

The ArtiViStory Collective's research endeavor seeks to highlight the limitless potential, as well as the complexity and formal diversity that the medium of comics affords. Within the artistic practice, the exploration and experimentation of the limits and openings offered by the urban comic strip medium have generated multiple formulas specific to the comic genre: documentary CS, analysis CS, research CS, investigation CS, reflexive CS, self-referential CS, intimate CS, fictional CS and auto-fictional CS.

In the creative process, an own research methodology was developed and, implicitly, a creative laboratory in which various methods of observation, analysis or documentary representation were used, as well as a framework for experiment and interpretive analysis through subjective representations and imaginary constructs. The work process was carried out in a phased, long-term research program with the aim of generating new systems for exploration, representation and interpretation, different algorithms for analysis and dissemination of results. The artists established different codes of representation, and

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[15] Eric Gordon, Barbara Bulc, Tomas Guarna et al., *Activating Values in Urban Transitions: A Novel Approach to Urban Innovation in Romania* (Plovdiv: Punkt, 2022).

[16] Anamaria Tomiuc, Alice Iliescu and Daniel Popescu, "Urban Comics as a Research Method and Tool in Social Innovation. Case Study: ArtiViStory Collective", *Journal of Media Research* 15, no. 3/44 (2022): 74–92.

decoding formulas, and created inside the comic strips frames of reflection and analysis through which the viewer is invited to problematize the visual content and its meanings.

These exploratory formulas of analysis and representation in urban comics resulting from the research carried out subsequently create contexts for dissemination through curatorial processes, which seek the direct involvement of the public in an interactive, creative and participatory exhibition perimeter.

In this way, within the current exhibition, the curators have built in the exhibition perimeter a maze of comics, conventional and unconventional narrative sequences, oversized sequential illustrations, animations and creativity activation areas, imagining an interrogative route reflected in several areas dedicated to the following concepts and issues: ArtiViStory Collective's creative lab, understanding social issues, remembering the past, exploring the ecosystem, the need for change, imagining the future, youth well-being, collaboration, trust and care.

As stated in the introductory text, the exhibition starts from the premise that collective efforts are needed to imagine and build the future of our communities and invites the viewer to discover both the personal creative universes of the artists and their collective efforts towards imaginative representation of the city, focusing on either subjective stories or representational documentation or symbolic reinterpretations of the surrounding world. Conceived as a mapping of the creative process, the exhibition renders opinions, captures points of view, questions different ways of perceiving reality, raises issues and proposes concepts, while inviting the viewer to engage in a dynamic conversation about the power of imagination.[17]

As mentioned above, the exhibition is organized around a series of themes explored in visual narratives and aims to engage the viewer in a process of reflection on different ways of perceiving the surrounding society, the viewer being invited to respond, in a self-reflexive manner to a series of questions such as – What is the role of art in the community? How do we perceive the world around us? What stories can be told about the past? How do we imagine the future? How do we build inclusive communities? How can young people get involved? What if we placed the concept of well-being and not economic growth at the center of community development concerns?[18]

Through visual documentation, comic strips, animations, sequential illustrations and other means of artistic expression, the exhibition thus offers a glimpse into the creative laboratory and renders sequential art not only as a

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[17] Reference to the press release of the exhibition that can be found here:
URL: https://www.macluj.ro/exhibitions/imagining-futures-urban-comics-from-artivistory-collective

[18] Tomiuc et al., *Urban Comics*, 88.

tool of representation, but as a catalyst for activating the collective imagination. Through a wide variety of formulas for exploiting the potential of the graphic imaginary, through multiple construction systems in sequential frames in which image and text build visual artistic narratives specific to the medium of documentary comics, the works of the artists of the ArtiViStory Collective investigate the urban imaginary and social identity in objective and subjective ways and emphasizes the role that comics and sequential art could acquire in collaboration with different research collectives of urban development practices and social innovation processes.[19]

In the context in which the museum institution is today a strong partner in the educational process and taking into account both the artistic environment and the conceptual content of the exhibition, public involvement was one of the stated intentions of the curatorial approach. Thus, the exhibition was accompanied by an extensive cultural mediation program dedicated to young people from Cluj schools. We will use the term cultural mediation here in a double sense: primarily as a process of acquiring and negotiating knowledge about arts and social or scientific phenomena through exchange, reaction and creative response, which is at the heart of the work between artistic objects, institutions, social contexts or the people who meet them[20] covering a wide spectrum of practices intersected with public development, artistic or cultural education, but also with collaborative or participatory art; secondly, as a process that investigates debate and critical discussion around artistic/cultural works or events assuming a programmatic mission to transform the public, the visitor, the spectator, into an active cultural participant.[21]

The cultural mediation program has been twofold. On the one hand, it was addressed to the average museum visitor through a mediation kit available for everybody at the entrance of the exhibition, and, on the other hand, it was particularly conceived for youngsters in Cluj schools, under the form of a guided tour within the exhibition.

The mediation kit consisted of a brochure entitled *Your Inner Hero in Cluj* which included a series of activities that could have been considered during the exhibition visit. Even though any visitor could use the mediation kit, the targeted audience was young people, both because of the nature of the works of art

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[19] URL: https://www.macluj.ro/exhibitions/imagining-futures-urban-comics-from-artivistory-collective

[20] Carmen Mörsch and Andrew Holland, *Time for Cultural Mediation* (Zurich: The Institute for Art Education of Zurich University of the Arts, 2013), 14.

[21] Eva Quintas, *Cultural Mediation: Questions and Answers. A Guide* (2015), 2, https://www.culturepourtous.ca/en/cultural-professionals/cultural-mediation/2015/09/05/cultural-mediation-questions-and-answers/.

and because of the conceptual content of the exhibition. With this mediation tool, the visitors were invited to join the @*artivistory* Instagram page where they could envision their personal hero based on a series of personality traits while being invited to screenshot a template, complete it and repost it as a story using the hashtags *#artivistory #imaginingfutures!* The inquiry activity would allow the viewers to reflect upon and position themselves in a direct relation with the city. Next, they were directed towards a series of works within the exhibition, where through direct observation, description and analysis they were asked to identify different issues in connection to the city and the community, as well as their own priorities in dealing with these problems. Then, a series of questions were set in confronting the viewer with a series of concepts such as mental health, well-being, recognition, equal opportunities, support system, inclusion, green spaces, ecosystem, trust or care, all connected to the exhibited works. At the end of the journey the visitors were invited, within a creative activity to draw their own one-page comic in the exhibition, whose main hero would face the societal or personal problems and would act for the future. The one-page comic was posted afterwards in stories on the Instagram page.

The second part of the program consisted of a guided tour of the exhibition, dedicated to young audiences, more precisely groups of school students. For a period of 6 days, 576 students from 13 schools in the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area, from the 3rd grade to the 11th grade, participated in the mediation activities. For the participation in the program an invitation letter had been sent through the support of the Cluj Schools Networks initiated by Cluj Cultural Center, thus 17 classes from the 30 schools included in the network came to take part in this extra-curricular activity. The invitation letter included details about the exhibition, about the comics strips medium, about the research process and the aims of the mediation program: to understand the characteristics of urban comics as an artistic genre and to familiarize students with a range of concepts such as social issues, collaboration, trust, well-being, caring and awareness of our individual values, thus discussing the role each of us can play in engaging in community life. The tour was conceived for a one hour duration and each of the classes was assigned a time slot within the 6 days dedicated to the program. The activities were run by mediators, MA students of the Contemporary Curatorial Practices study program of the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca (UAD) and their coordinators, Anamaria Tomiuc and Alice Iliescu, both curators of the exhibition and professors within UAD. The activities were developed through a non-formal education approach, adapted for each group of students.

The guided tour started from the figure of the comic strip's hero and aimed, on the one hand, to facilitate dialogue and familiarization of young people with the concepts raised in the exhibition and, on the other hand, to offer them

a safe space in which, through creative exercises, they could imagine possible perspectives on the future of their city, but also on how they themselves could contribute to its construction. The guided tour was conceived from the very beginning with a strong participatory dimension, with a series of activities planned within it, following the palette of artistic thinking developed within Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education,[22] such as questioning and inquiry exercises, observation, description and analysis exercises, compare and contrast exercises (mainly done in discussions) and creative/drawing activities. We will accurately describe the route within this tour to illustrate the role of cultural mediation in museum practice and, implicitly, a concrete example through which the museum becomes a space of co-participation and social engagement.

Upon entering the exhibition, each young visitor received a sticker, as an avatar of their presence in the museum environment, which they were encouraged to place on the first piece of the exhibition, a cartographic illustration of Cluj, being invited to reflect on favorite places in Cluj, in the spaces that define them or with which they have a personal affinity, thus drawing attention to what the city represents as an identity vector in the lives of its inhabitants. The map was populated with these avatars, and a series of places in the city became indicators of the city's relationship with its young inhabitants: the central square, the central park, and different streets and neighborhoods became signifiers of this relation.

Entering the exhibition space, the viewers stepped into the comic strip maze and were invited to problematize in a first discursive activity, the concept of the comic strip. Following the discussions, the mediators also explained the implicitly assumed definitions understood as "systems formed with the help of collections of codes and symbols united within an «iconic solidarity» that reflects a certain cultural specificity"[23] as a "mechanism of arranging pictures or pictures and words to tell a story or dramatize an idea"[24] or as "the juxtaposition of pictorial images and other images in a deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer".[25] Attention was then drawn, by the mediators, to the specificity of the term urban comic strip understood as sequential art and graphic narratives that emphasize the contingency of the physical infrastructures that shape our city life, while at the

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[22] Shari Tishman and Patricia Palmer, *Artful Thinking. Stronger Thinking and Learning through the Power of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2006).

[23] Thierry Groensteen, *Système de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 14.

[24] Will Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art* (Tamarac: Poorhouse Press, 1985), 8.

[25] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1994), 9.

same time making visible, through multidimensional formats, the invisible connections, the different socio-political concerns or the various conceptual interpretations that appear in our contemporary urban spaces.[26] In the midst of creative approaches, in urban comics, there will be constant concerns regarding the reconstruction of public space, urban common spaces and the future of cities and their communities, often realized within collaborative production processes that contribute to the creation of alternative communication networks, to cultural exchange and social interaction. Then, during the discussions, the formulas of sequential composition, the genres addressed, the narrative character of the comic strip, the ways of constructing the characters, and the various formats of graphic representation had been analysed. In addition, there was an exercise of personal selection of a favorite comic strip from 12 publications that were available to the public for reading, which was directly connected to one's own experience.

In continuation of the discursive activity (based on reflection and analysis), visitors walked into the exhibition area dedicated to the creative laboratory of the ArtiViStory Collective's artists. Information was provided about the artists, about their working process (with a detailed analysis of Evelina Grigorean's installation that presented the way of working and her conceptual and artistic process), about the creative context and the online experience (many of the artworks being made during the COVID-19 pandemic), about individual styles, but also about the collective way of working and the formation of the ArtiViStory Collective. This community of artists has coagulated in a visual research approach documenting the urban development process within the OurCluj initiative to make visible to the general public, with the help of comics, the invisible aspects of the interconnectedness of the OurCluj ecosystem, but, more than that, to contribute through the visual discourse to offering solutions and artistic perspectives with reference to these investigated aspects and aiming to implicitly engage the general public in intended to activate their imagination.

In the second part of the exhibition, which aimed to actively involve the viewers in understanding some essential concepts in the discourse on urban development and social innovation, the discursive and reflective activities had been combined with creative activities resulting in a participatory project (of puzzle type). So, starting from the analysis of a series of artworks by Teodora Predescu, in which a special emphasis was placed on a series of identity or social issues such as trust, well-being, friendly environment, bureaucracy, health and mental health, visitors were invited to analyze the problems they had faced

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[26] Dominic Davies, *Urban Comics: Infrastructure and the Global City in Contemporary Graphic Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 6.

either in their homes, at school, in their communities or friend groups, or in our wider society. Then, they were invited to draw or write on a triangular puzzle piece (white paper) their main problem and / or their main solution to this problem, thus building in the exhibition space a huge participatory puzzle that reflected the different points of view of young visitors. A series of subjects had been tackled, thus rendering the views of the young visitors on the collective issues they were confronted with: personal and collective trauma, ecological issues, poverty, social relationships, bullying and aggression, inadequate education, etc. The tour continued with the analysis of the artworks of Melinda Ureczki-Lázár and Sebastian Ștefan that problematized the notions of past and future, debating concepts such as trauma, collective memory, healing or change and observing multiple perspectives of individual or collective action in relation to these.

The third part of the exhibition showed the artists' involvement in the research project *(in) VISIBLE: a novel approach to research and community engagement for OurCluj*, financed by Botnar Foundation, visitors being presented through discursive activities, starting from the works of Lucian Barbu and Horaţiu Coman, a series of concepts such as ecosystem, civic imagination, stakeholders, but also the work process within *OurCluj* and the artists' contributions regarding the transformation of the invisible process (interviews, working sessions, workshops, debates, innovation policies, specific reports) in visible constructs: the works of art that constituted within the project a strong catalyst for reflection and analysis. As a main concept related to the research process, OurCluj is an ideational construct, a new approach to urban innovation that stimulates it around a set of values.[27] As a part of the city's ecosystem, OurCluj takes the form of a multisectoral and multidisciplinary living laboratory, optimized for the increased well-being of the city's young inhabitants, considered to hold the key to a better future. Living labs usually focus on specific innovations such as transportation, energy systems, tourism or education.[28] Instead, OurCluj[29] focuses on well-being, which substantially changes the form and function of the living lab structure. This unique arrangement was called the Value-Based Living Urban Laboratory. The aim of OurCluj is to value trust and care, while prioritizing them is a requirement for creating optimized policies and programs to increase the well-being of citizens. This new approach to urban innovation is funded with a 10-year commitment by Botnar Foundation, a Swiss foundation focused on improving health and well-being in urban environments and is part of the

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[27] Gordon, Bulc, Guarna et al., *Activating Values*, 32.
[28] Simon Marvin, Harriet Bulkeley, Lindsay Mai et al. (eds.), *Urban Living Labs. Experimenting with City Future*s (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[29] URL: https://ourcluj.city/#ourcluj

foundation's "New Cities" initiative in cities across Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia.[30] The in-depth research study of OurCluj entitled *Activating Values in Urban Transitions – a novel approach to urban innovation*[31] analyzes the social, political, cultural and economic context of Cluj and can provide, for those interested, more details about this unique initiative of urban innovation in Romania.

In the final part of the exhibition, the mediators initiate a conversation based on a series of concepts explored in the exhibited artworks: change, collaboration, well-being, the audience being invited to imagine their own role in the community and to reflect on how each of the members of a community can act in its support. The youngsters were invited to create a one-page comic strip (on a given format), this being the final activity conceived as a creative series of comics on the theme *My Inner Hero in Cluj* to imagine a story, an individual path of one's own involvement in the community. Not coincidentally, the mediation program ended with this creative activity that brought into question the figure of the hero in relation to the figure of the superhero as the favorite character of the comic book. If in American comics the superhero is the collective character who accumulates, through his fantastic powers, all the social desiderata and fights for the rights and freedoms of the community, in European comics, each of the individuals can become a hero through individual involvement and through the power of example, thus representing *the everyman hero* who contributes, step by step, together with the members of his community to various acts of social change. By engaging the public in the creative act, each participant in the mediation program who had built a comic strip accepted the challenge of assuming an individual role in the process of imagining the urban future.

During the 6 days, 576 students from 13 schools in the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area, from the 3rd to the 11th grade, participated in this program, as a result of which 114 one page comics were generated – *My Inner Hero in Cluj* and 360 puzzle pieces that identify the various problems and concerns of the young people in Cluj. Following the analysis of the content of each puzzle piece, after the exhibition, the following categories of issues stated by the participants in the mediation program could be observed: over 39% were concerned with topics that speak of various traumas (96 pieces) and the need for healing (33 pieces), this represented the highest percentage identified. A percentage of 15% are concerned with social and economic problems (49 pieces), 12% with problems related to the environment and climate change, and also with the need to get

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[30] URL: https://www.fondationbotnar.org/project/ourcity-initiative/
[31] Gordon, Bulc, Guarna et al., *Activating Values*, 34.

involved in finding solutions (47 pieces). Education and school occupy 9% (30 pieces), as well as concerns regarding collectivity and social relations (32 pieces), the lack of trust and the need to strengthen it occupy a percentage of 7% (25 pieces), while the family only 4% (13 pieces). These results later formed the basis of a new exhibition project, *Voices of Youth*, presented at the Casa Matei Gallery in September 2022. At the same time, the one-page comics contained stories of self-fulfilment and healing, stories of friendship and community, the individual presence in the city, the need for nature and for safe spaces, the favorite small details in one's life, the saving of the others or of the environment, while imagining different possible actions for the future of the city and of the community.

As part of the *Imagining Futures* exhibition, the curators built an interrogative journey during the exhibition that, ultimately, questions both the role that art can have in the community, and the status of comics as socially involved art that can contribute to the public discourse on society and community activation. During the project that was the basis of the present exhibition, the urban comics primarily represented a qualitative research method, through which concepts, processes, and tools used by different actors in their social innovation efforts are transferred into sequential registers with the aim of making them transparent and rendering them in a comprehensive visual language. Also, the urban comic strip, beyond being a way of documentary representation, is used for its ability to build fictional universes in subjective reinterpretations of the issues and concepts researched. In this way, comics, as an independent artistic medium, becomes, a subject of analysis with strong implications, in the exhibition context. Through the cultural mediation program related to the exhibition, the urban comics build a secure framework, a safe, friendly, and participatory space in which the invited public can feel free to problematize, debate and imagine, in turn, various possibilities for the construction of the urban future. Thus, the urban comic strip is both a means of activating the individual and collective imagination and a means of engaging the public in art.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the case study described here is an example that could constitute a basis for further approaches that explore the relationship between the individual and the city, or the museum's role as a catalyst of community. For the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca, it has been the first initiative to exhibit comics as a main genre as well as, through the cultural mediation program developed, an inquiry into the social responsibility of the contemporary museum, opening the gate for other projects dedicated to urban comics and to social activation.

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URL: https://ourcluj.city/#ourcluj

URL: https://www.fondationbotnar.org/project/ourcity-initiative/

Examples of artworks by ArtiViStory Collective artists
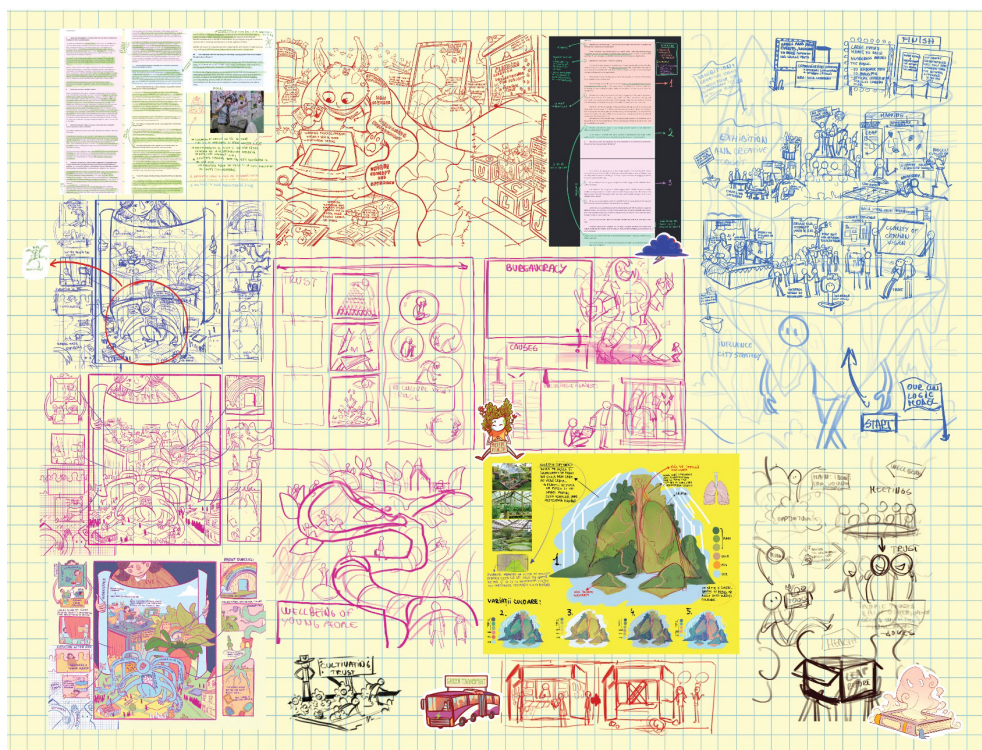
Fig. 1. Teodora Predescu, *Creative Laboratory*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)

Fig. 2. Evelina Grigorean, *Conceptual and Artistic Process*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)
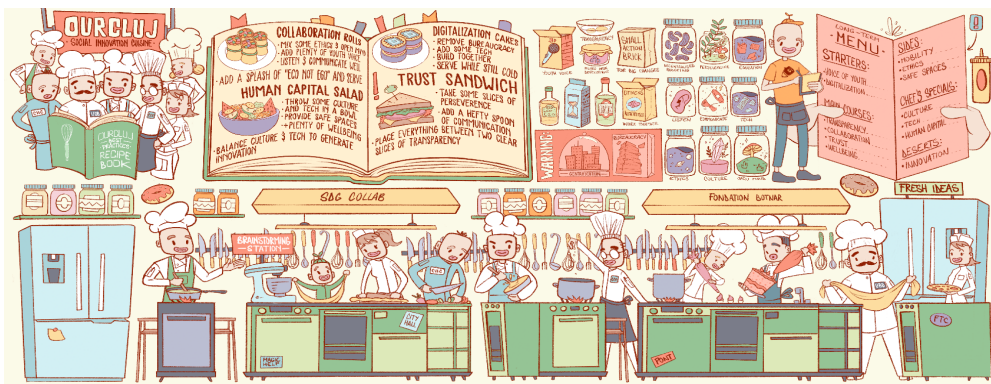
Fig. 3. Horațiu Coman, *Ecosystem Mapping*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)

Fig. 4. Ureczki-Lázăr Melinda, *Remembering the Past*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)

Fig. 5. Lucian Barbu, *Youth and the Ecosystem*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)
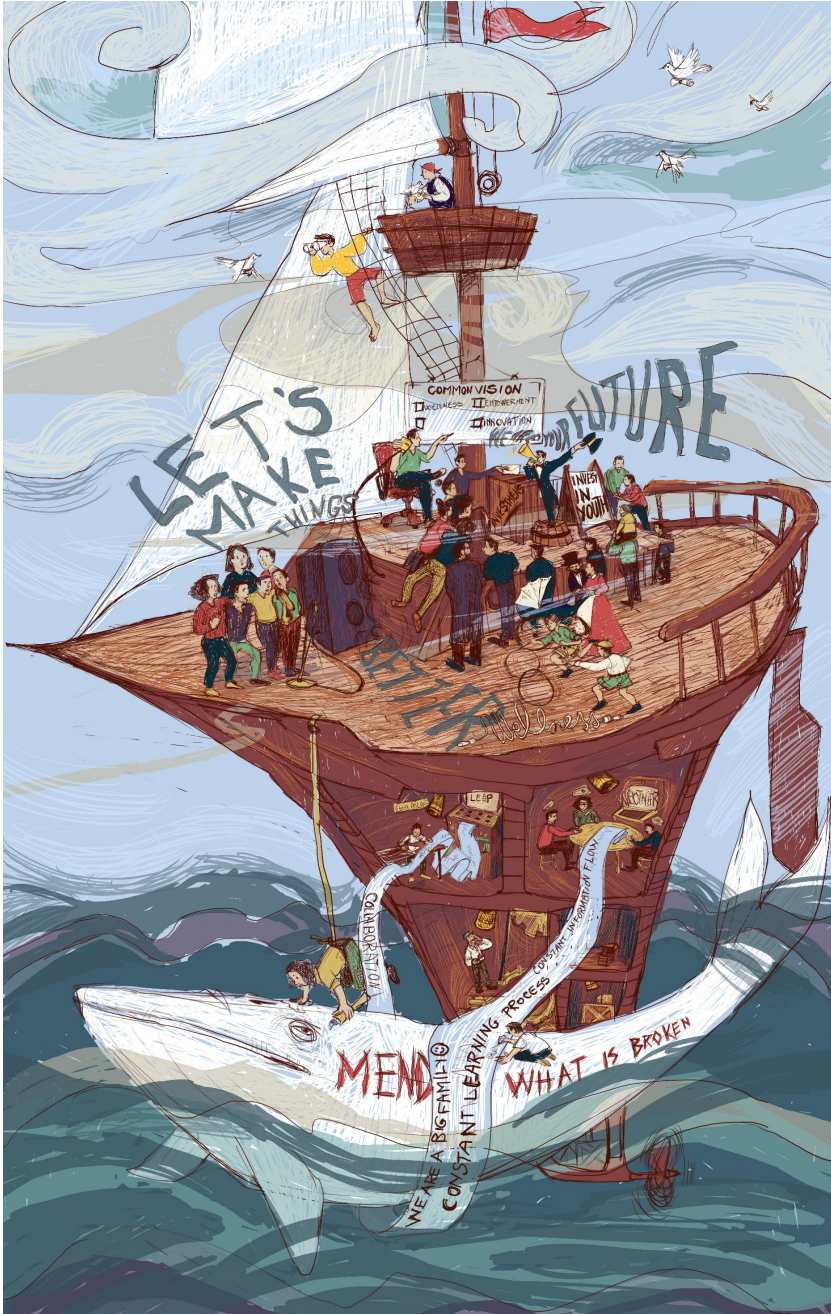
Fig. 6. Sebastian Ştefan, *Imagining the Future*, 2022. (photo A. Sârbu)

Images from the exhibition

Fig. 7. Entrance to the exhibition space. (photo A. Sârbu)

Fig. 8. Image from inside the exhibition space. (photo A. Sârbu)

Examples from the cultural mediation program

Fig. 9. Group of school students at the beginning of the cultural mediation program. (photo A. Sârbu)

Fig. 10. Group of school students during the cultural mediation program. (photo A. Sârbu)

THE VISIBILITY OF A CITY IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD.
SCOPIC REGIMES IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF
LAJOS ORBÁN (1897–1972) FROM CLUJ[*]

Melinda BLOS-JÁNI[**]

ABSTRACT. The Visibility of a City in the Interwar Period. Scopic Regimes in the Photographs of Lajos Orbán (1897–1972) from Cluj*. Lajos Orbán was an amateur photographer, whose main body of work was produced starting from the 1920s when he became the employee of a local shop specialized in photographic equipment and member in local photographic societies, e.g. the Tessar Bowling Society. His photographs were displayed at international photo exhibitions, but he was organising regional photo contests and exhibitions as well. His photographs show the influence of the pictorialist photography, but traces of modernism or the new objectivism are present as well. These pictures became archival documents, and they are also important resources to the visual culture of Transylvania, the visual literacy of the people living in the interwar years. The paper offers an in depth analysis of the scopic regimes detectable in the photographic heritage of Lajos Orbán based on the ways human figures and spatial relations are represented in his pictures.

Keywords: *amateur photography, visual culture, urban life, "flâneur", scopic regime, landscape, human figures.*

[**] **Melinda BLOS-JÁNI PhD** (blosmelinda@kv.sapientia.ro) is Lecturer at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania and assistant editor of the journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*. Her research interests include home videos and amateur films, silent cinema, documentary film, found footage films and archival images. She published the book: *The Genealogy of Home Movies. Transylvanian Amateur Media Practices from Photography to New Media* (in Hungarian), 2015. She has published articles in journals within the area of Film Studies and History of Photography. Currently she is employed as a member in the exploratory research project, *Affective Intermediality. Cinema between Media, Sensation and Reality s*upported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1297, and conducts research related to the affective use of photography in documentary films.

The photographic image, emerging in the 19th century, entered into everyday use at the beginning of the 20th century leading to the vernacularization and democratization of the new technology (gradually getting more and more user friendly). This was a global phenomenon that reached Transylvania as well. At the end of the 19th century the city of Cluj kept up with the appearance of a new medium, photographic studios were established in the city at the same time as in other locations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In this period photographs replaced the graphic postcards[1] of the city, and the newspapers of Cluj started to publish photographs as illustrations already in the late 1890s. Regarding the photographic culture of Transylvania, the history of photo studios and professional photographers is perhaps the most studied. Károly Szathmáry Pap (1812–1887), Ferenc Veress (1832–1916) or the Dunky brothers are the best-known 19th century Transylvanian photographers, who are nowadays considered artists rather than artisans (although they worked mostly as entrepreneurs and shop owners). Much less is known about the social and cultural acceptance of the medium at the turn of the 19th century: how it was regarded by the contemporary society, in what way it was different, what social classes are reflected in photographs, or what kind of visual literacy the studio photographers and their clients of the time must have had. Career histories and monographs[2] on the history of photography in Transylvania appeared scarcely, and they are rather encyclopedia like, and less concerned with the relationship between photography and society or with visual culture. The post-1918 period tends to remain a blind spot in the field of research, although the end of the First World War had been a veritable regime change, as Transyilvania became part of Romania. In the interwar period the Hungarian population had to accept their new status as a minority, while the Romanians started to establish their activites. A new type of multiculturality emerged in this region, whilst technological development was underway in the field of visual culture as well. This was the time when a more ample democratization of the technical image making apparatus

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[1] The first ever postcard used as an open (not enveloped) form of written and pictural communication was posted in 1869 in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the popularity of this medium increased in the following years. See Keszeg Anna, "A Magyar Királyság városainak látványstruktúrái a századforduló képeslapjain", in *Médiakultúra Közép-Kelet-Európában*, ed. Kálai Sándor (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2016), 129.

[2] The most impressive of these is Miklósi-Sikes Csaba, *Fényképészek és műtermek Erdélyben 1839–1918*: *tanulmány és okmánytár* (Székelyudvarhely: Haáz Rezső Alapítvány, 2001). The book is rich in historical source material and oral history interviews, but needs reevaluation as new data surfaced in the past decades. To be also mentioned here are the books edited by Lajos Erdélyi for the Kriterion publishing house: *Székelyföld képekben* and *Teleki Samu Afrikában*, both presenting 19th century photographers*.

like film and photography occurred. This paper aims to explore the visual culture of Transylvania in the interwar period, the vernacularization of photography as a medium and the patterns of visual literacy of non-professional photographers and its beholders, drawing on the results of urban history and media culture studies. All of this will be revealed through the story of the photographs taken by a member of the bourgeoisie from Cluj called Lajos Orbán.

From the visual contemplation of *flâneurs* to urban photography

The birth of modern cities was accompanied by the appearance of a new popular culture based on spectacles – as pointed out by research on urbanization history in Hungary[3] and also by the historians of visual culture.[4] These approaches define a city as a discursive space structured from the 19th century onwards by new identities, by the emergence of a public sphere, and hence, by visibility. Then in reverse, the images mediating this 20th century urban life should be understood from the perspective of the city dweller, of an observer defined by its specific historical time, the social history of vision. The amateur photography collection created by Lajos Orbán (1897–1972) spans from the First World War's soldier's perspective to the very dedicated amateur photographer's vision of the 1940s. During this time Lajos Orbán became an adult and founded his own family, while his collection has grown from owning a single photo camera to seven-eight cameras. This article is an attempt to reconstruct his career inseparable from the history of the visual culture in Cluj and the history of everyday experience of urban life, deeply affected by its increasing visualization.

19th-century European cities not only created new spatial structures, but also a new type of dweller, in Walter Benjamin's words, a *flâneur*, who participated in this world by visual contemplation. Observation was a way of enjoying the urban environment, but also a means of communication: "the small differences in the world perceived visually, from the myriads of signs like gestures and clothing, all kinds of irreplaceable supports in information and orientation. But the success of this enterprise also requires the education of the gaze, the knowledge of interpreting the signs."[5] The increasing value of practices of looking and

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[3] Gyáni Gábor, *Az utca és a szalon. A társadalmi térhasználat Budapesten (1870–1940)* (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 1998).

[4] Füzi Izabella, *A vurstlitól a moziig. A magyar vizuális tömegkultúra kibontakozása (1896–1914)* (Szeged: Pompeji, 2022).

[5] Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon*, 27.

seeing in the behavior of the metropolitan man already represents a kind of visual culture that anticipates the future "visual turn,"[6] i.e. the production of cultural meaning through spectacle and image. Theorists of visual culture warn that "the disjunctured and fragmented culture that we call postmodernism is best imagined and understood visually, just as the nineteenth century was classically represented in the newspaper and the novel."[7] Theories of visual culture argue that spectatorship, 'visual experience', 'visual literacy' cannot be fully explained in terms of a model of textuality,[8] so we must also ask why our culture places so much importance on the visualization of experience.[9] If visual literacy is a theoretical framework that deals with the physiology of visual perception, techniques of visual production and techniques of understanding what is seen,[10] then the image interpretation and image production skills and competences that individuals may have acquired in a given period, have a strong relevance when interpreting a photographic legacy.

Although the domestication of the camera in the late 19th and early 20th century was influenced by various needs, the large number of city albums, postcards and photographs from the turn of the 19th century show that the new medium was integrated into the visual strategies developed for the reception and perception of the metropolitan space. Urban photography, as Gábor Gyáni confirms, documents the natives' experience of the city, the culture of perceptions and sensations in a metropolis.[11] In this sense, amateur city photographs are not merely representations of the city, but also documents of a visual culture. That is, in addition to their denotated content (that they show an existing settlement with its well-known buildings and squares), we can also read secondary meanings from them (the worldview of a historical period, a photographic style, or the evolution of a photographer's biography, his socio-cultural horizon), which are culturally encoded.[12]

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[6]   William J. Thomas Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *ArtForum* 30, no. 7 (1992): 89–94.

[7]   Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 5.

[8]   William J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

[9]   "The world-as-a-text has been challenged by the world-as-a-picture." Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture?", 5.

[10]   Keszeg Anna, "Vizuális kultúra, visual literacy, media literacy, digital literacy. A vizuális műveltség tipológiája és kontextusai", in *Fogalom és kép II.,* eds. Egyed Péter and Gál László (Kolozsvár: Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó, 2011), 267.

[11]   Gyáni Gábor, "A reprezentatív város – a reprezentált város," in *Terek és szövegek. Újabb perspektívák a városkutatásban*, eds. N. Kovács Tímea, Böhm Gábor, and Mester Tibor (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2005), 232.

[12]   Gayer Zoltán, "Fényképaktusok. Amatőrképek a rendszerváltás előtt és után," *Replika* 33–34 (1998): 90.

In this paper, I experiment with a method of image analysis that (de)codes a collection of images building on the stories of the individual who took the photographs. What becomes important for the image interpretation will be something else than what is captured by the camera lens and is usually invisible in the images: the photographer looking on from behind the lens. In this framework photographs become the primary evidence of what structured the photographer's gaze, thus describing and interpreting the visible dimension of the images has to pay attention to this aspect. In the vein of the field of the visual culture and of the "visual turn" Martin Jay (1988) introduced the term *scopic regimes* to describe the characteristics of Western modernity, and the way practices of seeing, representing and subject positioning are linked to systems of knowledge and power. Experimenting with a kind of reading that does not think of the image as a spectacle, but rather as the result of a gaze that was determined by cultural and social habits, the concept of the scopic regime seems a good methodological anchor point.

Today, we can understand the mentality and the habits of the man who photographed in the first decades of the 1900s mainly from his photographs to a lesser extent from written sources and, in a fortunate case, from the accounts of the ones who later inherited the photographs. Photographs are attractive, sensory surfaces that make visible what the photographer saw, what was visible from a possible human perspective at a given time. In other words, photography is a medium that mediates the mental image and makes it social.[13] In fact, such an interpretative framework tries to reveal what structured Lajos Orbán's gaze: how his life, his visual literacy, and the local visual culture contributed to the final form of his photographic compositions.

Structures of photographic vision in pre-WWII Cluj

An important milestone in the history of the photographic representation of Cluj was the work of Ferenc Veress, who produced five photo albums documenting Transylvania between 1859 and 1873, two of them focusing on the city.[14] In these images, landmark buildings are highlighted, but there are also street views and

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[13] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014 [2001]), 25.

[14] According to the literature, of the five photo albums, the one from 1859 was made for the Transylvanian Museum Society (Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület – EME), the 1869 one for Empress Elisabeth of Austria and Queen Consort of Hungary, while the remaining ones were made for exhibitions. Two of the five albums have been lost. See Újvári Dorottya, "Ferenc Veress, one of the Pioneers of Photography in Transylvania", *Uncommon Culture* 5, no. 9–10 (2014): 142–147 and Sas Péter, *Ónodi Veress Ferenc fényképész-műterme Kolozsvárt* (Kolozsvár: Művelődés Kiadó, 2014).

panoramic views that present Cluj as a monument of urbanism itself,[15] i.e. "spectacle-type representations" of the city that emphasise aesthetic qualities.[16] These early depictions correspond to the 19th-century representational habits, which presented the people populating the streets as a decorative, staffage pieces, or reduced them to a marginal spot within the field of vision.[17] This scopic regime was operated by the desire to encompass the total city and preserve its image as a museological object, and it was usually performed by very skilled, awarded photographic craftsmen of that period, like Ferenc Veress – an internationally renowned photographer from Cluj. The human figures in these cityscapes are immobile, less lifelike or individualisable figures, more like shadows, which will be put into focus and brought to life by a different gaze, of amateur photographers capturing the urban bustle, sometime in the first decades of the 20th century. This resulted in a quite visible change in the visualization of urban life, it is not a bold statemenet that amateur photography movements created a new scopic regime. For this "survey type of gaze" the city was defined by the metropolitan crowd, by the human scale.[18]

The Fortepan online image archive has published a series of 15 photographs[19] taken on the streets of Cluj sometime between 1902 and 1914 by an anonymous photographer, showing people walking on the street, acting like baudelaireian *flâneurs* (Fig. 1–2). The composition of the pictures indicates that the photographer's intention was to capture the passers-by instead of the urban landscape, not posing, rather being in a rush, even causing motion blur. Full-figure portraits fill the frame, while the exact location can be inferred from fragments of inscriptions and details of buildings appearing in the background. While the subject matter of the images seems revolutionary, as if anticipating the very modern street photography in vogue to this day, the blurred figures call attention to the obsolescence of the studio photographic technique (requiring long exposure times and rigid posing).

The two types of representing the urban landscape of Cluj – the spectacle-type and the survey type of gaze – can be encountered in various genres of early 20th century photographs: postcards, private photographs, amateur photographs or press photos. Analyzing the type of gaze rather than the image of the city, one can argue that the series from the Fortepan archive is characterized by the point of view of a contemplative person who made the act of photographing part of

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[15] Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 232.

[16] Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 235.

[17] Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 234.

[18] Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 235.

[19] According to the website of the Fortepan archive (*www.fortepan.hu*) the code numbers of these pictures are: 08984, 08197, 06991, 06988, 08126, 07947, 07946, 07945, 07036, 07044, 07037, 07035, 07001, 06973.

the ways he used the urban space. The camera's exit onto the street, and its subsequent domestication, transformed it into a tool for the visual strolling of the *flâneur*. This has changed not mere the image of the city, but also the people of the street itself, as a new kind of person, the "man with the photographic camera" emerged.

Fig. 1–2. Pictures no. 7001 and 7037 from the Fortepan online archive.

Those who called themselves "amateur photographers" at the beginning of the 20th century were in fact photographers who took pictures for exhibitions, for competitions or as a leisure activity. As Miklós Peternák reminds us, this new habit also shook the society of professional studio photographers, even leading to the partial disappearance of this world in Budapest in the 1920s.[20] In Cluj, amateur photo culture as an alternative to studio photography emerged in the late 19th century. This is reported by Dr. Ödön Éjszaky in the pages of the tourist journal entitled *Erdély* (Transylvania): "In 1890, when I started taking photographs, there were already two amateurs in Cluj. László Bodor, a magistrate, and Kálmán Kováts, the co-owner of the still existing Kováts P's Sons (in Hungarian: Kováts P. Fiai) photography company. There were several professional photographers and studios at that time. These were: Ferenc Veress, Ferenc Marselek, the Dunky Brothers, Császár and Meinhardt".[21] According to

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[20] Peternák Miklós. "Kis magyar fotótörténet," 1997.
http://marcheo.c3.hu/index.php?inc=obj&id=42&oid=26&ref=sub&roid=7, accessed February 15, 2017.
[21] Éjszaky Ödön, "Az amatőr fényképezés kezdete Kolozsvárt," *Erdély* 1–2 (1933): 21–23.

another source, the author of the article, Ödön Éjszaky, himself organised the Association of Amateurs in Cluj in January 1906.[22]

There is not much data on the photographic associations[23] before the First World War, nor any trace of László Bodor's photographs, but the photographic activity of Kálmán Kováts and Ödön Éjszaky continued in the post-World War I period. Kálmán Kováts died in 1919, but the management of the shop on the Central square, founded by his father Péter Kováts in 1853, was passed down in the family. In the 1920s, László Schäfer[24] (1893–1977) managed the shop Kováts P's Sons, which by then was advertising itself primarily as a photographic speciality shop and photolab. The name of Ödön Éjszaky (1875–1944) reappears in 1928, as the artistic director of the photography section of the Cluj Athletics Club (in Hungarian: Kolozsvári Atlétikai Club, KAC),[25] and then as a member of the Tessar Bowling Society (in Hungarian: Tessar Teke Társaság, TTT),[26] which was founded in 1932 (I will refer to them by the acronym often used by them: KAC, TTT).[27] This society had already 53 members, quite a development compared to only 3 amateurs *flâneurs* active 40 years earlier.

Between the two world wars, it was not only amateur photographers who created competition for photo studios, since the circle of photographers had also expanded greatly: the camera was now a common accessory for scientists, hikers (Transylvanian Carpathian Association, in Hungarian: Erdélyi Kárpát Egyesület, EKE), scouts, sportsmen (KAC),[28] reporters, artists and soldiers. However, along with a growing demand for photographs and photography, the visual culture had changed, as reflected in the above cited article by Ödön Éjszaky. He described the state of the art of contemporary photography as follows:

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[22] Gaal György, *Kolozsvár a századok sodrában. Várostörténeti kronológia* (Kolozsvár: Kincses Kolozsvár Egyesület, Kriterion, 2016), 127.

[23] According to Dorottya Újvári's research, a national amateur photography exhibition was held twice in Cluj: in 1905 and in 1916. The names of the exhibiting photographers reveal that amateur photographers were active at the time. See Újvári Dorottya, "Műkedvelő fényképészek és fotós társaságok a 20. század első felében Kolozsváron," in *Látható Kolozsvár: Orbán Lajos fotói a két világháború közötti városról*, ed. Blos-Jáni Melinda (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, Exit Kiadó, 2018), 45–46.

[24] Péter Kováts had two sons, Kálmán and Ede. László Schäfer married Ede Kováts' daughter Irene and inherited the job of running the shop.

[25] Ifj. Fanta, "Figyelő," *Művészeti Szalon* 3, no. 6–7 (1928): 20.

[26] The acronyms of these names will be used throughout the article, as these were the names used at the turn of the 20th century.

[27] For more on the history of the company, see Blos-Jáni Melinda, *A családi filmezés genealógiája. Erdélyi amatőr médiagyakorlatok a fotózástól az új mozgóképfajtákig* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2015), 82–85.

[28] Killyéni András, "Manouschek Ottó, a *Sport-Világ* első kolozsvári származású tudósítója," *ME.DOK* 5, no. 3 (2010): 25–32.

Not only in equipment and materials, but even the image, its subject, its conception, its execution, was completely opposite to the current one. I could best describe the perception of four decades ago by saying that if an amateur of that time had accidentally taken an unsharp, soft, blurred, hazy picture, such as today could win first prize at a photo exhibition, the amateur of that time would have thrown it into the bin as an absolutely bad one. In those days, the sharper, the fuller of contrasts a picture was, the better and more beautiful it was. It was even a requirement that, for example, a landscape picture should cover as much as possible from the view. If, for example, the subject of a photo competition was a muddy street, the amateur from 40 years ago would take the picture of the muddy street in such a way that as much of the street as possible would be visible in the picture, with a crowd of people, perhaps with a four-ox cart in the foreground. The image is sharp, intense and contrasting. And today's amateur would want a picture with only one of the back wheels of the cart on it, not even that, and the rest of the frame would be filled with the muddy road. And the image would be soft and blurred. However, one characteristic of photography, which has changed in all its aspects over the past four decades, has remained unchanged, and that is that it can always give great pleasure and joy to those who are engaged in it.[29]

The gaze of Lajos Orbán

The photographic activity of Lajos Orbán is in several ways connected to the grassroots amateur photographic movement that was developing in Cluj. Around 1924, he left his role as a purchaser at the Dermata leather factory and became a supplier and later a co-owner of the Kováts P's Sons until 1940, due to his friendship with László Schäfer. At the same time, he became an active participant in photography-related events in Cluj between the two world wars, organised by the Kováts P's Sons, the Transylvanian Carpathian Association or the grassroots photographic societies (KAC, TTT). In the press of the time,[30] his name is mentioned as a lecturer at photography courses, as a judge at photography competitions and as an exhibiting artist.

Although the Orbán family's use of everyday photography goes back several decades, and they even had a camera in the early 20th century, it was only in the interwar period that Lajos Orbán became a city *flâneur* on its own. His earliest photographs survive on glass plates from 1917, taken when he joined the army in Budapest and at the training camp in Tátra (e.g. about the Lomnici

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[29] Éjszaky, "Az amatőr fényképezés," 22–23.
[30] Mainly the monthly journals like: *Erdély*, *Művészeti Szalon*, *Pásztortűz*.

Peak, the streets of Budapest). In the interwar period, several factors contributed to his becoming an avid camera user: in the 1920s and 1930s cheaper and more user-friendly technology appeared on the market,[31] making photography an increasingly common activity. On the other hand in the early 1920s, Lajos Orbán started a family life (his marriage marked a veritable pictorial turn, as he took many photographs of his family), and around 1924 he began working as a technology supplier for a photographic shop.[32] As a result of these factors, Lajos Orbán became an above-average camera user in that period: he had 8-9 cameras, maintained a photo laboratory in his home, took a large number of pictures, often exceeding the intentions of a photographer documenting his/her family. His identity as an amateur photographer, however, would develop only until 1944, when the invading Soviet soldiers temporarily turned his home into a hospital and confiscated all his cameras. Therefore, it was not his desire to take photographs that waned, but the cameras went missing, and it is likely that the new life situation and the new socio-historical context no longer favoured peacetime leisure and recreational habits.

The 300 or so photographs made available for research[33] are only a fraction of the photographer's heritage, accumulated over a 20-year period of intensive photographic practice. This set of images can be considered a random selection, which, precisely because of its fragmentary nature, is not suitable for quantitative analysis, but it does allow one to identify the subjects and compositional habits favoured by the photographer. But this is still not sufficient resource to uncover the structures of his vision.

What is it that he and his fellow photographers wanted to render visible, and how did they interpret the images captured with their cameras? To understand this, it takes more than just describing and analysing the images; it requires thematic classification of the images, reconstructing the relationship between photographer and spectacle by tracing out the photographic acts, the 'irreplaceable' statements or actions[34] in which the photographer has incorporated his/her personality and by which he/she has in fact shaped his/her own social relations.

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[31] Indeed, this is the turning point, when all kinds of technologies entered homes and everyday life. On this, see Jaap Boerdam, and Martinius Warna Oosterbaan, "Family Photographs – a Sociological Approach," *The Netherlands Journal of Sociology* 16 (1980): 164–167.

[32] Through the photo shop he had access not only to photographic equipment, but also to the Kodak amateur film camera, launched in 1927, with which he was already shooting in the city in 1928. On the amateur filmmaking habits of Lajos Orbán, see Blos-Jáni, *A családi filmezés,* 69–99.

[33] The photographs, with the exception of a few images, were handed over for research purposes to the Transylvanian Audovisual Association in the form of glass negatives by his heir, László Orbán. The Kriza János Ethnographic Society helped to digitise the negatives.

[34] Gayer, "Fényképaktusok."

How can one read photographs in order to disclose the relationship between the photographer and the subjects of an image (spaces, landscapes, people or objects) at the moment of taking the picture? A solution to this question could be a method of analysis that distinguishes between the ways in which space is represented. The urban space is a complex reality that is subject to constant exploration and can be as diverse as the ways in which we relate to it or want to represent it. Lefebvre uses the description of the *military gaze* and the *landscaping gaze* to illustrate the difference between modes of observation that result from different attitudes and expectations towards landscape or space.[35] When creating a military map, or when producing aesthetically appealing landscape views the focus of the gaze is varying and compositions emphasize different features.

Lajos Orbán's collection can be divided into three main categories based on the representation of space and man, each of them shows a unified compositional and aesthetic approach, and to a large extent they mirror the photographer's social life and his affiliations with different institutions. The first group of images is composed of photographs portraying the centre of Cluj and relates to his working time, the second captures the spaces and habits of leisure time, especially the man enjoying nature theme, and the third captures family life and its members in various spaces of their private life.[36]

The relatively large number of photographs taken on the Main Square of Cluj could be explained by the fact that Lajos Orbán was an employee of the photo shop and laboratory of Kováts P's Sons, situated there. Some of the photos capture the shop interior, including some masterful shots of the laboratory and still life compositions in the office, but also conventional shots were taken of the staff in the interiors, or around the shop. There are also a number of images advertising the shop's photographic products, some with text and graphics or photos with an added caption. Photographs of the shop window also show that they had an original postcards series in the product offer (Fig. 5). The Kováts P's Sons had a long tradition of postcard production by this time, in the archives one can find postcards bearing their name from the late 1890s (Fig. 3–4). It is not

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[35] Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 32.

[36] An exhibition of photographs by Lajos Orbán entitled *Visible Cluj-Napoca* was organized by the Transylvanian Audiovisual Archive and Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, which was open to the public between 27 October and 19 November 2016 in the Sapientia EMTE building from the Turzii street. In the exhibition, the spatial grouping of the images was made perceptible by dividing the exhibition space into three spatial units: the Main Square, the Central Park and the Family House, which emphasized the differences in the visual systems of the images with explanatory inscriptions and different spatial arrangements and furnishings.

known for sure whether Lajos Orbán's photos were used to this end, only that the opportunity was given to him. He may have been well informed about the visual genre of the postcard as a condensed, stylized representation of reality,[37] be it a spectacle or a survey type of visual representation.[38]
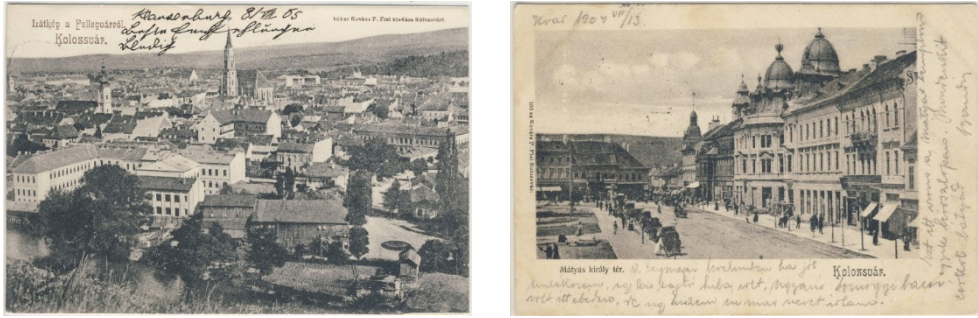
Fig. 3–4. Cluj as a monument. Vistas from the Citadel hill and from the Main Square. On two postcards published by the Kováts P. Fiai shop. (The postcard collection of Radu Lupescu)

It is not known what Lajos Orbán's purpose was when he took pictures of the city, which of them were conceived as postcards, exhibits or personal memories, but looking at the series of pictures from the photographer's point of view, an authorial attitude is detectible, an aestheticizing gaze that bears the influence of both the synthesizing visuals of the postcard and the contemporary trends of artistic photography. The personal character of the images is also evident in the choice of locations for the photographs: if we were to place the points from which he took pictures on a map, we would roughly draw the route that Lajos Orbán took every day from his home on Erzsébet út (today Emil Racoviță street) to the Kováts P's Sons shop. Pictures were taken from the balcony of their house, their garden, the Citadel, the bridge over the Someş River, the old city mill, the Franciscan Church, all four sides of the Main Square, the tower of St. Michael's Church, and the sidewalk in front of the shop (Fig. 6). In addition, small excursions were made to the Farkas Street (today Mihail Kogălniceanu street), Király Street (today George Barițiu street), Búza Street (today Inocenţiu Micu Klein street), Egyetem Street (today Universității street), Jókai Street (today Napoca street), Hunyadi Square (today Ştefan cel Mare square) and Únió Street (today Moţilor street).

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37 Csillag Gábor, "«Képek és képtelenségek» – a valóságábrázolás határai a turisztikai képi emlékekben," in *Helye(in)k, tárgya(in)k, képeink. A turizmus társadalomtudományos magyarázata,* eds. Fejős Zoltán and Szijártó Zsolt (Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum, 2003), 73.

38 Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 235.

Fig. 5–6[*]. The entrance to the Kováts P. Fiai photoshop and its window in the 1930's. Lajos Orbán is the men standing in the doorway in the first picture. The sixth image is the countershot, an image made possibly from the same doorway. There are alternate versions of this shot emphasising different actors from the scene: e.g. shoeshiners.

The compositions of the photographs call for contemplation, they invite the viewer to linger over images of the city captured from novel perspectives: as seen through tree branches reaching up to the sky, or as a cityscape framed by a snow-covered tree or the wrought-iron elements of a house, or as a network of streets and houses visually echoed by the balcony railing of the tower of St. Michael's Church (Fig. 7–8). These photographs present the buildings of the city as elements of reality, structured by the spectacle type of gaze of the postcard, on the one hand, and the subjectivity of the photographer, on the other. The points from which he viewed the city, his unique visual experiences are not available to others. The way in which his gaze created connections between architectural or natural elements with the real subjects of the image - cannot be replicated by others. They are at once abstract cityscapes and romantic settings saturated with subjectivity.

Besides panoramas, there are pictures taken from the passer-by's point of view. These pictures taken from a camera held at the eye's level are also challenging perception and call for reflection. Human figures are visible, but only as contours, shown from the back, as *Rückenfigur*s, devoid of facial expressions (Fig. 9–10). These compositions lack the functions of the portrait, which does

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[*] Fig. 5–17. belong to the photographic legacy of Lajos Orbán in the holding of the family.

Fig. 7–8. Cluj seen from the Citadel hill and from the tower of the St. Michael's Church.

Fig. 9–10. The poetry of the fog in the city. The passers-by were captured along Lajos Orbán's morning route. Several versions were take from the same point of view.

not just depict, but also creates the subject.[39] People populating the streets are rather decorative, geometric shapes or visual spots creating contrast with other elements of the picture, they become components of the portrayal of the modern bourgeois city. The reflexive gestures of these photographs, that demand heightened activity from the viewer, are very well described by Ödön Éjszaky in the article quoted earlier, in which he defines the visual trend of the interwar period as a synaesthetic vision focusing on details and building, on soft focus and blurriness. It is difficult to decide whether the shadowy, yet attractive outlines of streets and buildings in the background are the real protagonists or if people are rather the real focus. By all means, they add dynamism to the cityscape, which is accessible through visual puzzles (e.g. human figures that divert attention) and through the interpretation of elements that challenge the boundaries of visibility (fog, rain, snow, sunshine).

This photographic style originates from the pictorialism that became popular in the 1900s, which sought to establish photography as art by building on new developing techniques and a specific iconography (with a preference for trees) to create painterly and sensual effects, rather than documentary records relying on optical sharpness. Lajos Orbán's photographs were taken at a time when pictorialism had already become widespread as a universal photographic movement and language, yet in Cluj in the 1920s it was a novelty and became synonymous with art photography. Lajos Orbán was probably inspired by the photographic magazine *Das Bild*, which he bought on his commercial trips to Germany, but there were other amateurs besides him, who assimilated this style. In the art journal entitled *Művészeti Szalon* (Art Salon) the review of a photo exhibition demonstrates how consciously they adapted this style:

> It would be quite pointless today to take a stand as to whether we should include among works of art a photograph which is technically absolutely faultless, but it's print was made using a noble technique, which could rival the wonderful tonal effects of a painting's pittoresque or etching, yet, despite all its artistic character, it does not defy it's photographic nature. [...] László Schäfer and Lajos Orbán are dedicated amateurs, characterised above all by their ability to capture the moment. Movement, harmony of lines, the atmospheric beauty of rainy and misty landscapes are their themes. [...] Of Lajos Orbán's street photographs, *Morning* is definitely the most ingenious shot, a great achievement in its breath-like tones and its fortunate capture of movement, although its distribution of spots is not quite balanced. His picture entitled *Lambs* is poetic.[40]

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[39] Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Portrait* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 5–10.

[40] Finta Zoltán, "A K. A. C. fotószakosztályának házi kiállítása," *Művészeti Szalon* 3, no. 10 (1928): 10–11.

Lajos Orbán's photographs capture the ever-changing face, the ephemer moments of Cluj. The image of older and younger women hurrying past St. Michael's Church was only momentarily in the right place, forming a shape contrasting to the New York hotel shrouded in fog. A recurring compositional element in Lajos Orbán's photographs is the long shadow of people, that he kept observing in passageways, arcades or other public spaces on the street (i.e. the spaces characteristic to *flâneurs*). The human figures shown from behind or as shadows became, in the course of time, increasingly integrated into dynamic compositions with the built environment, becoming merely outlines, like the roofs of the central houses, and therefore these pictures point towards the new direction of objectivity that replaced pictorialism, modernism.

On the other hand, in another group of photographs taken around the centre, these abstracted urban figures become the main subject of the images. Lajos Orbán also took pictures of people working on the streets: shoe shiners, wood drums, confectioners, garbage collectors, pretzel and newspaper sellers, small vendors, beggars – as if he wanted to create an encyclopaedia of the work type taking place on the main streets of Cluj. Furthermore, these photographs often reveal social differences, therefore they can be considered socio-photographs. The village people staring at shop windows, the man with the hat sitting on the pavement and looking at the Matthias statuary group, the blind old man selling newspapers or the war invalid are presented with both curiosity and the detachment that comes from observation. The photographer seems to have wanted to keep the camera a secret, not making eye contact, without any confrontation.

The gaze that emerged from the combination of a bourgeois perspective and ethnographic inquiry sometimes created thick images: people gazing at the window from the back become interesting because of their folk costumes, while looking at a glamorous window displaying crystal chandeliers and other ornaments (Fig. 11). There is no less dramatic contrast in the scene of the blind news vendor, behind whom is the well-groomed male image and text of a poster offering cosmetics for men. And the image featuring the one-legged news vendor presents the very issue of the *Friss Zeitung* that reports on the mutiny of a war invalid, with no less talkative figures appearing next to him: on the left, a rural couple, the man wearing a scrip on his back, while the woman stands barefoot, holding her boots in her hands, and to her right, an elegant city woman (Fig. 12).

Just as panoramas, cityscapes made in a pictorialist or objective style present the urban space as a landscape, which in Martin Lefebvre's terms is autonomous, as it is independent of human figures and events.[41] Unlike postcards, in artistic projects the city is not presented as a monument, but as a set of sensory, optical impressions registered by the observer.

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[41] Martin Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 63.

Fig. 11–12. The first picture is a scan of a paper print made with noble techniques in order to achieve softness and a painterly blur. Fig. 12 is a scan from a glass negative, characterized by documentary rawness.

In contrast, in Orbán's survey-type images of the activities and typology of the people walking the streets, the city almost disappears, the man himself becomes the subject, not as a face or an individual, but as a social type, like an emblematic figure who fits in or stands out in various ways in the urban landscape. The city appears in these pictures more as a setting,[42] a functional landscape in which the various social actors perform, play themselves out, and the visible world is subordinated to their presence. However, this is also based on passive observation, the photographer's gaze lingers, selects the decisive moment, or captures the subject in a characteristic setting. The subject is objectified and aestheticised by this gaze. On the whole, the images of the city centre are mainly characterised by a landscaping gaze.[43]

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[42] Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," 64.

[43] Lefebvre has modelled this term based on Gombrich, distinguishing land from landscape (Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," 47–48), and landscape as a genre, autonomous in itself, from landscape sensibility, or from the landscaping gaze. According to him, this concept is needed in order to see landscape not only as a genre, as a set of formal principles, the product of a process of perception, but also to distinguish it from the case where the viewer

A different structure of spatial perception can be observed in the images about leisure time. Here, Lajos Orbán is no longer the solitary photographer on the way to his workplace, but a member of the bourgoisie who spends his leisure time having fun and taking photographs, and a person who pursued his hobbies in the social framework of associations and clubs. Articles sometimes refer to the activity of amateur photography as a photographic sport. According to family members and newspaper articles published in Transylvania, Lajos Orbán was not only a member of such societies, but was also active as an instructor and exhibition organiser.

The most important institution behind the leisure time pictures was the Tessar Bowling Society, which was partly made up of members of the KAC's photo circle. The group, which ironically described itself as a "society of those who rarely take photographs and often go bowling", was not all about photography. Although Dr. Ödön Éjszaky, Gabriella Hintz, István Fanta and Béla Pohl were acknowledged amateur photographers, some of the members of the group were members through family connections and belonged to the group for the sake of socialising and entertainment. The main document of the association's existence is a yearbook, which commemorates their meetings between 1932 and 1941. For 10 years they met every Thursday to bowl and sometimes to take photographs, but the yearbook does not explicitly mention this. The drawings illustrating the yearbook (mostly the work of Dr. Ödön Éjszaky) are more indicative of the relationship between photography, nature and the idea of the picturesque than the written entries.

One could easily predict that the photographs of a man who goes hiking with his camera would be landscapes, nature itself will become a subject. Yet there are far fewer images in Lajos Orbán's collection of images whose primary subject is nature as landscape than one would expect from the landscaping gaze of his cityscapes. Although the undisturbed landscape also appears within the city boundaries (e.g. in pictures of the Botanical Garden of Cluj, where there is no trace of human presence), the sensitivity to the landscape is often mixed with a different kind of curiosity. If landscape pictures are statements about space through the gaze,[44] landscaping gaze is also a positioning of the point of view in relation to space (being in it or outside it). In Lajos Orbán's photographs we can recognize traces of the landscaping gaze, but the photographer's gaze is more concerned with the human narratives and events that were taking place in the landscape. On these walks, which sometimes led to the meadows surrounding

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sees in, projects the idea of the landscape on the scenery she/he is looking at. Lefebvre uses this distinction to explain how (background) spaces that function as narrative spaces in feature films, i.e. as set pieces, can still be perceived as landscapes too. The sensitivity of the beholder's gaze toward landscape is thus not only a matter of composition, but also of cultural knowledge.

[44] Martin Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," 65–66.

the town and the Someş river bank, sometimes to more distant attractions, several photographs were taken, whole series of which only 2–3 photos were about the landscape per se, while the other photos represent people walking, working or playing sports in open air.

The most represented leisure activity captured on images is photography, the landscape as an object of interest is disturbed by a man walking around with his camera. The coexistence of action and contemplation can be interpreted as an autobiographical moment,[45] a reflection on the artist's concerns, but they also evoke the genre of landscape and the topos of contemporary visual culture.[46] The aesthetic pleasure of the landscape is inseparable from the act of observation, these images suggest. Indeed they are compositions that can be read as both landscaping gaze and setting. People walking into the landscape are aware that they are being photographed, sometimes posing. In these images, the human figure is included in the frame, as an internal aperture (Fig. 14), or appears in the central plane of the image, foreshortened in perspective and therefore occupying only a small fragment of the frame.

Lajos Orbán's portrayal of the landscape photographer is very similar to Ödön Éjszaky's drawings from the TTT yearbook, which show the figure of a skier or hiker with mountains and hills in the background. One of the illustrations shows a signpost with the words "TTT members not allowed" in front of a picturesque background. Besides its playfulness and humour, the sign can be read as an indication that to see the landscape proper, a certain distance must be maintained, that the men populating the picture are less in focus, that the real subject of the picture is the landscape revealing itself to the photographer (somewhat similar to the passer-by as *Rückenfigur* in urban spaces). The study of the painterly effect of fog and other elements is not absent in these photographs, and reflective surfaces are a recurring theme: rivers and lakes duplicate the surrounding landscape (Fig. 13). To sum up, based on the themes and visual style, landscaping gaze is dominant in this visual regime, even if these are not fully autonomous landscapes, as they envelop the human figure. The individual images, the photographic series, are structured in such a way that the landscape becomes visible behind and around the people, allowing a kind of double vision.

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[45] Besides being a member of the TTT, Lajos Orbán often gave lectures at the request of the Transylvanian Carpathian Association (EKE) to help hikers take better photographs. EKE also supported amateur photography by setting up a free photo laboratory. Lajos Orbán did not become an EKE member, he only collaborated with the association. A film of his 1931 photography course was made, for an analysis of which see Blos-Jáni, *A családi filmezés*, 92–94. The film can be viewed here*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVDZTM5SMKo*.

[46] Similar visual elements (mountains, forests, skiers) can be found, for example, in the graphics of contemporary posters made to promote Transylvania. See Sümegi György, "Erdélyi plakátok 1940–41," *Székelyföld* 15, no. 2 (2011): 143–147.
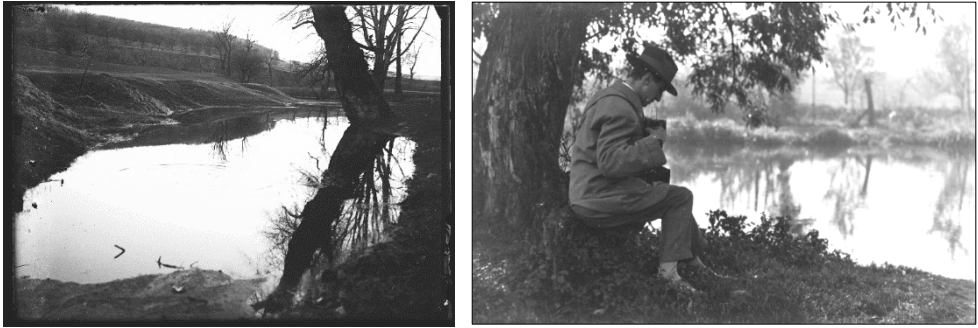
Fig. 13–14. A tree and its reflexion. To the right: a photographer, probably László Schäfer taking similar pictures at a lakeside.

The third group of images is less structured by aesthetic experience or the narrative experience of social events, and more by personal space and identity. The family photographs encapsulate the phenonmenology of a lived and inhabited space and the identity of the people depicted in the photographs. The majority of the photographs were taken in Lajos Orbán's home and garden, and less frequently on the street or in public spaces (e.g. church celebrations, school ceremonies, on the way to the Central Park). The family members in front of the photographer's camera are usually aware of the picture being taken, and their gestures, postures and symmetrical formations of the subjects in the group shots reveal their cooperation. The faces and life situations revealed to the lens are composed to capture real identity, to create the subject,[47] or the sense of connection between the subjects of the image. Therefore, standing side by side or placing a hand on a shoulder becomes as important as the gaze directed towards the camera.

In contrast to the previous group of pictures, here human figures fill most of the frame: they are placed in the centre of the picture or slightly to the left. The thematic diversity of the images and the different occurrences of the subjects are beyond the scope of this study, but the relationship between man and space should be mentioned. In these photographs, people are not only the centre of the composition, but also the space seems to gravitate around them. The house, the garden is no longer interesting for its appearance, for the way it looks, but appears as an inner space, an experienced space. Lefebvre (2006) describes the totality of relations with the environment as a kind of possessive relationship, as a territory, which stands in contrast with the aesthetic experience of the person who contemplates space from afar.

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[47] Nancy, *Portrait.*

In the spontaneous snapshots, the objects and spaces that can be observed in the background show the living spaces of the family, while in the staged images we can witness the photographer's imagination and associations. Throughout the collection, one can observe several topos in the representation of different people, for example, children are mostly photographed in natural settings, among trees, on a haystack, in the snow, in a pond, in the company of animals or inside a room, playing, reading, using different tools (e.g. a photo camera). It is as if the photographer has not only staged the children's place within the home, but has also marked out the place of childhood in his imagination (Fig. 15, 17, 18). In the photos, childhood is depicted as an intermediate state between nature and culture. Young children are often depicted together with older family members or siblings within a picture, as if forming a genealogical branch. Similar figures can also be seen in images of adults and the elderly. These backgrounds seem to be arbitrary, but to a certain extent the bourgeois values and family traditions dictate the possibilities of variation (Fig. 18). In this collection, sitting in an armchair

Fig. 15–16. The living room of the family home located on the Emil Racoviță street. On picture no. 15 Lajos Orbán the elder is depicted with his granddaughter, while no. 16 is a group photo with Lajos Orbán and his wife together with their friends.

or chair, the swing, the window, the pictures on the wall, the table or the desk are recurring habitats, places in which the characters are at home (Fig. 16), they do not feel the need to adjust their pose to render visible the space of the home, as they are the protagonists, they can block out the space. One could say that the representation of family photographs is mostly determined by the family institution, with all its historical or ideological overtones, of which the family home itself is a symbol. In these photographs, Lajos Orbán depicted his family first and foremost, not the home as a landscape. This group of photographs shows anthropologised spaces, inhabited environments.

Fig. 17. László, the son of Lajos Orbán reading a magazine.
Fig. 18. Childplay in the garden. Several shots were taken on the same spot.

Conclusions

On postcards, cities are transformed into media spaces, but in a some respect the process of urbanization is most evident in the new kinds of spectacles, in the media practices of the everyday life. The apparatus of the photographer "immortalizes the gaze of the city dweller", writes Gábor Gyáni.[48]

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[48] Gyáni, "A reprezentatív város," 235.

By way of conclusion, the gaze of Lajos Orbán was influenced by the visual literacy and visual culture accessible in Cluj in the interwar period. He was surrounded by photography related objects and activities at work, he socialized with people who shared his passion for photography in their free time, and he had a routine in taking pictures in his private sphere, his home. The visual regimes described in the article indicate that the perception of space, the structuring of the visual field, could reveal the photographer's biography, his conception of the world and his visual literacy. In Lajos Orbán's photographs, space is not a predetermined structure, but is constantly being recreated according to the photographer's intentions, knowledge and connections. The collection of photographs presents Cluj as a landscape, as a setting and as a territory, and through them an idiosyncratic filter: the gaze of the amateur photographer.

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PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE PRACTICE OF CONTEMPORARY PAINTING.
A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Anca MUREȘAN*

ABSTRACT. Photography in the Practice of Contemporary Painting. A Pedagogical Perspective. Photography is a technological medium that suffers continuous evolution. From its earliest developments to the various types of recent printing, the photographic image has become an avatar of the world. Since images are irreversibly intertwined with human activity, their usage becomes an increasingly frequent practice in the area of traditional creative techniques. This article discusses some examples of this usage in the context of contemporary painting studios in higher education. Photography is accessed by young students and the foray into photographic documentation is now an inevitable tool. The way students use it as an intermediary can be disruptive to their learning process, as long as the role of photography in painting practice is not fully comprehended. There are different ways of integrating photography into the practice of contemporary painting. The present article addresses conceptual aspects, presents several particular situations and launches some perspectives for better understanding these practices. Photography is a tool, not an end, but what happens when these terms juxtapose or are taken for granted? What kind of painting results out of the practical process "contaminated" by photography? However, if technology is properly and timely integrated in the practice of painting, one can no longer talk about a "contamination", but rather about a conscious process able to generate quality painting.

Keywords: painting, photography, hyper-realism, photorealism, contemporary art, art teaching, art pedagogy, art courses, artist, contemporary painters

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* **Anca MUREȘAN PhD** (anca.muresan@uad.ro) is an associate professor at University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca, Romania where she teaches contemporary painting techniques. She is a professional painter and explores different concepts in contemporary art.

1. Historiographical survey

Photography had and still has a fast development once the technical solutions became more and more simple and effective in rendering a projection. The processes of image transposition are based on photosensitive materials, hence the adaptation of the Greek term *photo-graphia* to this medium that will change the course of the history of visual arts. In a very short period of time, the camera would function "as an extension of the eye in capturing the world".[1] 60 years have passed since the first photo was taken on paper until film rolls were available on the market, at which point the multiplication of images entered a straight line towards a total liberalization of access to image. As a double effect, photography will not only spread as a new technology, but it will also open the way to the moving image, i.e. to film.

The immediacy of the photographic experience would profoundly influence many areas where the visual was part of knowledge methodologies. This new way "to see" quickly turns into a tool. Scientific visual documentation, journalistic documentation, recording of immovable sites, mapping, archaeology are some of the fields that have adopted photography as a working tool. The imagined elements designed according to the subject, the personal approaches practiced so far in painting, drawing and engraving are now confronted with the power of realism. Film easily captures what brushes and charcoal cannot: a kind of accuracy that would profoundly change the way images are perceived.

Through the camera, vision was taken out of its physiological circuit and mechanized by an apparatus. In the end, photography manages to dislocate the real and replace it into a different context. It involves a complex and refined process, that gradually succeeded (and culminated today) in dominating image creation. Photography and later digital photography involved a complete reshaping of image typology and graphical needs in terms of their reproduction, becoming a science of the image.

2. Photorealism and the mutation of perception

The clarity and pragmatism of the photographic image entered the territory of painting. Starting from the 50s–60s access to images became more and more available. Glossy magazines were edited, then larger and more complex posters,

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[1] "As an extension of the eye reaching out into the world". See Ansel Adams, *The Camera*, The Ansel Adams Photography Series 1 (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2020), 9.

billboards, adds. At the same time, television and cinema were made on an ever-larger scale, all based on painted scenery. In this context, it was only a matter of time until the emergence of photorealism or hyper-realism, which began towards the end of the 60s in US and speeded quite quickly in Europe. Simultaneously, it was technically doubled by the invention of acrylic or vinyl colours. The appearance of these polymer paints confers a special texture to the painting, a smooth, clear, semi-opaque pellicle, enhanced by the technical advantage of the fast drying of the colours.

1970s American painting, along with the abstractionists and conceptualists, embrace photography as a starting point in creating a painted figurative image. Painters are seduced not so much by mimesis, as by the solid structure of the photographic composition and by the particular light of photography. Its rendering in painting requires a precise technique and a discipline of applying successive colour layers. However, photorealists do not aim at making a perfect copy after a photograph. The mere technical displacement of a subject from one medium to another was not an end in itself. The concept built around photography's passing into the spectrum of painting, corresponds exactly to Ansel Adams's definition for photography as "departures from reality".[2] Hyper-realistic paintings start from photography as a concretely expressed reality, rendered unambiguously and in details. Just as the lens simultaneously captures the planimetry of a subject, so the hyper-painting focuses on a plenary view of an image.

This new type of painting pushes the technical limits of a traditional medium that previously seemed limited in capturing reality. In the old day, the ability to mimetically render an image required a number of special painterly skills: impeccable drawing, a well-controlled colour palette, flawless linear and chromatic perspective practiced long enough to counteract lens aberrations. The texture of these paintings is also specific to a photographic image, with no modelling paste, no reliefs, no obvious brushwork or graphics that betray the technique. Everything is smooth, fluid and focused on form and light. This luminosity typical of photography is what painting borrows from photographic techniques. Through exposure and successive development, brightness is controlled to achieve different tonal intensities in the photograph. The light and the way it disperses into the image, becomes what we call photographic light, that is, a peculiar brightness that seems artificial. Photographic light is distinguished from natural light, either by being flat or by being strongly directed or solarized. All these light effects are brought into the "apparatus" of the painting. Painting has the ability to simulate materiality, and with photorealistic painting, materiality becomes essential to picture perfection.

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[2] "... departures from reality"; Ansel Adams, *The Camera*, 1.

The extraordinary abilities of hyper-realist painters are mesmerizing. The texture of the painting is concrete, the stake being the illusion that what we are looking at is a photograph. The conceptual finality of hyper-realistic painting is not mimesis of the real, but the mimicry of a universe already technically manipulated. Photography was assimilated to painting through a reality that became *hyper-reality*, that is, an augmentation of a palpable reality. Basically, painting increases the sensation of realness present in photography by texturing details that are hard to see with the naked eye or hard to understand. Photorealistic painting renders the subject by making visible what is hardly perceptible but one knows it is there: pores, the thickness of the hairs, the iridescence of the iris, scars, dermatological spots, hematomas, wrinkles, folds, threads, cavities, asymmetries and so on. Chuck Close, Robert Bechtle, Richard Esste, Audrey Flack, Ralph Goings, Richard Phillips, Denis Peterson are just a few of the hyper-realist painters who became well-known in the US in the early 70s (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).
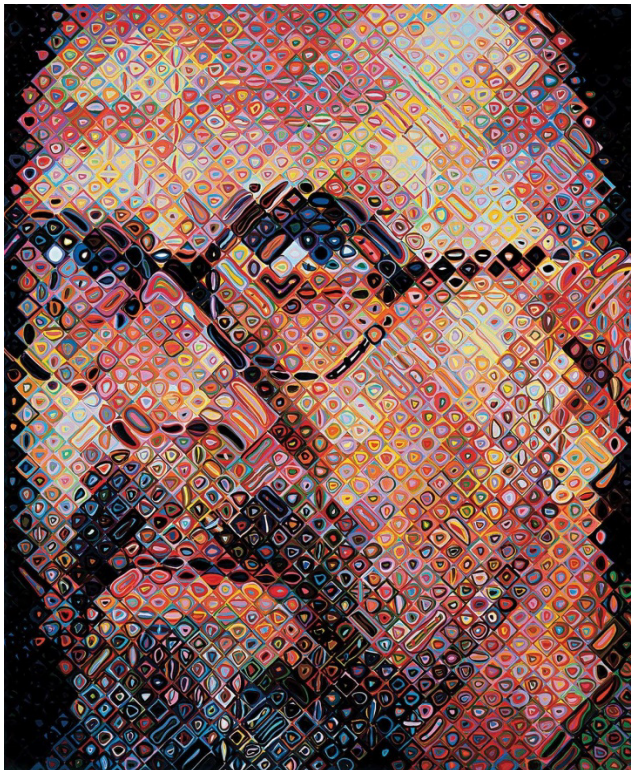

Fig. 1. Chuck Close, *Self-portrait*, 2000 (photo: PRNewsFoto/Corcoran Gallery of Art/ AP Images, Encyclopædia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/ Chuck-Close/images-videos#/media/1/122091/163024)

Fig. 2. Robert Bechtle, *'61 Pontiac* (1968–1969), oil on canvas, 151.8 x 214 cm (photo: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Bechtle#/media/File:Robert_Bechtle,_%E2%80%9961_Pontiac,_1968%E2%80%9369.jpg)

Art theory places the phenomenon of hyper-realistic painting in the *phatic images*[3] zone: images that involuntarily capture the gaze and attention. *The glissando* between the *photo-image* and the *hand-made image* in the painting technique becomes the focus of attention. Images possessing this phatic function have an addictive power. The viewer feels suspended in the field of perception, trying to fully understand what he sees, while simultaneously anticipating the certainty that completes the cognitive process. The fine oscillation between questioning and certainty confers the eye-holding power to an image. In the case of the painting, this confiscation of the eye creates suspense around the identity of the image, followed by anticipation of the certainty that it is in fact a painting. Re-editing the real is basically the main achievement of hyper-realistic art. The image not only has the ability to irresistibly dominate attention, but this attention turns into a need to "visually" touch the painted subject. Hyper-reality works in two ways, once by reproducing reality and then by reconverting it into a tactile, sensory, immersive iconography. These apparently seductive qualities are anchored both in painting and hyper-realistic sculpture, as shown by the works of John de Andrea, Ron Mueck or the installations of Olafur Eliasson that simulates the experience of a real phenomenon (*Mist, Sunrise)*.

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[3]   Barbara Maria Stafford, and Horst Bredekamp, "One step beyond Hyperrealism"*, TATE ETC*, no. 5 (Autumn 2005), https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-5-autumn-2005/one-step-beyond.

The strong sensation of real is given by the valences with which ordinary objects are invested in different contexts. The viewing experience becomes more intense. In both painting and sculpture, objects visibly removed from the everyday environment are engaged in a different special reality, created through accumulations of detailed information, delivered simultaneously and at the same intensity. The perception of reality is not disguised, but simply enhanced.

3. Beyond de real. How come the hyper-realism is still hype?

Young generations are not only *digital natives,* but they actually form their aesthetic education starting mainly from images. LCD screens and HD formats have raised the standard of image accuracy in everything related to the visual industry. Even Pixar or Disney productions changed not so much the type of animation, but the accuracy of textures, materiality, graininess, fineness of shapes and colours, depth of shadows, basically everything that enhances spatiality and three-dimensionality. Cinematic 3D imaging was just one step away. It is beyond any doubt that new generations of artists grow up receiving much more from children's imagery than previous generations did. The same goes for video game graphics. Virtual raids are increasingly specific and amazingly accurate. It is not surprising that the VR world is exponentially developing nowadays, not only on the *gaming side* but also in cinematography, documentaries, interactive animation, immersive installations.

Why this growing need to simulate and reproduce real things as faithfully as possible? For the gaze to be retained by an image as long as possible, information is needed.[4] A realistic image provides much more information than a synthetic one. Besides, the simulacrum is an appealing concept. Not so much by extraordinary mimicry, but by recontextualizing the real. The overlapping of plans arouses the desire to foray into a world that otherwise seems inaccessible. What catalyses attention is the overlapping of two realities: one of what we know about reality but don't necessarily see and one of what we see but didn't necessarily knew it existed. The fact that I am sitting in a room, and, at the same time, I transpose myself to the African savanna through VR, where I can even "touch" a lion's mane, consists in an overlap of reality planes – one in which I physically exist and another to which I have access through visual sensors.

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4 Marta Calbi, Hava Aldouby, Ori Gersht, Nunzio Langiulli, Vittorio Gallese, and Maria Alessandra Umiltà, "Haptic Aesthetics and Bodily Properties of Ori Gersht's Digital Art: A Behavioral and Eye-Tracking Study", *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (November 7, 2019), https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02520/full.

Hyper-realistic painting adheres to the same concept of gaining access to a reality otherwise difficult to enter and understand. The augmentation of a detail makes the real go beyond its conventional limits and produce a revelation. This new version of revealed reality captures and satisfies our senses simultaneously. The reality we just have access to is amazingly accurate and this aspect becomes a stake, a stake aiming to produce surprise and to trigger curiosity to visually and cognitively encompass a new state of the familiar. Once scaled up, this familiar reality goes beyond the everyday life and becomes a new reality, a new version of the subject. Hyper-awareness is what characterizes a photorealistic image. By clarifying hyper-definition, painting adds value to this experience. We may not fully understand why painting has the power to bring a photographic image to "more than" photography, but we can admit that, in addition to the visual stimulus derived from the image, painting confers *surface* to the subject. The painting displays a layer loaded with physical matter, which triggers tactile sensory needs,[5] thus entering the territory of the haptic image.[6]

"The overproduction of too many or too much"[7] as Barbara Stafford calls it, the hyper-real, has as its final effect a laconic reduction of the object to its pellicle that can be touched, but which never needs to be touched to become a real object. Just stimulating and simulating touch is enough. This way, the subject of the painting becomes an object.

In the 1960s and 1970s, photography made it possible for painters to conquer a territory that for a long time was beyond their power of expression. Nowadays, the new media technologies, VR and augmented reality give a new dimension to the desire to appropriate reality. The banality of a common object or place is redefined once it is transposed into a hyper-real context. The premise is reality, and the goal is to overcome it, by mastering it in the field of artistic vision.

In such a framework, photography does not replace painting, but merely gives a subject to it. The practice of faithfully painting after a photograph in the 1960s has been replaced over the last 10 years by image processing on the computer and, more recently, through mobile applications. A mobile application operates on the same trajectory of intervening over the image surface, redefining its subject by enhancing certain details. Basically, one manipulates details and characteristics of the subject in the image by acting on the stylistic structure. Hyper-realism manifests itself on a fine line between mimesis and imaginary. Mimesis is the gear that sets the creative process in motion in the case of photorealistic painting,

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[5] Calbi, Aldouby, Gersht, Langiulli, Gallese, and Umiltà, "Haptic Aesthetics".
[6] Calbi, Aldouby, Gersht, Langiulli, Gallese, and Umiltà, "Haptic Aesthetics".
[7] "The overproduction of too many or too much". See Stafford, and Bredekamp, "One step beyond Hyperrealism".

but as long as the author remains captive to this mechanization in the act of painting, the image becomes flat and empty of meaning. Mimesis remains stuck in the narrative, which drastically limits the painting's value.

4. Photography in the practice of recent painting

In short, history counts already more than 100 years since painters have resorted to photography as a means of creating a painting. One could think of Edgar Degas or Gustav Caillebotte, of the painting of Salvador Dali or Maurice Utrillo. The latter frequently used postcards to paint his frenetic urban landscapes.[8] Painters captured what the experience of the real offered, but the structure of the image and the various rendition details, which memory often alters or eliminates, were present in the photograph as a compositional *fixus*.

As image multiplication became simpler and more accessible, photography entangled more and more with painting. It evolved into a visual element in painting, not by imitation, but through its physical integration into the inner layers of the painting.

For example, the artist Arnulf Rainer intervenes with gestures over the photograph. His art consists of this specific dialogue between gestures and surfaces, between the static frame of the photograph and the expressive, involuntary gesture of the hand. Overlapping these two layers was a way of manipulating the perception of the image. This mergence between photography and painting, in which photography works as a base for the latter will continue and further develop once image multiplication with typographic ink (and later with digital printing) appears. Photography is also a "primer" that offers more. It offers a working framework in which the pictorial gesture has a privileged role of enhancing the image (Fig. 3).

Gottfried Helnwein was an artist assimilated to Viennese expressionism, who explored macabre themes marked by war trauma, in which the figure of a child is often used in contexts not connected to childhood.[9] In his works, children are a symbol for fragility and resistance at the same time. The artist used large size print photos, over which he intervened with layers of acrylic painting, precisely in order to emphasize the visual impact and to accentuate the dramatic effect of children's portraits. For Helnwein, the photo is a constitutive layer, an intrinsic part of the final result, and not just a medium that experimentally substitutes classical painting techniques (Fig. 4).

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[8] Francis Carco, *Utrillo* (Bucureşti: Ed. Meridiane, 1970), 50.
[9] *Gottfried Helnwein* (St. Petersburg: The State Russian Museum, 1997), 345.

Fig. 3. Arnulf Rainer, *Face Farces (Face Coloring),* 1969, colored pencil, oil chalk over photography, 57 x 43 cm (photo: https://www.instagram.com/p/COH6kwsBYRW/)

Fig. 4. Gottfried Helnwein, *Untitled* (Payton 2), 2005, 160 x 106 cm / 62 x 41'', oil and
acrylic on canvas (photo: https://www.instagram.com/p/CtjtnOPAfR_/)

Contemporary art encompasses multiple overlapping and experimental techniques. Any image resulting from a rigorous artistic discourse and a solid plastic approach lays within the terms of contemporary art.[10] The mixture of photography and painting is not a new phenomenon, but it continues to fascinate mature and young contemporary artists alike.

A review of the contemporary painting produced in Cluj-Napoca during the last decade, in the framework of the University of Art, reveals a consistent production of paintings that include, technically or conceptually, photography. Mircea Suciu, an exponent of recent Cluj painting, uses a personal method of transposing the photograph onto the canvas. In his case one could think of a variation of the monotype, but in the end the specific way the photo is integrated on the canvas is less important. What is relevant is the discourse assumed by the author.[11] For Suciu, the photograph receives the plasticity of the painting precisely because that specific painterly gesture (the trace of the brush, the wiping of the finger on the surface of the canvas) brings the image into the privileged circle of the painting. Alone, the photograph attracts through its message framed by contrasts, lines and expression, but within the painting it brings that haptic element, which automatically raises the photograph to the status of a unique object.

Photos used as an obvious iconographic substratum belong to two categories: photos with iconic figures or poses, or simply random borrowings from the online environment, and personal photos from one's own staging. The fact that the photo is not randomly extracted from the vast internet but is processed and created by the author confers a certain note of assumption and originality in this dual mechanism of constituting a painting. In this sense, Juhos Sandor's painting is a good example (Fig. 5). Juhos composes his own images, his own "assembles". Using exclusively personal photographs, the photo undergoes computer processing where the image is calibrated to the desired colour density and texture. This procedure is rational, the stages of editing are clear and predetermined. The resulting image is then transposed into the painting medium. The British artist Justin Mortimer has a similar process, his compositions being dependent on a pre-editable phase in the virtual editing of different photographs (Fig. 6).

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[10] Szu-Yen Lin, "*Art and Interpretation" Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* https://iep.utm.edu/art-and-interpretation.

[11] Mircea Suciu, "Arhivez nişte stări pe care le traversez", interviewed by Silviu Pădurariu, *Dilema Veche*, 880, February 18–24, 2021, https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-zi-in-cultura/arte-vizuale/arhivez-niste-stari-pe-care-le-traversez-632084.html.

Fig. 5. Juhos Sandor, *Glaze and Pom-pom*, oil on canvas 82 x 80.2 cm
(photo: artist's personal gallery)

Fig. 6. Portrait of Justin Mortimer in his studio
(photo: https://www.contemporaryartissue.com/justin-mortimer/)

The scenic composition assembled by the artist, then photographed and "exported" in oil on canvas, it abundantly found in the imagination of Teodora Axente, a painter from Sibiu. Her images abound in contrasts between textures and reflections, so that photography fixes the scenography, but also the precious materiality that constitute an end in itself in Teodora's painting. So, in Mortimer's and Axente's cases the photograph is the element that keeps the composition together and the authors are using it as a means of visual fixation.

Ana Maria Micu is another Romanian painter who uses a lot of photographic and video documentation in her works. Photography is a clear point of reference in her work, but as she approaches the subject through painting, she surpasses the photo and renders the depths and contrasts of the image. She uses photography mostly in order to control the visual simultaneity of the image and refines through painting the subtle contrasts and textures that the lens flattens (Fig. 7; Fig. 8).

Fig. 7. Ana Maria Micu, preparatory photograph (photo: artist's personal gallery)
Fig. 8. Ana Maria Micu, *of uncertainty. ... Children who perceive*, 2019, oil on linen, 100 x 95 cm (photo: artist's personal gallery)

Gerhard Richter is already a classic name in postmodern and contemporary painting. Early in his career, when he was searching for meaning in his painting, he managed to bring a new element to the way figurative painting delivered a message. Even if a certain trans-continental line can be drawn between Richter's searches and what Jack Whitten was doing with the "erasing" gesture – *cancelling*

the painted image, Richter remains the established European author of this manner of painting. Richter used press images, at first black and white, but also personal photographs later on. Whether the photos belonged to him or not has little consequence, as long as the painted image was validated by the act of painting. The artist never built an intimate relationship with the photograph he used, but merely viewed it as a snapshot of someone else's history.[12] Richter "manipulates" these histories by bringing that snapshot into the context of painting, subjecting them to the painter's decisions (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Gerhard Richter, *Hunting Party* (1966), at the Art Institute of Chicago, in 2023, (photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerhard_Richter#/media/ File:Hunting_Party,_1966,_Gerhard_Richter_at_AIC_2023.jpeg)

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[12] Robert Storr, *Interviste sull'arte* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2019), 328.

It is clear that the cinematic eye of the camera has repositioned our way of understanding and operating with the image, which becomes "an enlargement of experience".[13] But when we talk about painting, part of the mental visualization of a composition, is transferred to new technologies. Thinking, premeditation and reflection have a clearer antechamber from the moment the device took over the part of the "making off" a project, and the time frame between premeditation and mental projection is shortened. The artist is now able to directly access a base of images that becomes part of the creative process.

Film once again reshaped the way we relate to composition and its dynamics. The painting, however, implies a fragmented image, a discontinuous continuity, a sequential narrative that works through visual analogy. That's why the photograph, the frame, the snapshot, the screenshot, is much closer to the specific thinking of a painter. The crystal-image that Deleuze was talking about when he theorized about the cinema and image,[14] is also valid for the painter who develops a series of works. The fragment becomes an independent piece. Piece no. 1, track no. 2 and so on – they are all works that reflect a continuous idea and a coherent whole at a conceptual level. However, descriptive image is no longer a unanimous desire in contemporary art. Conceptual art and minimalism have stripped away the surplus one by one. Composition in contemporary art no longer primarily means a reference to reality, painting is no longer required to be an extension of reality.

Even if recent art can encompass any possible artistic direction, there is an ethos of what visually dominates in art at a certain point. Nowadays, this dominant no longer seems to be a composition loaded with human bodies perfectly positioned in perspective, with clear gestures and intentions, described in a conformist palette. The monumental and figurative groups that narrate a scene, that compose a scenography have been taken over in more scenographic artistic media (performing arts, film, video). Contemporary painting is created rather intuitively and is very much based on the profile of its creator and not on an artistic collective or trend. Even if certain visual matrices are easily recognizable in contemporary painting, the materiality of the painting has gained increasing importance, leaving representation values as a secondary issue. In this context, the fragment, the frame, the detail become much more desirable in a personal painting approach, while the instant photo becomes more relevant in the practice of painting. But when one says "relevant", what does one really intent?

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[13] Ansel Adams, *The Negative*. The Ansel Adams Photography Series 2 (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2020), 2.

[14] Gilles Deleuze, *Tratative* (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2005), 49.

5. Pedagogical perspectives on the use of photographs in painting practice

As we have seen, the desire to capture reality on canvas is not something new, but it remains essentially the eternal combustion of representation. The affective attachment towards image is formed in an early stage. When a young student enters the environment of artistic high studies, this already existent attachment is (ideally) educated and professionalized. The craving for creating a painting that would "resemble" or be in perfect synonymy with reality is educated in university through conceptualizing the artistic approach, through deeply understanding the desire to render an image in a certain way. Basically, the selection process and critical spirit come into play. This stage engages analytical thinking, synthesis and abstraction, in order that the artistic concept (if it exists at all) should be later revealed through the works. Overcoming this desideratum of imitation implies that it is first transformed or deconstructed, thus the student reaching a maturation of the gaze and the ability to understand a subject. In a nutshell, this process means discovering one's own gaze and a specific and personal way of synthesizing and rendering visual information. When the only goal is mimesis, the intellectual processes referred to above are non-existent. Precisely this whole process is essential to comprehending the subject of an image and to perceive photography as a means, and not as a purpose.

Photographic art itself requires a good understanding of the visual language and compositional rigors, but especially of the conceptual implications, well-articulated by Cartier Bresson:

> To me photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event, as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression (…). A balance must be established between these two worlds – the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to from a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate. But this takes care only of the content of the picture. For me, content cannot be separated from form. By form, I mean a rigorous organization of the interplay of surfaces, lines and values. It is in this organization alone that our conceptions and emotions become concrete and communicable. In photography, visual organization can stem only from a developed instinct.[15]

Highlighting these aspects, I will further refer to my experience of working in the studio with undergraduate students in various courses dedicating to the exploration of painting. During the last 10 years, the presence of photography

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[15] Ansel Adams, *The Camera,* 110.

in painting studios has increasingly strengthened. Liberalization of information and access to images is now almost unlimited and discretionary used. Not only access to image databases, but also the possibility to create a photographic image at any time and through a multitude of digital methods is obviously an advantage of today's students (Fig. 10; Fig. 11).

Fig. 10. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureșan)
Fig. 11. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureșan)

If before obtaining an image involved material and time consumption, today the process is compressed in a few seconds. This being the case, creating or obtaining an image is no longer perceived as a disruptive moment during creation. Practically, the reality of young artists is constantly doubled by digital images. The photo itself doesn't even have to be physically present, a mobile phone is enough.

However, the problem does not lie in the fact that access to images is non-discriminatory and unfiltered, for a teacher can easily direct a student to look for something specific, to search the correct information. From a pedagogical point of view, the problem arises when the student does not know how to relate

to the selected image. There are thousands of photographs very well focused on a specific subject, but once "translated" into the medium of painting they are disowned, devoid of content. There is a possibility that this situation stems from the fact that students of recent years no longer have a conscious relationship with photography. They are, paradoxically, no longer sensitive to this medium. Their constant exposure to images, either photos or videos, contradictorily brings along a certain desensitization to the artistic valences of photography. First and for-most, photography is present in students' preoccupations as a channel of communication. The photographic image is a vector in communication and its role is reduced to a simple hyphen and not to a "container" with complicated meanings. The purpose of photography in the artistic studio is strictly utilitarian nowadays. I will not dwell upon here onto the debate concerning the differences between artistic photography and anything beyond this definition. Suffice is to say that in painting studios, the use of photography is a reality already integrated into the artistic process nowadays. This is not completely new, nevertheless the novelty stands in the particularity of new technologies and gadget applications (Fig. 12; Fig. 13).
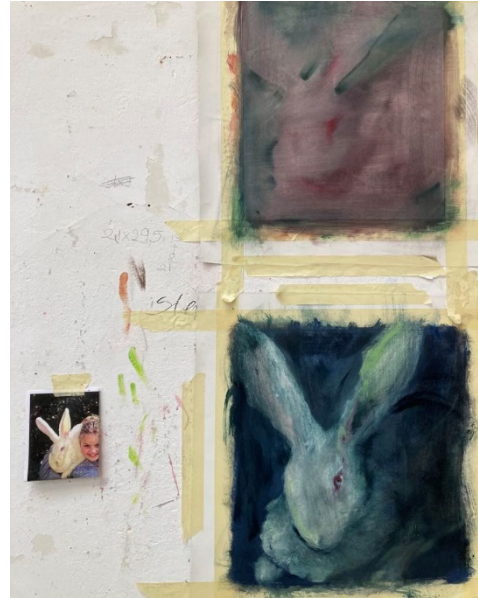

Fig. 12. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureşan)
Fig. 13. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureşan)

6. Conclusions - The photograph/image in the painting studios

In the case of established artists, a photograph (be it personal or borrowed) that works as a starting point for a painting is integrated by the painter into his own artistic endeavour. A photograph might be accidental, but it is never accidental that the artist uses it.

The photographic image printed on the canvas or mounted on a panel confers a certain texture and style to the painting and leads to a specific working method, in which the paint layer complements the photograph underneath. There is also a transferring technique of the photographic image onto a support, most often a specially prepared canvas, while the transfer itself gives new substance, new consistency and texture to the surface of the painting. The transfer itself can be controlled so that the image can be antiquated or incompletely transposed on canvas, but the most important aspect is that it the does not mark the limit of the photo on the fabric. Therefore, it seems to have been printed directly on the fibre of the canvas. The transfer allows even much finer manipulation of the photo in the painting process. The interventions can be very subtle, so fine and well contoured on the photographic image, that the simulation of an oil painting can be complete. In the case of some of the artists already mentioned, this is assumed and integrated at the level of theoretical discourse. One can speak of a mixed technique that gives less importance to the method itself, since the real priority is acquiring an evocative image.

During their university training in painting, students frequently use various techniques of transposing photographs into their works. Photography is constantly used in the studios as a reference for composition, colour and most often for drawing. While before 2010 access to images, as well as the creation of an image were still mediated by a digital camera, with smartphones photography has become extremely accessible. Images multiply daily and the online platforms where they can be downloaded are becoming more and more complex.

Nevertheless, unlimited access to photography has a paradoxical limitation as a consequence. The available visual information is so vast that a simple quest that is not specific enough would lead to a range of images selected by an algorithm based on previous searches, on the most frequent requested ones or on network HITS. Thus, as long as students do not master a clear search track, a certain defined feature of the image, or if they do not diversify the specifications enough, the images they would finally use as the basis for a future composition might have multiple flaws. The most frequent mistake emerges when the resulted image does not reflect the student's personal discourse on the project. Topics such as the copyright debate or how a photo is captured from the internet to be used in an artistic project are not of my concern here. What I want to point out is that, in

spite of the unlimited access to images, the result of collecting photos from the internet is often typologically repetitive or inferior in terms of symbolic and aesthetic content, regardless of the author's intentions (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureşan)

Notwithstanding the infinite possibilities to access digital images, students are encouraged to create their own image base through personal staging, through personal photographic documentation or by using a personal selection of still frames relevant for the subject explored in the painting. A photograph randomly taken from the internet, without being the outcome of a Dadaist exercise at most, will inevitably reduce the quality of the artistic result.

Debates on how photography is used in art courses during the completion of an assignments have been increasingly addressed within the university environment for the last five or six years. Photography has become omnipresent in students' painting studios, either in the form of prints on photographic paper (that is, artistic photography) or merely as documentary images of varied content, having mostly a journalistic and observational character. In the space of the painting studio, photographs function more and more as a visual landmark, which gradually replaced the draft. What previously was recorded rather by drawing notation, small coloured sketches or compositional variations by hand, has now been replaced by photography – an image able to provide much more details on the subject matter. Compared to a sketch, either hand-made or digital, this method may seem excessive, but one needs to acknowledge that preliminary documentation no longer necessarily involves a sketchbook. Detailed visual information is already present in the photograph, where from the young artist extracts as much as he needs, complying or not with that information.

Before this unlimited access to images, the preparatory hand sketch for a subject required a somewhat longer grasping of the theme, line morphology and technique. This inner dialogue still remains valid in contemporary painting, but it is no longer externalized through gesture, as it resumes to merely observing the photographed image and selecting from it what the artist finds relevant. The process of correlating an image with the future painted work is now mediated by photography. For the younger generations, this seems more than natural, given that they frequently use images as *pinned post*. Nowadays, if something needs to be remembered (a figure, a quote, a cover, a recipe, a code), it is usually pinpointed through a photograph. Even more so, an idea that needs to materialize in a painting will firstly be recorded in pixels and only later developed in a different medium. Moreover, if a photograph plays the role of a sketch, it will also bear the changes that a sketch carries in order to better define the iconography of the future painting. Thus, photography becomes an intermediary stage in the creation of an artistic project. While an evolving sketch comprises various subsequent changes to the image, meant to offer clear technical coordinates for the final painting, a photograph can serve as a compositional and chromatic structure to be further processed. On the computer or even on a smart phone, certain image effects or features can be exacerbated or eliminated. Moreover, starting from a photo, a virtual image can be created, which will be later translated into painting techniques. Such an approach is now largely widespread in both mural and easel painting.

However, a major shortcoming encountered these days in painting classes is the students' increasing temptation to use photos on their phones as a substitute for the model or the still life from the course topic. Albeit the human figure is present in the studio, totally available to students' eyes, it often occurs that the observation

exercise does not focus on the model in the vicinity, but on its photograph, taken in the same pose. I find it to be a strange way to do the study, that essentially cancels the intellectual process required for studying a subject and reduces it to merely copying a photograph. In two out of three such cases, the motivation of the students is that various details (folds, joints, facial details or texture details) are not visible to the naked eye. Basically, they resort to photography as a kind of telescopic lens, which is supposed to bring clarity to the forms. Nonetheless, the result of such an approach produces a dislocation of the fragment from the whole, a deformation of the perspective and the total loss of depth. In addition, the entire process of forming perception and plastic articulation is compromised (Fig. 15, Fig. 16).

Fig. 15. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureşan)
Fig. 16. Painting studio during practice courses, Painting Department, University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca (photo: A. Mureşan)

As long as the role of photography in easel painting is clearly defined and assumed as part of the conceptual construct of the painting, photography is justifiably incorporated into the DNA of the creation process. In these parameters, it becomes a means able to facilitate the configuration of the final painted image

or the thematic ensemble. As long as the use of photography in practical courses or in the sphere of individual creation is not a simple mimetic process, the fact that it can replace a hand sketch does not lower the quality of the painting. Yet, mimetism without a reflexive critical process reduces the painting to a meaningless image. Even if certain technical qualities are well preserved, they become irrelevant in the context of the copy which retains a purely formal attachment to the photograph. The simple transition of an image from one medium (photography) to another (painting) is not enough to ensure sufficient aesthetic and conceptual quality to the final painting.

A common mistake consists in the way drawing and perspective are taken from the photograph, often out of proportion and distorted. The "design" of the lens and the optical analyser of the camera work differently compared to the human eye.[16] The human visual organ has a unique perception of reality and three-dimensionality. The apprehension of proportions and of the distances between shapes is often contorted when copying the content of a photo without making the correction specific to human perception. The chromatic characteristics are also different in a photograph, therefore their simple taking over in painting, without changing the palette also leads to a distortion of perspective and to a fading of volumes and depths. If these chromatic effects are not realized consciously in the composition, they will have a disruptive effect to the painting as a whole. Thus, painting needs to go beyond the chromatic and drawing terms of photography, through solid knowledge of studying drawing and colour.

It remains to be seen whether the AI-generated image will be able to overcome this hurdle of sterile mimetism. So far, it has been proven that humans respond with brain activity when faced with a work of art, an endeavour that encloses a human intervention, a processing resulting in a form of visual expression.[17] This does not happen when looking at a nature landscape or at a real, concrete narrative image that is defined by the mere communication of an instance and not by processing it through a critical filter. Precisely this filtering process and what remains after this creative decantation is what makes a work of art, respectively a painting and constitutes the delimitation between an artwork and any other type of image. The recent emergence of GPT chat-generated images depends on the specification of the request (prompt) and on the accessed database. However, the conceptual or morphological manipulation of images undergoes critical reasoning in the case of generated images as well. Studies confirm that

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[16] Ansel Adams, *The Camera*, 110.
[17] Rogala Jacek, Beata Bajno, and Andrzej Wróbel: "A hidden message: Decoding artistic intent", *PsyCh Journal* 9, no. 4 (August 2020): 507–512, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7497000/.

an HD image causes more brain activity than a blurry image[18]. Responsible for such an impact are the characteristics of the image and the degree of perceiving a certain type of artistic manipulation of the image.

"Artwork" produced by AI has only begun its journey in our visual universe and future studies will have to establish how this type of image will be perceived and appreciated. It remains to be seen how and in what way AI images will replace photography in art studios practice as well. Not in the least, the future will tell if AI images have a direct input into painting made in traditional techniques or whether traditional techniques will be still used at all.

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[18] Jacek, Bajno, and Wróbel, "A hidden message".

BOOK REVIEW:

Jérémie Koering, *Les Iconophages. Une histoire de l'ingestion des images*, Arles: Actes Sud, collection *Les Apparences,* 2021, 348 p.
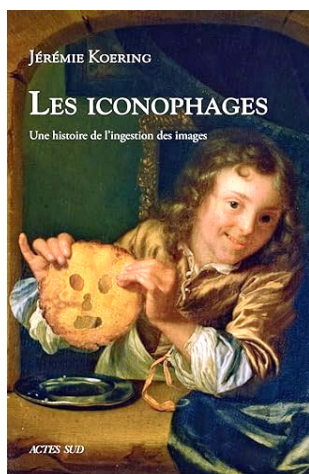
Certain somewhat miscreant Boeotians will be quick to declare anathema: how could we not cast into some circle – of some hell, of some library, somewhere between the iconophiles and the iconodules – the iconophages, so much their relationship with images defies comprehension. Drinking water spilt on a stele, licking a statuette, scraping a fresco to make balms, crushing a holy image to use as a potion, chewing an engraving, or simply swallowing the diluted ashes of ancestors: such are these anomalies of the senses. At best, critics will greet these "oral urges", which oscillate between high piety and low madness, with perplexity.

Rest assured, *Les Iconophages* is not a stylistic exercise, a simple *plaisir du texte* relying on gratuitous allusions or metaphorical speculations about passionate relationships with images – the kind of frivolity that sometimes leads us to (in Romanian) *a sorbi din priviri* or (in French) *dévorer des yeux* our beloved. On the contrary, Jérémie Koering's investigation is of the highest scientific rigour. His book meticulously traces the evolution of a phenomenon that has too long remained bereft of an overarching synthesis. The undertaking is as ambitious in terms of its temporal scope (from ancient Egypt to Dennis Oppenheim) as it is daunting in its abundance of primary sources – more numerous than was previously thought – on this other *raison d'être* of images. This historical putting into perspective is coupled with visual acuity: the iconographic corpus has been meticulously compiled and includes over a hundred illustrations.

Jérémie Koering traces the history of edible images in a synchronic and polyrhythmic fashion, from ancestral practices to contemporary creation. He is concerned with grasping the performative shift from a scopic to a gastric regime, perhaps even the symbiosis of the two. By its very pulse, the *phagia – philia* conjunction seems to point, on the base side, to a "régression dans l'échelle de notre rapport aux choses, du spirituel vers le bas matériel" (p. 13). On the noble side – whether religiously, anthropologically or politically motivated – it suggests an inextinguishable desire to take the visible into oneself, an ontological need manifested in its most tactile forms, a devout attachment to that which, in an image, *fait foi*, to the point of wanting to incorporate it.

The author surveys the many visual pharmacopoeias that are manufactured, manipulated and subverted for curative or protective purposes with a view to an *ingestion constituante*. In this way, various ceremonies ritualise the consumer's entry into a particular community, which the author terms *ingestion instituante*. The book is divided into three parts, each of which allows ample space for the full range of the author's arguments, substantiated by emblematic case studies. The first – "L'image en soi" – examines the materiality of supports and the *raison d'être* of artefacts destined for the mouth: *tortae*, *cialde*, *terra sigillata*, blessed waxes, etc. It explores the catalytic role played by images in Egyptian magic, notched fragments of gems given to drink, the proto-Christian trade in eulogies, the dismemberment of relics into edible form, the tactile relationship with holy images in Byzantine art, *Schluckbildchen* as appetising printed matter, and so on. The second part – "Imaginaire de l'ingestion" – demonstrates that, in addition to apotropaic, prophylactic, or therapeutic virtues, the ingestion of images serves to "connect" the individual to religious communities and sometimes to exclude him from them (trials by ordeal). In this "oral stage", the bonds of the religious community are also cemented through founding hagiographic narratives such as Mary's lactation (Saint Bernard) or Christ's bleeding wound (Saint Catherine). The metaphor of rumination (the Books of John or Ezekiel) as the incorporation of knowledge allows the author to play on two literary registers at once, biblical and artistic, since edification through the mouth finds itself actualised by the pedagogues and moralists of the Renaissance as well as by famous trattatists (Cennini, Vasari, Zuccaro, etc.), each defining in their own way the precept of *imitatio* as the bodily assimilation of profane knowledge. The third part – "L'image en partage" – focuses on the various ceremonies, meals, masses and agapes that ritualise iconophagy. From antiquity (sacrificial cakes) via Christianity (*cialde*, blessed waffles, *Lebkuchen*) and up to the tables of princes, various edible delights are artistically laid out before the eyes of guests. Commensality provided the ideal time and place for forging links between communities, whether religious (Mass of Saint Gregory), familial (heraldic dishes) or political (exuberant food decorations during receptions). These initiatory

parodies of ancient banquets merrily extend into artistic territory, as attested by Vasari's descriptions of the Compagnia del Paiuolo and the Compagnia della Cazzuola.

Jérémie Koering also examines the shadowy side of these images. He explores this dark continent by following the phenomenon of iconophagy down its sceptical slope, from devotional cannibalism (the theophagy abhorred by Protestants), via the critique of pure unreason (Hogarth, *Enthusiasm Delineated*), through to the satirical and political depreciations of the nineteenth century (the gingerbread Louis-Philippe).

Needless to say, the gamble of *Les Iconophages* hinges on striking the right balance between history of images and history of art. Undeniably, these practices – once pious, now heterodox – constitute "paradigms of contact" that seem to challenge the monopoly of sight. On the condition – a lax one, of course – that these images are understood not as inert, fossilised by time, or fetishised in museums, but as living entities, "en acte, agies, dans la bigarrure de leurs usages et des sociétés qui les ont vues naître" (p. 25).

To move between different fields in such an unrestrained yet rigorously documented manner is an unmistakable sign of intellectual ease. One can only imagine what it cost the author to leave the boulevard of High Art, taking instead the treacherous paths of magic, medicine and theology. In each case, Jérémie Koering takes care to clear the terrain by reducing it to its essence (agency, *virtus* of the image, thaumaturgic *potentia*, principle of sympathy, presentification, thingness of the image, *transitus*, etc.). The metabolic knot of "alchemical" relationships is thus made all the tighter. Everything hangs together admirably thanks to the structure of the book, and is conveyed in a poetic style that is a pleasure to read. This is a literary feast that satiates omnivores and omnivoyants alike.

It is relatively easy to discern to which ranks this book aspires. Page after page, Jérémie Koering enters into a kind of *sacra conversazione* with his illustrious predecessors of recent decades: Freedberg, Belting, Gell, Bredekamp, and Descola, to name but a few. Let us venture that his theoretical approach to iconophagy will further fuel an inexhaustible debate that seems to haunt thinkers of the image. *Les Iconophages* is an ambitious and brilliantly successful undertaking; the kind of *livre à thèse* that is indispensable if one wishes to seriously study images. Praised by its peers, critics and journalists, the book was awarded the Prix Pierre-Daix (2022). A translation into English is currently being prepared by the prestigious New York publishing house Zone Books. It is sure to become a classic. Romanian translators, sharpen your pencils!

Translated from French by Sarah Jane Moloney

Dominic-Alain BOARIU
Université de Fribourg, Switzerland
Email: dominic-alain.boariu@unifr.ch

BOOK REVIEW:

Mihaela Michailov, *Corpuri radicale în spectacole contemporane*, București: Editura Vellant, 2021, 232 p.

As a playwright, critic and lecturer (at UNATC "I. L. Caragiale", Bucharest), Mihaela Michailov (b. 1977) knows how to build a piece of research that is both valuable and innovative in the domains she is focusing on, but also accessible to the general public. Representing a new and improved version of her doctoral thesis, the book *Corpuri radicale în spectacole contemporane* (roughly translated to *Radical bodies in contemporary performances*) concentrates on the ways modern theatre, performance art and contemporary dance perceive and "play" with the human body.

The book is divided into three chapters, all similarly structured – a general introduction, between 5 and 9 case studies on representative figures, and a short analysis regarding the theme of corporeality in the vision of Romanian artists. The text is accompanied by black and white images, but even more helpful are the QR codes that, when scanned, lead you to various YouTube videos or web pages.

In the first chapter, titled "Protesting bodies. Directorial theories and practices", the main focus is corporeality in theatre, a field that was first innovated by the Russian actor and theoretician, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940). Meyerhold was interested in the revolutionary role that theatre could take on, using it as a way to educate and emancipate those oppressed by an abusive regime. The Russian actor's ideas represent only the starting point of a long string of actors/theatre directors/theoreticians that will continue to develop the theme of corporeality in their plays – Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Eugenio Barba (b. 1936), Romeo Castellucci (b. 1960) and many more.

When it comes to Romanian theatre, Mihaela Michailov doesn't go as in-depth as in the first part of the chapter but still manages to highlight the more important names and the themes that are explored alongside that of the human body. From pioneers such as Ion Sava (1900-1947), Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011), David Esrig (b. 1935), to Mihai Măniuțiu (b. 1954), Radu Afrim (b. 1968), Eugen Jebeleanu (b. 1989) and not only, the subject of corporeality receives feminist, racial and LGBTQ undertones.

„Bodies in danger. Performance and Body Art" is the second chapter and it concentrates on how different artists chose their own bodies as their main medium of creation. Even more than that, performance art represents "an event that involves everyone, to varying degrees, and depending on different capacities" (p. 89), meaning that its socio-political message has an even stronger impact on the audience. The roots of this branch of art can be found in the avant-garde movements (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism), but its most memorable representatives only started to emerge in the 70s-80s: Marina Abramović (b. 1946), ORLAN (b. 1947), Ana Mendieta (1948-1985).

The communist regime has not been an impediment to the development of performance art in Romania, as we can see in the early works of Ion Grigorescu (b. 1945), Geta Brătescu (1926-2018), or Alexandru Antik (b. 1950). In the '90s, after the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the instauration of the democratic system, performance art became even more popular and represented the main focus point of different art festivals.

Last but not least, the third chapter, "Interrogative bodies. Fluid representations in contemporary dance", is an introduction to the world of "theatre-dance", a world where standing in place can still be considered dancing. Tackling subjects such as lost innocence, fear, fragility or even the "transgression of human nature" (p. 189), contemporary dance performers hardly fail at immersing the audience in their shows. Pina Bausch (1940-2009), Sasha Waltz (b. 1963), and Vera Mantero (b. 1966) are some of the dancers and choreographers that Mihaela Michailov describes in this chapter.

In Romania, contemporary dance only started to take off in the early 2000s, but its fast-paced progress it's nothing short of impressive. According to Michailov, contemporary dance "became a territory of absorption of artistic practices from visual art, politics and philosophy of the body" (p. 191), which gave dancers, now more than ever, the chance to reflect on the hardships of the society we are living in, and therefore to deeply connect with the spectators.

That being said, one of the first questions that this review wants to answer is: does Mihaela Michailov succeed in reaching her primary goal, as it is stated in her foreword? The answer is, without a doubt, yes. The playwright does a great job in creating a "mini dictionary" of key figures and performances from

each domain mentioned, all while managing to highlight the connections between them. Even though she doesn't put as much emphasis on the Romanian cultural space, Michailov's analysis is still pretty thorough, and it doesn't leave the reader with unanswered questions, but maybe just a taste for a little bit more.

Is Michailov's book approachable to the average reader? In the most part, yes. Channelling both her playwright and pedagogical skills, the author gives us a pleasurable reading, where she doesn't shy away from explaining different specialized terms and from going back to various historical moments, all in order for her presentation to be as precise and logical as possible. Nonetheless, *Corpuri radicale în spectacole contemporane* is a book specifically aimed at those interested in the world of corporeality in arts, as Michailov states at the end of her foreword.

Another thing to appreciate about Mihaela Michailov's book is her objectivity when it comes to the artists she presents, whether we are talking about foreign performers or performers that she knows personally. For example, in the subchapter about Rodrigo García (b. 1959), a director whose plays revolve around the concepts of mass consumption and food waste, Michailov doesn't hesitate to question his methods, wondering if he is not "guilty" of the same acts he is criticising (p. 67).

To conclude this review, I have to say that *Corpuri radicale în spectacole contemporane* by Mihaela Michailov is a must-read for those who have a passion for either modern theatre, performance art or contemporary dance, especially if they are active in these fields. Not only is it a well-written book, but it also analyses a world that not many people are familiar with and not many articles are exploring enough, that of corporeality in the vision of artists.

Timea-Andrada TOTH

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: timea.andrada@yahoo.com

BOOK REVIEW:

**Thomas Köhler, Stefanie Heckmann, and
Janina Nentwig (eds.),** *Edvard Munch. Magic
of the North,* **Berlin: Berlinische Galerie,
Hirmer Publishers, 2023, 304 p.**
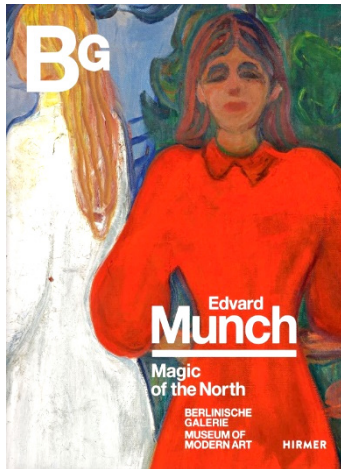
The catalogue of the exhibition *Edvard Munch. Magic of the North* (15.09.2023–22.01.2024), curated by the *Berlinische Galerie. Museum für Moderne Kunst* can be reviewed as a book, as it consists of several research-based texts which could function as its chapters. As such, they analyze various pivotal aspects of Munch's work and highlight the aims and structure of the exhibition. The essays are preceded by a section dedicated to the works chosen to represent Munch's oeuvre in the current exhibition, headed by brief captions, which are also reproduced throughout the display of the works in the gallery, and followed by a biography of the artist, structured around Berlin landmarks, studios, galleries and bars. Both in the exhibition and in the catalogue, Munch's works are presented in thematic clusters, which complement rather than fully reflect the concept and the topics explored in the essays.

The exhibition and the catalogue produced for this occasion aim to examine Edvard Munch's special relationship with Berlin, and to argue that his original style developed in the context and under the influence of this growing and dynamic city, to reconstruct the development of the artist's aesthetic practice, defining his style and emphasizing the originality of his work, and to evaluate the reception of his art in the capital of the Empire, highlighting the impact of Munch's work on both his contemporaries and younger artists.

In this sense, the scene is set in the catalogue by Stefanie Heckmann's text, "Edvard Munch. Magic of the North", which acts as an introduction and provides an overview of the main themes explored by the exhibition. In order to convincingly frame the artist's work, the curators opted to use the two exhibitions, organized during his lifetime, which prominently featured Edvard Munch's paintings as essential landmarks in his career, illustrating his appropriation by Berlin's artistic milieu. The first, organized by the Association of Berlin Artists, which took place between November 5th and 19th 1892 is thoroughly discussed by Sabine Meister's text, "Affair, Scandal, Fiasco? Munch's Debut in Berlin. A Backstage View" and illustrated by the paintings presented in the cluster entitled "The Dream of the North. The Munch Affair". True to its provocative title, Meister's text attempts to reconstruct the effect of the failure of his first exhibition on the later reception of Munch's work. This ill-fated exhibition is rather dramatically and persistently considered a 'scandal' which placed Munch at the centre of the controversy between conservatives and modernists, turning his case, as Meister has convincingly suggested into a battleground for ideologies and cultural politics and, in a sense, marking the beginning of Modernism in Berlin. Conservative standpoints were voiced by the representatives of the Royal Academic University of Fine Arts and by Adolf Rosenberg who wrote a devastating review in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which led to the dismantling of the exhibition soon after its opening, while Munch's supporters included progressive intellectuals, gallerists and collectors who appreciated his work. The second is the retrospective of 1927 at Berlin's National Gallery, discussed by Dieter Scholtz, "Exceeding all Expectation. The Large Munch Retrospective at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1927". This was organized by Ludwig Justi, the director of the Nationalgalerie at the *Kronprinzenpalais*. Considered the largest exhibition of Munch's work, the event seems to have sealed his acceptance by Berlin's art world, thus providing an opportunity to explain his success.

Besides these two pivotal moments, recurrent allusions to exhibitions which included and/or promoted Munch's work, present in several of the essays in this catalogue, signed by Nentwig, Fellchenfeldt and Behrmann, signal the development of processes of institutionalization within Berlin's art world, for instance, the emergence of private and independent galleries that reached well beyond the walls of the Academies of Fine Arts. In fact, Munch's initial lack of success in the capital is persuasively explained by Meister as a consequence of the modesty and lack of luster of the Berlin art world, which revolved around a small number of galleries and was dominated by the Royal Academy of Arts. In Meister's view, in the 1880s, mediocrity reigned with historical, religious and genre paintings dominating the scene. This changed only when a new generation of painters, who had been flocking to Berlin, drawn by its dynamic economic

development, brought new ideas and experimented with new styles. These new artists were showing their work in the new galleries founded by people like Paul Cassirer as suggested by Christina Fellchenfeldt's contribution, "No Simple Relationship: Edvard Munch and the Kunsthandlung Paul Cassirer", which deals with Munch's relationship with the artistic establishment. In the new context, the 'scandal' caused by the events of 1892, i.e. the quick demise of the exhibition, was astutely used by Munch as an 'advertisement' in a carefully-orchestrated act of self-promotion: in response to the rejection, he mounted an itinerant exhibition showing his work to an increasingly larger public, keen to see the paintings that had been so ruthlessly criticized by the Royal Academy. This new strategy leads one to the conclusion, suggested by several articles, although never explicitly stated, that there was a shift in the agency in promoting art and particularly new artistic trends. The intellectual and artistic authority of the Royal Academy was undermined by the artists' groups that had been recently founded, who organized exhibitions independently, in commercial galleries, openly competing with state-supported established gallerists. Thus, small curated group exhibitions, which often included foreign artists, partly replaced the canonical galleries and became a 'free' place where the works of the modern movement could be seen.

The exploration of Munch's connection to Berlin is not limited to biographical details, such as the fact that he had recurrently lived in the city for extended periods of time, while deliberately highlighting the benefits for his career of his Berlin life-style and entourage. One of the main points made by all the texts included in the catalogue is that Munch (1863-1944) evolved as an artist in the environment created by a growing and energetic city and within the comfort of groups of like-minded intellectuals, whom he interacted with socially. According to the authors of the catalogue, these were members of the intellectual bohemia who found inspiration in Friedrich Nietzsche's ideal of achieving freedom from religious, moral and social constraints. Sometimes referred to as the 'Ferkel circle', this group congregated in a bar, *Zum schwartzen Ferkel* (the Black Piglet) which is mentioned without fail in all of the articles, providing yet another example of the impact of 'café society' on intellectual debates during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It also transpires from these texts that, although outwardly bohemian, this group, which included artists (Walter Leistikow), art critics (Julius Meier), writers (Richard Dehmel, Dagny Juel), playwrights, art collectors and gallerists, like Walter Rotheman and Harry Graf Kessler, had the financial and institutional means to help support Munch's career and promote his art. Consequently, the essays in the catalogue lead one to conclude that Berlin was where Munch became a member of a coherent movement, the Berlin Secession, and of prestigious institutions, such as the Association of German Artists and the

Prussian Academy of Arts, learned new techniques like printing, etching, dry point, lithography and woodcut, dabbled in photography and conceived his most original work.

Circumscribing Munch's work to a specific movement and defining his particular style is however extremely difficult and many trends have been mentioned as possible inspiration for his oeuvre. He has been seen as belonging to and distancing himself from Naturalism and Impressionism in their Berlin guise, the Art Nouveau stemming from Paris, Vienna and Brussels, and eventually even from Symbolism, which he had initially embraced wholeheartedly. Munch had been familiar with these trends during his stay in Paris beginning with 1889, where he had studied the works of the avant-garde, including Paul Gauguin, the Nabis, a symbolist group, and Vincent van Gogh. In broad strokes, his affinity with particular artistic trends has been seen as a shift towards the Berlin Secession, slowly transforming him into an avant-garde artist. Things are by no means crystal clear, as one of Munch's supporters in Berlin, who provided opportunities for him to show his work was Paul Cassirer, who, as suggested by Christina Fellchenfeldt's essay, was a staunch supporter of Impressionism. He had opened a gallery at Kantstrasse 12 in 1899 wishing to present to the public a selection of contemporary artists, provide opportunities for foreign artists to show their work and introduce Impressionism to the Berlin art world. However, the founding of his gallery is considered instrumental to the beginnings of the Secession movement.

Despite the suggestions of most authors in the catalogue, who argue that Munch was the child of the Secession, based on the inclusion of his work in the Secession exhibition of 1902 and on the invitation to officially become a member of the Berlin Secession in 1904, it seems that the movement, or rather the individuals who represented it chose Munch as a figurehead. Thus, on the one hand, Munch was turned into a prominent showpiece and stood for the Berlin Secession's engagement with the international avant-garde. On the other, perceived as having a lasting influence on the younger generation of German painters, Munch was also, perhaps more convincingly, considered a forerunner of Expressionism. However, although his influence on the next generation of Expressionists is taken for granted, authors in the catalogue are not able to unearth many contacts between Munch and the Brücke artists. Fortunately, Munch's affinity with Expressionism is more strongly substantiated by the development of his style and specific aesthetic language.

Munch's evolvement towards Expressionism is illustrated by the cluster of images placed under the heading "Breathing and Feeling, Suffering and Loving. The Frieze of Life" and quickly becomes obvious, both thematically and morphologically. Morphologically and stylistically speaking, most of the authors of the essays have commented on the shift from the mimetic depiction of objective

reality towards representations of moods, states of mind and inner experiences, that gave Munch's paintings a 'raw' and 'unfinished' quality, which often elicited criticism from more conservative members of the artistic community. These elemental emotional states are expressed by simply-constructed scenes with contradictory and complex meanings, generally using primary colours and deploying optical impressions.

One of the most interesting contributions to the catalogue and one of the most eye-opening sections of the exhibition is that dedicated to the productive alliance of printing with painting that dominated Munch's work between 1894 and 1908, illustrated by the cluster "Experimental and Virtuosic and by Andreas Schalhorn's essay New Content Creates a New Vessel for Itself: Munch's Printings of the Berlin Years and Their Path to the Kupferstichkabinett" from the catalogue. The latter explores Munch's experiments in the new medium of graphic art, a less-known side of his work, and his interest in photography, although the camera was mostly used by the artist to document his exhibitions. The authors in the catalogue argue that Munch became increasingly interested in graphic work and experimented with various techniques, such as intaglio, etching, dry point, lithography and even woodcut while living in Berlin, which had become an important centre for printing. Munch's prints were often related to his own paintings and, although they were not original works, they were equal in quality and enjoyed widespread reception. They are rather striking, either through their use of colour or through stark and powerful contrasts between black and white. Although a catalogue essay does not allow an in-depth discussion of the compositions themselves, Schalhorn does comment on the differences between the paintings and the graphic art, especially in the rendition of the *Madonna and Jealousy*. In the print of the Madonna (otherwise known as *Loving Woman*, or *Woman Making Love*), unlike in the painting, the symbolist frame is part of the image, while the depiction of an embryo and several sperm make identification more likely, expressing the theme of procreation. Despite the moon-shaped Alice band in the woman's hair, reminiscent of a halo, which again subtly introduces the reference to the sacred, the print retains an explicit erotic content. In the lithograph *Jealousy*, the portrait in the foreground bears an uncanny resemblance with the writer Stanislaw Przybyszewski, while in the background a couple is depicted near a tree, the woman naked and the man clothed, alluding to the Biblical scene of Adam and Eve's transgression. This is different from the painting, where a man and a woman, both fully-clothed are depicted embracing in a doorway. From this perspective one must commend Schalhorn's astuteness in recognising the religious undertones in Munch's work, which are not remarked upon in any of the other essays.

Munch's development towards Expressionism is much better illustrated by the thematic content of his work. In this sense, attention is inevitably drawn to the *Frieze of Life*, often called a series, a group or a cycle, which was composed of several paintings, independent of, but related to one another, and better understood when viewed together. Perhaps best-defined as a visual poem about life, the paintings focus on the themes of love and death, deploying recurrent motifs like *The Kiss*, *Madonna*, *The Scream* and *Death in the Sickroom*, which the artist connected to personal experiences, such as the premature death of his mother and sister and his love affairs that ended tragically. Authors, however, have remarked that these were not simply biographical documents but rather visual expressions of emotional states of mind. The sequence brought the paintings together and turned them into a poem about life and death, portraying the beginning of a love affair, marked by erotic and sexual experiences and often its rather dismal end. Thus, the sequence became a philosophical discussion of modern man and his fate, ridden as he was with anxiety and melancholia. Although the paintings did not constitute a coherent narrative with recurrent protagonists, they traced the path of the lovers in a psychologically powerful way.

All the authors agree that Munch showed this work in various arrangements, in different spaces and in numerous places in Europe: in the foyer of the building at the Secession Exhibition of 1902, in Leipzig and Kristiania (Oslo) in 1904, in Prague in 1905, as a monumental cycle for the Auditorium of the University of Kristiania in 1909 and at the exhibition at the National Gallery in Berlin in 1927. Munch's ultimate dream was to show the *Frieze of Life* in a building constructed specifically for it, and hence in relation to the architecture. This ultimate, and, sadly, never accomplished goal turned the frieze into a perpetual work in progress, perfected over decades. The various series are different from one another in both size and painting style, leading the authors who have written about them to ask what gave Munch the idea to present them as a frieze in the first place. The explanation offered by Janina Nentwig's article in the catalogue, "Explaining Life: Edvard Munch's Frieze of Life at the Berlin Secession in 1902" is that the idea was a response to the need of presenting a dozen paintings in a previously conceived space, where their spatial layout had to be adapted to existing structural elements. This explanation is less than convincing, given the use of this manner of presentation in 1896 at the Parisian gallery of Siegfried Bing, the *Maison de L'Art Nouveau,* which suggests that the arrangement was not dictated by spatial constraints. Moreover, even in Berlin, under the title *Studies for a Series Love*, a version of the sequence was presented in 1893-1894 in two rooms that Munch had rented in a building on Unter den Linden.

Munch's *Frieze of Life* is also prominently showcased in the current exhibition, as several authors would have us believe that this innovative way of expression was a result of the artist's Berlin experience. Although this is not necessarily true, as, according to Nentwig, Munch had already shown a version of the Frieze in Paris in 1896, whilst it was also the subject of fourteen etchings presented under the title *L' Amour.* It can, however, be asserted that Berlin was the place where this manner of presentation was recurrently used, although with certain compositional differences, often adapted to specific places like the children's room decorated by Munch for Max Linde (1904), an art collector from Lübek (known as the *Linde Frieze*) or the Banquet Hall of the *Kammerspiel* in Max Reinhardt's theatre (1906-1907), now known as the *Reinhardt Frieze*, discussed in Pauline Behrmann's essay, "A Norwegian Summer Night. Munch's Frieze for the Kammerspiel of the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin". Although Munch's ideas concerning the frieze had developed before his arrival in Berlin, the city was where he first exhibited them.

The idea that Munch's originality stemmed from his experiences in Berlin is also posited by discussions of his graphic art. However, versions of the lithograph *The Scream* in black and white were published in the Parisian art journal *La Revue Blanche,* while some of the portfolios created by Munch were inspired by Toulouse Lautrec. Moreover, Munch's experiments with coloured lithographs began during his stay in Paris, under the influence of Japanese prints and Paul Gauguin's work.

The final topic addressed by the essays in the catalogue is Munch's reception within a broader social spectrum and the artist's image of himself. Munch's reception in Germany during his lifetime was problematic, as some of the authors of the texts are compelled to admit. For example, Lars Toft-Eriksen's text, "Genius of the North. Making the Image of Munch" painstakingly reconstructs the artist's image as fashioned by his contemporaries, supporters and enemies alike. Two of the sections dedicated to the works themselves "I am absolutely not a portrait painter" and "Triumph and Tragedy. 'Nordic-Germanic' or 'Degenerate'" also attempt to unravel the workings of image-making. Early in his career, Munch was praised for the Northern quality of his art, whereas later, particularly after 1933, he was 'institutionalised' as a 'Nordic', 'Germanic' artist, a label as ideologically charged as it could possibly be, while at the same time discredited as a 'degenerate' artist, whose works were removed from museums and collections and sometimes destroyed. The authors of the texts agree that some of Munch's interests, his taste for brooding landscapes, fantasies about Vikings, Old Nordic literature and contemporary authors like Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg allow for speculation about his affinities with an antimodern, nationalistic utopia of the north. This attitude was enhanced when, from 1933, art in Germany was firmly placed in the service of the state.

Some interest is also bestowed on the image that Munch fashioned for himself, as a misunderstood outsider, withdrawn from society and destined to suffer, in the context of new social projections concerning the role of the artist as a cultural figure, as a prophet and a "seer", a visionary of sorts. In this sense, Munch's painting of *Golgotha* (1900) is mentioned, as the artist depicts himself as the suffering Christ. Toft-Erikson also points out that there was a more pragmatic side to Munch's strategies of self-promotion, creating a public persona instrumental to the reception of his work.

The exhibition, together with the catalogue must be commended for the originality of the concept, sensitive to social and political, not just cultural contexts and committed to decoding the inner workings of institutions promoting art and artists, while validating the aesthetic value of their work. Despite various incongruities, redundancies and occasionally confusing layout, the exhibition fulfilled its aim to present Munch's oeuvre in German context and inextricably linked to his time in Berlin while the catalogue provides the necessary detail to better understand his work.

Maria CRĂCIUN

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: maria.craciun@ubbcluj.ro

BOOK REVIEW:

Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work.*
The Complete Photographs 1903-1917,
Köln: Taschen Bibliotheca Universalis, 2022, 552 p.
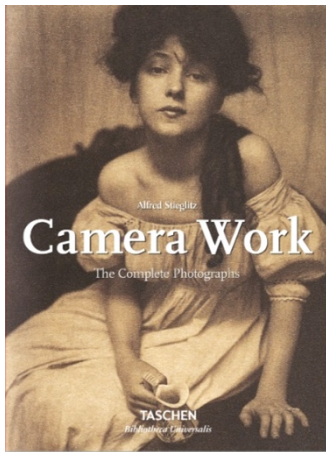
The catalogue is a new edition of the 1997 original, and frames the photographs, now owned by the Royal Photographic Society, Bath, published in *Camera Work* between 1903 and 1917. As such, it highlights the multifaceted work of Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), known first and foremost as a photographer, although he was also a publisher and curator. However, his contribution to the field of photography is not restricted to his own astounding photographs. Around the turn of the twentieth century, he founded the *Photo-Secession,* a progressive movement concerned with exploring the creative side of photography. This was part of Stieglitz's plan to gain recognition for photography as an art form in its own right, propelling it from a peripheral position to center stage. In this context, in 1903, Stieglitz began publishing *Camera Work*, an avant-garde magazine devoted to expressing the ideas of the *Photo-Secession* in both images and words. *Camera Work* is considered the first photo journal whose focus was visual rather than technical and its illustrations were of the highest possible quality. Thus, the first merit of this book is to bring together the amazing photographs from the journal's 50 issues while highlighting Stieglitz's work as a publisher. As a journal, *Camera Work* was also intimately linked to the *Little Galleries of the Photo Secession,* often referred to simply as 291, for the number where they were located on Fifth Avenue, to the point of becoming an exhibition catalogue and a publicity machine for the *Photo-Secession*.

The book also brings new insight into Stieglitz's life and oeuvre, as details of his biography are less-known to a wider public and highlights the development of his work from European Pictorialism to Modernism. Stieglitz's work was initially very European in style, impacted on by pictorial techniques, but eventually promoted clarity and modernism. The change was mostly due to the challenges brought by his return to New York in the 1890s and the more realistic subject-matter available in a growing and increasingly intense city scape. Photographing New York, which became 'the' character, he realized the vast photographic potential of the energy and rapid growth of a city. Finally, at the end of his life, Stieglitz distanced himself from the style of photography that he had initially nurtured and introduced to America. Perhaps surprisingly, after withdrawing from his activities as a gallerist and as a publisher, Stieglitz turned to his own work, photographing Georgia O'Keefe obsessively, enhancing and emphasizing the photographic purity, steeped in naturalism, that had been so strong in his earlier work.

The catalogue, however is ultimately less concerned with Stieglitz's personal development, the abandonment of photogravure, which he had mastered while working for the *Photochrome Engraving Company*, and his support for amateur photography, which he had become familiar with while studying in Europe, especially the work of Secession groups in Austria and Germany, than with the movement he initiated and his work as a publisher.

The *Photo-Secession* began as a group of American photographers who emulated European pictorial ideals but who rapidly developed a photographic language of their own, which eventually became photography's *lingua franca*, moving from pictorial photographic production and its concern for specifically-created subjective moments to what was to be known as 'straight photography', which captured reality with "unqualified objectivity". Stieglitz's movement was informed by photographic portfolios created in Vienna, Paris and London in the 1890s. Generally, the groups who produced these portfolios, for example, the *Linked Ring Brotherhood,* formed as a breakaway group by members of the *Royal Photographic Society,* have separated (seceded) from existing photographic clubs and other associations, such as the *Société Française de Photographie*, to create new and liberating institutions. All such groups wished to free photography from its documentary and technical fetters and to use it as a more impressionistic and flexible tool to realize a valid form of artistic expression. They wished to create a new photographic reality. Their success was ensured by the increasing availability of photography, due largely to technical developments, which, in a way helped place the camera in the hands of amateurs, and by the rapid occurrence of a market for commercial photography.

Stieglitz, no matter how visionary he was, fell into the turn-of-the-century pattern of promoting his ideas with the help of a gallery, making his mark as an exhibition organizer, featuring modern art as well as photography. In March 1902, Stieglitz organized the exhibition at the *National Arts Club* in New York

entitled *American Pictorial Photography*. In 1905, the *Little Galleries of the Photo Secession* opened their doors and became a meeting place for members of the *Photo-Secession* and interested adherents. The scope of the gallery broadened when, in 1907-1909, Stieglitz visited Europe and met Matisse and Rodin while becoming familiar with the work of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Braque. Around this time, especially in 1914-1915, non-photographic exhibitions, showing drawings, paintings and sculpture, gradually became part of the programme of 291, including the controversial introduction of French art. Initially, Stieglitz showed drawings by Rodin and introduced works by Picasso and Braque, Brâncuşi and Gino Severini, while he developed an interest in African art. True to these aesthetic choices, Stieglitz started to exhibit young American painters who had worked in Paris, while he also began to show Georgia O'Keefe's work.

When discussing Stieglitz's work as a publisher, one has to note that *Camera Work* was not his first venture into this field. From 1892 he edited the *American Amateur Photographer* believing that only the true amateur had real artistic freedom. In 1897 the *Camera Club* was formed. Stieglitz was appointed vice president of the club and the editor of the club's new quarterly journal, *Camera Notes*. Commendably, the catalogue highlights the fact that, between 1897 and 1902, *Camera Notes* became the most influential photographic journal, attracting a wide readership, mostly because of the journal's artistic quality. Completely immersed in the new venture, Stieglitz reprinted articles, critical essays and exhibition reviews from European publications and commissioned home-grown artists and critics to write provocative and controversial texts. The journal published works by George Seeley, Gertrude Käsebier, Eduard Steichen and Clarence White. After he resigned from *Camera Notes* in 1902, Stieglitz produced the first issue (1903) of a new journal he had been thinking about for some time. The catalogue thus suggests continuity between the two projects and Stieglitz's significant involvement in the process. *Camera Work* was funded, edited and largely designed by Stieglitz himself, reflecting his choice of writers, photographers and artists. It was not a commercial publication and, on the whole, it turned out to be a profit-losing venture. From its very beginnings, the journal was the voice of the *Photo-Secession*, while after the *Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession* opened, it increasingly became an exhibition catalogue, a symposium for the gallery, and even a sort of public relations exercise, despite Stieglitz's initial reticence.

As Stieglitz always fought for editorial control over content, *Camera Work* primarily presented stunning reproductions of the best available photography. It was, in that respect, the first journal with a visual focus, intent on communication with a wider public. Each issue was dedicated to the work of a single photographer or a school of photographers – usually members of the *Photo-Secession*. Some of the photographers whose work was featured in the journal were Eduard Steichen, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Clarence H. White, Frank Eugene, Heinrich Kühn, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Remarkably, for those times, the journal also

featured women photographers, like Annie W. Brigman, Ema Spencer and Alice Boughton. Under Stieglitz's guidance, who was commissioning articles from more interesting contributors, *Camera Notes* became less domestic and assumed an increasingly cosmopolitan vibe, impacted on by European modernist experiments. One is thus led to conclude that *Camera Work* began as a confluence of Symbolist art, photography, and literature and ended up as a messenger of modernism. The final issue of the journal, dedicated to Paul Strand, was Stieglitz's *vademecum* for the future of photography, ultimately mirroring the autobiography of its creator.

Stieglitz was almost obsessed with the quality of the illustrations which were reproduced either from the photographer's original negatives or from prints. Equal attention was paid to detail in the production of the quarterly, including the cover and the binding. Stieglitz was also concerned with the dissemination of the journal, making sure that the New York Public Library and the Royal Photographic Society had complete, freely-given and sometimes signed sets. In the same vein, he gave his collection of 600 photographs by members of the *Photo-Secession* to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The catalogue must be commended for highlighting Stieglitz's contribution to getting photography accepted as an art form. In the words of Pam Roberts, who signs the introduction to the catalogue, Stieglitz "brought photography from obscurity to center stage". He tried to change the direction of American photography from within the establishment structures but ended up changing it from outside the system. In this sense, the catalogue does not do justice to Stieglitz's effort, obvious in all aspects of his work, to introduce modern European art to the US. Nor does it comment on the fact that these tireless endeavours mostly impacted on New York and, even more narrowly, on the isle of Manhattan. It does however highlight the importance of Stieglitz's work as a publisher, who turned both *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work* into publications with international appeal. Under his guidance, and because of the quality of each issue, *Camera Work* ceased to be a cosy home journal, becoming a state-of-the-art publication, whose relevance to the field is obvious to this day.

Maria CRĂCIUN

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: maria.craciun@ubbcluj.ro

BOOK REVIEW:

Miklós Székely, *Schools and Museums of Modern Design in Transylvania Around 1900*, Budapest: Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, 2023
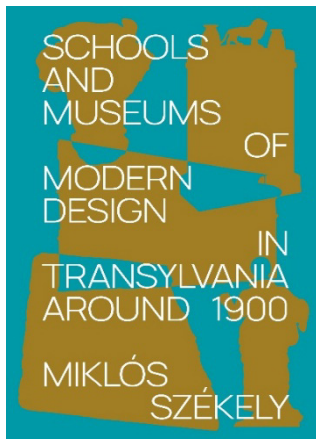
The volume *Schools and museums of modern design in Transylvania around 1900* explores the arts and craft movements in Transylvania after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 until World War I, through the lenses of the industrial development, education, and culture in several towns of the region which came under the jurisdiction of the newly created independent Hungarian administration and which are today a part of Romania. The author Miklós Székely, researcher at the Institute of Art History in Budapest, has pointed out over the years in several published articles different aspects of the presence and transformation (in approach and mentality) of arts and craft movements which emerged in the mid-19th century, in connection to the industrial education in the region discussed. However, this book summarizes the results of ten years of research, and brings a more concrete approach to the analysis of the impact the industrial vocational schools had on the applied art movements in Transylvania. On the other hand, the book also investigates the state involvement in industrial education and the part it played especially during the 1890s, when a reorganization of the institutions was carried out and a national system was implemented.

In the *Introduction,* Miklós Székely outlines first the historical context of the region of Transylvania and presents the concepts used in his research. For example, he discusses the concept of museum of industry, getting the reader familiar with the meaning and the importance of this kind of institution in the context of industrial and applied arts education in Transylvania. Apart from being a key point in the modernization of national industry, the author points out that a museum of industry, through its collecting strategy, is a very reliable source for such research, together with the libraries which were organized at the time. For Miklós Székely, these sources provided a glimpse of the theoretical and practical backdrop for industrial education in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Other concepts discussed by the art historian in the *Introduction* are those of industrial art and industrial education, both bringing useful additional information for a better understanding of the research theme.

When presenting the existing literature on the subject, the author highlights the merits of several previous publications on industrial vocational education in Hungary, books such as *Fifty years in the history of Hungarian industry* by Mór Gelléri and *Industrial Education in Hungary* by József Szterényi. However, one notices the originality of Miklós Székely's approach is different, with a different focus on the issue of vocational education. For instance, while Mór Gelléri analyses the reciprocal developments in industry and arts, Miklós Székely focuses on the impact the industry and the industrial education had on the approach and mentality of arts in the studied period.

As the art historian points out in the *Introduction*, the research does not concentrate so much on towns such as Timişoara, Arad or Oradea, which were more developed in terms of industrialization and also home to industrial vocational schools at that time. The main focus lies instead on towns like Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureş, Zlatna, and Odorheiu Secuiesc, mainly due to the abundance of archival documents and workshop products related to the studied period. One should mention that many of these sources have never before been exploited for the study of the emergence and transformations in the approach of arts and crafts movements in Transylvania.

The first chapters of the book are dedicated to Cluj-Napoca. The art historian presents the founding of the school and the museum of industry using a variety of sources, from newspaper articles, registries, collection of artefacts, exhibition catalogues, construction plans, old photographs and even travel journals. In his endeavour, Miklós Székely manages to sketch the road from merely an idea, born in the second half of the 19th century, to build a school and a museum of industry to their actual realization, delivering an easy understanding of the factors which contributed to the development of such institutions in Cluj-Napoca and

their impact on the arts and craft movements. The analysis centred of the town of Cluj-Napoca through the lenses of social, economic and cultural history in the mentioned period revolves around several key figures of the society which contributed to this achievement. The author mainly relies in his research on investigating the contribution and cooperation of the director of the institution at that time, of other teachers, of the central administration, as well as of the industrialists and entrepreneurs of the town. The art historian also brings into discussion the educational reform, the teaching methodology, and the way in which the courses and practical training were organized within these institutions. Furthermore, the reader gets acquainted with the activity of collectors who had a significant contribution to the spreading of Oriental material culture in Europe and especially in Hungary. Miklós Székely considers that the presence of Oriental objects in the collection of the museum of industry gave the students the opportunity to study them as examples of tools and samples, which rendered more relevant the task of the museum in the industrial educational system.

The next three chapters refer to the evolution of the industrial educational system in the Transylvanian town of Târgu Mureș. The approach is similar to the one in the previous chapters. First of all, the author analyses the importance of the museum of industry for the community, then he focuses on the vocational school and the key figures of the town such as the mayor and the school director at that time. He also analyses the pedagogical approach and the objects made by the students for a better understanding of the impact the industrial vocational schools had on the applied art movements in Transylvania. As the art historian justly pointed out, the training in vocational industrial institutions and the objects made there are the other facets of the history of modern Hungarian architecture and applied arts.

The last chapters are more oriented towards more specific matters. In the case study on Zlatna, Miklós Székely analyses the specific background and the modernization of the town, with its multi-ethnic environment in the final years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century focusing only on the local stone carving and cutting school. He investigates the implication of the authorities in ensuring financial resources for the school, the implication of the teaching staff, the contents of the curriculum and the resulting workshop objects using almost the same types of sources and research methodology as in the previous chapters. The discovery in the year 2014 of a new and unique source, namely a stone and plaster collection, in the attic of the school in Zlatna enriches the research conducted by Miklós Székely and renders a better and more precise image of the impact the industry and the industrial education had on art in the studied period. The curious reader is gratified with a detailed description of the

collection in terms of art morphology and the particular way in which the objects were made. Moreover, the author explores how they contributed to the development of a modern approach towards applied arts, especially in the distinctiveness of Art Nouveau style. He concludes that the plaster casts discovered in Zlatna reflect certain modern art tendencies in Transylvania. Based on this type of sources, Miklós Székely`s research manages to bring into light the importance of discovering new evidence for a better understanding of the development of arts and crafts movements in Transylvania.

The last case study investigated in the book is dedicated to the town of Odorheiu Secuiesc. While he explores the turn-of-the-century industrial modernization in Odorheiu Secuiesc through the history of the industrial school and the way these two aspects collide, the author follows the same research questions and the methodology as in the previous chapters.

Despite the fact that Miklós Székely uses many different sources throughout his book, it is important to mention that, as the art historian himself cautions his readers, the source material for such a documentation do not abound. For instance, a significant part of the documents regarding the schools and the museums of industry after the end of World War I are lost or kept in archives with very restricted access. Due to this aspect, the reader is being presented only with a fragmentary view of what the industrial vocational education really meant for the evolution and the legacy of the applied arts in Transylvania.

At the end of an extremely dense inquiry and in-depth analysis regarding the way in which industrial vocational schools in Transylvania impacted the mindset of the applied art movements, the reader is acquainted with the aftermath of the industrial vocational education in Transylvania. Miklós Székely meticulously points out that the arts and craft movements had a tremendously impact on the way Transylvanian architecture, material culture, and interior design were perceived in the epoch and how they evolved. Throughout the whole book, the argument is well structured, while the careful methodological examination of the available sources is supported by a rich visual material, such as maps, historical photographs, and various objects found during the research. Therefore, the work *Schools and museums of modern design in Transylvania around 1900* is well-suited for anyone who is looking for a glimpse of not only what the applied art movements in Transylvania and its developments and trends meant, but also on the evolution of the industrial education and its connections with other parts of the world.

Overall, the book written by Miklós Székely fully answers to its own main research question, by emphasizing the important impact of the industrial vocational schools and museums in Transylvania on the approach and mindset

of the applied art movements. Using various types of sources, including new discoveries, the book is a much-needed contribution to the field of art history and even further, to the social, political, and economic history of Transylvania and Hungary in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Cristina ZAHA

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: cristina.zaha@stud.ubbcluj.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

The Enfilade of Frames
National History Museum of Transylvania

By inaugurating the medieval lapidarium, the National History Museum of Transylvania ends a several decades-long wait, during which we have been deprived of one of Cluj's most admirable exhibitions. A special space of the museum is being reborn, arranged more than a century ago, when the *mise en scene* with the Renaissance frames enriching the space created by the enfilade rooms was a stroke of genius of the respective era. The rhythm of the doors, gates, and windows adorned with various decorations and inscriptions recreated the varnished world of Renaissance Cluj at a tangible distance. The artistic and visual experience in this lapidarium remained for each visitor unique and memorable in the general context of the museum. The new exhibition maintains the axiality of the old one, yet the thematic grouping of the pieces is much better thought out and presented.

Even though in the case of the museum in Cluj, the architectural elements have had a prominent role, and continue to do so, we cannot help but notice that in museums throughout Europe, the lapidarium represents a marginal, tolerated space. In many cases, the masonry recovered from demolished or restored edifices lays among corridor entrances and sometimes in stuffed courtyards, exposed to the elements. We come across them not only in the context of museums but also within castles and churches all across Europe. They rarely get the privilege of being relocated in special deposits or, at best, being exhibited. Even when they do become part of an exhibition, they take a supporting act in relation to the more traditional museum pieces.

Just as architectural heritage constitutes an important chapter of human creation, its components, even taken out of context, are extremely valuable pieces. These are artistic creations, but also unending historical sources, offering plenty of details regarding the evolution of settlements, the predilection of a community for representative buildings, and the role of the patrons and a series of historical data marked through inscriptions. The Cluj lapidarium reflects, first of all, the graduate economic growth of the town from more timid beginnings in the 14th and 15th centuries towards the prosperous urban development in the following centuries. *Claudiopolis, Transilvaniae civitas primaria* was not just a mere formula of humanistic courtesy but reflected a reality that strikes us in the current exhibition through the numerous Renaissance profiles.

These pieces, whether we encounter them on the roadside or in exhibitions, stand witness to actions of demolition, destruction, or radical modification of historical edifices. Basically, any lapidarium grows from the disappearance of monuments, which is obviously undesirable. The modernizing process that Cluj, like many other cities, has gone through also brought the demolition of many heritage buildings. The recovery and maintenance of decorative fragments started painstakingly in the first half of the 19th century. Up until then, the exception were the Roman inscriptions for which there was a long-standing tradition, dating from the 15th century, of collecting them. In Cluj, many Roman pieces were gathered by the famous antiquary Literati Nemes Sámuel who embedded them in the walls of his house before 1840. Another lapidarium-like edifice was built by the city's architect Lajos Pákei at the end of the same century. The difference between the two collecting efforts of the architectural pieces was due to the latter's preference for medieval and Renaissance architecture, which demonstrates the growing interest in these more recent eras.

Pákei was after all instrumental in saving and collecting medieval and early modern masonry by being the main collector in this field, alongside the archaeologists Henrik Finály and Béla Pósta, the first custodians of the collections of Numismatics and Antiquities of the Transylvanian Museum Society. We should also mention the sculptor Ferenc Kolozsvári Szeszák, the one who installed the majority of the Renaissance pieces in the manner in which we have inherited them to this day. In the decades that followed, the medieval and early modern lapidarium was under the care of several historians and art historians such as Lajos Kelemen, Géza Entz, András Kovács, Nicolae Sabău, and not least Melinda Mihály.

During the 19th century, built heritage became a reference element in the ideology of modern nations. Collections were born that were meant to reflect both the specificity and the grandeur of nations. In the field of architecture, it was impossible to gather all the representative monuments together, therefore casts were made, and gypsum libraries were created. The pieces thus accumulated

also served an educational purpose. Starting from the 20th century such pieces made their way into the collection of Numismatics and Antiquities in Cluj. We are delighted that in the new exhibition of the lapidarium, the last room is dedicated to this genre, which presents us not only with copies of top-notch sculptures, but also bears witness to an exhibition approach that has fallen out of fashion.

Moreover, the lapidarium in Cluj has also contributed to the genesis of the same type of exhibition at the Museum of National History in Bucharest. During the 1970s many pieces representative of Transylvanian Gothic and Renaissance were taken there, thus after the closure of the museum in Cluj there was a consolation in visiting the lapidarium in Bucharest which is undoubtedly the largest one of its kind in the country. Now, through the reopening of the exhibition in Cluj we can observe an interesting parallel between the two museums, as they both built their permanent collection starting from their lapidarium which was open to the public. However, the exhibition in Cluj also has another even more specific task: throughout the 20th century, the need for opening an exhibition dedicated to the history of the city has been repeatedly expressed, yet for various reasons, unfortunately, this desire could not be fulfilled. Through the newly avenged lapidarium, the museum in Cluj has managed to recover some of the important and representative aspects regarding the history of our city and hopefully, the other permanent displays accentuating local history will soon follow suit.

Translated from Romanian by Voica Puşcaşiu

Radu LUPESCU

Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: radulupescu@yahoo.com

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

The Reopening of the Pharmacy Museum
National History Museum of Transylvania

The National History Museum of Transylvania was elated to announce for the 15th of January 2024 the reopening of the Pharmacy Museum, a treasure trove of medical and pharmaceutical history. After undergoing renovations, on the Day of National Culture, the museum received visitors in the new and expanded exhibition.

The Pharmacy Museum, situated in the iconic Hintz House, contains an impressive collection of over 7000 authentic objects. These artefacts range from pharmaceutical vessels, old remedies and medicines, valued books and manuscripts, to vintage medical apparatuses and tell the story of the evolution of pharmacy and medicine in Transylvania. The viewers are invited to explore the evolution of attitudes towards health and disease over the centuries, while the Museum, with its steady mission of research and dissemination, keeps and showcases a rare and highly specialized heritage, and is also a location representative of Cluj-Napoca, a formerly very important medical and pharmaceutical center in Romania. The collection was also recently published during a research project and the 7-volume catalogue is wholly available online (in English).[1]

The history of the location, the Hintz House, is fascinating in itself. The first public pharmacy in Cluj was opened around 1550 in one of the now-demolished buildings surrounding the Saint Michael parish church, this then became a private

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[1] *PHARMATRANS. All Things Apothecary in 16th–20th-century Transylvania. The Pharmacy Collection in Cluj-Napoca* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Mega, 2023), vol. 1-7, available at https://pharmatrans.mnit.ro/catalog/.

enterprise and moved to this current location nearly two centuries later. The Mauksch and then Hintz pharmacies were open here for another 200 years. In 1949 the pharmacy was nationalized and since 1954 the building has hosted the Pharmacy Museum instead. Recently renovated, the edifice is a historical monument that reveals a unique architectural mosaic from Roman ruins to Medieval foundations, and later reconstructions. The internal structure of the pharmacy and the role of each chamber can be partially retraced. Initially, the *officina*, meaning the pharmacy's store, was located in a room decorated with Baroque paintings and was later moved to the hall which opens towards the square. The former *officina* was converted into a study, thus becoming the administrative heart of the business. On the ground floor, the pharmacy had a laboratory and a deposit which was exclusively accessible to the pharmacists and their assistants. The basement was used for the storage of liquids and those substances that were sensitive to changes in temperature, while the attic was dedicated to drying medicinal plants. As for the living quarters, the family of the pharmacy's owner occupied the most prestigious apartment on the first floor which overlooked the square.

The museum provides a variety of methods of exploration including free audio guides (in Romanian and English through a mobile app which is also available outside the museum), informative brochures (available in three languages: Romanian, English, and Hungarian), and the specialized guidance of a curator. There is also a new bilingual website (Romanian and English), a YouTube channel and a Facebook page.

The National History Museum of Transylvania invites all those passionate about history, medicine, and pharmacy to discover this unique cultural space and to enrich themselves with the information the Museum of Pharmacy provides. Shortly this invitation will be extended to demonstrations and interactive workshops where curios folk of all ages under the supervision of curators will be able to prepare perfumes, medicinal soaps, candles, ink, the Love Elixir, and other potions.

Translated from Romanian by Voica Puşcaşiu

Audioguide: https://muzeulfarmaciei.muzeon.app/
Website: https://muzeulfarmaciei.mnit.ro/
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEtKReQcaSTWTyS-T8ztCGQ
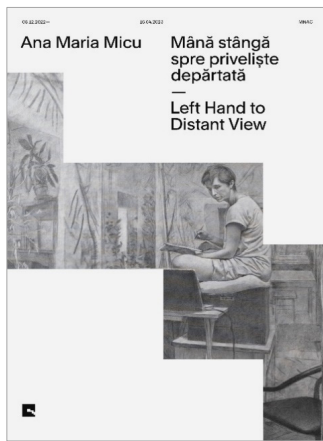Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/colectiefarmacluj/

Ana-Maria GRUIA

National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: ana.gruia@gmail.com

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

MNAC – Exhibition Session, 08.2022–03.2023

I'm glad that I managed to visit the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest after a long time during which I haven't been able to see the simultaneous exhibitions. I'm curious to explore the work of the artists in the line-up so I quickly get into the story. On the ground floor, there was a large photography exhibition under the title *Continuous Flow – Discontinuous Images*: Author Dani Ghercă, curator Sam Steverlynck. What do we see? A few visual obstacles in the ample space of the first hall, i.e. photographs mounted on a few lonely monoliths describing geometric compositions seen from above. The planimetry of the buildings looks like a section in the structure of a voluminous honeycomb. The compositions are monumental but not as imposing as one would expect after the first steps into the exhibition. In this case, the minimalism of the display excessively rarefies the exhibition. Next door, in the marble hall, we have a slightly more mystical room. Artist Dorina Horătău's installation relies on correspondence. The bright diagonals are what support the whole ensemble, they are the key to the room. Slits of light mystify the dry leaves layered inside some vertical labyrinth objects. The penumbra leaves a slight feeling of depth, of something more. We advance to the next level. This exhibition is called *Leviathan* and was inaugurated on 26.05.2022, allowing the visitor to step "Into the bowels of the collection" of MNAC, concept: Călin Dan, curator: Irina Radu and architecture: Raluca Vişinescu & Ioana Marin.

The MNAC archive hosting big names in modern, post-modern and contemporary Romanian art is and is not on display. This exposure separates in some parts the gaze from the object, leaving a feeling of seclusion. Basically, it's

simply unfortunate that we don't have the opportunity to understand our art, past or present, in more standardized visiting conditions, here or anywhere. The need for the archive to be exposed but at the same time protected didn't allow too many display options. One would certainly like to see those sculptures that sit heavy on the shelves, to look at their corners, asperities, shapes. We can only hope that in the future such desires will be fulfilled in a permanent collection.

By contrast, we reach the floor of the Ştefan Câlţia retrospective. A beloved, celebrated artist, well-staged by the exhibition design. The entire scenography of this extensive exhibition manages to transport the viewer somewhere else; I don't know if near the artist's work, but definitely in a special world. The very dynamic background in shape and color is capable, in several route sequences, of distracting you from the works, themselves becoming just bits of laborious scenography. A lot of displays, a lot of architecture, too much *mise-en-place* when what one actually wants to understand about the artist is strictly in his works. And the works are many. No variant of the Câlţia artist is overlooked: painting, drawing, prints, graphics, objects. The work of this artist is loaded with literature and dreamlike, insidious representations. There is no need to double this with a special exhibition design. But let's be clear, on this floor, in this MNAC artistic segment, one sees, observes, understands and explores art. The clear curatorial intentions (curators: Cătălin Davidescu, Alexandra Manole) ultimately succeed in emphasizing an artist's personality.

The success of this series of exhibitions is ensured by the top floor, literally the icing on the cake. Here one enters the sane territory of contemporary art, with the exhibition *Left hand towards distant view* signed by Ana Maria Micu and curated by Simona Vilău, an artist herself. Here the architecture serves the exhibitor, it serves the works, and the whole concept. Ana's works have silent poetry. It is the type of poetry that plants have in their invisible and endless movement. I will not talk about philosophical complexities, nor will I psychoanalyze artistic intentions, I wish I could be competent at that, but I leave this temptation to psychologists passionate about contemporary art. I simply note that I was in this exhibition in front of a profound artist who does not throw herself into the flow of chances but chooses the one that best intertwines with the rhythm of her creation. Ana grows plants. She created a micro garden in her home. In the same living space, two systems are developing, growing side by side in an autonomous but controlled manner, observed in a mind laboratory. Plants with or without fruits, images in colors or colorless grow organically, fully and concretely under the same roof. Two totally different growth systems, yet very close in structure. They develop daily, in silence, in perpetual subtly motion, all living or dying in impossible but functional contexts and all guided by the same hand, that of the artist. It is no coincidence that two worlds grow in the same cabin: the boreal creation of Micu

– the *Lapp* and that of *Crypto* – the chlorophyll, which exists by its sole intention to prosper. Yes, these things can be felt and seen when you step into the exhibition, otherwise quite small but condensed in the strong gesture of the artist. The force of this gesture will throw you unprepared into the other exhibition on the same floor, the Polaroid pieces by Charif Benhelima – *Morning Light*. Curated by Sandra Demetrescu, the exhibition is sensitive, gentle, exhibited silently, as in a herbarium that carries with it different stages of the artist's growth.

So, this series of MNAC exhibitions was worth visiting from bottom to top in order to experience a qualitative crescendo in terms of contemporary art.

Anca MUREŞAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: anca.muresan@uad.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Nice, Summer, Art.
Thu-Van Tran, *We Live in the Flicker*,
MAMAC, Nice, 10.06-01.10.2023
Matisse in the 1930s. Through the Lens of Cahiers d'Art,
Musée Matisse, Nice, 23.06.2023-24.09.2023

When you first arrive on the Côte d'Azur you expect an incredibly beautiful seaside, the sort you see on Instagram, Saint Tropez movies or in old postcards found around the house. You expect sunshine and a sky melting in a sparkling azurite sea. The advertisement is adequate, but the French Riviera is much more than that. You pass from Italy to France without feeling a cultural transfer on the coast, it's as if the two countries have put the best of each other together, in the only place where this was possible: Nice.

A huge, dense city of mountain and sea, with luxuriant hills, and lavish courtyards spilling out onto the stony slope and down into the sea. A sea that is always calm, torrid and... blue. Nice is not only special for this Franco-Italian overlap that permeates the atmosphere, but also for the abundance of art! Maybe it's something one doesn't really anticipate when planning a summer vacation, but the Cote d'Azur's incredible culture and art are overwhelming.

The air, the light, the blue horizon between Cap Jean Ferrat and Antibes attracted the best modern artists. But the secret of this abundance lies not only in this magnetic attraction for creators, but also in a sensible cultural policy of

decentralization, beautifully applied by Andre Malraux as minister for cultural affairs in the '60s. This policy resulted in a French Riviera studded with museums dedicated to art, cultural foundations, and art schools such as the famous Villa Arson.

From my *niçoise* trip of 2023, I will focus on two exhibitions, one contemporary and one modern.

Nice has MAMAC (Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain), namely a huge building, half dedicated to a collection of modern and postmodern art and the other half dedicated to contemporary art by means of temporary exhibitions. I will not detail the permanent collection. Suffice it to mention some admirable pieces by Jean-Christo, plenty of Yves Klein, Kiki de Saint Phale, and an accurate "room" by Daniel Spoerri, just to call out a few names. Additionaly, there were also three temporary exhibitions in the museum at the time of my visit, but I will only refer here to the good one, the very, very good one!

An astonishing exhibition signed by the artist Thu-Van Tran who was also present in the 2017 edition of the Venice Biennale. Her works vary across different mediums from painting to video and object, all placed organically in a huge installation. In fact, the whole exhibition – spread over an entire floor of the museum – was an installation, naturally unfolding in space. Objects rhythmically followed each other with accumulations and concentrations during moments of conceptual tension. I found many textures in this exhibition, bronze, paper, canvas, plaster, plastic, textiles, shadows, light and sound projections. I'm usually skeptical about such syncretism because the multitude of surfaces and the way they absorb or reflect the light/gaze is always difficult to harmonize within the same space. Nevertheless, the artist fully succeeded! Her work is lyrical but not monotonous, it is fragile but well-articulated, it is distant but intimate, and it covers the whole range of visual perception.

In Nice and its scorching summertime, I also visited a Matisse biographical exhibition hosted by the Matisse Museum, one of the many cultural institutions founded by Malraux. A gorgeous villa surrounded by olive trees where Matisse and many other artists and writers spent time creating art. This summer exhibition covered Matisse's journey through America and his experience of encountering civilization overseas. This journey involved many sketches, postcards and a stopover in Tautira on Tahiti Island, at the invitation of the director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau while he was filming the famous *Tabu*.

Matisse was on a creative hiatus at the time, with an indisposition to paint and already feeling canonized in interior subjects and odalisques. Thanks to these transatlantic journeys, the painter returns to painting full of energy and gestural vigor. His seemingly simple, clear, and vivid painting unfolds generously in works brought together in this exhibition from American collections, difficult

to view otherwise. The public could admire portraits, the fabulous and typical collages, illustrations for Joyce's novel Ulysses and Mallarme's poems, plus the wonderful *Le Danse* mural project documented in various work stages, all of which displayed throughout the space of the villa that celebrates 60 years of existence.

The permanent collection includes atypical works by the artist (still lifes and landscapes in a classical, study key) that demonstrate the sinuous path followed by an artist with an effervescent talent, sharpened in a life dedicated to the search for line, form and color. By combining these three elements, he stated directly and without hesitation that life is worth living. And it is a belief that Matisse did not hide, continuing to draw and create cut-outs daily, even when he could not leave his bed, being sick with cancer. An artist and a tremendous painting, which glows in the light of the azure coast.

Anca MUREŞAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: anca.muresan@uad.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

El Greco Exhibition. Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 22.10.2022–19.02.2023

El Greco was a genius!

Being a great artist is not synonymous with being a genius. I've also heard it said about Pollock, for example, that he was a genius, but art is less subjective than one might think when it comes to an evaluation. Pollock is a very good artist, but he is not a genius. Art history is rarely wrong when it places an artist or another in its rightful place. Of course, if it is aware of his/her existence, but that's a different topic...

Why did I start with a reference to Pollock even though I want to talk to you about El Greco? No, not because of the 60 drawings signed by Pollock after compositions of Domenicos Theotokopoulos, but because both of them brought something new to painting, something unseen and thought of until they got their hands on colors. Because both of them sparked controversy and each had admirers and a wary public at the same time.

It's not a small thing to come up with "something else" when the Renaissance is still in full swing across Europe and you rush to Rome with all your hopes and dreams, just 6 years after the death of Michelangelo, as the painter from Candia did. Just like it's not easy to bring something new when art has just thrown out the lessons of Surrealism, DADA, Fauvism, Futurism, and Abstract Art, and make a difference with your oil painting, literally, as Pollock did.

El Greco succeeded; Pollock also, but of the two, only El Greco is a genius. Of course, bridging the ages is easy. We can talk about a Persian miniature at the opening of a Rothko retrospective, it would not be wrong, we have the advantage

of looking back now and being able to see and feel with a different intensity all the art unveiled until now. This is the convenience of the age we live in: like a Leviathan contemporary art swallows anything, anyone in any way. Let the art historians manage to untangle the threads and separate the wheat from the chaff. Until then, I can talk unbothered about El Greco and Pollock in the same text asking myself: why El Greco, today? It might be easier to understand why people would still be queuing up for a Pollock retrospective in 2023, but why would they still be interested in a painter born in 1541 in a place where charters are humming now in the summer?

In the Budapest exhibition dedicated to El Greco, considerable efforts were made to bring together works from all over the world in the attempt to offer a cross-section of the work of this gifted, brilliant artist. Retrospectives of this type should not be missed! Why? Because maybe one will get to the Prado once in a lifetime but is less likely that one would go specifically for just one work to the Bowes collection, or the Museo Cau Ferrat (both present with works in the Budapest exhibition), no matter how much time one has. That is precisely why such exhibitions that bring together works from small collections, in addition to famous pieces, are so important. Even in Europe, you probably won't fly from Porto to see El Greco's *Engagement of the Virgin* at MNAR-Bucharest, unless your PhD depends on it. Incidentally, this piece was not present in Budapest, but reference works were exhibited such as the *Laocoon* from Washington, *St. Peter* from El Escorial, the *Immaculate Conception* from Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid together with the *Holy Family* from Prado or works from the Santa Cruz Museum in Toledo.

The viewing route for more than 50 works in the exhibition was not the most suitable, but who cares about the curator and his honorable intentions, when you have in front of you the penitent Magdalena, Saint Francis in ecstasy, Saint Peter in prayer, Sant'Ildefonso or the magnificent St. Jacob the Great Pilgrim. Had they been put up *a la* Baselitz, it really wouldn't have mattered! A painting that overwhelms you once you open your eyes wide and take a good look, manages to detach you, atom by atom, from where you are physically and plunges you into the mind of this genius painter.

The biography of Domenicos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614) is not generous. Even the name is a puzzle. Born in Crete under the Venetian Republic, trained in icon art, familiar with Titian's circle and determined to make a name for himself in Rome, the nickname is the only thing he achieves in Italy: Greco. That's also what the Spanish call him, adding only the article. In Venice, although he made a good impression, he found no work among the highly active Venetian painters, and in Rome, the spirit of Raphael and Michelangelo was still too strong. Toledo, on the other hand, a cultural and religious benchmark at that time, seemed ready to

receive this stranger. He hoped to get into the good graces of King Philip II, but he could not, and he never convinced the king that he was good enough to paint the grand Monastery of El Escorial. However, he enjoyed the appreciation of the guild, clergy, and intellectuals of the time (Antonio de Covarrubias, Fray Hortensio Felix Paravicino are just a few whom he portrays). El Greco was a truly modern painter, ahead of his time even concerning the amazing resourceful self-management we now learn so much about from TEDx speakers! El Greco did not have an Insta account to 'share' his work, but he hired engravers to make reproductions of his works, two of which were present in Budapest.

El Greco unwittingly achieved in the middle of the 16th century what contemporary artists want now: the appreciation of the guild, the intellectuals, the gallerists, and less, if not at all, the appreciation of the political authorities. However, the appreciation of connoisseurs did not guarantee the Cretan painter an immediate spot in history. His unanimous recognition came much later. The Spaniards seemed to believe more in Goya than in Domingo. The fact that he wasn't Spanish was also a problem at one point. Even if El Greco set the tone for Iberian painting, he did not easily find his place in the artistic trends. Not to mention that he was formed as an icon painter. Today it would be almost unimaginable for an icon painter to become a spearhead in an artistic movement! And this is not because of technical deficiencies or vocational differences, but because of the generalized refraction towards contemporary art of this particular guild. The icon artist Domenicos understood and wanted to understand the art of its time. He did not condescendingly condemn the decadent West with all its art, but learned everything that was new while also innovating.

Precisely that was his genius! He compared himself to the great painters of his time and succeeded in equaling them. When one looks at El Greco's painting, one sees the robustness of the reds and blues that Michelangelo executed in fresco, one feels the compositional openings of Raphael, one notices Tintoretto's glazes, and the vibrancy of a mature Titian. The viwer sees that light that covers the icons like a halo and the little flashes of light, also distinctive for icons, rising up in El Greco's painting, making it something that the world has not seen anywhere else and will probably not see again. El Greco vibrated the impasto as the Impressionists would centuries later. Every fiber in the canvas moves, shines, and breathes. It is no wonder that this fresh way of painting could appear rushed, inaccurate, and inferior to the eyes accustomed to the monumentality of the Italian masters. But El Greco was a genius! His compositions have a fluid but stable rhythm, nothing pulls you back, nothing drives you away. Everywhere you look you discover painting. El Greco's "rushed" way of painting was nothing but the force of something that is alive, present. If we look at the penitent Magdalena's hand from the Hungarian collection, we see the tremolo of the brush, as if too

small for the anatomy of a saintly soft hand. No one before him has ever painted a hand like that! No one dared to break the anatomical limits because the playful brushwork did not fit within the all-too-stiff edges of the epidermis.

I learned in art school that a human head is about 7 times the height of the body, only in El Greco it is more than 9 times. Only he elongates the forms and stretches the ligaments until the saints are inhumanly detached from the posture of a biological figure. There are also theories that these elongations are not intended but are the consequence of an ophthalmological deficiency. I fail to see how anyone could think that astigmatism is enough for an artist to conceive this anatomical solution. El Greco's painting is not an accident, it is not insecurity, it is not disability. His painting is a masterpiece accurately inappropriate to his time.

It is likely that the king and his courtiers did not appreciate the incandescent light too much. The cold lights on the drapes are sharp. The folds do not envelop the form in simultaneous contrasts, instead, he builds it up with a succession of acid tones that make and break the forms in an allegro rhythm. Perhaps this rapidity in creating form was not at the pace of his contemporaries. El Greco's painting does not have the patience to explain alphabetically the experiences of Jesus in the *Spogliamento* or *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*. Everything is there at once! Form, color, light, and expression all rush across the surface of the canvas at once, and if you don't have your eyes and heart open, you're missing out on all this world that pours itself fearlessly beyond the canvas.

El Greco was virtually a Greek immigrant who did Venetian painting in Spain – everything seemed excessive in this situation. Too vibrant, too fractured, too white, too long, too ecstatic, too intense. Yes, that's right, El Greco's painting is intense, it's no wonder that the world needed about 300 years to get used to its incandescence. His public was not yet born during his lifetime. Scholars of the time sensed the value of their friend's art but did not know exactly how to place it among the other masterpieces of the era.

One looks at El Greco's painting and feels instantly freed from any iconographic rigor, or any artistic trend. El Greco was free and the way the painting is placed on his canvases does not fit comfortably into any technical definition and any stylistic periodization. I have read in the margins of some art history volumes that El Greco was a Mannerist. But why would he have used the cumbersome scheme of Mannerism? Again, you look up at his canvases and say to yourself "Who cares?" Even if he tried to paint in the manner, any manner, he could only paint as he saw the lights, contrasts, and forms. Before the vibrating brushes of the Greek, nothing stands, no sterile rigor, no manner, no technique of his time.

It took Picasso – a Spaniard who made art in France, and proud of the Spanish paintings made by a Greek – for the world to revisit El Greco. But this theme of the winning nationalities is a useless discussion for high art does not

and has never been concerned about it. Domenicos Theotokopoulos known as El Greco was a fascinating immigrant who opens the great book of Spanish painting. His creative power swallowed up a good part of what came after him in painting. No one ever painted like him and anyone who would try to paint like El Greco would be instantly ignored. If you're living in Cluj and haven't taken the highway to the Art Museum in Budapest, then take the Olt Valley route to Bucharest to see at least two of the works signed by El Greco at the National Museum of Art of Romania. It is not a small thing to have such a painting in the national collection and to ask ourselves, how does this painter make us, even now, look at his painting without gasping?

Anca MUREŞAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: anca.muresan@uad.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Timişoara 2023 – Spring Vibes, 06.04.2023

Different Degrees of Freedom, Kunsthalle Bega, 17.03–13.08.2023, curator Diana Marincu, Artists: Andreea Albani (RO), Ştefania Becheanu (FR/RO), Andrei Bucovanu (RO), Mircea Cantor (FR/RO), Ştefan Curelici (RO), Judith Fegerl (AT), Adrian Ganea (RO), Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien (FR), Sebastian Moldovan (RO), Ciprian Mureşan (RO), Cristian Rusu (RO), Sinta Werner (DE), Anna Zvyagintseva (UA).

Chronic Desire, section Comenduirea Garnizoanei, 17.03–13.08.2023, curators Cosmina Goagea, Corina Oprea, Brînduşa Tudor, artists: Ana Adam, Leonor Antunes, Tarek Atoui, Matei Bejenaru, Anca Benera & Arnold Estefan, Irina Botea Bucan, Pavel Brăila, Anca Bucur, Dana Catona, Lia Dostlieva şi Andrii Dostliev, Saskia Holmkvist, Shilpa Gupta, Joan Jonas, Hiwa K, Zhanna Kadyrova, Ana Kun & Noemi Hügel, Susanna Jablonski & Santiago Mostyn, Adriana Lucaciu, Silvia Moldovan, Harun Morrison, Dan Perjovschi, Agnieszka Polska, Renée Renard, Marinella Senatore, Alexa Szekeres, Slavs & Tatars, Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor, Rosa Whiteley, RomaMoMA (Ionela Mihaela Cîmpeanu & Sead Kazanxhiu).

Victor Brauner: Inventions and Magic, National Museum of Art Timişoara, 17.03–28.05.2023, curator Camile Morando.

Paul Neagu. O retrospectivă, National Museum of Art Timişoara, 16.12.2022–15.04.2023, curators Friedemann Malsch, Magda Radu, Georg Schöllhammer; Co-curator MNArT: Andreea Foanene, Display: Attila Kim Architects, display concept: Johannes Porsch.

The year of grace 2023 meant for Timişoara what Cluj hoped for itself, had it won the title of European Capital of Culture. Long story short, a pandemic later, in April 2023 two important artists could be seen in the National Art Museum of Timişoara: Paul Neagu and Victor Brauner. Two long-awaited, much-hyped

exhibitions, one even than the other, I'll let the reader guess which one. Before I got to the museum, I briefly checked the Kunsthalle Bega where I found an exhibition with a conceptual, interactive design, arranged from large objects to small ones, an art concept store scientifically "dotted" in places of architectural tension. Paintings, installations, textiles, and exotic names were gathered in the exhibition *Different Degrees of Freedom*, by curator Diana Marincu. Well-known names were present: Cantor, Cristian Rusu, Ciprian Mureşan. The exhibition is a glissando from creating an experience to the introspection *in situ* through the works. Then I went to see something that was supposed to be a grandiose exhibition at Comenduire, as part of the central exhibition *Chronic Desire*. This is a difficult space. A burdensome, decrepit space that needs to be converted with a lot of effort into a suitable location for contemporary art. It was in vogue when ex-industrial spaces became incubators for recent art, but to bet on it, in the context of a European Capital of Culture in 2023, is similar to wearing slouchy socks at Opera House. It's simply a poor and outdated type of display, it doesn't help anyone, much less the works which are lost between the cesspools and the musty air that surrounds the environmental installations. I will not comment on the bad idea of avoiding feminine or masculine pronouns from the labels because: "the Romanian language is predominantly masculine nominative and therefore oppressive", but I will say bluntly that the only work for which the entire experience was worth enduring belonged to the Ukrainian artist Zhanna Kadyrova, namely the installation *Palianytsia*.

On the ground floor of the Comenduire, there was a cumulative exhibition of the creation of the late artist/critic/curator known under the pseudonym Mircea Nicolae (1980-2020). A conceptual artist, he discreetly entered the world of art through the pores of art theory and left this world just as smoothly. We will never know to what conceptual dimensions he would have progressed, but we can understand the framework of his thinking as an artist. The exhibition at Comenduire develops from the work *Romanian Kiosk Company*, a capsule of symbols and references that constitute a segment for architecture, labor, and art.

However, returning to the reference exhibitions held in the first part of the exceptional year 2023, I visited to the National Art Museum of Timişoara. Paul Neagu – an impressive artist, an artist with vision, with method, with a mental and artistic plan, all anchored in perfect creative skills. The first time I encountered his works was in 2005 at MNAC, in an exhibition signed by Mircea Oroveanu. At that time, curatorship was not completely mastered as the works were exhibited on the floor or on stands, slightly cramped and without an implicit red thread. In spite of the obvious progress in the field of exhibition design meanwhile, unfortunately Neagu was better represented in 2005 than in the exhibition of 2023, which benefited from serious funding. It is difficult to explain

why Paul Neagu was exhibited in several constricting rooms within the palace. Such a choice left the impression that whoever had on their hands an impressive amount of this artist's work did not really know what to do with them. Somehow, they succumbed to the pressure of the moment. Too bad! It could have been Paul Neagu's moment.

He was an enormous artist, yet not perceived as a star of the art world, as his museum colleague Victor Brauner. This is rather unfair, given that Neagu is much more complex than Brauner. Perhaps I am forcing a parallel that a fair critic would not accept. However, it must be said that Paul Neagu did not stand on the crest of an artistic current conceived by a famous essayist, but created his own current, his own system of creation and artistic concepts. And he did it in such a serious and meaningful way, that Anish Kapoor and Anthony Gormley acknowledged him as their mentor. It's not a small thing, but it still didn't motivate the curatorial team from Timişoara to rise up to the level of this heritage. Works exhibited at different heights, without a specific explanation, large, bulky objects crammed between the walls, podiums on which one difficulty turned around and which abound with objects of different sizes and types that need to be seen in detail. Of course, Neagu exhibited relatively large objects in small spaces with that kind of simultaneous presentation in mind, but this does not work in a retrospective show. Here, the exhibition was mounted for connoisseurs, but organized by non-connoisseurs. Setting objects on walls, supported by visible nails does not seem like something made on purpose according to some requirements of the artist. Regardless, as long as one was familiar with Neagu's personality and the period in which he created, it was still possible to enjoy the opportunity to see so much of his creation and to overlook the shortcomings of the exhibition.

However, this availability disappeared irretrievably when, from between Neagu's dense objects, I ended up inexplicably surrounded by Baba's paintings in an oppressive room, with a sordid pink and an unsuitable lighting system for oil painting. Unfortunately, this forced proximity between two different artists working in almost opposite techniques and paradigms did not enhance the understanding of either of them. The "finish line" of the Paul Neagu exhibition was under no circumstances supposed to be shipwrecked in the Baba hall.

Finally, I finished viewing the Paul Neagu halls and headed upstairs to immerse myself in the surreal world. The sign of the revival of interest in this current was set by the Venice Biennale: *The Milk of Dreams*. Victor Brauner was widely presented in Timişoara and the display followed all the exhibition clichés of the moment: diffuse light and spotlights just a little above the object, grey walls, paneled walls... The expensive effort, however, missed the perfect scenography. Halos of light form concentric shapes around the works. Basically, that far too well-defined luminous halo entered into dialogue with the shapes gathered in the

compositions of the works. Instead of revealing, the light unnecessarily competed with the compositions. In other passages of the exhibition, some veneer walls reminded me of the texture and shapes of modernist furniture. I still don't understand why the organizers resorted to the installation of these walls, which in some places embedded works. Maybe they relied on a certain type of contrast, maybe the wall alone seemed too rough. Hard to tell, but the result left the feeling of props, of scenography in excess within a space that was not generous in size. The exhibited works, however, marked the entire course of the artist's activity. This would not have been possible without the collaboration with Center Pompidou. Such an effort is honorable, and the exhibition remains memorable! A collaboration in the field of painting is rare in Romania and must be all the more appreciated. Thus, Victor Brauner received a well-deserved introduction and insertion into the consciousness of older generations. Yes, I dare to say that young people are acquainted with surrealist art more than the 60+ generation. Where, when and how could our grandparents have heard about the feats of surrealism? Even though Tristan Tzara was better known, Victor Brauner might have been a bit far from the trending artists before `89.

In conclusion, despite particular concerns, these two exhibitions at the National Art Museum of Timişoara deserved all the attention! It's a pity that they lasted so little. It would be nice to always have at hand such a consistent collection of art created by our compatriots, at an international level. This could seriously matter for young generations in the long run!
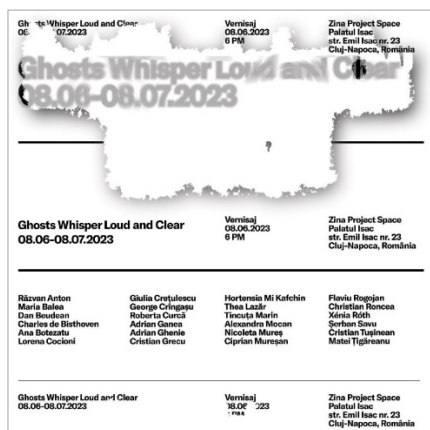
Anca MUREŞAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: anca.muresan@uad.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Ten Contemporary Art Exhibitions
from Cluj-Napoca, 03–07.2023

Fabrica de Pensule was a welcome exercise for the artistic community in Cluj. An ambitious action modelled on the art hub in Leipzig but keeping in mind the proportions. Unsurprisingly, the exercise ended, as most such agglomerations do, after an average of 5 years. Hopes were rekindled when another artistic "hub" appeared shortly after the last studios in the "factory" disappeared. Centrul de Interes, however, destabilized itself in an even shorter time. Even though there is a certain constancy of artistic events in this space, it is no longer what Fabrica de Pensule used to be and what we all hoped Centrul de Interes would revival. It no longer has a vibe, as Gen Z would say. Fabrica de Pensule and, initially, Centrul de Interes, were attractive not just because they were exhibition spaces, but because they emanated the effervescence of creative studios. Artists' studios were the lifeblood of this ecosystem of contemporary art production and exhibition. In fact, those are the only things that artists essentialy need: a place to create and a place to exhibit! Otherwise, other factors join the platform: gallerists and curators who push things further. Well, the two models of the artistic ecosystem in Cluj did not come out of the 5-year average statistics. However, the community of contemporary artists from Cluj did not evaporate with the dispersion of these two coagulation points. The year 2020 triggered a resettlement on the artistic map of Cluj, of creative studios and exhibition spaces.

At the moment we have art studios in the Unirea complex, a former industrial area which, in anticipation of real estate developers, hosts several studios of contemporary artists under 30 in one building. For several years 'open studio' events have been organized regularly here, and it is practically the only place where open studio visits are still organized. The place is not exactly friendly until you discover it, but those who have set up their studios there are very good artists: Oana Năstăsache, Camelia Filipov, Norbert Filep, Roxana Ajder or Leo Silaghi have opened their art studios to the public. The creative conditions in Unirea are not great, but we have already got used to the idea that the best works are not conditioned by facilities.

Although Cluj's urban living is becoming increasingly inaccessible and expensive to independent artists, they have shown surprising resilience by continuing to produce art at a very good level!

Without any intention of synchronizing, on the same evening I visited the Unirea Open Studios, I also discovered a new space: the Altoi Studio, housed in a structure of the former Clujana factory that is now Mushuroi. Here, the painter Cantemir Hauși exhibited several large works in private. Nothing new so far, I was familiar with Cantemir's pictorial options, the element of surprise was the folklore insertion through the voice of his sister Maria Cassandra Hauși who sang for us. 30 minutes... too little for the *connoisseurs*, too much for the impassive and pretty domineering in relation to the exhibited paintings. A lot can certainly further happen in 1 Mai Square for contemporary art, let's be happy about it!

Also, as a centrifugal effect, I happily discovered the return to the stage of the Sabot Gallery with the funny-art-gimmicks artist from Cluj – Stefano Galigaro. For those who know how Stefano's art should be consumed, it's a pleasure to discover his computational language-based art. He identifies the patterns of pop culture we're immersed in and cleverly manages to turn a pop cliché into a mental hook.

Another side-effect of the decentralization of the contemporary art "block" is the Camera Gallery. Irina Dumitrașcu, who supports the exhibition program both financially and conceptually, opened a suitable space on Einstein Street. A perfect gallery for contemporary photography. Its public inauguration coincided with a cyanotic photo installation on textile, which was mimetically inserted beyond the small, checkered window. Exhibitors: Allkimik Photographic Association under the title *Share, Tag or Dye*, which we did.

Quadro Gallery leaves behind the space we all liked on Samuil Micu Street and "rebrands" itself on Napoca Street with two sections: the classic one, already known, and the Aluvial space (white cube type) with a show signed by the sculptor (I dare to attribute an artistic identity for him) Ciprian Mureșan. The works fit well in the space, and the concept, neatly expressed, comes with a video and a twist:

the white torsos are actually *camerae obscurae*, pin-holes, and they photograph the visitors through this rudimentary method. Viewers watched and recorded on a photo film are sequentially exposed in the gallery. Obviously, it's good that one takes "the maiden voyage" alongside a big name because one wants to have a more consistent audience than at a post-war art auction. And they did.

The new spaces in Cluj do not stop here. Zina G Gallery opened in May a micro-exhibition (*All Work and Time and Care*) in the "red house" on Brâncuşi Street, only to then set up another one in a palace located in the heart of Cluj. On Emil Isac Street, Zina G hinted towards bringing up the long-awaited museum or permanent collection of contemporary art in Cluj. After the CCC froze in the project phase and while we are still pouring screed in the palace at the intersection of Avram Iancu and Republicii Streets, Zina G may offer Cluj what we have all been waiting for 15 years: a large space, dedicated to a collection of contemporary art. For now, the place was inaugurated with a condensed exhibition of older and newer acquisitions of the owner – *Ghosts Whisper Loud and Clear*. The space opened on the ground floor of the building, a historic residence of the Isac family, where old pieces of furniture, common to any home of the communist period, were converted into plinths or supports for the exhibited works: small sculptures created by Tincuţa Marin and Lorena Cocioni, pseudo-archive of Ciprian Mureşan, a good drawing by Dan Beudean and one by Anton Răzvan, some illustrations by Charles de Bisthoven similar enough to those of Mi Kafchin, an unrecognizable work by Ghenie, a small painting by Matei Ţigărean held briefly my attention. The opening was loud, long and well-maintained by the host. I will most certainly come again here!

Although it is not a new space, MATCA has brought a new exhibition through the works of Mihai Grecu, also a graduate of the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca but perfected in digital art in France. Mihai exhibited here several video works and one in VR. *Saturnism*, from 2020 is an unsettling experience: one is transposed into Saturn's cave from Francisco Goya's painting. The viewer is somewhere behind the son-devouring god, inclusing sound effects and all. One has a strange feeling of vertigo before being discovered by the monster and sharing the fate of his sons. 3 intense minutes in which Grecu manages to transpose the viewer elsewhere and keep him captive in VR for a while...

Precisely on the same day with the opening at MATCA, I discovered an exhibition signed by two young aspiring curators: Andreea Goţa & Daria Corlaţan under the title *You Will Die with an Undelivered Message and That's a Bummer*. This happened at the Casa Matei Gallery of UAD, a difficult space to curate, with many textures and diffused lights. Nevertheless, the Art History and Theory students surprisingly managed to find a red thread of the exhibition, to which contributed many participants, not homogeneous in terms of techniques and style. A good exhibition that surpasses by far the level of a student experiment.

ANCA MUREŞAN

Biju Gallery has a very clear profile: easel painting, figurative if possible. An elegant space, in a courtyard specific to old Cluj architecture. Two vaulted rooms and a warm light will certainly benefit the well-tuned chromatic painting. In June, the gallery proposed to the public an exhibition curated by Ada Muntean. Knowing the aesthetic directions of the curator, I assumed from the start that I would see something extra at Biju. And I did. A painting by Saha Bandi, yes you read that right: a painting. Then a small light box installation signed by Ada herself, correlated with a recognizable drawing in the artist's style. Finally, the exhibition was a breath of fresh air. It wasn't hard to feel that way after putting together younger artists with a personal, rigorous type of painting (for example Mathias Bar and Călin Dumitraşcu).

Finally, we must mention the new space on Iuliu Maniu Street, the Parter Gallery of the Union of Visual Artists Cluj-Bistriţa branch. It is almost opposite the former UAP Cluj gallery, lost many years ago by the Cluj Union branch. Here, the members of this UAP branch managed to get a space, and not just any kind of space, but a central one, renovated to standards and with a generous inner courtyard. I hope it lasts!

The inaugural exhibition was a Brudaşcu–Bertalan duo, both graduates of the Ion Andreescu Institute of Fine Arts in 1959. While Ştefan Bertalan is no longer among us, Corneliu Brudaşcu, although in his 80s, still arouses interest even among the younger generations. This exhibition was cared for, cured, or curated by Mihai Pop because *a cura di* or *prendere cura* have a common path in a literary sense. A way to nurture the oblivion of the older generations in the face of the crushing steps of the very young ones. A praiseworthy and very trendy gesture not only here, but throughout all Eastern Europe. Always preoccupied with socialist progress, then civilizational recovery, and now technological synchronization, the generation that was still caught up in communism, then transition, and then in the liberating flight to the West, now feels the need to look back. In the footsteps of culture and arts. What was it, what's left? It is still impossible to know everything from a period of censorship and we don't know for sure what remained after gaining freedom, but for some time now, everyone has been taking care of the archive 'blooming' in their garden: in Bucharest Ion Grigorescu, Câlţia, Geta Brătescu, Ioana Bătrânu, in Timişoara Flondor, Neagu, Bertalan, and in Cluj Albert Nagy, Moholy or Brudaşcu and, more recently, Kancsura who had a retrospective at the Art Museum in July. Returning to the exhibition in Parter Gallery, it has a Mihai Pop brand curatorship: neat, good frames, and a dynamic line of sight between the walls and the podium. The works belong to private collections such as Plan B Foundation, Ştefan Gadola, Adrian Crivii, Dr. Sorin Costina, and Cornel Brudaşcu. Maybe that's why some works are less flattering for the artists, but overall, one finds what one already knows: a

cerebral drawing by Bertalan plus abstract compositional constructions, and on the other hand Brudaşcu's intuitive, lyrical and apparently volumetric painting. His painting appeals to the young eye, eager for lessons in descriptive gesture, impasto and millimetric dynamics. The exhibition shows a dialogue between two schemes of work, one cerebral and the other emotional, between a look that seeks beyond and a look that frantically embraces the here and now.

Will follow!

Anca MUREŞAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: anca.muresan@uad.ro

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Renowned Artists of the Twentieth Century in Bucharest.

The Picasso Effect, Museum of Recent Art, Bucharest. 27.09.2023–22.01.2024, Curator Erwin Kessler
The Universe of Salvador Dalí, ARCUB, Bucharest – Gabroveni Inn, 13.12.2023–12.05.2024, Curator Jasmine Merli

The exhibition at the MARe/Museum of Recent Art in Bucharest titled *The Picasso Effect* (September 27, 2023 – January 8, 2024), commemorates the 50th anniversary of Picasso's passing. It featured 46 invaluable works by Picasso alongside 65 pieces by 37 contemporary Romanian artists, profoundly influenced by Picasso's legacy. The exhibition comprises paintings, sculptures, video art, prints, and sketches both by Picasso and Romanian artists.

The space itself echoes the artist's life, exemplified by the striking contrast between the pink walls and the remarkable blue tint of the artworks, reminiscent of Picasso's pink and blue eras. Another interesting aspect of the space is the grouping of various themes or subjects from Picasso's life in different rooms of the museum.

The intriguing aspect lies in the dialogue between Picasso's artworks and the other 65 pieces by contemporary Romanian artists, whether part of the museum's permanent collection or temporary exhibitions. The Museum of Recent Art consistently fosters communication among artworks, drawing imaginary lines between them, a characteristic evident in this exhibition as well. What particularly resonated with me throughout the exhibition was the connection between the artwork *Sleeping Woman with Shutters* and the entire row of portraits by various Romanian artists. I appreciated both the thoughtful curation of the pieces and the aesthetics of the paneling. Another intriguing connection emerged between Picasso's *Femme à l'Oreiller* and Dumitru Gorzo's painting, *Lilith*. Following the gaze of the paintings, I discerned a pattern that indicated the specific order in which a visitor should view the artworks. Gorzo's *Bull* gazes over at Tincuţa Marin's artwork *Untitled*, creating a compelling crossover between a painting and a sculpture. This interaction between the wood and the canvas helps create a strong dialogue between artworks across mediums and time. The interconnections established within space offer an authentic and universal perspective on Picasso's artistic universe.

Another correlation established by the Museum of Recent Art links Picasso with a specific Romanian artist, particularly concerning the central figure of Picasso's Pink Era, Harlequins, and a main figure in Corneliu Baba's paintings, exemplified by works such as the exhibited piece titled *Arlechin*. One connection that I truly appreciated, and I believe it was made with great taste, was the association between Picasso's overall Blue Era and Valeriu Mladin's artwork *The Blue Period*. The clever wordplay between Picasso's influential era that left its mark on art history and the title of Mladin's artwork, in my opinion, is both amusing and intelligent. If the blue era was emphasized not only through Valeriu Mladin's exhibit but also through other displays predominantly featuring blue pigments by artists such as Picasso and Romanian painters, the Pink Era, acknowledged to have occurred between 1904–1906, was delineated in the exhibition by the freshly painted walls of the museum in a very light shade of pink.

The oversight in addressing the exhibition design was noticeable, as there was a lack of deliberate manipulation of lighting and spatial arrangement. The absence of nuanced play with lights and spatial adjustments directed the entire focus solely on the artworks, missing an opportunity for a more immersive and engaging visiting experience. The decision not to direct spotlights onto the more impressive or iconic exhibits is regrettable. Thus, the attention is not focused

on those particular exhibits, creating a static atmosphere that fails to captivate the viewer's attention. Placing small artworks within the confined corridors generates a spatial inconvenience for spectators to adequately dedicate time to observing them, moreover, these corridors serve as thoroughfares, further diminishing the contemplative atmosphere, as they facilitate movement from one room to another.

In the meantime, Bucharest also hosts *The Universe of Salvador Dalí* (December 13, 2023 – May 12, 2024) located on Gabroveni Street, that celebrates the life and work of the great surrealist artist. It encapsulates 170 works from various fields of his activity: life-size sculptures, surrealist furniture, and other specially made works of art, in the creation of which materials such as glass, bronze, gold, and even diamonds are ingeniously used.

An essential part of the exhibition concept is the incorporation of technological elements that help the public connect with the dreamlike state associated with the surrealist movement. Throughout the entire exhibition, the sound effects and images projected on the walls help the visitors immerse themselves in a truly surreal experience. Another element that contributes to the fantasy feel is the stunning historical building in which the exhibition is placed.

When it comes to the way the exhibition is organized, I considered it to be very coherent, even if the space of the historic building which hosted it is not a unitary whole. There were numerous ways for the organizers to ensure that visitors followed the course of the exhibition, without restricting free movement and ruining the enjoyment of admiring the exhibition at one's own pace. The exhibits were spread over several rooms and floors, containing themed rooms or displays of different pieces. Especially the first room made a strong impression on me, most of it being filled with large feminine figures that made Dalí's profound reverence for women easy to notice. My favorite piece from this part of the exhibition had to be *Woman with the Head of Roses*. This golden sculpture expresses a strange grace despite being held up with the help of two crutches. This object is also one of Dalí's favorite symbols, being often used for emotional and physical support in his artworks.

Another aspect that I really enjoyed was the numerous lesser-known works that were on display, especially in the graphics category. They familiarize the viewer with the fascinating mind of the Spanish artist, especially considering the fact that the surrealist art movement can be pretty hard to conceptualize for a large part of the population. The diversity of the pieces is impressive, a fact that shows how versatile Salvador Dalí truly was. For the people who are not necessarily deeply interested in art and only know the artist through his 2D works, this will be a pleasant surprise, allowing them to revel in a multitude of artistic mediums they might not expect.

Regarding the dosage of information that was provided, I believe it was very well thought out, the exhibition being sprinkled with countless explanatory texts, which help the inexperienced viewer understand the concept behind the exhibition. I believe that, especially in the case of a surrealist display, such written passages are necessary considering that often modern art must be accompanied by an explanatory text, so as to understand the artist's intentions. In addition to the information about the artworks themselves, they also briefly present the artist's life and all it entails, enriching the public's general knowledge and providing precious context for when the pieces were created. Aspect-wise, they were easy to read and tastefully designed, not disrupting the space in which they were placed.

The surreal feeling was enhanced through the use of various contemporary techniques. For instance, in the exhibition's basement, visitors can participate in a unique phantasmagorical experience through a set of virtual reality glasses. This was one of my favorite parts. I think this kind of experience complements the surrealist style perfectly, giving the visitor the feeling of actually being in a dream. Both the visual and auditory parts perfectly express the basics of the surrealist movement; otherwise, all the technological inserts had their place and served their purpose.

This lovely exhibition stands out from other artistic manifestations that try to familiarize the general population with the works of Salvador Dalí by including in the discussion a lesser-known area of his work, sculpture. The physical presence that this artistic medium has in this space is undeniable. There have been previous cultural events that focused on the Spanish artist; his presence was felt before in our country through exhibitions like *The Unexpected Dalí* or his appearance in Art Safari. In those cases, the presence of lithography, engraving, and generally 2D pieces was definitely more prominent. *Dalí's Universe*, on the other hand, with the considerable amount of large bronze sculptures, tiny golden bejeweled pieces, glass sculptures, and even furniture that it displayed, helps encourage the visitors to get familiar with this more obscure but not less impressive part of Dalí's work. This particular characteristic makes the exhibition a staple that promotes cultural and artistic interest and entices the public to dig deeper into the minds of their favorite artists, ready to be delighted by what they are about to discover.

In conclusion, through these exhibitions, *The Picasso Effect* at the MARe/ Museum of Recent Art and *The Universe of Salvadore Dalí*, Bucharest pays a profound tribute to two legendary artists. The Museum of Recent Art exhibition showcases Picasso's masterpieces with the works of contemporary Romanian artists, creating a rich dialogue that transcends time and cultural boundaries. While the exhibition effectively forges compelling connections between Picasso's works and those of Romanian artists, one aspect requiring enhancement is the

overall design. Meanwhile, *The Universe of Salvador Dalí* exhibition is one of the firsts for the Romanian public, by sheer size as well as subject and the impressive volume of pieces, where the viewer gets acquainted with the surrealist movement and the famed genius of Salvador Dalí. The hard work and positive intentions behind both shows are evident and visiting them should be compulsory for any art lover. Both experiences were surprises in terms of cultural experiences in the past year and through their presence, they enriched the cosmopolitan air of the Romanian capital city.

Gabriela Iulia MOLDOVAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: moldovangabrielaiulia@gmail.com

Flavia MONEA

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: flaviamonea.fm@gmail.com

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Gustav Klimt: The Immersive Show. Aural Eye Studio, Music Producer Alexei Țurcan, Museum of Immersive New Art, 25.08.2023–31.01.2024

The Exhibition *Gustav Klimt. The Immersive Show* is part of the permanent exhibition *Immersive Space – Gustave Klimt – Underwater World – Inner Constellations – Santa Claus* of the Museum of Immersive New Art, which opened its doors on 25th August 2023. The exhibition was presented as a multimedia production, it included over 60 of the most renowned works of the celebrated artist from various periods of his career. Each projection of Gustav Klimt lasted around 15 minutes, and it repeated itself every hour of the museum's daily program.

Among these, notable pieces included *The Kiss*, recognized as the artist's most iconic work and considered a national treasure in Austria, and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer,* known as *The Woman in Gold*, representing the pinnacle of Gustav Klimt's golden period. The venue impressed with its towering seven-meter height and generous space. Inside, strategically placed mirrored columns conveyed the illusion of a larger space. For the comfort of attendees, the room was equipped with soft cushions, contributing to a relaxing atmosphere. The experience was facilitated by high-performance 360-degree video projectors by Epson. The duration of the projection extended over a period of 60 minutes, thus providing a comprehensive journey through various artistic realities such as the ones mentioned: Underwater World, Inner Constellations, and Santa Claus which was a special projection for the month of December. During the projection of Klimt's artworks I observed, in addition to the well-known

paintings mentioned, others such as *Judith and the Head of Holofernes*; *Goldfish*; *Hygieia* from the ceiling of the University of Vienna, *Portrait of Fritza Riedler, Water Serpents II, Portrait of Emilie Flöge, Lady with a Fan, Hope I, Hope II Danae, Lady with Hat and Feather Boa, Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein,* but also very early works of Klimt like *Idylle.* The technique employed in crafting the projection is video mapping, defined by the creation of the video through the succesive layering of images. The exhibited projection at MINA constitutes a 2D video mapping project executed by Aural Eye Studio in collaboration with music producer Alexei Țurcan.

The projections started with a message to the public: "Please maintain silence throughout the immersive show. If accompanied by children, for their safety and the immersive experience of all visitors, kindly keep them close." The restrictions on movement within the immersive show were, in my opinion, quite inconvenient for the overall immersive experience. The essence of participating in an immersive exhibition is to freely experience being a part of the artwork, to feel engrossed within the painting.

The selection of artworks comprises a wide variety of well-known paintings. The approach taken by the art studio involves creating a collage featuring distinct cutouts of characters from the paintings mentioned. The backgrounds used to fill the cutouts of characters consisted of various symbols from Klimt's artworks. The focal point of the projection lies in the expansion of the dress depicted in the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I.* Additionally, the noteworthy augmentation of the background, replete with substantial details from *The Kiss* painting, enhances the overall impact of the presentation.

Immersive exhibitions typically involve curators who collaborate closely with show designers and artists. However, in the case of MINA, no individual was appointed to fulfil this role; the creators did not assign someone for the position. I believe a curator was necessary in this context because the one-hour projection that people paid for included three additional projections that lacked artistic value or relevance to artistic subjects. These additional projections were solely for the entertainment of children. The projections titled *Underwater World*, *Inner Constellations*, and *Santa Claus* exhibited explicit titles indicative of their content. While MINA has appropriately categorized the projections of Gustav Klimt and those designed for children into distinct classifications on their social media platforms and website, this distinction was not maintained within the consolidated one-hour projection experience.

Immersive experiences with video mapping in black box setups have become popular over time as a fascinating blend of art and tech. This type of exhibition, whether technology-infused or not, has existed for some time. Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms* from the 1960s stand out as an early and well-known example of immersive art. However, over the past three years, particularly in

the aftermath of the pandemic, this type of exhibitions has witnessed a notable rise in popularity. This resurgence is evidenced by the renewed interest in Yayoi Kusama's works, such as *My Heart Is Dancing into the Universe* in 2018 and the widely discussed *One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama in the Hirshhorn Collection* from 2022.[1]

Taking a critical perspective, drawing from my experiences at various immersive exhibitions in Central Europe, including venues like the Gallery *Dark Matter* in Berlin that includes some of the most fascinating experiences I have seen titled *Grid* and *Liquid Sky,*[2] Immersive Space *The Lighthouse of Art* in Berlin that includes an infinite room and the show *Particle Poetry,*[3] Immersive Space *Khroma,*[4] Immersive International Exhibition *Klimt Kuss: Spiel mit dem Feuer,*[5] and other immersive exhibitions from the same studio, like *Monet*[6] and *Van Gogh, The Immersive Experience,*[7] there are significant distinctions between MINA and these widely recognized international exhibitions.

One of them pertains to the architecture of the space: the columns made of mirrors mentioned earlier disrupt the immersive experience, making visitors aware of their surroundings and themselves. This addition is quite contradictory in the overall experience. In the exhibitions above-mentioned, I have only encountered spaces where the ceiling is incorporated into the projections, fully immersing the entire space in the artistry of the artists. Another shortcoming is the absence of projections on the ceiling. Unfortunately, the open ceiling space exposes all the technical cables, which, once again, disrupts the overall immersive experience for each individual. The spectators' experience is abruptly interrupted by the cables and metal supports of the projectors, which is, ironically, contrary to the museum's intended message.

1 Elliot C. Williams, "Yayoi Kusama's Long-Anticipated 'one with Eternity' Hirshhorn Exhibit Opens in April," NPR, March 7, 2022, accessed January 13, 2024, https://www.npr.org/local/305/2022/03/07/1084485025/yayoi-kusama-s-long-anticipated-one-with-eternity-hirshhorn-exhibit-opens-in-april.

2 "Über," Dark Matter, accessed December 30, 2023, https://rb.gy/oj5x3e.

3 "Exhibition," The Lighthouse of Digital Art, November 20, 2023, accessed December 30, 2023, https://lighthouse.berlin/en/exhibition/.

4 "Khroma - New Media Art Center: Revaler Str. 99–Book Tickets," Berlin.de, accessed December 30, 2023, https://rb.gy/d34k0m.

5 "Klimts Kiss - An Immersive Story: Ticket," visitBerlin.de, accessed December 30, 2023, https://www.visitberlin.de/en/klimts-kiss-an-immersive-exhibition-berlin-ticket.

6 "Monet Exhibition: The Immersive Experience," Monet Exhibition: The Immersive Experience, accessed December 30, 2023, https://monetexpo.com/.

7 "Van Gogh Exhibition: The Immersive Experience," Van Gogh Exhibition: The Immersive Experience, accessed December 30, 2023, https://vangoghexpo.com/.

The outcomes of my inquiry revealed a spectrum of responses among participants. A minority of adults exhibited notable engagement, while the remainder showed little to no interest, resorting to checking emails during the projection. Conversely, adolescents emerged as the cohort investing time to attentively observe and engage with the projection, demonstrating authentic interest in the immersive encounter. Conversely, children displayed behaviors indicative of distraction, such as sleeping, reading, or employing headphones during the unfolding of the projection. Despite an initial enthusiasm among parents, evidenced by their active capture of moments through photography, a gradual waning of interest transpired, serving as an indicator that the pledged immersive experience did not resonate as anticipated.

In the previous exhibitions I visited across Central Europe, the audience was captivated. I believe this was partly due to the fact that the participants were able to move around freely, following the projections throughout the 360-degree space. Having the freedom to move and synchronize my movements with the projections significantly enhanced my experience. It made me feel as if I were immersed in the universe of Klimt, Van Gogh, or Monet. Being able to touch the walls, feel the beauty of Van Gogh's sunflowers, and engage myself in the same universe depicted in Klimt's *The Kiss* painting heightened the connection with the artists' mastery.

In conclusion, the presentation of *Gustav Klimt: The Immersive Show* at the Museum of Immersive New Art constitutes an insightful exploration into the iconic works of the esteemed Viennese artist, showcasing a selection of his beloved artworks. While the exhibition successfully captures the essence of Klimt's artistry, certain aspects warrant critique. The imposed restrictions on movement and the absence of ceiling projections detract from the immersive experience. Furthermore, the inclusion of entertainment-focused projections within the one-hour session, without a curator's guidance, creates a dissonance in thematic cohesion.

Drawing comparisons with other international exhibitions reveals distinctions, particularly in the architectural approach. The incorporation of mirrored columns and the absence of ceiling projections in MINA diverge from established immersive exhibition practices. These elements disrupt the immersive experience and introduce a level of self-awareness that is ironic in the context of the intended artistic immersion.

Despite these shortcomings, the exhibition succeeds in engaging certain demographics, with teenagers notably demonstrating genuine interest. The audience's varied responses, from notable engagement to disinterest, indicate a mixed reception, suggesting a need for further refinement in the curation and execution of immersive experiences. In my opinion, the success of immersive

exhibitions lies in the freedom of movement, allowing participants to feel fully absorbed in the artwork. The lack of it in MINA's presentation hinders the audience's connection with the art.

Ultimately, the Museum of Immersive New Art's exhibition has its merits but falls short of providing a consistently immersive experience. While it successfully showcases Klimt's masterpieces, addressing the identified shortcomings, such as architectural disruptions and thematic cohesion, could enhance its overall impact and resonate more effectively with diverse audiences.

Gabriela Iulia MOLDOVAN

University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: moldovangabrielaiulia@gmail.com

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

"Look at them, until you see them".
The Brâncuşi Exhibition in Timişoara
30.09.2023–28.01.2024

Following the success of the Victor Brauner exhibition, which attracted 26,000 visitors in the spring of 2023, the National Art Museum of Timişoara prepared for another grand event last fall: the *Brâncuşi: Romanian Sources and Universal Perspectives* exhibition, which opened on September 30. Its success surpassed all expectations. By the end of the year, the number of online-purchased tickets reached 100,000 and yet there was a continuous queue in front of the museum, as people from all parts of the country and even from abroad hoped to encounter Brâncuşi's creations without having pre-purchased tickets.

The exhibition created through the collaboration of the National Art Museum of Timişoara, the Art Encounters Foundation, and the French Institute in Romania, with financial support from the Timiş County Council was undoubtedly the most successful event of the Timişoara 2023 European Capital of Culture. If you were to ask why… Among the main reasons was undeniably the pulling force of the name itself: alongside George Enescu, Brâncuşi is internationally recognized as the most acclaimed Romanian artist. Another factor was the effective marketing campaign, emphasizing that this was Brâncuşi's most comprehensive exhibition in Romania in the last 50 years, displaying 100 artworks from major European collections (e.g. Centre Pompidou - Paris, Tate - London, Guggenheim Foundation - Venice). The professionalism of the exhibition was guaranteed by the curator,

Doina Lemny, as she is among the most knowledgeable experts on Brâncuşi's oeuvre. The Romanian art historian, residing in France, has authored several books and studies on the artist and had previously worked on large-scale exhibitions dedicated to his art (Europalia, Brussels, 2020).

The organizers faced a challenge in arranging the exhibits in the confined spaces of the Baroque palace in Timişoara, while taking into account the high number of visitors expected. The "black box" constructed based on Kim Attila's plans aimed to make the best use of the available space by covering windows, doors, and the Baroque ornaments, ensuring that the sculptures were optimally displayed and could be walked around. Despite the attempts to control the number of visitors with an entry system, navigating the somewhat corridor-like, cramped spaces without stepping on anyone's toes or intruding into the protective aura of the sculptures equipped with alarms proved quite challenging.

The curse of blockbuster exhibitions is that it hinders the thorough examination, the meditation in front of artworks, which is one of the main requirements of the aesthetic experience, that probably floated before the curator's eyes during the planning. In several interviews with Doina Lemny she emphasized that one of the main goals of the exhibition was not merely to look at, but to truly see Brâncuşi's creations, or as the artist phrased it: "Look at them, until you see them."

The well-structured exhibition, operating with diverse materials, sought to capture Brâncuşi's complex personality, perspective and relationships. The last comprehensive exhibition showcasing Brâncuşi's oeuvre in Romania was in 1970, at the National Museum of Art in Bucharest, exhibiting 48 sculptures from major European and American collections — significantly more than the exhibition in Timişoara (which featured only 22 sculptures), but without displaying any photographs. One of the novelties of the Timişoara exhibition, at least among those in Romania, was that besides his sculptures one could see the artist's "secondary" artworks as well, meaning photographs and fragments of films he directed depicting his own creations. The artist never commented on his works in writing or verbally. Instead, the photographs developed in a darkroom set up in his studio serve as commentary on the sculptures. These photos reveal the artist's unique perspective on his artworks, showing how he saw and intended to present them. The photos from the David Grob private collection and the film fragments shot by Brâncuşi himself allowed the visitors to virtually step into the artist's studio.

As the title suggests, one focus of the exhibition was to emphasize the Romanian sources and connections in Brâncuşi's creations. However, it nuanced the widespread belief, particularly emphasized during the era of state socialism, that the artist's sculpture drew inspiration from Romanian folk art. Recent research does not assume such a close connection between folk art and Brâncuşi's

avant-garde, sublimated forms as previously thought. Modern artwork does not organically stem from folk culture but engages with it reflexively. Even if the basic theme is of local inspiration, it is eventually raised to a universal level.

The curator revealed Brâncuşi's Romanian connections more in terms of his academic background and his early works created for Romanian commissioners living either in France or in the country. Since many of these sculptures are housed in the collections of Bucharest and Craiova, it was much easier to borrow them, than it was for his major works. Starting the exhibition with the *Ecorché*, a piece that demands high professional skills, was a good introduction. This cast plaster sculpture, made for didactic purposes at the demands of the anatomy professor Dimitrie Gerota, approaches the human body from both artistic and anatomical perspectives. By featuring this work created in 1902, the year Brâncuşi graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, the exhibition outlines the path of sublimating figurative elements into pure form that the sculpter traversed in his oeuvre.

The same process is noticeable in the next section of the exhibition, focusing on child heads. One can clearly trace how the artist purified, more or less conventional child heads (e.g., *Pride*, 1905, Craiova Art Museum), freeing them of all unnecessary elements until achieving the pure oval form seen in *Head of First Step* (1907) or *The Newborn II* (before 1923).

In 1907, Brâncuşi spent a few months in Rodin's studio, and we consider his work *The Kiss* (1907) as one of the first milestones in his liberation from Rodin's influence. The work is regarded as a rediscovery of the direct stone carving technique and a key piece of modern sculpture in general. The artwork radically breaks with the classical canon. The exhibition borrowed its first version from the museum in Craiova. *The kiss* is the first motif that the artist had developed into a series, having engaged him for nearly 40 years. The exhibition mirrored this fact by displaying *The Boundary Marker* (1945) and various drawings on the theme.

A subsequent section presents Brâncuşi's muses, showcasing iconic works such as the gleaming bronze "portrait-sculpture" of Renée-Irana Frachon, the *Sleeping Muse* (1910), the early stone work inspired by the features of the Chinese actress Hanako (1907-1909), and its later variant, a bronze *Danaide* (1918) or *Mlle Pogany I* (1950). The latter, often referred to as a *modern Madonna*, portrays the Hungarian painter Margit Pogány. A common feature of these works is that the prominent eyes of the figures turn inward, enveloping them in a sense of mystery.

The plaster version of *Torso of a Young Man* (1923) holds a special place in Brâncuşi's oeuvre since the artist was less concerned with male anatomy. The torso, simplified to the extreme and stripped of all unnecessary details, could have been influenced by the Platonic philosophy and is a good example of how Brâncuşi envisioned the representation of the *idea*.

The following section of the exhibition stepped out of the human world, as the artist himself was concerned more and more with dimensions beyond humanity, particularly focusing on fish and birds, or more precisely, on their movement, which fascinated him. The motif of the fish rarely appears in sculpture, and although the gleaming bronze artwork, borrowed from the Tate in London, remained motionless, the visitors could see it spinning in a film made by the artist. While the essence of fish is swimming, that of birds is flying. Among the 28 bird sculptures created by Brâncuşi, the bronze version of *Măiastra* from 1911 (Tate, London), connected to Romanian folk tales, and the bronze *Bird in Space* (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice), considered one of Brâncuşi's main work and featured on the exhibition poster as well, reflect the artist's interest in flight.

The above-mentioned *Bird in Space* is connected to a story – quite amusing from our perspective – that was presented in the exhibition through reproductions of contemporary newspapers. It happened in 1926, on the occasion of an exhibition in New York organized by Marcel Duchamp, where the work *Bird in Space* was supposed to be displayed. During the transportation, the U.S. Customs refused to recognize it as an artwork, thus subjecting it to import duties. The trial that emerged from this situation involved not only Brâncuşi and his artwork but also a broader discussion on modern art. It concluded with Brâncuşi's victory in November 1928.

The exhibition recalled the artist's greatest undertaking, the monumental ensemble in Târgu Jiu, through photos, film fragments shot by Brâncuşi and the wooden version of *The Endless Column*. Erected in memory of the fallen heroes of World War I, the 29.35-meter-high *Endless Column* has become a symbol of ascension and transcendence. Along with the triumphal arch-like *Gate of the Kiss*, *The Table of Silence* and its 12 hourglass-like seats, it has become a suitable place for meditation on death and love.

Among the 16 bilingual studies (Romanian and English) of the impressive exhibition catalogue, published by Art Encounters, there are comprehensive writings as well as studies presenting new results and interpretations. While the exhibition promised a bit more than it delivered – I am referring to the fact that among the 100 artworks, that had been announced, only 22 were sculptures – it undoubtedly enriched and nuanced the knowledge the average Romanian visitor had of one of the greatest Romanian artists, Constantin Brâncuşi.

Translated from Hungarian by Klára P. Kovács

Emese PÁL

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: emese.pal@ubbcluj.ro

INTERVIEW:

"As a historian, I understood from the beginning that you cannot present the course of history without delving deeper into understanding the epoch, its people, their ideals, and without fully respecting them." An Interview with Gheorghe Mândrescu

by Zsolt KOVÁCS[*] and Elena FIREA[**]

In the new format of the *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal, the editors wish to provide a section dedicated to interviews with prominent representatives of our craft. It is aimed, on the one hand, to evoke the characteristics and evolution of the institutional framework in which art historians have operated, from museums to the various methods of training specialists in these institutions, and on the other hand, to underline the professional achievements and research interests of those interviewed. By evoking the more or less recent history of our specialization, we aim to reflect at the same time on the current challenges of Art History, in the hope that presenting phenomena and issues faced by previous generations provides not only information related to the institutional or historiographical evolution of the discipline itself, but may also help younger generations in finding solutions to professional problems they are currently facing or will face in the future.

[*] Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
     Email: zsolt.kovacs@ubbcluj.ro
[**] Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
     Email: elena.firea@ubbcluj.ro

You are part of a valuable generation of art historians active in Cluj in the last decades of the old regime, as well as during the period of major institutional changes, especially during the post-December 1989 period of freedom of expression. Furthermore, you are the one who launched the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal in 2008, a journal that you then coordinated, with dedication and a great sense of responsibility, for 15 years. You are therefore the most suitable person to inaugurate the interview section of our journal. We want to thank you for your kindness in answering our questions about your early years of professional training, your research interests, the most important stages of your career, the editorial activity undertaken, and your view of the past, present, and future of the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal.

You graduated from the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeş-Bolyai University between 1961–1966. What was the atmosphere like during your years as a student in Cluj? Who were the professors and what were the readings that influenced you in the early years of your education?

The years preceding my enrollment at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeş-Bolyai University, my childhood and adolescence were decisive in choosing my field and the subsequent research. I grew up in a family where history, heritage, and the country's journey in the first half of the 20th century were constant topics of conversation. For my grandparents and parents, the historical events marked the course of life. I listened, understood, and absorbed information which formed the foundation of my future education.

I lived in Bistriţa, a city with an exceptional cultural heritage. Every day, on my way to the imposing building of the high school, I passed by the great lutheran church, past the well-known *Sugălete*, through the passages leading to the medieval fortress walls, and past numerous details whose value I would discover over time.

It was here, alongside admirable teachers, that I had the chance to participate in a unique experiment proposed and competently supported by Professor Leon Titieni, a geographer and the school's director. Starting in the sixth grade, and for a period of five years, between July 1st and 18th, he led us on routes that covered the entire country, with its unique heritage. In a passenger train car, in compartments with six beds, and one carrier designated to food, a whole universe was created that nourished my love for heritage, irreplaceable. It was my first university, which I experienced with the emotion and fascination of an explorer.

I hoped to go through my university history studies by building on these exciting experiences and by deepening the information that would further explain the things I had already begun to know. I did enrich myself, but ideological

indoctrination and statistics took up a lot of time. The period between 1961 and 1966 was marked by restrictions, fears, ideological pressures, isolation and regrets, such as the prohibition of accessing Nicolae Iorga's books in the library on Napoca Street. We were being prepared to become agents of 'Rollerism', which was then in full growth. Let's not forget that the four volumes of the *Treaty of Romanian History* were published between 1960 and 1964. These were elaborated under the tutelage of Mihail Roller, a former student at the University of Moscow, who was sent in 1945 to rewrite and distort national history in school textbooks and impressive volumes.

In my third year of studies, after the first mentioned faculty, I had the opportunity to enroll in the Art History section, dominated by the personality of Professor Virgil Vătășianu. He had published his famous *Feudal Art History in the Romanian Lands* in 1959, which remains to this day the only comprehensive synthesis of that period. He opened the door to research for us, at a time when numerous monuments and testimonies of the past were beginning to disappear. His demeanor in the classroom and outside it visibly distanced him from official tendencies. Professor Virgil Vătășianu inspired me, guided my undergraduate and doctoral studies, and supports me with his aura to this day.

The readings were from the works of respected professors within the faculty like Francisc Pall and Virgil Vătășianu, but also those published by I.D. Ștefănescu. An extraordinary resource I discovered was the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission*, the famous periodical with uninterrupted appearances from 1908 to 1945 with four issues a year, unfortunately among the first to be banned after the Soviet occupation. It remains to this day an exceptional source for the knowledge and reevaluation of historical heritage, a trend that began in the era of King Carol the 1st.

Immediately after completing your studies in 1966, you were hired at the Art Museum in Cluj, which had just opened its exhibitions in the freshly restored Bánffy Palace a year earlier. You were a curator of this institution until 1999. How do you retrospectively view this period of your activity? What did it mean for your professional development? What were the main requirements and difficulties of a curator's work at that time?

In the summer of 1967, just returning from fulfilling my military service, I had the chance to be employed, temporarily, as a guide, replacing a colleague who was on maternity leave. Not long before, my former Art History professor, Mrs. Viorica Marica, was appointed director of the Cluj Art Museum. Soon after, I was permanently employed. It was an exceptional opportunity to work in the midst of organizing a new museum structure, benefiting from the experience of a

true museum professional, as Professor Viorica Marica came to Cluj after over ten years of work experience at the Museum in Arad. Everything involving the internal structure, the organization of sections and archives, our training as curators, the reorganization of the storage rooms and the main exhibition, acquisitions, the preparation of retrospective exhibitions, and exhibitions in general, as well as those itinerant exhibitions through which we got to know enterprises, tourist resorts, cultural centers in communal or urban centers throughout Transylvania, were based on her ideas born in the laboratory in Arad. All this was a remarkable complement to the courses at university. I recall spending the first three months at the Central University Library studying the interwar Cluj newspapers and gathering information from contemporary chronicles about exhibitions and artists whose works were in our storage rooms or news about the period, about important artists, useful for the work files of the future catalogues that were to accompany the collection or retrospective exhibitions which were planned. This was part of the foundation that every museum should have, in order to fully understand the treasures it has to protect. The lists of works, incomplete as they were, and the exhibition catalogues after the Great Union did not provide as rich information as we are accustomed to seeing today. Those were extraordinary apprenticeship years for me, during which I specialized in the knowledge of modern Romanian graphics and later in Romanian medieval art. All this information, plus the specialized readings, immediately served me for the guided tours I conducted with great pleasure in front of an unprepared audience (then as now), but eager to learn about the richness they saw during their visits.

The museum's storage rooms were full of works requisitioned during the war, and especially during the nationalizations of 1948 and afterwards. In order to illustrate a program presenting a chronological and artistic project, the museum would have needed a systematic acquisition campaign. The chronic underfunding did not allow the completion of the museum collections despite the timing being extremely favorable, as the monetary value of artistic heritage objects had dramatically decreased. Simultaneously, the museum suffered from the lack of specialists in conservation and restoration. Such laboratories did not exist for a long time, and when a few specialists in the field were finally employed, they could not rely on a true training structure in the country, not to mention the impossibility of specialization abroad, in centers benefiting from great progress in the use of new technologies and materials.

Beyond the museum's desired program, the only constant sources of enriching the storage rooms came from the contemporary acquisitions of the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education or from the allocations of the Ministry of Culture that followed the ideological program imposed by the Communist Party. And all this constrained atmosphere evolved on a deficient, I would say non-existent basis, considering the lack of Art History information in Romanian

schools and high schools. How could we talk to them about artistic values and exceptions, when the graduates did not have even the vaguest notions about the birth, journey, and role of national or universal art?

Museum work before 1989, but also today, is a type of Cinderella – a status determined by deficient museology (i.e., the relationship with politics, administration, and the educational system) that does not respect as it should the importance of cultural heritage.

The drama of the national patrimony accentuated in the recent period, an evolution that has as key moment the events of December 1, 1977 – ironically, nowadays the National Day – with the abolition of the Historical Monuments Commission. What followed Nicolae Ceaușescu's decree, issued a few months after the earthquake of March 4, 1977, is not hard to imagine. Moreover, a policy of selective destruction and marginalization of the cultural heritage was defined in 1972, when Romania refused to join the UNESCO Convention on the protection of monuments and natural reserves (see Gheorghe Mândrescu, *Sacred Heritage*, Cluj Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2020, p. 226). For the autonomy and development programs of the museums, the decisive blow came with the National Cultural Heritage Law no. 63/1974, practically blocking the scientific and cultural valorization paths: "Only one interest persisted – that regarding heritage coming from private property – and towards which the communist authorities have often practised abuse, blatantly violating human rights" (Gheorghe Mândrescu, loc. cit. p. 227). As far as the public was concerned, a sincere dialogue could not be established. The owner of cultural heritage assets, instead of being protected by the state to preserve his values, felt suspected and in danger of having his assets taken away. What sort of collaboration could we possibly have with these people? Could we hope they would become potential donors, as Virgil Cioflec did when he offered his unique collection to the University of Cluj in 1933? His generous donation is up to this day the nucleus of the main exhibition of the National Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca. The lack of respect for the owner, donor, and the value of his gesture made it impossible for us for many years to mention on the paintings' labels the ownership, the provenance of the works, namely the Virgil Cioflec donation (Gheorghe Mândrescu, *loc. cit.*, p. 263–266).

For decades, we requested to be officially recognized as researchers in museums, as we were the closest to the artworks and were practically obliged to permanently deepen our knowledge of them. From the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education as well as from the local and superior leadership of the Communist Party, we were always told (I cite from memory): "...stop making these requests, you are propagandists of the Party and you must spread its message among the numerous visitors you guide."

Filed trips for medieval art, documenting churches, icons, books, etc., also constituted a painful chapter, showing the disaster that began with the measures of the 1970s when everything was dismantled, frozen, and started being destroyed. I keep as a reference point the image of the church in Tărpiu – Bistrița, where Professor Vasile Drăguț, the last director of the Historical Monuments Directorate in the autumn of 1977, decided to erect a veritable forest of tree trunks to save an exceptional Gothic vault. That's how that saving intervention remained until post-1989, protecting an outstanding monument. How many disappeared in the same interval is impossible to say. I saw hundreds of Agricultural Production Cooperatives or State Agricultural Enterprises that had administrative headquarters in valuable buildings, with the movable inventory gone. Others became institutions for disabled children. Those buildings, although degraded, at least kept their roofs, but, alas, after 1989 many remained without an owner, completing the list of losses even today (although some are restored now and admired by visitors from Romania and abroad). I experienced the helplessness of saving this civilization subjected to a barbaric ideology. The village people were persuaded not to cherish their roots, which deserved to be respected. For this reason and many others, I agree with Theodor Paleologu, Minister of Culture at that time, who, on the evening of February 14, 2009, when asked on national television to characterize the state of national heritage with a single word, said unequivocally: catastrophic (Gheorghe Mândrescu, *loc. cit.*, p. 574–576).

Beyond the experience as a curator, a pivotal role in your formation was played by a series of scholarships you received at Italian universities. Indeed, they were reflected in some of the research topics you subsequently addressed. What memories do you have of your early Italian experience? What influence did these internships have on a young art historian from the communist bloc?

The scholarship at the International University of Art in Florence, offered by the Italian state, focused on museology and museography and complemented what I had begun in Cluj through Mrs. Viorica Marica's program. University courses, seminars, and practical work in conservation and restoration laboratories, along with practical examples in interacting with the public at the Uffizi Gallery, offered me unique opportunities. Concurrently, the trips across the peninsula, tracing the incomparable Renaissance heritage, marked my decision to specialize in the study of the transition from Gothic to Renaissance, beginning with my undergraduate thesis on *Secular Architecture in Bistrița*. This led me to further elaborate my doctoral thesis on *Renaissance Architecture in Bistrița*.

I was a high school student who had not received any information about Art History; a university student who, through Professor Virgil Vătăşianu's book, *The History of Feudal Art in the Romanian Lands*, published in 1959, learned surprising information from my favorite teacher about a heritage fallen into disgrace and which I had seen with my own eyes in the train journeys imagined by Professor Leon Titieni; a curator who was more than a qualified guardian front of a treasure that needed to be preserved for an audience searching for its message.

In comparing the two systems, communist and capitalist, one dominated by ideology, destructive, slow in innovation, suspicious, and refusing the specialist's initiative, and the other open, in step with technological and intellectual revolution, the shock of a Romanian curator encountering Italian reality was only natural. Everything happened by seeing the interest and openness encountered in classes, in front of television shows led by specialist commentators, in front of the queues at the entrance of the Uffizi Gallery, in front of the reactions of a large public that highlighted interest and preparation at high school level, through normal courses in Art History, not optional or facultative ones (as proposed even today in our country).

Curious to see how the relationship with the public at the Uffizi Gallery developed, I discussed it with Mrs. Maria Fossi Todorow, who led the Didactic Section in 1970. She confessed to me that there was a need for young people from the outskirts of the great Italian cultural center, and not only, to deepen their knowledge of the message of art, heritage values, and the diversity of models. She stated: "...we do not want to offer you a history of art but only to teach you to look at the beautiful things we have around us." She also noted that for many young people, visiting the monuments in the city center and the museum was equivalent to a great discovery. All these factors determined them to get involved. In agreement with the municipality, they arranged for a bus to provide transportation to and from school for a two-hour visit. Then they launched correspondence with the 250 schools in the area to see their preferences and establish a schedule of visits by hours, days, weeks, and months. School teachers were to be involved in preparing the visits in class beforehand. Once arrived at the Uffizi, the students would be greeted by a museum guide, with whose help they would cement their knowledge in the end. The dialogue was supposed to encourage them to return to the museum with their parents or relatives and to behave like true guides. For this purpose, they were also to be offered two free tickets. All schools responded to the museum's invitation. The Uffizi Gallery also published a 76-page didactic guide, that was offered to teachers and contained useful questions and relevant comments. The success of the initiative was conspicuous and furthermore, schools asked for a continuation, a more in-depth exercise. The museum responded by proposing the formation of research groups to which they offered a catalogue on a specific theme. This was to be filled in by glueing illustrations in sections

surrounded by only a border and had only the author and the title of the image underneath. The illustrations were then made available at all tourist attractions in Florence – museums and churches. Occasionally, in the pages of this veritable album, there were references to contemporary political disputes and cultural movements related to the work, because a work of art is not something that randomly appears from an artist's imagination, but it is always connected to life, to the problems and way of thinking of the time and place where the artist lives – as Mrs. Todorow remarked. She offered me a copy of the didactic guide when I left, a model for the research group, and another one completed with all the requested images. The first theme with which the project was launched was *Art in Florence in the 13th–15th centuries*. I carefully kept them to bring them back to my country.

Upon returning to Cluj, I thought about replicating the Florence experiment. I appreciated at the time that it would be good to address the Communist Youth Union – the municipal organization, to help me obtain a bus for transporting students. I was listened to and viewed as a peculiar curiosity, while my proposal had no echo or response whatsoever. Simultaneously, I insisted on obtaining the addresses of the schools in the city and the outskirts. To my surprise and disappointment, none of the invitations written according to the Italian model ever received a response. This lack of reaction from teachers and schools was the biggest disillusionment. I would have liked to propose to the students as the first research and illustration theme the Collection donated by Virgil Cioflec at the Art Museum in Cluj, a unique treasure, unknown then and now, which enriched the young University of Cluj after the Great Union.

This first scholarship and those that followed after 1989 provided me with countless examples and made me understand how seriously were treated abroad issues of preserving and getting to know the cultural heritage, how the professional training was in balance with the needs of civil society and how much respect there was for the specialist's initiatives in a democratic society, while in our case, the balance was dominated by the dictatorship of aggressive dilettantism. I always kept alive the power of the professional example offered by the period spent in Italy. It served as a support for me to try, even in the communist system, which became increasingly totalitarian, to propose ideas and to try solutions beyond the rigidity imposed by embarrassing actions and characters. In any case, the terms of comparison resulting from these experiences served me in creating my own universe, and my own convictions (even if they remained only theoretical). With such a handicap and without an educational program based on revealing the true path to meritocracy, supported by the state and especially by civil society, how could we be able to recover from the damages with repercussions in the economy, culture, tourism, and quality of life in general within the framework of the European Union?

One of the main concerns throughout your career has been the Renaissance architecture of the city of Bistriţa. How did you choose this topic and what were the stages of research culminating in the publication, in 1999, of the monograph dedicated to the subject? Do you consider that there are aspects you have not been able to exploit or new research directions which could be continued in the future? How do you appreciate the recent restoration works in Bistriţa?

The concern and admiration for the architectural heritage I passed by daily on my way to school emerged early on. I noticed its uniqueness from the beginning. For years, I saw houses and details deteriorating, inhabited by families who obviously showed no attention to maintenance. Throughout the old town, one could notice the same disaster. It was known that they lived crowded into apartments meant for one family, from which the Saxon tenants had been evicted. The dramas resulting from this mismanagement could not be hidden; people talked about them, and the destruction caused by the tenants, often driven by the need to live in cramped conditions, was well known. In an apartment meant for one family, two to three families were forced to coexist. The Administration and Surveillance House of Enemy Assets, a sinister institution conceived after the establishment of the Soviet communist occupation, which functioned between 1945 and 1947, parallel with the Housing Fund Service of the municipality, were the executors of the aforementioned situation. Enemy Property (sic) in the case of Bistriţa was a heritage built over centuries by its Saxon community. The atrocious fate reserved for this typically European heritage was evident in the incredible name itself. The only monument that survived relatively unscathed was the monumental Lutheran Church.

The proposal made to me by Professor Virgil Vătăşianu to choose the *Secular Architecture in Bistriţa in the 15th–16th Centuries* as the topic of my thesis, stemmed from his knowledge of the local realities, observed in field trips during the drafting of his well-known work, *The History of Feudal Art in the Romanian Lands*, published by the Academy in 1959. He then considered that the subject required in-depth analysis. The thorough research I conducted into every component of civil architecture was crucial for the knowledge I have today about this heritage. Entering every house, every apartment, every room, I found details of immeasurable value starting from the Gothic style that emerged in Transylvania through the contribution of the Cistercians monk from the Cârţa Monastery (Făgăraş) as early as the 13th century. Thanks to them, this limit of the spread of Gothic in Eastern Europe was established. In the 15th century, following the fashion of the time, buildings constructed from durable materials, replacing those

of wood, blend late Central European Gothic with details from the new Renaissance style that emerged in the Italian space, which the Catholic monks naturally frequented. Researching these connections provided me with information about the movement of builders around the towns of Como and Lugano, discovering routes that reached Poland (Krakow) and present-day Ukraine (Lviv), in constant connection with Bistriţa. I especially documented the life and activity of the builder Petrus Italus de Lugano between 1560–1563, mentioned in the inscription on the portal of the lutheran church. The phenomenon of transition from Gothic to Renaissance is richly represented in Bistriţa, not just by the lutheran church, but also in the surrounding constructions, which convinced me that a true workshop of builders had worked in the city in the epoch. Data gathered from the documents of the time required expanding the research to the neighboring region as well, namely medieval Moldavia, which benefited from Bistriţa's urban development and the existence of numerous stonemasons, known thanks to various commercial and political connections. This resulted in a fascinating exploration, which continues to this day (and I hope to publish it soon), relying mainly on visual material, a work that will contribute to a better understanding for as wide an audience as possible.

The events of May 12, 13, and 14, 2023 in Bistriţa, on the occasion of the completion of the restoration works at the lutheran church, after the disastrous fire on June 11, 2008, represent a special moment in my life as a specialist concerned with the research, conservation, restoration, and valorization of national heritage. I was overwhelmed by the manifestation, interest, and appreciation of tens of thousands of visitors, most of whom had not known the monument for the past 70 years and now consider it a symbol of their own, even though it is an exclusive creation of the Saxon settlers. On the evening of June 11, 2008, Mihai Tatulici, a TV reporter present in front of the burning tower, was talking to an older Romanian lady. When asked, "Why are you crying, madam?", she answered: "How can I not cry when our symbol is disappearing?" It was then that I understood that something was changing in the mentality of the over 80,000 inhabitants, newcomers to the town. For comparison, during my school days, Bistriţa had about 20,000 inhabitants, mostly Saxons.

The restoration of the lutheran church in Bistriţa is a great success for our generation.

Beginning in 2001, you also taught Art History at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeş-Bolyai University. How did your teaching experience fulfill you professionally? What challenges did you encounter over time?

In what areas have you tried to pass on your professional experience to the new generations? What advice would you give to young people who choose the Art History specialization today?

I have always enjoyed the teaching experience. During my long museum career, I found guidance to be a way to exercise my relationship with those who listened to me. Presenting artistic creation, the miraculous phenomenon of creation, requires a connection with the complexity of historical evolution, with the world that shapes the existence of painters, sculptors, builders, and stonemasons, with the ideas and philosophies that accompany human existence.

As a historian, I understood from the beginning that you cannot present the course of history without delving deeper into understanding the epoch, its people, their ideals, and without fully respecting them. It was difficult to do this in a world that demanded referring to the past with the vision of the totalitarian regime, thus eliminating essential paths and even falsifying them, as was done by Roller and his school of thinking. From my teaching experience, I have concluded that, as a result of prolonged misinformation, we do not emphasize enough the presence of a unique feature that the art in Romania possesses. It concerns the Christian encounter, the extraordinary coexistence of artistic models specific to Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Protestants. The effects of this multifaceted encounter, rare in the rest of Europe, are valuable and can be found in a multitude of references that need to be analyzed beyond the tendencies of opposition, of destruction that my generation experienced fully in the era of national communism. The religious coexistence we experience in Romania is a treasure, and I would recommend to young people aspiring to become art historians to enrich their knowledge with the necessary readings in this regard. Referring to the representative models that naturally emerged in our past, we must rebuild the bond with this past, whose importance has been diminished in the fifty years of constant attempts to move away from our roots. These were aspects that I felt even during my student years. I remember that at seminars on medieval art, I asked at one point to have presentations about the biblical characters encountered in the examples from the lectures. It is not difficult to imagine that we were not answered at all. We also lived in the constant aggression that propagated "the transformation of nature." Today's tendency towards balance was then totally overturned. Speaking about Gothic – the style of light, as I like to call it, or about religiosity, about the voluntary collective effort in the extraordinary construction of medieval monuments, was not recommended. As if the Church, the main sponsor of the Gothic style, and the world that admired it then and now did not exist.

For the Museum Studies course, my experience of over thirty years at the National Art Museum in Cluj and the innovative perspective offered by my Italian studies have helped tremendously. The Museology part was made more difficult by the late effects of the unnatural relationship between politics, administration, and education imposed in totalitarianism, that did not protect or enhance the extraordinary baggage of cultural heritage. I tried to stimulate volunteering to overcome the inherited indifference towards this heritage. For over a decade, I was involved in fieldwork with the students, consisting in trips in Bistrița Năsăud county that could only be arranged with the help of extraordinary friends. On the background of constant losses and degradation of the monuments, the connection with the territory, with its history, gave me the chance to ask for their involvement in volunteering, to find solutions for the future, even if the official program had not yet changed. The reactions of the students were the most pleasant teaching experience. I believe that breaking out of the *status quo* and forming groups and associations aimed at protecting cultural heritage will increase the number of students interested in Art History. A decade of practice with the help of the Bistrița City Hall and of passionate friends proved to me that it is possible.

I can advise young people eager to study this discipline to defend it vigorously, stimulating volunteering wherever they are. They should be proud because they represent a top field, an elite product towards which all others converge. The way cultural heritage is preserved in monuments and museums reflects the general state of society.

Parallel to your university teaching activity, you also launched the *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia Artium* **journal, which you directly managed for 15 years. What were the main motivations and objectives behind this initiative? What editorial program did you follow? Looking back, how does it reflect in the successive 15 issues of the publication coordinated by you? What is the mission of a journal dedicated to the study of cultural heritage and Art History today?**

In 2002, I was responsible for the editing of the 3rd issue of *Studia Universitatis. Historia,* which was thus dedicated to art historical studies. Over the years, art historians active in Cluj felt the need for their own journal, in an attempt to establish the coherence of the group after the 1960s revival of the field under the authority of Professor Virgil Vătășianu. We wanted to focus more on a cultural heritage that, even though well represented in the pages of one of the most valuable interwar periodicals – the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments*

Commission, had suffered from neglect for over 50 years of communism. The editorial program aimed primarily to valorize research on forgotten or deteriorating monuments, to underline their value, and to become a place where our graduates and collaborators could develop and consolidate an academic style specific to art history. The emphasis on Transylvanian values was natural, and I believe that throughout its existence so far, the journal has contributed to the formation of specialists who, slowly, perhaps too slowly, are involved in the revitalization of conservation and restoration.

I believe that the 15 years of our publication marked the beginning of the path proposed by our editorial program, and many unknown or long-dormant themes for 50 years have become relevant again, at least for specialists in our field. The professional profile of young art historians has also been consolidated meanwhile, some of them continuing the mission of our journal today.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the last three decades have shown a growing interest in cultural heritage. I think that a wide horizon opens up. Our specialists, hopefully more and more numerous, naturally need to relate in their analyses to the work of museum professionals, architects, restorers, builders, and other types of culture professionals. Investigating the documentation provided by archives and old publications, engaging in interdisciplinary studies, and fostering collaboration with foreign specialists can diversify and enrich the perspectives of connecting Romanian Art History research with its European counterpart. Thus, the wounds caused by the painful hiatus of communism might heal.

Your entire professional activity is closely linked to cultural heritage, whether museum collections or the research, preservation, and valorization of our country's built or movable heritage. In your opinion, what is the fate of this heritage nowadays? How do you see its future?

Seeing the political class's immobility and the inefficiency of using heritage in education, in understanding our specificity, and in tourism, I regret its fate today. The involvement of specialists in forming volunteers can save something, in a society with many dilettante tendencies, the successor of a sad period. Without a compulsory permanent course in the school curriculum and without a transformed local administration that would support private property, hopes are minimal faced with the avalanche of destruction or the inefficiency of conservation measures. I believe it's good for graduates of Art History departments to get involved in the local administration, as well as in county councils, since their contribution to making correct decisions concerning patrimony can be essential.

I would give the example of our former student, Vasile Duda, PhD whom I am glad to have recommended to the Bistrița municipality where he is employed as an art historian. His work is noteworthy for the image the city has today.

Much empty talk and the programmatic constant destruction of cultural heritage were characteristic of the education and measures propagated by the communist system. Today, we need the opposite direction, but also a new generation, with a different vision, that would be able to rebalance a national system distorted by past propaganda. Following the example of our colleagues from the European Union is a way to accomplish this. Without a lustration law which has failed from the beginning, mentalities have not had a chance of being quickly changed. Without a full implication of professionals, undesirable results are seen everywhere, in this strange coexistence where evil and destruction are all too present.

Last but not least, what is your message towards those who will now continue your editorial work? What are your wishes for the journal?

Thank you to the new editorial team of *Studia. Historia Artium* for the idea of conducting this interview. I represent a generation that had to go through an unwanted, imposed experience, with numerous losses for valuable heritage.

I believe that the program we have proposed should be continued and diversified. The focus should be on intense volunteer work in high schools. In the absence of a true program for the study of Art History, through conferences and debates with the new generation, on-site presentations, and the involvement of the new generation in protecting local values, professionals, as many as they may be, cannot hope for the emergence of a solid basis among young people that will help change attitudes towards cultural heritage. Presenting the journal's issues and debating its arguments in front of potential collaborators would lead to the assessment of the current challenges and to the coagulation of a new movement.

This will be a starting point to increase the number of students through which the importance of our field will be strengthened. The inclusion of more specialists is required not only at the school level, but also in the management of cultural heritage, which can no longer remain under the shadow of uncertainty and hazard. Let us remember that in the 1950s–1960s, even in a hostile period, Art History courses attracted students, filling amphitheaters with students from other disciplines as well. The phenomenon disappeared meanwhile due to indifference and dilettantism, but I see no reason why it couldn't be revived. In the beginnings, after the Great Union, Art History was an important discipline at the University of Cluj, thanks to the appreciated activity of professors such as Coriolan Petranu and

Virgil Vătăşianu, both well acquainted with the state of the art in the international research. Different from the situation of that time, in the last 34 years, the political class and administration have not evolved towards a professionally sustained form and structure, and the authorities responsible for education have not shown the desire to approach the European realities, where investments in the knowledge and protection of heritage often brought spectacular results.

For a real understanding of the efforts and difficulties in this dramatic journey of the last century, I would propose the opening of a new column in the journal, one dedicated to reviews of high-quality studies published in the interwar period and published between 1908 and 1945 in the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission* (it is highly relevant that this publication was among the first to be closed down under the Soviet regime). The reviews could be written by Art History students who, starting from the analyses of professionals from those years, could observe the current state of the monuments and add, where appropriate, the conclusions of later studies. The work of our predecessors would be appreciated, and the damage suffered during the dictatorship period could be noted, thus enriching the horizon of as many as possible, which were denied knowledge of the roots that gave substance to the nation.

Thank you and I wish you the best of luck!

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Translated from Romanian by Voica Puşcaşiu

Contributors

MELINDA BLOS-JÁNI is Lecturer at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

DOMINIC-ALAIN BOARIU is Senior Researcher at Université de Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland.

MARIA CRĂCIUN is Professor at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

CIPRIAN FIREA is Senior Researcher at the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ELENA FIREA is Lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ANA-MARIA GRUIA is Museographer at National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ALICE ANDREEA ILIESCU is Associate Professor at University of Arts and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ESZTER JOBBIK is PhD Student at Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary.

ZSOLT KOVÁCS is Lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

JÁNOS KRÄHLING is Professor at Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary.

RADU LUPESCU is Associate Professor at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

SERGIU-MARIUS MAN is PhD Student at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

GABRIELA-IULIA MOLDOVAN is MA Student at University of Arts and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

FLAVIA MONEA is BA Student at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ANCA MUREŞAN is Lecturer at University of Arts and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

EMESE PÁL is Lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

IOANA RUS-CACOVEAN is Lecturer at University of Arts and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ALEXANDRA SÂRBU is Museographer at Art Museum of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

ANAMARIA TOMIUC is Associate Professor at University of Arts and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

TIMEA-ANDRADA TOTH is MA Student at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

CRISTINA ZAHA is MA Student at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.